Workshop

Visual Arts, Museum Practices and Display

Interdisciplinary Research Group Net1 “Arts and the Transcultural"

May 9, 2014
Karl Jaspers Centre
Voßstraße 2, Building 4400, Room 212
69115 Heidelberg
Interdisciplinary Research Group Net1 “Arts and the Transcultural”

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“Visual arts, museum practices and display”, the second main focus of the interdisciplinary research group Net1 “Arts and the Transcultural” explores how certain localities, their histories and cultural conventions give rise to broader topographies of display such as temple exhibitions, transnational artists’ networks or tea gatherings in late medieval through modern Japan, literati gatherings in early modern China or the international 21st century biennale-system. What are the implications of transculturally mobile objects, artists and displays for curatorial practice and what kinds of spectatorial experiences (in various museum settings) do they induce?

The second workshop of the project “Art and the Transcultural” will focus on museum practices and problems of display in line with this second research focus. The workshop will commence with a keynote lecture by Annapurna Garimella on the most recent project of the research and design organisation Jackfruit: Vernacular, in the Contemporary (Devi Art Foundation, New Delhi). In the context of this exhibition focusing on the vernacular, shifts of the art historical and institutional terms for understanding and theorizing visual art will be addressed. The morning session of the workshop centres on South Asian Art and its display and museum practices. The talk by Fiza Ishaq will deal with problems of exhibiting religious artefacts in display settings different to their origin, against the background of an upcoming exhibition, organised in the context of the Cluster’s Annual Conference with the title “Cultural Mediation: Creativity, Performance, Display” at the Cluster in October 2014. In a panel discussion with Annapurna Garimella problems of displaying the vernacular and exhibiting objects from religious contexts will be addressed in a dialogue. An input statement by Roos Gerritsen will conclude the morning session. The second part of the workshop will centre on modalities of display in museum contexts of East Asian objects. The talk by Anna Grasskamp will shed light on how the practices of window displays may influence exhibiting national heritage in Dutch museums. Annette Löseke will discuss two empirical studies on the approach of displaying co-presenting contemporary and historic Asian art. Both talks will be wrapped up with an input statement by Birgit Hopfener.
Programme

**Friday, May 9**

9.30 to 9.45 am  Welcome & Introductory Remarks

9.45 to 11.15 am  Keynote Lecture by Annapurna Garimella (Jackfruit Research and Design)

  “Taking It to the Gallery: Vernacular, in the Contemporary”

  Discussion

11.15 to 11.30 am  Tea & Coffee Break

11.30 to 12.00  Talk by Fiza Ishaq (Cluster “Asia and Europe”)

  “Let’s Display It on the Sidewalk! The Problematics of Exhibiting Religious Artifacts in Other Contexts and Spaces”

12.00 to 12.30  Panel Discussion with Annapurna Garimella (Jackfruit Research and Design)

12.30 to 12.45  Input Statement by Roos Gerritse (Heidelberg, Institute of Anthropology)

12.45 to 1.00 pm  Discussion

1.00 to 2.00 pm  Lunch Break

2.00 to 2.45 pm  Talk by Anna Grasskamp (Cluster “Asia and Europe”):

  “Asia in Frames: Dutch Window Curators and Public Museum Displays”

  Discussion

2.45 to 3.00 pm  Tea & Coffee Break

3.00 to 3.45 pm  Talk by Annette Löseke (Cultural research and strategy counselling, Berlin)

  “Co-presenting Contemporary and Historic Asian Art. Two Visitor Studies at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and the Asian Art Museum in Berlin”

  Discussion

3.45 to 4.00 pm  Input statement by Birgit Hopfener (Art History/East Asian Art Department, Freie Universität Berlin)

4.00 to 4.15 pm  Discussion

4.15 to 4.30 am  Concluding remarks

4.30 to 5.00 pm  Small reception (in front of room 212)

from 6.00 pm  Dinner with speakers
Friday, May 9, 9.45 to 11.15 am

Annapurna Garimella: “Taking It to the Gallery: Vernacular, in the Contemporary”

Vernacular, in the Contemporary (VINC) is a landmark exhibition I curated along with Jackfruit Research and Design for Devi Art Foundation (DAF) in 2010-2011. This lecture discusses the exhibition in the context of what is happening in curatorial practice and how non-Anglophone art in the VINC exhibition challenges established ways of defining the contemporary and accepted ways of politically active curation. Galleries, institutions and individuals are more and more undertaking serious exhibition projects. Rather than invoking curatorial standards from elsewhere, I would like to reflect on the Indian situation, one in which the curator often has paradoxically both too much and too little power to create and present a narrative. This odd situation is the product of the way in which institutions are structured, the forms of patronage that make shows possible, the themes that curators take up, the spaces in which exhibitions happen and the types of audiences who visit them.

