“Civilizing” the World (London, 22–23 Oct 26)

The Warburg Institute, School of Advanced Study, University of London, Oct 22–23, 2026
Deadline: Dec 1, 2025

Eckart Marchand, London

“Civilizing” the World: Classicism, Neo-Classical Sculpture, and Plaster Casts in the Service of Imperial Powers and Post-Colonial Elites (1780-1945).

We invite proposals for 20-minute papers for a two-day conference to be held at the Warburg Institute (School of Advanced Study, University of London) in co-organization with the Institute of Classical Studies (SAS, UoL) and the Department of the Classics (University of Reading).

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European imperial and colonial powers used both Greco-Roman and neo-classical sculpture, as well as architecture and other art forms, to express and consolidate their authority, at home and in colonial settings, through the assertion of Eurocentric notions of “civilization” and inherited supremacy. The establishment of museums and art academies, on a European model, remained a feature of nation-building by elites in many former colonies after independence.
This conference aims to bring together and foster new research into the roles that classical and neoclassical art (broadly defined) fulfilled for European colonial powers and post-colonial elites globally, seeking critical exploration and assessment of the ways classical visual culture has been reused, redefined and also contested. The conference seeks to investigate classical visual culture in the service of self-presentation among competing nations and as a means to “civilize” and / or dominate indigenous, subaltern and settler populations. We encourage examination of the social, political and racial implications of engagement with the European classical tradition in both colonial and post-colonial contexts worldwide. We invite contributions on works including neo-classical sculpture, plaster casts after the antique, and works such as ethnographic life-casts, the creation and use of which amplified and illuminated concepts of race and evolution that underpinned notions of Greco-Roman cultural supremacy. While the principal focus of the conference is on sculptural works, proposals on other arts and/or the interaction of the visual and literary are also welcome.

We invite scholars at all stages of their career, including PhD students and early-career researchers, to submit proposals (300 words maximum) for 20-minute presentations.
The preferred mode of attendance will be in person, and the organizers are aiming to raise funding in support of travel expenses for speakers who cannot obtain funding from elsewhere. In the light of the international scope of the topic and call for papers, please indicate whether you may be able to access travel subsidies from your own institution or other sources, and / or whether you would be prepared to attend and present online if necessary.

Proposals and the accompanying statement should be sent to Eckart.Marchand@sas.ac.uk no later than 1 December 2025.

Organizers:
Dr Eckart Marchand (Warburg Institute)
Prof. Katherine Harloe (Institute of Classical Studies)
Prof. Amy Smith (University of Reading)

For enquiries and further information please contact one of the organizers:
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Reference:
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