

Mining Value

Art and the Extraction of Resources



A conference presented by the Power Institute with the Terra Foundation and the Sydney Environment Institute

Introduction

The Power Institute together with the Terra Foundation and the Sydney Environment Institute presents the two-day conference "Mining Value: Art and the Extraction of Resources".

Why should we talk about Art and Mining? This conference will bring together papers from a variety of periods and cultures that explore how artists and artworks depend on mining and abstraction for their very materials, how artists add value to their material resources, and how artists envisage and imagine mines and extraction sites.

Mining and artistic production have long been closely linked: we might think not just of gold leaf decoration and the quarrying of marble but also the refining of natural pigments and the mixing of clay bodies. Artworks are also at times literally excavated, as at archeological sites, and the artistic processes often resonate with geological ones such as the imprinting of fossilization or the rounding of rough stone.

Other questions the conference asks include: What does it mean to conceptualize the value of art objects as something hidden beneath the surface, or like as a substance dug out of the ground? What kinds of relations do such terms suggest between art objects and other kinds of valuable resources? How might artworks materialize labour and production, or engage with the realities of resource depletion or environmental scarcity?

The Conference is convened by Mark Ledbury, Director of the Power Institute, in conjunction with Maggie Cao (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Alex J Taylor (University of Pittsburgh) and Sophie Cras (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne). Speakers include Anne Dunlop (University of Melbourne), Amy Ogata (University of Southern California), Anna Arabindan-Kesson (Princeton University); Matthew Hunter (McGill University), Iain McCalman (University of Sydney), Ann Elias (University of Sydney), Ian McLean (University of Melbourne) and Maggie Cao. Respondents include Jennifer Ferng (University of Sydney), Ute Eickelcamp (University of Sydney), Sophie Cras and Alex J Taylor.

Thursday, 9 August

9:30

Tea & Coffee

10:00

Welcome with Mark Ledbury, Director of the Power Institute

Introduction with Maggie Cao (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Alex J Taylor (University of Pittsburgh) and Sophie Cras (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne).

10:30

Session 1: Environmental Effects

Mining Sydney Harbour Ann Elias, University of Sydney

The Return of the Repressed Iain McCalman, University of Sydney

Response by Ute Eickelkamp, University of Sydney

12:15

Lunch

1:30

Session 2: Mineral Politics

Mining, Metallurgy and Manufacture in Second Empire France Amy F. Ogata, University of Southern California

Rusting Giant: U.S. Steel and the Promotional Material of Sculpture Alex J. Taylor University of Pittsburgh

Response by Jennifer Ferng, University of Sydney

3:15

Afternoon Tea

3:45

Session 3: Gold

Surface and Surfeit: African Gold and Italian Gold-Ground Painting Anne Dunlop, University of Melbourne

Licentious Gold Maggie Cao, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Response by Alex J. Taylor, University of Pittsburgh

5:00

End of Day

Friday, 10 August

1:15

Tea & Coffee

1:30

Introduction with Maggie Cao (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

1:45

Session 4: Image Extraction

An Engine, Not a Camera: Photography and Combustion in the Early Anthropocene Matthew C. Hunter, McGill University

Mining Vision: Ingrid Pollard's Photographic Formations Anna Arabindan-Kesson, Princeton University

Mining, metaphysics, metaphor and making art Ian McLean, University of Melbourne

Response by Sophie Cras, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

3:45

Afternoon Tea

4:00

Roundtable Discussion - Art and Value(s) - Economic, Environmental, Ethical

1. How does it help, change or challenge art history to have a nuanced understanding of material provenance? Specifically, where materials for art making come from, the effort, violence and economic disparities that produce them.
2. Have we begun to chart mining's deep effects across human cultures and time? And how might the relatively short history of human-made art and artefacts help us understand the long and deep environmental processes with which mining interacts and often interferes?
3. How does art fit into the chain, or the map, of the inequalities that mining and extractive industries often entail?
4. Can we mine metaphorically? What does it mean for artists to 'extract' material?

5:30

Closing Reception

6:30

End of Day

Abstracts

Session 1: Environmental Effects

Mining Sydney Harbour

Ann Elias

University of Sydney

Since 1900, the global-scale of human influence on the planet has been measured by the degraded environments of industrial harbours. In Genoa in 1901, Paul Klee (1879-1940) described gigantic steamers from the 'wide globe', the smell of oil, human bodies black with coal, 'the disgusting water' (Italian Diary). In the same decade, Sydney Harbour was pronounced 'reeking with filth', the water infested by sharks seeking abattoir effluent, the air thick with coal smoke from steamers and mining. The effects of Sydney Harbour dust and smoke pollution were captured in atmospheric, pictorialist photographs by Harold Cazneaux (1878-1953). Sydney then boasted the world's only inner city coal mine, tunnelled under the sea floor.

