

## **'British Art and Natural Forces' Conference**

October–November 2020  
Speaker Abstracts and Bios

6 October: Geomorphic Forces – Zoom Webinar, 12.00–14.00

### **Caterina Franciosi (PhD Student, History of Art at Yale University), “‘Hell on Earth’: Edward Burne-Jones’s Perseus Series (1876–1885) and Narratives of Geophysical Development’**

The tremendously odd environments in the art of Edward Burne-Jones (1833–98) have been repeatedly characterised as ‘dreamlands’, painted visions in which landscape features hold a thoroughly fantastic connection with the stuff of nature. In a move away from these critical and art historical generalisations, this paper interprets the shifting geomorphological elements of Burne-Jones’s Perseus series in light of nineteenth century physics of the Earth and the universe. I draw on popular geophysics, thermodynamics and metaphysical texts from the 1870s to suggest that the succession of geomorphological transformations, compositional frames, and visual modes in the series harnesses ideas about matter, chaos, and human agency contained in contemporary narratives of earth development and cosmic collapse. Decoration, I argue, is a key pictorial mode for the articulation of this relationship, as it enables Burne-Jones to progressively inject chaos into the visual field and ultimately reinstate steady pictorial order.

The second law of thermodynamics, formulated in the 1860s, postulated that the world was steadily approaching its end. This was due to the irreversible degradation of energy from usable, transformable form into disordered waste, or entropy. Even more terrifying was the idea that mankind was precipitating environmental and cosmic breakdown by using up the earth’s energy resources for the advancement of civilization. By prophesying the catastrophic obliteration of nature and the universe, however, geophysics and thermodynamics also made it possible to imagine post-apocalyptic worlds that might exist beyond visible reality. Such was the hopeful alternative that geophysicists Balfour Stewart and Peter Tait proposed in their popular cosmological treaty *The Unseen Universe* (1875). Stewart and Tait conceived of the existence of multiple linked orders of reality where energy flowed uninterrupted; in their unseen universe, the energy that brings the visible world to life was not used and lost in a scenario of maximum chaos, but endlessly reconverted in the generation of invisible worlds.

Burne-Jones's documented cosmological anxieties, I suggest, inform his staging of Perseus's mythical journey. Throughout the series, the landscapes are subject to material modifications; they gain increasing mobility and instability to the point of complete disarray; finally, they are tightly restructured. Chasing down these modifications means identifying the gradual morphing of pictorial registers into a decorative realm. Perseus both responds to and triggers these modifications; he ultimately overcomes chaos by entering an insistently decorative world. This trajectory and its culmination, I argue, may be seen as visualising Stewart's and Tait's hopeful promise of a post-visible, post-entropic world that depends on the dissolution of reality as we know it.

Caterina Franciosi is an incoming PhD student in the Department of History of Art at Yale University, where she will study nineteenth-century British art, with a focus on the visual culture of landscape and the environment and its intersection with the history of science. She received her MA from the Courtauld Institute of Art in 2019, where her dissertation "'Hell on Earth': Edward Burne-Jones and the Histories of the Earth" was awarded the Courtauld Prize for an Outstanding Dissertation. She holds a BA in Art History from John Cabot University, Rome.

**Stephanie O'Rourke (Lecturer in Art History at the University of St Andrews),  
'Picturing the Geological Sublime'**

Of the many novel Italian sights that attracted British travellers and artists in the eighteenth century, few were more truly spectacular than its infrequent but sensational volcanic eruptions. Evocatively portrayed by Joseph Wright of Derby and William Hamilton among others, these sublime luminous events and the ancient eruptions they recalled left a surprisingly diverse and complex mark British visual culture. In the early nineteenth century, several theatrical paintings of conflagration and natural destruction – including those famously produced by John Martin – became popular forms of entertainment in their own right. As Martin Myrone has argued, scenes of the 'apocalyptic sublime' can be understood in relation to political and religious radicalism but they also participated in broader and more foundational transformations at hand – including the rise of global commerce and steam-powered industrialisation.

In this paper, I will explore how we might further understand such scenes in relation to changing ideas about the history of the natural world. During this period, Charles Lyell was expanding upon and popularising a geological concept known as 'deep time', a field-changing term coined by the Scottish naturalist James Hutton in the late eighteenth century. 'Deep time' named a new way of understanding the Earth's history, whose chronology was so vast as to render the span of human history comparatively insignificant. In other words, as Lyell promoted the idea more broadly in nineteenth-

century Britain, human-centric models of time were increasingly understood to be incompatible with geological models of time. This tension, I suggest, posed a unique challenge to artists of the day: how to render geological events and human narratives alongside one another.

Although I focus on a small number of landscape paintings from the 1820s and 1830s, I will discuss how geological concepts like uniformitarianism and catastrophism influenced mainstream ideas about the status and history of the natural world in early nineteenth-century Britain. Doing so suggests how such ideas can, in turn, transform our understanding of landscape painting.

Dr Stephanie O'Rourke is a lecturer in art history at the University of St Andrews. This paper is part of a Leverhulme-funded research project on the relationship between landscape painting and natural history in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Europe. Her recent publications on this topic can be found in *Representations*, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, and *Word & Image*. She holds a PhD from Columbia University and a BA from Harvard University.

**Joe Kerr (Adjunct Professor of Architectural History at Syracuse University, London), 'Alfred Watkins: Art, Nature and the Supernatural'**

This paper draws on current research being undertaken for a forthcoming book and for an exhibition\* to be held in 2021 to mark a significant centenary. In June 1921 Alfred Watkins, photographer, inventor and antiquarian, experienced an extraordinary revelation, when travelling across his native Herefordshire, he believed he had discovered evidence of an ancient network of trackways lying underneath the English landscape. This Damascene moment spurred him into an exhaustive investigation of the landscape which resulted in *The Old Straight Track* published in 1927.

The paper is not concerned with the validity or authenticity of Watkins' eccentric theories, but instead it will place his revelation and the methodologies he developed to investigate it within a far larger and longer set of ideas about landscape and the forces that have shaped it. For on the one hand Watkins in his persona of photographer had previously placed himself in a local landscape tradition stretching back at least to the picturesque movement and embraced Repton, Turner and Wordsworth, and which sought to depict the natural and elemental forces at work in the shaping of landscape.

But on the other hand, Watkins' eccentric ideas about the patterns of landscape sparked furious debates amongst historians, archaeologists and occultists whose consequences can be felt a century later. Whilst most experts rejected his ideas out of hand – most famously O.G.S. Crawford – his ideas resonated with a burgeoning popular enthusiasm for the landscape in the aftermath of the Great War, and his

methodologies offered a mechanism for actively engaging with the countryside, as well as offering a tantalising hint that there might be previously unknown forces to be revealed in our landscapes.

Watkins himself only made one brief reference to the possibility of supernatural forces at work, but others were quick to suggest something stranger and darker in the matter of ley lines. M.R. James made use of them in a ghost story written in Herefordshire in the 1920s, the first of many writers to tap into the natural forces hinted at by Watkins' work, including Tolkein, Alan Garner, and John Michell, whose *View Over Atlantis* of 1969 reawakened the debate over ley lines, and invested them with even greater magical significance. Equally though in this same period land artists including Hamish Fulton and Richard Long turned back to Watkins as an inspiration for artistic practices that negotiated the natural and the elemental.

Thus in a conscious counterpart to the debate surrounding artistic and art historical encounters with natural forces, this paper will consider how the work of Alfred Watkins serves to illuminate a fascinating tension between theories of both natural and supernatural forces in the shaping of the landscape in the century since his visionary theories were first revealed, and it will suggest potential trajectories for future research fields that can negotiate the boundaries between academic notions of natural forces, and popular belief in the mystical and the magical.

Joe Kerr is an Adjunct Professor of Architectural History at Syracuse University, London. He was previously the Head of the Critical & Historical Studies Programme, Royal College of Art. He is co-editor of the forthcoming book *Alfred Watkins: Man of Vision* (Strange Attractor Press, 2021) and curator of the exhibition of the same name at the Hereford Museum & Art Gallery (June 2021). Amongst his publications are: *The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Space* (MIT Press, 2000); *Autopia: Cars & Culture* (Reaktion, 2002); *London From Punk to Blair* Revised 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Reaktion, 2012); and *Bus Fare: Collected Writings on London's Most Loved Means of Transport* (AA Publishing, 2018).

### **Tobah Aukland-Peck (PhD Student, Art History at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York), “‘Minerals of the Island’”: Tracing the Fossil Landscapes of the 1951 Festival of Britain’**

London's Festival of Britain, organized by the Labour government in 1951, was a celebration of the productive power of the British landscape. Visitors would start at the 'Land' pavilion, processing through the 'Countryside', the 'Minerals of the Island', 'Power and Production', and 'Transport'. This sequence posited a clear hierarchy: natural resources gave way to mechanical modernity. Among displays of dinosaur models, shipping charts, and granite samples were exhibits on resource extraction.

Notably, 'Minerals of the Island' was anchored by an enormous tower simulating the depths of a mine. It was surrounded by models of the miners themselves, who were celebrated as the foundation of Britain's energy system.

