

## DIGITAL PORTRAITS OF TRANSCULTURALISM - NEW YORK

**Title: IMPURE IDENTITIES**

**Subtitle: DIGITAL PORTRAITS OF TRANSCULTURALISM**

**Concept for the panel and areas of investigation**

Digital media in their complexity and variety of technological applications are contributing to reshaping contemporary behaviors and forms of interactions as well as challenging traditional cultural concepts such as identity and nation state.

In a globalized society where the access to technology allows the re-definition of who we are as well as the choice of the arena within which we wish to play – from second life to teenagers' web communities – the construction of a personal identity is shaped not only by the physical environment in which we live but also by the virtual spaces in which we dwell.

Cultural values, morals and habits - that contribute to define a personal identity traditionally conceived as linked to and expression of a particular space and time - have become borderless. New generations define themselves independently from localized cultural and political frameworks and adopt behaviors, perceptions and expectations that are borrowed by distant cultural spaces or that are born out of the expectation and mythology of freedom that the Internet promotes.

These expectations clash with the reality of physical spaces and the personal identity becomes a space of conflict within which old and new hierarchies attempt to impose a structure of control that is both cultural and political.

Web communities and social networks defy political, cultural and religious controls offering to a new generation of individuals the expectation that the real space should provide the same degree of freedom of the internet – a space where sexual, cultural and social customs are defied in semipublic and semiprivate spaces.

Who is portraying today these new identities? What are the challenges that the digital imposes upon a traditional physical relationship between the portraitist and the sitter? Is it possible to say that the space of portraiture is being redefined by the digital and that the identity of the sitter is no longer that identifiable with a cultural national space but that of an hybridized identity that accretes upon, refutes or even challenges the traditional concept of national identity? Is there any longer a national identity if communities and individuals in cities like London, Istanbul or Singapore share – through the digital – cultural approaches, readings, filmic references and fashion codes with other people in distant and even remote parts of the world?

Who are the artists that have been working and are working today through digital media in portraying these new digitized identities?

The digital renaissance is contributing to a redefinition of individuals' expectations, to an identification of their self beyond the traditional imposition and to a concept of defiance of the real that falls short of the expectation and promises of the virtual.

These are the contemporary challenges in the redefinition of identities in which gender, religion and national identity are obsolete and obstructive values. The avatar, the representation of our personal identity, is what we are and we wish to be – in defiance of the restrictions that the body imposes, of a concept of human race that is anthropocentric absolutely and of a medieval tradition that a human being belongs to a god, a sovereign or a state.

To understand these cultural shifts – that are generational and happening across the world – means to portray new identities that recombined, constructed and nurtured through the virtual are then expressed in the physical world generating innovating thinking and alternative usages of technological tools.

**The specific topic areas presenters could address are:**

Media studies analyzing the challenges brought through the digital to concepts of pure identities as envisaged and imposed by localized cultural national contexts

New media theoretical and practice based approaches to the representation of identities in online and virtual worlds

Cultural studies analyzing the new media shift on identity creation and representation

Visual culture analyses on the relationship between the real and the virtual in the creation of identities

Transculturalism and multiculturalism in contemporary visuality

Hibridized identities on real and virtual spaces

Digital humanities with a focus on the relationship between the digital representation of the self and localized social realities in a globalized context

Fine art practices related to the representation of identities in relationship to digital world

Portraiture and sitter, changes and challenges to an historical tradition by a new digital media context

**What types of presentation formats will be considered:**

The panel will be open to a variety of formal and less formal presentations. In particular usage of new media technical presentation will be encouraged. The panel will of course favor presentations in which visuals and documentation play a larger importance.

**Timeline**

Abstracts (max 600 words) and a brief bio due by September 15, 2010. Presenters will be notified by October 15, 2010. Final papers due January 15, 2011.

**Format**

Presenters can propose brief lectures; media or artistic presentations or their own, or other artists' work; or other acceptable suggestions.

**Nature of the panel**

Presenters will be selected from a variety of regions. This panel would be following a symposium in London at the National Portrait Gallery (with a small exhibition).

The New York event for the New Media Caucasus at CAA would represent the final and most important part of this series of three symposia started in 2009 in Istanbul.

It is the chair's intention to have a Leonardo Electronic Almanac Discussion (LEAD) and a call for artworks on transculturalism and portraiture in digital worlds leading to the panel in order to increase audience and attention to the event itself.

Should the panel be approved synergies will be established and sought in order to replicate the London exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery in New York with institutions such as Columbia University, NYU and MIT.

Although there is a list of presenters to be invited already in place, it is important to open the event to a larger audience and therefore have a call for submission. The final event could be a mix of invited and selected presenters.

A list of possible presenters are:

Ute Meta Bauer (US) MIT

John Baldacchino (US) Columbia

Sarah Tinsley, Head of Exhibitions and Collections Management (Previously part of the digital programmes team at the Tate)

Emma Black (UK) NPG

Louise Shannon (UK) V&A Digital Curator - Specifically the numerous 'Mirror' pieces in Decoding the Digital

Hasan Bulent Karaman (Turkey) SU

Selim Birsal (Turkey) SU

Martin Constable (Singapore) NanYang Tech

Martin Callanan (UK) Slade School of Fine Art, UCL

## **Title**

### **Impure Identities**

Include Email and Phone Contacts for Chair &/or Co-Chair

Lanfranco Aceti

Email: [Lanfranco.aceti@gmail.com](mailto:Lanfranco.aceti@gmail.com)

Tel. +90 216 483 9292

## Speakers' Abstracts

### **Impure Identities: Portraits of Transculturalism and Visual Representations of Hybridized Humanity**

**Lanfranco Aceti**

The evolutionary nature of culture and how reality is portrayed is particularly visible when there is a visual cue that signals a social change in the representation of an individual or a society. Anthropologists and critical theorists have defined and embraced the changing nature of contemporary culture. What about the role played by new media arts in the social re-shaping of contemporary identities? Is there a digital art portrait that represents the transcultural and globalized nature of contemporary networked societies? What are the modalities in which contemporary arts are engaging with the representation of societal changes provoked by the borderless digital intermingling of cultures, races, religions and genders?

The contemporary speed of cultural exchanges, both in the physical and digital worlds, creates new cultural subsets that autonomously redefine and defy the rules of hierarchical structures. What are the contemporary portraits of these new identities, new people and societies that are defined by transcultural engagements?

Guy Scarpetta wrote in *L'impurité*: "Impurity is the order of the day. The we and you, include also the he and the she of all linguistic groups, of all nationalities, of all the sexes. We are of all the cultures. Each person is a mosaic."

The lecture will present a range of contributions that analyze the contemporary curatorial and fine art practices, both in real and digital worlds, that utilize and showcase the transcultural mosaic of identities.

The start of the 21st century witnessed a shift in the perception of transcultural societies and the way transculturalism affects the fine art portrayal of identities in the contemporary visual arts. The lecture addresses, through curatorial and fine art geographically varied experiences and representations of the interplay between real and virtual, the shaping and creation of new contemporary digitized identities.

Lanfranco Aceti

Visiting Professor, Goldsmiths College, University of London

Associate Professor in Contemporary Art and Digital Culture, Sabanci University

<http://www.lanfrancoaceti.com>

Editor in Chief, Leonardo Electronic Almanac (Leonardo, ISAST and MIT Press)

<http://www.leoalmanac.org>

Conference Chair and Artistic Director, ISEA2011 Istanbul

<http://www.isea2011istanbul.org>