

# 2018 Company of Ideas Forum

Jeffrey Rubinoff Sculpture Park  
25-27 June 2018

## Art and Knowledge 1900-1950

Modernism has traditionally been defined in part by its withdrawal from other art forms or disciplines, its quest for formal purity, and its embrace of autonomy as an aesthetic and political ambition. In recent decades, however, it has become increasingly clear that twentieth-century art was in fact marked by an unprecedented degree of cross-fertilization, between different artforms and fields of knowledge. These interdisciplinary conversations shaped both the form and content of modern art from the very beginning of the century: philosophical discourses inspired Europe's Expressionist movements; scientific and mathematical breakthroughs informed the pioneers of abstraction; the rise of psychoanalysis influenced the meanings and methods of Surrealism; and spiritualist beliefs – particularly those found in Theosophy and Christian Science – motivated a great deal of non-objective art.

This year's Forum is the first in a series of conferences that will explore the relationship between art and knowledge in the twentieth century. It concentrates on the first half of the century, with particular interest in art's claim to philosophical, scientific, and spiritual knowledge.

## Agenda

Sunday 24 June	various	Speakers' arrival & dinner in Vancouver
	7:30 pm	Meet in Buchan Hotel Lobby for dinner
Monday 25 June	8:30 am	Meet in lobby to depart to float plane
	9:15 am	Sea plane to Hornby Island from Coal Harbour
	10:30 am	Tour of sculpture park for speakers
	12:30 pm	Lunch (Forage or VORIZO at the Coop)
	1:30 pm	Tour of sculpture park for students
	3:00 pm	Earliest check-in time at Sea Breeze Lodge

Monday 25 June	6:15 pm	Bar open for drinks
	6:45 pm	Please be ready to order dinner (Sea Breeze)
Tuesday 26 June	8:00 am	Breakfast at Sea Breeze
	8:30am	Depart for JRSP
	9:00 am	Welcome by JRSP Board Chair Betty Kennedy Introductions by Karun Koernig and James Fox
	9:15 am	Dr Lieke Wijnia, <i>Knowing through Seeing: Piet Mondrian's Visions of the Sacred</i>
	10:15 am	Dr Lucy Kent, <i>Material Illusions: Three Seminal British Modernists and Christian Science</i>
	11:15 am	Coffee Break
	11:45 am	Dr Nicola Kozicharov, <i>Rewriting the Canon: Dmitry Stelletsky's Designs for the Russian Orthodox Church</i>
	1:00 pm	Lunch at the JRSP
	1:00-3:00pm	Sculpture Park is open to explore
	Afternoon	Free to visit the Sculpture Park, explore the island, or rest (please ask about options)
	6:15 pm	Bar open for drinks
6:45 pm	Please be ready to order dinner (Sea Breeze)	
Wednesday 27 June	8:00 am	Breakfast at Sea Breeze
	8:30am	Depart for JRSP
	9:00 am	Dr Lucy Whelan, <i>What the Painter Knows: Pierre Bonnard and the Experience of Time</i>
	10:00 am	Dr Maria (pronounced Masha) Mileeva, <i>On New Systems in Art: Karl Marx, Kazimir Malevich, and Heinrich Wölfflin</i>
	11:00 am	Coffee

11:30 am Amanda Balter, *Knowledge in the Presence of Art*  
(inaugural JRSP Essay Presentation)

12:15 Wrap up discussion

1:00 pm Lunch at the JRSP

2:00 pm JRSP meeting for staff and board members

Afternoon Free to rest or explore the island

7:15 pm Bar open for drinks

7:45 pm Please be ready to order dinner (Sea Breeze)

Thursday 28 June

8:00 am Breakfast

8:45 am Speaker depart for Seaplane

9:15 am Sea plane departs to Vancouver airport

9:30-10:30am Student presentations on session highlights

10:30 am Students depart Hornby Island

# Abstracts

## **Lieke Wijnia, *Knowing through Seeing: Piet Mondrian's Visions of the Sacred***

Dutch painter Piet Mondrian's (1872-1944) spirituality is often characterized in terms of his theosophical interests, which in turn offer a much-used interpretative framework for his paintings. Yet, Mondrian envisioned a future in which people would be spiritually able to experience the world's fundamental structures. Therefore, I argue for a shift in scholarly focus from the abstract visual language, which Mondrian called *beelding*, to its visionary equivalent *ziening*, a term he coined for that spiritual engagement with visible reality. In this paper, I trace the spiritual foundations of Mondrian's artistic visions, by relating references to religion, spirituality and the sacred from selected letters and theoretical texts to his paintings. A pressing methodological concern is how to relate Mondrian's writings, in which he invented a new vocabulary to express new ideas, to his paintings, the materializations of his radically innovative visions. The focus on the question how the artworks function as embodied visions, reveals the presence of an understudied paradox. While Mondrian's spirituality is strongly related to modern life, his conceptions about its visionary character are rooted in pre-modern ideas on seeing. The aim for his art to evoke an objective, spiritually invested mode of seeing strongly contrasts the increasingly subjective and individualized ways in which modern viewers construed knowledge in their viewing of art. In turn, this paradox lies at the heart of the complex reception history of Mondrian's abstract works.

