



**SUMMER
SYMPOSIUM
2021**

GLOBAL BRITAIN: DECOLONISING ART'S HISTORIES

Online

Monday 21 June 2021

9.15 – 5.30pm GMT

WELCOME TO THE 2021 SUMMER SYMPOSIUM

The Association for Art History's *Summer Symposium* is a two-day annual event that highlights current postgraduate and early career research. This year's symposium will take place online over two days rather than the usual one day. The first day will take place at the end of June, the second day in early September.

Art holds a power to speak to the present moment. It is often the product of historical specificity, being rooted in the make-up of an individual, a society and the political environment. Yet an artwork from the sixteenth century, for example, can also speak to the thoughts, feelings and struggles of new generations and yield atemporal importance. Art can be celebrated, appropriated for activism, vandalised or destroyed in an effort to recognise and fight hierarchies, inequalities and marginalisation. It will be one year since Black Lives Matter activism prompted a group of protesters to topple a statue of slave-trader Edward Colston in Bristol. In recognition of this and many other acts that seek to de-stabilise visual histories of power and oppression, this year's Summer Symposium will be dedicated to 'Global Britain: Decolonising Art's Histories' (21st June 2021). This online symposium will showcase research dedicated to decolonising Britain in the past and present: centred on the role of artists and art historians in both structures of racism and anti-racist movements.

In 2020, the journal *Art History* published 'Decolonizing Art History', giving major intervention to several of the most pressing questions now being addressed by our discipline: What is the historical specificity of current calls to decolonise art history? How are they different from previous challenges to the discipline (such as postcolonialism, feminism, queer studies, Marxism)? What is your understanding of decolonising art history now? What does a decolonised art history look like? How should it be written/practiced? How might the decolonisation of art history impact upon your own area of

research/practice? What would be produced from it? Might anything have to be jettisoned? Where should decolonisation in relation to art history happen? What strategies might different spaces for decolonisation demand? These questions and more rouse this call to engage with understanding the art objects which have shaped and continue to shape structures and systems of power in Britain.

Organised by the Association for Art History's Doctoral and Early Career Research ([DECR Committee](#)), this symposium seeks to further develop this debate by asking: how has culture shaped and been shaped by Britain's colonial history, within the UK and across its empire? What is it about art specifically, with its experimental visual imagination and its speculative possibilities, that might contribute to the work of decolonising Britain? And what can the UK arts and higher education sector do to challenge entrenched structures?

Decolonisation has an expansive focus in its global reach and links to a multitude of wider issues and debates. The symposium aims to be one conversation among many others on decolonisation, with a specific focus on the globality of Britain from 'within'. While also exploring the transnational reach of decolonisation, speakers will explore Britain's historically multiracial society as well as the implications of its imperial past.

The symposium will split over two separate dates. Day 1 on 21st June 2021 will consist of a three DECR panels and a keynote. Day 2 (in September date tbc) will respond to the important themes and conversations raised on Day 1 with a roundtable discussion with senior academics, and a curating workshop in collaboration with [Mother Tongue](#), Glasgow, to celebrate the opening of the upcoming AfroScots Exhibition at Glasgow Museums.

The 2021 Summer Symposium is generously supported by the Paul Mellon Centre Event Support Grant.

PROGRAMME

Keynote Speaker: susan pui san lok, Professor of Contemporary Art and Director, UAL Decolonising Arts Institute

Monday 21 June 2021, Online

09.15 Opening remarks by Gursimran Oberoi, Chair of the DECR Committee

9.30 -11.00 Panel 1: The Subjectivity and Objectivity of Race and Gender

Annabelle Gilmore, PhD Candidate, University of Birmingham
'The Ties that Bind: Untangling Imperialism and Slavery Display at Charlecote Park'

Izabella Gill-Brown, PhD Candidate, University of York
'Decolonising Sculpture, Princess Gouramma of Coorg's Enduring Bust'

