The Department of Art History
Postgraduate Research Seminar Series
Semester 2 2017

Tuesday August 8, 6pm
Lecture Room 424,
4th floor, Education Building

Associate Professor Christina Neilson
Oberlin College
Crafting the Miraculous: Animating Automata

Sculptures with movable body parts appeared during the late Middle Ages and their appeal continued for centuries. With arms that could fold, legs that could bend, heads that could nod, eyes that could roll, and tongues that could move, these figures closely approximated that which they represented—living things. The ability of these sculptures to move suggested they had come to life, but this capacity was dependent on makers, who applied leather, parch-ment or polychromed gesso like skin over a corpus of wood with joints rendered to enable movement. This lecture will address what it meant for an artist to make these images and explore how the maker’s skill intersected with their object’s ability to become animated.

Thursday August 17, 4pm
Schaeffer Seminar Room 210

Dr Stephen Whiteman
Department of Art History, University of Sydney
Portrait, Plan, Map: Making and Unmaking Early Modern Landscape in China

The early eighteenth century Qing court was a site of burgeoning intellectual cosmopolitanism in which systems of knowledge and rhetorics of authority from China, Inner Asia and Europe all circulated. Landscape, a category encompassing both physical and represented space, offers unique insight into these intersections. Beginning with a monumental representation of the Kangxi emperor’s new garden, the Mountain Estate to Escape the Heat, this paper explores the distinct, yet ultimately overlapping and complementary approaches to the imagination and construction of imperial space at work in the court, raising questions about the nature of artistic experimentation, transcultural interchange, and political authority in the early modern world.

Thursday September 7, 5.30pm
Mills Lecture Theatre 209

Professor Richard Cohen
Academic director of the Israel Center of Research Excellence (ICore) for the Study of Cultures of Place in the Modern Jewish World and former Paulette and Claude Kelman. Chair in French Jewry Studies, Department of Jewish History and Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Jewish Icons of Modernity: Spinoza, Da Costa, Mendelssohn, Jesus and Herzl

The lecture treats the ways in which artists of Jewish and non-Jewish origin dealt with the above personalities, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Their image was reshaped and reimagined in later times as they came to represent certain trends in Jewish life in that period. Each of them commanded much attention long after they died, and their representation continued to attract attention by artists, who creatively fashioned them in various settings and contexts. Their inclusion in a Jewish pantheon demands attention of historians and art historians.
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Thursday September 21, 4 pm
Schaeffer Seminar Room 210

Paper One
Lorraine Kypiotis
National Art School
PhD candidate (Department of Art History)

“Castaways”: a classical collection adrift on an island continent

In the late nineteenth century the National Art School (NAS) purchased plaster casts from the London company D. Bruciani & Co., at a time when the cultural influence of classical learning had not yet buckled under the pressure of nineteenth century utilitarianism. This paper will examine the changing academic attitudes towards the collection, from once being considered ‘essential’ for art education and appreciation in the 19th century, to complete disparagement and destruction in the mid-20th century, to a rehabilitation in the 21st century, especially in the use of existing historical casts in Drawing and Sculpture classes and the use of plaster as a material in students’ and lecturers’ art making.

Thursday November 2, 5pm
Schaeffer Seminar Room 210

Paper One
Jana Vytrhlik, PhD candidate
(Department of Art History)

Judaica Australian: an emerging theme in the history of art

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Jewish community of Sydney was reaching the pinnacle of its development. The opening of the Great Synagogue on Elizabeth Street in 1878 was a loud and visionary statement of a confident congregation. It seemed to herald an era of a unified and independent identity.

This paper, I discuss the iconography and significance of three objects of Jewish culture and religion, broadly called Judaica. Focussing on the oldest ceremonial silver ornament used in an Australian synagogue, a large hand-illuminated folio dated 1879, and a unique gold presentation piece of the early gold-rush Victoria, I consider the evolving Australian Jewish identity and its visual manifestation. I argue that by introducing a largely unexplored angle of examination – the art history – we can gain a new understanding of the layers of the Jewish community awareness and cultural aspirations.

Paper Two
Angie Contini, PhD candidate
(Department of Art History)

The Saddest Music in the World: uncanny anthropomorphisms in the ineffable musical moment

Through Guy Maddin’s Saddest Music in the World (2003), this paper reimagines the existential secrets of musical experience through the burlesque theatre of inner-subjectivity, where the quarrelsome paradoxes of uncanny anthropomorphism and ineffable affective feeling collude and cross-over to satirise the anthropocentric beliefs of the serious self.

Paper Two
Victoria Souliman, PhD candidate
(Department of Art History)

Investigating Australia’s Acquisitions of Modern Art: A Vehicle of National Identity?

A closer look at the acquisition trends of Australia’s major artistic and cultural institutions during the interwar years provides evidences of a delay in the reception of modern art: the Art Gallery of New South Wales acquired its first French impressionist painting, Camille Pissarro’s Peasant’s House, Eragny (1887) in 1935, while numerous public institutions outside Europe had already gathered collections of modern art. However, when considering European artworks acquired by the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the National Gallery of Victoria, there was a growing interest in British contemporary art during the 1920s and 1930s, thereby hinting at an upkeep of national collections driven by political forces. Focusing on a comparative case study of the acquisition policies of these two national galleries, this paper will consider how the onset of their national collection of modern art reflects a lingering interest in, and a sense of identification with, British artistic achievement. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how, in the context of the interwar period, acquisitions of modern art in Australia reflected a preoccupation with national cultural identity and attempts to maintain a bond with Britain’s artistic heritage.