

ART HISTORY POSTCOLONIALISM AND THE GLOBAL TURN

ONLINE CONFERENCE PROGRAM

SEPTEMBER 25
OCTOBER 9
OCTOBER 10
& OCTOBER 23
2020



ART HISTORY,
POSTCOLONIALISM,
AND THE GLOBAL TURN
CONFERENCE PROGRAM

CONFERENCE AT A GLANCE

For more information please visit our website:

pococonf.risd.edu

FRIDAY
09/25/2020
11:00 AM

SESSION I

TAMMER EL-SHEIKH (YORK UNIVERSITY)

“What Does Art History Have to Say about a Lebanese Sasquatch?: Form, Value and Negation in the Decolonial Work of Edward Said and Amanda Boulos”

SONAL KHULLAR (UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA)

“In Light of Octavio Paz”

10/02/2020
–
10/09/2020

FILM SCREENING: *UN-DOCUMENTED: UNLEARNING IMPERIAL PLUNDER*

Directed by Ariella Aïsha Azoulay

FRIDAY
10/09/2020
11:00 AM

SESSION II

DIANA MARTINEZ (TUFTS UNIVERSITY)

“Architecture in Triple Person: National Character between Humanism and Ethnology in Pre-Post-Colonial Philippines”

JENNIFER BAJOREK (HAMPSHIRE COLLEGE)

“Mediterraneans on every corner”

ANTHONY GARDNER (OXFORD UNIVERSITY)

“Doing Art History in the ‘New Normal’”

SATURDAY
10/10/2020
11:00 AM

A Conversation between the director of *Un-Documented: Unlearning Imperial Plunder*, Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, and Vazira Zamindar (History Department, Brown), and Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa (Photography Department, RISD)

FRIDAY
10/23/2020
11:00 AM

SESSION III

IJLAL MUZAFFAR (RISD)

“Counting Quality”

ALEXANDER ALBERRO (BARNARD/COLUMBIA)

“Coloniality, Decoloniality, and ‘The Potosí Principle’ in the Twenty-first Century”

ART HISTORY, POSTCOLONIALISM, AND THE GLOBAL TURN

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

SEPTEMBER 25 / OCTOBER 9 / OCTOBER 10 / OCTOBER 23, 2020

For conference description and participant bios see pococonf.risd.edu

Each paper approx. 2000 words (10-to-15-minute presentation); papers circulate in advance to co-panelists and discussants.

SESSION I

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2020

| 11:00 – 11:15 Opening remarks + Conference Introduction

| 11:15 – 11:30 Tammer El-Sheikh (York University)

“What Does Art History Have to Say about a Lebanese Sasquatch?: Form, Value and Negation in the Decolonial Work of Edward Said and Amanda Boulos”

Abstract: Two books on the state of art history appeared this past year. Christopher S. Wood’s *A History of Art History* and a first English translation of Eric Michaud’s *Barbarian Invasions* both respond to pressures felt by art historians to account for a relativistic and ahistorical global contemporary art scene. The challenge for both is to show how global contemporary art with its dizzying range of practices, mediums, and sites of emergence can be meaningfully related to a discipline that was established on the basis of contrasts between, for Michaud the “barbarism” of 4th century Germanic tribes and the classical traditions of Rome, or for Wood ethnically distinct “biographies of form” in Riegl and Wölfflin’s work. In her double review Rachel Wetzler formulates the crisis resulting from these incongruities between art history’s past and present succinctly: “In both books the main narrative ends around 1960; when the story jumps to the present, it focuses not on new ways of understanding the past but solely on contemporary art—whose mode, we are told is amnesia.” While this decade marks the beginning of contemporary art as a period, it also saw the collapse of colonies in Africa, the MENA region and Asia. In this paper I will explore the resources for a decolonial, global and cosmopolitan contemporary art history in the published and unpublished work of Edward Said. Taking Palestinian-Canadian artist Amanda Boulos’s work as a case study I argue that, what strikes Michaud and Wood as a kind of amnesia in contemporary art might also be viewed as a strategic forgetting of the discipline’s Eurocentrism in service of ongoing struggles for decolonization.

- 11:30 – 11:45 **Sonal Khullar (University of Pennsylvania)**
“In Light of Octavio Paz”
Abstract: For Octavio Paz (1914-1998), India was Mexico’s intimate other. He wrote of his first visit there in 1951: “From the beginning everything I saw inadvertently evoked forgotten images of Mexico. The strangeness of India brought to mind that other strangeness: my own country.” In Paz’s poetry and prose, which abound in comparisons between India and Mexico and their experiences of European colonialism, strangeness is the basis for affinity, identity, and community. While Paz’s *Essays on Mexican Art* (1993) is a celebrated example of art criticism, his less well-known memoir *In Light of India* (in Spanish, *Vislumbres de la India*, 1995) is a singular meditation on South-South relations and models what I have elsewhere called postcolonial worldliness. Drawing on *In Light of India*, this paper offers methodological and historiographical reflections on the discipline of art history. Rather than locating Paz’s comparative method and postcolonial worldliness in the past—belonging to or associated with historical movements such as modernism, liberalism, internationalism, and decolonization—I consider its implications for the present. Paz’s writing illuminates the juxtaposition of the work of Indian painter Amrita Sher-Gil (1913-1941) and American filmmaker Maya Deren (1917-1961) at documenta 14 (2017), which highlighted affiliations in their feminism, primitivism, and cosmopolitanism. The intimate estrangements on view in Kassel’s Neue Galerie link Tahiti and Haiti as art-historical and world-historical projects, and establish them as foundational rather than exceptional to our thinking of art history, postcolonialism, and the global turn.
- 11:45 – 12:30 **Discussion**

