

2021 – 2022 Postgraduate Symposium

Thursday 19th May 2022

MATERIALITY AND DISPLAY

Stephen Feeke

Cold marble, hot bronze: a change of temperature and a shift in Hepworth's sculptural process

Barbara Hepworth only began using bronze in 1956 when, as it transpired, she was midway through her career. Whilst other artists had already begun using non-art materials, Hepworth's use of a traditional sculptural medium could be seen as a retrograde step. My research has been concerned with recasting her decision as experimental, adventurous and brave, not least because it involved learning entirely new techniques with great risk to both career and reputation. Central to my project is also the fact that Hepworth's late change generated new global audiences for her work and, crucially, coincided with recognition from feminist artists and writers most notably in America. By reconceptualising Hepworth's shifting process, furthermore, it is my contention that new metaphorical readings of her bronze sculptures are still plausible. For this paper I shall interpret Hepworth's bronzes as a direct response to the typical critical reception of her earlier stone carvings as cold, puritanical and impenetrable, evinced by a lecture Hepworth wrote about her work entitled 'The Sculptor Speaks'. For this lecture, recorded for the British Council in 1961, Hepworth's use of language is particularly heated, conflating the process of fire and molten metal with a defiant response to previous assessments of her work, and this I shall argue allows us to re-examine her later bronze sculpture as a confident statement of creativity in advancing age.

Helen Lewandowski

Insta-humanism: Instagram's Book for Pope Francis

In this paper, I examine an unusual artefact of our times: a very rare, printed book produced by Instagram solely for the audience of Pope Francis in 2016. I explore some of the images that make up this book in the context of a wider resurgence of humanism in documentary photography and photojournalism—and how its distinct ideology and underlying set of motivations contrast with the post-war universal humanism of the 1950s.

SPACE AND RITUAL

Lorenzo Gatta

A Community of Equals: the Confessionals in the Jesuit Church of Mechelen (1683)

The ensemble of fourteen confessionals in the Jesuit Church of Mechelen was realised in 1683 to cope with “the large crowds of penitents that thronged the sacred tribunals.” Extending along the entirety of the side walls, this imposing structure of wood would be inhabited by more than forty people at the same time, all taking the sacrament in public and collectively. Moving beyond issues of style, iconography and patronage, this paper examines how the spatial arrangement of these confessionals expressed the public, collective and gregarious nature of early modern confession. While their linear distribution along the aisles ensured an efficient control of the crowd during the performance of the ritual, their structural incorporation into the side walls produced a condition of “perpetual equality” among the penitents. As revealed in the lack of recognition of the donors and the artists involved in their production, the confessionals were designed to erase any distinction of status within the community. Against the view of a progressive “privatisation” of penance, this paper shows that the aim behind these confessionals was not the cultivation of the individual self, but its ultimate negation.

Alice David

Theorising the Cut-Out Stencil in Grupo Suma’s Urban Interventions (1976 – 1982)

From public murals to grand redevelopment schemes informed by cybernetics, successive governments in post-revolutionary Mexico have sought to inscribe the walls of the capital city with the promises of economic modernisation. The yawning gap between the State’s triumphalist rhetoric of progress and the lived reality for the majority of Mexico City’s inhabitants peaked in 1968 when the State transformed the city into an art installation for the duration of the Olympic Games. Quite literally painting over the cracks in time for the television cameras, poorer inhabitants of the city who undermined this vision of modern Mexico were also removed. Artists responded on the same terms. On the ten-year anniversary of the notorious Summer Games, artists seized upon the physical space of the street – the walls, the roads, urban debris – to protest the introduction of further neoliberal economic policies. This paper examines the urban interventions of Grupo Suma, a collective of young artists who developed a repertoire of conceptual strategies based almost exclusively in the technology of the cut-out stencil. Considering the performative dimensions of their work and the intersections between the street and the institutional space of the gallery, the paper will ultimately propose new ways for thinking about the stencil outside of its basic capacity for reproduction.

