

KONFERENZBERICHTE

Summer School “Seeing Matter(s): Materiality and Visuality”

Karl Jaspers Centre for Advanced Transcultural Studies, Heidelberg,
29. July – 4. August 2012

The role of visual and material culture in the context of transcultural exchange processes between Asia and Europe was the topic of the summer school “Seeing Matter(s): Materiality and Visuality”. It was organised by Christiane Brosius together with Barbara Mittler (both Heidelberg) and Sumathi Ramaswamy (Durham), coordinators of project B4 „Transcultural Visuality” at the Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context”. A group of 20 Master and PhD candidates and more than 10 scholars from various countries and academic disciplines, such as history, art history, literature studies, the social sciences and anthropology, discussed the manifold interrelations of materiality and visibility. They focused on encounters with things, practices of seeing, transferring, collecting, framing, and representing objects.

The Summer School kicked off with the participant’s presentations of their individual research focus and material. Visualized through posters, these presentations addressed important topics and raised interesting questions, such as how to deal with the sensory experience of objects and how seeing is both personal and culturally influenced. The first keynote lecture was given by Kenneth George (Madison). The anthropologist presented a paper entitled “Companionable Objects, Companionable Conscience: Reflections on Sunaryo’s Titik Nadir”. He argued that Sunaryo’s wrapping up of art pieces, which was the central part of the Indonesian artist’s work, was an iconoclastic gesture that gave form to the ways in which the artist dealt with the collapse of the national order, the situation of the local art world and his own conscience.

The topic of the presentations on the next day was “Delicate Materials: Embodying and Colouring Intimacy”. With “Undressing Fashions: Intimate Bodies and Public Narratives in 21st Century Chinese Visual Culture”, Paola Zamperini (Amherst, Massachusetts) presented her research on underwear in contemporary Chinese Visual Culture. She argued that a close analysis of the ways in which underwear is worn and depicted in visual media generates knowledge about intimate issues, such as perception of the body, changing gender roles, and economic and sexual preferences. Christiane Brosius, Professor of Visual and Media Anthropology, talked on “Colouring Companionship in Urban India”. She discussed imagined and real space making through objects such as Valentine’s cards. Using the examples of small feet and large hands in Chinese visual culture, Barbara Mittler showed how the visual implementation of beauty and intimacy is constantly reshaped and how narratives of the body are subordinate to prescribed modes of seeing. In her talk on “Seeing Matters: Forms, Materials & Colours of Love and Life in China”, she addressed the colour and shape of things and its changing significance according to political circumstances, highlighting the need for the “period eye”.

The next sessions were entitled “Forming Material Worlds: Scale, Form and Substance.” Kajri Jain (Mississauga, Canada) began the day with a talk on the emergence of monumental statues of religious figures in India. In discussing “How size does matter,” the art historian

related the increasing popularity of these monumental statues to the country's neo-liberal changes, such as urban development, expansion of capitalism and the tourism industry". Sumathi Ramaswamy (Durham) led the participants from the scale of religious statues to debates on the globe and its influence on the formation of an early modern subjectivity with regard to the South Asian continent. The historian's paper "Global encounters, Spherical reflections" followed itineraries of the globe as a tangible instrument through three 'biographical' stories and different media (painting, photography, film). Monica Juneja (Heidelberg), Professor of Global Art History, presented the example of the "Millionenzimmer" or "Spiegelzimmer" in the Schönbrunn palace in Vienna for her talk on "Cut, paste and reconfigure: bringing home mythical worlds". She focused on the practice of decoupage in the Millionenzimmer, in which pieces from miniatures of South Asian albums were used.

Jan Bardsley (Chapell Hill, North Carolina) gave the second keynote lecture, "From Kitsch to Cool: The Geisha Apprentice in Japanese Visual Culture". The presentation addressed visions of girlhood in contemporary Japan and asked how traditions, in the form of the Maiko, become packaged as cute, consumable goods such as Maiko accessories, make-up products, postcards and candy.

On the next day, the participants dealt with matters related to "Collecting & Exhibiting Material: Assemblages, Performances, Museums". In her presentation, Kavita Singh (New Delhi) brought the National Museums of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh to attention. Starting with the question of how people have been collecting things, she argues that these three museums are expressions of a new national identity subsequent to independence and separation. In the lecture entitled "Showcases: Isolation vs. Interrelation", Christoph Lind concentrated on the use of showcases in the display of exhibits. The Head of the Department "Exhibition Management and Education" at the Reiss-Engelhorn Museums (Mannheim) reconstructed the dichotomy produced through this twofold usage of isolating and interrelating. On the one hand, used to ensure protection and security, showcases are perceived as barriers between the object and the visitor. On the other hand they can be seen as instrument to frame and/or set apart certain exhibits. The last day was used for concluding statements and discussion.

Further information is available at www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/en/summerschool. The next summer school of the Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global Context" will be held in August 2013.

Marlène Harles

4. Kooperationsworkshop: Osttimor 10 Jahre in der Unabhängigkeit

Berlin, 16.–18. November 2012

Der Wunsch nach fachlichem Austausch und Vernetzung zu Osttimor stand im Mittelpunkt des 4. Workshop, der von Watch Indonesia!, der Deutschen Osttimor Gesellschaft, dem Osttimor Forum und dem Asienhaus ausgerichtet wurde. „Wir sind heute auf einem guten Weg und wir lösen unsere Konflikte nicht mehr auf der Straße, sondern im Parlament“, begrüßte Nelson Santos, Osttimors Botschafter für die Europäische Union, die Teilnehmenden. 1999 sei das Land zerstört gewesen und niemand habe Erfahrung im Regieren gehabt. Die politische Krise von 2006 hätte das Land in seiner Entwicklung beinahe wieder auf den Nullpunkt zurück gebracht und die Gesellschaft reagierte traumatisiert in den Mustern der Vergangenheit. „2006 war eine Schande für unsere Regierung“, räumt der Botschafter ein, „und die Armutsrate stieg!“ Doch das Land habe sich aus der Krise heraus gekämpft: „Dank der