

(RE)ACTIVISM

Artists and Academics as Political Agents

Interdisciplinary Graduate Student Conference

Hosted by the Department of
French and Italian at the University
of Colorado, Boulder

Wolf Law Building

University of Colorado Boulder

October 6-7, 2017

*Keynote speaker: Dr. Frieda Ekotto
of the University of Michigan*

"This is precisely the time when
artists go to work. There is no
time for despair, no place for
self-pity, no need for silence, no
room for fear. We speak, we
write, we do language. That is
how civilizations heal."

- Toni Morrison

Call for papers

Art is necessarily in conversation with the world, reflecting it, reacting to it, shaping it. Literature, film, and visual arts document human experience and help us to envisage possible futures, including the dystopian or utopian. By inviting a reader or viewer to engage with the world in a different register— affective or embodied as well as intellectual—art unearths concealed patterns.

Despite the fact that the academic arena of the humanities studies and comments on the world, it can also be a somewhat insular sphere; we can act through the academy to alter the world, or we can act on the academy to alter the way that it functions. As teachers and scholars, the choices we make about the things we read, write, and teach shape the cultural and epistemological landscape. Through canonization or theoretical enquiry, we may influence the public reception of transformative or challenging works of art. Our methodologies may question preconceived assumptions about our rights, access to, or authority over our objects of study. We may interrogate the disciplinary bounds of our institutions by writing beyond the limits of medium, era or language.

This conference embarks simultaneously on two paths: the first is to explore the myriad ways artistic production has (and continues to) successfully act on the world. The second is to consider the place of activism in the academy. While these may be treated as two separate inquiries, our hope is that this conference will open up a conversation about the relations between paradigm shifts through art and through academia.

We find that disciplinary divisions in the academy may obscure those aspects of literature, film, painting, that speak across spacial and temporal confines. Rather, by communicating with our colleagues in other fields, we may find that art functions similarly in different cultures, and through different mediums, to shape society and challenge perspectives. In this spirit, we invite interdisciplinary discussion on artistic engagement with the world, and on the multiple expressions of activism in academia. In what ways have artists influenced the social or political landscape using the space of their novels, films or art? How does academia currently operate in the greater context of epistemological, religious, political, and societal conflicts?

Proposals accepted until July 15th 2017

Please submit proposals of 250 words to CUFrench@colorado.edu by July 15th 2017. We invite 20-minute presentations in either English or French; however each panel will be conducted either entirely in English or entirely in French, to ensure maximum accessibility. Knowledge of both languages is not required.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Literary reactions to historical events
- Literature and activism
- Film and activism
- Bandes dessinées / Comic strips
- Activism within the academy / universities
- The role of interpretation in influencing reception of artworks
- Activist movements directed outside of the university system
- Activist networks
- Colonialism / Post-colonialism
- Migrations / Immigration / Borders / Margins
- Power discourses
- Radicalism
- Academic elitism
- “Safe spaces” and the university
- Sanctuary campuses
- Complicity vs. questioning within academia
- Canonization
- Open access
- Gendered activism
- Ecocriticism