



ECO ART HISTORY: Genealogies, Methodologies, Practices, Horizons

Nuclear disasters.

Acid rain.

The mass extinction of animal and plant species.

The devastating environmental crisis that the planet faces today has fundamentally transformed the way we perceive human interaction with the natural environment. New forms of thinking such as postcolonial ecophilosophy, actor-network theory, new materialisms, evolutionary-developmental aesthetics, and posthumanism have challenged Enlightenment distinctions between natural and human history. Can art history, a discipline primarily engaged in the study of human creativity, also breach the natural/human history binary? What would such a history of art and architecture look like? Inescapably located in deep time, the ecological is omnidirectional and rhizomatic in its scalarity. Therefore, rather than focusing on specific sites or temporal periods, the conference seeks to explore the interconnected ecologies of planetary systems and art and architecture practices across a *longue durée*. It aims to bring forth the genealogies, methodologies, practices, and horizons of ecologically-oriented art, architecture, and visual histories.

Speakers:

Lamia Balafrej (University of California, Los Angeles)
Elisabeth de Bièvre (University of East Anglia)
Whitney Davis (University of California, Berkeley)
Natasha Eaton (University College London)
Anthony Grudin (University of Vermont)
Meredith Hoy (Arizona State University)
Monica Juneja (Universität Heidelberg)
Riad Kherdeen (University of California, Berkeley)
Gregory Levine (University of California, Berkeley)
Ramón De Santiago (University of California, Berkeley)
Shivani Sud (University of California, Berkeley)
Sugata Ray (University of California, Berkeley)
Ivonne del Valle (University of California, Berkeley)

Friday, May 4, and
Saturday May 5, 2018
10:00 am - 5:00 pm
308A Doe Library
UC Berkeley

Organizers: Sugata Ray and Whitney Davis, Department of History of Art, University of California, Berkeley

Sponsors: University of California Humanities Research Institute; Institute of International Studies; Department of History of Art; Sarah Kailath Chair of India Studies; Institute for South Asia Studies



PROGRAM

May 4

10:00-10:15 Whitney Davis and Sugata Ray, *Introductory Comments*

10:15-10:30 Coffee Break

10:30-11:15 Ivonne del Valle, *Water in Mexico: From a General Economy to Infrastructure Run Amok*

11:15-12:00 Elisabeth de Bièvre, *The Ubiquity of Aesthetics: Dutch Urban Cultures, 1200-1700*

12:00-1:00 Lunch Break

1:00-1:45 Sugata Ray, *How to Live with Plants: Towards an Eco Art History of the Eighteenth Century*

1:45-2:30 Whitney Davis, *History in Petroglyphs at the Second Cataract of the Nile*

2:30-2:45 Coffee Break

2:45-5:00 Graduate Student Panel

Ramón de Santiago, *Hurricanes on my Mind: Global Flows and Environmental Pressure*

Shivani Sud, *On Materiality and Other Matters: Photographing the Third Plague Pandemic in Bombay, 1896-97*

Riad Kherdeen, *Radiating Waves: Eco-Poiesis and the Paintings of Mohammed Melehi*

May 5

10:00-10:45 Lamia Balafrej, *Mining and the Desert*

10:45-11:00 Coffee Break

11:00-11:45 Natasha Eaton, *Ecogold*

11:45-12:45 Lunch Break

12:45-1:30 Anthony E. Grudin, *Warhol's Vanishing and Endangered Animals*

1:30-2:15 Meredith Hoy, *paper title tbd*

2:15-2:30 Coffee Break

2:30-3:15 Gregory Levine, *Thinking of Ecocentric Art History*

3:15-4:00 Monica Juneja, *The Hunter and the Squirrel: Writing Art History in a Post-Anthropocentric Mode*

4:00-5:00 Final Discussion

ABSTRACTS AND SPEAKER BIOS

Lamia Balafrej, *Mining and the Desert*

This paper considers the desert not as an actual, barren landscape but as a figure of inertness, produced and deployed to legitimate various forms of exploitation and violence, from extractive capital to nuclear weapons testing. Drawing on art history, environmental studies, historical anthropology, and critical theory, I propose to explore the desert as a symptom of how colonial powers have developed the binary of life and nonlife. Focusing on mining industries and their human and ecological impact across the *longue durée*, I examine how resource-making in particular has produced the desert, a set of discourses, tactics, and affects that aim at producing imaginaries of inanimate spaces in order to facilitate extraction, technological intervention, and the exploitation of labor.