This paper discusses Sydney's submarine coal mine, situated in Balmain, from an Anthropocenic perspective. It seeks to establish the connection between the ambition to mine the floor of Sydney Harbour and modernity's obsession with depth, penetration and extraction. By focusing on visual culture, on public arguments over the relative value of the Harbour's beauty over utility, and the overlooked rights of Aboriginal owners, the paper explores Sydney's little known submarine history as a renewed inquiry into the environmental consequences of industrial modernity.

The Return of the Repressed.

A poet, a painter and a forester won a 1960's war to save the Great Barrier Reef from oil mining but feared that mining threats might one day resume.

Iain McCalman

University of Sydney

For a decade from 1965-75, the poet, Judith Wright, and Mission Beach painter, John Busst, played a major role in helping to save the Great Barrier Reef from man-made destruction. The populist Queensland State Government had zoned eighty percent of the Reef's 2,300 kilometres of coral for oil, gas, fertilizer and cement mining. The campaign of resistance led by these two artists, in alliance with a forester, Dr Len Webb, contributed decisively to the establishment of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in 1975 and to then to the Reef's World Heritage listing in 1983 as 'the most impressive marine environment in the world.' In this paper I will explore the similar and different challenges facing today's conservationists as they attempt to combat a new threat to the Reef's survival posed by the mining of coal in Australia and by the burning of that coal by its purchasers.

Session 2: Mineral Politics

Mining, Metallurgy and Manufacture in Second Empire France

Amy F. Ogata

University of Southern California

The French Second Empire (1852-1870) saw the rise and expansion of interest in mining and in the production and manufacture of metallic structures, street decoration, and public sculpture. The completion of the railroads and the renovation of the city of Paris during this era gave metals, especially cast and wrought iron, new visibility in the capital. While the metaphorical notion of mining can help us to understand the politics of value in art, in this paper I argue that a literal understanding of mining and the subsequent processing of ores and manufacture into objects productively allows us to revisit a key moment in the architectural and design history of modern France. By exploring the ways that mining was visualized--in popular illustrated books as well as the statistical charts of an engineer--we can begin to understand the preoccupation with extraction that took hold in mid-century France. Riches mined in Mexico and Algeria were viewed as exotic specimens with tremendous monetary value. But the products made from these materials were likewise understood as a manmade *merveille* of the Second Empire evident in currency reform, exhibitions and urban ornament, all produced to enhance the Second Empire image of wealth and power.

Rusting Giant: U.S. Steel and the Promotional Material of Sculpture

Alex J Taylor

University of Pittsburgh

Abstract: In the 1960s, a range of mining companies turned to modern sculpture as a means to showcase the materials they produced. This paper considers how U.S. Steel used the 'Chicago Picasso' (1967) to promote the use of their trademarked Cor-Ten alloy as a prestige material for monumental sculpture. Reconstructing the production and promotion of this work, I consider how Picasso's art was drawn into the the public relations and lobbying requirements of the beleaguered industrial giant, helping to transform the rust that so plagued the industry into a material sign of its innovation and progress.

Session 3: Gold

Surface and Surfeit: African gold and Italian gold-ground painting

Anne Dunlop

University of Melbourne

In the field of Italian painting, the presence or absence of gold has been historiographically determinant: it is taken to divide the medieval from the modern. The works of the thirteenth to the fifteenth century – the so-called 'primitives' - are still occasionally called gold-back or gold-ground painting, as if the taste for all that glitter and shine revealed its immaturity or lack of sophistication. What has been less acknowledged is that much of the gold covering Italian painting had its origins in West Africa, in the areas still sometimes called the Gold Coast; it was a product of complex long-distance trade of commodities valued inter-culturally, and those distant origins shaped both artists' manipulation of gold and viewers' understandings of the images created with it. This paper will therefore trace some fundamental ideas about gold in this period, picking up on the linking of gold and the autograph, material and skill, gold and brush.

