America in the Making of Early Modern Ingenuity

A workshop from the Genius before Romanticism: Ingenuity in Early Modern Art and Science research project

Friday 30 June 2017, 09:30 - 17:00
Room S1, Alison Richard Building

Convenors: José Ramón Marcaida and Richard Oosterhoff with Alexander Marr, Raphaële Garrod and Tim Chesters
Genius Before Romanticism: Ingenuity in Early Modern Art and Science

Drawing on the perspectives of history of art, history of science, technology and medicine, intellectual history and literary studies, this project seeks to capture ingenuity across and between disciplines. Studying six countries (France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, England and Spain) across three centuries, it traces ingenuity's shifting patterns and fragmented fortunes over the longue durée.

http://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/programmes/genius-before-romanticism

https://twitter.com/ingenuityCRASSH

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Cover Image:
Hammock - Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, Corónica de las Indias. La hystoria general de las Indias (1547) © John Carter Brown Library

Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH)
Alison Richard Building, 7 West Road, Cambridge CB3 9DT
www.crassh.cam.ac.uk
Programme

9.30 Opening Remarks: José Ramón Marcaida (University of Cambridge)

9.45 - 11.00 Session I – Chair: José Ramón Marcaida (University of Cambridge)
Alessandra Russo (Columbia University)
Universal Ingenium, Singular Stakes. Arts and Artists in the Early Modern Worlds

Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra (University of Texas at Austin)
The Hermeneutics of the Obscure: Baroque Golden Age and the Emergence of the Secular Genius

11.00 - 11.45 Coffee break

11.45 - 13.00 Session II – Chair: Richard Oosterhoff (University of Cambridge)
Andrés Vélez Posada (Universidad EAFIT)
Ingenious Places: Early Modern Cosmology and the Economic Interpretations of Tropical Nature

Stefan Hanß (University of Cambridge)
Material Encounters: Knotting Cultures in Peru and Spain

13.00 - 14.00 Lunch

14.00 - 15.15 Session III – Chair: Raphaële Garrod (University of Cambridge)
Ana Pulido-Rull (University of Arkansas)
Art and Law: Indigenous Maps as Legal Evidence in Colonial Mexico’s Land Disputes

Carolyn Dean (University of California, Santa Cruz)
‘A Sight to Behold’: The Inka Road System Beyond Description

15.15 - 16.00 Coffee Break

16.00 - 17.00 Round Table – Chair: Joan-Pau Rubiés (Universitat Pompeu Fabra)
Rodrigo Cacho (University of Cambridge), Anna Grasskamp (Hong Kong Baptist University/Leiden University/Heidelberg University), Joan-Pau Rubiés (Universitat Pompeu Fabra), Mark Thurner (Institute of Latin American Studies, London)
Abstracts

Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra (University of Texas at Austin)

The Hermeneutics of the Obscure: Baroque Golden Age and the Emergence of the Secular Genius.

As an erudite-humanist poet, Luis de Góngora introduced a number of “strange” and novel resources to language that shocked his readers. Some of these new techniques included the deliberate inversion of the order of words (hyperbaton); the promiscuous use of new places and objects drawn from imperial cosmographies and natural histories; the constant use of Latin and Greek etymologies to coin new meanings for traditional terms or to create new words; and the many references to classical mythology with no clear intent. For Góngora, language became self-referential, valuable onto itself, namely, ‘literature’. Some readers openly scorned Góngora’s obscurity and his deliberate efforts to alter etymology, grammar, and syntax. Other readers, however, reacted with awe, producing massive interpretations of his slim volumes of poetry. A new genre emerged, namely, exegetical commentary of secular poetry that ran into the thousands of pages. The interpreters of Luis de Góngora’s new poetry drew on the epistemology of biblical hermeneutics that sought deeper meanings behind the veil of the literal. Piercing through the veil of obscurity via detailed exegetical commentary became a way of identifying the regular poet from the genius. I investigate the emergence of this new meaning of genius that applied old meanings of biblical prophetic illumination and ciencia infusa to secular poetry. I focus on seventeenth-century commentary around three poems of the Iberian Atlantic: Luis de Camões’ Os Lusiads, Góngora’s Primera Soledad, and Sor Juana Inès de la Cruz’s Primer Sueño. All three were treated as sacred texts.

Carolyn Dean (University of California, Santa Cruz)

‘A Sight to Behold’: The Inka road system beyond description

The first Spaniards to visit the Inka (Inca) realm declared that its network of roads, bridges, storage facilities, and way stations was an ingenious and wondrous ‘sight to behold’. From the sixteenth century to the present, admiration has tended to focus on the technological feats, engineering acumen, and administrative expertise displayed in the Inkas’ system of roads. Although these aspects are to be greatly admired, no less impressive are the ways this network expressed the Inka episteme. In particular this paper considers how the Inkas mobilized visual culture to promote the critical connectivity of their empire. Specifically, it will be suggested that the roadways and communication networks materialized the togetherness of their empire, which they called “Four Parts Together” or, in the Inkas’ language of Quechua, ‘Tawantinsuyu’. This paper calls attention to the ‘ntin’ of Tawa-ntin-suyu as it was visualized and materialized by the Inkas. Although experienced by the conquistadors as a difficult and broken topography of diverse people and varied resources, Tawantinsuyu was created by the Inkas—both in the land and in the imagination—as four parts bound inextricably together.
Stefan Hanß (University of Cambridge)

