After Hope: Future Forms and Alternative Methods

Location: Asian Art Museum, San Francisco
Dates: September 25-27, 2020

*After Hope* seeks to engage critical explorations of hope as an aesthetic and embodied experience. The prompt to think “after” hope is intended as a way to consider hope’s complex relationship to the future and the past. Through presentations and workshops focused on cultural, material, and technological expressions of hope, this interdisciplinary symposium aims to explore hope as a dynamic index of change. To do so, it asks what it means to go after hope and what comes after hope.

Hope is an important historical, cultural, and social marker. Its significance for social action, however, is hotly debated. Often associated with general naivété, or unrealizable utopian thought, hope can also be understood as a critical lens for understanding collective values and approaches to many of today’s most pressing issues. It functions as an emotional register that underwrites, connects, divides and in other ways animates relationships between different communities, driving active processes of imagining, representing, and creating the conditions for desirable and eclectic futures. Through a discussion of hope in art, activism, and global alliances, we seek to understand expressions of optimism, pessimism, fear, and anticipation as part of cultural, material, and technological practices.

Marking the inauguration of the Asian Art Museum’s TRILOGY series, *After Hope* will explore diverse expressions and legacies of hope within contemporary art, using the work of artists from across Asia and its diaspora as guides and catalysts for further inquiry. Bringing together artists, scholars, curators, and activists, we aim to host an interdisciplinary and critical examination of hope’s potential for form, methods, and action.

Proposals that address contemporary, historical, and theoretical approaches to hope—and its various discontents—are welcome. As points of entry, we are proposing three initial lines of inquiry: Communities and cultures of hope, technologies of hope, and narratives of hope. Through these themes we aim to explore hope within a variety of histories, traditions, and disciplines, from the allure of space travel to accounts of exile and displacement. Rather than entirely forward looking, might hope be focused on the past or characterized by nostalgic longing? What are the specters of hope in religious and political discourses, ranging from the promise of paradise in religious millennialism to the utopias of Marxist and socialist thought? Hope has a particularly powerful history as part of radical social and political movements, whether for social justice and political reformation or as part of emancipatory solidarities. What is their impact on current futurisms? Some related questions that might arise include: What does it mean to make hope the basis for critical discourses? Can a focused attention on hope in art and technology offer new models for the study and production of cultures of belonging? Do we need to suspend or abandon hope in search of more concrete methods, or does hope present the possibility of enduring and continual change? Issues of censorship and silence further suggest avenues for how we think through, express, and query alternative visions of the future.

We welcome proposals that address any of these questions, or related ones, with reference to how we might complicate or develop new theories and approaches to hope, especially in relation to specific case studies or individual works of art, architecture, or literature.
In addition to short conference style papers, we also welcome proposals for “action sessions,” 45-minute workshops intended to facilitate collaborative exchanges framed around thematic, practical, and agentive approaches to hope in the arts and society. Proposals for individual, group, and paired sessions are welcome.

Submissions will also be considered for inclusion in a digital record that will accompany the symposium and related exhibition at AAMSF. Available in the museum gallery and online, the digital record will serve as an archive of the proceedings and a platform for future workshops, publications, and discussions.

Please submit 250-word abstracts to Padma D. Maitland at pmaitlan@calpoly.edu by March 15, 2020.