Licentious Gold

Maggie Cao

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

In a news story that broke earlier this year, we learned that Donald Trump's request to borrow Vincent van Gogh's serene 1888 Landscape with Snow to decorate the US White House private suites was turned down by the Guggenheim Museum. A curator offered instead a piece entitled America, a fully functioning 18-carat gold toilet by contemporary provocateur artist Maurizio Cattelan—a substitution that no doubt takes a gibe at what has been perceived as Trump's crass ostentation, his love of gilding. The Trump-Guggenheim tussle also registers in parodic form a century-old debate about the necessity of metallic currency while the artwork evokes a sordid and base miners' history. Taking this failed negotiation as a starting point, this paper considers the implications of gold as a political material in American history from a global perspective.

Session 4: Image Extraction

An Engine, Not a Camera: Photography and Combustion in the Early Anthropocene

Matthew C. Hunter

McGill University

In late 1862, a curator from London's Patent Museum named Francis Pettit Smith traveled to Birmingham on a collecting mission. Seeking to acquire a prototype of James Watt's steam engine from the Soho manufactory established by Matthew Boulton in the mid-1760s, Smith unearthed an unusual set of chemo-mechanical images. With these images, Smith made a daring intervention as much into the imagining of Enlightenment industrial history as to consolidating narratives of photography's origins. Claiming the images (then identifiable as replicas after paintings by Angelika Kauffman, Benjamin West and other leading, Georgian Academicians) as photographs, Smith moved the medium's invention from the 1820s/30s back to Birmingham in the final decades of the eighteenth century. Smith's intervention was convincing to many leading photographers in the 1860s; but, it found its greatest opponent in Matthew Piers Watt Boulton,

grandson of the Soho industrialist. Boulton's antagonism is surprising on many levels. Not only did he effectively destroy Smith's story, but Boulton simultaneously integrated the curator's chemo-mechanical findings into his own aircraft designs. This paper argues that, far from being some red herring fished from the depths of photo-lore, these contested, material appropriations of eighteenth-century chemical experiments by Smith and Boulton help to foreground an inconvenient (if strangely forgotten) truth: the extensive imbrication between what has come to count as "photography" and combustion-engine research. What happens, this paper asks, when we stop talking about "photography" and, instead, re-examine its putative early history by thinking the combustion chamber, the applied camera obscura, and the extraction-industry-derived chemicals binding them all together?

Mining Vision: Ingrid Pollard's Photographic Formations

Anna Arabindan-Kesson
Princeton University

With her 2013 series *Regarding the Frame* front and center, my paper will reflect on Ingrid Pollard's practice and its relationship to histories of British landscape representation, colonialism and photography. Born in Guyana, raised in London, Pollard's photographs are unique for their attention to the rural landscape and the place of Black and Brown bodies within it. Since the early eighties she has been exploring the relationship between historical imaginaries and the representation of place, the ecological effects of land use and experiences of living and working in the British countryside. To do so she deploys a variety of photographic techniques and compositional devices that puts her work in conversation with a canon of British art from which many Black British artists have been sidelined. In *Regarding the Frame* Pollard examines the history of coal mining in the North of Britain, a narrative that allows her to explore form (geological and photographic), process and experience. My paper follows this series and its making to trace the multiple meanings to which "mining" gives rise. It is a metaphor that has deep resonance in Pollard's overall oeuvre and especially in this set of photographs, as she works through what geographer Katherine McKittrick has termed the "sites of memory as the sight of memory." In the field of Black diasporic art mining is often used metaphorically to describe the implications of artworks, how they excavate and uncover museums/histories/the Past. While this certainly is part of Pollard's project, she

moves beyond metaphor here to seriously grapple with the physical, geological and ecological effects of coal mining in the British, and colonial, landscape. Exploring how Pollard structures vision itself as a sightline into the past, I want to consider the material relationship she constructs between a sense of uncovering or excavating history and the experience of being, working and walking in the land. My paper examines her photographic practice and the ways it responds to the geological formation of coal, and the process of mining, a subject she spent several months researching. I also contextualize her work in relation to nineteenth-century landscape art, the politics of immigration and art making in 1980s Britain and more recent interventions that focus on the presence and experience of Black people in the British countryside. In doing so, I hope to articulate both what photography means for Pollard – aesthetically and philosophically – and its relationship to her deep commitment to environmental action. Both these aspects inform her ontology of landscape, which becomes something akin to a mode of connection across multiple chronologies and disparate spaces. Ultimately, I also want to show how this exploration of a historical form of mining can also be understood as a reflection on contemporary conceptualizations of value and its extraction from art work made by Black diasporic artists.

