
2017 OCAT Institute Annual Lecture Series

Eurocentric and Beyond: Art History, the Global Turn and the Possibilities of Comparativism

Lecturer: Jaś Elsner

Lecture 1: Art History: Disciplinary Receptions of a European Tradition

September 12 7pm-10pm

Respondent: Chen Ping (Shanghai University)

Lecture 2: Panofsky's Circle: History and the Object of Art Historical Enquiry

September 13 7pm-10pm

Respondent: Wu Qiong (Renmin University)

Lecture 3: Eurocentric and Beyond

September 14 7pm-10pm

Respondent: Wu Hung (University of Chicago)

Venue: The University of Chicago Center in Beijing, 20th floor, Culture Plaza, No. 59A Zhong Guan Cun Street, Haidian District, Beijing

Organizer: OCAT Institute

Co-organizer: The University of Chicago Center in Beijing

Support: Shenzhen Overseas Chinese Town Co., Ltd.

Registration: The events are free, please sign up via the official wechat account "ocatinstitute" by providing the date of event (912/913/914)+name+phone number+ID number after 10 am on September 1.

General Inquiry: info@ocatinstitute.org.cn

Press Inquiry: press_ocatinst@foxmail.com

Eurocentric and Beyond: Art History, the Global Turn and the Possibilities of Comparativism

This lectures series will show the genesis of the discipline of art history as a twin entanglement of two fundamental cultural responses to the European Classical tradition: namely, the making of art and the writing of history. The series will explore the long attempt to find a historical

frame for the visual arts within a European dynamic, the way this became integrated into a sophisticated scholarly discourse about questions of style, form, iconography and meaning, and the tensions between historicism on the one hand and the living existence of the art objects of the past in the subjective experience of viewers in the present. The argument will be that the history of art as a discipline, now over 250 years old in its modern form, is a fundamentally European and Eurocentric self-examination of crucial issues with long histories in visual production that were specifically developed within the Greco-Roman tradition, such as naturalism and iconoclasm. This conclusion entails a fundamental problem if the discipline is to be valid as an interrogation of visual traditions beyond the European, traditions founded on very old and powerful philosophical assumptions that are different in their starting points and in their methods of argument from those of Europe. In the wake of the global turn of the last couple of decades, art history needs to find new models of comparativist argument in order not only to do justice to non-European art, but to bring a series of non-European perspectives to throw light on what has for too long been a Eurocentric set of positions.

Jaś Elsner

June 2017

Jaś Elsner

Jaś Elsner is Professor of Late Antique Art and Humfry Payne Senior Research Fellow in Classical Art at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and Visiting Professor of Art History at the University of Chicago. He studied Classics and art history at the universities of Cambridge, Harvard, and London, with a doctorate at King's College, Cambridge completed in 1991. While teaching at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, and later at University of Oxford, he has also held visiting teaching positions at the British School at Rome, the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, the Institute for the Humanities at the University of Michigan, and Princeton University. In July 2017, he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy (FBA). His main research interest is art, ritual, and visibility in late antiquity, on which he published several books including *Art and the Roman Viewer: the Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity*, and *Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text*. He also continues to publish an ongoing series of studies and translations on art historiography in *Critical Inquiry* and *Art History*. Since 2013 Elsner has been Principle Investigator on the *Empires of Faith* project, a collaborative initiative between the British Museum and Wolfson College, Oxford, exploring the visual cultures of the world religions in the Mediterranean and Asia between 200 and 800 AD.

Lecture 1

Art History: Disciplinary Receptions of a European Tradition

TUE September 12 7-10pm

Respondent: Chen Ping (Shanghai University)

This lecture explores the roots of art history as a scholarly discipline in European culture after the Reformation, and in particular the debts that its twin founders – Giorgio

Vasari in the 16th century and Johann Joachim Winckelmann in the 18th century – owed to the writings about art inherited from the ancient Greek and Roman traditions. The narrative culminates with the great moment of European imperial and colonialist dominance when the discipline of art history attained its first full maturity at the end of the 19th century and in the early 20th century in the works of Alois Riegl, Heinrich Wölfflin and Aby Warburg, all writing in German but hailing from Austria, Switzerland and Germany respectively.

Lecture 2

Panofsky's Circle: History and the Object of Art Historical Enquiry

WED September 13 7-10pm

Respondent: Wu Qiong (Renmin University)

This lecture looks closely at the signal contribution of one of the most important scholars of the mid-20th century, Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968). The problem at stake is the question of historicism and of what is valid in art historical explanation and interpretation. Panofsky's thought builds on and critiques Riegl, Wölfflin and Warburg; it is not only of immense theoretical significance in its own right, but it proved to be the most influential model of how to write art history in America in the years after the Second World War, since Panofsky was one of the great generation of refugee Jewish scholars forced into exile by the Nazi regime in Germany. I will argue that Panofsky's prescriptions remain the basis for how to think about art in a historical way, but that they are in certain respects fundamentally flawed.

Lecture 3

Eurocentric and Beyond

THU September 14 7-10pm

Respondent: Wu Hung (University of Chicago)

The final lecture accepts the conclusion of the preceding two, that the discipline of art history as a series of methods has evolved to solve problems substantially centred on issues in European art, and remains profoundly Eurocentric in its instincts. But the challenge – in the rise of a deeply learned and theoretically informed series of discourses about for example Islamic, Chinese, Indian and Japanese art – is that the discipline of art history as we currently have it, founded on European philosophical assumptions and patterns of argument, is inadequate to deal with the visual and material cultures of extremely ancient, mature and independent philosophical traditions with their own styles of argumentation and rhetoric. The need is to find a way forward that is genuinely global and comparative but celebrates individual traditions (including the European) in their own right and in their own specificity.

