

**LANGUAGES OF ECOLOGY:
ANCIENT AND EARLY MODERN
APPROACHES TO NATURE**



MAY 14, 2020
ONLINE COLLOQUIUM
GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Organized by
Jesús Muñoz Morcillo, GRI Volkswagen Foundation Fellow
Getty Research Institute & Volkswagen Foundation

THURSDAY, MAY 14, 2020

1:00 p.m. Opening Remarks
Alexa Sekyra, Head of GRI Scholars Program

1:05 p.m. Session I
Sense and Evidence

In the Air: Reading Atmosphere in Sappho
Alex Purves, University of California, Los Angeles

The Art of Description and the Origins of Visual Ecology
Jesús Muñoz Morcillo, GRI Volkswagen Foundation Fellow

Chair: **Alan Braddock**, Getty Research Institute Scholar

2:10 p.m. Session II
Artifice and Agency

Automating Nature: Hero's Elemental Artifice from Alexandria to Renaissance Gardens
Courtney Ann Roby, Cornell University, New York

Material and Spiritual Conversions: Jacopo Ligozzi and the Descrizione del Sacro Monte della Vernia (1612)
Bronwen Wilson, University of California, Los Angeles

Chair: **Mónica Domínguez Torres**, Getty Research Institute Scholar

3:15 p.m. Closing Remarks & Questions
Ancient Ecologies and the Key to Modernity
Jesús Muñoz Morcillo, GRI Volkswagen Foundation Fellow





Alex Purves is professor of Classics at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Her paper examines the notion of atmosphere in Sappho, beginning with the descriptions of various qualities of air (*aither*, *aer*, but also breezes, smoke, mist, dew, and the celestial sphere of sky, stars, and planets) in her poetry. It draws on roughly contemporaneous attempts by early Greek philosophers (primarily Anaximenes) to describe the air and name what it is, as well as later ethnographic explications of air's affective qualities (for example, Hippocrates' *Airs, Waters, Places*). The paper will argue for the importance of the air in creating a key atmospheric mode in Sappho's fragments, through which she is able to articulate a form of visibility through invisibility and materiality through immateriality, as well as a sensibility to environment and ecological forms of description.

Jesús Muñoz Morcillo, is postdoctoral research associate at the Art History Department and the ZAK | Centre for Cultural and General Studies at Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT). In his talk, Muñoz Morcillo discusses how ancient descriptions coined premodern notions of ecology in different media—especially in emblem and science books. He analyzes the persistence of ancient ideas in new images, on the one side, and the critical approach to classical ecphrastic theories, on the other. This approach helps shed light upon the complex relationship between the ancient practice of describing the physical world by rhetorical means and the hybrid and varied visual culture of the Renaissance, on which a substantial part of premodern environmental thinking relies.

Courtney Ann Roby is associate professor of Classics at Cornell University, New York. In her paper, she will talk about Hero of Alexandria's treatises on technical topics, and its renaissance of interest in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Hero's works, particularly his *Pneumatica*, were translated into Latin and several vernacular languages. Hero promised to supplant endless philosophical debates about the nature of matter and void with "perceptible proof" of the dynamics of elemental particles of fire, air, water, and earth using artificial siphons, compressors, boilers, and other devices that amplified their activities becoming visible to the human eye. In the Renaissance, Hero's pneumatic wonders took on new meaning as they were deployed in courtly contexts of playful discovery, from dinnertime entertainments to grotto gardens. Centuries after Hero himself described them, his use of the artificial to illuminate the natural continued to ignite curiosity and wonder.

Bronwen Wilson is professor of Renaissance and Early Modern Art at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). In her talk, Wilson focuses on the generative power of the earth and its instrumental role in the process of both reviving the cult and conceiving the etchings and engravings of the *Descrizione*. Still perceived by some to be a living substance, stone attested to the inventive power of nature. It becomes a protagonist in Ligozzi's work for the Observant Franciscans in *pietra dura* furnishings in Florence and in the *Descrizione*. The volume incites sensual experiences and spiritual visions; virtual visitors to La Vernia contend with rocky boulders and screens that conceal and then disclose sacred loci, thereby enhancing the revelatory character of the mountain.

ABOUT THE COLLOQUIUM



Languages of Ecology: Ancient and Early Modern Approaches to Nature focuses on the origins, variety, and transformations of notions of ecology in antiquity and the early modern period.

The colloquium aims to initiate an interdisciplinary debate about epistemic and literary-based image production that led to popular, symbolic, and new scientific notions of ecology. Studies into the foundations and traditions of environmental thinking and ancient experiences of nature, including eco-critical attitudes, enable a better understanding of the different languages of ecology that emerged and co-existed during the early modern period and beyond.

Artists and humanists from different fields of knowledge, including anatomists, botanists, garden designers, mineralogists, and even authors of emblem books contributed to the development of a visual culture that built on multisensory experiences as well as the rhetorical evidence of vivid descriptions, natural philosophy, and environmental thinking from ancient times. The colloquium's speakers will discuss and question ancient ways of approaching and conceptualizing nature, the reception and transformation of different, sometimes even opposing "ecologies," as well as the educational and moral dimensions of description and imitation of nature. This multi-layered dialogue conducted by experts in the fields of Classics, Renaissance Studies, and Art History will throw light on the complex relationship between the ancient polyvalent notion of nature and visual responses from the early modern period.

Cover image: *Manus oculata* (Eyed Hand), from Andrea Alciati, *Emblematum Liber* (Patauij: Apud Petrum Paulum Tozzium, 1621).

Inside Left Image: Plants and Animals from the Americas, from Francisco Hernández' *Rerum Medicarum Hispaniae Thesaurus* (Romae: Vitalis Mascardi, 1651), 131.

Inside Right Background Image: Jacopo Ligozio (Italian, 1547–1627). Sasso di Fra' Lupo (The Rock of Brother Wolf), from Lino Moroni's *Descrizione del Sacro Monte della Vernia*, 1612, plate V.

Back Image: Initial with Floral Motifs and Bees, Woodcut from Francisco Hernández' *Rerum Medicarum Hispaniae Thesaurus* (Romae: Vitalis Mascardi, 1651), 845.

Event Coordinator: Ann Harezlak, Research Associate, Getty Scholars Program

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