Lamia Balafrej is an assistant professor of art history at UCLA. Her first book, forthcoming in 2019, *The Making of the Artist in late Timurid Painting*, addresses the poetics and politics of artistic self-representation in Persian painting. Her current research explores art's relation to labor and ecology.

Elisabeth de Bièvre, *The Ubiquity of Aesthetics: Dutch Urban Cultures, 1200-1700*

Aesthetics here refers not to the tradition of the evaluation of art but, drawing on the original Greek, to the omnipresent role of the senses in the shaping of human culture. In any particular place and time people are profoundly influenced by their sensual exposure to all aspects of their environment, the geological, geographical, climatological, as well as the social and historical. That influence is ubiquitous, affecting the material lay-out of all communities, their art and architecture, law and order, religion, education, medicine, industry, economy and warfare. It is also ubiquitous in another sense. Because sensory exposure to activity in one area can affect behavior in another we have to be constantly alert to their mutual influence. If visual art is the best context for the study of the exchange involved it is because in art the impact of sensory exposure is clearest, especially in a culture where art was so prominent as in the early modern Netherlands.

Elisabeth de Bièvre has taught at the University of East Anglia, University College London, and UCLA. She has also delivered the Baldwin lectures at Oberlin College and the Gombrich lectures at the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou. Her study of Netherlandish art alerted her to the influence of the physical and cultural environment on art production, as demonstrated in articles in the journal *Art History*, and her interest in the principles involved led to her contributing an essay to the volume, *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, edited by K. Zijlmans and W. van Damme (2008). She has explored their relevance to history in the *longue durée* in a major book, *Dutch Art and Urban Cultures 1200-1700* (Yale, 2015).

Whitney Davis, *History in Petroglyphs at the Second Cataract of the Nile*

Between the eighth through third millennia BCE, petroglyphs were continually made by local Nubian nonliterate peoples inhabiting the region of the second cataract of the Nile River (approx. 150 km south of the present-day border of Egypt and Sudan). They depict "big game" (Ethiopian megafauna like giraffe and elephant), human hunting and fishing, and, later, herding (goats and cattle). The papers argues that the petroglyphs found an ingenious way to document the long-term environmental history of the region, making visible histories of certain dramatic climatic and environmental transformations (partly outside the possibility of direct "eye witness") primarily associated with the long-term aridification of the north African savannah (since the second millennium BCE, largely desert: the "Sahara") and the decline of rainfall in mountainous East Africa (affecting the scale of the annual "inundation" of the Nile that was the primary regulator of life in ancient Nubia and ancient Egypt). The petroglyphs explore human interactions with these transformations and the social changes they entrained, notably the rise of centralized irrigation

agriculture in Egypt (administered by a theocratic patrimonial state) and the emergence of a bovine economy in Nubia as well as conflict between these two forms of life in Neolithic northeastern Africa.

Whitney Davis is George C. and Helen N. Pardee Professor of History and Theory of Ancient and Modern Art at UC Berkeley. He is the author of ten books: *The Canonical Tradition in Ancient Egyptian Art* (Cambridge UP, 1989); *Masking the Blow: The Scene of Representation in Late Prehistoric Egyptian Art* (California UP, 1992); *Pacing the World: Construction in the Sculpture of David Rabinowitch* (Harvard UP, 1996); *Drawing the Dream of the Wolves: Homosexuality, Interpretation, and Freud's "Wolf Man" Case* (Indiana UP, 1996); *Replications: Archaeology, Art History, Psychoanalysis* (Penn State UP, 1996); *Queer Beauty: Sexuality and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Freud and Beyond* (Columbia UP, 2010); *A General Theory of Visual Culture* (Princeton UP, 2010), which received the Monograph Prize of the American Society for Aesthetics and the Susanne K. Langer Award of the Media Ecology Association; *Visuality and Virtuality: Images and Pictures from Prehistory to Perspective* (Princeton UP, 2017); *Space, Time, and Depiction* (forthcoming), based on his Research Forum Lectures at the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London; and *Inquiry in Art History* (forthcoming).

Natasha Eaton, *Ecogold*

What might be the ecoaesthetics of gold? Gold as we are told has a glister and sense of slipping from Standard to vulgarity, perhaps; its shimmer is contingent. This paper will think with recent debates on ecoaesthetics and the planetary unconscious or sense of reflexivity through the mining of gold and the idea of the shimmer. Roland Barthes suggests the shimmer as the light of The Neutral - The Neutral as the indeterminate politics of today.

