

***1898: Imag(in)ing the Caribbean in the Age of the Spanish American War***  
Terra Foundation Conference at the Freie Universität Berlin

**Date:** Tuesday, June 25, 2019

**Location:** John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies, Freie Universität, Lansstrasse 7-9, Berlin. Room 340, 10:00 am to 6:00 pm.

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This interdisciplinary conference will address visual representations produced in the wake of the Spanish American War—an understudied yet pivotal conflict in the history of the United States and its relation to the world. While the war only lasted four months, the consequences were profound. The U.S. military seized four colonies from Spain (Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Philippines, and Guam), signaling the end of the vast Spanish Empire and the beginning of American imperial ambition in what would come to be called “The American Century.” (Even during the conflict, the U.S. military, at the urging of President William McKinley, had annexed the independent republic of Hawaii.)

The conference will focus on the Caribbean, illuminating Puerto Rico and Cuba, which represent very different trajectories in the United States’ “first episode in globalization.” Puerto Rico’s ambiguous legal status and lack of sovereignty as an unincorporated U.S. territory continues to fuel critical debates about the island’s identity as a commonwealth, future U.S. state, or an independent nation. Puerto Ricans continue to fight for both greater autonomy and for full rights as U.S. citizens—a dual struggle thrown into sharp relief by crippling debt and by a devastating 2017 hurricane. Cuba, by contrast, a U.S. protectorate for only three years, has since the 1959 communist revolution stood in stark defiance against U.S. power and influence.

Situating their talks in the era of the war and its aftermath, scholars will explore the ways that paintings, sculptures, photographs, architecture, tourist postcards, sheet music, and ethnological and historical artifacts (created and collected by both islanders and mainlanders, locals and outsiders), have pictured, documented, negotiated, critiqued, and resisted that new world order. Speakers will draw on art history, museum theory, anthropology, post-colonial studies, and American and Latin American studies to interpret the work of artists, designers, collectors, and travelers. They will demonstrate how the acquisition, classification, publication, circulation, and display of such material culture has constructed powerful narratives that have shaped popular and often problematic perceptions of Puerto Rico and Cuba, which Puerto Rican poet Lola Rodríguez de Tío called “two wings of one bird.” Speakers will also consider 1898 from the lens of the current political, economic, and environmental crises on both islands, as well as from contemporary diaspora perspectives.

The conference is organized by Laura Katzman, the 2018-2019 Terra Foundation Visiting Professor of American Art at the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies, Freie Universität Berlin. Sponsorship is provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art, based in Chicago and Paris, and the Culture Department of the JFKI/FU.