

ASHMOLEAN
MUSEUM
OXFORD

OTHER WORLDS:
SYMBOLIST ART IN EUROPE AND BEYOND

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MONDAY 14 – TUESDAY 15 DECEMBER 2026

Sultan Nazanin Shah Conference Centre,
Worcester College, Oxford



PROGRAMME

MONDAY 14 DECEMBER 2026

10:00 AM Registration and Coffee

Welcome and Introduction

10:45 Xa Sturgis (Director, Ashmolean Museum), Matthew Winterbottom (Ashmolean Museum), Stefano Evangelista (University of Oxford)

Panel 1: Styles and Identities

CHAIR: Stefano Evangelista

11:00 Elizabeth Prettejohn (University of York) **Rossetti: Symbolist?**

11:25 Margaret D. Stetz (University of Delaware) and Mark Samuels Lasner (University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press): **Symbolism at the Bodley Head: Two Examples**

11:50 Michael Shaw (University of Stirling): **John Duncan and the Intersections of Scottish Celtic Revivalism and Symbolism**

12:15 Questions

12.30 – 2:00 PM Lunch

Panel 2: Artistic Journeys

CHAIR: Clément Dessy

2:00 Neungreudee Lohapon (Chulalongkorn University): **Symbolism in the Modern Art of Siam: Italian Artists and Transcultural Encounters**

2:25 Suzanne Veldink (Singer Laren Museum): **An Artist between two Worlds: Sources of Inspiration for Jan Toorop's Symbolism**

2:50 Hitomi Inoue (Aichi Gakuin University): **Fenollosa, Okakura, and Symbolism in the Formation of Modern Japanese Painting**

3:15 Questions

3:30-4:00 PM Tea Break

Panel 3: Cosmopolitan Cities

CHAIR: Charlotte Ribeyrol

4:00 Antonio Saborit (Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City): **Symbolism in Mexico**

4:25 Laima Laučkaitė-Surgailienė (Lithuanian Culture Research Institute): **Symbolism in Lithuania: Between National Romanticism and Cosmogony**

4:50 Mariàngels Fondevila (Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya): **Imagining Other Worlds: Catalan Symbolism**

5:15 Questions

6:30 PM Aperitif

7:15 PM Speakers' Dinner

TUESDAY 15 DECEMBER 2026

9.30 AM Coffee

Panel 4: The Body: Beauty, Morbidity, Violence

CHAIR: Matthew Winterbottom

10.00 Francesco Parisi (Accademia di Belle Arti, Macerata): **Between Decadence and Symbolism: Giulio Aristide Sartorio and the Reconfiguration of Artistic Language**



10.25 Rachel Passannante (Danforth Art Museum): **Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller and Symbolism**

10.50 Thomas Holman (Wartski): **Symbolist Jewellery**

11:15 Questions

Panel 5: Colonialism

CHAIR: TBC

11:30 Alastair Wright ((University of Oxford)): **"Je est un autre": Gauguin, Martinique, and the Colonial Origins of Symbolism**

11:55 Werner Adriaenssens (Vrije Universiteit Brussel): **White Gold from the Congo: Belgian Ivory Sculpture at the Fin de Siècle**

12:20 Questions

12:45 – 2:00 PM Lunch

Panel 6: Changing Forms

CHAIR: An Van Camp

2:00 Geoffrey Batchen (University of Oxford): **A Shaft of Light: Symbolist Photography in Australia**

2:25 Jessie Elizabeth Alperin (University of Chicago): **Le Décor symboliste: Émile Gallé's Preparatory Drawings as Formes Suggestives**

2:50 Tyuki Imamura (University of Oxford): **Mushi no iki – Anarchist Symbolism in Taishō Japan**

3:15 Questions

3:30 PM Tea and cake

Researching Symbolism

CHAIR: Stefano Evangelista, Matthew Winterbottom

4.00 Round Table

5:00 PM Conference Close



SPEAKERS' BIOS

Werner Adriaenssens is Professor of Decorative Arts at Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) and Head of Decorative Arts at the Royal Museums of Art and History (KMKG), Brussels. As curator at the KMKG since 2000, he oversees its twentieth-century collections. His research focuses on Belgian Art Nouveau and Art Deco, on which he has published extensively. He has curated exhibitions including *The Wolfers Dynasty* (2006–07), *Henry van de Velde: Passion, Function, Beauty* (2013–14), and *Horta–Wolfers* (2017–18), and led the creation of the KMKG's new Belgian Art Nouveau and Art Deco galleries, opened in 2025.