In the sewers of Mumbai workers dive in search of gold. This gold is the detritus of the world. Seen by artists like Subodh Gupta in a relatively recent work, gold is sold, tooled, admired for its meteoric qualities. Gold mining in South Africa has been a subject of much recent art writing. But what of South Asia? This paper will explore the weight of gold in India as a major player in the world and its implications for ecoaesthetics. Is there ecogold?

Natasha Eaton is Reader in the History of Art at UCL. Her publications are included in *The Art Bulletin*, *The Oxford Art Journal*, *The Journal of Material Culture* and other places. She is an advisor to and an editor of *Third Text*. Her monographs are *Mimesis across Empires* (Duke, 2013), *Colour, Art and Empire* (I.B. Tauris, 2013) and *Vertiginous Exchange* (Routledge, 2019).

Anthony E. Grudin, *Warhol's Vanishing and Endangered Animals*

During the 1980s, Andy Warhol worked on two projects that specifically addressed the plight of non-human animals: *Endangered Species* (1983) and *Vanishing Animals* (1986). Even scholars sympathetic to Warhol's late work have tended to spurn these projects as faddish and embarrassing attempts to profit from a trendy topic. This paper argues that Warhol's interventions in the field of non-human animal advocacy were instead premised on the artist's profound and enduring interest in the lives and feelings of the creatures around him, and particularly in those creatures that were unloved or imperiled. In the unusual plight of the okapi, an artiodactyl mammal native to Central Africa and included in the *Vanishing Animals* series, Warhol found a striking instance of maternal affection and bodily care that, under atypical circumstances of captivity and boredom, could be fatal to its young recipient.

Anthony E. Grudin is Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Vermont. He is the author of *Warhol's Working Class: Pop Art and Egalitarianism* (University of Chicago Press, 2017). His articles have appeared in *Warhol: Headlines* (National Gallery, 2011), *13 Most Wanted Men: Andy Warhol and the 1964 World's Fair* (Queens Museum/Andy Warhol Museum, 2014), *ON&BY Andy Warhol* (Whitechapel/MIT, 2016), *October*, *Criticism*, and *Oxford Art Journal*. He is working on a second book on Warhol and animal life and an edited volume on the present prospects of social art history.

Monica Juneja, *The Hunter and the Squirrel: Writing Art History in a Post-Anthropocentric Mode*

Following the call to “decolonize nature” (T.J. Demos), the expanding field of eco-aesthetics positions itself at the intersection of art production, politico-ecological theory and environmental activism. It focuses primarily on contemporary art that, driven by discourses of the Anthropocene, promises new and radical ways of comprehending ourselves in relation to the more-than-human world. What does such a theorization of art’s relation to the biosphere entail for the study of artistic practices that took shape before the onset of industrial modernity and its modes of visualizing anthropogenic environmental destruction? As a starting point, my presentation will engage with Sugata Ray’s unravelling of the reciprocal relationship between an aesthetic of venerating the natural environment and ecological catastrophe. I will then proceed to query what such a perspective implies for the analysis of artistic conventions and genres – for instance, that which art historians call “landscape”, instead of land, territory, field or ecosphere. Can we read such images – in spite of their intrinsic anthropocentric perspective – as an articulation of a relationship between humans and the world of plants, animals and geological formations, that acknowledges the presence of the non-human together with their innate power and agency as co-producers of a life-world? How do we interpret the tensions that appear to play out within pictorial strategies? What are the art historical methods required to be able to read images against the grain of established scholarly practice? I will address these issues by drawing upon examples from the pictorial practices of early modern court societies in northern India.