This paper connects these mining exhibitions with two monumental canvases commissioned for the Festival; Graham Sutherland's *Origins of the Land* (which hung at the entrance of 'Land', the exhibition's first pavilion) and Josef Herman's *Miners* (in the 'Minerals of the Island' pavilion). Sutherland's vivid image is composed of stratified layers, populated both by composite metallic figures and the ancient body of a pterodactyl. The fossil history of the British landscape displayed by the 'Land' pavilion is evidenced by Sutherland's application of modernist techniques to evoke the endlessness of geological time. Herman's painting, alternately, focuses closely on a group of miners. Their simplified bodies, made up of geometric lines and a limited brown and gray palette, expand to consume the claustrophobic compositional space.

*Origins of the Land* and *Miners* seem to relate to two separate subterranean landscapes; one, the ancient history of the 'Land' pavilion and the other, the infrastructure of modern-day extraction of 'Minerals of the Island'. I argue, however, that Sutherland's metallic figures are directly linked to his drawings of British miners during the Second World War. This experience shifted his relationship to subterranean space, a perspective visible in the implied depth of *Origins of the Land*. Contemporaneous critics noted the mythic quality of Sutherland's miners, who were transformed by their sojourn underground. The metallic figures of *Origins of the Land* push this transformation one step further, merging the body of the miner with the mechanical product of their labor. Herman's miners, likewise, dissolve into the very material they are working to extract. The texture, color, and geometry of their bodies recall the earthly quality of mined material itself. Both compositions reveal the message of the Festival to be the merger of natural forces with the body of the worker.

Tobah Aukland-Peck is a fifth year PhD student in art history at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Her dissertation research focuses on images of extraction (mines, miners, and mining infrastructure) in interwar Britain. She locates the figure of the miner as an alter-ego for the artist, tracing the way in which both instances of labor are engaged with the translation of landscape and raw material into productive commodities. Her essay "'The Abbey in Ruins and Ablaze": Staging Disaster at the British Empire Exhibitions' will be published in *Imagining the Apocalypse*, forthcoming from Courtauld Books Online.

8 October: Plants, Animals – Zoom Webinar, 16.00–17.30

**Lauren Cannady (Assistant Clinical Professor, University Honors at the University of Maryland), 'The Order of Nature, the Disorder of Names'**

European conceptions of the limits and material contents of the natural world expanded exponentially over the course of the seventeenth century. Whether for study or pleasure, gardens were the primary physical repositories for native herbs, flowers, and trees and, increasingly, for non-native specimens yielded from the projects of imperialism. As New World specimens were collected, shipped across the Atlantic, and bought and exchanged, English naturalists and gardeners, many of whom traveled no further than continental Europe, were asked to know and order the natural world, to cultivate, name, and make use of botanical evidence from distant colonized spaces. However, the rate at which new plant specimens reached English gardens exceeded that of available classificatory systems. Nomenclature and taxonomies were particularly pressing issues for the study of natural history, but, as the naturalist and gardener John Parkinson lamented in *Theatrum botanicum* (1640), the discrepant English naming systems in which 'the blind [led] the blind' often led to miscommunication. In his own pursuit of truth, Francis Bacon railed against the inaccuracies and arbitrariness of language that impeded natural philosophy and scientific communication more generally. Bacon's proposal of a universal 'real character' – not 'letters nor words, but things or notions' – was actualized by John Wilkins in his 'Essay Towards a Real Character' (1668), in which the latter acknowledged the particular complexities of taxonomizing plants.

The early history of the New World *Tradescantia virginiana* (Virginia spiderwort) reveals much about the cultivation of plants and the naturalization of knowledge in seventeenth-century England. *Tradescantia virginiana* was first brought to England from the Colony of Virginia in the 1620s, cultivated by gardener John Tradescant, described by Parkinson in *Paradisi in sole* (1629), and, by the 1640s, catalogued as growing in the Oxford Physic Garden. Parkinson claimed that he himself imposed on the plant the name of Tradescant, its first English cultivator, and his description of the specimen's origin and application reveals just how unbound it had become from its environment. As for the spiderwort's use to medicine or craft, Parkinson noted that at the hands of the English the plant had become dissociated from Indigenous knowledge of it as he and his fellow naturalists had no idea 'whether the Indians have any use thereof'. By tracing the early history of the spiderwort in English gardens, plant catalogues, and natural histories, this contribution will lay bare the ways that linguistic imprecision further complicated the management and ordering of natural knowledge.

A historian of early modern art and architecture, Lauren R. Cannady is assistant clinical professor in the University Honors Program at the University of Maryland. She is completing a

book on northern European gardens as sites of knowledge production and transmission, and is co-editor of *Crafting Enlightenment: Artisanal Histories and Transnational Networks*, forthcoming in the Oxford University Studies in the Enlightenment series.

**Jeremy Melius (Assistant Professor, History of Art at Tufts University),  
'Vivisection and the Visual Arts'**

'A history of animal art must begin with the beginning of all art', Francis Klingender once observed. But only at certain moments within that long history have the mutual exposures of human and animal lives been more than cursorily explored. This paper takes the debate surrounding animal vivisection in late Victorian Britain to be one such uneasy moment, proposing to treat it as a key topos for understanding the relation between art and science during the later nineteenth century, as well as art's negotiations with the exigencies of a wider natural world. While the controversy has long been understood as a defining moral event of the period, its crucial impact on visual culture and aesthetic thought in particular – on the production, circulation, and lived experience of images – remains too little investigated. Addressing that impact, the paper brings together three particular cases: the status and deployment of images within the anti-vivisectionist movement, especially as theorized by the Irish writer and social reformer Frances Powell Cobbe; the critic John Ruskin's engagement with animal life, culminating in his resignation from Oxford protesting the university's 'vote endowing vivisection'; and the chequered rise of a Darwin-inspired 'physiological aesthetics', with its exploration, as the writer Grant Allen put it, of 'the community of taste and feeling' between animals and 'ourselves'. The topic poses challenges to scholarly method: Dealing, as one must, with the historical organization of sensibilities as much as with direct instances of representation, it is hard to know in advance what would count as interpretive evidence, or where exactly vivisection's shaping of a Victorian ecology of images would have an end. Yet it also poses difficulties of a thornier kind, difficulties to do with ethical positioning within 'our entire relation to the animal world... that is traversed by affect and that is troubled and troubling' (Jean-Christophe Bailly). In exploring such challenges, the paper offers a speculative account of a crucial historical moment in which vivisection's grim analogy between human and animal bodies came to structure understandings of the aesthetic, and the spectre of animal suffering threw an urgent light on the nature of images themselves.

Jeremy Melius is an assistant professor of the history of art at Tufts University and a specialist in modern art and art writing. Melius's writings have appeared in *Critical Inquiry*, *Art History*, *October*, *Selva*, *Threepenny Review*, and elsewhere, as well as in publications of the Getty Research Institute, the Reina Sofía, the Kunstmuseum Den Haag, and the Museum of Modern Art. Melius is currently completing a book, *The*

*Invention of Botticelli*, and at work on another concerning the fraught relation between Ruskin and art history.

**Laura Ouillon (Doctoral Student, British Visual Culture at the Université de Paris),  
'Re-memembering Trees after the Great Storm: Ecological Grief in Garry Fabian Miller's Work'**

The great storm of 1987 was the worst to have hit England since the great storm of 1703.[1] The scale of the natural catastrophe, as well as the visual and emotional shock which ensued, confronted British artists with the challenge of finding ways of 'mourn[ing] beyond the human'.[2] The storm profoundly altered the actual wooded landscape of Britain overnight, but also affected British imaginary landscapes, in which trees are key referents. The images of the millions of fallen trees found a larger echo in British artistic 'arbori-culture',[3] at a time when both global and local concern about the environmental crisis was gathering pace.[4]

Drawing on recent ecocritical debates in the burgeoning field of plant humanities and critical plant studies, this paper will focus on two artworks exploring and reimagining human-plant relationships in the direct aftermath of the storm. With *Split Thorn, the Last Leaves, the Last Branch, the Cuts, the Scars, the Wounding. A Gathering In for the Healing* (1987–8) and *Co-existence* (1989), Garry Fabian Miller aimed at 'mak[ing] a fitting memorial for the [traumatic] event.'[5] To do so, Fabian Miller did not rely on conventional elegiac or tragic modes of image-making. His ritual-like process consisted in collecting and taking photographs of the fallen leaves of old, local windthrown trees he then rearranged – *re-memembered* – in grids.[6] To borrow Prudence Gibson's words, the artworks thus contributed to the 'mitigat[i]on of the way [human beings] ha[d] forgotten the natural world'.[7]

1 Tamsin Treverton Jones, 'The Mural', in *Windblown: Landscape, Legacy and Loss - The Great Storm of 1987* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2017), ebook.

2 Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman, 'To Mourn beyond the Human', in *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*, ed. Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman (Montreal & Kingston ; London ; Chicago: McGill-Queen's Press, 2017), 3.

3 Owain Jones and Paul J. Cloke, 'Arbori-Culture', in *Tree Cultures: The Place of Trees and Trees in Their Place* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 19.

4 Charles Watkins, 'Introduction', in *Trees, Woods and Forests: A Social and Cultural History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), ebook.

