

Conference



Censer with cover, Japan, Edo period, 1750, stoneware covered with glaze (Bizen ware), gift of Mrs. V. Evert Macy, 1923



Censer? From Egypt, c. 3850-2960 B.C., pottery, paint, Rogers Fund, 1907



Swiss censer, Basel, before 1477, silver, raised and cast, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917

Friday, 7th  
Saturday, 8th

# 2019

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Censer, Italy, 15th century, copper-gilt, champlevé enamel, Rogers Fund, 1910

The Censer:  
A Comparative  
Approach

Friday, June 7th  
Saturday, June 8th  
2019

Institute for Art History  
Seminar room no. 124,  
Mittelstrasse 43, 3012 Bern

# 2019



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Byzantine Censer, Syria, 16th century, copper alloy, Rogers Fund, 1963



German Censer, 11th-12th century, Copper alloy, Rogers Fund, 1909

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The Censer:  
A Comparative Approach

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# The Censer: A Comparative Approach

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South Netherlandish Censer, 16th century, Copper alloy, The Cloisters Collection, 1925

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Censer, China, Qing Dynasty, 19th to early 20th century, bronze

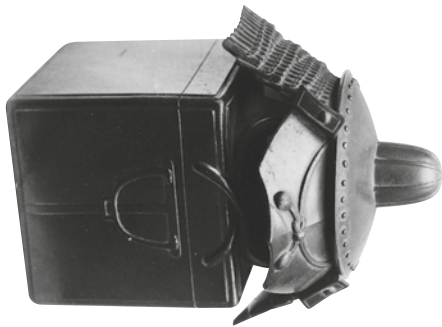
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Censer, Japan, Edo period, 1750. Stoneware covered with thin glaze (Bizen ware). Gift of Mrs. V. Everit Macy, 1923.

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Censer, China, Qing Dynasty, early to mid 19th century, bronze, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975

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The burning of incense is one of the most pervasive religious practices today and throughout history. The fragrant smoke filling the air can be witnessed in any tradition, whether polytheistic or monotheistic, whether in the Ancient Near East, Modern US, or Medieval Europe. Censers are ubiquitous among religious paraphernalia, and on a truly global scale. Surprisingly, however, little scholarly attention has been given to censers and the rituals they facilitate.

In this project we propose to explore these commonly used yet seldom studied objects from a comparative perspective. This investigation entails consideration of the material fabrication of censers themselves and their subsequent significations, as well as the role of the incense itself as it vaporizes in the course of religious ceremonies. By comparing we aim to unveil resemblances and differences across various religions that at the same time can give evidence to the particularities of a specific tradition. Through these objects we also hope to interrogate dominant narratives in Art History defined by exclusive categories like "the era of art" or by retrospectively defined periods or artistic developments aligned with dynasties.

Centering on the censer thus not only places the object in a constellation of other religious artifacts, but also relocates the importance of rituals that have long been placed at the margins of the study of religion, art, and ritual. Emerging from this, we hope, is a better grasp of the role of sensorial elements in the fostering of the devotional practices of world religions.

Acknowledging the need for an interdisciplinary approach to the profound questions provoked by the censer as object and as site, the project aims to unite scholars from different fields of study in an exploration of the censer and its materiality, ontology, and presence.

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9:00 - 9:15	Syrian Censers - Opening Horizons <i>Beate Fricke, Bern</i>	9:30 - 10:15	Shapes and Functions of Incense Burners (Levant and Byzantium) <i>Beatrice Casseau, Paris</i>
9:15 - 9:30	Holy Smoke: Posing Questions to Art Historians <i>Ittai Weinryb, New York</i>	10:15 - 11:00	The Galile Incense Burner: Dense Materiality of an Ambulatory Artifact <i>Margaret Graves, Bloomington</i>
9:30 - 10:15	The Incense Burner in Classical Art <i>Wolfgang Gaßmann, New Haven</i>	11:00	Coffee break
10:15 - 11:00	Visualizing the Smoke: Chinese Incense Burner in the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) Periods <i>Yao Ning, Florence, Berlin, London</i>	11:30 - 12:15	Vessels of Holy Fire: The Censer and the Womb of the Mother of God in Early Byzantine and Coptic Devotion <i>Nathan S. Dennis, San Francisco</i>
11:00	Coffee break	12:15 - 13:00	Heavenly Fragrance from Florence to Istanbul: A Comparative Study of Two Early Modern Censers <i>Mina Macarraig, Riverside</i>
11:30 - 12:15	Burning, Godliness, and Sacrifice in Classic Maya Art <i>James Doyle, New York</i>	13:15	Lunch
12:15 - 13:00	On Smoke and Balance: Incense-Burners and Ponderation in Etruria <i>Francesco De Angelis, New York</i>	15:00 - 15:45	In Chains: Energy, Interconnectivity, and the Physics of Censers <i>Allison Stielau, London</i>
		15:45 - 16:30	The Time of the Late Medieval European Censer <i>Aden Adami, Chicago</i>
		16:30	Coffee break
		17:00 - 17:30	Final discussion

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Censer, China, Southern Song period, Zhejiang, stoneware with glaze (Ge ware), Asia Society Museum, New York



Censer from Eastern Nahuatl, Mexico, Tehuacan Valley, 1200-1521, ceramic, pigment, The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection

6061, Fund. Rogers Fund, Smithsonian Institution, copper alloy, 12th century