Monica Juneja is Professor of Global Art History at the University of Heidelberg. She is also a Director of the Cluster of Excellence Asia and Europe in a Global Context at the University of Heidelberg. Her writings focus on transculturality and visual representation, the disciplinary practices of art history in South Asia, the history of visibility in early modern South Asia, Christianisation and cultural practices in early modern South Asia, heritage and architectural histories in transcultural perspective. Her book publications include *Peindre le paysan. L’image rurale dans la peinture française de Millet à Van Gogh* (1998); *Architecture in Medieval India: Forms, Practices, Histories* (2001); *Universalität in der Kunstgeschichte?* Theme Issue *Kritische Berichte* (2012, with M. Bruhn and E. Werner); *Contextualizing Choices: Islamicate Elements in European Arts*, (2012, with V. Beyer and I. Dolezalek); *Archaeologizing Heritage? Transcultural Entanglements between Local Social Practices and Global Virtual Realities* (2012, with M. Falser); *Kulturerbe Denkmalpflege transkulturell: Grenzgänge zwischen Theorie und Praxis* (2013, with M. Falser); *Disaster as Image. Iconographies and Media Strategies across Asia and Europe* (2014, with G.J. Schenk); *Miniatur Geschichten. Die Sammlung indischer Malerei im Dresdner Kupferstichkabinett* (2017, ed. with P. Kulhlmann-Hodick); *EurAsian Matters. China, Europe and the Transcultural Object* (2018 with Anna Grasskamp). Her book in preparation is entitled *Can Art History be made Global? A Discipline in Transition*, based on the Heinrich Wölfflin Lectures which Monica Juneja delivered at the University of Zurich.

Riad Kherdeen, *Radiating Waves: Eco-Poiesis and the Paintings of Mohammed Melehi*

This paper explores the central thematic of the Moroccan modernist artist Mohammed Melehi’s paintings, namely the wave. Rendered in numerous orientations and configurations beginning in 1963, Melehi’s abstract waves are not only representations of oceanic waves or sound waves or but also of electromagnetic radiation and flows of energy, and in their multiplicity and heterogeneity, they tap into a system that extends beyond their frames and propagate outward with a vital force. This paper presents an atmospheric investigation of Melehi’s wave paintings and develops the concept of eco-poiesis as an analytical paradigm that can be used to productively think through some of the complexity and contingency of the cymatic phenomena entangled within and without Melehi’s paintings.

Riad Kherdeen is a second year PhD student in the History of Art Department at UC Berkeley studying mainly twentieth century art and architecture with a focus on the Middle East and North Africa region. With interests in comparative and planetary modernisms, Riad’s research draws from postcolonial studies and critical theory, as well as technical art history, aesthetic philosophy, historical and new materialisms, ecocriticism, psychoanalytic theory, and cognitive sciences. Riad holds an MA in the History of Art and

Archaeology from the Institute of Fine Arts and a BA from New York University in Art History as well as a minor in Chemistry.

Gregory Levine, *Thinking of Ecocentric Art History*

What sorts of art history are “ecocentric,” if any? Is such a thing possible or logical, given the term’s presumption of Anthropos decentered? How to define the “ecocentric” and think through the notion of ecocentric art history: what it might look at, think about, how, and why? What might it mean for art, aesthetics, and history, for interpretation and narrative—and for the biosphere? Does ecocentric art history differ from “eco art history”? Can either help to prevent what Amitav Ghosh calls climate crisis “derangement” and anthropocentric ecocide? I have a particular sort of thing in mind for these questions, a sense of discomfort with certain aspects of art history’s “ecological turn,” and the hope that the conversation will probe the question of what “ecocentric” inquiry might be and do within art history and beyond.

Gregory Levine is Professor of the art and architecture of Japan and Buddhist visual cultures. His latest book is *Long Strange Journey: On Modern Zen, Zen Art, and Other Predicaments* (2017).

Sugata Ray, *How to Live with Plants: Towards an Eco Art History of the Eighteenth Century*

The emergence of imperial botany in the 18th century as one of the principle techniques of archiving and governing the natural worlds of India has received significant art historical scrutiny. Scholarly engagements with this phytohistory, however, has remained tied to an Enlightenment subject-object binary that centralizes human attempts to order and master the ecologies of the bio-world. My interests lie elsewhere. My talk focuses on the development of a new 18th-century geoaesthetics in the pilgrimage center of Braj to foreground a very different idea of the natural environment that also appeared at the cusp of colonial modernity. As we will see, the new aesthetics that emerged in 18th-century Braj offered a phenomenologically grounded conception of plant life in the age of empires. This conception was neither logocentric nor biocentric. Rather than the colonial picturesque, which also found articulation in the 18th century as an imperialist spectatorial regime, the geoaesthetics of living with plants in Braj, I propose, holds the promise of an eco art history that rethinks the purported rift between the human species and the world they inhabit.