About the speaker:

Annapurna Garimella (PhD) is a designer and art historian who focuses on the art and architecture of India. She is based in Bangalore, India and heads Jackfruit, a research and design organization, specialized on design and curatorial projects. Jackfruit’s most recent project is Vernacular, in the Contemporary for Devi Art Foundation, New Delhi. She is also the founder of Art, Resources and Teaching Trust, a not-for-profit organization for obtaining resources and promoting research and teaching in the histories of art and architecture, archaeology, crafts, design, and other related disciplines. She was the former Research Editor and Advisory Board Member for Marg Publications and is currently on the board of the S N School of Art and Communication, University of Hyderabad. She has written several essays on contemporary art and edited and contributed to two the publications Shaping the Indian Modern and Akbar Padamsee: Work in Language (in collaboration with Bhanu Padamsee).
Friday, May 9, 11.30 am to 12.00

Fiza Ishaq: Let's Display It on the Sidewalk! The Problematics of Exhibiting Religious Artefacts in Other Contexts and Spaces

In this presentation I outline the concept and ideas for an exhibition to be held in Heidelberg during the Cluster’s Annual Conference (October 2014). The exhibition is a curatorial perspective of my doctoral research project, 'Karbala Imagery in the Contact Zone: The Making of Shia Devotional Art.' Artefacts on the display will include religious imagery and material objects such as battle standards (alams) and replicas of Middle Eastern shrines. They are integral to everyday religious practice of Shia communities in Hyderabad and Lucknow. In their original context, these artefacts are primarily ritual objects that adorn the inner spaces of shrines throughout the year, as well as the surrounding streets of Shia neighbourhoods during the month of Muharram.

Exhibiting the devotional artefacts of a community usually raises debates about its representation. This exhibition becomes even more complex as we move away from the conventional set up of art galleries and museums. Instead, we opt to display a series of installations spread across various cultural and commercial spaces of the city. In this instance the process of mediation requires the deliberation of crucial issues relating to the extent of contextualization and decontextualization of objects, acceptable and ‘profane’ spaces for display, collaboration with the local community and how to exhibit the un-exhibitable, among others. Through this presentation I intend to raise a discussion on these issues, as I propose possible approaches to dealing with these concerns in the process of curating the exhibition.

About the speaker:

Fiza Ishaq (M.Sc.) has studied Psychology at Brunel University (London). In 2005, she received her MSc in cross-cultural psychology with the thesis “Acculturation and the significance of honor-related values among South Asians in the UK.” She spent the following years working as researcher and project manager with various NGOs and arts organizations in India. In 2010, she was awarded a short-term fellowship from Tasveer Ghar on behalf of the Cluster of Excellence, Asia and Europe in a Global Context (Heidelberg Research Architecture (HRA9) "Satellite of Networks"), on the theme “Circulation of Popular Images and Media in Muslim Religious Spheres”. She is a graduate student at the Cluster “Asia and Europe and her project “Karbala Imagery in the Contact Zone: The Making of Popular Shia Devotional Art” will document and analyse Shia devotional art produced in Hyderabad, Lucknow and Mumbai.
Friday, May 9, 2.00 to 2.45 pm

Anna Grasskamp: “Asia in Frames: Dutch Window Curators and Public Museum Displays”

As foreign tourists instinctively recognize, Dutch window displays are meaningful representation spaces of individual and familial self-expression. Visually, the items on display in the liminal space of the window, frame the gaze from the street and its access to private space; they screen the pedestrian’s perception of the house, arguably staging individual identity, personal wealth and family heritage through a conspicuous display of material culture. In such semi-private settings artefacts are accompanied by artificial or genuine (tropical) flowers, occasionally ‘typical’ Dutch designs, miniature clogs and window-cleaning gnomes, are placed alongside foreign images as well as images of foreigners, among which remarkably many Asian objects appear.

While conversations with Dutch ‘window curators’ reveal individual stories related to the artefacts on display, in particular concerning their cultural origin and acquisition, Dutch public museums stage national narratives through and alongside Asian objects. In the recently re-opened Rijksmuseum the greater part of the Asian artefacts is exhibited in the so-called Asian pavilion outside the main building, while some also appear in the main building’s displays of Dutch history. Based on the results of a recent visitor study I undertake a critical investigation of the Rijksmuseum’s new display. Situating the Rijksmuseum within the Dutch museum landscape, most notably in relation to the Scheepvaartmuseum, my focus lies on the use of Asian objects in exhibits related to the Dutch East India Company.

Aesthetically, the glass that shields the semi-private window displays makes them comparable to the display boxes of the museums. In both cases certain choices of Asian art and material culture are framed through curated exhibits. To what extent do object-related narratives of family heritage have an impact on the way that national heritage is put on display? And how do exhibits in the semi-private and the public realms differ from each other?

