

Material Metamorphosis: Natural Resources, Artmaking and Sustainability in the Early Modern World

Deadline: Jul 15, 2023

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Please consider submitting an abstract for the following edited volume, to be published with Brepolis:

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Between the Sixteenth and the early Nineteenth century, raw materials circulated globally to be traded, studied, and transformed into luxury goods for the consumption of Europeans, whose mishandling of the colonies' natural resources turned some of the potentially wealthiest countries into the poorest ones. This volume proposes to investigate craftsmanship and artmaking against the backdrop of colonial trade and in relation to current issues such as environmental, social, cultural and economic sustainability. The focus will be on natural resources, in particular their materiality, extraction, migration and transformation through labor and manufacturing processes as well as on the effects of their cultivation and the exploitation of territories.

Global trade routes interconnecting distant parts of the world existed since Antiquity – the famous Silk Road allowed to bring silk and spices from China to Rome in exchange of wool, gold or silver; the Incense Route facilitated the transport of frankincense and myrrh from Southern Arabia to the Mediterranean; and the Amber Road permitted to carry the precious homonymous stone from the Baltic Sea to the Mediterranean. These well-established complex networks of commercial trade boosted economies, but were also vital means of intercultural exchanges. Global trade soared in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth centuries, with the lead of the Portuguese and the Spaniards who opened the way to new maritime routes, followed in the Seventeenth century by the Dutch, the English and the French. Renewed commercial relationships with India, China, Japan and the Americas were the occasion for the Europeans to establish a stronghold on local economies and make profit on the trade of local products; the infamous triangular trade between Europe, Africa and the Americas from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth century, represents one of the apexes of these exploitative systems. These systems and their long-lasting impact on people, labor, production, and the landscape have gathered renewed scholarly interest. Here, we aim to investigate the effects of global trade routes on the exploitation of natural resources as related to artistic production, since raw materials were imported to Europe from abroad to produce goods of all kinds. The aim is to approach these objects not as finished products but as the final results of a long production process anchored in the exploitation of natural resources which contributed to the increasing environment's degradation and led to question the relationship between the human being and

nature.

We seek papers dealing with materials that travelled from Asia, the Americas and Africa to Europe (such as sugar, coffee, tobacco, wood, cotton, indigo as well as gold, iron and ivory). Papers could interrogate the fate of such natural resources and ask, in particular, how they were received, transformed, represented, collected, displayed or consumed. In general, we welcome research that deconstructs the artwork and looks at the material itself, its origin, exploitation, metamorphosis, reuse, preservation and consumption through the lenses of global exchange and development related to the modern concept of sustainability, the prodromes of which appear in the Seventeenth century. This period coincides indeed with the occurrence of the first ecological damages (deforestation, soil erosion, silted rivers, drought, etc.) which can be directly related to the new commercial strategies.

The volume will be articulated around three areas of the world where Europe founded colonies and exploited natural resources:

For example:

Asia: silk, cotton, spices, precious stones, tea, cotton

Africa: ivory, wood, iron, horn, gold, cloth

The Americas: silver, gold, pigments, sugar, tobacco, coffee, cotton

This inquiry welcomes a variety of media, including but not limited to: the decorative arts, ephemeral arts (theatre, exhibitions, masquerades), visual arts, textiles, cabinets of curiosities, jewelry.

Please send proposals to Louise Arizzoli (larizzol@olemiss.edu) and Susanna Caviglia (susanna.-caviglia@duke.edu). Include in your proposal: name and affiliation, paper title, abstract (max. 200 words), and a brief CV, by July 15, 2023

Submission timeline:

- July 15 2023, submit your abstract
- September 1, 2023: Notification of acceptance
- May 15, 2024, submission of your contribution (more information on publication format and guidelines will be available upon acceptance).

Reference:

CFP: Material Metamorphosis: Natural Resources, Artmaking and Sustainability in the Early Modern World.

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