

## THE MATERIAL RECEPTION OF ANTIQUITY

A JOINT CONFERENCE OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ANTIQUITIES, THE MATERIAL  
AGENCY FORUM AND THE BYVANCK CHAIR FOR THE HISTORY OF CLASSICAL ART AND  
ARCHAEOLOGY

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2018

RIJKSMUSEUM VAN OUDHEDEN (NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ANTIQUITIES), LEIDEN

LEEMANS ROOM

### PROGRAMME

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|---------------|---|
| 10.00         | Arrival   |
| 10.10         | Brief introduction by the organizers  |
| 10.15 - 11.00 | Keynote: Peter Miller (Bard Graduate Centre New York)<br><i>The New History of Antiquarianism and What it Offers</i>  |
| 11.00 - 11.40 | Cecilia Griener-Hurley (Ecole du Louvre/Université de Neuchâtel)<br><i>Pale imitations and corrected copies</i>   |
| 11.40 - 11.55 | Coffee & Tea  |
| 11.55 - 12.35 | Pascal Griener (Université de Neuchâtel)<br><i>A dream turned to stone. Michelangelo and the antique 'Cupid' purchased for the Victoria and Albert Museum (1861).</i> |
| 12.35 - 13.15 | Isabelle Kalinowski (Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris)<br><i>Catapetasmata. Gottfried Semper and antique drapery.</i>  |
| 13.15 - 14.15 | Lunch   |
| 14.15 - 14.55 | Astrid van Oyen (Cornell University)<br><i>The transient reception of wattle and daub</i>   |
| 14.55 - 15.35 | Laura Van Broekhoven (Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford)<br><i>Legacies and futures at the Pitt Rivers Museum</i>  |
| 15.35 - 15.50 | Coffee & Tea  |
| 15.50 - 16.30 | Jos Platenkamp (University of Münster)<br><i>“Damit es in guten Händen kommt“ On the interface between gifts and commodities</i>                                      |
| 16.30 - 17.00 | General discussion and concluding remarks by the organizers   |

## The Material Reception of Antiquity

A joint conference of the National Museum of Antiquities, the Material Agency Forum and the Byvanck Chair for the History of Classical Art

Organized by

Caroline van Eck, Pieter ter Keurs, Miguel John Versluys

### ABSTRACTS

It is commonly accepted that knowledge of ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome came to us largely through written sources. At the same time, it is generally acknowledged that the material remains of Egyptian, Greek and Roman cultures are so impressive that they cannot be ignored as important sources as well. We are obliged to pay attention to these material witnesses of ancient times. However, as script is transferred to the next generations by often formal learning processes, we find it still hard to understand how the impact of material remains is transferred over time.

Reception studies have been a core activity in the humanities since the Renaissance, where classics, egyptology, art history and archaeology meet. The humanist, antiquarian and philological strands have been renewed in the nineteenth century by the rise of archaeology and art history as academic disciplines. In the twentieth century Aby Warburg completely reformulated the question as one of the survival of antiquity and its underlying psychological mechanisms, and more recently reception studies received powerful impulses from German reception aesthetics and Anglo-Saxon more visually oriented reception studies within classics.

But it is now time to focus on the role of the objects themselves, and to turn from the textual and visual reception of Antiquity to its material reception. Can we develop a method that takes as its starting point the presence and agency of objects? How does materiality actually influence us? Is it foremost a psychological process? Or is it through our cultured ideas about matter? Or is it merely a question of style? How do these processes actually work?

In this conference, that is part of the celebrations for the 200th anniversary of the Dutch National Museum of Antiquities, but also marks the first lustrum of the Material Agency Forum, participants of the conference are invited to reflect on the material reception of antiquity by taking one object, or one class of objects, as a case-study, and to discuss the reception of an object over a longer period of time.

- *Peter Miller: 'The New History of Antiquarianism and What it Offers'*

Over the past three decades there has been a resurgence of interest in the antiquaries of the late Renaissance and their practice of historical scholarship. What can we say of the benefits of this historical recovery for our understanding of the history of studying the past? The

most important has been the gaining of a deeper perspective on the current “material turn.” With the antiquaries plugged back into the story, material culture seems a much more integral part of studying the past, and not some recent faddishness. This has implications for the history of archaeology, which can not only trace its origins to the antiquaries, but whose disciplinary elaboration in the mid nineteenth century was done in direct dialogue with antiquarianism. But it also has important consequences for the discipline of history which now seems to have been much more engaged with studying the past through things than the standard narrative which, post-Momigliano and abetted by Hayden White, sees a turn from Gibbon on to the highway of grand narrative leading toward the present. Now it might end up being the century of narrativizing from Gibbon to Grote that is really the exception in a continuing practice of structural, non-linear, analytical probings of the past’s body.