Azadeh Sarjoughian, PhD Candidate, University of Birmingham
'Contemporary Art from the Middle East: The Assemblage of Geographical and Gendered Boundaries and the "Saatchi-Type" Things'

11.00-11.30 Break

11.30 -13.00 Panel 2: Environments, Mobility and Entanglements

Vera-Simone Schulz, Postdoctoral Researcher, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz - Max-Planck-Institut
'More Than "In the Mirror of the Familiar": Artistic Dynamics and the Built Environment along the Swahili Coast'

Chloe Lee, Doctoral Candidate, Royal Holloway University of London
'"Can you find your way back?": Migration Stories in a School Drama Studio'

Amy Melia, PhD Candidate, Liverpool John Moores University
'Decolonising Institutions, Decolonising Urbanism: "Experimental Institutionalism" and Contemporary Art's Urban Marxism'

Ankita Srivastava, M.Phil Researcher, Jawaharlal Nehru University
'The Neoclassical Import in Sardhana: The patronage of the "Lunatic" heir of Begum Samru'

13.00-14.30 Lunch Break

14.30 -16.00 Panel 3: Decolonising Curation

Hardeep Dhindsa, PhD Candidate, King's College London
'(Mis)Labelling the Other: Cultural Erasure in Non-Western Object Museum Labels'

Matthew Jones, PhD Candidate, University of Sussex
'Curating the Slave Trade after Colston: Toppling as a Decolonial Strategy'

Eloisa Rodriguez, PhD Candidate, University of Leicester
'The Story of a Brazilian Painting Acquired by the Tate in 1944: A Reflection on Museum's Acquisitions'

16.00-16.30 Break

16.30-17.30 Keynote: susan pui san lok, Professor of Contemporary Art and Director, UAL Decolonising Arts Institute

ABSTRACTS

Annabelle Gilmore

PhD Candidate, University of Birmingham

The Ties that Bind: Untangling Imperialism and Slavery Display at Charlecote Park

This paper serves as an introduction to my thesis 'Slavery and Empire on Display at Charlecote Park in Warwickshire', as part of an AHRC Midlands4Cities collaborative doctoral award, in partnership with the National Trust. This thesis is exploring how the Lucy family at Charlecote Park became involved, albeit indirectly, with slavery in the Caribbean and imperialism in East Asia, through the collection that was purchased from the Fonthill Abbey sale in 1823. These art objects predominantly consist of Asian ceramics, Japanese lacquerware, and ebony furniture. This paper will explore the collecting habits of country house owners and in what manner their choices for collecting imported Asian goods reflected social attributes based on superiority and desires for the exotic. It will explore the indirect methods of imperialism through trade networks, and eighteenth and nineteenth-century British desire for foreign goods as signs of status. It will discuss some of the objects on display at Charlecote and how the Lucy family benefitted from their involvement with 'soft' imperialist links. It will discuss the ambiguity in tracing the object narratives and their transformation from Asian art objects to European-Asian objects.

My work also seeks to not only investigate the narratives of the Lucy family and William Thomas Beckford, the beneficiaries of slavery and imperialism, but to also explore the lives of the enslaved labourers in Jamaica in an attempt

to bring a voice to the countless unnamed persons who were part of the system that brought the art objects to Britain. This is with an effort to reflect on the wider narratives of the art objects and understand what is presented to the viewer in their displayed spaces. The paper seeks to explore the impact of art in reflecting the proceeds of slavery and imperialism.

Biography

Annabelle is a collaborative doctoral award PhD student at the University of Birmingham in partnership with the National Trust, funded by AHRC Midlands4Cities. Her work is investigating the links between slavery and imperialism at Charlecote Park in Warwickshire through the Beckford collection. She has studied the long-eighteenth century in the Caribbean and Britain including slavery and Black people in Britain. Her Masters work focused on Black subjects in portraiture in the eighteenth century. She has an interest in Black history, gender, museums and heritage. She is working on ensuring her work is accessible to the public and promoting anti-imperial and de-colonial histories.

