

ASIA AND EUROPE
IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT



CLUSTER OF EXCELLENCE
UNIVERSITY OF HEIDELBERG

RUPRECHT-KARLS-
UNIVERSITÄT
HEIDELBERG



The Power of Things and the Flow of Cultural Transformations

Lecture Series 2009 / 2010, Thursday 6:15 pm to 8 pm

Karl Jaspers Centre, Voßstraße 2, Building 4400, 69115 Heidelberg, Conference Room 212

Coordinator: Lieselotte E. Saurma

The lecture series aims at describing the role of things, artefacts, luxurious objects, and ideas in cultural processes. Material artefacts such as monuments, paintings, manuscripts, carpets, vessels etc. are signs of cultural self-definition even if they are integrated from far away. Thus culture is in a permanent process of becoming “colonized” by objects getting so familiar, that they are embedded in the social and economic context as “natural” indigenous things, specific signs of this culture. Normally, these processes were not guided consciously, it is rather a question of cultural achievements, started by networks such as courts, monasteries, legations and organisations, transferred from single groups or even individuals in the language of their own contexts, increasing the own cultural identity. Such forms of transgression demand an inappreciable process of adaptation, guided by upper classes top down, although in modern societies, a development bottom up is possible, too. Therefore, this effort of integration assumes a translation in inner cultural self-understanding, an adaptation of knowledge and the framing of objects in their new traditional context.

Things and Culture

15.10.2009 NICHOLAS THOMAS (CAMBRIDGE): Maori Carving and Colonial History. A supplement to Tene Waitere’s Travels

This lecture addresses the efficacy of things under changing colonial circumstances. Tene Waitere (1854–1931) was the most important Maori sculptor of the colonial period. Though profoundly aware of customary carving traditions, he seized opportunities raised by emerging tourist markets and commissions from ethnologists and the New Zealand government to create new genres and new carving styles. While he continued to carve for other Maori, much of his work for non-Maori clients was dispersed throughout the world: of the four historic houses now found outside New Zealand, three were partly or wholly carved by him. This paper reflects on the efficacy of his work in cross-cultural settings. A part of a collaborative project – which incorporates also contributions by Waitere’s great-great grandson, a contemporary Maori artist, and a documentary photographer of carvings ‘out of place’ – the essay draws on Auge, Nora, and Sebald in thinking through the ‘historic places’ in which Waitere’s works are now found.

Further information: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/press/booksauthors/otagoauthors/nicholasthomas.html>

29.10.2009 MARINA WARNER (LONDON): Riding the Carpet: Talismans and Toys in the 1001 Nights

The tales collected in the Arabian Nights, first translated into French and English at the beginning of the eighteenth century, ensured the popularity of novel forms of domestic and consumer enchantment, which conferred on goods, manufactures, and artifacts powers of animate life and magical energies. Lamps, gems, kitchenware, and flying carpets, inhabited by potent atavistic genies, act as the motors of the plots and the servants of the protagonists. Marina Warner will discuss the concurrent introduction of the concept of a talisman into western Europe, and explore the meanings of this form of magical thinking at the time, especially in relation to the process of storytelling and the transition to written literature.

Personal website: <http://www.marinawarner.com/>

Nearer East

05.11.2009 MICHAEL STOLZ (BERNE): Oriental 'spolia' in Wolfram's 'Parzival' and its manuscript tradition

The paper deals with Arabic objects, names and concepts in Wolfram's main novel. It shows that oriental components of the text such as the grail, planet names, the Prester John or the asserted source of Kyot prove to be a product of eastern contacts and imagination. The manuscript transmission reflects this fact in the way it adds alterations and ornamental decorations to the text.

Personal website: <http://www.parzival.unibe.ch/stolz/index1.html>

26.11.2009 LISA MONNAS (LONDON): Flight of the phoenix. The impact of Mongol silks in Europe (13th-14th centuries)

Oriental silk from the Mongol Empire reached Europe, via Italy, in increasing quantities from the mid-thirteenth century until the late 1360's by means of trade and diplomatic missions, initially as raw silk and later as finished pieces. Presenting new textures and unfamiliar, exotic designs, with a fascinating combination of Chinese and Islamic motifs, these silks were highly appreciated in the West and examples of them have been found in Italy, Spain and Northern Europe, in the tombs of princes and among the vestments of a pope and of an emperor. Their success represented a challenge and an inspiration to the burgeoning Italian silk industry. The Italians responded by imitating the texture, design structure and style of these silks, as well as individual motifs, and, for good measure, marketed them under oriental-sounding names. This lecture will discuss the process of assimilation, with reference to surviving textiles and pictorial representations, and the lasting impact of this cultural transfer.

Lisa Monnas is an independent textile historian.