FILM SCREENING

OCTOBER 2 – OCTOBER 9, 2020

- Oct 2 – Oct 9 Online screening of *Un-Documented: Unlearning Imperial Plunder*
Directed by Ariella Aïsha Azoulay
- Please register on our website for access to the online screening and conversation.
- Oct 10, 11 AM **Ariella Aïsha Azoulay** in conversation with Vazira Zamindar (History Department, Brown University) and Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa (Photography Department, Rhode Island School of Design)

SESSION II

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 09, 2020

- 11:00 – 11:15 **Opening remarks**
- 11:15 – 11:30 **Diana Martinez (Tufts University)**
“Architecture in Triple Person: National Character between Humanism and Ethnology in Pre-Post-Colonial Philippines”
Abstract: In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon describes an event in which he suddenly becomes aware of his body in “triple person”—a realization that he was simultaneously responsible for his body, for his race, and for his ancestors. This paper will use Fanon’s concept of living in triple person to navigate the life and work of the American trained Filipino architect, Juan Arellano, and will focus mainly on the Philippine Legislative Building, a building designed and built just after the United States made its first formal promise to grant the Philippines its independence. Arellano’s most symbolically loaded task was the coordination of the building’s decorative program, which included allegorical sculptures of idealized Filipinos. Arellano’s thematization of the Filipino body took shape at a moment when the humanist canon, or Vitruvian man was being radically challenged by the still new fields of anthropology and ethnology. The resulting hybridization of historical and natural man would become the aesthetic basis of the Philippines’ postcolonial “national character,” and would provide an exemplary image of how post-colonial nations would fit into an imagined new world order, one in which cultural and ethnic identity, the symbolic currency of Wilsonian internationalist politics, fit within a barely diminished Western imperial scaffold.
- 11:30 – 11:45 **Jennifer Bajorek (Hampshire College)**
“Mediterraneans on every corner”
Abstract: A key sequence of Sylvain Georges’s magisterial *Qu’ils reposent en révolte*, shot, between 2007 and 2010, in the “jungle” of Calais, shows several small groups of men removing their fingerprints. Some meticulously slice off their skin with razors; others methodically scorch their fingers on screws, heated to glowing over an open flame. In the sequence, both the filmmaker and his subjects—all of whom are African and black—offer a lucid and wry commentary on the relationships between the camera and the fingerprint, and between imaging technologies and European colonialism, whose unresolved legacies the men understand themselves to be living out. The violence of the men’s self-mutilation is, at the same time, evidence of their creativity and resourcefulness. At one point, as we see in close-up a man removing his prints with glowing metal, we hear voices talking off camera, explaining the challenges presented to their freedom of movement by the centralized European fingerprint database. One voice says, laughingly: “The Europeans have their techniques, but we, we also have our techniques.” The others chime in: “Africa united!” In this moment, the sequence seems less like a document of an ongoing catastrophe than a harbinger of things to come. I will explore Georges’s work and that of other artists making work about refugees and migrants in

contemporary Europe, in which, I argue, something like an ex-colonial cartography of blackness emerges. My hope is that in looking at this new cartography—which both differs from “new-world blackness” and, today, rapidly approaches it—we may stage one confrontation between a purported slipping away of the postcolonial and a concomitant rise of globalism. For these new cartographies remain illegible without continual reference to (anti-)colonial histories. At the same time, they offer new utopian possibilities, which are being mapped in and by blackness in Europe.

| 11:45 – 12:00

Anthony Gardner (Oxford University)

“Doing Art History in the ‘New Normal’”

Abstract: Are we still working in the age of “the global”? For the best part of three decades, the notion of globality has suggested the “free” movement (even if it was anything but free) of goods, services, people, and ideas, new modes of uneven development, new possibilities of intercultural exchange. The situation now seems very different. What we might call the nationalist-populist complex that has come to dominate many nations and cultures—in Modi’s India and Bolsonaro’s Brazil, in Trump’s America and Brexit Britain, post-Kaczynski Poland and isolationist Australia—has clearly threatened, if not quite brought to an end, the “global turn” heralded by this conference. The migration of people is, it seems, as terrifying as the migration of viruses, and both spur on an insidious xenophobia toward those scapegoats of yore, the “south” and the “east.” But the pressures that threaten the intercultural or even the global are not just borne by the right; they equally emerge in the conscience towards “flight shaming” or the persistent resistance (even from highly respected critics and curators) toward the surge and significance of biennale cultures beyond the North Atlantic. I am not immune to this conscience, having boycotted travel to the United States following the instigation of the travel ban, normalized by the U.S. Supreme Court and ever extending, that prevents many of our colleagues and friends from being able to engage in the same privilege of entering this country. By exploring what it means to break my boycott for this conference, I want to reflect on some of the challenges and urgencies facing our art-historical methods after the (post)colonial: our methods of writing and developing those histories and, just as importantly, our methods for researching and exchanging them. For if retreat, localization, and isolation are quickly becoming our new normal, then how can we persist in the kinds of art-historical practices—intercultural, translocal, perhaps even global—that promised to dissolve the North Atlantic hegemony and quarantining of the discipline?

