African Critical Inquiry Programme Announces 2015 Ivan Karp Doctoral Research Awards

The African Critical Inquiry Programme has named George Emeka Agbo and Ruth Sacks as recipients of the 2015 Ivan Karp Doctoral Research Awards. Agbo is a Nigerian doctoral student in Visual History at the University of the Western Cape. Sacks is a South African pursuing her degree through the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WiSER) at the University of the Witwatersrand. With support from ACIP’s Ivan Karp Awards, Agbo will pursue research on *Photography, Facebook and Virtualisation of Resistance in Nigeria*, while Sacks will complete work for her dissertation on *Style Congo, Art Nouveau: Links and Ruptures between Early Belgian Modernism, the African Colony and Postcolonial Zaïre*.

Founded in 2012, the African Critical Inquiry Programme (ACIP) is a partnership between the Centre for Humanities Research at University of the Western Cape in Cape Town and the Laney Graduate School of Emory University in Atlanta. Supported by donations to the Ivan Karp and Corinne Kratz Fund, the ACIP fosters thinking and working across public cultural institutions, across disciplines and fields, and across generations. It seeks to advance inquiry and debate about the roles and practice of public culture, public cultural institutions and public scholarship in shaping identities and society in Africa through an annual ACIP workshop and through the Ivan Karp Doctoral Research Awards, which support African doctoral students in the humanities and humanistic social sciences enrolled at South African universities.

About George Emeka Agbo’s project: Social media has changed the ways citizens relate with the state, impacting everything from electoral practices to the organisation of mass actions against governments. George Emeka Agbo’s research project, *Photography, Facebook and Virtualisation of Resistance in Nigeria*, proposes that in their involvement in this cyber culture, Nigerians have created an alternative form of resistance against poor governance and social injustice through the photographic practice of image production and circulation on Facebook. He will study the ways the boundary between professional and amateur photography is broken to challenge a sociopolitical order amidst a dearth of fundamental facilities, such as electricity, internet and digital resources. The research relies on photographs shared on the social networking site, including comments made on them by Facebook users, and interviews with those who posted them. It will focus on Facebook groups such as the *Nigerian Global Awakening Day Protest* and the *Nationwide Anti-Fuel Subsidy Removal: Strategies and Protests*, both of which emerged as part of protests against the Nigerian government’s fuel subsidy removal.

Agbo’s semiotic analysis of this material will define the challenges Nigeria grapples with and examine how online protest presents possibilities for socio-political
transformation. He will consider how the ontology of the image as a virtual object reflects the capability of digital technology to condition how agitations of the masses are seen in the public domain of the Internet. The study is framed theoretically and conceptually through notions of civil discourse and “cyberdigital montage.” While the photographic image plays as a site of resistance, the interactions it produces among people are contingent upon how is it digitally created, manipulated and disseminated.

About Ruth Sack’s project: Ruth Sacks will use support from the Ivan Karp Doctoral Research Award for a final research trip to Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to complete her project *Style Congo, Art Nouveau: Links and Ruptures between Early Belgian Modernism, the African Colony and Postcolonial Zaïre*. Sack’s dissertation examines the complicated role of African aesthetics in shaping modernist forms still present in the public cultures of Brussels and Kinshasa. Starting in late 19th century Belgium, she describes the entanglement of the proto-modernist Art Nouveau movement with King Leopold II’s colonial regime in the Congo. She then traces the display of Congolese objects from the colonial exhibition into the modernist museum, in order to follow them to post independence Zaïre, addressing how modernity was articulated through aesthetics in the postcolony. Her first-hand research in Kinshasa provides ways to contextualize her arguments in Africa, splintering and recasting the European frame and orientation usually brought to Art Nouveau.

Sacks has already completed archival research in Belgium and preliminary research in Kinshasa. On her return to Kinshasa she will interview local artists, arts educators, architects and museum professionals in order to gain an in-depth perspective on how public art projects, entertainment sites and exhibitions constructed a theatre of modern Africanity. She will gather visual data and multiple perspectives on the manner in which international-style modernism housed not only traditional Congolese objects, but also contemporary art commissions and designs embedded with notions of pre-colonial culture. This will allow Sacks to explore the idea of monumental sites, like *l’Echangeur* (1974, today a contemporary art museum) and the Mont Ngaliema museum complex (1970s), as futuristic structures encasing interiors whose logics rely on recourse to generalized notions of tribal Africa.

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Information about the 2016 Ivan Karp Doctoral Research Awards for African Students enrolled in South African Ph.D. Programmes will be available in November 2015. The application deadline is expected to be 1 June 2016, but please check the November announcement for confirmation.

For further information, see [http://www.gs.emory.edu/about/special/acip.html](http://www.gs.emory.edu/about/special/acip.html) and [https://www.facebook.com/ivan.karp.corinne.kratz.fund](https://www.facebook.com/ivan.karp.corinne.kratz.fund).