

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS: "The Material Life of Things" Project Seminar Group

Date : February 15, 2010

In recent years, the evidence of technical and material analysis has become increasingly important to art-historical interpretation. Beyond their traditional role in informing the restoration of artefacts, technical investigations have greatly contributed to our understanding of how works of art were made. Yet, less critical attention has been paid to the "use-life" of artifacts—that is, to the manipulation, exchange and consumption of artefacts throughout their life histories. Drawing together researchers from different areas of expertise including curators and conservators, this research project aims to explore the material lives of artefacts in a variety of media, encouraging object-based, methodological and theoretical discussions relating to the shifting relationship between artefacts, people and environments throughout the life history of particular objects or classes of objects. Emphasis is placed on works of art as material objects considering the ways in which they are manipulated, re-made and unmade by different individuals, at different times, manifesting different social and cultural practices.

Among issues that can be raised are the following: temporality, authenticity and change; fragmentation and reconstruction; aggregation of artefacts and the status of the object; ritual damage/reparation; pre-modern restorations; material history and conservation of new media; durability, ephemerality and material residuals; recontextualisation/decontextualisation (i.e. artefacts in consonant and dissonant environments); confiscation, displacement and repatriation; individual vs. corporate attitudes towards materiality of art; commoditisation and decommoditisation; ownership, market and the value of materiality; historiographic and methodological approaches to the materiality of art; the concept of "object biography" and its implications/limitations.

As part of the Material Life of Things, scholars working across the discipline are invited to join a research group to discuss various topics and address methodological questions within the theme of The Material Life of Things. The group will consist of 15-20 scholars meeting in the academic years 2009-10 and 2010-11, starting in spring 2010. Group members will be asked to develop a research project with a view to publishing the findings at the end of the designated period. Plenary sessions in which all group members will participate will be followed by small group discussions (4/5 members) in which individual projects and papers will be discussed. Group members will also be asked to participate in symposia to take place during the time span of the project, including a final international two-day symposium. A collection of essays presenting the results of the project is also planned.

Applications to join the research group are welcome from scholars at all stages of their career: from current graduate students to established scholars. Scholars applying to join the research group are asked to submit a proposal of 300 words on a topic that they wish to develop over the course of the project. We encourage proposals that address both object-based and theoretical/methodological issues. Topics are welcome from all periods and could address any aspect of The Material Life of

Things, with the issues above providing a general starting point.

Deadline for applications: 12 March 2010.

Applicants should send a CV, covering letter and a proposal of not more than 300 words detailing how they would develop their topic over the period of the project.

Applications should be addressed to Professor Caroline Arscott, Head of Research, and sent c/o Cynthia de Souza, Research Forum, The Courtauld Institute of Art, Somerset House, Strand, London WC2R 0RN.

The Research Forum will contribute towards the costs of attending the seminars.