Mining, metaphysics, metaphor and making art

Ian McLean

University of Melbourne

Using Fred Wilson's exhibition *Mining the museum* as paradigmatic of the so-called 'archival impulse' of contemporary art in the 1990s, this paper begins with an epistemological critique of the exhibition's metaphor of 'mining museums'. How for example, did Wilson mine the museum differently from an academic painter such as Sir Joshua Reynolds? Secondly, the paper aims to trace a genealogy of the 'archival impulse' in the knowledge systems of modernity and colonialism, and specifically in the infiltration of Indigenous thinking – what Claude Lévi-Strauss called *bricolage* – into Western modernist art practices. On the way it will analyse Imants Tillers' post-conceptual appropriation art of the 1970s and 80s, arguing that it reconstituted aspects of early modernist aesthetic practices such as cubism and the readymade into ways of knowing that prepared the ground for the archival turn of the 1990s in Australia, most evident in a string

of urban Indigenous artists.

Biographies

Alex J Taylor, Assistant Professor and Academic Curator, History of Art and Architecture, University of Pittsburgh

Alex J Taylor is an historian of twentieth-century art and visual culture. From 2014-2016, Taylor was the Terra Foundation Research Fellow at Tate, where he led research and displays into the museum's American collection. He is the author of *Perils of the Studio* (2007), the curator of *Lie of the Land* (2012) at the Australian Embassy in Washington DC, and recently contributed to the catalogue for *Australia's Impressionists* (2017) at the National Gallery, London. He is currently completing a book manuscript on 1960s corporate art patronage, including the production and promotion of abstract sculpture by the mining industry.

Amy Ogata, Professor of Art History, Art History Department, University of Southern California

Amy Ogata's research explores the history of modern European and American architecture, design and material culture. Her book *Designing the Creative Child: Playthings and Places in Midcentury America* (2013) historicizes the idea of childhood creativity, and shows how material goods such as toys, playrooms, playgrounds, books, schools, and even museums produced for the American baby boom participated actively in forming the notion of the creative child after World War II. Her first book was on architecture and design in turn-of-the-century Belgium, *Art Nouveau and the Social Vision of Modern Living: Belgian Artists in a European Context* (2001). Ogata is currently working on a study of metal and the metallic in Second Empire France.

Ann Elias, Associate Professor, History and Theory of Contemporary Global Art, Department of Art History, University of Sydney

Ann Elias's research interests include visual representations of nature in art, science and popular culture. She is the author of *Useless Beauty: Flowers and Australian Art* (2015) and *Camouflage Australia: Art, Nature, Science, and War* (2011). She is a Key Researcher with the Sydney Environment Institute, a serving

member of the International Committee of the College Art Association, and International Liaison for the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand. Her forthcoming book *Coral Empire: Underwater Oceans, Colonial Tropics, Visual Modernity* explores photographic and cinematic representations of the underwater at the colonial tropics in the early twentieth century.

**Anna Arabindan-Kesson, Assistant Professor, Department of Art & Archaeology,
University of Princeton**

Anna Arabindan-Kesson specializes in African American, Caribbean, and British Art, with an emphasis on histories of race, empire, and transatlantic visual culture in the long 19th century. Her research focuses on processes of cultural exchange and geographical movement, underpinned by histories of colonialism, and the legacies of these encounters in contemporary art practice. Her book project *The Currency of Cotton: Art, Empire and Commerce 1780–1900* uses the visual and material culture of the 19th-century cotton trade as a paradigm to untangle historical constructions of global connection, and their reappearance in contemporary art of the Black Diaspora.

**Anne Dunlop, Professor and Herald Chair of Fine Arts in the School of Culture
and Communication, University of Melbourne**

Anne Dunlop holds the Herald Chair in Fine Arts at the University of Melbourne. Her research focuses on the art of Italy and Europe between about 1300 and 1550, including cross-cultural exchange and the role of materials and technology in the making of art. Dunlop's most recent books are *Andrea del Castagno and the Limits of Painting* (2015) and, as co-editor, *The matter of art: materials, practices, cultural logics, c. 1250-1750* (2014). In 2016 she was a Visiting Professor at Harvard's Villa I Tatti Center for Renaissance Studies, working on a commissioned book with the working title *Global Renaissance*.

Iain McCalman, Professor, Department of History, University of Sydney

Iain McCalman is a scholar of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British and European history whose research has spanned scientific history, ethnography and environmentalism. His books have included *The Reef: A Passionate History* (2013) and *Darwin's Armada* (2009), which won three prizes and was the basis of the TV series, *Darwin's Brave New World*. He has co-curated exhibitions including *Gold: Lost Treasures, Hidden Histories* at the National Museum of Australia and *A Savage Liberty: Europe and the Exotic* at the National

Library. His current research spans projects in the environmental humanities, colonialism and museology.

