Migration and the Politics of the Deep Past (online/London, 19-20 May 23)

Online & River Room, King's College London, The Strand, London WC2R 2LS, May 19–20, 2023

Matthew Vollgraff

Imagining Lost Origins: Migration and the Politics of the Deep Past.

Culture has always been on the move, but the notion that culture is itself a product of movement is relatively recent. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, scholars hypothesised that the world's cultures developed not by linear evolution, but through migration, invasion, conquest, trade and exchange. Diffusionism became a master paradigm across several disciplines. The fascination and concern with how movement had shaped cultures historically reflected the anxieties of a time that witnessed more global migrations of people than ever before. Further, the modern quest for lost origins was (and is) inherently entangled in contemporary debates about the rights to land and resources.

This conference explores the relation between scientific and artistic imaginings of prehistoric migrations. To map cultural diffusion is also to theorize the relationship between bodies, place, art, and innovation. When investigating societies who have left no written records, the visual has a dual role: it is both the means by which these cultures are reconstructed, and the tool by which knowledge about them is disseminated. We ask how artists and scholars influenced one another in reconstructing lost origins, and probe the ways that these images were embedded in contemporary debates about race and migration.

Those interested in attending should register with Dr. Frederika Tevebring (frederika.tevebring@kcl.ac.uk)

PROGRAMME
19 May 2023, 6pm - 8pm | 20 May 2023, 10am - 5pm

Friday, 19 May
18.00: Keynote lecture: Michael Kunichika (Amherst): 'Debating the Origins of Art: Case Studies from the Prehistoric Front of the Cold War'
Response: Maria Stavrinaki (Paris)
Wine reception

Saturday, 20 May
10.00: Introductory remarks by Frederika Tevebring and Matthew Vollgraff
10.30: Felix Wiedemann (Berlin): 'Pure and Mixed Types. The Anthropological Reading of Ancient Works of Art and Their Use as Visual Evidence in Bio-historical Narratives at the Turn of the 20th

Century'
10.50: Frederika Tevebring (London): 'Women are from Venus, Men are from the Russian Steppe: Gendering Prehistoric Migration'
11.10: Response: John Robb (Cambridge)
11.20: Discussion

11.50: Carlotta Santini (Paris): 'Under Western Eyes. Prehistoric Art and the Migration of Culture in the Work of Leo Frobenius'
12.10: Matthew Vollgraff (London): 'The Monarch and Medusa: Wilhelm II, Leo Frobenius and the Quest for Sacred Kingship'
12.30: Response: John Tresch (London)
12.40: Discussion

Lunch Break

14.30: Jonathan Dentler (Paris): 'Revisiting “Red Atlantis”: Hilaire Hiler’s Aquatic Park Mural Project (1936-1939) and the Transatlantic Frontier'
14.50: Eva Miller (London): 'Only America Can Americanize: Immigration, Inheritance, and Civic Art'
15.10: Response: Oliver O’Donnell (London)
15.20: Discussion

15.50: Hans Hönes (Aberdeen): 'Prehistoric Art, Climate Change and 19th-Century Geographies of Culture'
16.10: Sria Chatterjee (London): 'The Robbery of the Soil: Vitalism, Nationalism, and Art in Early Twentieth-Century India'
16.30: Response: Chris Manias (London)
16.40: Discussion

Reference:
CONF: Migration and the Politics of the Deep Past (online/London, 19-20 May 23). In: ArtHist.net, May 2, 2023 (accessed Oct 20, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/39195>.