

Public Lecture Offerings

Not Your Grandfather's Renaissance: Rethinking the Early Modern World

What happens to our understanding of "The Renaissance" when we look at the ways it played out, not just in Florence or Rome, but in Mexico City and Nagasaki? What happens when our notions of a Renaissance artist or intellectual area stretched to accommodate, not just canonical figures like Leonardo da Vinci, but also marginalized ones like the indigenous Peruvian historian Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala? In this lecture, I explore the ways that our understanding of the Renaissance is changing as scholars adopt a more inclusive, global perspective on the years between 1350 and 1700, one that challenges the Eurocentrism upon which our ideas of the Renaissance, and of the dawn of modernity, have traditionally been built.

The Location of China: Spanish Encounters with the Middle Kingdom, 1521-1621

When we plot the history of early European expansion, we usually think of the Spanish heading west to the America (Columbus, Cortés, Pizarro) and the Portuguese east to Asia (Vasco da Gama), and forget the Spanish also reached Asia, by way of the New World and the Pacific, eventually founding a colony in the Philippine Islands. This led to a uniquely Spanish encounter with Ming China, which generated interesting questions about how Europeans should understand the country and its people. Were they actually as civilized as others said they were? Or were they just another version of the "barbarian" countries that the Spanish had already conquered in Mexico and Peru? What did it mean to be civilized anyway, and how could one tell? In this lecture, I introduce this little known episode in the history of early modern European

expansion, inviting audiences to better understand how Europeans approached foreign cultures at the dawn of modernity, and inviting them to imagine the many ways that history might have turned out differently.

From Maps to Mapping: The Politics and Poetics of Space

Thanks to the magic of Google Maps, we live in a world where we can always know where everything is, and how to get there. Yet this was not always the case. Before the sixteenth century, maps were extremely rare objects, and the word "map" was not even in circulation. People understood themselves and their place in the world without the help of the sort of representation that we associate with maps and mapping. In this lecture, I explore what it means to live in a map-saturated world by helping students see maps and mapping for what they are, highly complex representational practices mediated by culture and ideology.

Classroom Discussion Topics

- 1) Representing the world in early modern Europe – literature and cartography
- 2) How to interpret maps – hands-on practice using digitized historical maps
- 3) The conquest of the Americas and its impact on the early modern world