

Carousels and Other Colonial Spectacles (Copenhagen, 20–21 Aug 26)

Copenhagen, Aug 20–21, 2026

Registration deadline: Aug 7, 2026

Konrad Krčal

"Carousels and Other Colonial Spectacles. Performing race and racialization at European courts c. 1500–1700" – International conference, University of Copenhagen, 20-21 August 2026.

Organizers:

Emil Elg and Konrad Krčal (University of Copenhagen)

Confirmed keynote:

Noémie Ndiaye, University of Chicago

Bram van Leuven, Utrecht University

The central role of performance in the development and practice of racial categorization and discrimination in Early Modern Europe has found much needed attention in recent scholarship. Within this larger framework, the two-day international conference is dedicated to the "race-making" practiced as part of court spectacles and publicly organized festivities as it had profound impact on the dissemination of racist ideas and stereotypes in Europe.

The temporal frame suggested for this conference extends from early colonialism in the Americas to the turn of the 18th century, when the slave-based plantation economy was firmly established as integral to European trade, capital accumulation, law, imperialist politics, and culture. A well-documented early example for the kinds of colonial spectacles that we will discuss is the reception of some seventy Mexica and Tlaxcala people at the court of Charles V in 1528, where they accompanied the conquistador Hernán Cortés. While the nobles among them were treated accordingly and most likely dressed no differently from European courtiers, the task of performing "Indianness" fell to a group of indigenous "entertainers" and athletes. This display of racialized people as a spectacle is paradigmatic for the ensuing circulation of people, objects, and ideas that would feed into various types of court festivities, including carousels.

The title of the conference is connected to its location in Copenhagen: Inspired by the sumptuous Grand Carrousel hosted by Louis XIV in 1662 at the Louvre, Christian V of Denmark staged several carousels during his reign (1670–99). A theatrical amalgamation of jousting, dressage, and pageantry, such spectacles had long included aspects of exoticism and racialization, but the Carrousel of 1662 was exemplary in integrating colonialism and racism to the aesthetics of absolutism. In the Danish context, the central role of varying racial and colonial representations in the staging of these spectacles is well documented by a series of 12 anonymous paintings from the

1690s in The Royal Danish Collection.

As part of the conference program, the participants will have the opportunity to see and discuss the paintings and other objects related to the local carousels. That the exchange of both non-European objects (and sometimes people) and racist ideas and images is deeply tied to court spectacles not least in their function as diplomatic vehicles will be further explored at the Danish National Museum. There, 17th century featherwork artifacts of the Brazilian Tupinambá people are on display together with Albert Eckhout's paintings representing different "categories of people" in Dutch Brazil from the early 1640s having reached Denmark as diplomatic gifts in 1654. While ethnographic objects are readily interpreted in terms of the ritualistic and performance, one aim of the conference is to highlight the ways in which racialization was achieved through the incorporation/production of the Other as part of European spectacles.

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PROGRAM:

THURSDAY, August 20, 2026

Location: Copenhagen University, South Campus
Karen Blixens Plads 8, 2300 Copenhagen

Registration and sessions: Building/Room 15A.1.11

Keynote: Building/Room 23.0.49

9:30 - 10:00 | Conference registration with coffee and cake

10:00 - 10:15 | Opening remarks, Emil Elg and Konrad Krčal (Copenhagen University)

10:15 - 11:45 | Session I

Strategies and Technologies of Race-making

Chair: Vibe Nielsen (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek/Copenhagen University)

Helen Boeßenecker (University of Bonn, Institute of Art History)

"From a Tournament Book in Munich to a Masked Ball in Bonn. Constructing and Performing Racial Difference at the Courts of the Wittelsbach Dynasty in the 18th Century"

Dorothy Kwok (CUNY, Program for Art History)

"Chinese Bodies in the Machine: Mechanical Pagods & The 'Mascarade du Roy de la Chine' (1700) at the Court of Louis XIV"

Odai Johnson (University of Washington, School of Drama)

"Savaging the Turk's Head: Crusader Performance as Policy"

11:45 - 13:00 | Lunch break

13:00 - 14:00 | Session II

The Documentation, Dissemination, and Reproduction of Early Modern Spectacles

Chair: Maria Fabricius Hansen (Copenhagen University, Department of Arts and Cultural Studies)

Tania Lévy (University of Western Brittany, Institute of Art History)

"How to Perform Commercial and Colonial Exchanges with Brazil and Brazilians: The Royal Entries in Rouen during the Renaissance"

Chloé Glass (Art Institute of Chicago, Prints and Drawings Department)

"Constructing and Performing Race in Stefano della Bella's Etchings of Diplomatic Processions"

14:00 - 14:30 | Coffee and cake

14:30–16:00 | Session III

The Performance of Blackness at Northern European Courts

Chair: Mathias Danbolt (Copenhagen University, Department of Arts and Cultural Studies)

Linnea Ripenberg (Stockholm University, Department of Culture and Aesthetics)

"Representations of Blackness in Festivals accounts of the Early Modern Holy Roman Empire and Scandinavia"

Miles Grier (CUNY, Department of English)

"Internal and Imperial Politics at two English Court Masques"

