

WAKING THE DEAD  
Sublime poetics and popular culture  
in the aftermath of the French Revolution

Académie de France in Rome & Royal Dutch Institute Rome  
28 and 29 January 2011

Scientific committee:

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One of the oldest claims of art is that it can bring back the dead. Leon Battista Alberti for instance included this claim in his praise of the painter's art in *De Pictura*, where it is part of the humanist interest in the rhetorical concept of *enargeia*, a representation, be it in words or images, that is so lifelike, so vivid, that it seems to dissolve the representation into what it represents. But what happens when this endeavour to animate the inanimate matter of the work of art is applied not to the high art of the Renaissance and the Baroque, in the accepted contexts and genres of religion and politics, where it is anchored in generally accepted poetics, artistic canons and aesthetic traditions, but in periods of profound upheaval, such as the French Revolution?

To those who lived through the events of 1789-98, it seemed as if an irreparable gap had opened between the past of the Ancien Régime and the present times which were completely out of joint. The way artists and writers have tried to cope with this sense of loss (in many cases compounded by very real personal loss of relatives and friends who had died under the guillotine) has often been studied, and recently the concept of the sublime has been evoked for instance by the philosopher of history Frank Ankersmit to define the undefinable experience of a complete break with the past. In this conference we want to take a close look at one particular artistic variety of dealing with the French Revolution: the rise of new genres of popular culture such as the panorama, the tableau vivant or phantasmagoria to bring back events such as the execution of the King and Queen of France, the storming of the Bastille, or dead persons. These performances or installations drew on all the arts, drew huge crowds, and were often so effective in creating the illusion that the dead had returned from the grave that viewers fainted or became hysterical with terror. If, as David Freedberg observed on the closing page of *The Power of Images*, 'we think we can escape bad dreams by talking about art', these terrifying performances, fraught with loss and guilt, propose a particular challenge for art history.

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**28 January, Villa Médicis**

- 9.30 Welcome by Eric de Chasse, Director of the Académie de France à Rome  
9.45 Introduction by scientific committee  
10.00 – 11.00 Keynote: Frank Ankersmit (Groningen University)  
*The Presence of the Past*

*Session I: From a poetics of vividness to the presence of terror*

- 11.30 – 12.15 Caroline van Eck (Leiden University)  
*Piranesi, Gibbon, Soane et Michelet: La présence vive du monument*  
12.15 – 13.00 Philippe Bordes (University of Lyon II),  
*Après la Terreur: Cauchemars artistiques sous le Directoire et le Consulat*  
13.00 – 13.45 Emmanuel Fureix (University of Paris-III),  
*Les métamorphoses du sublime: Le deuil retardé des victimes de la Révolution (1814-1830)*

*Session II: Idolatry and Iconoclasm in the wake of the French Revolution*

- 15.00 – 15.45 Pascal Griener (University of Neuchâtel)  
*Les sortilèges de la présence absente. La muséographie post-révolutionnaire en France et la question du sublime*  
15.45 – 16.30 Maarten Delbeke (Leiden University/ Ghent University)  
*Architecture and the Representation of the Past in Post-Revolutionary Paris*  
16.30 – 17.15 Frédérique Baumgartner (Harvard University)  
*Impossible Immortality: Hubert Robert's Critique of the French Panthéon*

## 29 January, Royal Dutch Institute

- 9.30 Welcome by Bernard Stolte,  
Director of the Royal Dutch Institute
- 9.45 – 10.45 Keynote: Marina Warner (University of Essex, Royal Academy of  
Art, London)  
*Speaking Heads and Active Effigies: The Quickening Thing in 'Les Mille  
et une Nuits'*

### *Session III: Figuring historical experience*

- 11.15 – 12.00 Stephen Bann (University of Bristol)  
*Church Interiors and Historical Culture in Post-Revolutionary France*
- 12.00 – 12.45 Axel Gamp (University of Zürich)  
*Walking the dead. The Décadaire des hommes célèbres as link between past  
and future*
- 12.45 – 13.30 Pamela Warner (University of Rhode Island, USA)  
*Edmond and Jules de Goncourt's Brush with Death: The French Revolution,  
la 'nouvelle histoire', and Benjaminian Jetztzeit*

### *Session IV: New media and genres*

- 15.00 – 15.45 Sigrid de Jong (Leiden University)  
*Vesuvius Indoors: Re-enacting a Sublime Spectacle*
- 15.45 – 16.30 Kati Röttger (University of Amsterdam)  
*Melodrama as a Poetics of the Living Image*
- 16.30 – 17.15 Stijn Bussels (Leiden University) and Bram van Oostveldt  
(University of Amsterdam)  
*Du sublime au ridicule': The Spectacular and the Work of Antoine Wiertz*
- 17.15 – 17.30 Concluding remarks