



Art historical seminar of the KIK-IRPA no. 19

In collaboration with the Groupe d'études du XVIII^e siècle et des révolutions de l'Université de Liège and the Centrum Rubenianum Antwerp

Call for papers

A new look at the confiscation of heritage objects in Europe at the time of the French Revolution

Date: Wednesday 30 and Thursday 31 May 2018

Venue: Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA) in Brussels

It is frequent that in one place or another the notions of secularisation and decontextualisation of art works that gave rise to the modern museums in the second half of the 18th century, are questioned. Such a reconsideration leads to recognize, in line with Quatremère de Quincy, that a work of art can only be appreciated in its original context. Hence the risk of wanting to rewrite our history by reconsidering the transfer of heritage objects, a phenomenon that has been present throughout history.

The most striking example is most probably that of the revolutionary confiscations in the transition from the 18th to the 19th century, a decisive period for the awakening heritage awareness. Up to this day tempers can flare in some regions that had to part with many of their masterpieces. In Belgium, for example, there is a growing body of opinion to denounce the violence of the French troops and to demand that the art works appropriated in 1794-95 be returned. This resurfacing of reclamations that take no account of the principle of non-retroactivity of law is both in line with the restoration to Jewish families of art objects confiscated by the Nazis and with the UNESCO's recommendations for the restitution of cultural objects robbed by the former colonial powers.

A one-sided approach of this transfer of heritage at the end of the 18th century from the point of view of the art robberies tends towards reductionism. Indeed, one risks to forget how much the confiscation of cultural objects by the French nation was prompted by a universal ambition of liberation and art promotion with the aim of educating its citizens. This democratic ambition drew from the upcoming notion that heritage is determined by collective appropriation.

Complementary to the scientific inventory the KIK-IRPA is currently making up of the paintings and sculptures robbed by the French revolutionaries in the Austrian Netherlands and the Prince-Bishopric of Liège, the institution organizes a two-day colloquium to take on a broad approach to the re-evaluation of the historical, political and artistic circumstances of this revolutionary confiscation throughout Europe, as well as its antecedents and direct consequences. The topic will be extended to all cultural and scientific heritage concerned and thus entail much more than art works. Synthesis studies are preferred to case studies.

*The colloquium will be held in the auditorium of the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA) in Brussels on 30 and 31 May 2018. **Abstracts for communications** should be sent to pierre-yves.kairis@kikirpa.be at the latest on **8 November 2017**. The languages of the colloquium are English, Dutch and French. Abstracts should be 20 to 30 lines long and accompanied by a curriculum vitae (maximum two pages, with a list of recent publications). The organizers will announce their selection at the end of November. All meals during the colloquium (lunch and dinner on Wednesday and lunch on Thursday) will be paid for by the organizers, as well as the lodging expenses in Brussels of the selected foreign speakers and a maximum refund of 150 euros for their transport expenses (based on the receipts). The speakers commit themselves to submit their final article at the latest six months after the colloquium.*

Scientific committee:

Arnout Balis, ere-professor aan de Vrije Universiteit Brussel en voorzitter van het Centrum Rubenianum Antwerpen

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Hans Feys, adviseur van de Afdeling Cultureel Erfgoed van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap

André Gob, professeur honoraire de muséologie à l'Université de Liège et président du Conseil des musées de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles

Pierre-Yves Kairis, chef de département a.i. à l'IRPA-KIK

Christophe Loir, professeur d'histoire à l'Université libre de Bruxelles

Jacques Lust, diensthoofd externe communicatie van het Federaal Wetenschapsbeleid

Gaëtane Maës, maître de conférences HDR en histoire de l'art à l'Université de Lille 3

Caroline Marchant, attachée à la Direction du Patrimoine culturel de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles

Bart Suys, raadgever Wetenschapsbeleid, kabinet staatssecretaris Zuhail Demir

Joost Vander Auwera, conservator/werkleider-geaggregeerde aan het Departement Oude Kunst van de Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten van België

Robert Van de Walle, hoofd van de juridische dienst van het Federaal Wetenschapsbeleid

Beatrijs Wolters van der Wey, wetenschappelijk medewerker bij het KIK-IRPA