

• **IRENE BACKUS** •

102 Bartlett Center
Department of Art, Graphic Design, and Art History
Stillwater, OK 74078
irene.backus@gmail.com

EMPLOYMENT

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ART HISTORY, OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
2012 – present

EDUCATION

Ph.D. THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

June 2014

Art History, Concentrations: Italian Renaissance and Later Imperial Chinese Art

Dissertation: “Asia Materialized: Perceptions of China in Renaissance Florence”

ABSTRACT: *Asia Materialized* examines how three of the most highly valued Chinese imports—porcelain, refined silk textiles, and spices—shaped Italian Renaissance artistic and technological creation under the early Medici Dukes (c. 1537–87). Because direct, personal connections between China and Italy were extremely limited during this period, these imports acted as ‘ambassadors,’ the tangible evidence Florentines had of a place they otherwise only knew from travel narratives such as Marco Polo’s. Moreover, because these imports comprise technology that Italy was still grappling to manufacture domestically, Florentines poured substantial resources into obtaining these Chinese items, and even more into attempting to reproduce them. My study is divided by material, opening with a study of maps and travel narratives, followed by three case studies: porcelain, silk, and spices. These materials changed what the Florentines understood as possible, and changed their physical sensibilities as they drank out of porcelain bowls; slept beneath foreign cloth; ingested otherworldly scent, food and medicines. By widening the scope of my study to include questions based in anthropology and material culture, I develop an interdisciplinary framework in order to critically analyze the impact of Chinese imports on Florentine artistic, technological, and scientific development. This project also sheds new light on the early history of Europe’s relationship with and reception of the far East, as seen through a material lens.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE:

Chair: Professor Rebecca Zorach, University of Chicago

Professor Charles Cohen, University of Chicago

Professor Jennifer Purtle, University of Toronto

Professor Wu Hung, University of Chicago

EDUCATION cont.

M.A. THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO, 2005

Thesis: “The Text of *Laura Battiferra*”

Thesis advisors: Professor Rebecca Zorach, Professor Charles Cohen

THE SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

Non-degree seeking, 1999 – 2000.

Areas of focus: Chinese and 20th Century European Art History.

B.A. 1996, KALAMAZOO COLLEGE, Kalamazoo, MI

Major: Art History.

PUBLICATIONS

“Square Bottles: Medici Porcelain as Tempering Agent,” in progress for submission to *Renaissance Studies*, Fall 2014

AWARDS & FELLOWSHIPS

RESEARCH FELLOWSHIPS

Dean’s Incentive Grant, awarded by Oklahoma State University, 2013, 2014

Mellon Humanities Dissertation Fellowship, awarded by the University of Chicago, 2010-11

TRAVEL GRANTS

Division of the Humanities Conference Grant, awarded by the University of Chicago to present at the annual graduate student conference at Cornell University, 2010

Nicholson Fellowship, awarded by the Center for British Studies, University of Chicago, to carry out museum collections research in England, 2010

Hannah Gray Traveling Fellowship, awarded by the Art History department, University of Chicago, to carry out research in Italy, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010

LANGUAGE GRANTS

Frank Dowley Scholarship, awarded by the Art History department, University of Chicago, for German study at the Goethe Institut, Freiburg, 2005

Shelton Memorial Fellowship, awarded by the Art History department, University of Chicago, for Italian language study at Torre di Babele, Rome, 2004

SCHOLARSHIPS

Century Fellowship for graduate study, University of Chicago, 2003–07

Stetson Fellowship for graduate study, Kalamazoo College, 2003

CONFERENCES

- 2015 “*And is a friend to Lady Venus: Chinese Heating Simples in Renaissance Florence*”
Renaissance Society of America, Berlin
- “Tempering Earth and Body: Reformulating China in Sixteenth Century Florence”
Panel: *The Global in the Local*, College Art Association, New York
- 2014 “Soft Edges and Blank Spaces: Mapping Ambiguities of Cinquecento China”
Panel: *Allegories in Translation*, Sixteenth Century Society Conference, New Orleans
- “Ephemeral Imports: Chinese Remedies in Renaissance Florence”
Panel chair, organizer: *The World Material*, Medieval & Renaissance Studies, St. Louis Univ.
- 2012 “The Strand of Silk”
Panel: *The Renaissance Line II*, Renaissance Society of America, Washington, D.C.
- 2011 “Spices and Aromatics, Medical and Cosmetic *or* More than Skin Deep”
Panel: *Perceptions of Foreignness in Early Modern Tuscany*, Sixteenth Century Society, Fort Worth
- “Asia Materialized: Silk in the Bedroom”
Panel: *Where is Asia?*, Midwest Art History Society Annual Conference, Grand Rapids
- 2010 “Medici Porcelain: White Earthen Body”
Cornell University Department of the History of Art Annual Fall Graduate Symposium

