

Call for Papers

Different shades of white: Interdisciplinary perspectives on the albinotic body

06.-08. September 2018, Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz

Several phenomena have contributed to the increased attention paid to albinism in the past decade. The incredible atrocities inflicted on persons with albinism in Eastern Africa made international headlines. In response, local and global actors – from the Tanzania Albinism Society to the United Nations – have increased and/or started campaigning against such human rights violations. A social movement by and for people with albinism emerged. Another development grew shortly after: While the first fashion models with albinism had already worked during the 1990s and the early 21st century, it was ten years ago when the most famous ones – Shaun Ross and Diandra Forrest from New York City – forged their careers. They, too, have made international headlines. Both phenomena contributed to a wider circulation of knowledge, texts and images about and of albinism. They also emphasize the fact that albinism is much more than only a medical phenomenon. Albinism has come into focus today as a social and aesthetic reality. Repulsion and attraction are, nevertheless, not new reactions toward hypopigmented bodies. From the Enlightenment era, through freak shows in the 19th and 20th century, to Hollywood films, they were interpreted as racially transgressive, wonders, oddities or even otherworldly figures.

The conference calls for papers that discuss albinism in a historic, social, aesthetic or political perspective. How have conceptions of albinotic bodies varied and changed? We are interested in the perception, performance, representation, framing and treatment of albinism across different times and in several locales. How were cases we would nowadays identify as albinism interpreted in the past? How are they interpreted in varying world views today? How does the presentation of albinism differ in medicine, art photography, fictional literature or in the humanities and social sciences? The conference aims at bringing together approaches from the humanities and social sciences, as well as interested contributors from the life sciences. We also encourage activists and artists to present their work and foster a dialog about practical, political, artistic and scholarly perspectives. The conference aims at stimulating exchange about the way sameness and difference is negotiated from all these angles. Thus, we hope to provide an opportunity for networking, debate and mutual learning.

In addition to lectures and presentations, the conference also comprises a World Café session for all participants. An exhibition of photographs and videos by several international artists portraying persons with albinism complements the conference.

The conference will be held in English. Interested presenters please submit an abstract of no more than 350 words and a short biobibliographical note to albinism@uni-mainz.de. The deadline for submissions is March 1, 2018. Depending on our budget, limited funds to cover the costs of travel and accommodation will be available.

Team of organizers: Kathrin Hoff, Christopher Hohl and Matthias Krings, Department of Anthropology and African Studies, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, 55099 Mainz, Germany.