## **Lucy Kent, *Material Illusions: Three Seminal British Modernists and Christian Science***

The fact that Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson and Winifred Nicholson shared an interest in Christian Science has been well documented. The extent of their commitment to the faith, however, and its subsequent value as an analytical resource for interpreting their work, is often overlooked. Considerable archival evidence demonstrates that Christian Science exerted a significant influence on their lives and thinking for the vast majority of their careers. Furthermore, each of them made explicit claims for a direct correlation between their aesthetic and spiritual convictions.

Guided by the doctrine of Christian Science, as well as the artists' public and private assertions, this paper considers the symbolism, design and intended function of their work in the context of their mutual faith. Regarded in this light, the works discussed take on new meaning, not only as emblems of the artist's personal religious beliefs, but as part of a broader project of facilitating the healing and enlightenment of society as a whole.

## **Nicola Kozicharov, *Rewriting the Canon: Dmitry Stelletsky's Designs for the Russian Orthodox Church***

This talk analyses the relevance of spiritual knowledge within the art of the Russian Orthodox Church. With the advent of modernism in late nineteenth- to early twentieth-

century Russia, knowledge of the canonical particularities of religious art seemed to hold less relevance for artists, whose priorities tended to be artistic rather than spiritual. This talk will focus on an exception to this trend, Russian émigré artist Dmitry Stelletsky's commission to execute the murals and icons for the parish church of the Saint-Serge Theological Institute in Paris – one of the most important centres of the Orthodox Church outside of Russia. I will explore how his designs transformed a nineteenth-century gothic building into a functioning Russian Orthodox church by striking a balance between religious and aesthetic concerns. On the one hand, Stelletsky's deep knowledge of ancient Russian churches and icon painting, as well as Orthodox rituals, underpinned many of his designs, yet his colourful mural scheme deviated drastically from the strict Orthodox canon, making Saint-Serge an unusual departure for Stelletsky both as an artist and a devout Orthodox believer.

### **Lucy Whelan, *What the Painter Knows: Pierre Bonnard and the Experience of Time***

From his early career as a pioneering image-maker of busy fin-de-siècle Paris, to his late works after 1920 depicting everyday domestic life, the oeuvre of Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947) suggests an ongoing reflection on the time of daily experience. In exploring the subject of time in Bonnard's work, this paper considers the gradual processes involved in making his late paintings. What knowledge is revealed to the artist and his viewers, it asks, in such processes as repeatedly tracing the outline of a moving or changing subject? What might be discovered in continually returning to the same painting over a long period of time? Ultimately, what ideas about the conscious experience of time and memory, are visually thought through in Bonnard's work?

To ask these questions, this paper looks closely at Bonnard's late paintings of his wife Marthe, which transform scenes of her taking tea or lying in the bathtub into shimmering, fantastical colours. Looking closely at these works, and relating them to the ideas of the French philosopher Henri Bergson, I argue that they present a multi-faceted experience of time, in which the present mingles with the past, in ways closely connected to the female subject at their centre. Whereas the modern period has long been characterised by fast-paced modern temporalities – often seen as represented by Impressionist, Futurist, and Cubist artists – Bonnard's work offers a new paradigm of the modern experience of time

### **Maria Mileeva, *On New Systems in Art: Karl Marx, Kazimir Malevich, and Heinrich Wölfflin***

*On New Systems in Art* (1919), *Suprematism: 34 Drawings* (1920), *God is not Cast Down: Art, Church, and Factory* (1922), and other theoretical texts published by Kazimir Malevich during his Vitebsk period, develop the principles of suprematism in response to the October Revolution and the need for new forms of art education. In these texts, Malevich reflected on the role of the creative process, aesthetics, and artistic knowledge in a changing cultural context defined by communism, advances in science and technology, and his belief in the humanity's cosmic future. This paper will investigate Malevich's novel pedagogical approaches, which developed a method of art historical analysis that privileged the visual as a tool in the construction of art historical narratives. His teaching methods will be examined through a close analysis of twenty-two theoretical charts that were conceived as a pedagogical tool at the State Institute of Artistic Culture (GINKhUK, Leningrad) and

exhibited in Berlin in 1927. Identifying the main developments in West European painting from 1880 until 1926, Malevich used the visual means of a series of diagrams to outline impressionism, Cézannism, cubism, and futurism as the defining points in the evolution of suprematism. Set in the backdrop to the cultural revolution in Soviet Russia, Malevich's pedagogical approach constructs a new system of knowledge and attempts to reconcile many contradicting philosophies, such as Marxist-Leninism and the writings of Heinrich Wölfflin.