5 Garry Fabian Miller and Martin Barnes, 'The Gatherer', in *Illumine: Photographs by Garry Fabian Miller: A Retrospective* (London ; New York: Merrell, 2005), 62.

6 *Ibid.*, 61-66.

7 Prudence Gibson, 'Introduction', in *The Plant Contract: Art's Return to Vegetal Life* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 1.

Laura Ouillon is a doctoral student in British visual culture at the Université de Paris, France. She is a former student at the École Normale Supérieure, Lyon, France. Her PhD focuses on the imaginary of trees and forests in contemporary British art from the eighties onwards. Her aim is to see how the contradictions of British contemporary identities and identifications have been – and are – negotiated and articulated in these canonical artistic motifs. She will pursue this research at the Oxford French Institute for Research (*Maison Française d'Oxford*) later this year.

20 October: Authors of Architecture – Zoom Webinar, 12.00–14.00

**Freya Wigzell (PhD Student, Architectural History and Theory, at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL), 'Piling Up The Debris'**

Almost as soon as Alison and Peter Smithson's Economist Building was finished in 1964, interpretations of it started to appear, and they have gone on appearing ever since. Today, the Economist is one of the most written about British buildings of the last fifty-five years. Of the different elements that make the Economist Building, one of the building's most distinctive features – the roach bed Portland stone cladding – however, has been relatively little discussed, despite it being, at the time the Smithsons chose it, an unprecedented choice for a cladding. One of higher beds of Portland limestone, roach is less compressed than the lower Portland beds, and as such, it still bears the evidence of the creatures that made it.

As Eric Robinson – a geologist who has published extensively on the use of stone in London buildings – described it in a letter sent in 1991 to the *Economist's* then managing director David Gordon, roach is a rough-textured stone featuring deep fossilized cavities left by many thousands of shells – relics of organisms that lived 150 million years ago and which have been dissolved in the limestone by acidic groundwaters leaving behind only casts of what was once solid.

Based on published accounts at the time the building was completed, it is unquestionable that part of the reasoning behind the Smithsons' choice of roach lay

in practical considerations not least the effects of weather and pollution. Various retrospective explanations for the choice of this previously unused stone by the Smithsons and their assistants on the Economist however, also suggest other, not unconnected, rationales for the choice of a highly fissured stone. When considered in light of the Smithsons' and their friends Eduardo Paolozzi and Nigel Henderson's interests in disposability, pattern, in hidden orders, and in the problems of 'human association', the choice of roach seems less surprising. More than just 'pretty', as Peter Smithson later described the material, roach can be seen to connect with a fascination with underlying, non-human, systems of order, while at the same time providing a particularly expressive form of protection for human identity in the modern city.

Freya Wigzell is completing her doctorate at the Bartlett, UCL on the widespread interest in shells in twentieth-century architecture.

### **Euan McCartney Robson (History of Art at UCL), 'Sticks and Stones: A Poetic Cathedral'**

'Deep dales' (*deope dalum*), 'thronging waters' (*floda gemonge*), 'a great woodland-enclosure' (*wudafæstern micef*): the Old English poem, *De situ Dunelmi* (Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff. 1. 27), opens with a lush and abundant image of a building in its natural environment. Whether by mitigating descriptions of trees and wildlife through topoi, or by emphasising the essential Otherness and danger of 'animality' beyond civilized borders, many post-Conquest sources worked hard to mask the special relationship of ecclesiastical sites to their 'untamed' surroundings. By contrast, this anonymous poet tied Durham Cathedral ineluctably, symbiotically, to its landscape. This paper seeks to do three things. First, it situates Durham – as, strikingly, so many other early medieval sources seem to have done – in relation to trees and to timber. Second, it asks how and why the builders of this otherwise precocious Norman structure may thus actually have spent much of their time looking, not to the new, nor to the future, but somewhat nostalgically to the 'first little church of branches' (*citissime de uirgis ecclesiola*) built by Bishop Ealdhun at Durham in 995. Finally, it invites a discussion on the role of the skeuomorphic in architecture. Hidden in plain sight, were several of Durham's more unusual masonry forms – its many chevrons, zig-zags and lozenges – actually once designed to evoke a much older Hiberno-Saxon tradition, within which 'hewn', 'thatched' or 'timbered' churches were not so much outdated alternatives to stone, but pronounced statements in their own right of core insular identity?

Euan defended his PhD dissertation at UCL in 2019 and was named the winner of the 2020 David R. Tashjian Award for the 55th International Congress on Medieval Studies

at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo. His work is currently being supported by a Research Continuity Fellowship from the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art.

**Alicia Weisberg-Roberts (Independent Scholar), 'Terraforming Hong Kong (1840–1860)'**

This paper will explore the ways climatic theory shaped the built and cultivated environment of early Hong Kong, and underpinned its representation. The 1842 treaty of Nanking ceded Hong Kong to the British as a permanent, year-round trading settlement, but in order to fulfill its *raison d'être* the territory had to be rendered, as well as seen to be, habitable. Hong Kong's foundation occurred at a point at which the conceptualization of climate and Britain's imperial projects were closely intertwined. In the 1840s European ideas about 'colonial' climates were in flux. Discourses rooted in Aristotelian geography and medicine, which had long informed approaches to settlement and subjugation, were being supplanted by the concept of climate as an object of empirical study. Significantly, Alexander von Humboldt's elucidation of climate as a global phenomenon, and his belief in ecological malleability had deeply penetrated British scientific networks of formal and informal empire.

Early narratives and images of the city of Victoria, on Hong Kong Island, describe a miraculous arc of development from a 'barren rock' to a quasi-Palladian 'white city.' In reality, this process was interrupted and re-directed by major outbreaks of disease, piracy and catastrophic typhoons, all of which were linked to the idea of climate in the contemporary imaginaire. Hong Kong Island's topography, which included little flat land and drastic changes in elevation drove intense competition for salutary sites. Civic, commercial and military interests scrambled for climatic advantage, proposing and deploying a range of interventions drawn from a latitudinal section of imperial possessions, including building types from the Straits Settlements, India and the West Indies. Multiple mapping campaigns were initiated, determining the relief and exposure of the territory in minute detail. The shoreline of the new settlement would be repeatedly altered through land reclamation. Public and private initiatives were proposed with the specific intention of ameliorating unhealthy atmospheres and reducing ambient temperature through afforestation, and the introduction of plants with physiological benefits and economic potential.

Using maps, charts and views produced in the 1840s and 50s, including topographic drawings by George Chinnery (1774–1852), and the contemporaneous series of lithographs published by the architect and buildings inspector, Murdoch Bruce (1815–c. 1850), which thematize the technological and discursive mastery of climate and terrain, I will examine the ways that these images portray the the settlement as a nascent ideal colony, and a viable site for Imperial enterprise.

Alicia Weisberg-Roberts' research focuses on intersections of art, science, and sociability in visual and material culture. She has worked at the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Yale Center for British Art and the Walters Art Museum. From 2011 to 2019, she taught at the University of Hong Kong. She was coeditor and cocurator of *Mrs. Delany and Her Circle* (2009), and also contributed essays to *Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill* (2009), *Knowing Nature: Art and Science in Philadelphia, 1740 to 1840* (2011), and *Ways of Making and Knowing: The Material Culture of Empirical Knowledge* (2014).

**Jonathan Hill (Professor of Architecture and Visual Theory, the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL), 'The Landscape of Climate: John Evelyn and Brenda Colvin'**

The climate and weather have stimulated the architectural, artistic and literary imaginations for centuries. John Evelyn's *Fumifugium: or The Inconveniencie of the Aer and Smoak of London Dissipated*, 1661, was the first book to consider the city's atmosphere as a whole and propose mitigation and adaptation as responses to anthropogenic climate change, three centuries before these principles were widely accepted. Emphasising the allegorical, poetic and practical significance of his treatise, Evelyn proposes that the edges of London are to be forested with trees and planted with fragrant shrubs so that wood could replace coal as the principal fuel and the whole city would be sweetly perfumed.

Elected President of the Institute of Landscape Architects in 1951 – the first woman to head a UK design or environmental profession – Brenda Colvin appreciated Evelyn's advocacy of forestry science and sustainable development in *Sylva, or A Discourse of Forest-Trees*, 1664, asserting that planting regimes were a responsibility inherited by the post-war Welfare State. Appointed landscape architect of the University of East Anglia in 1965 at the suggestion of the architect, Colvin and Denys Lasdun integrated landscape and architecture, appreciating the late eighteenth-century picturesque setting, maintaining the rich variety of natural habitats, and advocating a self-conserving system as far as possible.

Despite the long history of environmentalism, and the ecological movement in the 1960s, anthropogenic climate change was not widely acknowledged by scientists until the mid-1970s, leading architects to sometimes forget the past and instead employ a debased technocratic empiricism devoid of the poetic and practical implications of Evelyn's research. The dangers of global warming are real and need to be addressed when and where possible. But climate change is not only a scientific concern and may encourage cultural, social and environmental innovations and benefits, including greater appreciation of the Earth and criticism of the isolationist policies of corporations and nations.

