Cultural Encounter and the Category of Art

Offered by Daniela Bleichmar
Associate Professor of Art History and History
University of Southern California

The Getty Research Institute
Fridays, 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.
Orientation: Friday, December 6, 2013
Seminars: January 17, 24, 31, February 7, 21, 28, March 7, 14, 2014

This graduate seminar will examine the relationship between cultural encounter and art, exploring not only how art participated in encounters but also how the study of encounters brings into question the very category of art. At an empirical level, we will discuss and compare historical case studies in order to assess some of the different roles that images and objects have played in cultural encounters. How were they mobilized, challenged, interpreted and misinterpreted, appropriated, incorporated, resisted, reactivated, transformed? At a methodological and theoretical level, we will examine the ways in which cultural encounter can problematize the modern Western notion of “art” by challenging some of its basic assumptions about objects, makers, viewers, taxonomies, hierarchies, and the functions and power of images and objects.

Topics to be discussed include: histories and geographies of art; art and aesthetics as distancing mechanisms; theories of contact, exchange, and translation; different modes and moments of encounter; the role of mobility; the relationship between art and documentation; art and the politics of exclusion; and taxonomies of value.

We will work closely with primary sources in the Getty Research Institute’s special collections and draw on an interdisciplinary array of secondary sources in anthropology, art history, cultural geography, history, and literary studies. The framework of the seminar will be historical and comparative. While many of the case studies will focus on the early modern period (ca. 1500–1800), we will also discuss materials from other periods. The seminar will be relevant to students from across the humanities and humanistic social sciences.

To apply to participate in this seminar, please submit the following:

1) Personal information
   Name, home address and phone number, campus address and phone number, e-mail address

2) Graduate transcript
   (not required for students in their first term)

3) Statement of interest
   No longer than one page (double-spaced) about your reasons for wanting to participate in this seminar

4) Reference
   A brief recommendation (a paragraph is sufficient) from a faculty member who is familiar with your work sent by e-mail to the address below

All application materials should be sent to the Getty Research Institute by November 1, 2013.

E-mail materials to: Sabine Schlosser (sschlosser@getty.edu)

Questions about course content may be directed to Daniela Bleichmar at bleichma@usc.edu.