- *Cecilia Griener Hurley: 'Pale imitations and corrected copies'*

Over the course of the centuries, plaster casts after the best-known antique sculptures were collected by amateurs, artists and academies alike. They offered decoration for castles and rich bourgeois interiors, an understanding of the antique corpus of sculpture for those who could not make the journey to Rome and drawing practice for aspiring artists. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, these traditional uses were increasingly being called into question. In a series of penetrating articles published in the influential journal *Museumskunde* in the opening decades of the twentieth century, scholars debated the use that could be made of these casts, proposing a number of solutions and especially forcing us to reconsider the relation between original, copy and reproduction.

- *Pascal Griener: A dream turned to stone. Michelangelo and the antique 'Cupid' purchased for the Victoria and Albert Museum (1861).*

In 1861, Sir Charles Robinson purchased in Florence a battered sculpture destined for the South Kensington Museum in London, today's V&A. Immediately, he attributed this statue to Michelangelo. This statue is now exhibited in the Italian Renaissance court, but with a much more modest attribution. A mere history of connoisseurship is powerless to explain how what is probably an antique statue, reworked by a minor artist of the sixteenth century, could suddenly resurface as a work by the great Florentine Genius. On this occasion, Robinson - a superb eye, most of the time - was caught up in a dream, and in his dream, a Michelangelo appeared to him, that would transform Great Britain into the landmark of a new Grand Tour in modern times, and London into a new artistic capital. Under the surface of that sculpture, rugged and damaged by time, he could feel a divine Presence. This episode highlights the impact of old religious beliefs within the field of art and connoisseurship, even at the time of the industrial revolution. In effect, a theological aesthetics of Presence blinded Robinson, and a whole generation with him.

- *Isabelle Kalinowski: Catapetasmata. Gottfried Semper and antique drapery.*  
[abstract to follow]

- *Astrid Van Oyen (Cornell University): The transient reception of wattle and daub*

In 2012, the Roman Peasant Project excavated at the Roman site of Marzuolo (Tuscany, Italy). Expecting a village, they instead revealed a large-scale craft complex constructed with carefully built masonry (*opus reticulatum*), and producing among other things so-called *terra sigillata*, the must-have pottery of the imperial Roman world. As a result, when the excavation hit layers of fired organic, clayey material, this was interpreted as debris of kiln infrastructure. New excavations at Marzuolo since 2016 by the Marzuolo Archaeological

Project, however, have reinterpreted the organic layers as wattle and daub building material, exceptionally preserved in a fire that destroyed the complex. The use of wattle and daub contrasts markedly with the monumentality of the stone architecture, and with the fashionable output of the craft site. This paper will explore this material hybridity, as a product of modern archaeological expectations as well as past affinities. In particular, it will ask how to write material histories around things such as wattle and daub, which are transient in their matter but durable in their form.

- *Laura Van Broekhoven: Legacies and futures at the Pitt Rivers Museum*

The Pitt Rivers Museum is the University of Oxford's Museum of Anthropology and World Archaeology. It is widely regarded as one of the best museums of its kind and at the same time is a very much contested space. The Museum was founded in 1884, when General Pitt Rivers donated his collection to the University and now stewards over half a million objects, and is visited by more than 500,000 international visitors annually.

The museum consciously cultivates its Victorian age character but has seen significant changes both to its architecture, displays and practices since the 19th century. As part of its new Strategic Plan, the Pitt Rivers Museum seeks to be an inclusive, thought-provoking and reflexive space built upon open, engaged, global and local relationships. How does the materiality of its space, the objects stewarded and the place it sits in affect these aspirations? Might emerging new curatorial approaches help us to move towards a practice of reconciliation and hope for historic ethnographic collections?

- *Jos D.M. Platenkamp: "Damit es in guten Händen kommt" On the interface between gifts and commodities*

Bares für Rares ('Cash for Curiosities') is a highly popular auction programme broadcasted on German public television with a strong presence in the social media. It provides the stage for individual Germans to offer precious or merely curious objects for sale. First the objects' authenticity, provenance, condition, and market value are assessed by an art historian, a jeweller or an antiquarian - according to the type of object. If their price assessment agrees with the one the seller had in mind, the programme's presenter hands out the so-called 'trader's card' that provides access to another room where five antique dealers inspect the object offered, whereupon the bidding starts. If a price level has been attained that is acceptable to the seller, object and money change hands and the transaction is concluded; if not, the seller takes the object home.

At first glance these are straightforward market transactions. And yet they call into question the conventional anthropological distinction between 'gift exchange' and 'commodity exchange'. According to this model, gift exchanges serve the acquisition or perpetuation of social relationships by means of the reciprocal transfer of inalienable goods (valued as social beings) whereas commodity exchanges aim at purchasing alienable goods (valued as inanimate objects) by means of converting these into money - the exchange relationship pertaining during the actual transaction only. Hence whenever the two types of exchange co-occur in a single social system, they are marked as socially and morally separate types of transaction conducted in distinct 'spheres' or 'cycles' of exchange.

Bares für Rares challenges this paradigm. In various respects the valuation of the sales transactions displays features that identify the objects transferred simultaneously as gifts and as commodities. It appears that this configuration provides the moral means to justify the alienation of goods, the provenance value of which should qualify them as inalienable.