



Universität der Künste Berlin



Workshop

Empowering Materials: Women, Entrepreneurship, Artisanry, and Cultural Heritage

Time: 18 February 2025, 1-6 p.m.

Venue: Institute for Asian and African Studies, Invalidenstraße 118, room 507

Organizer: Prof. Dr. Manja Stephan, Transregional Central Asian Studies, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (HUB) & Prof. Dr. Miriam Oesterreich, Universität der Künste Berlin (UdK)

This workshop interrogates the making and fashioning of cultural items as empowering processes for women. Focussing on i) practices of cultural re/production such as embroidering, weaving, tailoring, or designing, ii) the materials (e.g. textiles, clothes) that result from these practices, and iii) how these materials *matter* resp. empower through their materiality (form, aesthetics) and meaning, this workshop recognizes the pivotal role of women as pioneering and creative agents in shaping economic fields such as cultural industry, online fashion market, and heritage entrepreneurship, as well as the realm of immaterial labour.

Major interest of this workshop is thus on highlighting female epistemologies and women's experiences: What means empowerment for them and how do they get empowered through their cultural practices and the items they make and fashion? How do women interweave their selves and life experiences with these cultural items/materials? How do they gain agency through what they are doing? And is there a transformative power inherent to their cultural practices resp. the things they make/fashion?

Assembling case studies from the field of handicraft, arts, and business, the workshop aims to understand how women through their engagement in the re-/production of cultural items make, re-make and fashion their female selves as well as how they re-position themselves, as women, in the intersecting contexts of patriarchy, nationalism, and capitalist economy.

In terms of empowerment, we apply an emic approach that may cover material aspects such as economic independence or success, or immaterial aspects such as self-realization, self-fulfilment, social mobility or spiritual or cultural awakening.

Conceptually, we propose to understand 'making' with Tim Ingold (2013) as a process that creates knowledge, builds environments and transforms lives, while with 'fashioning' we tackle in line with Stephen Greenblatt (1980,) the process of constructing identity (of the women or the things they produce) towards an outwardly projected image. This allows us to follow the transformation of materials, its meaning, value und identity, from a handicraft or art product into a commodity, a consumer good, an item of cultural and artistic capital, or a brand.

Finally, the workshop gives space to interrogate concepts such as creativity, resilience, sustainability, or authenticity/indigeneity, as well as to tackle women's empowerment in the field of cultural re/production through the analytical lens of intersectionality.

Programme

12:45 – 13:00 Arrival and Welcome

13:00 – 13:15 Introduction (Manja Stephan, HUB; Miriam Oesterreich, UdK)

13:15 – 14:15 Panel 1 Women Entrepreneurs

Nurlykhan Aljanova (NU Astana): Bulbul Kapkyzy: Interweaving Threads of Heritage and Crafting Empowerment

Kholdida Khaldarova (NU Astana): Empowering through Fashion: The Case of Uzbek Female Entrepreneurs

Coffee Break

14:30-15:30 Panel 2 Agency and Resilience

Indira Alibayeva (NU Astana): Growing with Textile, Growing through Textile: on the Agency of Uzbek Women in the Handicraft Sector

Fiona Katherine Smith (Ethnologisches Museum/Humboldt-Forum): Handicrafts and Resilience: Pamiri Cultural Heritage as Empowerment

Coffee Break

15:50-17:20 Panel 3 Transcultural and Transregional Perspectives

Sol Izquierdo de la Viña (UdK, Online): Transcultural Weaving – Exiled Jewish Women Artists in the 20th-century Americas

Azita Ibrahimy (HU Berlin): Empowering Women, Preserving Heritage: The Material Power of Afghan Khamak Embroidery

Hilka Dirks (UdK): Embroidery as Aesthetic Practice between Art, Crafts, and Historical Document

Coffee Break

17:40 – 18:00 Interweavings: Wrap Up

Joint Dinner