

Global Earth Matters: Mining, Materiality and the Museum – Silver & Resource Futures

Date: Friday 20 October, 2017

Location: Research Center for Material Culture, Steenstraat 1, Leiden



Maryanto, *Tales of the Gold Mountain*, 2012, Collection NMW, TM-6503-1a

Materiality plays an important role in shaping our understanding of the world around us. **Global Earth Matters: Mining, Materiality and the Museum** is a series of seminars that seek to re-center scholarly interest in the *materiality* of objects, opening onto broader questions of labor and making, skills and craftsmanship, on issues surrounding the (exploitative) economies from which these objects emerge. Bringing together artists, academics and curators into interdisciplinary conversations, we want to push the conversation about museum objects beyond, while not excluding, questions of aesthetic quality or (cultural) use, to critically explore the relationship between the materials from which these objects are made and the social world within which they are created or function.

- What kinds of cultural values are ascribed to certain minerals, say gold or silver, which make them of preferable for some objects and not others?
- What might a focus on the materials from which objects are made tell us about ideas of creativity and innovation or about the globally interconnected worlds in which these objects circulate?
- Beyond the objects themselves, what role did minerals play in shaping earlier and contemporary geopolitical relations?
- What role does the mineral play in the *objectness* of the object?
- What hopes, dreams and desires did the discovery of these minerals offer, and in what ways did their discovery shape how we experience the world today?
- How is mining for (precious) minerals associated with histories of social inequalities and exploitation, as well as with projected futures of ecological disasters?

The Silver Lining

Following on from two successful seminars on aluminum/bauxite (June 2016) and on gold (November 2016), our next event will explore the history and materiality of silver. This seminar will continue our conceptual interest in the relationship between minerals, 'world making' and 'world breaking'.

Our use of the title *silver lining* for this workshop hints at our interest in the politics of concealment and revelation, of visibility and invisibility associated with mineral extraction and museum practices. What, we want to ask, are the other histories of silver's materiality that remain untold or elided in contemporary narratives of the minerals extraction and consumption, and, how do museum storage, or exhibition practices become complicit in those elisions? What were the hopes associated with the search for the mineral, and what forms of "worldings" did this create?

Since the 16th century silver has been an important connector of three continents: it moved from South America to Asia mainly through the hands of European traders. The proverbial silver line had a double meaning for the Dutch. On one hand, as silver was extracted and taken towards Europe, Dutch and English fleets engaged in piracy, stealing silver from the Spanish. On the other side, differences in value of silver became a major pillar for the trading wealth of the Dutch VOC. This seminar takes this silver lining as a fulcrum around which its inquiry will be based. We are interested to ask how has silver served in the coining of Dutch histories of entrepreneurship and nation building? What aspects are highlighted e.g. in narrating heroic acts of stealing silver in schools or in material exhibitions in museums of coins? And what remains hidden?

Secondly, it will focus on studies from below in the literal sense of mining as working underground. These practices of tapping into 'a netherworld of rocks and reservoirs' (Bridge 2009) have given rise to experiences, images and narratives related to the world below. The sensory experiences and cosmological ideas associated with the underground have been subject to academic scrutiny, artistic productions and museum exhibitions.

Programme Global Earth Matters: Mining, Materiality and the Museum –Silver Lining /Resource Futures

Friday October 20 at Research Center for Material Culture, Leiden

09:30 – Arrival and Coffee

10:00 – 10:20 Introduction by Sabine Luning (Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology of Leiden University) & Wayne Modest (Head of Research Center for Material Culture)

10:20 – 11:00 Keynote: Rosalind Morris (Department of Anthropology, Columbia University)

11:00 – 11:30 Q &A

11:30 – 12:00 Patricia Pisters (Media and Culture, University of Amsterdam)

12:00- 12:20 Rossana Barragan (International Institute for Social History) - Representing Potosi

12. 20 – 13.00 General discussion

13.00 – 14. 00 Lunch

14.00 -14.20 Marcel van der Beek – Silver in Monetary History

14.20 14.30 Discussion

14.30- 14.50 Pienke Kal – Curating "*Yogya Silver: Renewal of a Javanese Handicraft*"

14.50 – 15.00 Discussion

15.00 – 16.30 Global Earth Matters Research Project – proposal discussion.

16:30 – Opening Mentawi exhibition and reception.

17:30 – Dinner