

Interpretations of 'Primitive Art' around 1900 (Tilburg, 13–14 Jan 14)

Tilburg, Jan 13–14, 2014

Ingeborg Reichle, Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities

Workshop/Roundtable on:

Interpretations of 'Primitive Art' in European Scholarship and Museums in the Decades around 1900

Tilburg School of Humanities, Tilburg University

13 - 14 January 2014

Conveners: Wilfried van Damme, Leiden University / Tilburg University
and Raymond Corbey, Tilburg University / Leiden University

BACKGROUND

The decades around 1900 saw Europe engaging with the arts from outside Europe on an unprecedented scale. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, various developments brought these arts to the attention of ever-larger groups of Europeans. Intensified trade, colonialism, and missionary activities, in tandem with improved means of transport and communication, resulted in foreign art works being shown at World's Fairs and other venues, as well as being published in a variety of books and journals. Already in the second half of the nineteenth century, decorative arts from outside Europe started influencing European designers. In the first decades of the twentieth century it was the sculpture of Africa, Oceania and the Americas that led to the well-known phenomenon of primitivism among modernist avant-garde artists in France and Germany (Picasso, Die Brücke, etc.).

THE ROUNDTABLE

This roundtable, however, will deal with the far less studied reception of the latter types of sculpture in European scholarship and museums at the end of the nineteenth (and the beginning of the twentieth) century. How did these objects reach Europe and how were they interpreted and evaluated, in particular by art historians, philosophers and anthropologists? Which intellectual frameworks were at play - e.g., neo-Kantianism, the rise of hermeneutics and the *Geisteswissenschaften*, developments in ethnology? How did these frameworks enable, and constrain, European scholarly dealings with various artistic expressions from small-scale societies outside the West? In the European reception of these works, various types of museums - natural history museums, art museums, missionary museums, etc. - played a prominent role. To what extent and in which way were museums instrumental in acquainting audiences with these expressions from outside Europe and how did they present them to the public?

FOCUS

The roundtable brings together an international group of scholars discussing these issues from an interdisciplinary perspective (art history, anthropology, aesthetics, museology, and philosophy). The focus will be on an emerging theme in present-day scholarship that highlights the positive reception of works from small-scale societies as art, both in the world of learning and in museums at the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, accumulating evidence suggests that a revision is in order of the received wisdom according to which it was the so-called primitivist revolt of the modernist avant-garde that opened European eyes to the artistic dimensions of these works in the early twentieth century.

PROGRAMME

Monday, 13 Jan. 2014

10.00-13.00

Wilfried van Damme, Treub Chair of Ethno-aesthetics, Tilburg School of Humanities

Introductory lecture: The Reception of 'Primitive Art' in European Scholarship and Museums in the Decades around 1900

Ulrich Pfisterer, Ludwig Maximilian University (Munich)

Small World - Small Books. The New 'Musée Imaginaire' of Art History around 1900

Raymond Corbey, Tilburg University / Leiden University

'Tribal Art Traffic' in the late 19th century: The Role of the Missionaries

Maarten Couttenier, Royal Museum of Central Africa (Belgium)

Collecting, Studying and Exhibiting Congolese Artefacts as African Art in Belgium (1885-1910)

14.30-17.30

Ingeborg Reichle, Humboldt University (Berlin)

The Birth of World Art History. Kunstwissenschaft and the Early Anthropology of Aesthetics (before 1900)

Susanne Mersmann, Mainz

Ein Mittel zur Verständigung über Kunst: der Fragebogen für die französischen Forschungsreisen ab 1882

Rudolf Effert, Leiden University

An Unpublished Manuscript by the Leiden University Ethnologist J.P.B de Josselin de Jong on Non-Western Art

Tuesday, 14. Jan 2014

9.00-13.00

Hein Vanhee, Royal Museum for Central Africa (Belgium)

Collecting 'primitive art' in rapidly modernizing societies: reflections on the question of agency

Doris Kaufmann, Bremen University

Ethnological Expeditions to 'Primitive Art' around 1900 (Torday, von den Steinen)

Christian Kaufmann, University of East Anglia

Seeing Art in Objects from the Pacific around 1900: Where Field Collecting and Arm Chair Anthropology Met between 1873 and 1907

VENUE

The roundtable will take place at the Dante Building of Tilburg University, room DZ 3.

Reference:

CONF: Interpretations of 'Primitive Art' around 1900 (Tilburg, 13-14 Jan 14). In: ArtHist.net, Jan 6, 2014 (accessed Aug 8, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/6618>>.