Sugata Ray is Assistant Professor of South Asian art in the History of Art Department at the University of California, Berkeley. His research focuses on the intersections among early modern and colonial artistic cultures, transterritorial ecologies, and the natural environment. Forthcoming books include *Climate Change and the Art of Devotion: Geoaesthetics in the Land of Krishna, 1550–1850* (2019), *Ecologies, Aesthetics, and Histories of Art* (2018; coedited with Hannah Baader and Gerhard Wolf), and *Water Histories of South Asia: The Materiality of Liquescence* (2018; coedited with Venugopal Maddipati). In the past, Ray has published essays on theories of collecting and archiving, postcolonial theory, and methodologies for a global art history in journals such as *Art History* and *The Art Bulletin*. He has recently guest edited a special issue of *Ars Orientalis* (2018) on translations and terminologies.

Ramón de Santiago, *Hurricanes on my Mind: Global Flows and Environmental Pressure*

On September 5 1622, a powerful hurricane in the Caribbean beset an abundantly laden fleet of ships set on a return course to Spain with a pageant of goods from the New World. The tropical storm sank several of the twenty-eight vessels of the flotilla and claimed over a thousand lives along with their cargo. The tragedy of this event is a traumatic loss of life and materials but also a momentary arrest of the success of the global flow of goods and capital that is one of the characteristic attributes of the early modern period. What can we say about a storm that arrests the flow of goods amid the success of global expansion? How do we incorporate global flows of nature outside of the agency of humans? In this paper, I address how art history can incorporate forces more powerful than any historical momentum and more insistent than any movement of people and goods.

Ramón de Santiago is a PhD student in the Department of History of Art researching the trans-Pacific transfer of visual and material culture between South and Southeast Asia and South America in the early modern period, with a particular interest in pre-colonial systems of trade in both regions. His theoretical interests include questions of historiography in trans-oceanic systems and visual and material practices. His current project uses multidisciplinary methods to investigate the layers of exchange of objects, goods, and people through world oceanic systems.

Shivani Sud, *On Materiality and Other Matters: Photographing the Third Plague Pandemic in Bombay, 1896-97*

This paper examines the ways in which the third plague pandemic was documented and visualized in relation to rapidly evolving ideas about disease, medicine, and the environment by engaging with a set of photo-albums produced in late 19th-century Bombay. As one of the first examples of epidemiological photography, a new genre of photography that had developed at the turn of the century in the wake of the bubonic plague epidemic, the photo-albums serve as a significant archive of late 19th-century colonial epidemiological, visual, and urban practices. Through my analysis of the Bombay photographs, I aim to foreground the environmental and biological contexts of cultural practices, focusing on the multiple ways in which non-human materials such as water, air, light, and microorganisms can drive and effect image making. I thus propose an epistemological shift in our reading of colonial photography that foregrounds the dynamic materiality of the natural world.

Shivani Sud is a fifth year PhD Candidate in the History of Art Dept. at UC Berkeley, specializing in the visual cultures of South Asia. Her dissertation focuses on artists and painting practices in late 19th and early 20th-century Jaipur, a former princely kingdom in western India. Shivani's dissertation research has been supported by fellowships such as the American Institute of India Studies Junior Research Fellowship, the Fulbright-Nehru Student Research Award, and the SSRC International Dissertation Research Fellowship.

Ivonne del Valle, *Water in Mexico: From a General Economy to Infrastructure Run Amok*

In pre-Hispanic times, for the indigenous groups living in the area of what is now Mexico City, water was such a crucial element that it's not an exaggeration to say that it was present in everything they did. From politics and statecraft, to the economy and daily life, water was everywhere, to the extent that it can be considered that it was made the very intentional center of a general economy—an all-encompassing element shaping life in multiple ways. Water has once again become so central to daily life in Mexico City that it could be said that it is indistinguishable from many other spheres: water is health, economy, social class, science. Since its critical role in these areas is an indirect and undesired result rather than a decision, this time water's life-shaping power is very different from what it was in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Ivonne del Valle is Associate Professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. She received her Ph.D. from U.C. Berkeley in 2004, and before returning to the Bay Area in 2009, she taught at the University of Michigan. Her research and teaching make connections between the past and the present which try to show the relevance of the colonial period for an understanding of contemporary times. She has written a book and a series of articles on the Jesuits (José de Acosta and Loyola, and Jesuits in the northern borderlands of New Spain) as a particularly influential politico-religious order that served modernization and the expansion of the Spanish empire. She was co-director of the Berkeley research group "Mexico and the Rule of Law," and co-editor of the *Política común* special issue *Radical Politics and/or the Rule of Law in Mexico*. She also co-edited *Cardenismo: auge y caída de un legado político y social*. Currently, she is working on the drainage of the lakes of Mexico City.