PRESENTATIONS

- 2013 “Asia Imagined: Curious Stories & Material Curiosities”
Art History Faculty Roundtable, Oklahoma State University, 2013
- “Asia Materialized: Perceptions of China in Renaissance Florence”
Oklahoma Conference of Art Historians, East Central University, 2013
- 2012 “Spice of the Earth: Chinese Herbals in Renaissance Italy,” Art History Faculty Roundtable
Art History Faculty Roundtable, Oklahoma State University
- 2011 “Silk”
Visual and Material Perspectives on East Asia Workshop, University of Chicago
- 2008 “Imaging Asia: Perceptions of China in Renaissance Florence”
Visual and Material Perspectives on East Asia Workshop, University of Chicago
- 2005 “The Text of *Laura Battiferra*”
Renaissance Workshop, University of Chicago

TEACHING

COURSES TAUGHT, OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

“LEONARDO, ART, AND SCIENCE”

“EAST AND WEST: BIASES AND BORROWINGS”

TEACHING cont.

“HISTORY OF ART, SURVEY II”
“HISTORY OF ITALIAN RENAISSANCE ART”
“HISTORY OF BAROQUE ART”

COURSES TAUGHT, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

“THE PAINTED ROOM IN EARLY MODERN ITALY AND CHINA” 2007

COURSES PLANNED

“FASHIONING AND SELF-FASHIONING: THE EARLY MODERN PORTRAIT”

COURSES ASSISTED at the University of Chicago

“INTRODUCTION TO ART,” Spring 2012
“EARLY CHRISTIAN AND BYZANTINE ART” & **“SACRED IMAGE IN BYZANTIUM”**
Autumn 2011
“ISLAMIC ART AND ARCHITECTURE, 1500–1900,” Spring 2009
“ART AND NATURE IN ANCIENT ROME,” Autumn 2008
“CHINESE CALLIGRAPHY AND CIVILIZATION,” Spring 2007
“RENAISSANCE ART,” Winter 2006 & Winter 2012
“SACRED SITES IN ASIA,” Autumn 2005

MUSEUM EXPERIENCE

EXHIBITIONS CURATED

Exported Visions: Early 20th Century Japanese Woodblock Prints
Smart Museum of Art, Spring 2007

Drawings from the Smart Museum’s Permanent Collection
Smart Museum of Art, Winter 2006

PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS HELD

SMART MUSEUM OF ART, The University of Chicago
Curatorial Intern for Mellon Projects
April 2004 – January 2009

ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO, MUSEUM EDUCATION
Assistant Producer of Performance Programs
October 1997 – September 2003

ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO, OLD MASTERS SOCIETY, DEPARTMENT OF EUROPEAN PAINTING
Assistant Coordinator, September 1998 – September 2003

ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO, DEPARTMENT OF PRINTS AND DRAWINGS

Intern, Winter 1996

THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION, Washington, D.C.

Development Department Intern, Spring 1994

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

ITALIAN: HIGH PROFICIENCY IN READING, SPEAKING, AND WRITING

FRENCH: HIGH PROFICIENCY IN READING, SPEAKING, AND WRITING

GERMAN: PROFICIENCY IN READING AND SPEAKING

LATIN: MODERATE PROFICIENCY IN READING

DEPARTMENTAL SERVICE

OSUMA Academic Advisory Board, Fall 2014

Curriculum Committee, Department of Art, Graphic Design & Art History, 2014–15

Student Tech Fee Committee, Department of Art, Graphic Design & Art History, 2013–15

Recruitment Committee, 2012–14

ACTIVITIES

Argentine Tango Club, 2008–present; board member 2010–present

Dean's Graduate Student Advisory Board, Humanities Division 2007–09

Chicago Art Journal, Copy Editor 2007, 2008

University Ballet, 2005–10

Art History Department Social Coordinator, Spring 2004–2007

Chicago Art Journal Fall Workshop, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007

SPECIALIZED SKILLS

Art Handling

REFERENCES

Available upon request