Jessie Elizabeth Alperin is a PhD candidate in Art History and the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. Her dissertation, *Sculpture by Other Means: The Sculptural in Fin-de-Siècle Europe*, examines how sculpture was reimagined across the decorative arts, drawing, and performance at the turn of the twentieth century. Her research focuses on nineteenth-century European art, Symbolism, Art Nouveau, and Franco-Japanese artistic exchange, with particular interests in intermediality and the relationship between sculpture and the decorative arts. Her work has been supported by the Georges Lurcy Fellowship, the Chateaubriand Fellowship, and the Decorative Arts Trust.

Geoffrey Batchen is Professor Emeritus of History of Art at the University of Oxford.

Mariàngels Fondevila holds a PhD in Art History from the University of Barcelona, specialising in Art Deco. She is currently curator of Modern Art at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC), Barcelona, where she has curated numerous exhibitions. She has contributed as an adviser and essayist to major international exhibitions on Catalan modernity at institutions such as The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Grand Palais, Paris. Among others, she has co-published *Pedro Mañach, primer marchante de Picasso* (2024). A Board Member of ICOM Design, she has been actively involved in the organisation of international conferences, including 'The Architect Beyond the Building: Decorative Arts and Design', held at MNAC in November 2026.

Thomas Holman is a director of Wartski. He is a specialist in engraved gems and jewellery design of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In 2019, he curated the exhibition 'Multum in Parvo: A Collection of Engraved Gems' and wrote the accompanying catalogue of the same name. In 2022, he contributed a chapter on the Arts and Crafts silversmith Frederick Partridge to the catalogue published by the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon entitled *The Partridge Family of Barnstaple: Ethel Mairet, Fred Partridge and the Arts and Crafts Movement*. He has lectured at The Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, Chatsworth House in Derbyshire, and The Society of Jewellery Historians in London.

Tyuki Imamura is a historian and curator, and an Ertegun Scholar and DPhil Candidate in Contemporary Art History and Theory at the



Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford. His research explores the aesthetics of mutual aid in contemporary art and culture. He studied Philosophy and Art History at Bard College, receiving the Heinrich Blücher and John Bard Scholars Prizes. His curatorial work spans Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, including his current role as Curator for Thailand Biennale 2027, work with Raqs Media Collective at Yokohama Triennale 2020, and as Curatorial Assistant at documenta fifteen with ruangrupa.

Hitomi Inoue is a professor in the Faculty of Letters at Aichi Gakuin University, Japan. She studied Japanese art history at Tokyo University of the Arts and earned her Ph.D. from the University of Tokyo. She previously served as a curator at the Nagoya/Boston Museum of Fine Arts for twenty years, where she organized numerous exhibitions, including 'Japanese Masterpieces from the MFA, Boston' and 'Looking East: Western Artists and the Allure of Japan from the MFA, Boston'. Her current research focuses on the formation of art museums in Japan and the United States, particularly on Japanese art collectors such as Ernest Fenollosa and William Bigelow and their roles in the MFA, Boston.

Neungreudee Lohapon is Associate Professor of Italian Studies at the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand, where her research bridges art history, cultural memory, and digital preservation. Over the past three decades, her work has focused on Italian art history, nineteenth and early twentieth-century art and architecture, transnational cultural networks, and artistic encounters between Italy and Siam, contributing to a deeper understanding of the transcultural dynamics that shaped Siam's modernisation. She directs the Arc of Memory Research Unit and the Digital Archive of Modernized Siam Project, where she conducts interdisciplinary research integrating archival and provenance research, endangered archives, and digital preservation.

Francesco Parisi is Professor of History of Drawing at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Macerata. A specialist in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Italian and European art, he has published extensively on Symbolism and its broader cultural contexts. He recently edited a new Italian translation of Max Klinger's treatise on aesthetics, *Painting and Drawing*, and has curated numerous monographic volumes on Italian Symbolist artists. Among his major exhibitions are *Simbolismo in Italia* (Fondazione Magnani Rocca, 2026), *Arte e Magia* (2017), and *Pre-Raphaelites: A Modern Renaissance* (2023). He is Senior Curator at the Musei di San Domenico, Forlì.

Rachel Passannante is Assistant Director and Collections Manager at the Danforth Art Museum, where she oversees the permanent collection, including the nearly 400 works by sculptor Meta V.W. Fuller. Rachel also handles the artwork for and the curating of exhibitions, including the annual Juried Exhibition and permanent collection exhibitions. Previous to Danforth, Rachel worked at the American Independence Museum in Exeter, New Hampshire where she developed exhibitions, managed collections and archives, and the preservation of two historic buildings. She has a Masters in Material Culture Studies from the University of Sheffield in England and a B.A. in Archaeology with minors in Museum Studies and Geology from SUNY Potsdam in upstate New York.

