

Viewing Topography Across the Globe Series

Workshop II: Indigeneity

SPONSORED BY THE LEWIS WALPOLE LIBRARY
ORGANIZED BY CYNTHIA ROMAN, The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University
AND HOLLY SHAFFER, Brown University

On Zoom May 13 and 14, 2021

Topography, from *topos*, is the practice of describing place through language, the features of the land, the inhabitants, and the accumulation of history. Specific to locality and the perspective of the person delineating, describing, or collecting materials, topography counters the worldliness of geography while also offering a potential tool to multiply singular approaches.

In this second workshop in the series “Viewing Topography Across the Globe,” we will consider approaches to place from Indigenous and European perspectives and interrogate the frame of “topography” in global contexts. In two half-day virtual sessions, we will focus on topographical practices in the Americas as well as South and Southeast Asia and the Pacific Ocean as well as how the materials of art-making both locate and disrupt notions of place. We will hear from artists and academics, work with colonial-era paintings, Indigenous objects, mapping, and literature, and consider Indigenous pedagogy.

Panel 1: The Americas

Thursday May 13, 2021: 10:00 to 11:45 am

Indigenous Bodies and Topographical Imagination

Barbara E. Mundy, Fordham University

Local vs. Universal Knowledge: Locating Place in von Humboldt's Picturesque

Emmanuel Ortega, University of Illinois at Chicago

Sucker-fish Writings: Indigenous Inscription and the History of Written Language in the 18th Century

Robbie Richardson, Princeton University

*Sybil / Spider / Sibyl: On Anancy*ness, Archives, and Spider Space*

Heather V. Vermeulen, Wesleyan University

Lunchtime Keynote: 12:00 to 1:00 pm

Artist as Social Engineer

Cannupa Hanska Luger, Artist

Moderated by Marina Tyquiengco, Boston Museum of Fine Arts

Panel II: South, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Ocean
Friday, May 14: 10:00 to 11:45 am

Beyond Human Vision: Knowing Angkor Wat through Topography, from a Watercolor Map to LIDAR Capture

Jinah Kim, Harvard University

Unexplored Terrains: Topography, Temporality and Emotion in 18th-century Udaipur

Dipti Khera, New York University

Debra Diamond, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

Rising from the Ocean: Perspectives of Land and Watercraft during Cook's Third Voyage

Kailani Polzak, University of California, Santa Cruz

Topographies of Battle: The National War Memorial, New Delhi

Ayesha Ramachandran, Yale University

Anxieties of a Bazaar: Making of Commodities in Colonial South and Southeast Asia

Garima Gupta, Artist and Researcher

Chitra Ramalingam, Yale Center for British Art

Lunchtime Keynote: 12:00 to 1:00 pm

Techniques of the Imperial Observer: How Aquatint Travel Books Taught Britons to See

Douglas Fordham, University of Virginia

Moderated by Tim Barringer, Yale University

Abstracts:

THURSDAY MAY 13

Keynote:

Artist as Social Engineer

Cannupa Hanska Luger, Artist

In a world polarized politically, economically, racially, and sexually we are forced to question our trust. However our trust is the mortar that binds our intelligence. We need one another now more than ever. But, how do we see eye to eye with human groups we don't trust. Enter the artist. If we can subvert the idea art is an object, a noun, then we can reinstate the truth that art is a verb, an action. In developing processes that include society as a medium the act of making builds communities that are embedded in the object of these processes. It connects people that may not engage with one another to create work together. Thus the role of artist is bridge builder.

Panel I: The Americas

Indigenous Bodies and Topographical Imagination

Barbara E. Mundy, Professor of Art History, Fordham University

A collage in the Lewis Walpole collection overlays an 18th-century engraved map of Tenochtitlan-Mexico City with painted figures of "Aztecs." The creator's confident assignment of figures to place reasserts an ideology where bodies "belonged" to certain topographies, and in this case, are literally painted onto the map. How can we interpret these topographical projections in light of the presence of Indigenous bodies?

Local vs. Universal Knowledge: Locating Place in von Humboldt's Picturesque

Emmanuel Ortega, Marilynn Thoma Scholar in Art of the Spanish Americas, University of Illinois at Chicago

In *Science in Action* (1987) French philosopher Bruno Latour notes, "The implicit geography of...natives is made explicit by geographers; the local knowledge of... savages becomes the universal knowledge of...cartographers" (p. 211). The landscape images in this presentation, which can be qualified as the imperial-picturesque, stem from the legacy of Alexander von Humboldt's (1769-1859) personal writings and illustrations. They projected a need to transform Native American knowledge of the land into universal, ontological, and scientific truths. Following Michel de Certeau (1984), I will analyze these colonial impulses to convert Indigenous belief systems into quantifiable European knowledge, i.e. the violence of altering *spaces* into consumable *places*.

"Sucker-fish Writings: Indigenous Inscription and the History of Written Language in the 18th Century"

Dr. Robbie Richardson, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Princeton University

Mi'kmaq hieroglyphic writing, known as *komqwejwi'kasikl* or "sucker-fish writings," is thought to be the oldest written form of an Indigenous language north of Mexico. It is first documented by Jesuit missionaries in the seventeenth century, who claimed to introduce it among them, but the Mi'kmaq claim it pre-existed that time and was used, among other things, to map territories. This paper will discuss the history of this writing alongside European representations of Indigenous forms of inscription in the eighteenth century.

