

Synthetic Histories: Plastics, Climate and Colonialism (Dundee, 27 Jan 23)

V&A Dundee, Jan 27, 2023

Deadline: Nov 7, 2022

Alice Read

Synthetic Histories: Plastics, Climate and Colonialism.

This symposium brings together thinking from V&A Dundee's exhibition, *Plastic: Remaking our World* and the Paul Mellon Centre's multi-year project, *Climate & Colonialism*.

While the exhibition explores the promise and problem of plastic through historical and contemporary initiatives, the symposium will explore plastics, climate and colonialism as sets of interconnected material and extractive relations. Bringing together researchers, designers, artists and activists from a range of backgrounds, the symposium is interested in intersectional, granular detail and local examples as it re-evaluates the relationship between design and its materials.

Taking place on Friday 27 January 2023 at V&A Dundee, the symposium will be structured into three strands exploring the past, present and future of the material. The event will also be live-streamed to a digital audience.

Areas of interest include, but are not limited to:

Past: Where did plastic originate? Investigating colonial histories of early plastics to understand how Britain and other European states benefited from exploitative relationships and material extraction around the world. How does the long-life cycle of plastics impact on the way we think about time, both geological and human?

Present: How are art, craft and design practices implicated in extractive processes, and how do they challenge them? What is the relationship between plastics and the body? What are the ongoing consequences of climate injustice and the unequal impact of global waste streams on people and the planet?

Future: Is there a future post plastic? What role do artists, designers and environmental humanities researchers play in creating such futures? What are some possible proposals for collaborative action around environmental justice?

Submissions are encouraged from contributors from all backgrounds and across all disciplines; we are committed to championing new voices.

Please submit the following by 12pm noon (BST) on Monday 7 November 2022 listing "Synthetic Histories" as the subject line to: events@paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk. Please note: incomplete or late submissions will not be considered.

A two-hundred-word abstract outlining the topic of your intervention or idea, why you would like to be involved and the format you imagine your involvement might take (for example an illustrated talk, a conversation with one or more participants, a performance or another format). Alternatively, you can submit a two-minute video.

A short biography or biographies of approximately one hundred words (please do not send CVs). Successful contributors selected through this open call will be paid a fee of £150 for their contribution and all reasonable travel and accommodation costs will be covered. If there is any relevant information that you would like to share with us, such as required adjustments or access needs, please do let us know when you submit and we will do our best to support these.

The symposium is convened by Sria Chatterjee (Head of Research and Learning at Paul Mellon Centre), Nichol Keene (Creative Programmer at V&A Dundee), Charlotte Hale (Curator at V&A Dundee) and Laurie Bassam (Assistant Curator at V&A Dundee).

About the Exhibition

Plastic: Remaking Our World charts the changing fortunes of a material with a history of more than 150 years. The exhibition asks How did we get here?, beginning with the innovation of a material that now has global dominance. It presents the story of plastic from invention to ubiquity, from the history of what was once considered a magical material to the challenge of plastic pollution today as one of the world's most urgent issues. The exhibition features product design, graphics, architecture and fashion from the collections of the V&A and Vitra Design Museum, as well as collections all over the world. This is the first exhibition co-produced by V&A Dundee, the Vitra Design Museum and maat, Lisbon with curators from V&A London.

About the Climate & Colonialism Research Project

The Climate & Colonialism research project led by Sria Chatterjee at the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art works towards new and interdisciplinary understandings of visual and material culture produced around and in response to the interconnected and enduring histories of colonialism, capitalism and climate change. A primary aim of this multi-year project is to provide a testing ground for transhistorical conversations and collaborations between art historians, artists and other scholarly and community groups thinking critically about colonialism and climate change.

Reference:

CFP: Synthetic Histories: Plastics, Climate and Colonialism (Dundee, 27 Jan 23). In: ArtHist.net, Oct 15, 2022 (accessed Apr 5, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/37687>>.