

## German Wood (Kansas City, 18–21 Sep 14)

Kansas City, MO, USA, Sep 18–21, 2014

Deadline: Feb 7, 2014

Freyja Hartzell

### CALL FOR PAPERS

German Studies Association Thirty-Eighth Annual Conference, Kansas City, Missouri September 18-21, 2014

Deadline for Proposals: February 7, 2014

German Wood:

Material and Metaphor from Forest to Fireside and Beyond

“The German Forest has moved into the German living room,” wrote liberal politician Friedrich Naumann in response to a 1906 exhibition of modern wooden furniture designed by the progressive Munich architect Richard Riemerschmid and fabricated with the help of machines. What might sound at first like a humorous (or even ironic) comment on the overabundance of natural wood visible in Riemerschmid’s modern “machine furniture,” was actually freighted with economic, social, and cultural weight. For the material product of the “German Forest” – wood – was not only an important resource and major export of the lately established German nation, it had also constituted the utilitarian backbone of German domestic life for centuries; and its cultural resonance was rooted in the legendary Battle of the Teutoborg Forest, when Germanic tribes, emerging from the trees (as the story goes), had vanquished the Roman legions of Ceasar Augustus. But like the account of the Teuton victory – part history, part myth – the notion of a “German Forest,” as historian Jeffrey K. Wilson has recently shown, was a cultural construct: an abstract (though powerful) idea – not a concrete thing. The German lands enclosed a variety of wooded territories, each distinct in its topography and biology. But there was, in actuality, no single “German Forest”; the concept had been cobbled together – like the German nation itself – from various regional examples and traditions to form an ideal or myth of unity, ripe for public figures (like Naumann) to exploit.

This interdisciplinary, diachronic panel will probe the paradox of abstract and concrete embodied by the entry of the “German Forest” into the “German living room.” Its aim is to reveal and untangle the interlaced complexities inherent in wood as indigenous material, utilitarian product, and cultural symbol. Proposals are welcome that consider the significance of “German wood” from any period and in any manifestation, in its dual role as object and concept. Topics might examine the role that German wood has played in confrontations between: past and future; the domestic and the wild; authenticity and artificiality; the living and the inert or “wooden”; naturalism and folklore; history and myth; the utilitarian and the symbolic; the prosaic and the poetic; the everyday

and the marvelous; the vernacular and the cosmopolitan; science and spirituality. Historiographical and theoretical investigations, as well as specific case studies, will be considered. Proposals are encouraged that move beyond the reductive nationalist rhetoric of “the German Forest” to problematize images of Germans and their trees from the Teutons to today.

Please email a C.V. and proposal of no more than 400 words by Friday, February 7, 2014 to:

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**IMPORTANT:** You do **not** have to be a German Studies Association member to submit a proposal. However, all participating panelists must be registered GSA members by February 17, 2014.

Reference:

CFP: German Wood (Kansas City, 18-21 Sep 14). In: ArtHist.net, Dec 12, 2013 (accessed May 10, 2026),

<<https://arthist.net/archive/6592>>.