Respondents

Chen Ping is Professor at Shanghai University, and is also a committee member of China Artists Association and Visiting Professor at the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute. Previously, he served as Associate Editor-in-chief at the China Academy of Art Press and Departmental Chair at the College of Fine Arts at Shanghai University. His research interests are architectural history and the historiography of Western art history. He is the author of *Art History's History* and *History of World Architecture* (the recipient of First Prize in publication on philosophy and social sciences in Shanghai). A long-standing translator of key works in Western art historiography, Chen is also Editor-in-chief of *Landmarks in Art History Series*.

Wu Qiong is Professor at the College of Philosophy at China Renmin University. His research interests are western philosophy and aesthetics, theories of visual culture and iconology, and Western art history. He is the author of *Jacques Lacan: reading your symptoms, Towards a Dialectical Critique, Studies on Marxist Theories of Art in 20th Century America*. His current project focuses on art of the early Renaissance in Italy.

Wu Hung, a permanent member of the American Academy of Art and Science, is a famous art historian, critic, and curator. Currently he holds the Harrie A. Vanderstappen Distinguished Service Professorship at the Department of Art History and the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago, and is also the director of the Center for the Art of East Asia and the Consulting Curator at the Smart Museum of the same university. He is also the Executive Director of OCAT Institute. Wu Hung's research interests include both traditional and contemporary art. His major publications on traditional Chinese art include: *The Wu Liang Shrine: The Ideology of Early Chinese Pictorial Art* (1989), *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture* (1995), *The Double Screen: Medium and Representation in Chinese Painting* (1996), *The Art of the Yellow Springs: Understanding Chinese Tombs* (2010), and *A Story of Ruins: Presence and Absence in Chinese Art and Visual Culture* (2012). His major books on modern and contemporary art include: *Exhibiting Experimental Art in China* (2000), *Remaking Beijing: Tiananmen Square and the Creation of a Political Space* (2005), *Making History: Wu Hung on Contemporary Art* (2008), *Wu Hung on Contemporary Chinese Artists* (2009), *Contemporary Chinese Art: A History* (2014), and *Zooming In: Histories of Photography in China* (2016).

About OCAT Institute Annual Lecture Series

As an open initiative dedicated to research in art history, the OCAT Institute Annual Lecture Series intends to delineate the contour of contemporary thought, reexamine potential histories of contemporary art, and create a platform of exchange and dialogue between the academic community in China and abroad. As one of the essential components of OCAT Institute's public

educational programs, it promotes an approach to research that draws from a wide range of disciplines in the humanities.

Since the opening of the OCAT Institute in 2015, the Annual Lectures has seen two successful series of programs. Delivered respectively by the French philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman and the famous art historian, critic, and curator Wu Hung, these three-part lecture series are entitled *Image, History, Poem: 3 Lectures on the Visual Art of S.M. Eisenstein* (2015) and *Space in Art History* (2016). As part of each annual program, the Institute also organized a series of research seminars and public forums, to discuss their scholarship, curatorial practices, and intellectual contributions. Meanwhile, the two Annual Lecturers, Georges Didi-Huberman and Wu Hung, were also invited to curate two related exhibitions—*Memory Burns* (2015) and *An Exhibition About Exhibitions: Displaying Contemporary Art in the 1990s* (2016). This series of events inspired discussion and drew the attention of academics and art historians both in China and abroad.

In 2017, the OCAT Institute invites Professor Jaś Elsner (University of Oxford) as its 2017 Annual Lecturer. The Annual Lectures entitled *Eurocentric and Beyond: Art History, the Global Turn, and the Possibilities of Comparativism* will be held between September 12 and 14, 2017, at the University of Chicago Center in Beijing. Throughout the entire annual cycle, the OCAT Institute will host a variety of events including a Launch Lectures series, research seminars, public forums, exhibitions, and publications, with an overarching focus on historiography. During the first two months of the year, the OCAT Institute initiated the *Jaś Elsner Launch Lecture Series* and invited researchers in art historiography to discuss the Vienna School of Art History and the German tradition of formalist aesthetics. The subsequent *Jaś Elsner Seminar Series*, which constitutes the central component of the program, unfolds in three installments. The first and second seminars *Beyond Kunstwollen* and *Towards a Self-Aware Description* took place in April and June this year respectively. The final part of this seminar series will be held on September 14, prior to the third lecture of the Annual Lectures. The exhibition *Sites and Images: Two Research Projects of Oxford University and the University of Chicago* jointly initiated by the OCAT Institute, the Historic Environment Image Resource (HEIR) at Oxford University, and the Center for the Art of East Asia at the University of Chicago will also open to the public on September 15.

Related Events

Jaś Elsner Seminar Three:

Comparativism in Relief

Moderators: Jaś Elsner, Wu Hung

Speakers: Jia Yan, Wang Yudong, Wu Yanan, Zou Qingquan

Time: September 14 2pm-5.30pm

Venue: The University of Chicago Center in Beijing

Registration: The events are free, please sign up via the official wechat account “ocatinstitute” by providing the date of event (912/913/914)+name+phone number+ID

number after 10 am on September 8.

Sites and Images: Two Research Projects of Oxford University and the University of Chicago

Organisers: OCAT Institute, HEIR (Historic Environment Image Resource, Oxford University), Center for the Art of East Asia (University of Chicago)

Opening: September 15 3pm

Duration: September 15-December 31 2017

Venue: OCAT Institute