

THE CULTURAL TRANSFERS WORKSHOP SERIES
Wednesday, March 26, 2014 from 4:00 – 5:30
Carleton University Art Gallery, St. Patricks Building

Johnny El-Alam (Cultural Mediations PhD Candidate)

Echoes of Trauma Theory and False Memory in the Art of Walid Raad

Psychopathological trauma has recently become a popular subject in the academy and in everyday social and political life in Western societies. Heralds of art's exclusive power of representing trauma such as Dori Laub and Cathy Caruth have been challenged by genealogists such as Ruth Leys, moralists such as Susannah Radstone, Art Historians such as Jill Bennett, and Psychotherapists such as Harald Weinbock. This presentation uses the art of Walid Raad as a vehicle for understanding the complicated relations between trauma and representation. The author will argue that Raad's use of false memory in historiographic parodies deconstructs the notion of authenticity in representations of trauma.

Peter Hodgins (Assistant Professor, Canadian Studies & ICSLAC)

Between Elegy and Taxidermy: Archibald Lampman's Golden Lady's Slippers

In a critical review of what has come to be known as "cultural memory studies", Susannah Radstone has argued that the field's recent focus on issues of trauma, cultural haunting, and ethical witnessing has endowed Freud's assertion that history stands behind every act of remembering with an almost sacred character. The irony of this new emphasis on trauma, haunting, and witnessing, she asserts, is that at the same time that its students are well aware of the difficulty, if not impossibility, of representing traumatic memory, they often follow "a literalist and uncritically realist path" that obscures the constructed nature of memory, curtails the play of meaning, and offers only one possible reading position: an empathetic identification with the subject of trauma combined with an unquestioning belief that their suffering was caused by some sort of real historical event. In this talk, I want to trouble this realist tendency within contemporary cultural memory studies by examining a series of texts composed by the Ottawa-based Confederation poet Archibald Lampman that are infused with a sense of melancholy and mourning. However, what perhaps differentiates these texts from others studied by contemporary scholars of cultural memory is that Lampman was grieving a traumatic loss that had not yet occurred.

The workshop will be moderated by Sarah Waisvisz, a PhD Candidate in the Department of English Language and Literature. Waisvisz studies intersections between postcolonial literature, trauma studies, human rights issues, memory, and genre.