Race and Representation in the French Colonial Empire

Susannah Blair, Columbia University, seb2210@columbia.edu
Stephanie O’Rourke, University of St Andrews, so38@st-andrews.ac.uk

This session will consolidate new research on the visual culture of race in France and its colonies during the 18th century and into the 19th century. It will be oriented around two key terms, ‘representation’ and ‘possession’, and their many resonances – artistic, political, legal and relational. Papers will be invited to explore how art objects articulated, contested and disseminated changing notions of racial identity and citizenship in France and its global networks.

Over the past several years, scholars have examined the role of pictorial representation in shaping ideas of race, identity, indigeneity and slavery in the context of the British Empire. Bringing together new scholarship that builds upon these precedents, we aim to address a deliberately expansive geographical notion of French visual culture, one that includes the Caribbean, New France, North Africa, Canada and the Indian Ocean in addition to sites within the ‘metropole’ such as Paris and Nantes. Fostering a dialogue between art history, indigenous studies and critical race theory, our panel will provide a crucial scholarly platform for research that can inform pedagogy, curatorial practice and future scholarship.