### **Amanda Balter, *Knowledge in the Presence of Art***

The question posed in the Inaugural JRSP Essay Award competition was "In what ways is art a source of knowledge?" Balter responds to this question from the perspective of a student of philosophy and religious thought. She argues that art functions as a source of knowledge because it offers the viewer an interpretative experience. Her essay examines how thinkers and artists from Paul Ricoeur to Terry Barrett to Rob Mulholland analyze the process of interpretation. She demonstrates the value of viewing art for the everyday person through a discussion of the subjective experience of the viewer. This experience provides the viewer a new means of understanding and making connections in other areas of life.

# Speaker Biographies

## **Amanda Balter**

Amanda Balter is a graduating senior at Rocky Mountain College in Billings, Montana, where she majors in Philosophy & Religious Studies. Outside of her schooling, she is an active member of her church and volunteers regularly. She enjoys reading and writing poetry as well as painting with her younger brother, searching for the best hot chocolate, and cross country skiing in Montana's backyard. In the future, she hopes to pursue graduate study in the liberal arts.

*Amanada is the inaugural winner of the Jeffrey Rubinoff Sculpture Park Essay Award.*

## **Dr Lucy Kent**

Lucy Kent completed her doctorate at the University of Cambridge, where her research explored the correlation between new religious movements and modern art in England. Prior to this, she earned a BFA in painting at the Rhode Island School of Design and an MA with Distinction in British Modernism from the Courtauld Institute of Art. She has published her work in academic journals and museum catalogues, and recently provided research for a BBC series on American art.

## **Dr Nicola Kozicharow**

Dr Nicola Kozicharow is the Schulman Research Fellow at Trinity Hall, Cambridge and an Affiliated Lecturer in History of Art at the University of Cambridge. She is a specialist in nineteenth- and twentieth-century European and Russian art, and her current book project explores the impact of migratory experience on Russian modern art in interwar Europe. Her research has recently been sponsored by the Getty Research Institute and the Likhachev Foundation. Kozicharow received her PhD and MPhil from the University of Cambridge, and holds an MA from University College London, and a BA in History of Art (Honors) and Slavic Studies from Brown University.

## **Dr Maria Mileeva**

Maria Mileeva is a specialist in modern Russian culture, specialising in late 19th– and 20th–century Russian art and international avant-garde networks, with a particular interest in museum histories, cultural politics, and cross-cultural exchange. Her specialist knowledge and professional experience embrace cross-currents of European, Russian, and American art in the first half of the 20th century, with a particular focus on Russian, German, and East European cultural politics. Maria received a BA in History of Art at the University of Cambridge (2005), and MA (2006) and PhD (2011) at The Courtauld Institute of Art. Her doctoral thesis examined exhibitions of Western art in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s with a particular focus on the history of the State Museum of New Western Art (GMNZI), Moscow. Maria has also worked as an Assistant Curator of 'Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970', held at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London in autumn 2008. She co-edited and contributed to the book *Utopian Reality: Reconstructing Culture in Revolutionary Russia and Beyond* (Brill, 2013). Since finishing her PhD, Maria has taught at The Courtauld Institute of Art and University College London (UCL). In 2016-17, she was an Associate Researcher in the Faculty of Art History, at the European University, St Petersburg. She is currently working on her next book project, which focuses on the evolution of Soviet Socialist Realism in art and criticism between 1930 and 1970. She continues to serve as the Co-director of the Cambridge Courtauld Russian Art Centre (CCRAC).

**Dr Lucy Whelan**

Lucy is a visiting fellow at the Humboldt University in Berlin, where she holds a Hanseatic Scholarship from the Alfred Toepfer Foundation. Earlier this year she completed her doctorate at Oxford, and is currently revising her thesis for publication. Her research presents a new understanding of the French artist Pierre Bonnard by approaching his works as a form of knowledge, demonstrating how they engaged with debates essential to artistic modernism around the relationship between vision and representation. Lucy is also beginning a new project on religion and modern art in the early twentieth century.

**Dr Lieke Wijnia**

Dr. Lieke Wijnia lectures Art History at University College Tilburg and is a research fellow of the Center for Religion and Heritage at the University of Groningen. In 2016 she defended her PhD research, on perceptions of the sacred at Festival Musica Sacra Maastricht, cum laude at Tilburg University. Her postdoctoral work on the sacred in the art museum received a golden medal from the Teylers' Theological Society. Together with Dr. Naomi Billingsley at Manchester University, she founded the international research network Visionary Artists, Visionary Objects (1800-now). Her research explores the relationship between modern art and religious heritage, with a particular focus on the work of Piet Mondrian.

*Dr Wijnia is the first Jeffrey Rubinoff Sculpture Park Postdoctoral Award-holder.*