Elizabeth Prettejohn is Professor of History of Art at the University of York. Her books include *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites, Beauty and Art 1750-2000, The Modernity of Ancient Sculpture, and Modern Painters, Old Masters: The Art of Imitation from the Pre-Raphaelites to the First World War*. She is an active guest curator and has co-curated exhibitions on Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John William Waterhouse, and the Pre-Raphaelites. Her new book, *The Art of the Victorians*, will be published in the Oxford History of Art series in August 2027.

Antonio Saborit has served as director of the National Museum of Anthropology since January 2013. The Museum is the most important museum in Latin America. As director, Antonio Saborit has focused on the improvement of the museum's infrastructure, and on promoting and facilitating its role as an educational tool and unparalleled archive of Mexico's material culture. Dr. Saborit studied filmmaking, literature, and history at Mexico's National University. He holds a Ph.D. in history and ethnohistory from the National Schoolof Anthropology and History. As a scholar and writer, he has focused primarily on the intellectual communities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Mark Samuels Lasner, Senior Research Fellow Emeritus at the University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press, is a bibliographer, typographer, and recognized authority on Victorian literature and art, whose books include *A Selective Checklist of the Published Work of Aubrey Beardsley* (1995). His is among the foremost collections of books, manuscripts, letters, and artworks from 1850 to 1900, focusing on Pre-Raphaelitism and on 1890s writers and illustrators. With Margaret D. Stetz, he recently curated 'Max Beerbohm: The Price of Celebrity' (New York Public Library, 2023-2024). Their next exhibition, 'Decadent Partners: The Worlds of Charles Ricketts, Charles Shannon, and Oscar Wilde', is scheduled for Fall 2027 at The Grolier Club in New York City.

Michael Shaw is Senior Lecturer in Scottish Literature at the University of Stirling. His research primarily focuses on late-Victorian Scottish literature, fin-de-siècle decadence, and the interactions between the two. He is author of *The Fin-de-Siècle Scottish Revival: Romance, Decadence, and Celtic Identity* (Edinburgh UP, 2020) and editor of *A Friendship in Letters: Robert Louis Stevenson and J. M. Barrie* (Sandstone Press, 2020). With Scott Lyall, he is currently editing a volume titled *The Scottish Literary and Cultural Revival, 1880s-1950s*. In 2023, he was awarded a Royal Society of Edinburgh Personal Research Fellowship to investigate the coverage of homosexuality in the Scottish periodical press from 1885 to 1928.

Margaret D. Stetz is the Mae and Robert Carter Professor of Women's Studies and Professor of Humanities at the University of Delaware. She has published more than 150 scholarly essays on literature, material culture, film, war, sexual violence, and feminism. Her books include a study of twentieth-century British women's comic fiction and a catalogue of late-Victorian portraits. She has also curated over a dozen exhibitions of art and print culture at museums and libraries in the US and UK. In addition, she is a widely published poet and Poetry Editor of *The Steinbeck Review*, a Pennsylvania State University Press journal.

Laima Laučkaitė Surgailienė is an art historian, art critic, and curator. She lives in Vilnius, where she is a leading researcher at the Lithuanian Culture Research Institute, in the Department of Art History and Visual Studies. She was educated at Vilnius Art Institute (MA, 1979), the University of Moscow (PhD, 1988), and the



Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, Munich (PDF, 1992). She won the Lithuanian Government Award for Culture and Arts in 2015. Her research focuses on early twentieth-century art. She is the author of, among other books, *M. K. Čiurlionis and Lithuanian Art at the Beginning of the 20th century* (2007); *Art in Vilnius 1900-1915* (2002; AABS Book Prize 2008-09); *Expressionist Rider Marianne Werefkin* (2007); and *Art in Vilnius during the Great War* (2018).

Suzanne Veldink works as a Senior curator for Singer Laren (NL) and specializes in French and Dutch nineteenth and early twentieth-century art. In the past she worked as a researcher and (exhibition) curator for Glasgow Museums, the Van Gogh Museum, and the Rijksmuseum, and as head of collections, exhibitions, and education for Museum Panorama Mesdag. Exhibitions curated by Veldink include *Matthijs Maris* (Rijksmuseum, 2017), *Suze Robertson* (Museum Panorama Mesdag, 2022), and *The worlds of Jan Toorop* (Singer Laren, 2026).

