

Popular Classics

The theme of this proposed panel is the relationship between elite (or “high”) and popular (or “low”) culture appropriations of ancient Greece and Rome. In the United States classical antiquity has long been associated with elite culture through education, but reception by popular culture (in, e.g., film, television, music, and comic books) has also been strong and shows no signs of abating. The papers that comprise this panel seek to explore and elucidate the sometimes separate, sometimes parallel histories of these two reception modes. The case studies of each paper span the breadth of media that both elite and popular culture employ to construct their visions of classical antiquity: scholarly and fan communities, visual art, and literature. Although they each have a discrete focus, the papers build upon one another and seek answers to overlapping questions and issues concerning the reception of classical antiquity. The papers also incorporate theory explicitly into their considerations of their respective texts in order to highlight common issues and point towards new directions for considering the complex appropriations of classical material in elite and popular culture. Common points of exploration in these papers include elite and popular audiences’ different knowledges, the popularizing of antiquity, the difference in the histories of elite and popular classical receptions, and fragmentation.

The first paper (“Textual Poachers: Scholars, Fans, and Fragments”) argues for shared elements between the understanding of ancient fragments and the circulation of knowledge in contemporary popular culture. This paper raises provocative theoretical issues about the nature of elite (scholars) and popular (fans) receptions that will recur, *mutatis mutandis*, in the case studies of the subsequent papers. The second paper (“Elite and Popular Reception of Classical Antiquity in the Works of Cy Twombly and Roy Lichtenstein”) explores the diverging

receptions of two visual artists in the late twentieth century. Pop artist Roy Lichtenstein appropriated imagery from antiquity through a popular medium, comic-books, which contrasts with Cy Twombly's contemporary artwork, which received antiquity in an elite mode through abstract splashes of paint and scribbles with character names and concepts written on the canvases. This topic segues nicely into the third paper, which analyzes contemporary artist Jeff Koons ("Replication, Reception, and Jeff Koons's *Gazing Ball Series*"). Koons' work post-dates the Pop Art movement, but it engages with many of the same subjects, and thus poses similar issues of popular reception, as Lichtenstein's. This paper argues that Koons' *Gazing Ball* series, which replicates classical sculptures in plaster with the addition of blue lawn ornaments, challenges the notion of authenticity that has dominated the elite reception of classical sculpture from the Enlightenment onwards. The subject of the fourth and final paper ("*The Passion of Cleopatra* (2017): Anne Rice's Sequel to *The Mummy* (1989)") is a forthcoming sequel to popular writer Anne Rice's novel *The Mummy*. In *The Passion of Cleopatra*, the Egyptian queen is depicted as an undead revenant, which the paper shows has a history in popular receptions of Cleopatra, but not in elite ones.