Among the influential Hartwell climate researchers, including Mike Hulme, Gwyn Prins and Steve Rayner, Lancelot 'Capability' Brown is a frequent reference. The gardener and landscape designer are rewarding models for contemporary approaches to climate change, biodiversity and architecture because they work with nature not against it. Equally, we need to remember that people are natural as well as cultural beings. The term 'Anthropocene' is unhelpful because it is anthropocentric. The collaboration of multiple authors – human, non-human and atmospheric – is an appropriate model for architecture and landscape in an era of increasing climate change.

Jonathan Hill is Professor of Architecture and Visual Theory at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, where he directs the MPhil/PhD Architectural Design programme. Jonathan is the author of *The Illegal Architect* (1998), *Actions of Architecture* (2003), *Immaterial Architecture* (2006), *Weather Architecture* (2012), *A Landscape of Architecture, History and Fiction* (2016) and *The Architecture of Ruins: Designs on the Past, Present and Future* (2019); editor of *Occupying Architecture* (1998), *Architecture – the Subject is Matter* (2001) and *Designs on History: The Architect as Physical Historian* (2021); and co-editor of *Critical Architecture* (2007).

**22 October: Keynote Paper – Andrew Patrizio** (Professor of Scottish Visual Culture, History of Art, at the University of Edinburgh), 'Apocalyptic Conjunctions: The Weather of Art History', Zoom Webinar, 16.00-17.30

This wide-ranging paper will consider Herbert Read's anarchistic views of the 1940s as a pivotal moment, that drew on radically organic and romantic political models of the past but pointed towards the multiple kinds of approaches available to art historians today, as they work alongside others in an expanded environmental humanities movement. The paper will attempt to offer useful methodological approaches captured within an historical context, where the apocalyptic presence of World War Two, the subsequent nuclear threat, and today's climate collapse give ecological possibilities in art history new urgency.

Andrew Patrizio holds the Chair of Scottish Visual Culture at the University of Edinburgh. He teaches and writes in main two areas: firstly, on Scottish post-1945 art – writing texts for artists and exhibitions since the late 1980s; and secondly, on ecological artists, themes and methods, represented most fully in his book *The Ecological Eye: Assembling an Ecocritical Art History* (Manchester University Press, 2019). Other writing and curatorial projects include: *Art Unlimited: Multiples of the 1960s and 1990s from the Arts Council Collection* (1994); *Contemporary Scottish Sculpture* (1999); *Giuseppe Penone* (1999/2000); *Stefan Gec* (2002); *Anatomy Acts* (2006 and winner of the Medical Book of the Year from the Royal Society of Medicine); *Ilana Halperin: STEINE* (Berlin, 2012, co-curated with Sara Barnes); *The Scottish Endarkenment: Art and Unreason 1945 to the Present* (co-curated with Bill Hare); he has recently published two book chapters on Scottish artists Christine Borland and Ilana Halperin. Prior to his academic career, he had curatorial posts at the Hayward Gallery, London and Glasgow museums. He is currently on the Little Sparta Trust (Ian Hamilton Finlay's garden), Editorial Board of

Interdisciplinary Science Reviews and is a founding member of the European Forum for Advanced Practices.

3 November: Observations, Meteorology – Zoom Webinar, 12.00–14.00

**Mark Cheetham (Professor of Art History University of Toronto), 'Storm Clouds, Plague Clouds & Laundry Lines of the Nineteenth Century: Domestic Meteorology Aboard Arctic Voyages from Britain'**

Polar exploration was an obsession in nineteenth-century Britain. The Arctic's unique physical environment and 'savage' nature were seen as an unfettered testing ground for explorers, technologies, and infrastructures that combined science and visual culture. National and personal glory was articulated through lavish illustrated publications of dramatic voyages, sublime landscape paintings and heroic portraits, accomplished botanical, zoological, ethnographic, and meteorological prints, state of the art panoramic spectacles, the shameful display of Indigenous peoples and animals, and ingenious scientific instruments for navigation and meteorological prognostication.

In addition to the high drama of finding the Northwest passage or the North Pole, recording spectacular natural phenomena such as the Aurora Borealis and Parahelia, or rescuing the tragically lost company of John Franklin's 1845 voyage, Arctic voyages had a quotidian aspect. Royal Navy expeditions were tasked with important yet 'domestic' scientific goals. These included the careful measurement of pressure and temperature, for example, and laborious record-keeping, both with new instruments and the human eye. It is to the strength of this anthropic technology that John Ruskin appealed in 'The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century' (1884). He proclaimed 'the uselessness of observation by instruments, or machines, instead of eyes' in perceiving what he called both the 'storm' and 'plague' cloud of his time, a change in the atmosphere attributable to industrial pollution.

Ruskin's focus was the English landscape, but his allusion to the imbrications of technology, science, and human sight is relevant to one of the prime laboratories of these 'media' in the nineteenth century, the Arctic. Like the weather and in meteorology, most natural phenomena recorded on these voyages were ordinary, as they must be to establish norms. Their gathering and dissemination in visual and textual form were largely routine, domestic. A prime case study is the assembling of northerly temperatures and their phenomenal effects, including 'fog bows' and mirages. This visual record also traces a health problem encountered in the cryosphere: prolific condensation resulting from the extreme differences in temperature below and above deck, which in turn caused suffering and disease. While we do not see attempted ameliorations (central heating, drying rooms), this problem is visible in a most un-heroic way in the frequent picturing of ships' riggings festooned with laundry. The visual culture

of domestic hygiene helps us to fathom cycles of science and personal care, home and away, voyaging and commentary as they were mutually constituted in Victorian Britain.

Mark A. Cheetham is the author of books, volumes, and articles on topics including Immanuel Kant and art history, abstract art, postmodernism, and the environmental humanities. His book *Artwriting, Nation, and Cosmopolitanism in Britain: The 'Englishness' of English Art Theory since the 18th Century* appeared in 2012. *Landscape into Eco Art: Articulations of Nature since the '60s* was published in 2018. He is a Professor of Art History at the University of Toronto.

**Benjamin Pollitt (Caird Research Fellow at the National Maritime Museum, London, and Associate Lecturer in the History of Art at the Courtauld Institute of Art), 'Between Westall's Chaos and Humboldt's Cosmos: Picturing the Weather in 1848'**

William Westall was twenty-one when it happened. On his way back to England, on August 17 1803, a storm cast his ship onto a reef in the Coral Sea. For two years he had worked as the expedition artist on Matthew Flinders' coastal survey of Australia. Now the seawater filled his cabin, ruining 'all his finished sketches.' The loss was devastating, as were the days that followed, stranded for two months on a tiny, barren island waiting to be rescued. Later, in London, reports came back that 'His Head had been affected.' The trauma stayed with him throughout his life. One of the last works he produced was a study for a painting of the wreck, a composition very similar to his final great canvas, *The Commencement of the Deluge* (1848).

As Westall mourned the loss of his sketches, across the Pacific, in South America, Alexander von Humboldt was engaged in his own data-gathering project. From the vast material he brought back to Europe, Humboldt presented a new ecological worldview, which reached its widest audience with the publication of his multi-volume *Cosmos: A Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe* (1846–62). In the second volume, published in 1848, Humboldt explored the history of landscape painting, arguing that this had progressed alongside scientific expeditions like his own, providing a 'satisfying substitute [ersatz]' that imaginatively transported the viewer out of Europe and into the tropics, the most naturally diverse region of the world, thus expanding their affective horizons.

In its errant spaces of biography, Westall's *Deluge* is a world away from Humboldt's *Naturgemälde* (nature picture). But, perhaps, the difference is not so great. To what extent, this paper asks, does the *Deluge* and the wreck that it evokes, draw into focus the antagonistic relationship between sign-systems, like Humboldt's, and the natural forces whose secrets they seek to penetrate. The painting's allusion to Paradise, too, raises questions as to what sin has caused this fall/flood/wreck. Is it, perhaps, from the

practices of the *ersatz* that chaos springs, either in the transferences enabled by it – the carrying over of pre-existing ideas, impressions, traumas, like the physical transportation of plants, animals, and people to places such as Australia – or the opposite, the state of lockdown in which – imagined as an *imperium*, a centre of panoramic vision, where, according to Humboldt, ‘we remain equally near to all’ – the ‘satisfying substitute’ forces us to stay?

Dr Benjamin Pollitt recently completed his PhD at UCL. His thesis ‘Sympathy Unbound: Attachment and Dissonance in John Webber’s Atlas’ explored visual cultures and material exchange in relation to James Cook’s third voyage. His research was funded by a Critical Histories of Art Studentship from UCL, as well as support made available through the Andrew Wyld Fund and the Paul Mellon Centre. He is currently a Caird Research Fellow at the National Maritime Museum, London, conducting research under the title ‘Colour as Weather: Art and Meteorology 1750–1900.’ He also works as an Associate Lecturer at the Courtauld Institute.

### **Sarah Gould (Lecturer at Panthéon Sorbonne University), ‘Matters of Excess in J.M.W. Turner’s Paintings’**

In 2019, photographs by Emma Stibbon showing Joseph Mallord William Turner’s glaciers now ravaged by climate change gave a new prescience to his landscapes. These images revealed how paradigms of ecological thinking productively complicate our understanding of Turner’s work as his pictures can be read as celebrations of the British natural environment, captured in paint as it was beginning to be altered irrevocably by the effects of the Industrial Revolution.

