

5th Transregional Academy on Latin American Art

## “Contesting Objects: Sites, Narratives, Contexts”

MALI – Museo de Arte de Lima, 4-12 May 2024



The academy was organized by the German Center for Art History Paris (DFK Paris, Max Weber Foundation), the Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute for Art History in Rome (BHMPI), and the Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI), in cooperation with the Forum Transregionale Studien, Berlin. The academy was made possible with support from Getty through its Connecting Art Histories Initiative. This was the fifth transregional academy organized by the DFK Paris since the 2016 launch of its initiative “Travelling Art Histories” and was the first to take place inside a museum: the Museo de Arte de Lima.

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Lena Bader

## Report on the Transregional Academy

“Contesting Objects: Sites, Narratives, Contexts” (Lima, 4-12 May 2024)

The fifth transregional academy of the DFK Paris took place from 4th through 12th May 2024 and was the first iteration to convene in a museum setting. Its topic was “Contesting Objects: Sites, Narratives, Contexts.” The academy was organized and conceived in collaboration with the Museo de Arte de Lima and the Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute for Art History in Rome, as well as with support from the Forum Transregionale Studien, Berlin. It was made possible with support from Getty through its Connecting Art Histories Initiative. The academy belongs to the research area “Travelling Art Histories. Transregional Networks in Exchange Between Latin America and Europe,” which was launched at the DFK Paris in 2016 in collaboration with Thomas Kirchner, and has given rise to four previous transregional academies, among several other events: “Modernisms Concepts, Contexts, and Circulation” (16-24 July 2016, São Paulo); “Mobility: Objects, Materials, Concepts, Actors” (30 September-8 October 2017, Buenos Aires); “Spaces of Art: Concepts and Impacts in and Outside Latin America” (26 October-3 November 2019, Mexico City); and “Plural Temporalities: Theories and Practices of Time” (24 September-2 October 2022, Bogotá) – all organized in cooperation with and by the Forum Transregionale Studien.<sup>1</sup> Although the academy’s cycle in Lima has come to a close for now, the project will be carried forward in new formats as part of the research area “Transcultural Displacements,” in collaboration with Peter Geimer.

The structure of the Lima academy followed the format of the previous meetings, with the programme alternating among three modules: *Project presentations* in which the fellows present their research; *thematic sessions* in which texts by fellows and senior scholars – compiled in a reader and circulated in advance – are presented for discussion; and *object studies* in museums and galleries, supplemented with evening excursions, viewings, and walking tours.

The academies are first and foremost a place for coming together and for engaging in open dialogue: they aim to promote exchange and discussion around topics that seem particularly urgent both from a scientific and a broader social point of view. In the face of political landscapes marked by identity discourses, as well as scientific stances whose oppositions sometimes become similarly dogmatic, the academies seek to offer an open forum for encounters – with sites, with fellow participants, and with ideas.

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<sup>1</sup> For further information, see the overview of the organized events along with the respective reports, programme booklets, etc., at <https://dfk-paris.org/de/research-project/travelling-art-histories-1625.html>.

With the topic “Contesting Objects: Sites, Narratives, Contexts” we wanted to encourage a sited and interdisciplinary research approach in which objects could be considered in their complex contexts: class, gender, race, the environment, the economy, religion, academia, the museum, etc. Convening at the Museo de Arte de Lima informed these questions in important ways, allowing us to remain in constant contact with objects as we engaged in thought and debate.

The choice of topic was motivated by a variety of considerations, from the experience of the pandemic, which compelled us to rethink and reevaluate the very possibility of visiting collections abroad, to the observation that the works of art – the objects of study – tend to disappear when confronted with methodological questions about transcultural encounters. Indeed, though we all had experienced the joy of discussing methods, approaches, and concepts with other scholars, we also sensed that these discussions often created a “think tank” wherein the objects could disappear from view.

