Press release

March 14, 2024

“L'Objet précieux : un fait social total?” (“The precious object: a total social fact?”): an international, interdisciplinary symposium organized by the EHESS and Cartier as part of an unprecedented collaboration

The international symposium “L'objet précieux : un fait social total?” (“The precious object: a total social fact?”), organized by the EHESS and Cartier on April 25 and 26, 2024 at the Institut national de l'histoire de l'art (INHA), aims to stimulate a wide-ranging reflection on this interdisciplinary theme. It is part of an unprecedented partnership between the EHESS and Cartier.

Social, political, religious, symbolic, commercial: the multiple functions, roles and representations of precious objects

This symposium invites a wide audience to take a closer look at the precious object. This examination will especially rely on the notions of value and creation. From anthropology to economics, from philosophy to sociology, from the history of the arts to techniques and work, it aims to stimulate a wide-ranging reflection on this interdisciplinary theme par excellence.

Over the centuries and across the globe, precious objects – and jewelry in particular – have given rise to a wide range of sometimes contradictory reactions, testifying to their major role in human societies. Rejected through notions of waste and luxury, admired or desired for aesthetic, symbolic, religious or economic reasons, the precious object has many functions: offering, symbol (status, power, loyalty, etc.), social or family heirloom, element of exchange and even economic driving force. If the precious object establishes a cultural and social divide, it is also subjected to imitation or reproduction, making it a fashionable, “mass-market” object.

But what properties determine the value of precious objects? For which materials (stones, shells, fabrics, pearls, etc.)? How does the circulation of precious objects help us understand the way societies function as well as their value systems? As for creation, what aesthetic parameters are involved? What is the “aura” of a precious object? To answer these questions, the first day of the symposium will focus on the sacred, the invisible and the dimensions of value (April 25, 2024), while the second day (April 26, 2024) will explore the dimensions of exchange, circulation, fashion and gender.

The EHESS and Cartier, a multidimensional partnership

The symposium “L'objet précieux : un fait social total?” (“The precious object: a total social fact?”) is the result of a partnership between the EHESS and Cartier initiated in 2022. It aims to articulate structuring initiatives such as training-through-research (master, doctorate, post-doctorate); scientific valorization; cultural and scientific mediation.

Participating EHESS research centers:
• Centre des savoirs sur le politique. Recherches et analyses (CESPRA, EHESS-CNRS)
• Anthropologie et histoire des mondes antiques (ANHIMA, EHESS-CNRS-EPHE-Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne-Université Paris Cité)
• Laboratoire d'anthropologie politique (LAP, EHESS-CNRS)
• Institut des mondes africains (IMAF, EHESS-CNRS-IRD-EPHE-Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne-Aix Marseille Université)
• Centre de recherches sur les arts et le langage (CRAL, EHESS-CNRS)
• Centre d'études turques, ottomanes, balkaniques et centrasiatiques (CETOBaC, CNRS-EHESS-Collège de France)
• Paris-Jourdan sciences économiques (PjSE, CNRS-INRAE-EHESS-ENPC-ENS-PSL-Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne)

About the EHESS
Founded in 1975, the École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS) is one of Europe's leading centers for the humanities and social sciences. It is unique in the French higher education and research landscape for its interdisciplinary intellectual project, its training-through-research model, its international reach and its openness to society.

The EHESS brings together teacher-researchers and 3,000 students from all over the world as well as administrative and research support staff. The École is based in Paris, at the Campus Condorcet in Aubervilliers, in Toulouse, in Lyon and in Marseille, and is home to 40 research units. It welcomes visiting professors, has its own publishing house, Éditions de l'EHESS, and its own social science festival: Allez Savoir.

About Cartier
A reference in the world of luxury, Cartier, whose name is synonymous with open-mindedness and curiosity, stands out with its creations and reveals beauty wherever it may lie.

Jewelry, high jewelry, watchmaking and fragrances, leather goods and accessories: Cartier's creations symbolize the convergence between exceptional craftsmanship and a timeless signature.

Today, Cartier is part of the Richemont Group and has a worldwide presence through its network of flagships and boutiques, authorized retail partners, and online.

Practical information
Dates:
April 25 and 26, 2024

Location:
Institut national d'histoire de l'art (INHA)
Auditorium Jacqueline Lichtenstein
Colbert Gallery
2, rue Vivienne - 75002 Paris

Registration:
Free admission, registration required

• Find out more on the EHESS website.
• Program on the EHESS website.

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