ABSTRACTS

Izabella Gill-Brown

PhD Candidate, University of York

Decolonising Sculpture, Princess Gouramma of Coorg's Enduring Bust

A large swathe of public sculpture is being decolonised as we speak, with media attention and protests to go with it. But, what about the private figures and the bust sculptures that evade this attention? My research looks at a very particular series of busts which highlight the complexities of decolonising royal sculpture. More specifically, Anglo-Indian sculptures produced for the British Royal Family.

The Princess Victoria Gouramma of Coorg (Kodagu) was one of Queen Victoria's godchildren. Currently, she is gradually being brought into the fore front of public attention through social media and news sources, though more needs to be investigated to help define her as a figure. Her presence as an early member of Queen Victoria's diverse Royal Circle is one which is not very well documented. A bust was commissioned by Queen Victoria as part of a pair to help display a unified India, North and South, Dhuleep Singh and Princess Gouramma. Her entry into British high society and her subsequent early death at the age of twenty-two in England means that this is the only marble sculpture of the Princess produced in her short lifetime. My research looks at the sculptural narratives produced on the bust and how we can interpret and visually analyse it to gain an insight into the life of the princess and the endeavours of the sculptor, Baron Carlo Marochetti.

Biography

Izabella Gill-Brown is a second-year PhD candidate supervised by Professor Jason Edwards at the University of York. Her research examines the relationships and roles of Anglo-Indian sculptural portraits produced in the nineteenth century for the British Royal Family, based on the exploration of specific case studies. Her wider interdisciplinary interests include material cultures, feminist and postcolonial criticisms of the long nineteenth-century, and the conservation of fine art. Izabella received her MA in Conservation of Fine Art at Northumbria University at Newcastle, specialising in Easel painting and frame conservation with a focus on the treatment of monochromatic artworks. Prior to this, she gained her BA in History of Art at the University of York.

ABSTRACTS

Azadeh Sarjoughian

PhD Candidate, University of Birmingham

Contemporary Art from the Middle East: The Assemblage of Geographical and Gendered Boundaries and the 'Saatchi-Type' Things

Following the rise of international attention to contemporary Middle Eastern art in the early years of the 21st century, the Saatchi Gallery held an exhibition entitled *Unveiled: New Art from the Middle East* in 2009. In this paper, I demonstrate how the reception of the Unveiled exhibition is shaped by the fact that it is a Saatchi Gallery show and therefore, affected heavily by the reputation of Charles Saatchi and his link with the YBAs.

Furthermore, regarding Jasbir Puar's argument on the rise of homonormative Islamophobia in the global North since 9/11, this paper highlights that the show is curated through the lens by which the dichotomies such as veiling and unveiling, excessively heterosexual and perversely penetrable Muslim men versus subjugated invisible veiled women as well as celebratory queer liberal subjects and deviant queer backward countries are reiterated. Regarding the essentialised presumptions of the Western viewers from a regional exhibition along with the critical expectations about what a Saatchi show should include, this paper explores the potential and novelty of some of the individual artworks that are overlooked. I argue how the Unveiled exhibition becomes a space where subversive and stereotypical visions meet and due to the dichotomous narratives upon which the whole show is built and perceived, their differences potentially drowned out.

Biography

Azadeh Sarjoughian is a College of Arts and Law funded PhD candidate at the University of Birmingham where she also received her MRes in Sexuality and Gender Studies. Her research interests include postcolonial and decolonial theory, feminist and queer theory and contemporary art from the Middle East. She is currently focusing on the interactions between the stereotypical representation of Muslim men's and women's bodies in visual arts by considering the impact of contemporary curatorial practices, particularly in the UK. Azadeh is an artist, working with various media in sculpture and installation, graduated in Illustration (MA) from the University of Art, Tehran, and Sculpture (BA) from the University of Tehran, Iran.

