



Exhibiting Biskra: Art, Photography and Tourism in an Algerian Oasis

Wednesday 20 September 2017, 4.30 – 6pm

Speaker

Professor Roger Benjamin

Professor of Art History
University of Sydney

Location

The Nye Hughes Room

ANU Centre for European Studies
The Australian National University
Building #67C, 1 Liversidge Street
Acton ACT 2601

Map reference

[http://www.anu.edu.au/
maps#show=29321](http://www.anu.edu.au/maps#show=29321)

Registration required

<https://rbenjamin.eventbrite.com.au>

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Anon, *Chaouia families near Biskra*, Autocrome c1911, Collection Serge Kakou, Paris

From the time of the seizure of the oasis by the French army in 1844 until today, the once-famous desert tourist town of Biskra has excited a myriad of pictorial representations, from oil-paintings and maps to postcards and stereoscopic photos, to newsreel films and Technicolor romances.

The exhibition *Biskra: sortilèges d'un oasis* has been sparked by responses of cosmopolitan avant-gardists who visited around 1900: the novelist André Gide (*The Immoralist*), the painter Henri Matisse (*Blue Nude, Souvenir of Biskra*), the composer and ethnomusicologist Béla Bartók (recordings of *Amazight/Chaouia* song that influenced his later work). For the first time a detailed image of this Algerian space of aesthetic revelation, where poetry, luxury and squalor jostled, is revealed in the cross-cultural richness of its contested histories, colonial and postcolonial.

Professor Roger Benjamin has curated *Biskra: Visions of an Oasis* for the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, supported by the Algerian Ministry of Culture. In October 2017 the exhibition continues to the Musée Matisse, Nice.

Professor Benjamin is a Canberra-born art historian and curator who trained in Melbourne, Bryn Mawr and Paris. His work has focused on Matisse studies, contemporary Aboriginal art, and the social history of European Orientalist painting. His books include *Orientalism: Delacroix to Klee* (Sydney 1997), *Orientalist Aesthetics: Art, Colonialism and French North Africa, 1880–1930* (Berkeley 2003), *Renoir and Algeria* (New Haven 2003), and *Kandinsky and Klee in Tunisia* (Oakland 2016). His current project is *Double Crossings: Art and Politics at the Strait of Gibraltar*. Professor Benjamin recently held the Australian Research Council's DORA Fellowship at the University of Sydney.

Enquiries: T 02 6125 9896 E europe@anu.edu.au