About the speaker:

Anna Grasskamp (PhD) is post-doctoral fellow at Cluster of Excellence Asia and Europe in a Global Context, Heidelberg University. In 2013 she received her Ph.D. from the Department of Art History at Leiden University for a dissertation on the collecting and displaying of foreign objects in early modern China and Europe. Her research focuses on the re-framing of material and visual culture through exchanges between Asia and Europe.
Friday, May 9, 3.00 to 3.45 pm

Annette Löseke: “Co-presenting contemporary and historic Asian art. Two visitor studies at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and the Asian Art Museum in Berlin”

My paper will present findings from two qualitative empirical studies on the reception of Asian art in museums in Europe.

The two visitor studies were carried out in the Asian Pavilion of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and the Asian Art Museum in Berlin, and evaluated visitor response to the specific curatorial concept of co-presenting historic pieces and contemporary artworks in the exhibition rooms of the permanent collections of Asian art.

The studies aimed at examining in what ways and for what reasons the copresentation might influence visitors' reception of both contemporary and historic pieces, as well as the overall display.

Building on empirical findings, the paper argues that environment, space layout, and exhibition design significantly impact on how content is received. The paper therefore suggests to understand reception as dynamic process shaped by historic and contemporary social and cultural practices. Instead of pre-given objects we should rethink collected pieces as 'exhibits', displayed for reception. Not only should we challenge (Western) notions of the artwork but also (Western) notions of the exhibition.

If we understand interpretation as a dynamic process, artworks and objects potentially refer to multiple frameworks and affiliate to diverse classification categories, depending on multiple contexts of production, presentation, and reception. We therefore need to develop new models and categories, taking as starting point contemporary pluralistic, cross-/intercultural interpretation and 'meaning-making' practices by today's increasingly globalising societies.

Combining empirical insight into reception practice and theoretical reflection on the 'artwork', 'object' and 'exhibition', my paper will present first ideas for developing multiple, more complex, non-representational intercultural exhibition models.

About the speaker:

Annette Löseke (PhD) works as an art historian specialising in museum studies, intercultural reception studies and exhibition development. She recently carried out visitor studies at The British Museum, Shanghai Museum, the Asian Pavilion at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, and the Asian Art Museum in Berlin.

Annette is invited as a Visiting Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Cornell University (2015) and currently prepares a research project on 'Rethinking exhibiting: Developing intercultural exhibition models'.

She is an appointed lecturer for Visitor and Reception Studies at the Reinwardt Academy in Amsterdam, Master of Museology programme. She has worked as a guest lecturer at Humboldt University in Berlin, Free University Berlin, Leiden University, and London Metropolitan University/Whitechapel Gallery’s joint MA programme.

Annette holds a PhD in art history (University of Bonn), and studied art history, philosophy, romance literature and linguistics, and cultural management in Freiburg, Paris, Munich and London. She currently lives in Berlin.
Net 1: Arts and the Transcultural: Concepts, Histories and Practices

Coordination: Monica Juneja, Christiane Brosius, Melanie Trede, Franziska Koch, Cathrine Bublatzky

The search for a new conceptual vocabulary and research apparatus to study the dynamics of transculturality in the fields of art history, visual culture and media anthropology is a reflexive enterprise which requires synergetic collaboration across regions, time spans and disciplinary boundaries. The network project “Arts and the Transcultural: concepts, histories and practices” offers such a cross-disciplinary research environment of 15 scholars working on subjects which focus on art worlds and practices in a transcultural perspective. Based on collaborative research and publications, joint teaching and research colloquia/symposia at Heidelberg University, the research network aims to strengthen the foundations of ongoing research and to provide fresh impulses emanating from the Heidelberg Cluster to practitioners of art history, anthropology and visual culture within and beyond Heidelberg. It will move beyond the university to work together with institutions such as the Heidelberger Kunstverein. Engaging with different cultures and their relationalities requires a critical questioning of the boundaries demarcating units of investigation as they have been handed down in writing on art worlds. Rather than following national, linguistic or ethnocentric demarcations, boundaries might more productively follow the logic of circulatory practices. This framing raises challenging questions about cultural difference, multiple temporalities and shifting, often paradoxical relationships to locality which artists and other agents negotiate, all of which call for alternative explanatory paradigms.

About the Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context”:

The Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global Context" is an interdisciplinary network of researchers at Heidelberg University. About 250 scholars examine the processes of exchange between cultures, ranging from migration and trade to the formation of concepts and institutions. A central question is in which dynamics the transcultural processes between and within Asia and Europe develop. These complex historical relationships are of great relevance for the global transformations of our time. The Cluster was founded in 2007 as part of the Excellence Initiative by the German state and its federal governments. It is located at the Karl Jaspers Centre for Advanced Transcultural Studies in Heidelberg, Germany, and has a branch office in New Delhi, India. Among its international partners are Chicago University, Oslo University, Zurich University, Jawaharlal Nehru University and Kyoto University.
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