It was in this context that we began thinking of objects as a challenge for art history, as a critical counterpart to abstract concepts and narratives – whether because the objects appeal to a variety of senses and may confront researchers with bodily experiences that problematize their scholarly assumptions; or because they bring into play lived situations, the social and historical components that are part of every object’s biography; or because they invite us to think of different notions of space, place, or site, beyond institutional spaces such as museums, galleries, etc. There was also the question of the objects art history may be forgetting, of objects that disappear while others become all the more visible and representative of select approaches. We talked about the way art history controls its object – how objects are framed not only by museums but also by economics, religion, race, gender, etc., and how they can be both overvalued and diminished by academic research. Hence, the question was also, How do objects engage us as researchers?

One of the recurring themes was the question of the balance between poetic experience and artistic practice, on the one hand, and socio-political context and ideological narratives, on the other. What would an art-historical approach look like that could derive its criteria for subject- and object-specific inquiry from an awareness of the respective context? Questions about contemporary historiography were central as well: In light of the evident tendency towards presentism, how can dealing with objects contribute to a critical understanding of history and historiography?

During the numerous visits to the Lima collections and exhibitions, as well as our conversations within the seminar room, methodological questions concerning linguistic usage were repeatedly

raised, as in the case of various concepts that may arise when reflecting on transcultural encounters: circulation, syncretism, symbiosis, entanglement, etc. The focus fell particularly on the problem of how and when new terms are used: What happens when a new term is coined to replace a modernist category, without interrogating the underlying valences? What is at stake when moments in a historiography are “corrected” (or “cancelled”) rather than “contextualized”? What happens when criticism becomes ideology?

As in the previous academies, we debated the question of language: Should we opt to speak in English, given that we are dealing with transcultural and not regional issues? Would it be wise to decide on a single language in which to speak with one another? Or should we use multiple languages, allowing everyone to choose for themselves? Is it fair to assume that everyone speaks several languages? There is no easy answer, and it seems that every option is indeed a problematic one; we must therefore call our attention to the choices we make and discuss them.

But there is more on this point: in circumstances where we are speaking one or two or even three languages, the words and concepts we use can have very different – and sometimes even strongly contrasting – connotations. This creates the need for each one of us to position ourselves in relation to our own context, our own intellectual trajectory, in order to be attentive to our particular subjectivity and the way in which it shapes our vocabulary. Making explicit what we know intimately means adopting the position of the observed, attempting to verbalize what is too often implicit or assumed – be it ideological motivations, cultural histories, linguistic roots, scientific frameworks, biographical factors, etc. It means to recognize from where we are speaking, the trajectory that helped mould our points of view, and to be aware that there are so many others – i.e., to always have in mind the plurality of approaches. This is where dialogue can take place – in the double movement towards opening yet with an awareness of one’s own anchoring – and, ideally, can operate with cognizance of the dangers of both relativism and universalism. In this sense, we like to think of the academies as an exercise in dialogue and encounter.

Because the object-study sessions were a particularly valuable part of the Lima iteration, we have included in this report a selection of photographs to give an impression of the rich encounters with art on-site. The time in Lima is over, but the academy will continue virtually. We have launched a new format in order to continue our collaborative work: our “transregional readings,” an online seminar via zoom to discuss selected texts (every six weeks). In this forum, the exchange carries on!



Sunday, 5 May



Sunday, 5 May

Walking Tour in Downtown Lima,  
with Sharon Lerner, Ricardo  
Kusunoki and Luis Eduardo



Visit to MUCEN



Visit to Centro Cultural Inca Garcilaso

Monday, 6 May



Welcome and Introduction with Joselyn Vergara (MALI), Sharon Lerner (MALI), Natalia Majluf, Lena Bader (DFK Paris), Jacqueline Wagner (Forum Transregionale Studien), Tristan Weddigen (Bibliotheca Hertziana), (from left to right)



Public Roundtable with Steering Committee members Tristan Weddigen, Mijail Mitrovic, Natalia Majluf, Roberto Conduru, Lena Bader, Luisa Elena Alcalá



Visiting the MALI collections







Working in three parallel working groups: Thematic discussions and Project presentations







Object study sessions at the MALI





Visit to Proyecto Amil, 80m2, Crisis





Visit to the MALI, contemporary exhibitions, with Sharon Lerner



Visit to the Museo Arqueológico Rafael Larco Herrer, guided by Director Ulla Holmquist, Giannina Bardaes and Julio Rucabado





Object study sessions at the MALI





Final discussion





Excursion to Pachacamac