Sybil / Spider / Sibyl: On Anancy*ness, Archives, and Spider Space

Heather V. Vermeulen, PhD, Visiting Assistant Professor, Feminist, Gender, & Sexuality Studies, Wesleyan University

This paper begins with an eighteenth-century overseer's diary entry giving an account of an enslaved woman's reaction to a spider bite on a sugar plantation in Jamaica. I consider how this single sentence might register and engender two topographic imaginaries—one ordered around the Cumaean Sibyl, an ancient seer in classical literature, and the other dis/ordered through the spidery figure of Anancy, often described as a "trickster" whose origins lie in Asante folktales.

FRIDAY MAY 14

Keynote:

Techniques of the Imperial Observer: How Aquatint Travel Books Taught Britons to See
Douglas Fordham, Associate Professor Art History, University of Virginia

For a few decades around 1800, London publishers produced a glorious set of illustrated travel books in hand-colored aquatint. These books did more than represent distant portions of the globe to the British public, they also taught Britons how to see in distinctive, highly mediated ways. This talk examines illustrated travel books as a technology of empire; for they disseminated new techniques of observation, displacement, and possession.

Panel II: South, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Ocean

Beyond Human Vision: Knowing Angkor Wat through Topography, from a Watercolor Map to LIDAR Capture

Jinah Kim, George P. Bickford Professor of Indian and South Asian Art, Harvard University

An eighteenth century Japanese watercolor painting is the earliest known topographic rendering of Angkor Wat, the famed emblem of the Khmer empire and today's Cambodia. A massive funerary temple dedicated to Vishnu built by Suryavarman II (r.1113-45 or later) occupying more than 400 acres of land in the heart of Angkor, the Khmer capital, its scale and blueprint are inconceivable in ordinary human sensory faculty. How were the images of Angkor Wat represented, especially when the site is not just a building but an expansive landscape? Comparing different methods of representations and materials used to render Angkor Wat over time, from the eighteenth century watercolor map to twenty-first century LIDAR captures, this paper will explore how different methods and materials used to create these representations impacted our knowledge about Angkor Wat and their circulation.

Unexplored Terrains: Topography, Temporality and Emotion in 18th-century Udaipur

Dipti Khera, Associate Professor, Art History and Institute of Fine Arts, New York University
Debra Diamond, Curator of South and Southeast Asian Art, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

India is rich in descriptions of sacred rivers and mountains that serve as crossing points between earth and the heavens. Its abundant literary and poetic forms praise cities and catalogue diverse terrains by the moods that they evoke. In contrast, its visual traditions, which focus almost exclusively on the bodies of gods and humans, rarely depict landscapes. However, between 1700 and 1900, court artists in Udaipur in northwest India produced hundreds of paintings that depict the kingdom's lakes, riverine plains, forested hillsides and fields. The sheer numbers of landscape paintings patronized by the Udaipur rulers over two hundred years situate the terrain as a valid conceptual category. Indeed, the paintings and their inscriptions constitute an exceptional – and largely untapped – archive.

In Udaipur, artists and patrons were deeply invested in picturing the moods of place. Their paintings capture ambient feelings, while revealing geographies and layered notions of

territoriality. Our acknowledgement of the powerful emotional work of images & places uncovers agency and histories distinct from the stories of decadence narrated within colonial texts and 20th century art histories. In this talk, we focus on two early eighteenth-century court paintings to interrogate place and emotion, topography and temporality.

Rising from the Ocean: Perspectives of Land and Watercraft during Cook's Third Voyage

Kailani Polzak, Assistant Professor of Art History, University of California, Santa Cruz

This paper looks at three views of the island of Hawai'i published after the third voyage of Captain James Cook and considers how the charts and pictures that rendered the Pacific Ocean more comprehensible to European viewers did so by differentiating places and peoples. Though the lines of the horizon and coast were often treated as a constant and index of progress, respectively, in eighteenth-century hydrography, the intervening space was often where the first contact between the voyagers and Kānaka 'Ōiwi took place, and several limits of Enlightenment-era rationality were recorded. By considering points of convergence and divergence in British and Kanaka 'Ōiwi understandings of oceanic space and genealogy, this paper aims to put these printed charts and views in greater conversation with current scholarship on imperial histories and Indigenous ways of knowing.

Topographies of Battle: The National War Memorial, New Delhi

Ayesha Ramachandran, Associate Professor of Comparative Literature, Yale University

This talk focuses on the central gallery of six commemorative bronze bas-relief “murals” at the National War Memorial in New Delhi, India, inaugurated in February 2019, each of which depicts a significant military engagement of the Indian Armed Forces. Strikingly, each of the “murals” highlights distinctive topographic elements of the sites of battle which serve both to situate the war scenes with precision and also to evoke the vast geographic reach of the nation. I will focus primarily on the first of these topographic reliefs, the Battle of Longewala, which was fought on the India-Pakistan border in the Thar desert in December 1971. My talk will consider the relationship between commemoration and place, topography, borders, and identity, and between particular local histories and the making of large-scale national narratives.

Anxieties of a Bazaar: Making of Commodities in Colonial South and Southeast Asia

A conversation between Garima Gupta, contemporary artist and researcher based in Delhi, and Chitra Ramalingam, Associate Curator of Photography, Yale Center for British Art

Garima Gupta's work engages the visual and ecological legacies of trade and migration in South and Southeast Asia. They will discuss her work and its relation to notions of topography, including a collaboration between them at Yale on mineral specimens, mining, and landscapes of extraction in the former British empire.