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UNIVERSITY OF  
TORONTO

CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF  
THE UNITED STATES

**Thursday, March 5, 2:00-4:00 pm**

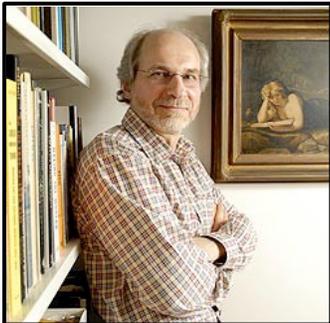
Munk School of Global Affairs

Room 208N, 1 Devonshire Place

## MICHAEL LEJA

### *Early Mass Culture's Image Ecology*

*Organized by the Centre for the Study of the United States, Munk School of Global Affairs, and co-sponsored by the Department of Art, University of Toronto.*



In the history of photo production, as opposed to the narrower history of fine arts, the United States in the 19th century was a site of internationally significant developments. It became a principal locus for advances in the instrumentalisation of images for marketing, political persuasion, and the circulation of information. At first slow by European standards to develop a pictorial press, a lithography trade, and a corps of skilled draughtsmen, printmakers, and designers, the U.S. was, by the end of the century, a world leader in the mass production of pictures and in the expansion of commercial, political, and aesthetic uses for them. Although the growth of mass visual culture was an international phenomenon, the unconstrained capitalism and rapid territorial and demographic expansion of the U.S. made it ground zero. This crucial chapter in the commodification of images is largely unwritten, yet it is foundational for the international image-culture of the 21st century. This paper will argue for an account of 19th-century U.S. visual culture as a complex image ecology warranting comprehensive, critical, and non-triumphalist historical examination. It will focus on a small cross section of this visual culture drawn from the transformative period between 1835 and 1860.

**Michael Leja** (Ph.D., Harvard) studies the visual arts in various media (painting, sculpture, film, photography, prints, illustrations) in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, primarily in the U.S. His book, *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp* (2004), traces the interactions between the visual arts and the skeptical forms of seeing engendered in modern life in northeastern American cities between 1869 and 1917. It won the Modernist Studies Association Book Prize in 2005. An earlier book, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (1993), situates the paintings of Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman, and others in a culture-wide initiative to re-imagine the self in the midst of a traumatic history. It won the Charles Eldredge Prize for Distinguished Scholarship in American Art from the Smithsonian American Art Museum. He is currently at work on a book exploring changes in pictorial forms and in social relations associated with the industrialization of picture production and the development of a mass market for images in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Registration is required for this event. Please register [here](#).**