

Documents of culture/barbarism (Santa Barbara, 25–26 Apr 14)

Santa Barbara, United States, Apr 25–26, 2014

Deadline: Dec 31, 2013

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Call for Papers

The Art History Graduate Student Association 39th Annual Symposium
University of California, Santa Barbara

Documents of culture/Documents of barbarism
April 25-26, 2014

There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. No cultural history has yet done justice to this fundamental state of affairs, and it can hardly hope to do so.

Walter Benjamin

Written in 1937 on the precipice of total war in Europe, Benjamin's now famous statement continues to challenge art historical scholarship to reimagine itself beyond a long-standing framework that privileged an autonomous creator and an elite consumer. The criticism he posed to cultural history has been taken up in many ways: it has led to efforts to move beyond the hegemony of the canon and to produce accounts that examine canonical works in relation to social forces of the most diverse kinds. Scholarship has attempted to include all that had been previously excluded from inquiry, whether "low-art" imagery and practices, work from non-Western cultures and, even within Western art, from marginalized groups. On what is perhaps an even deeper level, art and architectural history has tried to break down discursive structures and to "open" the object to the diverse narratives implicit within it.

With Benjamin's insight as the point of departure, this conference seeks to ask whether all documents of culture are necessarily documents of barbarism, with "documents" understood in the broadest sense to include texts, works of art, the built environment, visual culture, ephemera, institutions, and their collections. Has the discipline of art history been able to approach the kind of cultural history that gives voice to the manifold narratives present in every object? Where have art historians and architectural historians found Benjamin's insight useful, and his critical thinking prescient and malleable as a methodological/theoretical tool and where have they drawn their limits? Does Benjamin's challenge lead to multivalency or rather to a more rigorous, uncompromising focus? How has it pushed art history to take more seriously its function as critique?

We are seeking paper proposals relating to all historical periods of art and architectural history

and visual culture as well as those that think through these issues in new media and from multi-disciplinary perspectives. Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- the structure of the discipline in perpetuating certain kinds of power relations
- how art history as a discipline controls and regulates knowledge production
- how the changes in art historical scholarship impact and have impacted collecting practices and patronage
- the role of the artist in shaping the historical and cultural fate of his or her work
- the deployment of the built environment to stage ideologies of domination
- the state of debates concerning the repatriation of objects
- how museums and cultural sites reconcile the entertainment objective with the educational objective regarding violence, conquest, and trauma
- how new questions about globalization—both contemporary and historical—may serve to open up approaches to a multivalent analysis of art and visual culture

Please submit abstracts of no more than 300 words for 20-minute papers along with a CV to alisaalexander@umail.ucsb.edu and ldizerega@umail.ucsb.edu by December 31, 2013. We will contact all submitters by February 1, 2014. We will ask that papers, including images, be submitted to conference organizers at least one week in advance of the symposium.

Reference:

CFP: Documents of culture/barbarism (Santa Barbara, 25-26 Apr 14). In: ArtHist.net, Oct 31, 2013 (accessed Jul 3, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/6301>>.