

1 Session at HNA (London/Cambridge, 10–13 Jul 24)

Historians of Netherlandish Art Conference 2024 (HNA): Britain and the Low

Countries / Cambridge, UK, Jul 10–13, 2024

Deadline: Sep 29, 2023

Sarah Mallory, Rachel Kase

[1] Round Table Session: The “More-Than-Human World” in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Visual and Material Culture.

From: Sarah Mallory and Rachel Kase.

Date: 08.09.2023

Deadline: 29.09.2023

It has been almost thirty years since ecologist and philosopher David Abram coined the phrase “more-than-human world” to describe the endless enmeshment of the human and non-human (including plants, animals, and natural phenomena). Today, this idea takes on yet another dimension with the increasing presence of artificial intelligence (A.I.) in our daily lives. With this in mind, this roundtable seeks to foster a robust and timely discussion around the role, both historic and contemporary, of the more-than-human in seventeenth-century Dutch visual and material culture.

The more-than-human has become an important area of study for historians of Netherlandish art, this interest supported by the subjects often depicted by artists and artisans. For example, animals abound in Dutch visual culture, from beached whales to butterflies, to camels and birds of paradise. Likewise, studies of plants, geological formations, landscape features, and other natural phenomena, like comets and clouds, captivated Dutch artists. Mythological, wonderful, and monstrous beings also fueled their imaginations. Appearing in a diverse array of media and genres—from printed books, maps, and celestial charts to small sketches, large-scale history paintings, and diminutive still lifes—artists frequently visualized the more-than-human world. Rare and precious objects like ostrich cups or the fluid curves of auricular silver attest to yet another way in which encounters between artists and the earthly world were not merely transactional but reciprocal, with the material properties of artworks functioning as vital elements of their making. Such explorations may have been displayed in anatomy theaters, as prized possessions in private *kunstkammern*, or featured in joyous entries and processions. These objects could symbolize the vastness of the Dutch trade empire while also raising questions about the implicit hierarchy of humans over other beings, particularly in colonial contexts, which often employed brutal oppression of peoples and ecosystems.

This roundtable seeks papers that consider the role of the more-than-human in Dutch seventeenth-century visual and material culture. We will explore how artworks articulate period attitudes and perspectives surrounding this topic, and how they prompt comparison between the human

and non-human world. At the core of this conversation is the question: how was art variously understood as a non-human actor or, as an extension of human actors? How, for example, can visual or material depictions of animals or landscapes serve as passive or active agents capable of negotiating with humans? How do animals and plants adapt to changing environments, particularly when transported to the Netherlands from distant locales, and how does this adaption influence the production of visual and material culture? How did ways of knowing and seeing the non-human world encourage the innovation of new technologies, such as the microscope? How does the depiction of the non-human draw attention to issues related to taxonomy and scale, particularly in colonial contexts where the very status of human life was a matter of debate? Paper topics might include, but are not limited to:

- The role of collectors in shaping ideas of the more-than-human
- The demonstration and display of the more-than-human
- Strategies for defining and identifying the more-than-human
- Colonial encounters and the more-than-human
- Artistic innovation as a product of non-human encounters
- Humanism and knowledge production
- Migration and travel in the more-than-human realm
- Gender and the more-than-human world
- Machines and the more-than-human
- Curating the more-than-human in today's museums
- A.I. and the study of Dutch Art

This session will consist of five short papers, each one twelve minutes in length. Presentations will be followed by thirty minutes of discussion amongst the panelists and attendees.

Please submit your proposal (no more than 500 words) and a C.V. (one page) by Friday, September 29 to Sarah Mallory smallory@themorgan.org and Rachel Kase rlkase@bu.edu.

Reference:

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