ABSTRACTS

Vera-Simone Schulz

Postdoctoral Researcher, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut

More Than 'In the Mirror of the Familiar': Artistic Dynamics and the Built Environment along the Swahili Coast

Swahili stone towns have been described 'in the mirror of the familiar' over centuries: when travellers were reminded of cities in other regions of the world when approaching locations in coastal East Africa and when individual buildings recalled monuments elsewhere. This paper will shed new light on the art and architecture along the Swahili coast by analysing both actual long-distance connections that came to shape the built environment in coastal East Africa and transregional imaginaries and projections when Swahili stone towns were associated with other sites. The paper will show how such descriptions 'in the mirror of the familiar' have contributed to the marginalisation of the artistic and architectural heritage of Swahili stone towns in the discipline of art history. And it will make clear how art historical analyses of the built environment in coastal East Africa can help us to move beyond traditional frameworks of 'center' and 'periphery' and to overcome Eurocentric notions in the field. The paper will thus highlight what is to gain from art historical perspectives for new studies on the art and architecture in coastal East Africa which, for a long time, has been predominantly studied by archaeologists, anthropologists and scholars of other disciplines, but it will also show what is to gain from new analyses of the built environment along the Swahili coast for transcultural and decolonial art histories today.

Biography

Vera-Simone Schulz is an art historian and postdoctoral researcher at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut in Florence, Italy, where she is working at the crossroads of Islamic, African and European art histories and on her habilitation project on liminal spaces along the Swahili coast. She holds a PhD in art history from Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and her research has been supported by the German Research Foundation, the German Academic Scholarship Foundation, the German Academic Exchange Service, the Gerda Henkel Foundation and the Bard Graduate Center in New York, among others. Her publications have appeared in *Perspective: Actualité en histoire de l'art*, *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, *Konsthistorisk tidskrift*, and *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes*, among other peer-review journals

ABSTRACTS

Chloe Lee

Doctoral Candidate, Royal Holloway University of London

'Can you find your way back?': Migration Stories in a School Drama Studio

Speaking in 2015 to the Oxford Student Union, the writer, activist and artist, Akala pushed Carter Woodson's argument of miseducation further to argue, 'in order for racism to function... everyone has to be functionally miseducated about the human story.' In 2021 demands for the decolonisation of education in the UK have become increasingly public, with the galvanisation of the Black Lives Matter movement in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder on 25th May 2020. These concerns have been distinctive in the emphasis on the individual to educate themselves and to take responsibility for their own learning, in addition to calls for the remedying of wider systemic issues.

The 'graft' of decolonising however, remains a complex practice. The arts are often recommended as 'ideal' tools for education practitioners to engage young people with historic wrongdoing and injustice. Conversely, the poor handling of diverse stories in schools may obscure a deeper conformity to western narrative paradigms that both limit the range of narratives explored, and perpetuate myths of victimhood, thus enabling and sustaining justification for ongoing exploitation of the non-west.

My paper will describe my research in a school in South-East Essex. In my project, forming the basis of my doctoral thesis, I collaborate with a drama specialist, using historical migration stories as a lens to explore belonging as a fully embodied and emotional concept. Through

implementing a historical scheme of work in the drama studio, I engage with the challenge of decolonising work through interdisciplinary and mixed approaches. Specifically, how researchers might come to understand the 'long tale' of engaging schools and students with complex histories. Finally, I will explore how theories of witnessing might provide a framework that enables students to situate themselves on the same map as historical actors and thus a part of the wider tapestry of British history.

Biography

Chloe Lee is a third-year doctoral student and Technē candidate at Royal Holloway University of London. Her interdisciplinary and practice-based project explores migration stories through drama practice in educational settings. She has collaborated with Jennifer Stacey and the Ortu Federation in Essex to design and deliver a scheme of work developing the concept of 'creative witnessing', which understands young learners as carriers of their own movement stories. As part of the Technē cohort she has also helped organise the annual student conference and is passionate about the wellbeing of post-graduate students and demystifying the doctoral experience. She has been part of the Arts and Decolonisation Symposium Committee at Royal Holloway University and PGR Colloquium, 'Stepping Stones'. Most recently she has contributed to *Transfers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Mobility Studies* as a literary reviewer.