Material Encounters: Knotting Cultures in Peru and Spain

This paper reconsiders cultural contacts in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Peru and Spain by studying knotting techniques. Early modern protagonists, in the Andes Mountains as well as in the Iberian Peninsula, understood such intricate techniques as refined skills. This, in fact, prompts historians to rethink the notion of literacy and cultural encounters in terms of material contacts. I first present the refined knotting techniques that Chimù and Inca featherworkers used in order to attach feathers to textiles. These highly elaborated artisanal techniques, I argue, gained their broader cultural meanings in pre-Spanish Peru, where indigenous people cultivated a “literacy of knots” in such textiles as well as in quipus. Arriving Spaniards, in fact, were aware of that and admired Peruvian knotting techniques. In chronicles, they praised the knotted quipus for their ingenious transmission of information. As Spaniards cultivated themselves the aesthetics of knots in featherwork and textiles throughout the sixteenth century, this paper readdresses the concepts of literacy and ingenuity in terms of cultural contacts in the early modern material world.

Ana Pulido-Rull (University of Arkansas)

Art and law: Indigenous maps as legal evidence in colonial Mexico's land disputes

This paper analyses how native artists from colonial Mexico responded to Spanish land distribution policies through the examination of the maps they painted as evidence for the legal proceedings known as “land grants” or mercedes de tierras. The Spanish Crown implemented this program in the sixteenth century to allocate the territory of New Spain among its dwellers in an orderly fashion and prevent illegal occupation. In this paper I argue that native-made maps did much more than recording the disputed territories for the lawsuits; they enabled indigenous artists to translate their own ideas about the contested space into visual form, offered compelling arguments for the defence of these spaces, and in some cases even helped them preserve some of their lands. I will discuss how these images bolstered claims in legal proceedings and challenged the information presented in the written case files. The intertextuality between these different forms of spatial practices—written and visual—offer a more nuanced view of the social conflicts faced by indigenous communities in sixteenth-century Mexico and their response to these.

Alessandra Russo (Columbia University)

Universal Ingenium, Singular Stakes. Arts and Artists in the Early Modern Worlds

The observation and circulation of extremely refined artifacts —and in particular, of American artifacts—, in the context of the Iberian expansion, immediately prompted a meditation on how, anywhere on the sphere, humanity could be precisely defined through a potential for artistic rationality, ingenium. But the observation and circulation throughout the world of ingeniously human-made —and infinitely varied— artistic pieces
also prompted a theoretical and practical redefinition of what being a singular, contemporary, artist meant. In my paper, I will address how this productive tension — between the universality of *ingenium* and the singularity of every art piece and of every artist beyond it— can be regarded as the conceptual ground of the most creative dynamics in the Early Modern times.

Andrés Vélez Posada (Universidad EAFIT)

**Ingenious Places: Early Modern Cosmology and the Economic Interpretations of Tropical Nature**

The idea of nature as a productive agent was a persistent one during the European Renaissance. In the context of early modern natural philosophy, this interpretation was expressed by operative metaphors conceiving nature as a machine (*machina mundi*) and as a productive artist (*natura artifex*). Such economic and artistic thinking was undoubtedly connected to the abundant terminology and representations of the paradigmatic *ingenium* (i.e. the generative power of Nature). Although early modern studies have emphasized the role of ingenuity in human bodies and practices as well as in animals and artefacts, its geographical role has received less attention, as in the case of expressions like *ingenia terrae* (the terrestrial sources of singularities) and *ingenium loci* (the productive quality of a singular place). The main aim of this paper is to raise the question of how this economic interpretation of Nature was used in geographical descriptions and naturalist explanations concerning the New World, and particularly the tropical zone of the northern Andes. In terms of sources, the paper will focus on texts by the cosmographer Sebastian Münster, the natural philosopher Antonio Persio, the learned soldier Bernardo Vargas Machuca and the Spanish questionnaire *Relaciones Geográficas*. 
Participants

Rodrigo Cacho
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University of Cambridge
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University of California, Santa Cruz
University of Cambridge
Hong Kong Baptist University/Leiden University/Heidelberg University
University of Cambridge
University of Cambridge
University of Cambridge
University of Arkansas
Universitat Pompeu Fabra
Columbia University
Institute of Latin American Studies
Universidad EAFIT
rgc27@cam.ac.uk
canizares-esguerra@austin.utexas.edu
tc435@cam.ac.uk
csdean@ucsc.edurf234@cam.ac.uk
anna.graskamp@asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de
sh885@cam.ac.uk
jrm213@cam.ac.uk
ajm300@cam.ac.uk
ro289@cam.ac.uk
apulidor@uark.edu
joan-pau.rubies@icrea.cat
ar2701@columbia.edu
mark.thurner@sas.ac.uk
avelezp6@eafit.edu.co