African Critical Inquiry Programme
ACIP Workshop 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.

African Critical Inquiry Programme Workshops

Each year, ACIP invites proposals from scholars and/or practitioners in public cultural institutions in South Africa to organize a workshop that identifies and addresses critical themes, fundamental questions and pressing practical issues concerning public culture. ACIP Workshops might focus on notions and issues related to publics, visuality, museums and exhibitions, art, performance, representational or institutional forms from methodological, practical, and theoretical vantages. They might examine forms and practices of public scholarship and the theories, histories and systems of thought that shape and illuminate public culture and public scholarship. Workshops encourage comparative, interdisciplinary, cross-generational and cross-institutional interchange and reflection that brings into conversation public scholarship in Africa, creative cultural production, and critical theory. Below is a list of ACIP-supported Workshops:

2017 Secret Affinities

Das Passagen-Werk, Walter Benjamin’s unfinished reflection on modernity and history, is the starting point for a two-day workshop – Secret Affinities: A workshop in critical reading and an interrogation of the city in Africa via Walter Benjamin’s “Passagen-Werk” – in which sections of Benjamin’s text (known in English as The Arcades Project) will be discussed with the aim of facilitating cross-disciplinary discussion in relation to heritage, architecture and public history practices associated with cities and the African present. As with Benjamin’s positioning in Paris, his ‘capital of the nineteenth Century’, we work from our vantage point in Johannesburg, city of an African (but also hybrid) modernity, arguably the ‘African capital of the twenty-first century.’ We follow Benjamin’s endeavour in Arcades to construct ‘a world of secret affinities’ in which his assemblage of notes, reflections and citations on a host of topics, could begin to inform each other in
unpredictable ways.

The very site of the workshop illustrates the layered urban histories, experiences, transformations and architectural imaginations that the workshop will seek to examine through particular sites. It will take place at what is now known as Satyagraha House, built as a residence in 1907 by German-born Lithuanian architect Hermann Kallenbach with a rondavel-inspired design. Mohandas Gandhi lived there with his friend Kallenbach and others for two years. Today the buildings have been renovated as a heritage site, museum about Gandhi’s time in South Africa, and guest house. It is a place steeped in history that we cannot recover outside of imaginary recreation involving rhetorics of display and heritage curation; a place that cannot now be divorced from re-invention or politics, but that nevertheless has been re-invented in austere opulence by a French tourism company working with an historian, curator and heritage architect.

The Secret Affinities workshop will form small discussion and working groups made up of established scholars, artists, architects and postgraduate students. Groups will define projects located at the intersections of architecture, public history, spatial planning, heritage and urban studies to develop through regular meetings during the following year. Their outcomes will be presented in 2018 and could include exhibitions, performances, public lectures or seminars, publications, digital and on-line platforms, or special editions of journals.

2016 Other Universals

Other Universals examined and thought through "universals" that have emanated from experiences of marginality in three regions of the Southern Hemisphere: the African continent, the Indian subcontinent, and the Caribbean. Ruchi Chaturvedi, Victoria Collis-Buthelezi and Premesh Lalu organized two Other Universals workshops, in May and October 2016, bridged by an ongoing, interdisciplinary, cross-institutional working group composed of postgraduate students and faculty based at University of Cape Town and the University of the Western Cape. This organization allowed for extended and intensive engagement with work revolving around anti-colonial and anti-imperial thought and Other Universals that have been formulated both from an anti-imperial vantage point as well as from marginal positions in parts of the Global South. Each workshop revolved around the work of a key scholar who has written on universals crafted outside the fold of Western humanism; each did public lectures and taught a master class with the working group. The May workshop with Dr. Aaron Kamugisha (University of West Indies) helped plot shifts in Caribbean identities inflected by experiences ranging from the abjection of slavery to diasporic, internationalist histories; his public lecture considered the Caribbean as a non-national space. The October workshop with Prof. Gopal Guru (Jawaharlal Nehru University) focused on the universals that Dalit groups in India, once known as “untouchables”, might aspire to, both challenging their marginality and addressing the pain and humiliation born from the stigma of untouchability. Other Universals will help define new
research directions and foster academic and public discourse attentive to these other universals and political thought from the Southern Hemisphere. The reading group and workshops will now continue for two additional years with further funding from the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

2015 Red Assembly – Time and Work

The Red Assembly workshop, held in August 2015, revolved around the question of what it would mean to place art at the center of a historical reading. Simon Gush’s installation and film, both entitled Red, were returned to the Eastern Cape and exhibited at the Ann Bryant Art Gallery, in East London, South Africa, the workshop’s venue. Gush’s work was inspired by the commitment of Mercedes Benz autoworkers to produce a (red) car for Nelson Mandela after his release from prison in 1990 and a nine-week wildcat strike and occupation of the factory by those workers later that same year. Workshop themes related to these events and their presentation in Gush’s work. Participants responded to the different forms of expression invoked by the exhibition (film, photography, installation, sculpture, oral and written text, sound) to embark on a discussion around time, work and artwork that returned to questions of how particular subjectivities (racial, gendered, classed) are established and contested and of the role of public culture, cultural institutions and critical scholarship in the postapartheid era. Coming from a number of South African and U.S. institutions, over forty people attended -- artists, curators, public intellectuals, philosophers, historians, activists and postgraduate students in the humanities, humanistic social sciences and beyond. The workshop was convened by Gary Minkley, Leslie Witz and Helena Pohlandt-McCormick.

2014 The Arts of Intervention

The inaugural ACIP workshop, The Arts of Intervention, took place in April 2014 in Oudtshoorn, South Africa in coordination with the 20th anniversary of the annual Absa Klein Karoo Nasionale Fees (KKNK; Little Karoo National Arts Festival). Organized by Brett Pyper, Heidi Grunebaum and Premesh Lalu, the workshop brought together two dozen students, public scholars, and artists for three days that alternated between workshop sessions and discussions and attending festival events – including art exhibits; musical performances; plays; discussions with curators, artists, actors/director; a township tour with a local musician/activist and more. Workshop sessions discussed notions of intervention and the post-apartheid arts and culture landscape, seeking to enable new perspectives on the relationship of the arts to questions of public institutions, politics and critique. By coordinating with KKNK, the workshop drew on questions raised by an arts festival that has attempted to address some of the pressing questions of the transition to a postapartheid South Africa. These
questions relate to non-racism and anti-racism, notions of institutional transformation particular to public culture, the politics of language and community, and scripts of nation and belonging in the arts.

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