ABSTRACTS

Amy Melia

PhD Candidate, Liverpool John Moores University

Decolonising Institutions, Decolonising Urbanism: 'Experimental Institutionalism' and Contemporary Art's Urban Marxism

In light of contemporary urban tragedies such as the Grenfell Tower Fire, it is vital to address the urgencies of capitalist-urbanism as being not only rooted in class struggle, but also, as being demonstrably racist, and as blatant continuations of the West's colonial histories (Danewid 2019). In this paper, I will highlight and examine how some UK art institutions have directly responded to capitalist-urbanism's most pressing racialised urgencies such as neo-colonial spatial agendas (gentrification), contemporary forms of racial segregation, and 'revanchist urbanism'. I will propose that the examples of institutional practice addressed are symptomatic of 'experimental institutionalism'—an ongoing and predominantly European field of institutional experimentation/reform, curatorial practice and critical debate, which is concerned with the dynamic transformation of art institutions into socially responsible agents (Aikens et al. 2016;

Byrne et al. 2018). Decolonising activities have been integral to experimental institutionalism's quest towards a socially responsible, user-centred museology. Arguably, in the context of experimental institutionalism, it is possible to configure 'decolonising institutions' and 'decolonising urbanism' as profoundly interconnected projects. In this research paper, I will outline the key themes of experimental institutionalism's decolonising project in order to provide potential stimulus for prospective institutional/curatorial practice and art historical discourse.

Biography

Amy Melia is an Art Historian and PhD Researcher at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU). She is currently in the final stages of her doctoral studies and will soon be defending her thesis. Amy's research examines the urban Marxist tendencies of contemporary art. Her research discusses and analyses the various ways that contemporary art practice actively engages with and responds to the social urgencies, which are characteristic of capitalist urbanisation, i.e. the housing crisis, gentrification, racial inequality, social fragmentation, and urban spectacle. During her doctoral studies, Amy has published her research on contemporary art's urban Marxism and has presented at many international conferences, including the annual Association for Art History conference in 2019. Amy has also taught on the History of Art BA (Hons) programme at LJMU. She is currently teaching her self-designed Brilliant Club course, Art, Activism and Social Movements, which introduces high school students to art's position as a social tool in feminist, LGBTQ+, anti-racist, and decolonising activism.

ABSTRACTS

Ankita Srivastava

M.Phil Researcher, Jawaharlal Nehru University

The Neoclassical Import in Sardhana: The patronage of the “Lunatic” heir of Begum Samru

The presentation will trace the patronage of a grand Carrara Marble tableau commissioned by David Ochterlony Dyce Sombre—in memory of his late benefactress, *Begum* Samru of Sardhana—in 1839. The presentation focuses on the biography of one object that flows from Europe to India. Dyce Sombre was an Anglo-Indian, adopted heir of the converted Catholic *Begum*, who went from being a teenage courtesan in Delhi to a major power broker in the Indian subcontinent with a formidable army of European mercenaries and the prosperous principality of Sardhana (in the North-Indian Doab). Dyce Sombre emigrated to England in 1838 from where he went on to a *Grand Tour*. While in Rome, he commissioned the multi-figural, theatrical marble tableau which sits in a church built by the *Begum* in Sardhana in 1822, serving as a cenotaph over her grave. Rome's studios were shipping Neoclassical commissions in and outside of Europe, especially to Britain and the Americas. Their import of Neoclassical sculptures and architectural styles is interconnected with ideas of race at the time. Connected to this is the mixed-race heritage of the patron Dyce Sombre—an infamous “black prince” as some papers and journals dubbed him—and his desperate desire to achieve *whiteness*. The presentation will specifically reflect on the idea of what constitutes English (or European) ‘taste’ at this time. Taste and Insanity as the two tensions for the patron—a mixed-race Eurasian aristocrat negotiating with culture-shock and political aspirations within the gentile society of London. Famous because of a heavily documented Chancery ‘Lunacy’ trial, the patron's self-expressions of taste in high art were overpowered by his “Eastern upbringing

