

Cultural Transfers 2017-2018

Session 1: **From Old to New Worlds**

Friday November 17, 2017

“Madness and Creative Genius in Cinema”

Pauline Goutain (PhD Candidate, Cultural Mediations)

The association of art and madness is a cliché which reappears frequently in art history. From Romanticism to Surrealism and Outsider Art, madness has been praised as the condition of creation. Madness is seen as the force which breaks the limits of Reason and enables artists to see more widely and to liberate their creative impulse. Recently, the relation between art and madness has attracted a lot of attention from both art historians and doctors. For instance, the Grand Palais in Paris organized in 2005 a retrospective dedicated to “Melancholia. Genius and Madness in Europe;” the first Festival d'Histoire de l'art in France was dedicated to the topic “Art and Madness.” In the medical field, psychological studies of art and artists have multiplied. The American Institute of Medical Education in Santa Fé (USA) is leading a symposium every year on « Creativity and Madness »; the Cité des Sciences organized in March 2015 a debate to question the relations between Art and Madness. This interest witnesses a fascination for – even a mystification of – the creative power of madness. Our presentation wants to question the way movies transpose this myth. We'll base our analysis on a few biopics of both recognised and outsider artists: *Camille Claudel* by Bruno Nuytten (1988) and *Camille Claudel; 1915* by Bruno Dumont (2013); *Pollock* by Ed Harris (2000); *Klimt* by Raul Ruiz (2006); *Aloïse* by Liliane Kermadec (1975); *Séraphine* by Martin Provost (2008) and *Henry Darger*; *In the realms of the unreal* by Jessica Yu (2004). Our thesis is that most of the movies on artists reiterates the image of the artist mad, passionate and tormented, whose vision is different and out of step.

“Beneath the avant-garde's interwar primitivism: New France as a reservoir of colonial common places in 18th-century French fiction”

Dr. Sébastien Côté (ICSLAC and French)

As a comparatist, I always had a particular way to look at the literary canon, a body of work, or a research question. This is how I came to write a dissertation about *Documents* (1929-1930), a French avant-garde journal genuinely obsessed not only with what was then called the primitive, but also with ethnological analysis in the broadest possible sense. As serious as most collaborators were, their disruptive discourse relied on a wide pool of clichés, whose primitivist roots were deeply anchored in their European psyche. In short, in the 1930s, these common places about otherness were not new, or exceptional, they were only the latest version of a century-old song. In a way, they are one of the many bridges between the German-French interwar avant-garde gathered around *Documents*, which I left behind year ago, and my new discipline, a re-reading of the literature of and about New France (1534-1763). In my talk, instead of addressing the usual classics of the period (Champlain, Lahontan, Charlevoix), I want to talk about common places pertaining to primitive life that are constantly surfacing in forgotten French works of fiction of the 18th century about New France (or Canada). This will

make clear that a shift between the 1930s and the Ancien Régime is not irrelevant and, more importantly, that we can't understand the present or the near past without a wide-ranging contextualization. Cultural transfers are nothing new, they're also called *tradition*.