



DEPARTMENT OF
ART & ARCHAEOLOGY

Metamorphic Matter: Elemental Imagery in Early Modern Art

Friday, April 5, 2024, 9:15 am–5:30 pm

Louis A. Simpson International Building A71

ROBERT JANSON-LA PALME *76 CONFERENCE AND KEYNOTE

SCHEDULE

8:45 am	Light Breakfast
9:15 am–9:30 am	Welcome Nathan Arrington , Acting Chair, Department of Art & Archaeology Princeton University
	Introduction Christine Göttler , Robert Janson-La Palme *76 Visiting Scholar, Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University
9:30 am–11:00 am	Moderator: Janna Israel , Princeton University Art Museum
	Ivano Dal Prete , Yale University, “Metamorphoses of the Earth and Fifteenth-Century Italian Landscapes”
	Carolyn Yerkes , Princeton University, “The Earthwork of Early Modern Siege”
	Susan Dackerman , Independent Scholar, “The Paleontology of Print”
11:00 am–11:15 am	Coffee
11:15 am–1:15 pm	Moderator: David Young Kim , Institute for Advanced Study
	Maria Loh , Institute for Advanced Study, “Chaos Theory”
	Carolina Mangone , Princeton University, “Transforming Stone into Stone”
	Andrew Morrall , Bard Graduate Center, “Metalwork and Metamorphosis”
	Shawon Kinew , Harvard University, “The Bite: Transformation and Exchange”
1:15pm–2:30 pm	Lunch
2:30 pm–4:00 pm	Moderator: Cloe Caverro de Carondelet , Princeton University
	Christopher Richards , New York University, “Samblances and muances: Elemental Imaginary and French Vernacular Painting”
	Vera Keller , University of Oregon, “The ‘Metamorphosis of Colors’: Color Changes in Liquid Solutions”
	Felipe Pereda , Harvard University, “The Color of the Escorial”
4:00 pm–4:30 pm	Coffee
4:30 pm–5:30 pm	Welcome & Introduction Carolyn Yerkes , Princeton University
	Keynote Address Christine Göttler , Robert Janson-La Palme *76 Visiting Scholar, Princeton University, “Igneous Art: Rubens on Metamorphic Matter”
5:30 pm	Reception



SPEAKER ABSTRACTS

Susan Dackerman · Independent Scholar

The Paleontology of Print

“The Paleontology of Print” is an accounting of the coincident development of paleontology and lithography. The fossils and printing matrices that emerged in 1796 from Solnhofen, Germany’s limestone quarry informed each other’s conceptualization and materialization. My paper imagines a history of printing from the perspective of the earth as image maker.

Ivano Dal Prete · Yale University

Metamorphoses of the Earth and Fifteenth-Century Italian Landscapes

In medieval and Renaissance natural philosophy, the element earth was the primary constituent of both human bodies and of their terrestrial abode. Building upon recent scholarship on the pre-modern Earth and on the contiguities between the lithic and the human, this paper explores how stones and bodies, geological and human history, the natural and the artificial, interacted, resonated, and morphed into one another in fifteenth-century pictorial landscapes. As the globe grew older and approached its next renovation, eroded cliffs and exposed strata emerged as ruins of a decaying world, often merging with those of classical buildings and extending into the remotest antiquity the Renaissance perception of time past.

Christine E. Göttler · Janson-La Palme *76 Visiting Professor, Princeton University · Institut für Kunstgeschichte, Universität Bern

Igneous Art: Rubens on Metamorphic Matter

Stories of elemental beginnings and endings were of crucial importance for Rubens’s art as he explored the power of natural and supernatural forces to create and destroy matter and life in many of his paintings. At the center of my talk is Rubens’s so-called *Fall of the Damned* (Munich, ca. 1620), showing the universal conflagration just before the world ceases to exist and time turns into eternity. How did Rubens translate biblical and natural philosophical accounts of disasters into his own medium of paint? My interest focuses, on the one hand, on the widely shared and growing preoccupation with the physical substance of the heavens in the age of telescopic observation and, on the other, on Rubens’s use of cosmic and meteorological extremes to reflect on the metamorphic and mutable nature of his own work.



Vera Keller · University of Oregon

The “Metamorphosis of Colors”: Color Changes in Liquid Solutions

Chemical color changes in liquid solutions have been known globally to dyers, to developers of inks and paints, and to forgers and spies for millennia. In early modern Europe, these dramatic transformations gained a new focal point in the showmanship of wandering charlatans and within the *Kunstammer* where vials of changing liquid colors known as “element glasses” could be admired and manipulated. As a performance of metamorphosis, these evanescent and largely forgotten objects staged transformation in ways that raised new questions about the nature of the elements and of color. This talk focuses on how seventeenth-century natural philosophical discussions of color changes in liquid solutions drew on the color transformations of inks, dyes and curiosity objects and related them to experiments in corpuscular natural philosophy and in the production of colored glass. By the end of the seventeenth century, a rainbow of collectible-colored glasses froze these metamorphoses in a more enduring form.

Shawon Kinew · Harvard University

The Bite: Transformations and Exchange

Io, for the crime of having been kissed by Jupiter, is punished by jealous Juno, a gadfly sent to bite and torment the girl. Within the bite, the kiss, venom, and saliva, is a seeming paradox at the heart of therapeutic treatments: *that which harms heals*. This paper traces these transformative exchanges as figured in early modern painting.

