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National Gallery of Art



Updated September 22, 2020 (original release: May 1, 2019)

Yve-Alain Bois of the Institute for Advanced Study, Presents the 69th Annual A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts in 2020 at the National Gallery of Art, Washington



Yve-Alain Bois, distinguished expert in 20th-century art and professor in the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, NJ, will give the 69th annual A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts in fall 2022. The lectures are postponed from spring 2020 due to the Gallery's closure amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Washington, DC—The Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (CASVA) at the National Gallery of Art has announced that Yve-Alain Bois, distinguished expert in 20th-century art and professor in the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, NJ, will give the 69th annual A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts in fall 2022, specific dates to be announced.

The lecture series, entitled *Transparence and Ambiguity: The Modern Space of Axonometry*, was originally scheduled to be held in the East Building Auditorium at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, on March 22, March 29, April 5, April 19, April 26, and May 3, 2020 at 2:00 p.m.

In his six-part lecture series, Yve-Alain Bois will explore the various uses of a system of spatial representation called axonometry, in which receding parallels remain parallel and do not converge in a vanishing point. Although axonometry has a long history in the East—originating in ancient China and playing a major role in Japanese painting—the lectures will focus on its Western avatars, especially on its appeal since the late 18th century, in fields as diverse as architecture and architectural history, archaeology, crystallography, optical physiology, geometry, mechanical drawing, painting, and philosophy. Crisscrossing various disciplines, most notably the history of art and the history of science, the lectures will ponder the question: why did axonometry, which was independently discovered, forgotten, and rediscovered several times in history, take hold only at the dawn of modernity? Valued either for its limpidity or for its ambiguity, axonometry has received its most celebrated emblem in the Necker cube, a figure that can be read in mutually exclusive ways.

Original 2020 Dates and Lecture Titles:

March 22: El Lissitzky: Axonometry as "Symbolic Form"?

March 29: From Denis Diderot to William Farish: Mechanical Drawing and Its Failed Encounter with Industry

April 5: From Crystallography to Josef Albers via the Necker Cube: Transparency versus Ambiguity

April 19: Architectural Rationalism and the Worm's-Eye View

April 26: Theo van Doesburg versus Walter Gropius: Axonometry as the Graphic Esperanto of Modernist Architecture

May 3: The Postwar Resurgence of Axonometry: From Alison and Peter Smithson to Minimalist Sculptors

About the A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts

Since 1949 the preeminent A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts have presented the best in contemporary thought and scholarship on the subject of the fine arts. The program itself is named for Andrew W. Mellon, founder of the National Gallery of Art, who gave the nation his art collection and funds to build the West Building, which opened to the public in 1941.

Past speakers have included Sir Kenneth Clark, T. J. Clark, Thomas Crow, E. H. Gombrich, Michael Fried, Mary Miller, Helen Vendler, Irene Winter, Alexander Nemerov, Hal Foster, and, most recently, Wu Hung. For a full list, visit www.nga.gov/research/casva/meetings/mellon-lectures-in-the-fine-arts.html.

About Yve-Alain Bois

A specialist in 20th-century European and American art, Yve-Alain Bois is recognized as an expert on a wide range of artists, from Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso to Piet Mondrian, Barnett Newman, and Ellsworth Kelly. He has curated and co-curated a number of influential exhibitions, including *Picasso Harlequin 1917–1937* (2008); *Matisse and Picasso: A Gentle Rivalry* (1999); *L'informe: mode d'emploi* (1996); and *Piet Mondrian, A Retrospective* (1994). His books include *Ellsworth Kelly: Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Reliefs, and Sculpture*, vol. 1, 1940–1953 (2015); *Art Since 1900* (with

Benjamin Buchloh, Hal Foster, and Rosalind Krauss, 2004); *Matisse and Picasso* (1998); *Formless: A User's Guide* (with Rosalind Krauss, 1997); and *Painting as Model* (1990).

A professor in the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study since 2005, Bois was previously Attaché de recherche (1977–1981) and Chargé de recherche (1981–1983) at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique. He has taught at Johns Hopkins University (1983–1991) and at Harvard University, where he was Joseph Pulitzer, Jr., Professor of Modern Art (1991–2005) and chair of the department of history of art and architecture (2002–2005). A cofounder of Éditions Macula (1976) and a coeditor of the journal *October* since 1991, Bois is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (elected 2005) and the recipient of the Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Award (2001).

Update: September 22, 2020

Updated with postponed lecture timeframe.

Update: January 6, 2020

Titles and lecture schedule added.

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