

ILLUSTRATED BOOK OF NATURE

New perspectives on the History of Natural History Museums

Since their foundation in the 19th century, Natural History Museums challenged and shaped the way people think about the natural world. Being scientific research institutes and public educational institutions at the same time, they had to find ways of conveying their topics to diverse audiences. Although creations of the industrial revolution, the Natural History Museums stand in an intellectual tradition reaching back to medieval times: complex presentations of animals can be traced back to illuminated manuscripts like the bestiaries. The talks of this symposium will try to fathom out the different (historic and modern) approaches of displaying natural knowledge.

Lecture Hall of the NHM Vienna
Wednesday August 29th, 2018, 18:00 – 20.30



Program

6:00 pm: Welcome & Introduction | Univ. Prof. Dr. Christian Köberl, CEO & Director General of the Natural History Museum Vienna

6:05 pm: Books of Beasts: The Medieval Manuscript Heritage of the Natural History Museum | Janine Rogers (Professor of Medieval and Sixteenth-Century Literature, and the Reverend William Purvis Chair of English Literature in the Department of English Literatures at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, Canada)

6:25 pm: Pre-Raphaelite art & Victorian science: The Oxford University Museum of Natural History | John Holmes (Professor of Victorian Literature and Culture at the University of Birmingham, UK)

6:45 pm: Art / Nature. Artistic Interventions at the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin | Anita Hermannstädter M.A. (head of PAN – Perspectives on Nature, the Department for Humanities and Arts at the Museum für Naturkunde) Berlin

*Following the talks: **Guided tour through the history of the NHM Vienna with a visit to the roof of the museum** | Stefanie Jovanovic-Kruspel (NHM Vienna)*

Valid entrance ticket required. The event will be held in English.

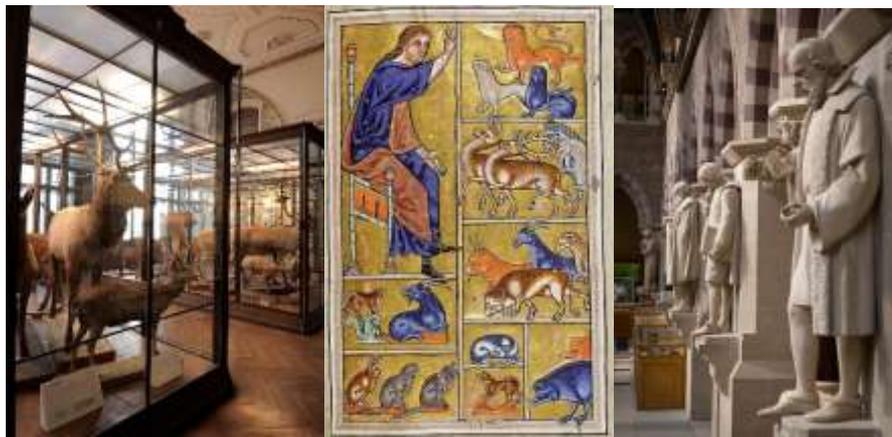
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- **6:00 pm:** Welcome & Introduction | Univ. Prof. Dr. Christian Köberl, CEO & Director General of the Natural History Museum Vienna

- **6:05 pm: Books of Beasts: The Medieval Manuscript Heritage of the Natural History Museum**

One important kind of illuminated manuscript of the middle ages was the *bestiary*, a “book of beasts,” which catalogued animals, both real and imaginary. Lions and lambs, dogs and dragons, were presented in rich illustrated detail. These texts ascribed powerful allegories to these animals – allegories we were intended to learn from in regard to our own moral and spiritual behaviour. In the natural history museums, especially those that evoke the medieval past, we see animals presented in similar ways. We use animals, as the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss said, to think with: how do the animals of the natural history museum give us tools to think with, and how do those tools reach back to the ancient intellectual heritage of the medieval manuscript?

Janine Rogers: Head of Department, the Purvis Chair of English Literature, Professor of Medieval and Sixteenth-Century Literature in the Department of English Literatures at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, Canada. She specializes in interdisciplinary approaches to literature. Her current primary research area is in the field of literature and science. She is the author of two monographs: *Eagle* (Reaktion Press, 2015) and *Unified Fields: Science and Literary Form* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014).

- **6: 25 pm: Pre-Raphaelite art & Victorian science: The Oxford University Museum of Natural History (John Holmes)**

The Pre-Raphaelites were the most influential art movement in Victorian England. They rejected the conventional teachings of the Royal Academy, taking inspiration instead from medieval art and modern science. Since the beginning of the 19th century, precise observation and experiment had achieved huge advances in sciences. The Pre-Raphaelites believed they could use the same methods to achieve similar advances in painting, poetry and sculpture. In this talk I will show how one particular group of scientists, based at the University of Oxford, embraced Pre-Raphaelitism as a visual language for communicating their own scientific worldview. In the design of the Oxford University Museum of Natural History (1850s), the scientists followed Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic principles. Through

this remarkable collaboration, a vision of science and the natural world was built into the fabric of the Oxford Museum itself, setting the precedent for the major natural history museums that would be built later in the century.

John Holmes: Professor of Victorian Literature and Culture at the University of Birmingham (UK). Books: *The Pre-Raphaelites and Science*, has just been published with Yale University Press. *Darwin's Bards: British and American Poetry in the Age of Evolution* (2009), *Science in Modern Poetry: New Directions* (2012) and *The Routledge Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century British Literature and Science* (co-edited with Sharon Ruston, 2017), and the anthology *Guests of Time: Poetry from the Oxford University Museum of Natural History* (2016).

- **6:45 pm: Art / Nature. Artistic Interventions at the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin (Anita Hermmanstädter)**

In 2014, the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin and the German Federal Cultural Foundation launched an international model project (2014-18) exploring the interplay between contemporary art, museum practice and natural history research. This project, called Art / Nature, invited artists and writers to create new works that reflect on the natural history museum. These artworks were displayed in four annual rounds of interventions in order to enrich, interpret or comment on the representations in a NHM. In my talk, I will introduce some of the artworks and discuss their specific approaches towards the natural history museum. I will also look at feedback the museum has received (via a visitor evaluation) on those pieces and approaches.

Anita Hermannstädter, M.A.: head of PAN – Perspectives on Nature, the Department for Humanities and Arts at the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin. After studying modern history, art history and ancient American studies in Berlin, she worked as a researcher and exhibition curator first at the Ethnological Museum in Berlin and then in the department of scientific collections and science communication at the Hermann von Helmholtz-Zentrum, Humboldt-Universität (2003–2008).

Following the talks: ***Guided tour through the history of the NHM Vienna with a visit to the roof*** | Dr. Stefanie Jovanovic-Kruspel (NHM Vienna)

Valid entrance ticket required.



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