African Critical Inquiry Programme
Ivan Karp Doctoral Research Awards

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

Ivan Karp Doctoral Research Awards

Each year, ACIP’s Ivan Karp Doctoral Research Awards support African students (regardless of citizenship) who are registered in PhD programs in the humanities and humanistic social sciences in South Africa and conducting dissertation research on relevant topics. Grant amounts vary depending on research plans, with a maximum award of ZAR 40,000. Awards support doctoral research projects focused on topics such as institutions of public culture, museums and exhibitions, forms and practices of public scholarship, culture and communication, and the theories, histories and systems of thought that shape and illuminate public culture and public scholarship. Projects may work with a range of methodologies, including research in archives and collections, fieldwork, interviews, surveys, and quantitative data collection. Below is a list of student scholars whose research has been supported by Ivan Karp Doctoral Research Awards:

2015
George Emeka Agbo is a Nigerian doctoral student in Visual History at the University of the Western Cape. Agbo is pursuing research on Photography, Facebook and Virtualisation of Resistance in Nigeria

Project Abstract: Social media has changed the ways citizens relate with the state, impacting everything from electoral practices to the organisation of mass actions against governments. Agbo’s research examines how Nigerian involvement in this cybculture has created alternative forms of resistance against poor governance and social injustice through the photographic practice of image production and circulation on Facebook. He looks at this in relation to the history of photography in civil struggle in Nigeria and studies how 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. Agbo focuses 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. Through interviews, archival research and participant observation, he documents the circulation of politically-charged images on Facebook and conversations around them and analyses the changing ways photographic images play as sites of resistance and critique.

Ruth Sacks is a South African student pursuing her degree through the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WiSER) at the University of the Witwatersrand. Sacks is traveling to Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, to complete work for her dissertation on Style Congo, Art Nouveau: Links and Ruptures between Early Belgian Modernism, the African Colony and Postcolonial Zaïre.

Project Abstract: 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. Sack’s project is based on archival research in Belgium and archival work, interviews and visual documentation in Kinshasa. Her first-hand research in Kinshasa provides ways to contextualize her arguments in Africa, recasting the European frame and orientation usually brought to Art Nouveau. At the same time, her work offers an in-depth perspective on how public art projects, entertainment sites and exhibitions constructed a theatre of modern Africanity and explores 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.

2014

Genevieve Wood, a South African doctoral student in the Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand, spent several months doing research in Amsterdam for her project On “Intolerance” by Willem De Rooij.

Project Abstract: Wood’s research sought to build a contextual understanding for analysis of the critical oeuvre of Dutch artist Willem De Rooij, especially his exhibition Intolerance, held at the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin in 2010. A combined installation
and catalogue raisonné of Hawaiian featherwork and 17th century Dutch genre paintings presented together in an art museum, De Rooij’s work brings into critical view the powerful interrelation between the modes of interpretation and representation. This includes considering historical and contemporary consequences of what Intolerance suggests, such as that: a) the Dutch Golden Age brought about not only a new relation between art and capital, but also a new kind of civil discourse, attended by the operational socio-economic concept of ‘tolerance’, the historical complexities of which hold implications for contemporary discourses of aesthetic ‘exchange’; b) the traces of Dutch trade routes are marked by the symbolic translation of objects and images accumulating in the Netherlands as a colonial centre; and c) that the viewer is ‘looking’ and ‘looking out’ at symbolic images, being invited to risk standing amidst the advance and retreat, or ebb and flow, of the colonial threshold itself. In Amsterdam Wood collected pertinent documents, did interviews, and worked in museums and archives.

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