Following these new perspectives on Turner’s work, I aim to look at how his engagement with materiality testifies to the ever-changing experiences of early industrialisation and globalisation. Turner’s obtrusive handling of paint was considered excessive by many of his contemporaries; his use of impasto was sometimes thought to thwart representation itself. The disruptive dimension of his technique has in turn become one of the main entry points for critical evaluations of his work and, for art historians, a crucial marker of his modernity. Shared by many art historical studies concentrating on this question, is the idea that Turner’s treatment of matter is regarded as avant-garde because it testifies to a consciousness of form. Contrary to this view, this paper aims to show that an alternative conceptualisation of texture as excess might contribute to reprocessing Turner’s attention to materials and natural forces. Indeed, it will be my contention that through the expressivity of the painterly medium Turner introduces a new relation to observed natural matter, both setting him apart from his contemporaries, and enabling him to illustrate what was outside of traditional representations. As Nicolas Bourriaud explains in his 2017 book *L’exforme* the inclusion

in an artwork of what is omitted, banished, not useful, is what has informed the dynamics of art ever since the Industrial Revolution. Thanks to Bourriaud's concept of 'exform,' I will show how Turner's paintings were attempts to depict nature's residues, then being pushed aside from society.

By adopting the methodology of material studies, or rather of what Jennifer Roberts calls its 'horizons,' my paper will consider how present-day paradigms of ecological thinking can invite us to reexamine excessive nature not only metaphorically, that is, in light of modernist discourses which hypostatized materiality – but concretely and postanthropocentrically.

Sarah Gould is a Lecturer at Paris 1-Panthéon Sorbonne University. Her dissertation entitled 'Making Texture Matter: The Materiality of British paintings, 1788–1914' was completed under the supervision of Prof. Frédéric Ogée. She has written two articles on J.M.W. Turner ('Le jaune chez Turner : Une étude matérielle', XVII–XVIII, 75 | 2018, and 'Penser le geste et sa mythologie chez J.M.W. Turner,' to be published in the autumn). She is currently under contract with the French publishing house Cohen and Cohen to write a monograph on John Everett Millais. This year she is co-organizing a series of conferences entitled Humanities after Humans, Deconstructing Anthropocentrism: Humanities after Humans.

### **Nicholas Robbins (Lecturer, History of Art at UCL), 'John Constable, Luke Howard, and the Aesthetics of Climate'**

In the early nineteenth century, the painter John Constable and meteorologist Luke Howard both experimented with new aesthetic forms whose aim was to represent England's 'temperate' climate. Unlike the fleeting, evanescent effects of weather, climate (especially in the emerging discipline of meteorology) increasingly denoted long-term, prevailing conditions – average, rather than aberrant forms. Through sketches, tables, graphs, sketches, and landscape paintings, they grappled with climate's extended temporal and spatial scale, one that exceeded the domain of individuated, momentary 'feeling' associated with landscape representation and scientific observation alike. Attempting to represent this average, or 'normal,' climate, Constable and Howard contributed to the emergence of new modes of disciplinary environmental perception across mediums and discursive fields. These efforts to construct England's 'normal' climate took shape against the polluted atmosphere of industrial and imperial London, and in tandem with the modern state's disciplinary visibility. This paper explores this new disciplinary visibility while attempting to locate, at points, how both artist and scientist attempted to oppose or evade the forms of estrangement such visibility entailed. As such this emerging aesthetics of climate

illuminates the representational opportunities and limitations posed by an environment increasingly experienced through data, numbers, and abstraction.

Nicholas Robbins is a specialist in the history of nineteenth-century art and visual culture in Europe and North America, with an emphasis on Britain and its former empire. His research centres upon the intersections of art, ecology, and scientific thought, particularly within histories of landscape, photography, and scientific visual culture. His current book project examines the aesthetic, scientific, and cultural history of climate in the nineteenth-century Atlantic world. In September 2020 he will join the Department of Art History at UCL as Lecturer in British Art.

**5 November: Keynote paper – Anna Arabindan-Kesson (Assistant Professor of Black Diaspora Art with a joint appointment in the Departments of African American Studies and Art and Archaeology at Princeton University), ‘Observation and Diagnosis: Pathologizing Bodies, Medicalizing Space in the British Empire’**

Over the last three decades art historians have increasingly turned their attention to how Empire plays an important force in the production and circulation of British Art. In particular these studies have reminded us how both art making and colonialism share a concern with the epistemology of vision. From the birds-eye to the microscopic, the creation of viewing positions has been crucial to the construction of meaning about peoples and places across the former British empire. My talk returns to this question of ‘how things come into view’ through the lens of medicine and its forms of observation. I focus on the production imagery that transformed non-white lives and spaces into, as Rana Hogarth has shown, ‘medical matter.’ Drawing on the work of Black and Indigenous writers like Sylvia Wynter and Eve Tuck, I want to reflect on the ways these forms of image-making continue to haunt our vision and what it means for us to see (through) Empire. Alongside these histories, I will examine how Black and Indigenous forms of medicine, healing and land-use redraw our perspectives, and our vision, of the past and its futures. Taking the decolonizing critiques and ethical frameworks of these artists, writers and scholars seriously, I wonder if British art history – indeed the field of art history – can dismantle in order to rebuild new ways of seeing and being in the world?

Anna Arabindan-Kesson is an Assistant Professor of Black Diaspora art with a joint appointment in the Departments of African American Studies and Art and Archaeology at Princeton University. Born in Sri Lanka she completed undergraduate degrees in New Zealand and Australia, and was a nurse before becoming an art historian. She completed her PhD in African American Studies and Art History at Yale University. Anna writes and teaches about African American, Caribbean, and British Art, with an emphasis on histories of race, empire, and transatlantic visual culture in the long

nineteenth century. Her first book is called *Black Bodies, White Gold: Art, Cotton and Commerce in the Atlantic World* and will be published by Duke University Press in spring 2021.

17 November: Decolonial Agencies – Zoom Webinar, 12.00–14.00

**Holly Shaffer (Assistant Professor, History of Art and Architecture at Brown University), ‘Birds and Books in Flight across India and Britain’**

This paper aligns bird migrations with their traffic as commodities, sport, natural history, and art in the British empire. It focuses on a series of painted albums produced in, and on the journey between, western India and Britain. From 1765 to 1784, the British East India Company official James Forbes drew the birds that he saw, shot, and purchased in a series of albums, which included his own drawings and letters, arts that he collected, and poems that he copied in English, Persian, and Sanskrit. His collection spanned his travels and places of residence. It included species native to western India, which he observed, hunted, and read about in epics as well as birds that he witnessed on his journey out, such as those sold in pierced ostrich eggs in South Africa and observed in rice fields in Brazil. He also documented birds that traveled to and from the subcontinent in paintings and specimens, such as those hamstrung and limned in China, or birds captured and de-clawed in Indonesia.

Forbes’ albums thus offer a window into how birds – alive, dead, or painted – were part of the long-distance transmission of goods and information across Asia and Europe. They further document the local trade in natural history and economy in western India, alongside the collection and rendering of birds in pictures. However, they also point to the materiality of documentation and its own metamorphoses. Forbes transformed his personal thirteen-volume log into one far more colonially minded for publication. In this paper, I therefore stress how Forbes’ albums – rather than the volumes that he published in 1813 and 1834 – elucidate the entanglement of British art and natural and man-made forces in the flight patterns of birds, and of their representations, before they were edited. In the process, and in consideration of the state of the field, I question the extent and limit of global trade networks, colonial governance, and the role of the spatial, and avian, imagination in our understanding of eighteenth-century British colonial history.

Holly Shaffer is Assistant Professor of the History of Art & Architecture at Brown University with a focus on South Asian and British art and empire specifically in western India. Her articles have been published in the *Art Bulletin*, *Journal 18*, *Third Text*, and forthcoming in *Art History*; and she has been supported by fellowships from the Getty/ACLS, the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, the American Institute of Indian Studies, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Yale Center for British Art.

**Bergit Arends (Curator and Researcher, British Academy Fellow at the University of Bristol), 'Empire and Ecology: Activations by Contemporary Artists of Collections at the Natural History Museum in London'**

Nowhere else is the encounter between Western science and the cultures of non-European peoples so evident than in the collections of European museums. These encounters are reflected in the collecting practices, the archiving and documenting, the conservation of objects and in the ordering systems through which these artefacts are interpreted. But in Western museums we need to learn how to recognise and how to acknowledge these encounters. Moreover, we should feel inspired to not simply address national, but European histories in a global context.

Museum collections are sources of both cultural and environmental knowledge (Thomas, 2018), particularly natural sciences collections. Moreover, taxonomic systems of the past, particularly in the natural sciences, are now considered to be one of the most important resources for understanding the interconnections of science and culture (Browne, 1989). With a surge in addressing environmental issues and the need to decolonise museums, contemporary artists are mobilising historic collections.

