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Session 7: Translation and Change

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Please submit the abstract of your paper for this session to the chairs before June 30, 2015.

The appearance of transcultural visual forms in societies across the world has elicited significant scholarly attention in recent years. New art histories have utilized trade networks, migration patterns, and conflict zones as the locus of enquiry to engage with the question of translation and change on a global scale. The Black Atlantic, the Indian Ocean littoral, the Pacific Rim, the Silk Route, the Sub-Saharan Trail, and the Mediterranean world, among others, have thus emerged as key geopolitical constellations that have shaped the pluralistic topography of intercultural flows. While this plurotopic hermeneutics has allowed scholars to identify a set of intercultural economic, political, and geographic formations as central to theorizing translation and change, we are yet to fully confront the conceptual and methodological questions such configurations present for art history's disciplinary contours. By examining the circuitous movement of artists, objects, aesthetic concepts, and knowledge systems, the panel seeks to offer a broad vision of translation and change. Approaching Translation and Change through the lens of trade networks, migration patterns, and aesthetic discourses, our aim is to engage with the relatively under-theorized dialectic between the global transmission of objects and ideas and the disciplinary contours of art history in dispersed locations through three distinct, but inter-related, areas of emphasis:

» Spatiality: Synchronic movements across communities, cultures, nations, and empires will allow us to examine the spatialities of translation and change. How do we account for multiple spatial systems of translation and change? Along with the mobility of elite merchants, the aristocracy, and cosmopolitan art collectors, could we, for instance, account for everyday micro-practices of subaltern intercultural translations that make visible entanglements between “localized” peripheries and “cosmopolitan” global centers? How are micro-spaces, for instance the house or

the hut, situated within these processes? How is the notion of space, place, and site translated through aesthetic practices? How do we account for mediatic translations, for instance from stone to paper and painting to architecture? What is the role of natural ecosystems and the landscape within aesthetic and artistic translation?

» Temporality: Diachronic movements mapped across lifecycles will make visible the temporalities of translation and change. How were knowledge systems, objects, and aesthetic practices translated across time and to what extent were these systems modulated to address changing social practices? Are there differences in temporal approaches to translation and change? How did the translation of objects and knowledge occur through familial lineages, guilds, and artistic intellectual communities? What was the role of didactic manuals, art schools, and intellectual translations in a global field? Might there be a dissonance between professional structures of knowledge transference articulated through disciplinary concerns and non-formal networks of circulation? What is the role of inter-generational knowledge flow in translation and change?

» Lexicon/s: Moving beyond normative histories of exoticism (Orientalism) and Westernization, what are the lexicons and terminologies that allow us to consider the aesthetic and social purport of translation and change from a global perspective? While the language of art history is undoubtedly a product of the European Enlightenment, colonialism, and modern rationality, might premodern theorizations allow us to question the strictures of art history? Are there differences in regional approaches to translation? How might we write art histories that account for the dissonances in diverse global perspectives to translation without reiterating the West as art history and the non-West as affective ethnography? Can we read the translation of art history texts across cultures, the art historian's ekphrastic translation of image to text, the cultural biographies of objects, and collecting and display as processes of translation and change? Can Translation and Change enrich the concepts of art history on a global scale?

Reference:

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