under a *Begum*” as a legal defence for his perceived lunacy in English society. The tableau's rendering of an irreconcilable tension between classical codes of allegory—characteristic of the Neoclassical style—and stereotypically “Indian” physiognomies reflects complicated histories of movements—of persons and objects, ideology, and icons. It also happens in the larger context of early nineteenth century colonisation process, that culminates in the *Raj* soon after. Dyce Sombre's education and failed attempts to ‘assimilate’ by marriage and a cultural conversion become the sites of where the socio-cultural constructions *whiteness* can be interrogated. Further, the final resting place of the tableau in India points to aspirations of participation in colonisation by laying claim to a piece of high art that had equivalents only in the Presidency towns during that time.

Biography

Ankita Srivastava is an M.Phil. Research Scholar at the Centre of Visual Studies, School of Arts and Aesthetics (SAA) of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). After completing her Bachelor of Arts (Hons.) in History from Delhi University in 2016, she completed her Masters in Arts and Aesthetics from JNU in 2018. Her M.Phil./PhD program began in 2018, where she chose to study the transcultural mobility of a Neoclassical sculptural object between Europe and India. She has been awarded the Junior Research Fellowship by the University Grants Commission (UGC), India in 2019. Her research interests lie in early modern art, intermediality and themes of race, gender, and pathology of the body & mind in art and history.

ABSTRACTS

Hardeep Dhindsa

PhD Candidate, King's College London

(Mis)Labelling the Other: Cultural Erasure in Non-Western Object Museum Labels

On September 13 2017, a Keeper from the British Museum's Department of Asia sent out the following tweet:

'Curators write the labels based on their specialist knowledge and they are edited by our Interpretation department' / 'We aim to be understandable by 16 year olds. Sometimes Asian names can be confusing, so we have to be careful about using too many.'

While this shocked many, this is unfortunately all too common in Western museums when tasked with writing labels for non-Western objects. In Europe, curators take care to identify the artist, the year, and the location. Other collections are not so lucky. Often invoking vocabulary like 'exotic' and

'tribal', curators over-simplify these objects for the sake of western convenience and fall into the trap of generalisation. This paper discusses the subconscious bias that exists in museum labels and the wider art world in two parts.

First, I will focus on the language of museum labels themselves and how they perpetuate colonial discourse surround the 'Other'. What museums call 'African' or 'Native American' is a deliberate assumption of homogenous cultural identity across independent groups. What they class as religious is shrouded in 'primitive' and mystical imagery, while Christianity does not fall under such scrutiny. The second part contextualises labels within wider practices of

orientalism and simplification in Art History, both in the museum and at large. In the British Museum, for instance, European collections have rooms dedicated to countries, centuries, even medium, but in the Africa Gallery, a sixteenth century salt cellar from Benin is displayed alongside a twentieth century tent from Egypt. I will also briefly discuss colonial generalisation in university syllabi and popular art history book series. It is my hope that my paper offers the audience ways to engage with this problem in their work beyond the museum.

Biography

Hardeep Dhindsa is a current PhD Classics student at King's College London, where he looks at the relationship between whiteness and Classics during the British Empire in art, and how that has affected our perception of Classics today. He has spoken at several conferences about his research on classical pedagogy, decolonisation, and whitewashing in European Art, and he is a guest speaker at this year's Symposium Cumanum. Currently, he is writing a chapter alongside Barbara Goff and Shelley Haley for the upcoming Routledge publication, Handbook of Classics and Postcolonialism. On the side, Hardeep is a freelance illustrator and recolours ancient statues in eye-popping colours to disrupt the images of whiteness we see in museums today.