I discuss the performance of historic collections by contemporary artists at the Natural History Museum, London. The discussion addresses the concept of liveness and activations of collections in conjunction with processes of archiving and conservation. I propose two case studies, one on the project by indigenous artist Daniel Boyd (Australia) who engaged with object provenance, bureaucracy, access and visibility of objects and legacies of colonial impositions from the late eighteenth century onwards. Boyd's research was made public in a gallery installation.

The second example is on London-based photographer Chrystel Lebas, who worked collaboratively with museum botanists on an orphaned collection. The collection, so it turned out, provides an example of early ecological plant studies using photography in the first part of the twentieth century. Research revealed that the collection was created by ecologist Sir Edward James Salisbury, later director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, London. Ecological photography challenges the institution through its photographic medium and by not conforming to the dominant systematics of the museum.

These projects emphasise that artists, together with scientists and museum staff, can create fora for public, critical exchanges. These can address injustices embedded in the practices of science, to find new forms of critique and to co-create new knowledge.

Bergit Arends curates and researches interdisciplinary processes, with current focus on environment and visual art. She publishes widely, recently on plants in *The Botanical City* (2020), *Botanical Drift* (2018), *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* (2018), and on decolonising natural history museums (*Art in Science Museums* 2020). Her thesis 'Contemporary Art, Archives and Environmental Change in the Age of the Anthropocene' (2017) resulted in the award-winning publication *Chrystel Lebas: Field Studies* (2018). She curated contemporary art projects for the natural history museums in London and Berlin (*Art/Nature*, Braus 2019). Bergit is British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of History of Art, University of Bristol.

**Eleanore Neumann (Doctoral Candidate in the McIntire Department of Art at the University of Virginia), 'Maria Graham on the Natural History of Brazil and Chile, 1821–1824'**

On November 19, 1822, a massive earthquake struck Chile. This natural disaster set in motion a series of events that would have widespread ramifications not only for the artist and author Maria Graham (1785–1842) but for the larger ecosystems in which she was enmeshed. The young nation of Chile erupted into civil war following the quake as tensions surrounding a lengthy fight for independence surfaced. After nine months of living in the country, Graham was forced to return to Brazil, where she was welcomed at court by Maria Leopoldina, Empress consort of the newly-independent nation. While documenting her experience of these and other momentous events for two travelogues illustrated with landscapes after her sketches, Graham became increasingly involved in the practice of natural history. She was thus well positioned to represent, in both image and text, the natural and human forces shaping the world.

The article that Graham subsequently published about the earthquake – the first authored by a woman in the *Transactions of the Geological Society* – shifted the impassioned debate raging in scientific circles about the origins of the earth. Despite being a landscapist, however, Graham refrained from picturing the quake's devastating effects. In her remarkably extensive archive, there are no extant drawings nor illustrations of the aftermath. The invisibility of this cataclysmic event in Chile is countered by hundreds of annotated botanical drawings from Brazil that Graham sketched in her garden and on expeditions sponsored by the empress. She then collaborated with leading male botanists to publish the results of this fieldwork in *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* and the landmark compendium *Flora brasiliensis*. This paper will examine Graham's engagement with the publication of botany and the emergent discipline of geology following her travels in Latin America (1821–1824). I argue that she determined what (or what not) to publish based on how closely the interests of botany and geology aligned with socially acceptable pursuits for the polite British woman. While the stakes were high for women who participated in any

masculine discursive sphere, Graham more boldly asserted her place within global scientific discourses than in the London art world. By strategically navigating the gendered terms of artistic, literary, and scientific practice, she established herself as a credible eyewitness, which was indispensable to her professional success on the London book market.

Eleanore Neumann is a doctoral candidate in the McIntire Department of Art at the University of Virginia where she is writing the dissertation "'The Global Landscapes of Maria Graham (1785–1842).'" She studies the intersection of landscape, gender, and empire in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British art and visual culture. Neumann received a BA in art history and Hispanic studies from Vassar College and an MA in art history from the Courtauld Institute of Art. She is the recipient of a Huntington Library Travel Grant, the Praxis Fellowship in Digital Humanities, and a Junior Fellowship from the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art.

**Giulia Smith (Leverhulme Early Career Fellow 'Landscape, Identity and Belonging in Post-Imperial Britain', at the Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford), 'Decolonising the Amazon: Aubrey Williams and Wilson Harris Find El Dorado'**

Natural forces play a pivotal role in the decolonisation of the Caribbean territories of the British Empire. The lack of conventional documentation detailing the lives of the vast majority of Caribbean people, and especially of slaves and indentured labourers, meant that nature came to be seen as holding the key to a collective consciousness buried deep underground. While island dwellers ranging from Derek Walcott to Kamau Brathwaite turned overwhelmingly to the abyss for a poetics of recovery and reconnection across the Caribbean Archipelago, literary authors and visual artists born in British Guiana (the country became independent Guyana in 1966) looked to the Amazon for vital traces of a subaltern history that could never be found in the colonial archive. I propose to explore the latter tradition, concentrating in particular on the work of the painter Aubrey Williams and the novelist and peripatetic intellectual Wilson Harris, whilst also drawing connections with other Guyanese figures active in the mid-to-late twentieth century period, including the artist and archaeologist Denis Williams and the poet Martin Carpenter.

Having trained respectively as an agricultural field officer and a hydrographic surveyor, Aubrey Williams and Wilson Harris were uncommonly familiar with Guyanese interior, a sparsely inhabited territory whose primary inhabitants (locally known as Amerindians) descend from the indigenous communities that survived the onslaught of European colonialism. Crucially, both authors drew heavily on Amerindian cosmologies. My paper will explore these connections and detail how the non-anthropocentric cultures of the Amazon basin came to be seen as offering viable alternatives to European ways of

looking at and landscaping nature. To make this argument, I will focus specifically on a set of paintings created by Williams in London at the end of the 1950s and titled *El Dorado*, alongside Harris's novel *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), which similarly retraces and reinvents Sir Walter Raleigh's account of his quest for El Dorado, a gilt civilisation believed to hide in the depths of the Amazon rainforest. Highlighting the ecological connotations of these works, I will show how the Guyanese interior was reclaimed as a site of counter-memory and a locus of anti-colonial resistance grounded in notions of sustainability and more-than-human agency.

Giulia Smith is a Leverhulme Early Career Research Fellow at the University of Oxford, where she is researching 'Landscape, Identity and Belonging in Post-imperial Britain'. Previously, Giulia was a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Paul Mellon Centre for British Art and the Getty Research Institute. In 2016, she received her PhD from University College London, with a thesis on the intersection of ecology and aesthetics in British Art. Recently, Giulia has contributed an essay on 'Ecology and the Art of the Anglophone Caribbean' to *Oceans Apart*, an exhibition catalogue forthcoming with Tate Publishing in 2021. Previously, Giulia published in *British Art Studies*, *Sculpture Journal* and *Oxford Art Journal*.

**19 November: Keynote Paper – T. J. Demos (Professor, and Patricia and Rowland Rebele Endowed Chair in Art History, at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and founding Director of its Center for Creative Ecologies), 'Racial Capitalocene: Ecology and Abolition'**

This presentation begins with consideration of *Infinity Minus Infinity*, the 2019 speculative film by the Otolith Group, as a portal into a discussion and critical complication of the conference's conceptual framework, one that expands to vital questions of socio-environmental methodologies emerging in ecocritical art, visual culture, and politico-ecological analysis today. Within the latter, the status of 'nature' is thoroughly conflicted it's been questioned and even opposed by those who see it as a discursive vehicle for ideological forces (as a mode of naturalization, whether of gender or race, capitalism or nationality); and displaced and hybridized by others who view its discreet identity and presumed separateness from culture no longer ontologically viable in an Anthropocene geological era of entanglements wherein the natural and cultural materially intersect in historico-geographically differentiated ways. In considering the sixteenth century's Anthropocene emergence as inextricable from colonial capitalism and Indigenous genocide, and linking that deep history to more recent dramas of Britain's 'hostile environment' of xenophobic migration policy in the afterlife of slavery, *Infinity Minus Infinity* goes further still. Disrupting nature and nationality alike, even while uncovering how each has been reproduced in the other to violent effect, it names the racial Capitalocene as a more compelling political geology, one that demands an abolitionist critical framework of response – the precise contours of which await definition – where social, environmental, and racial justice coincide. Against countervailing tendencies that seek to conjoin nature and nationality in defense against present socio-environmental crises (thereby risking an ecofascism that is spreading widely in current ethnonationalist formations), and against liberal varieties of

activism that seek to depoliticize environmentalism, that response cannot be neutral, and the presentation will close by articulating the radical stakes of current socio-environmental artistic horizons.