Margit Thøfner (The Open University, Department of Art History)

"Black Diamonds: Anna of Denmark-Norway and the Performance of Colour"

16:00 - 16:30 | Recapitulation and discussion

16:30 - 16:45 | Coffee break

16:45 - 17:45 | Keynote lecture

Noémi Ndiaye (University of Chicago, Department of English Language and Literature)

"Racial Triangulation in Early Modern Court Performance Culture: The Case of Indigeneity"

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FRIDAY, August 21, 2026

Location: Copenhagen University, South Campus

Karen Blixens Plads 8, 2300 Copenhagen

Keynote, sessions, and reception: Building/Room 15A.1.11

13:00 - 14:00 | Keynote lecture

Bram van Leuven (Utrecht University, Department of Art History)

"From Glittering Sugar Banquets to Theatrical Wunderkammern: Performing the Colonies in Early Modern France and the Low Countries"

14:00 - 14:15 | Coffee and cake

14:15 - 15:45 | Session IV

Objects of the Other/Othering Objects

Chair: Magdalena Naum (Lund University, Department of Archaeology and Ancient History)

Mille Gabriel (Danish National Museum, American Collection)

"Ethnographic Objects in the Representation of Indigenous Brazilian Peoples in Early Modern European Court Spectacles"

Léa Kipfer (Sorbonne, Department of Germanic and Nordic Studies)

"'The little Lapp Boy and the Lapland Machine' – Performing Lapland at the Tuscan Court in a Colonial Context"

Sophia Abplanalp (University of Vienna, Center for Transdisciplinary Historical and Cultural Studies)

"Staging the Ottoman Other: Non-European Objects and the Performative Making of Difference in Early Modern Europe"

15:45 - 16:00 | Coffee break

16:00 - 17:30 | Session V

Stagecraft as Racecraft: Costumes, Texts, Scenography

Chair: Michèle Seehafer (National Gallery of Denmark – SMK)

Alexander McCargar (University of Vienna, Department of Theatre, Film and Media Studies)

"Pearls, Feathers and Blackface: Lodovico Ottavio Burnacini's Maschere Series"

Anne Fastrup (Copenhagen University, Department of Comparative Literature)

"The Sultan's Court and the Political Imagination of Absolutism in Early Modern France"

Elisa Cazzato (University of Naples Federico II, Department of Humanities / Art History)

"From Enlightenment Inquiry to Colonial Spectacle: Performing Otherness in Revolutionary and Napoleonic Paris"

17:30 - 17:45 | Closing remarks

17:45 | Reception

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Please register via:

<https://eventsignup.ku.dk/carouselsandothercolonialspectacles-6242/signup>

Abstract – Key Note Lectures:

Noémie Ndiaye:

"Racial Triangulation in Early Modern Court Performance Culture: The Case of Indigeneity"

In this talk, I will read some seventeenth-century European court performances through the lens of "racial triangulation," the key concept of my forthcoming monograph, *The Whiteness Between Us: Early Modern Playbooks of Racial Triangulation* (2026). After reflecting on what made court performances such an important archive for *Script of Blackness: Early Modern Performance Culture and the Making of Race* (2022), I will close-read scenes from the *Repraesentatio der Furstlichen Aufzug und Ritterspill* that took place in Stuttgart in 1616 and from Louis XIV's much-famed 1662

Parisian Carousel. Racial triangulation was the practice, ubiquitous in early modern European theatre and performance culture, to insert characters who are neither Black nor white into established racial dramaturgies based upon a black/white binary in order to assign coordinates to those characters in the global architecture of race relations that incipient white supremacy dreamed into being on stage. I will read the 1616 Stuttgart and 1662 Paris court performances for what they can teach us about early modern practices of racial triangulation, focusing in particular on the black/white/Indigenous triangle that those performances are so keen to dramatize.

Bram van Leuveren:

"From Glittering Sugar Banquets to Theatrical Wunderkammern: Performing the Colonies in Early Modern France and the Low Countries"

"This keynote examines how colonialism was performed and normalized within early modern Europe through public spectacle. Focusing on France and the Low Countries between the late sixteenth and mid-eighteenth centuries, it argues that colonial authority was not only exercised overseas but also staged at home through immersive forms of pageantry that shaped metropolitan understandings of empire. Drawing on festival books, eyewitness accounts, city records, and visual sources, the paper explores four forms of court and civic spectacle: sugar banquets, temporary architecture, dance sequences, and theatricalized visits of cabinets of curiosities. Sugar sculptures depicting tropical plants, animals, and colonial commodities celebrated imperial wealth while obscuring the labour and violence that sustained colonial economies. Triumphal arches, theatres, and pavilions made colonial conquest visible in urban space, often broadcasting slavery and extraction as sources of prosperity and order. Balls and ballets featuring Indigenous peoples – or European representations of them – exoticized colonial subjects and presented overseas territories as lands available for possession and exploitation. By comparing French and Netherlandish examples, the keynote shows how sensory experiences of empire helped legitimize colonial expansion, foster support for overseas rule, and contribute to emerging processes of racialization within early modern Europe itself."

For any questions about the conference please contact: krcal@hum.ku.dk or info@emilelg.dk

Reference:

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