ABSTRACTS

Matthew Jones

PhD Candidate, University of Sussex

Curating the Slave Trade after Colston: Toppling as a Decolonial Strategy

This paper will explore the toppling of the Edward Colston Statue in Bristol by Black Lives Matter protestors as a decolonial methodology for curating histories and legacies of the British slave trade. To do so, this paper will take Alan Rice's concept of Guerrilla Memorialisation and apply it to this act of counter-memorialisation. Consequently, this will push the concept beyond how Rice has formulated it as an act of dialogising, recovery and refashioning to one of radical removal. In doing so, it will argue that this provides a potential method for curating the British Slave Trade in museums and heritage sites as, in toppling Colston, a narrative space was created imbued with the politics of Black Lives Matter. That is, the past was not removed, rather, it was recalibrated for an anti-racist future.

Firstly, this paper will establish the history of Guerrilla Memorialisation around the Edward Colston statue over the past decades. Following this, the toppling of the statue and the post-toppling life of the plinth, as well as attempts to fill the space, will be analysed with the aim of developing a methodology in which the contentious future becomes the focus of decolonisation strategies towards dealing with heritage of slavery. This exploratory paper will then think through how this can be applied in other heritage and museum contexts to suggest a potential way forward in dealing, in a decolonial way, with the myriad legacies of slavery in modern Britain.

Biography

I am a third year AHRC funded PhD student at the University of Sussex in the art history department. My research focuses on how contemporary museums and the curating of exhibitions and displays on the British slave trade. I am particularly interested in institutional memory in museums, collaborative curatorial practices, memory, and representing trauma in the museum. I am also part of the Post-Colonial Heritage Research Group, a network of doctoral students and ECRs who run seminars and conferences on various themes to do with post and decolonial approaches to heritage and museums.

ABSTRACTS

Eloisa Rodriguez

PhD Candidate, University of Leicester

The Peculiar Story of a Brazilian Painting Acquired by the Tate in 1944: A Reflection on Museum Acquisitions

Tate's first acquisition of an artwork by a Brazilian artist was the painting *They Amuse Themselves* by José Cardoso Junior. This work was displayed in 1944 at the 'Exhibition of Brazilian Modern Painting' that took place at the Royal Academy of Arts (RA). The story of this acquisition is tightly interconnected with that of the exhibition. Amidst the Second World War, a group of Brazilian artists decided to donate over one hundred and fifty artworks to the British Government. Their aim was for the artworks to be sold in London and for the money raised to be donated to the RAF, as they wished to support Britain in the war efforts. Between the date of the donation and the opening of the exhibition, a long period of negotiation and diplomatic endeavours took place before the artworks were shown at the RA.

In this paper, I propose to present a reflection on the history of museums' acquisitions by focusing on the story of how *They Amuse Themselves* entered Tate's permanent collection. This reflection will account the historical context of this particular acquisition, paying attention to the networks (of people) and events that allowed for Tate to hold this painting. Through this analysis I aim to raise questions that I hope can shed light on the importance of understanding past museums' acquisitions and museums biases in this process. Museums play a crucial role in writing the narrative of history of art; therefore I argue that the process of learning the past can contribute for the discussion on decolonising both the museum and Art History.

Biography

Eloisa Rodrigues is a third-year PhD candidate at the School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, funded by AHRC Midlands4Cities DTP. Her research focuses on analysing acquisitions of Brazilian art by public museums in the UK. She is interested in acquisitions practices, history of collections, transnational history, decoloniality, and Latin American art. She is also Committee Member of the Doctoral and Earlier Career Research (DECR) Network of the Association for Art History. She was a co-Editor-in-Chief of issue 24 of the peer-reviewed journal *Museological Review*. She holds an MA in Museum Studies (University of Leicester), and a BA in History of Art (New University of Lisbon). She has worked in collection-based projects at the British Library, Royal London Hospital Archives and Museums, and LR Foundation.