T. J. Demos is an award-winning writer on contemporary art, global politics, and ecology. He is the Patricia and Rowland Rebele Endowed Chair in Art History in the Department of the History of Art and Visual Culture, at University of California, Santa Cruz, and founding Director of its Center for Creative Ecologies. Demos is the author of numerous books, including *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today* (Sternberg Press, 2017); *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology* (Sternberg Press, 2016); *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis* (Duke University Press, 2013) – winner of the College Art Association’s 2014 Frank Jewett Mather Award – and *Return to the Postcolony: Spectres of Colonialism in Contemporary Art* (Sternberg Press, 2013). Demos co-curated *Rights of Nature: Art and Ecology in the Americas*, at Nottingham Contemporary in January 2015, and organized *Specters: A Ciné-Politics of Haunting*, at the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid in 2014. During 2019–21, with the Center for Creative Ecologies, and as a Getty research institute scholar, he’s working on a Mellon-funded research project, art exhibition, and book project dedicated to the questions: what comes after the end of the world, and how can we cultivate futures of social justice within capitalist ruins? His new publication, *Beyond the World’s End: Arts of Living at the Crossing* was recently released by Duke University Press.

24 November: Curating the Sea: Panel Discussion and *Journal of Curatorial Studies* Special Issue Launch – Zoom Webinar, 12.00–13.30

**Pandora Syperrek** (Research Associate at Loughborough University London) and **Sarah Wade** (Lecturer in Museum Studies at the University of East Anglia), ‘Curating the Sea: Oceanic Exhibition Making at a Time of Ecological Crisis’

**Stefanie Hessler** (Director, Kunsthall Trondheim), ‘Tidalectic Curating’

**Miranda Lowe** (Principal Curator at the Natural History Museum)

The past decade has witnessed a proliferation of ocean-themed exhibitions. These have responded to both the swift and devastating effects of the climate crisis and other anthropogenic impact on the oceans, as well as the corresponding shift of ecological attention from charismatic land mammals to aquatic life, including its less readily anthropomorphised forms (e.g. coral). Such exhibitions have interrogated the relationships between humans, nonhumans and the sea, as was the case in the Golden Lion-winning Lithuanian Pavilion’s artificial beach and accompanying climate change-themed opera at the 2019 Venice Biennale, but also in curatorial projects that examine the imbalanced effects of the so-called Anthropocene, which has been disproportionately caused by wealthy nations and suffered by developing countries and the Global South. The aesthetic, ecological and ethical implications of this field demand

interdisciplinary approaches engaging with the arts, the physical and the social sciences and corresponding philosophical and political considerations.

Increasingly, exhibitions have developed from being oceanic in theme to exploring oceanic curatorial methods. In the British context alone, exhibitions such as *Aquatopia* at Tate St Ives and Nottingham Contemporary (2013–2014), *Coral: Something Rich and Strange* at Manchester Museum (2013–2014), *Offshore: Artists Explore the Sea* at Ferens Art Gallery and Hull Maritime Museum (2017), *Turner and the Whale* at Hull Maritime Museum (2017), and *Here Be Whales* at Porch Gallery, Left Bank Leeds and Hull Maritime Museum (2019), have variously mobilised transhistorical as well as transdisciplinary approaches to curating, non-linear narratives, a focus on the processual rather than the fixed and the finite, and a heightened sense of affect.

On the occasion of the publication of a special issue of the *Journal of Curatorial Studies* on 'Curating the Sea', this panel will offer perspectives on recent examples of and future directions for the exhibitionary oceanic. Panellists will discuss the curatorial turn to the sea from their unique disciplinary perspectives. They include: Stefanie Hessler, Director of Kunsthall Trondheim, Norway, and curator of *tidalectics* at TBA21–Augarten, Vienna, Le Fresnoy, Tourcoing, and Museum of Modern Art, Dubrovnik (2017–2018); Miranda Lowe, Principal Curator of Crustaceans, Natural History Museum, London, and founding member of the BAME museum and heritage workers' network Museum Detox; and the editors of *Curating the Sea*, Pandora Syperek and Sarah Wade. The panel will comprise three 20-minute talks followed by a discussion. This event may take place as either an online or in-person panel.

**Stefanie Hessler** is a curator, writer and editor focusing on interdisciplinary and long-term collaborations with artists and researchers. She has curated exhibitions by artists such as Joan Jonas, Armin Linke, Tomás Saraceno, Jenna Sutela and Christine Sun Kim, and worked with institutions such as the São Paulo Biennale, Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin, TBA21–Academy in London, Museum of Modern Art in Recife, FLORA in Bogotá and the Athens Biennale. She is the author of the book *Prospecting Ocean* (2019, MIT Press), editor of *Tidalectics: Imagining an Oceanic Worldview Through Art and Science* (2018, MIT Press) and director of Kunsthall Trondheim in Norway.

**Miranda Lowe** is a Principal Curator at the Natural History Museum, London with three decades-worth of collections management and curatorial experience caring for a plethora of historically important marine invertebrate specimens from both the *HMS Challenger* and *RRS Discovery* oceanic expeditions. She is passionate about the role museum exhibitions play in our understanding of the natural world and her research interests lie in ecology, zoology and marine biology.

**Pandora Syperek** is Research Associate at Loughborough University London. She is currently preparing a monograph on the gendering of jewel-like objects in the Natural History Museum, London, and has published articles on gender in John Ruskin's mineralogical curation, trans-animality in Victorian insect displays and queering the Blaschka glass models in the Coral Gallery. From 2016–2017 she was postdoctoral fellow at the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art. She has taught modern and contemporary art and display practices at Sotheby's Institute of Art, University College London and York University.

**Sarah Wade** is incoming Lecturer in Museum Studies at University of East Anglia. Her research examines human-animal relations and representations of wildlife in contemporary art and exhibitions, particularly with regards to ecological concerns. She has published on extinction and ecology in contemporary art and curatorial practice. Wade was a co-curator of *Strange Creatures: The Art of Unknown Animals* at the Grant Museum of Zoology (2015) and has also worked with various arts and heritage organizations.

1 December: Unstable Boundaries, Ecologies, Zoom Webinar, 12.00–14.30

**Siobhan Angus (Banting Postdoctoral Fellow, History of Art at Yale University), “‘Ferments of a disquieting instability’”: Iron, Industrialization, and Anna Atkins’ Cyanotypes’**

My presentation considers the entanglements between the geological, biological, and human registers in photography. As a case study, I explore Anna Atkins' *British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions* (1843), a photo book of algae specimens collected from around the British Isles. Atkins produced her photo books using Sir John Herschel's cyanotype formula, a type of photography that uses iron as a light-sensitive material to create negative and positive prints in Prussian Blue. The contact print photograms made impressions of the plants themselves, documenting a moment of encounter between the artist and the natural world. Atkins' cyanotypes capture a moment of overlap and co-production between the artist and the geological (iron) and biological (algae). I explore the ways in which the properties of matter enable and constrain visual form.

I read Atkins work through an ecological framework that highlights relationality and entanglement between the natural and the human. Eco-criticism is a diverse body of thought which emphasizes interconnectedness, conflict, and change across species and matter, a way of understanding the world that decenters the human. This approach situates artistic production within a dynamic mesh of materials, artistic and extractive labor, and histories. Narratives of mechanical reproduction typically define our understanding of photography. Materiality is the foundation of all mediums, but it is these material origins that 'much photography works hard to render invisible as if the

medium were transparent.’ Through an analysis that foregrounds materiality, I argue that photography is not simply representational, but rather, implicitly ecological.

My research explores the material and symbolic histories of iron. I situate Atkins botanical photographs within Victorian scientific investigation and illustration as well as the socio-ecological transformations of the industrial revolution. Coal is the fossil fuel that powered the industrial revolution, but the use of iron in steam engines made coal capable of producing power. Iron was critical component of the emergent industrial economy. To conclude, I consider contemporary photographers who are using the cyanotype formula to produce photographs that document the socio-ecological challenges of the Anthropocene.

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**Laura Franchetti (PhD Candidate, History of Art, Nineteenth-Century British Art, at the Courtauld Institute of Art), ‘The Undulating Self: Acoustical Physics, Embodied Sensations and Frederic Leighton’s Weaving the Wreath (c.1872)’**

This paper explores the impact that acoustical physics had on Leighton’s representation of the sensing body in *Weaving the Wreath* (c.1872). In the nineteenth century, new discoveries in acoustical physics emphasized sound’s capacity to incite physiological sensations. Physicists determined that the molecular vibrations of sound waves were transferred to the brain via the auditory nerve, producing the sensation of sound. As sensations generate thought and feeling, the vibratory responsiveness of the human body led to the belief that auditory phenomena shapes the character of our mental life. Through the reception of sound, the external world was brought into the body of the experiencing subject, which appeared both permeable and penetrable.

This paper takes as its starting point Leighton’s currently unrecognised, yet highly significant, friendship with the physicist John Tyndall (1820–1894). Using ideas from Tyndall’s work *Sound* (1867), it considers the ways in which psychophysiological acoustics fundamentally transformed Victorian notions of ‘self’ and subjectivity. In written work by Leighton, Tyndall, and other physicists such as Herman von Helmholtz, this paper identifies a common conceptualisation of the human body as ‘human instrument’ and argues that the body of the figure in *Weaving the Wreath* can be read in this way. On this account, the human-body-as-instrument becomes a site of Paterian

perpetual self-creation, as notes of acoustic phenomena from the external world reverberate through the body's nerve-like strings, orifices, and tympanic surfaces, becoming harmoniously (or discordantly) woven into our subjective experience, which is reshaped with each auditory sensation. The argument is framed by a discussion of Gilles Deleuze's notion of 'becoming', which is employed to augment our understanding of the constant process of subjective transformation implicit in the physiological physics of the nineteenth century. The paper grounds its discussion of Leighton's work within broader considerations of the interplay between the aesthetic movement and science. Ultimately, it reflects upon the extent to which the primacy afforded to the senses in aestheticism was informed by the body's physiological response to natural forces encountered via the sense organs.