Giosue Fabiano

'I will sing praise to thee in the presence of angels:' Sunlight, Frescoes and Chants in S. Angelo in Formis

The paper explores how frescoes took part in the staged liturgy of Vespers in the eleventh-century church of S. Angelo in Formis, near Capua (southern Italy). At sunset, the three Archangels depicted in the apse were bathed in sunlight by the three windows in the western façade. Medieval exegetes affirmed that angels enlightened the dark recesses of the human mind, just as light beams shining through a window (*'per fenestram'*). Would church observers understand this metaphor in embodied, physical terms? I suggest that at S. Angelo the angel-fenestration metaphor was sensorially activated by chants during the sunset prayer of Vespers, when monks sang of the "golden, perfect Trinity", and the "splendid and beautiful angel, who shines before the Lord and all the creatures." Ultimately, the paper reveals how medieval religious communities strategized the lighting of fresco decorations to enhance the devotional and aesthetic response to liturgy.

REPRESENTATION AND RECEPTION

Harvey Shepherd

A 'Laboratory' of Absolutism: Representation and Regional Identity During the French Annexation of Corsica, 1769

When Louis XV purchased the island of Corsica from the Genoese on the 15th of May 1768, he acquired not only a new territory for France, but also a population actively engaged in a struggle for their independence. The island became a site of fascination for French political thinkers, who saw it as an unprecedented opportunity to adapt the structures of absolute monarchic rule to new Enlightenment thinking. In the words of Louis-Charles-René, the comte de Marbeuf, one of the king's representatives on Corsica: "nothing exists there, so to speak, and everything remains to be established."

This paper examines three portraits dating from 1769, each of which depict the leader of the island's rebellion, general Pascal Paoli. All three portraits differ greatly in their representations of Paoli, and offer varied presentations of his Corsican identity for different audiences. Through a consideration of their varied political and geographical contexts, the discussion aims to understand how these works visually construct Paoli as a symbol of Corsican independence, setting the island's culture in opposition to French political aims.

Samuel Dawson

A Family Affair? Contextualising Francesco Morone's *Cycle of Illustrious Benedictines* in the sacristy of Santa Maria in Organo in Verona

The paper investigates Francesco Morone's fresco cycle of illustrious Benedictines in the Olivetan church of Santa Maria in Organo. Between 1505 and 1507, Morone decorated the church sacristy with a scheme depicting twenty-eight Benedictine popes alongside forty secular rulers.

In *Le Vite*, Vasari praised the sacristy as 'the most beautiful...there was in all Italy', remarking that the 'heads of great beauty' had been achieved by taking 'portraits from life...of the monks who had their habitation or temporary abode' in the monastery. Drawing on Vasari's description, the paper considers the fresco cycle from an Olivetan perspective. What factors motivated the Olivetans to decide upon this unusual form of sacristy decoration? How did the congregation, a cloistered religious

order characterised for their stringent interpretation of the *Rule of Saint Benedict*, come to picture themselves as monarchs and magistrates?

The paper argues that in ennobling their past, the Veronese Olivetans implicitly acknowledged the Order's aggrandised public status and stature at the turn of the sixteenth century. Yet the Veronese congregation also employed a tactic that would inspire confidence within the local elite, encouraging continued patronage of the Benedictine church.

Francesca Wilmott

Mike Henderson: Taking the Bottom Out of the Basket, 1965–1975

Painter, filmmaker, blues musician, and professor, Mike Henderson has defied categorization since the start of his career. Born in the predominantly Caucasian town of Marshall, Missouri, in 1943, Henderson was keen to move as far away from home as possible after finishing high school. In 1965, he enrolled at the San Francisco Art Institute, one of the only integrated art schools in the United States. His earliest paintings were large, allegorical scenes rendered in expressive drips and scratches of oil paint on canvas, in keeping with Bay Area figurative traditions. Unlike earlier compositions by Richard Diebenkorn, David Park, or Elmer Bischoff, Henderson's politically charged works conveyed his experience of racial violence in America. This paper examines the presentation of Henderson's early paintings in the Whitney Museum of American Art's 1969 exhibition, *Human Concern / Personal Torment: The Grotesque in American Art*, and 1971 exhibition, *Contemporary Black Artists in America*. Together, these shows allow us to parse out regional and racial debates and demonstrate how Henderson's work complicated established media hierarchies, racial categories, and geographic designations.