SECAC panels: Cuteness & Realities of Abstraction (Pittsburgh, 21–24 Oct, 15)

Pittsburgh, PA, Feb 04, 2015
Deadline: Apr 20, 2015

Elizabeth Howie; Herbert R. Hartel, Jr., Coastal Carolina University

[1] Visual Art & the Aesthetics of Cuteness
[2] The Realities of Abstraction: Issues and Problems of Interpretation in Studying Abstract Art

[1] Visual Art & the Aesthetics of Cuteness

Recent theoretical investigations into the aesthetics of cuteness (for ex., Ngai, 2012) open nuanced questions about the history, nature and uses of this cagey attribute. Cuteness arouses: affect, identification, cooing, intimacy, flirtation, nurturing. It creates desires: to possess, to touch, and, as Benjamin wrote about commodities: 'to nestle.' The seductive powerlessness of cuteness, taken to extremes, may arouse violence. While the term emerges in the mid-19th century, certainly cuteness exists in earlier eras (a drunken monk in a medieval illumination, a giggling Renaissance cupid, a cherry-ripe virgin in a Pre-Raphaelite frame, even the reading of impressionism as sweet, rather than subversive). More recently, cuteness saturated the coy, kitschy effusions of Warhol and Pop, and the ironic gestures of postmodernism. While cuteness garners intense, varied emotional responses, or perhaps because it does, the quality can obstruct judgment, close analysis, and substantive readings. We invite panelists to seek depths beneath the pink plush. Questions might include: How is cuteness deployed in different periods? In different genres? What does it mean to depict something typically understood as cute in a strategically not-cute way? Relationships of cuteness to gender, class, scale, age, animals, etc. To prettiness, beauty, ugliness, and grotesque? To commodity, jouissance, and the uncanny?

Session chairs: Elizabeth Howie, Coastal Carolina University, and Betsy Towns, University of North Carolina School of the Arts. 200 word abstract; membership in SECAC required to present at conference.

See conference CFP for abstract submission instructions:
https://secac.memberclicks.net/assets/documents/secac/conference/2015_call_for_proposals.pdf

[2] The Realities of Abstraction: Issues and Problems of Interpretation in Studying Abstract Art

The methodological concerns and problems endemic to studying abstract art are rarely discussed. When individual artworks are analyzed, it is usually for stylistic and formalist developments and achievements, not for what their meanings might be. Over the past forty years, social, historical and philosophical contexts have been studied at length and have expanded on the visual analysis that dominated scholarship for decades. As abstraction passes its centenary, some reflection on scholarly methods seems appropriate. When trying to understand a particular artwork, what problems, obstacles and limitations arise? What meanings are more plausible and apparent than others? What are the limitations of verbally explaining the

purely visual? What are the problems and constraints pertaining to how completely or narrowly one can interpret an abstract artwork? Are certain approaches and interpretations simply impossible, unsuccessful, inappropriate or untenable? This panel is not seeking new and alternative interpretations of artists and artworks but rather to scrutinize and reconsider the scholarly problems that are often encountered in interpreting abstract art. Case studies of artworks or artists are especially desirable, but papers of broader scope are also welcome.

Session chair: Herbert R. Hartel, Jr., Hofstra University.
For more information or for any questions, please e-mail Hartel70@aol.com

To submit a proposal, you must use the online form at the following URL:

https://secac.memberclicks.net/index.php?option=com_mc&view=mc&mcid=form_187575

Reference:
CFP: SECAC panels: Cuteness & Realities of Abstraction (Pittsburgh, 21-24 Oct, 15). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 9, 2015 (accessed Nov 2, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/9410>.