CALL FOR PAPERS
INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

Art of the Powerful, Multiple Objects: Medals and Tokens in Europe from the Renaissance to the First World War

PARIS, INHA (Institut national d’Histoire de l’art), 30 mars au 1er avril 2017

The medal was revived in the princely courts of fifteenth century Italy as a commemorative art and quickly adopted by sovereigns across Europe. Medals, tokens and other metallic objects devoid of fiduciary value became more and more widespread and benefitted from several peaks of popularity in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century, as illustrated by the metallic histories of Louis XIV or Napoleon, a format adopted by others as far afield as the Tsar of Russia. Whilst changes in taste led the medal to be seen as in or out of fashion at different moments, it has continued to maintain its essentially commemorative function and has been used to express the ideals of all manner of political regimes from monarchies to republics.

This symposium seeks to explore the specificity of a form of official art that associates image and text, producing objects whose message is also partially conveyed by the hierarchy of values intrinsic to the metals used, from the noblest gold to more modest alloys. As objects that can be reproduced, that are easily portable and largely distributed, their biographies also tend to be quite distinct from that of other types of art objects.

An initial specificity is that of the role of the engraver whose function oscillates between that of an artist, an artisan and an agent of a commissioning power. His artistic practice can be considered in some sense as paradoxical in so much as it is constrained by the conventions of the medium, and by the outline of the project which his talent is called on to convey in material form.

This opens up to the question of the expressive aims of this official art that seeks to capture and commemorate History as it happens, fortifying the glory of the commissioning party. Indeed medals and tokens represent the result of the interplay of the different actors that contribute to their elaboration: from the initial idea developed by a commissioning power and affiliated scholars, to the drawing of a model, to the production and diffusion of the multiple editions of the final product. It also need to be considered as part of a wide range of visual productions that share a common language dedicated to reinforcing the powers in place.

Finally, greater attention needs to be paid to the manner in which these objects (and their models) have circulated, in particular by considering the development of a market for modern and contemporary medals and their status in the make-up of private and public coin collections. This may also be an opportunity to consider the reciprocal influence between the evolution of the taste and interest of collectors and production styles, techniques and themes through time.

This conference will showcase current research that can provide an alternative to a very dispersed historiography dominated by the genre of the catalogue. We hope that a comparative effort, with cases from across Europe, in a large chronological frame will help to establish an interdisciplinary approach to the production and circulation of medals and similar objects; one that reflects their complex nature and the
specificity of their biographies. We welcome perspectives from a range of disciplines and research perspectives including art history, social and political history, numismatics, material culture studies etc.

Proposal of no more than 400 words should be sent accompanied by a short C.V. before the 6th of November 2016 to the following address: colloquemedailles2017@gmail.com.

Each presentation should aim to be no longer than 20 minutes and the conference papers will be published.

Languages are French and English.

The organizing committee will give notice of acceptance by mid December, 2016.

Organizing Committee
Felicity Bodenstein, docteur en Histoire de l’art, Kunsthistorisches Institut, Florenz, Max-Planck-Institut
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Jeton de Louis XIII, 1639, argent, h : 2,7 cm, BnF, de La Tour 983 © Sabrina Valin