Ian McLean, Professor and Hugh Ramsay Chair in Australian Art History in the School of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne

Ian McLean is a leading scholar of Australian art and particularly Indigenous art. His books include *Indigenous Archives: The Making and Unmaking of Aboriginal Art* (2017) with Darren Jorgensen, *Rattling Spears: A History of Indigenous Australian Art* (2016); *Double Desire: Transculturation and Indigenous Art* (2014); *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art* (2011), *White Aborigines: Identity Politics in Australian Art* (1998) and *The Art of Gordon Bennett* (1996).

Jennifer Ferng, Lecturer, Sydney School of Architecture, Design and Planning, University of Sydney

Dr Jennifer Ferng is an architectural historian at the University of Sydney. She received her PhD from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and her professional degrees in design from Princeton University and Rice University. She has served as an editor of the journal *Architectural Theory Review* published by Routledge and a chief researcher with the Sydney Intellectual History Network.

Most recently, she was awarded a Transregional Research Junior Scholar fellowship from the Social Science Research Council (SSRC). As part of this program focusing on Inter-Asia contexts and connections, she has been appointed a visiting scholar at the Harvard Asia Center, Harvard University from 2017-2018.

Maggie Cao, David G. Frey Assistant Professor of Art History, Department of Art & Art History, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Maggie M. Cao is the David G. Frey Assistant Professor of Art History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She received her PhD from Harvard University in 2014 and completed postdoctoral work at the Columbia University Society of Fellows. She is the author of *The End of Landscape in Nineteenth-Century America* (2018), which examines the dissolution of landscape painting as a major cultural project in the late nineteenth-century United States. She is currently at work on a project entitled "New Media in the Age of Sail," which examines art forms that emerged from contexts of global commerce in the long eighteenth century.

Matthew C. Hunter, Associate Professor, Art History, Art History & Communication Studies, McGill University

Matthew Hunter's research explores interfaces between physical materials and cognitive processes. He is the author of *Wicked Intelligence: Visual Art and the Science of Experiment in Restoration London* (2013) and co-editor of *The Clever Object* (2013). His article "Joshua Reynolds's 'Nice Chymistry': Action and Accident in the 1770s" for *The Art Bulletin* won the College Art Association's Arthur Kingsley Porter Prize in 2016. Hunter recently completed a book manuscript entitled 'Painting with Fire: The Temporally Evolving Chemical Objects in the British Enlightenment', and has begun a new research project examining the history of art insurance.

Sophie Cras, Assistant Professor, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

Sophie Cras's research explores the intersections of art and economics in the 20th century. Her book *L'économie à l'épreuve de l'art. Art et capitalisme dans les années 1960* (2018) – whose translation into English is forthcoming with Yale University Press (2019) – considers how money, finance, and economics in general became a focus for artistic experimentation in the Sixties. She is currently preparing an anthology of economic treatises written by artists, and is leading a collective project entitled: "Economics at the museum. A material history of economic knowledge on display (19th century – to the present)."

Ute Eickelcamp, ARC Future Fellow, Department of Anthropology, University of Sydney

Ute Eickelcamp is an anthropologist whose research and teaching is in the fields of cultural and social theory, philosophical anthropology, environmental humanities, psychoanalysis, childhood, art, Aboriginal Australian cultures and thought, and spatial imagination and practices. She has conducted ethnographic research with Anangu families since 1995, most recently on emergent ideas of nature and life in relationship to the Dreaming and Anangu Christianity. With a comparative eye to developments in the greater Sydney region, Ute is currently developing a collaborative study of postindustrial selves and ecological transformation in Germany's former coal mining hub, the Ruhr Metropolis, where industrial cultural heritage and wilderness co-exist. Here efforts are underway to restore land and society alike, by hosting the 2027 International Garden Expo across the entire polycentric region, and by re-making Europe's largest open sewer into the clean river it once was.

Cover image: Reinhold Vasters, Saxon miner cup (c. 1866-72), chalcedony, quartz and silver, 13.4 x 23 x 12.7 cm

The conference is the third in a series dedicated to economic encounters of and with artworks, following events held in New York and Paris. The event is supported by the Power Institute's "Art in Action" grant and a grant from the Terra Foundation for American Art.

