

(In)Visible Faces (online/Syracuse, 26–27 Mar 26)

Online / Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY, Mar 26–27, 2026

Melissa Yuen

(In)Visible Faces, The Politics of Portraiture and Social Change, 1700-Present.

The two-day symposium focuses on portraiture, the British empire, and the visual legacies of imperial portraiture in our current times. Building on a recently discovered 18th-century portrait of a Mrs. Seaforth painted by acclaimed artist, Sir Joshua Reynolds, the first president of the Royal Academy in London, the symposium will analyze portraiture, textile trade, and the East India Company on the first day, before shifting to print culture, photography, media, and social justice on the second day. Bringing together curators from the Syracuse University Art Museum (in whose collections Reynolds' "lost" painting was found) and Special Collections Research Center, as well as art historians, historians, curators, art and textile conservators, and communication scholars, the symposium will feature keynote lectures by acclaimed art historian Tim Barringer (Yale University) and renowned social psychologist Nilanjana (Buju) Dasgupta (University of Massachusetts Amherst).

We have also received a surge of interest in the symposium, so we are going hybrid-- here are the Zoom links:

Day 1. Thurs, 3/26 3/26: <https://syracuseuniversity.zoom.us/j/95971910776>

Day 2. Fri, 2/37 3/27: <https://syracuseuniversity.zoom.us/j/94795854797>

The symposium schedule can also be found here: <https://events.syracuse.edu/event/invisible-faces-the-politics-of-portraiture-and-social-change-1700the-present>

Programme:

Day 1: Thursday, March 26 | 11:30am – 6:30pm

Peter Graham Scholarly Commons, Bird Library 114

11.30am – Welcome Remarks

11:45am - 12:35pm

Robert Travers, Cornell University

The Return of the Nabob: Richard Barwell and Warren Hastings in 1780s Britain

Melinda Watt, The Art Institute of Chicago

The Lore and Allure of Woven Air

Respondent/Moderator | Radha Kumar (History)

12:35pm - 1:20pm

Debarati Sarkar, CUNY Graduate Center

"My Black Servant Juba": Sir Joshua Reynolds' Earliest South Asian Ayah Portrait in Eighteenth-Century Britain

Jennifer Germann, Independent Scholar and Affiliated Scholar, Institute for European Studies, Cornell University

Dressing up Dido: Constructions of Gender, Race, and Social Rank in the Portrait of Dido Elizabeth Belle and Lady Elizabeth Murray

Respondent/Moderator | Irina Savinetskaya (Special Collections Research Center)

1:30pm - 2:30pm – Lunch Break

2:40pm - 3:30pm

Amelia Rauser, Franklin and Marshall College

Veritable Athenians: How Artistic Dress Became Neoclassical Fashion

Joanna Marschner, Historic Royal Palaces

Muslin in Western Fashion in the Later Eighteenth Century. Lady Rockingham's Muslin Sack-Back Dress c.1775: a Case-Study

Respondent/Moderator | Jeffrey Mayer (Fashion Design)

3:30pm - 4:20pm

Raphael Shea, Westlake Art Conservation Center

A Considered Approach to the Conservation Treatment of Reynolds's Tuccia, The Vestal Virgin

Kirsten Schoonmaker, Syracuse University

Muslin, Magnified: Material Evidence in Local Collections

Respondent/Moderator | Kate Holohan (Syracuse University Art Museum)

4:20pm - 5:00pm – Tea, Coffee Break

5:00pm - 6:30pm

A Suitable Ornament: Reynolds, the Royal Academy and the British Empire

Keynote Lecture: Tim Barringer, Paul Mellon Professor of the History of Art, Yale University

Respondent/Moderator | Junko Takeda (History)

Day 2: Friday, March 27 | 10:00am – 4:30pm

Peter Graham Scholarly Commons, Bird Library 114

10:00am – Welcome Remarks

10.10am - 11:00am (virtual)

Adam Eaker, The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Two New Indian Portraits for the Met

Alice Insley, Tate Britain
To be announced

Respondent/Moderator | Durba Ghosh (History, Cornell University)

11:00am - 11:50am

Melissa Yuen, Syracuse University Art Museum
“And every body may know her”: The Display and Circulation of Mrs. Seaforth’s Image as Tuccia, the Vestal Virgin

Elizabeth Mitchell, McNay Art Museum
Anatomy of an Exhibition: From Reynolds to Warhol and Back Again

Respondent/Moderator | Romita Ray (Art and Music Histories)

11:50am - 12:50pm – Lunch Break

2:15pm - 3:30pm

How “Wallpaper” Creates Inequality: A Science-Driven Approach to Change It
Keynote Lecture: Nilanjana (Buju) Dasgupta, Provost Professor and Inaugural Director of the Institute of Diversity Sciences, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Respondent/Moderator | Srividya “Srivi” Ramasubramanian (Communications)

3:30pm - 3:35pm – Closing Remarks

3:35pm - 4:30pm – Tea, Coffee, Conversation

Cosponsored by Art and Music Histories. Chemistry. CODE^SHIFT. English. Goldring Arts, Style and Culture Journalism. History. Lender Center for Social Justice. Light Work. Premodern Global Studies. Ray Smith Symposium. South Asia Center. Syracuse University Art Museum. Syracuse University Humanities Center. Syracuse University Libraries. The Alexia at Newhouse. Women’s and Gender Studies. Psychology. The Rubin Family Foundation.

Reference:

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