03.12.2009 LARRY SILVER (PHILADELPHIA): India Ink. Imagery of the Subcontinent in Sixteenth-Century Europe

From the time that Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope (1498) and opened up the Indian Ocean, Europeans hastened to India for trade and exploration. Very soon the imagery in pictures and accounts filtered back to European audiences to describe this new and exotic locality, controlled by Portugal but also increasingly accessible to Dutch and English voyagers at the end of the sixteenth century. This lecture will explore that imagery across the span of the sixteenth century, considering both the varied peoples as well as the fauna and flora of the region. After the lingering medieval preconceptions of the "Marvels of the East" documentary (or at least claims to documentary) began to prevail: Albrecht Dürer and Hans Burgkmair, principally. By the end of the century illustrated publications by Linschoten and de Bry provide a fuller ethnography for India. Additionally, imagery of places and peoples on maps will reveal the codification of this acquired knowledge.

Personal website: <http://www.arthistory.upenn.edu/facultysilver.htm>

10.12.2009 THOMAS LEISTEN (PRINCETON): Adaptation, interpretation and misunderstanding: The after-life and disappearance of pictorial programmes of Classical Antiquity during the early Islamic period

The Umayyad period (660–750 CE) has today rightly come to be viewed more in terms of a last phase of Late Antiquity, rather than as marking its end. However the deployment of inherited pictorial programmes in early Islam soon came up against the limits laid down by education, on the one hand, and religious norms on the other. This lecture will examine the criteria according to which Muslims chose paintings and sculpture from classical antiquity for their building programmes and interpreted them afresh.

Personal website: <http://www.princeton.edu/artandarchaeology/faculty/leisten/>

East Asia and the West

07.01.2010 TOSHIO WATANABE (LONDON): Modern Japanese Garden in a Transnational context

Japanese garden is often regarded as the quintessential symbol of traditional culture in Japan, representing the purest form of Japaneseness. However, once we start to examine its history in detail, it becomes clear that in many cases the Japanese garden assumes a clearly transnational character. We will focus on the development of modern Japanese garden from mid-19th to mid-20th century in their transnational context. We will also examine particularly its relationship with Europe, such as the impact of European public parks on Japan, skirmishes with Britain to establish a colonial garden in Hong Kong, the role of Bruno Taut in establishing the canon of Japanese garden during the early 20th century and Japanese gardens in Europe and their identity both from the point of view of the production and consumption.

Personal website: <http://www.chelsea.arts.ac.uk/17260.htm>

14.01.2010 DAVID J. ROXBURGH (HARVARD): Ghiyath al-Din Naqqash's Report on the Embassy to Khanbaligh. Artistic Exchange Between the Timurid and Ming dynasties

After Timur's death in 1405 embassies from the Ming court came to Herat with greater frequency than they had for some years. Detailed accounts for embassies that arrived in Herat are for the years 1412, 1417 and 1419, while embassies between Samarqand and Khanbaligh (Beijing) also continued. Persian chronicles narrate the details of these arrivals and departures in some detail. When the Chinese embassy arrived in Herat in 1412, for example, Shahrukh (r. 1409–47) ordered that the tradespeople of the city bazaars make a display of their crafts. The next recorded embassy of 1417 included a list of the many gifts sent by the Chinese, including gyrfalcons, textiles, ceramics, and a painting. One of the return embassies to Khanbaligh was accompanied by a delegation of representatives selected by Shahrukh, his son Baysunghur, and other high-ranking Timurids. As his representative, Baysunghur selected the artist Ghiyath al-Din Naqqash who left a detailed description of his itinerary from Herat to Khanbaligh.

The lecture examines Ghiyath al-Din Naqqash's report in the context of increased diplomatic, cultural, and artistic exchanges between the rulers Shahrukh and Yongle (r. 1403–24) and artistic production in Herat from the 1420s to the 1440s. In this period Timurid artists embraced Chinese modes of artistic production and its aesthetic forms but adapted them to their own needs. Timurid perspectives on Chinese art, deduced through Ghiyath al-Din Naqqash's eyewitness report, and the systems of artistic response – how Chinese art was reflected in a Persian mirror, to adapt a metaphor from Persian literature – constitute the principal subjects to be considered.

Personal website: <http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k60336>

21.01.2010 CHARLES BURNETT (LONDON): Musical Instruments as conveyors of meaning from one culture to another

This lecture explores the nature of the transmission of Arabic musical instruments into Western Europe and how this relates to the transmission of music and song, and to ideas concerning the philosophical and mystical aspects of music. Central to this is the lute, whose Persian name (via Arabic) accompanied the instrument to West Europe, and whose shape, number of strings and position of frets embodied cosmological principles. This and other musical instruments are frequently described in word and image in Islamic and Christian contexts, often with metaphorical or allegorical meaning. The effects of music on the passions and on health will also be explored, as concepts which bridge religious and cultural divides.

List of Publications: <http://warburg.sas.ac.uk/institute/cburnett.htm>

28.01.2010 TIMON SCREECH (LONDON): Export items of the English East India Company in the early 17th century

The Company of London Merchants sailing into the Indies (generally known as the English East India Company) was founded in 1600. It predates the United (generally, 'Dutch') East India Company, although it arrived later into most Asian ports. This paper forms part of an ongoing research project into the early history of the English Company, and at its dealing in self-consciously cultural artefacts. Most trade was in commodities of little interest to the cultural historian. But the Company did experiment with import and export of cloth (as is well known) and also ceramics and paintings. These will be introduced and discussed.

Personal website: <http://www.soas.ac.uk/staff/staff31779.php>

Inquiries

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