This work forms part of a developing field of interdisciplinary research seeking to redefine our understanding of the relationship between art and science. In challenging the ahistorical assumption of the disparity between these two disciplines, it demonstrates how identifying the ways in which artists navigated and encountered the implications of science as a force of socio-cultural change enriches our understanding of the visual arts in the nineteenth century.

Laura Franchetti is PhD student at the Courtauld Institute of Art. She specialise in interdisciplinary research that examines the intersections between late-nineteenth-century British art and science. Her thesis focuses on the work of Frederic Leighton. It argues that Leighton's mid-late works are phrased via the imagery and theoretical concepts of Victorian physics. She is a recent recipient of a Paul Mellon Centre Research Continuity Fellowship for my doctoral project, "Utterances of Physical Phenomena": Victorian Physics & the Work of Frederic Leighton'. She has an MSt. from the University of Oxford and an MA in 'Aesthetic Movement Art and Victorian Science' from the Courtauld Institute of Art.

### **Thomas Hughes (Associate Lecturer in the History of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Courtauld Institute of Art), 'Ruskin, Chiaroscuro and the Limits of the Human'**

The question of the relations between human beings and nature exercised every area of Victorian thought, including art theory. This paper considers how in redefining conventional categorisations of *disegno* and *colore* in his teachings on drawing, John Ruskin delineates a radically unstable boundary between drawing and nature, between the reflexive awareness of the human mind and the forces of the natural world.

In *The Elements of Drawing* (1857) Ruskin departs from the procedures of instruction commonly found in mid-century popular drawing manuals. From the very first exercises Ruskin marginalises line and outline, and elevates shading, texture and colour. This

manoeuvre clearly counters certain visual implications of what David Brett has called the ideology of industrialisation. With his emphasis on colour and 'the innocence of the eye', Ruskin seeks to reorient the human mind towards nature and to make drawing the place of encounter between the human and the non-human. However Ruskin leaves colour radically undefined, undefinable. Colour is pure feeling, even pure love. It is also fact, truth. And it is perilous, bewitching, potentially sinful. Colour is independent of drawing, yet indivisible from it. Beguiling theoretical disintegration like this takes us to the essence of Ruskin, but a brief and overlooked passage in *Elements* is worth singling out because it introduces another order of ambiguity which resonates with contemporary ecological thinking. In his descriptions of J.M.W. Turner, Ruskin posits 'chiaroscuro' as a third term between the binary of *disegno* and *colore*. As the realm where the line and knowledge end, chiaroscuro demarcates the limits of the human and the beginnings of mystery. Surprisingly, this is where natural and human life coincide most closely, 'Nature' becomes 'a type of the human nature'. But this is quickly transformed into something painful. For there is a lesson, Ruskin writes, 'in every serrated point and shining vein which escapes or deceives our sight among the forest leaves', about 'how little we may hope to discern clearly, or judge justly, the rents and veins of the human heart'. Turning to Timothy Morton's arguments in *Dark Ecology* (2016) that ecological awareness can be activated through weirdness and loss, queerness and beauty, and thinking this all through in relation to Ruskin's strange and magnificent watercolour *In the Pass of Killiecrankie* (1857), my paper will explore where Ruskin's unresolved conceptualisation of human beings as a part of and apart from nature might lead.

Thomas Hughes is a Postdoctoral Fellow at The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art. He's currently transforming my PhD thesis, on John Ruskin, Walter Pater and Aestheticism, into a book. He is also co-editing a series of essays on Ruskin and ecology for Courtauld Books Online, coming soon. He is writing a chapter for that on Ruskin, Gothic architecture and time. He is also interested in modern British and French art and architecture, art writing, theories of art history, queer theory, ecology and phenomenology.

**Evelyn Whorrall-Campbell** (PhD Candidate in the Centre for Film and Screen Studies at Pembroke College, University of Cambridge), 'Erotic Ecologies: Horizontality and Be(holding) in Charlotte Prodger's *BRIDGIT* (2016)'

In an interview for the *Guardian* the artist Charlotte Prodger referred to her iPhone, the device on which the entirety of her Turner Prize winning film *BRIDGIT* (2016) was shot, as 'a filthy format – smeared and grubby.' Prodger described the organic materiality of an object more typically fetishized for its smooth surfaces and 'clean lines,' presenting instead the more unsightly reality of its contaminating encounter with a grimy human

body. This paper intends to attend to this filthy slippage between iPhone and body as an opening onto the particularly queer ecology explored in Prodger's *BRIDGIT*. In mobilising the horizontality and hand-held format of the iPhone, this paper explores the ways in which *BRIDGIT* embodies a present of human and nonhuman coexistence based upon a queer axis of common creatureliness, a fragile present of coexistence which offers the only possible path through our shared ecological crisis.

This paper positions itself alongside and against the majority of queer theory's anti-sociality and a DeleuzoGuattarian framework of becoming, attending instead to questions of fragility, dependence and vulnerability. Neither succumbing to the nihilism of queer theory's anti-social cry 'no future,' nor the vitalist's faith in endlessly impending possibilities, this paper argues that Prodger makes viewers linger in the *present* alongside nonhuman creatures as the only time of action and responsibility.

This paper also positions itself against previous discussions of *BRIDGIT*, which have drawn upon metaphors of environmental vision from British landscape painting, ignoring the radical materiality of the film's horizontal shots. Prodger began making *BRIDGIT* during recovery from an elective hysterectomy, an unnamed procedure which grounds the film. Prodger's limited mobility conditions these static horizontal shots, the iPhone held close to the body as it lies in a state of rest. It is from these embodied images that *BRIDGIT* stages a queer erotic materiality of sight, where the tactility of the hand-held iPhone transforms beholding into an act of 'holding.' The camera's proximity to the creaturely enables a sticky embrace which recognises the braided nature of life on earth. Through this vision, *BRIDGIT* recognises the shared precarity and co-dependency of all life held enmeshed in each other's embrace, a recognition which comes with an awareness of one's responsibility to take immediate action to secure the possibility of a future existence.

Evelyn Whorrall-Campbell is a PhD student in the Centre for Film and Screen Studies at the University of Cambridge. She is the recipient of an Honorary Vice Chancellor's Award and an AHRC OOC DTP Studentship. Evelyn's thesis is concerned with tracing alternative (re)productive genealogies through the work of feminist and/or queer video artists from the 1980s to the present. Her writing has also appeared in various publications, including *FDBNFictions*, *Another Gaze*, and *OREAD* (forthcoming).

**Luca Beisel (PhD Candidate in Art History at the Freie Universität Berlin), "As Nature Herself Might Do, Were Her Such Intent": The Form-giving Forces of Nature and their Simulation in British Picturesque Landscape Art (ca. 1770–1820)'**

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the geometry of clouds, the corrugation of mountains or the branching of trees were understood to be dynamic processes of natural form-giving that produced an infinitely varied, yet distinct natural physiognomy.

Landscape art of the Picturesque movement (ca. 1770–1820) is full of moments in which artists seek to harness such natural forces and processes as artistic techniques in order to shed the *artificiality* of their creations.

Thomas Gainsborough studied the self-similarity of rocks and trees on miniature landscapes from broccoli and coal. William Gilpin, in his fascination for the *roughness* of natural structures, built a dictionary of picturesque objects as well as the ‘little rules’ to recombine them. Philip James de Loutherbourg used rotating strips of backlit fabric in his spectacular *Eidophusikon* in order to simulate cloud shadows, that were deemed to be ‘varied beyond calculation’.<sup>2</sup> Alexander Cozens finally developed such elaborate procedures for the creation of trees, faces or landscapes views that William Thomas Beckford described him as being ‘full of systems as the universe’.

In my talk, I want to approach the art of the Picturesque via its computational aspects. Contemporary notions, such as algorithmic design or procedural generation, enable productive new approaches to the historic artistic and technological experiments and allow to us readdress the certain historical ‘difficulty of delineating a hybrid that seems to embody both nature and art, model and copy, reality and representation’, which characterises the aesthetic ideal.

The landscape creations of that period, I want to argue, were authenticated as *natural* not by similarity to existing nature, but by embodying forces and processes, that nature itself exhibits. In their pursuit of and experimentation with the ‘syntax’ of nature, artists of the Picturesque movement suspend conventional polarities of real and imaginary, natural and artificial, imitated and invented, and devised a new synthetic mode of representation of nature one can call its *simulation*.

Luca Beisel is an art historian, historian of science and computer programmer, working on historic and contemporary instances of immersive media, visual technology and mediated reality. He is a PhD candidate in art history at Freie Universität Berlin as part of the focus programme *The Digital Image* by German research foundation. Past affiliations include The Cohn Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Ideas at Tel Aviv University and the Maz-Pkanck-Institute for the History of Science, Berlin. In January 2020 he was a participant in the *MIT Reality Hackathon* at MIT Media Lab.