

W&M ART & ART HISTORY

✦ ART HISTORY ✦  
SENIOR COLLOQUIUM



# KEYNOTE

10:30-11:30

Social Networks of Shrines: Some Notes on Tibetan  
Buddhist Shrines in Diaspora--Melissa Kerin  
(Washington & Lee)

# LUNCH

12-1

# PRESENTATIONS

1:30-4:00

Donovan Watters

Heavenly Portals: The Spiritual  
Role of Icons in the Byzantine  
Church

Isabel Schreur

If Paint Could Talk: The  
Animality of Artistic Materials

Maeve Marsh

Maori and Moana: Indigenous  
Perspectives

Tara Vasanth

The Tree of Life: Biomimicry  
in Francis Kéré's Serpentine  
Pavilion



Melissa Kerin received her Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania in the History of Art and her MTS at Harvard Divinity School in the World Religions Program (Buddhist Studies). Dr. Kerin is a specialist in Tibetan and Himalayan art and material culture. Her research focuses on the intricate and multifaceted relationships between art and identity formation (political and cultural), cultural memory, and religious praxis. She has written on Tibetan Buddhist architecture in the Markha Valley (Ladakh), Nako (Kinnaur), and Kashmir.



Donovan Watters is a senior at William & Mary, majoring in Art History with a concentration in Critical Curatorial Studies and a minor in Religious Studies. His main area of interest is Christian origins/early Christianity and Judaism. After graduation, Donovan plans to take a gap year to work in the museum field, then pursue a graduate education in Paleochristian art and the art and architecture of the Second Temple Period. Eventually, he hopes to find a career as a professor or in curatorial/museum work. Outside of the classroom, Donovan is president of the college's Astronomy Club, plays the lute, writes the occasional short story or poem, and collects a few too many things.

## ABSTRACT

Byzantine churches were adorned with vibrant mosaics and frescoes of holy figures blanketing their interior walls. These contrasted with a plain exterior reflective of the earthly world outside and heightened the effect that to step into a Byzantine church was to step into heaven itself. My paper explores the deeper relations between the Byzantine churchgoer and these sacred images (icons) and examines the ways in which these representations acted as two-way portals to the divine. Through veneration and observation, the churchgoer was able to interact directly with the icon – and, in its own way, the icon reciprocated. Iconographic motifs present within churches were varied, ranging from earthly figures such as saints to larger-than-life depictions of Christ himself. Three such motifs are examined in this paper: the Theotokos (“Mother of God”), images of emperors subservient to holy figures, and the Pantocrator (“ruler of all”), with each representation in a different position within the church and each in a somewhat different way offering a bridge or portal to the divine.

Consequently, the movement through the space of the Byzantine church itself positioned the worshiper for sacred viewing. This began in the narthex, a liminal area separating the exterior from the church proper. From there, the worshiper continued into the

nave (the church proper), surrounded by icons on all sides, and was faced by the sanctuary and apse in front of them. As the holiest space in the church and home of the altar, the sanctuary was guarded by the templon, a screen housing icons at eye level with the churchgoer. Looking up, the churchgoer was confronted by the dome, usually housing the Christ Pantocrator (and his judgment cast down upon the Earth). The templon, providing tangible access to divine images, was typically the first destination for visitors in the church as they honored the images through veneration, which manifested in gestures and physical interaction with the icons. Sight, here, was itself a form of interaction, as the gaze of the iconic figures reflected the gazes of the venerator. This paper argues that as visual portals, icons held a key role in transforming the Byzantine churchgoer's spiritual experience of the church: a microcosm of heaven on Earth.



Isabel Schreur is a senior majoring in Environmental Policy and Art History with a concentration in built environments. While at William & Mary, she has worked for Student Unions & Engagement, interned with the Institute for Integrative Conservation as a GIS researcher for Conservation International, as well as for the Office of Admissions as a Senior Interviewer, and for the Chesapeake Climate Action Network as a policy advocacy intern. In the Spring of 2021, Isabel received the Anne Davis Grant for Environmental Justice Research and completed a 200-hour independent research project exploring the history of environmental justice in her hometown of Baltimore MD, and how art has been used as a form of science communication to spur grassroots activism. She is a Yoga Instructor for Campus Recreation, co-leads the Environmental Humanities Hub, and member of Alpha Phi Omega service fraternity. Her passions range from GIS, climate

policy, to oil painting and hiking. After graduating she will join the workforce as an environmental researcher, helping to make at risk communities more resilient to the effects of climate change.

## **ABSTRACT**

Art doesn't only imitate life, it also utilizes "life" for its creation. Non-human animals have existed as materials for art making throughout history. This use has ranged from the very first cave-paintings with their rudimentary forms of pigment, to gelatin silver photography, to contemporary performance pieces. My paper examines the ways in which our industrialized society has extended this use to either extreme, from advocacy for animal rights as sentient beings to mass slaughter of animal bodies for industry. I argue that though the animal presence in art may never disappear it at least deserves acknowledgment and respect. Throughout history, animals have provided an important basis for artistic creation, as sources for both materials and subject matter; our awareness of their presence—visible and invisible—is imperative for the ethical consumption of these conscious beings for the creation of art. Moreover, this self-conscious awareness of animal presence in art and artmaking might heighten the likelihood of greater sensitivity to their use and abuse in the wider culture.