Maria Loh · Institute for Advanced Study

Chaos Theory

The Old Testament imposes two conditions upon the cosmological primal scene. *In principio erat Verbum, et Verbum erat apud Deum, et Deus erat Verbum* (“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”). But what if it wasn’t? What if, instead, the beginning was an image and the image was God. Under what circumstances might word and image become one and the same? *Dixitque Deus fiat lux et facta est lux* is most often rendered as “And God said let there be light, and there was light,” but *facta est lux* reads more accurately as “light was made.” World making, as it turned out, was a heavy task even for God, as it would be for artists too. This talk will focus on Michelangelo’s *Separation of Darkness and Light* in the Sistine Chapel, emphasizing the embodied challenges of creating the heavens anew.



Carolina Mangone · Princeton University

Transforming Stone into Stone

What does it mean to carve stone into a representation of itself? This paradoxical question is posed by Gianlorenzo Bernini's *Fountain of the Four Rivers* (1648–51), its hollowed, rocky cavern hewn from banded, porous travertine—the humblest of the monument's hierarchical lapidary ensemble. This paper considers Bernini's worked travertine mass as reflection on the physical character of his material in relation to period knowledge of natural philosophy and examines, in turn, the ways in which his geological artifice inflects notions of architectural time.

Andrew Morrall · Bard Graduate Center

Metalwork and Metamorphosis

This talk explores the development of a metamorphic sensibility among the goldsmiths of early modern northern Europe. Grounded in a theory of the four elements, their creations subject to constant melting down and reconstitution into new forms, theirs was a craft especially suited to themes of metamorphosis and change. Among Nuremberg goldsmiths, classical texts such as Plato's *Timaeus* were influential in offering theories of the origin and the labile nature of matter based on admixtures of elementary qualities; while, more broadly, Ovid's poetic etiologies of natural forms and explanations of creation, generation and change made metamorphosis a fitting symbol of the processes of artistic creation itself. In the hands of many goldsmiths, metamorphic invention became an expression of inventiveness and the fantastical a measure of the artistic imagination; while signs of the artist's hand at work, of the painful drawing of form from matter, became marked components of aesthetic curiosity.

Felipe Pereda · Harvard University

The Color of the Escorial

Color is the last thing that one considers when looking at the Escorial, the sixteenth-century monumental granite monastery built by Philip II for the burial of the new Habsburg dynasty. Yet, the local stones employed in the construction, on the one hand, and the liturgical use of colored light, on the other, both were strategically used at the Escorial to bring life to dead matter. This paper will look into the use and the meaning of porphyry and jasper in the ornament of the building and, particularly, into Pellegrino Tibaldi's paintings in the "sagrario," the latter based—technically as well as iconographically—on atomist theories of light shaping its liturgical use on the altar.



Metamorphic Matter: Elemental Imagery in Early Modern Art

Christopher Richards · New York University

Samblances et nuances: Elemental Imaginary and French Vernacular Painting

The early manuscripts of *Ovide moralisé*, a fourteenth-century French adaptation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, contain the first large-scale pictorial programs of Classical mythology produced in Europe. Although each manuscript is distinctive, all register an abiding and reflexive interest in artistic creation. Images about images (e.g. Narcissus's reflection, Pygmalion's statue, Arachne's tapestry) dominate these programs. All include a miniature of the Shield of Achilles. This legendary object, on which the god Vulcan paints the cosmos and its four elements, is the subject of this paper. Previous art historians have judged these miniatures harshly for their almost "slapdash" application of paint, but I hold that miniatures of the Shield not only visualize a legendary artwork but also theorize *samblances* (images), including manuscript illumination, as *nuances* (metamorphoses). These images offer careful reflections on the image as a gesture and the artist as a new Vulcan. More than any mythic content they depict the creative process and the metamorphic mixing of pigments.

Carolyn Yerkes · Princeton University

The Earthwork of Early Modern Siege

Architectural historians usually interpret the military revolutions of the seventeenth century through two signal inventions, the cannon and the bastion. The story goes that advent of heavy artillery in western warfare heralded a technological call-and-response that reshaped urban space. Curiously absent from this narrative is the parallel story about how humans were used and ultimately depicted as part of a mechanized fighting force. Through the neglected genre of the spy map, we can trace what the foot soldiers depicted within these embattled drawings reveal about the reshaping of the early modern landscape.

The Eighty Years War marked the first time that specialized trench-diggers (known as 'sappers', or 'pioneers') were employed in a modern professional army. Throughout the prolonged conflict, thousands of English and Scottish troops fought alongside Dutch forces, and combatants documented sieges as they happened and sent their annotated plans and maps to government officials. These maps show a marked transformation in the perception of the space of warfare, as terrain is considered in units of human experience: how far a man can dig in a day, how many men can hide behind a wall, where the ground will hold beneath his feet, and where it will give way. This cartographic transformation relates directly to a social one, because the sapper was a pivotal figure in the military revolution. Specialized sappers were paid more than other soldiers due to the high level of risk they endured, and their introduction changed the relationship of the army to the peasantry who previously had been impressed into trench-digging service. Their siegeworks permanently altered both city and countryside.