

**2017 OCAT Institute Annual Exhibition
Press Release**

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

Section One: Site·Object·Biography: Archaeology and Photography

Section Two: The Buddhist Cave Temples and Sculptures of Tianlongshan: Historical
Photographs and New Imaging Technology

September 16-December 31, 2017

Opening: 3pm-6pm September 15, 2017

Organizers:

OCAT Institute

Historic Environment Image Resource (Oxford University)

Center for the Art of East Asia (University of Chicago)

Venue: OCAT Institute, Jinchanxilu, Chaoyang District, Beijing, China (100 meters North
from Subway Line 7 Happy Valley Scenic Area Station)

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The OCAT Institute is pleased to announce that its 2017 Annual Exhibition, entitled *Sites and Images: Two Research Projects of Oxford University and the University of Chicago*, will open to the public from 3pm, September 15, 2017. In this exhibition, *sites* refer to places of historical remains produced by human artistic activities, which also include architectural structures, sculptures, vessels, and paintings associated with the actual locale. *Images*, as will be seen throughout the exhibition, refer to representations of historical sites by means of modern visual technologies, especially photography and 3D imaging. The exhibition is divided into two sections.

Section One, entitled “Site·Object·Biography: Archaeology and Photography”, is organized by Historic Environment Image Resource (HEIR) under the Institute of Archaeology at Oxford University. It seeks to present two forms of comparison. In the first case, it offers a series of photographs – in different media from the glass plate slide to the digital image – of objects and sites from archaeological contexts in a series of cultures. These include Northern Europe, North Africa, and the eastern Mediterranean. Moreover, using multiple photographs of the same archaeological object or site from different periods, the section stages a further form of comparison. The different stages within the long life history of a given artifact or site become the point at issue. The rich set of imageries produced by modern archaeological photography can show us something of the history of the ways objects and sites have changed in the roughly 150 years since photographic recording began in earnest, and can hopefully act as a prism of vision and imagination through which to explore the biographies of sites and objects.

Section Two, entitled “The Buddhist Cave Temples and Sculptures of Tianlongshan: Historical Photographs and New Imaging Technology”, is organized by the Center for the Art of East Asia in the Department of Art History, University of Chicago. This section

makes use of early photographic records and new forms of imaging technology to “restore” many of the Tianlongshan statues scattered in foreign collections to their former integrity. The Center for the Art of East Asia has undertaken extensive recording and archiving of Buddhist cave sculptures outside of China using 3D scanning. It is also collaborating with the School of Fine Art, Taiyuan University of Technology and the Cultural Preservation Bureau of Tianlongshan Caves to conduct scanning of the actual caves. Combining the 3D information of the caves with that of the missing sculptures, the research teams are working toward the digital reconstruction of the cave shrines. This section is thus presented as an exploration of the possibilities of using historical images together with new digital displays – including video, interactive interfaces, and virtual reality – to create more informative and engaging museum exhibitions in the future.

Together, the dialogue between the two sections speaks to a central theme of the entire exhibition, i.e. the significance of the dialectics between sites and images for art-historical research. While archaeological sites undergo continuous transformations thanks to the twin forces of nature and man, images offer us the dual possibilities of documenting these changes and reconstructing lost contexts. These images and reconstructions, however, could never stand in for the actual sites; they are vehicles for the transmission of historical knowledge about them. It is hoped that the staging of this joint exhibition could create a potent comparative scenario in response to the *global turn* in art history, shed light on new paths taken by the discipline’s practitioners in recent years, and strengthen the connectivities and dialogues between the art-historical communities in China and abroad.

OCAT Institute

The OCAT Institute is an independent non-profit research center dedicated to the history of art and its related discourses. It is also an integral part of the OCAT Museums. The Institute has three main areas of activity: publication, archive, and exhibition. The scope of its research encompasses Chinese art from antiquity through the modern and contemporary period. More specifically, it investigates artists, artworks, art movements, exhibitions, aesthetic discourses, as well as art institutions, publications, and other aspects of art’s overall ecology. It will establish a research archive and facilitate dialogue and exchange between China and abroad. In addition, it serves as an exhibition platform in Beijing.

The OCAT Institute aims to establish a paradigm of valuation, a framework of academic investigation, and a unique set of methods, for historically grounded research on modern and contemporary Chinese art. Its scholarly vision has at its core: knowledge, intellect, and research. It seeks to forge connectivities between traditional art history and research on modern and contemporary art, and support the translation and publication of critical works on art history. Through an interdisciplinary approach that bridges contemporary art research, critical theory, and the history of ideas and visual culture, it promotes an integrated methodology and an open spirit of academic research.

HEIR

HEIR, the Historic Environment Image Resource, based at the Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford, UK, is a digitizing, crowd-sourcing, and re-photography initiative rescuing and bringing to light old photographs of archaeological sites and places.

The HEIR online database contains a digital collection of thousands of historic photographic images from all over the world dating from the late nineteenth century onwards. It's core images come from old lantern slide and glass plate negatives held in college, library, museum, and departmental collections within the University of Oxford and beyond. New resources are being added all the time.

HEIR's mission is to provide a freely accessible global database of historic photos of landscapes, monuments, and sites. HEIR draws on the knowledge of a world-wide community of citizen scientists to identify and re-photograph these sites in their modern settings, helping scholars from a wide variety of disciplines to track changes to sites, monuments, landscapes, and societies over time.

CAEA

The Center for the Art of East Asia in the Department of Art History was established in 2003 with support from the Division of the Humanities to facilitate and support teaching and research in the rapidly growing field of East Asian art at the University of Chicago.

The Center draws inspiration from trends in both traditional history and contemporary culture. East Asian art traditions have emerged and been redefined throughout history by cultural interactions. New archaeological finds provide evidence of this cross-fertilization over several millennial that is reshaping the field. In the contemporary world, East Asian societies of Korea, Japan, and China are interacting to an ever-greater extent with other nations and are playing larger roles in contemporary culture and international affairs. Scholars and artists from these areas have a growing impact in the areas of art, culture and international studies. This concentration of interest in Asian art and visual culture is redefining the parameters of East Asian art history. In response to these developments, we have adopted a global outlook and encourage new perspectives including organizing international collaborative research projects with universities, museums, and experts around the world.

Organizers:



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