

Reemerging Iconoclasms. On the contemporariness of image controversies

Online Workshop in cooperation with the **Institute of Art and Art History at the University of Duisburg-Essen**

Date: 1-2 July 2021

Concept and Organization: Prof. Dr. Birgit Mersmann (University of Duisburg-Essen), Prof. Dr. Christiane Kruse (Muthesius University of Fine Arts and Design, Kiel)

Religiously and politically motivated iconoclasms are a cultural-historical phenomenon with a centuries-old tradition. Hardly any culture that has invented images as insignia of its symbolic order, whose members have expressed their self-image, identity, interests in and through images, has not also experienced hostile attacks on its pictorial symbols. In contemporary cultures with societies that see themselves as enlightened, tolerant and liberal towards others, acts of image destruction should actually be considered obsolete. The opposite is the case: Current iconoclasms are not only – as for instance in the Middle East – directed against contemporary pluralism and its representatives; even in pluralistically structured contemporary societies, iconoclasms can break out again at any time with new violence – think of the dispute over the dismantling and destruction of civil war memorials in the southern states of the USA, which has been described as ‘American iconoclasm.’

In the 21st century, global political conflicts are not solely conducted militarily. Where warlike conflicts are to be avoided, monument collapses, the desecration of images and the violent destruction of cultural heritage take center stage. Where terrorists ignite violent clashes, the destruction of world heritage sites is considered a triumph that is particularly effective for the media, as ISIS demonstrated in Syria and Iraq in 2017. Iconoclastic actions have become the (image-)war-fueling dynamite in the public and media arena of political, religious, national and identitary conflicts.

The workshop aims to analyze the return of iconoclasms in the present under four main topics:

I Staging strategies and forms of mediation

Acts of image destruction are always followed by a media flood of images that stage and perform the destruction. These visual circulations are used in a

calculated and publicly effective way to enforce political and religious interests. The workshop will address the central question of how the political motivation of the destruction of images is related to specific forms of mediation. Case studies will be discussed to clarify which performative aesthetics, staging strategies and procedures of mediation the iconoclasts employ to communicate, celebrate and sell the destruction as an image event.

II Social and geopolitical transformation processes

Whether post-socialist restructuring processes, religious reform efforts or political revolutions: Current monument collapses are an expression of geopolitical and socio-cultural shifts. The workshop aims at examining the contextual conditions and factors under which the falling of a monument (and even its iconic reenthronement) occur.

III Interdependencies between religion and politics

Despite enlightenment and secularization which have led to the separation of religion and politics in various regions of the world, it is precisely there that the religious and political interests are once again mixed up, resulting in societal conflicts. Visual representations associated with or produced by the conflicting parties become the focus of these controversies. What ideologies are used to charge images in order to pursue and enforce religious as political or political as religious interests? How are the intersecting contents of the dispute about images communicated in the political and religious sphere?

IV Image matter and image magic

Monuments or memorials that have been neglected for centuries or even longer are virtually revived at a certain moment in contemporary history and become the site of a politically and/or religiously charged iconoclasm. What causes can be named for the resurfacing of a magic-dogmatic image fetishism? What role does the ontological aspect of the pictorial object and the pictorial matter play for ideologies that want to fight the magic of images? And what leads enlightened viewers, as in the dispute over the Bavarian official cross, to understand the dispute over pictures as a personal affront directed against their faith?

Based on case studies from different regions of the world, these questions will be discussed with experts from the fields of art history, visual communication, ethnology, political and historical science, comparative religious studies, cultural heritage and monument research.

Workshop Program with Time Schedule

Thursday, 1 July 2021

13:45 Welcome Address by the Director of the KWI Essen, Prof. Dr. Julika Griem

13:50 Introduction (Birgit Mersmann)

Panel I. Clashes over Monuments. Political Transformations and Identity Riffs

14:00 Silvia Naef (Genève)

Destructions, Reconstructions and Re-Appropriations of Public Monuments in Iraq

14:15 Gertrud Hüwelmeier (Berlin)

Malevolent and Benevolent Iconoclasm in Late Socialist Vietnam

14:30-15:00 Discussion

15:00 Sven Lütticken (Amsterdam)

The Labour and Practice of Iconoclasm

15:15 Arnold Bartetzky (Leipzig)

New Iconoclasms. Discomforting monuments between decommunization and decolonization

15:30-16:00 Discussion

Coffee Break 16:00-16:15

16:15 Martin Schieder (Leipzig)

„What should we do with the empty plinth?“ Von der Kunst des Denkmalsturzes

16:30 Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill)

Contesting the Confederate Landscape in the United States, 1975 to the Present

16:45 Sybille Frank (Darmstadt)

Urban Fallism. Iconoclasm and activism

17:00-17:45 Discussion

Friday, 2 July 2021

Panel II: Un-Iconism: Media and Artistic Strategies of Image Destruction

9:45 Introduction (Christiane Kruse)

10:00 Markus Rautzenberg (Essen)

Epoptheia vs. theoria? Indexicality between blindness and insight

10:15 Stephan Schwingeler (Hildesheim)

Iconoclasm as Artistic Strategy: Video game art between transparency and opacity

10:30-11:00 Discussion

Panel III: Idol Disputes: Imagery between Matter and Magic

11:00 Gabriele Genge (Essen)

Re-Inventing Totemism: Iconoclastic traditions in Léopold Sédar Senghor's concept of the „image idéogramme“

11:15 Christoph Günther (Mainz)

Iconic Socioclasm. Smashing idols to obliterate identities

11:30-12:00 Discussion

12:00-13:00 Lunch break

13:00 Pooyan Tamimi Arab (Utrecht)

The Image That Mattered Too Much: Displaying and removing the Prophet Muhammad at the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam

13:15 Marion Müller (Trier)

Punishing Images. An iconological retrospective on 'execution in effigies' practices past and present

13:30 Birgit Meyer (Utrecht)

"Idols" in the Museum: How iconoclasm and protection intersect

13:30 Panel Discussion

14:15 Final Discussion and Concluding Remarks

14:30 End of workshop