

VISUAL STUDIES RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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FALL 2023 EVENTS

Images Out of Time Seminar



FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 8

12-1:30pm PST

Zoom

Dioramas, Life-Casts, and the Lives of Sensitive Images: When Was This? And Did It Ever Happen?

NOÉMIE ETIENNE

Professor of Cultural Heritage and Art History,
University of Vienna

Readings and links for Images Out of Time events will be made available when you RSVP to vsri@usc.edu.

Life-casts and dioramas perform a complex temporality, mixing past, present, and future. This talk explores plaster life-casts and more broadly dioramas made in natural history and anthropological museums in the United States around 1900.

Dioramas are out of time as they are not recommended exhibition devices anymore. Indeed, they have been rightfully criticized for freezing people in the past and transmitting racist stereotypes. Since the moment of their creation, moreover, they have been somehow peculiar creations at the border of art and science. Life-casts are objects that have a long-lasting time frame. They are rather fragile when they are made of plaster, a material sensitive to humidity. But their multiplicity and constant replication and circulation between institutions makes them very present and active in museums—until today. Produced in a context of colonialism and oppression, they were made to fix the anthropological knowledge of the time. Their long life in museums galleries also generated new forms of knowledge, as they were studied by different generations of scientists for decades.

Noémie Etienne is professor of cultural heritage and art history at the University of Vienna. In 2023, she received an ERC Consolidator Grant for her project “Global Conservation. Histories and Theories (16th-21st Century)”. Her most recent monograph is entitled: *The Art of the Anthropological Diorama* (De Gruyter, 2021). Noémie Etienne is also a founding editor with Meredith Martin and Hannah Williams of *Journal18*.

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