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Suzaan Boettger, Independent Scholar NYC, and Leisa Rundquist, University of North Carolina Asheville



Friday, November 1, 2019

2-5 pm

Rettinger Hall

AMERICAN ART AND VISUAL CULTURE SEMINAR

Contextualizing the Confounding: Robert Smithson's "Don't be afraid of the word 'religion,'" [Suzaan Boettger](#)

In 1961, Robert Smithson (1938-1973) wrote the organizer of his upcoming show, "Don't be afraid of the word 'religion.' The most sophisticated people in Manhattan are very much concerned with it." His rationale for urging his dealer to exhibit his images of the crucified Christ appears contrary to historical understanding of New Yorkers' contemporaneous increasing secularity, and his own urges to repeatedly paint crucifixions contradict his subsequently cultivated persona as a cerebral sculptor and sardonic essayist-with-a-fantastical-bent, with which he entered the canon of art history. In this paper I seek to resolve Smithson's confounding revision of religious history by contextualizing it within a revision of his own history.



Rethinking Henry Darger's Vivian Girl: Transgressive (and Transgressed) Little Sainthood, [Leisa Rundquist](#)

Henry Darger created his art by tracing images from pop culture sources, including coloring books, comics, and clothing advertisements. Although he gleaned his imagery from resources that conform to the gender binary, he often complicates girl bodies with hand-drawn additions of male genitalia—a characteristic of "girls" in Darger's fictional world that remains unexplained. This paper positions Darger's Vivians within and against frameworks of transgressive and gender-bending saints celebrated in Catholic devotional lore and speaks to gender ambiguity as a sign of special holiness that marks the Vivians and links them to SS. Joan of Arc and Vivia Perpetua.

Respondent: Erika Doss, University of Notre Dame

Cost and Registration Information

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