

## **ART HISTORY 571**

**Seminar: Methodology of Art History** Term II 2014

Wednesdays, 2-5 p.m.

Professor Catherine M. Soussloff

Office: Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies, Room 326

Office Hours: Mondays, 2-3 p.m.

UBC Course Catalogue Description: Required by first year Art History MA and PhD students. An intensive seminar, taught by two members of the Art History faculty [one each term], addresses both "Western" and "non-Western" issues and engages students with current debates in the field. This is an intensive course and students should take advantage of any readings suggested for advance preparation.

### Topic for Spring 2014 Seminar: Contemporary Perspectives on Method

By the beginning of the 21st century perspectives on method in the field of Art History entailed historiography and theory, as well as methodology. Newer approaches to and new areas of the field, such as visual culture or visual studies, had emerged at the end of the last century as responses to the unquestioned mainstays of art historical method, i.e., the primacy of the concept of the artist; the separation of the object of study from issues of subjectivity, including race, ethnicity, and sexuality; Eurocentrism; and the persistence of the Enlightenment's view of what constitutes "art." At the beginning of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we can see that Art History--by now also inflected by the approaches brought to it via the social history of art in the 1970s-- has had a conflicted relationship to the incorporation of the critiques brought to bear on this disciplinary formation. These have included approaches drawn from French Post-structuralism, Frankfurt School philosophy, New Historicism, post-Freudian psychoanalysis, post-Colonial theory, and phenomenology. The purpose of this course will be to query the resistance to change in the discipline of Art History by exploring the explicit investments in theory and historiography in the field today. We will proceed topically and comparatively, as suggested in the textbook for the seminar: *Writing Art History: Disciplinary Departures* by Margaret Iverson and Stephen Melville (University of Chicago, 2010). We will ask the following questions throughout the seminar: What are the specific outlines of the discipline of art history? Are there methods intrinsic to its objects of study and/or to its intentions *qua* discipline? What are the assumptions about Art History made from the "inside" and from the "outside" of the discipline? What roles or pressures do image theory, performance studies, and other disciplines play in our current understanding of Art History as discipline and in an account of the production of knowledge concerning the world?

The University of British Columbia  
Department of Art History, Visual Art + Theory  
ARTH 571: Graduate Methodology Seminar  
Term 1, 2013

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## **INDIGENEITY, THE CULTURAL POLEMIC OF DECOLONIZATION, AND CONTEMPORARY ART: TOWARDS A NEW PARADIGM?**

As Saloni Mathur writes in *The Migrant's Time: Rethinking Art History and Diaspora*, "the notion of migration resonates with a variety of other categories and concepts that float around discussions of culture that are international in spirit: diaspora, exile, globalization, hybridity, migration, mobility, multiculturalism, transnationalism, the nomad. These terms, each of them internally contested and much debated, seem less to provide a stable ground of investigation than to signal a broad constellation of intellectual concerns with respect to the accelerating and uncertain conditions of human displacement and transplantation in the modern era" (vii-viii). Our seminar topic is prompted by a number of timely exhibitions and events -- MOA's *Safar/Voyage: Contemporary Works by Arab, Iranian and Turkish Artists* and *Sakahan: International Indigenous Art* at the National Gallery of Canada -- that enable us to critically interrogate some of these loaded concepts and cultural frames. Our focus will be trained on Canada and India, being attentive to their particular histories of colonialism and oppression. For art historian and artist Jolene Rickard, art criticism and theory needs to include a discourse read across indigeneity, colonization and sovereignty, arguing that indigenous expressive culture has always been geographically global (since European contact). Equally important is the visibility of Indigenous art in a global context from the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century. But we must also recognize the problematic inclusion of indigenous art as part of an elite arts network, and artists' uneven access to this network.

An interrelated component of our seminar is a creative collaboration with the Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology in Bangalore, India: an active dialogue around the making and writing about art practices, focusing on indigeneity and tradition. Art critic Geeta Kapur has argued that "sufficiently historicized, both tradition and modernity can notate a radical purpose in the cultural politics of the third world" (2000, 267). This collaboration is a work in progress and students will help shape the nature of our interactions and the project's outcomes, including a possible exhibition in Bangalore. Under the direction of Raghavendra Rao K.V., Srishti students will work with Vishwakarmas, a community of goldsmiths. They are interested in exploring the interface between craft and art and the changing opportunities available to traditional artists today in a dynamic and competitive marketplace. Our seminar will critically engage with a discrete group of current issues and rigorously debate what they offer as methodological and theoretical tools for the art historian today. For us as historians of the visual, this means attending to the textures and details of the past and present not only in theoretical but in interpretative and invested ways.

Student responsibilities: Working in pairs, students will be responsible for leading a week of readings and facilitating our discussion. The job of discussant is to present a succinct overview of each text, being particularly attentive to the ways in which the author structures his/her argument. What other scholars inform their work? The presenters should identify significant questions or critical issues raised, or problems with interpretation. It will be useful to place each author within an intellectual context or set of debates. Your presentations may include visual or other material you think will enhance the discussion.