Alastair Wright is Tutorial Fellow in Art History at St John's College, Oxford. His publications include *Matisse and the Subject of Modernism* (Princeton University Press, 2004); *Paradise Remembered: Gauguin's Noa Noa Suite, exh. cat.* (Princeton University Art Museum, 2010); and essays on topics ranging from Ford Madox Brown to global modernisms in journals including *Art History, Art Bulletin, and Oxford Art Journal*. He is currently working on two book projects, one exploring questions of audience and the public sphere in relation to Neo-Impressionism, the other examining representations of class and imperial space in the paintings of Ford Madox Brown.

ABSTRACTS

Werner Adriaenssens, 'White Gold from the Congo: Belgian Ivory Sculpture at the Fin de Siècle'

Ivory sculpture experienced a brief but remarkable revival in Belgium at the fin de siècle. This resurgence was closely connected to a deliberate campaign to promote the products of the Congo Free State, the personal colonial possession of King Leopold II, among the Belgian public.

A pivotal moment was the Brussels International Exhibition of 1897 and its associated colonial exhibition in Tervuren. At the initiative of Edmond van Eetvelde, Secretary of State of the Congo Free State, the exhibition was designed by leading modern architects, including Paul Hankar, Henry van de Velde, Gustave Serrurier, and Georges Hobé. Their innovative Art Nouveau designs introduced a strikingly modern aesthetic to a broad public. As the term 'Art Nouveau' was not yet established in Belgium, the style presented at Tervuren became popularly known as 'Style Congo'.

The centrepiece was the Salle d'Honneur, where an extraordinary ensemble of 86 ivory sculptures was displayed. To promote ivory—the Congo's principal export product—Van Eetvelde made



this costly material available free of charge to Belgian sculptors, on condition that they produced works for the exhibition. The ensemble brought together major currents in Belgian sculpture, from Realism and Art Nouveau to Symbolism, whose emphasis on mystery, imagination and spiritual meaning found a particularly suggestive medium in ivory.

This paper examines the ensemble at the intersection of artistic innovation, Symbolist aesthetics, and colonial propaganda. It argues that this exceptional revival depended on the colonial economy that temporarily made ivory accessible to artists. Once the exhibition ended, sculptors again had to purchase the costly material, bringing this artistic flowering to an abrupt end. The surviving works offer a revealing perspective on the complex entanglement of Belgian modernism, material culture and colonialism at the fin de siècle.

Elizabeth Alperin, 'Le Décor symboliste: Émile Gallé's Preparatory Drawings as Formes Suggestives'

In his 1891 lecture Le Décor symboliste, Émile Gallé described the task of the artist-decorator as the creation of formes suggestives: forms capable of evoking ideas beyond what they directly represent. This paper considers how suggestion operates not only through Gallé's choice of motifs but through the representational strategies of his preparatory drawings for glass. In these watercolours, floral and landscape motifs frequently exceed the drawn contours of the vessel, continuing beyond its visible surface or implying forms concealed from view. Rather than simply recording the appearance of a prospective object, the drawings ask the viewer to imagine what cannot be represented within the limits of the page.

I place Gallé's drawings in dialogue with late nineteenth-century Japanese design export drawings, in which related strategies allow ornament to pass across and beyond the contours of represented vessels. Gallé's engagement with Japanese art is well established, yet Japonisme has often been understood through the transmission and adaptation of motifs. By shifting attention from motif to modes of representation, I consider how Japanese design offers another context for understanding Gallé's conception of the suggestive form.

Reading these drawings through Gallé's own theory of Symbolist decoration, this paper argues that formes suggestives describes not simply symbolically charged objects, but a visual logic predicated upon incompletion, implication, and imaginative extension. Like Symbolist poetry, in which suggestion allows meaning to exceed what is explicitly stated, Gallé's drawings make the limits of representation productive. Drawing thus becomes a privileged site for Symbolist decoration: a medium through which the decorative object could be imagined as exceeding its visible and material boundarie

Geoffrey Batchen, 'A Shaft of Light: Symbolist Photography in Australia'

Although originating in France, Symbolism was a global movement in which artists around the world sought to express their new fascination with psychological states of being, with experiences that could be felt but not necessarily seen. In Australia, that fascination had to reconcile two conflicting impulses: the desire to be regarded as international and cosmopolitan and the desire to represent what was distinctive and specific about the local and the national. Australian photographers had the extra burden of overcoming their medium's fidelity to appearances. How could a photograph be made to conjure more than what can be seen in it? This paper will survey the impact of Symbolism on the history of Australian art, with a particular focus on the work of Australian photographers. It will ask what is Australian about Australian Symbolist photography, not in order to provide a definitive answer but as a means of pointing to the persistent presence of the unseen and the unseeable.

