

## 2015 Symposium Reflection

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Moderator Tessa Hite introduces the second panel of the symposium.

### **Creative Conflict – The 31st Annual Boston University Graduate Student Symposium on the History of Art & Architecture, February 27th & 28th, 2015**

*This two-day event was generously sponsored by The Boston University Center for the Humanities; the Boston University Department of History of Art & Architecture; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Boston University Graduate Student History of Art & Architecture Association; and the Boston University Art Gallery at the Stone Gallery.*

On February 26, 2015, news outlets around the world showed video footage released by Islamic State militants depicting the violent destruction of antiquities and artifacts at the Mosul Museum in Iraq. The vicious spectacle served as a sober reminder that a commitment to the preservation of art and cultural heritage is far from a foregone conclusion in contemporary life. The following day, the Boston University History of Art & Architecture community gathered at the [Boston University Art Gallery](#) (BUAG) for the keynote talk of the 31st Annual Graduate Student Symposium, titled “Creative Conflict.” In his address, “Killing Identity: Heritage Destruction in the Syria and Iraq Conflicts,” Dr. Richard M. Leventhal, Executive Director of the [Penn Cultural Heritage Center](#) (PennCHC) at the Penn Museum and Professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania, foregrounded the Mosul footage, stressing that cultural heritage is regularly endangered by conflicts worldwide. He explained its inextricable links to both memory and national and cultural identity in places like Syria and Iraq. Leventhal developed his lecture by outlining some of the work undertaken by the PennCHC, which implements a bottom-up, community-driven approach to help curators, scholars, and activists in conflict-stricken areas protect and safeguard cultural heritage. Dr. Leventhal ended his talk with a “Post-conflict Postscript” that introduced aspects of his own research on historical conflicts in the Yucatán, Mexico. The keynote address sparked an engaging and thoughtful Q&A session, which highlighted the importance of identity and community-building for areas impacted by conflict.

Considering discord and its visual manifestations across media, regions, and history, “Creative Conflict” continued on Saturday, February 28th, at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, with presentations by six graduate students from universities across the United States. This year’s Symposium Coordinator, Sarah Parrish, a Doctoral Candidate in the Department, along with moderators Tessa Hite and Olivia Kiers, organized the day thematically with two sessions, “Wound” and “Weapon.” In a recent conversation, Parrish explained that the symposium’s title aimed to accentuate both the destructive and generative capacities of conflict, while the structure of the panels further foregrounded this idea.

“Wound,” the morning session, was moderated by Olivia Kiers (Boston University) and emphasized situations in which different kinds of conflict impacted art objects. Kicking off the day, Steve Burges (Boston University) presented his paper “From Iraq to Afghanistan: The 1954 Hague Convention and the Renewed Mission of the United States to Protect Culture,” discussing strategies for protection of cultural heritage implemented by U.S. forces both before and after the 2009 ratification of the Hague Convention. Burges was followed by Christine Garnier (Tufts University), whose paper “Consequences of Conflict: Personifications of Captivity in an Armenian Manuscript” examined a fifteenth-century Armenian codex currently owned by the Boston Public Library. Focusing on three miniatures depicting themes of captivity and damnation, Garnier argued that these illuminations provide insight into the community in which the manuscript was made, pointing to its uncomfortable position between the Safavid and Ottoman Empires. Lauren G. Close (Institute of Fine Arts, New York University) ended the session with her paper “Vandalism on the Pont-Neuf: Monuments as Propaganda in Revolutionary France.” Through a close study of a seventeenth-century equestrian statue of Henri IV and its tumultuous history, Close articulated the monument’s various uses, highlighting the changing roles of public artworks during and after the French Revolution.

In the afternoon, Tessa Hite (Boston University) served as moderator for the second session, “Weapon.” The papers all centered on the notion that art objects and images could play an active role in conflict, as participants or antagonists, capable of intervening and enacting change. The session began with Florencia San Martín Piutort (Rutgers University) whose talk “Politics of Collectivity: Muralism and Public Space in Brigada Romano Parra’s (BPR) Practices During Unidad Popular,” examined the BPR’s program for social action, comparing it to those of other contemporaneous Chilean mural collectives. Piutort was followed by Luisa Fernanda Villa Morales’ (American University) “The Embodiment of Violence in Performance Art: Regina José Galindo.” In this paper, Morales analyzed an early work by Galindo, *Lo voy a gritar al viento (I will scream it at the wind)*, and argued that through the artist’s transgressive acts, viewers are encouraged to question the impacts of violence and their own roles in its perpetuation. The session ended with Megan Whitney (University of Arizona, Tucson) whose paper “Visualizing Violence: Seventeenth Century Slapstick Humor” focused on visualizations of domestic violence in Abraham Bosse’s prints *Le mari qui bat sa femme* and *La femme qui bat son mari*. Through a careful analysis of the prints and their inscriptions, Whitney examined the placement of these images in the realm of humor.

Following the day's presentations and discussions, "Creative Conflict" concluded with an "Epilogue" at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, where curator Pamela Allara led the group through her exhibition "[Permanent War: The Age of Global Conflict](#)." Echoing many of the themes discussed throughout the symposium, "Permanent War" featured work by sixteen artists, and drew attention to artificiality and the theatrics of war. A poignant conclusion to "Creative Conflict," the tour afforded participants and attendees some contemplative time to engage with artworks and reflect on the larger issues of violence and conflict in the creation, preservation and understanding of works of art. Indeed, as is evident by Dr. Leventhal's "Post-conflict Postscript," and the "Permanent War" Epilogue, the drive to remember and reflect is an inextricable part of understanding conflict and artwork related to it.

In conclusion, the [31st Annual Boston University Graduate Student Symposium](#) was a valuable and thought-provoking event. More than just another interesting academic conference, "Creative Conflict" tackled difficult, violent, and destructive material. With its stimulating presentations and pauses for reflection, it suggested a desire on the part of artists, scholars, critics, and historians to be a generative and creative force in dealing with the intersections of the visual arts, culture, and conflict.