Maeve Marsh is completing a double major in Art History and Business Analytics (with a concentration in Data Science and Consulting). Maeve is from Arlington, VA. With family in Santa Fe, New Mexico and many of her childhood memories involve interacting with and learning about Native American art and culture. Her study abroad in Auckland, New Zealand (early 2023) allowed her to further her interests in indigenous studies and to acquire a deeper understanding of the Māori people. Outside of Art History, Maeve has held a variety of internships, most notably with PBS Distribution and Bank of America, currently works on the two-time Emmy-nominated television show, *Legacy List with Matt Paxton*, and in her free time enjoys photography and starting her own photography business. After graduation, Maeve will be working for a global consulting firm in Boston, Massachusetts, merging her business and creative

talents to provide strategy advice and solve pressing business issues for companies around the world.

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## ABSTRACT

The Māori, who are indigenous to Aotearoa (New Zealand), have a long-standing cultural and spiritual connection to the environment and its resources, especially water. *Te moana* (the ocean) that surrounds the country is central to Māori traditions, spiritual life, and art. Given the extensive damage to the ocean resulting from pollution, ocean conservation has taken on increasing importance in the last decade, and has re-thinking what our relationship looks like with the aquatic environment that surrounds us. It is widely understood that important cultural concepts that pertain to environmental guardianship and management are prevalent in the Māori community. As a culture that connects deeply to *te moana*, the Māori community's awareness of declining ocean health and its damaging effect on Māori iwis (tribal groups) across New Zealand has led to influential activism that is evident in their art. By examining Māori art from the Oceanic region, from traditional forms to more contemporary designs, one can ascertain the cultural injustices that the Māori

people face due to pollution and how past European colonization continues to play a critical role in environmental degradation. This paper will first explore traditional Māori art that displays a deeply rooted cultural connection to the ocean. It will also examine keywords and themes in Māori Culture pertaining to environmental conservation and how these themes are evident in Māori spiritual beliefs and understandings. Using John's Walsh's landscape, *It's not art, it's just a scene* (2014), to critique New Zealand pakeha (the white settlers of New Zealand) landscape paintings, my paper will then present the contrast between pakeha and Māori relationships with Aotearoa's environment. Lastly, by studying *Bottled Ocean 2122* by George Nuku and *Mana Moana*, a video piece directed by Rachael Rakena (Ngāi Tahu, Ngā Puhi, Ngāti Pākehā), this paper establishes how contemporary Māori artists are examining these contrasting relationships with the environment to illustrate how the world can re-think its relationship with the oceanic environment. Viewing the importance of water protection via indigenous art allows us not only to give voice to a culture that is particularly susceptible to damage from ocean pollution but also to understand environmentalism from a new perspective, one that focuses on harnessing a conscious relationship with water.



Tara Vasanth '23 is a double major in Art History and Environmental Sustainability. She has a keen interest in the intersections between art, architecture, and sustainability; and, has authored, illustrated, and self-published two children's books about wildlife conservation in partnership with the Dallas Zoo. Upon graduation, Tara is pursuing a three-year master's degree in architecture. She will be working for a consulting firm in Boston, Massachusetts, merging her business and creative talents to provide strategic advice and solve pressing business issues for companies around the world. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/maevemarsh/>

## **ABSTRACT**

Architectural biomimicry, an approach in which human architects use natural models as the basis for their structures, is emerging as a provocative branch of design that deserves deeper investigation.

Nonetheless, its feasibility in the built environment remains to be seen. Though its champions celebrate reciprocity between their designs and the environment, it can be limited by its own romantic ideals and even widen the distance between culture and nature. The Eastgate Center in Zimbabwe and the Eden Project in England are prominent examples of biomimetic architecture that flaunt a sleek and futuristic image; a termite mound is turned into a multi-story mall and a soap bubble is blown up to become a world-class botanical garden. Despite each structure being different in appearance and location, there is a commonality linking these buildings (and others like them): a nonhuman metaphor. It is quite difficult—if not impossible—to precisely scale some of these analogies to suit human needs. To circumvent this pitfall, I argue that biomimicry's definition and application must be expanded to include *humanity*, to reconcile the human and nonhuman. By so doing, we will become more receptive to the interconnected transformative power of life—and especially grow more conscious of its transience. In this paper, I discuss the ways in which architect Diébédo Francis Kéré reassesses the meaning of biomimicry (and architecture) in his creation of a temporary pavilion that drew its inspiration from a communal tree in his hometown; in this project he created a building in which biomimicry draws from human experience of nature while upholding regenerative design.



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