| 12:00 – 12:45

Discussion

CONVERSATION WITH ARIELLA AÏSHA AZOULAY

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2020

Ariella Aïsha Azoulay's film, *Un-Documented: Unlearning Imperial Plunder* will be screened on the conference's website from October 2, 2020 until October 9, 2020. You can learn more about the film and register on our website for access to the limited online screening. On October 10, the director will be in conversation with Vazira Zamindar (History Department, Brown University) and Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa (Photography Department, Rhode Island School of Design).

- | 11:00 – 11:10 Opening Remarks
- | 11:10 – 12:30 Vazira Zamindar and Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa in conversation with Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, the director of *Un-Documented: Unlearning Imperial Plunder*.

SESSION III

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2020

- | 11:00 – 11:15 Opening remarks
- | 11:15 – 11:30 Ijlal Muzaffar (Rhode Island School of Design)
"Counting Quality"
Abstract: Some twenty years ago, Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, took a notorious flight over Lagos in the Nigerian presidential helicopter. In sprawling recycling operations under unfinished clover leaves, unending traffic jams, and the sea of tin roofs floating over the Lagos Lagoon that he saw below, Koolhaas proclaimed seeing "patterns" of a new, relentlessly inventive modernity. Its inhabitants worked with the speed of capital itself, ignoring outdated divisions of modern urban planning we were still following in the global North, were told in a subsequent book and accompanying film. Koolhaas was not the first, nor would be the last, architect/planner/expert to see the possibility of an alternative future in the Third World. In the postwar era, this outlook can be traced to the oft-declared "humanist" turn in architectural discussions in the 1960s that paralleled a similar humanist turn in development economics at the time. In this talk I will map how this reorientation also harbored a new mode of claiming expertise and deferring responsibility under the rubric of seeing "patterns" that continues to this day. In this genealogy, the pattern stands as a qualitative substitute for quantification. In seeking to discover patterns—cultural, formal, behavioral—the expert takes a pedagogical stance, willing to learn from the "ground" and relinquishing preordained authority. But in doing so, he

conjures an idealized and independent subject for ever new forms of credit-baiting who doesn't need any protection or guarantees, freeing both national and international clients of ensuing repercussions.

| 11:30 – 11:45

Alexander Alberro (Barnard/Columbia)

“Coloniality, Decoloniality, and ‘The Potosí Principle’ in the Twenty-first Century”

Abstract: My paper focuses on the project exhibition, “The Potosí Principle: Colonial Image Production in the Global Economy,” curated by Alice Creischer, Andreas Siekmann, and Max Jorge Hinderer, as well as the critique it received from the Bolivian group of artists and scholars organized under the name El Colectivo when it opened at Madrid’s Reina Sofia Museum in 2010. “The Potosí Principle” explored the callous dynamics of global capitalism from the surprising perspective of the Spanish colonial empire and its distinctive imagery. It presented the tandem of the primitive accumulation of wealth and systematic genocide as a fundamental capitalist “principle” that facilitated the exploitation of the Americas by the European economy. This principle becomes the conceptual basis for elaborating a genealogy backward and forwards, linking the framework of imperialism and the subsequent consolidation of capitalism to essential features of the early twenty-first-century neoliberal economy. The curators also experimented with figures of framing and point of view to develop exhibition techniques and narratives capable of fostering new subjectivities and new forms of identification. The resulting show merged history and place, discourse and design, the performative and the reflexive. Against the protocols of standard curatorial practice, the curators paid as much attention to the politics of display as to the display of politics. Despite the innovative techniques of presentation and interpretative boldness of the exhibition, however, El Colectivo accused the German curators of insufficiently taking into consideration the resistance efforts of indigenous peoples in the Andes. The group published a counter-catalogue, *Principio Potosí Reverso*, that argued that Creischer and the others had maintained the colonization of knowledge and of beings that the colonial world had inaugurated with the emergence of the Atlantic commercial circuits in the sixteenth century, and failed to decolonize the structure of exhibition-making. What was at stake in El Colectivo’s criticism? How justified were its claims? And what might this conflict tell us about the relationship between postcolonialism and art history in the twenty-first century?

| 11:45 – 12:30

Discussion

| 12:30 – 12:50

Closing Remarks



Art History, Postcolonialism, and the Global Turn is organized by Foad Torshizi (RISD), Joshua I. Cohen (CCNY), and Vazira Zamindar (Brown). For more information, please visit pococonf.risd.edu



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