

The Heinrich Wölfflin Lectures 2015
Prof. Dr. Gerhard Wolf

Sept 29 Oct 13 Oct 27
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PROXIMITY AND DISTANCE

Positions, Scales and Trajectories
of Transcultural Art History



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Proximity and Distance
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As 'global art history' is in the process of establishing itself across the academic world, it still represents a challenge for a discipline that has traditionally been dominated by Western paradigms and divided by areas of specialization, such as Islamic, Byzantine, East Asian, Pre-Columbian, or African art. Rather than equaling the sum of these single art histories as to constitute 'world art', global art history, as considered here, is mostly concerned with cross-cultural interactions, involving all of these fields and even questioning them. The lecture series analyzes the empirical and methodological implications of global art history under these premises and proposes trajectories beyond the mapping of artistic exchange and transcultural contact. At the same time, it discusses the scales and scaling practices of art history between microscopic and macro-

scopic perspectives, moving beyond the exclusive 'local versus global' dichotomy, with a focus on the transmediterranean area. By means of case studies—spanning from China to Latin America, from multiple antiquities to multiple modernities, with a concentration on the 4th to 17th centuries—the six lectures address fundamental questions and topics of transcultural art histories regarding temporalities and topographies; materiality and mediality; pictorial languages and object worlds between politics and religion; ecology and aesthetics; artistic dynamics and aesthetic practices in processes of colonialization, decolonization and migration, as well as modes of appropriation, transfer and translation.

Prof. Dr. Gerhard Wolf

professor at the Humboldt Universität zu Berlin (since 2008). He started his scientific career at the University of Heidelberg studying art history, Christian archaeology and philosophy (PhD 1989). After his habilitation at the Freie Universität in Berlin (1995), in 1998 he followed a call for the chair in art history at the University of Trier (until 2003). His numerous guest professorships took him to Paris (EHESS), to Rome (Bibliotheca Hertziana), Vienna, Basel, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Jerusalem, Mendrisio (Accademia di Architettura), Harvard University, Lugano, Chicago, Istanbul (Boğaziçi University) and Delhi (Jawaharlal Nehru University). He is a member of the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften (since 2009) and of the German Council of Science and Humanities (Wissenschaftsrat, since 2013). His main research fields and projects include Mediterranean art histories and pre-modern globalizations, theories of the image, and sacred topographies in an interreligious perspective.

Gerhard Wolf is director of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence, Max-Planck-Institut (since 2003) and honorary

Sept 29

Global Art History, or Transcultural Art Histories?
Critical Terms, Historiographies, and Elective
Affinities with Archaeology, Anthropology, History
of Science, and Art

The lecture explores the terminological, disciplinary, and transdisciplinary aspects of transcultural art histories. Whereas 'global' defines the potentially planetary scope of art history, its chronologies pose serious questions. To start with the simplest one: when does 'global art history' begin? How might it open a new conversation with archaeology (or archaeologies), with anthropology and with other related fields?

Oct 13

Of Sites and Non-Sites:
Topographies and Architectures, Spatial
and Ornamental Orders

Architecture plays a major role in the lecture series, less in the sense of isolated monuments than as constitutive participants in the formation or transformation of sacred and political topographies. In this lecture, Constantinople from the Early Byzantine to the Early Ottoman period serves as a prime case study to explore these aspects, focusing also on the ontology and functions of ornaments.

Oct 27

Vibrant Matter, Mobile Bodies,
Sensuous Surfaces:
Objects, Images, and Art

The lecture shifts the attention from macro-architecture to the shaping and decoration of things, the interplay and entangled notions of matter and form in a transcultural approach. It abandons the traditional hierarchies of artifacts in art history, and studies the multi-sensorial aesthetics of non-flat surfaces, concentrating on wrappings, vessels and the art of containment in general. From here, it turns to the concepts of images, processes of iconization beyond figuration, and the thingness of images, with a critical consideration of theories of agency and embodiment.

Nov 10

Proximity and Distance:
Dynamics of Transcultural Visuality

Working with the Benjaminian and Warburgian terms of 'proximity' and 'distance', or of 'image vehicles', the lecture studies pictorial and literary reflections on vision, space, and mobility, with case studies from China, India, Central Asia, Europe, and the New World, mostly from the 16th and the early 17th century. The cases presented are concerned with historical modes of exposing cross-cultural gazes, the aesthetics of the 'scaling' of spatial and temporal distances, or dialectical evocations of distance in proximity, such as landscapes and maps, and transcultural dynamics of sight and touch, of the eye and the hand.

Nov 24

Ecology and Aesthetics:
Towards an Environmental History of Art

The lecture reexamines the themes of all the preceding lectures under the new paradigm of an environmental history of art, shifting from pictorial fields or cinematographic screens to territories, gardens, plantations, urban sites, landscapes, and atmospheric phenomena—and here again scale matters, even up to an interplanetary dimension. By doing so, it invites a radical reflection on the aesthetics and politics of human and nonhuman interactions, and finally also turns to highly debated definitions and modes of conservation and the restoration of cultural and monumental heritage, as well as to the 'ecologies' of the museum.

Dec 8

Post-Global
Perspectives

Taking a critical reconsideration of the major arguments of the whole series as its point of departure, the last lecture discusses the ongoing changes in art historical practices. Mostly conceived and promoted within traditional, national academic and museological structures, global art history or transcultural art histories have and will have an impact on art historical work spaces, infrastructures, and media; the forms of individual and collaborative research, even across disciplines; the 'global' art historical community and its ways and technologies of communication; the interaction of research, teaching, and the museum practices as well as heritage management. Being not the only driving force, 'global art history' will also be re-thought and transformed in the horizon of and in relation to these dynamics.