Mariàngels Fondevila, 'Imagining Other Worlds: Catalan Symbolism'

The talk will explore Catalan Symbolism, drawing primarily on the collections of the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC, Barcelona). The aim is to showcase the diversity of individual approaches and creative practices present in disciplines such as painting, sculpture, photography, graphic arts, and decorative arts.

Broadly speaking, Catalan symbolism fits within the syncretic current of Modernism, which opposed materialism and rationalism and extended into the early twentieth century. It stemmed from romantic medievalism and, among others, from orientalism, which gained great popularity during the nineteenth century as a result of Europe's North African colonial

experience. Moreover, it is worth noting that turn-of-the-century Barcelona was one of the most cosmopolitan and prosperous cities on the Iberian Peninsula. The city, which proudly hosted the Universal Exhibition of 1888, became an important centre for the reception of international art thanks to the International Exhibitions of Fine Arts, in which exemplary artists of European symbolism took part. International exhibitions across the continent, travel, and the dissemination of illustrated publications facilitated the circulation of ideas, models, and influences in the context of the early days of cultural globalisation.

Building on these mechanisms of transfer and reception, the talk proposes a rereading of Catalan symbolism as a phenomenon simultaneously connected to international networks of artistic renewal and rooted in exotic, primitive, religious, poetic, and folkloric imaginaries. Through the analysis of works held at the MNAC, it will examine how Catalan artists adapted symbolism to a specific cultural context, imagining fantastic worlds, while rarely transgressing (with a few exceptions) the conservative moral frameworks of the society of their time. At the same time, it will explore the shift towards classicism in the visual arts, resulting from the influence of the Greek poet Jean Moréas, author of the Symbolist Manifesto of 1886.

Thomas Holman, 'Symbolist Jewellery'

The Symbolist movement used jewellery to espouse a very different philosophy to the nationalistic values that had underpinned revivalism. Whilst revivalism had reintroduced goldsmithing to the world of fine art, it was a positivistic project which had transposed the riches of ancient tombs into a newly industrialised and increasingly secular world. The enigmatic quality of these ancient treasures had been lost to the rigours of analysis, becoming symbols of national prosperity and power.

Symbolism considered the arcane quality of art as an important part of a society's culture. It wanted to restore a space for spirituality and the supernatural. The heroes and heroines of ancient mythologies and folklores were used to point to the unfathomable nature of the individual mind, which was capricious, emotional, driven by passions and desires. The intimate quality of jewellery, which is worn on the body often in contact with the skin, locates it at the boundary between two worlds: exterior, observable reality and the mysterious interior realm.

René Lalique's granddaughter would write some years after his death that 'Shakespeare had opened up new horizons for him and, in my view, had he not discovered him, he could never have been the great modern designer that he was.' The stage is where imagination collides with observable reality, where actors allow themselves to be conduits to their interior world, allowing passions, emotions and taboos to be explored.

This paper will focus on metamorphosis, a predominant theme in jewellery design associated with the Symbolist movement. I will explore the relationship between the artists and designers of Symbolist jewellery with the heroines of the stage. With the burgeoning 'femme nouvelle' of the fin de siècle, I will consider whether the remarkable jewellery of this period was made for the male gaze or whether it was deployed by women to project a more liberated place in art and society.

Tyuki Imamura, 'Mushi no iki – Anarchist Symbolism in Taishō Japan'

This presentation reconsiders the political dimensions of a largely overlooked form of Japanese Symbolism during the Taishō period (1912–1926), an era marked simultaneously by movements for democracy, as well as by disaster and war. Drawing on the work of architectural historian Hasegawa Takashi, the talk attempts to understand the socialist and anarchist symbolism within Taishō aesthetics.

Architecture, as deployed through state-sponsored public works, became a visible emblem of imperial authority, giving rise to a Japanese iteration of modern imperial style that integrated Greco-Roman classicism. Responding to this symbolic regime, a group of architects sought alternative aesthetic strategies: decorative practice. Here, ornament functioned not merely as adornment but as a symbolic articulation of multiplicity, challenging the ideological coherence of centralised imperial formalism.

Within this framework, handcrafted representations of nature, as explored in contemporaneous European movements such as Art Nouveau and Symbolism, were received not merely as stylistic influences but as ideological counterparts. The translation of John Ruskin and William Morris also contributed to a renewed fascination with medievalism, a development that crucially coincided with the translation of Mutual Aid by Peter Kropotkin, which idealised Gothic medieval cities as sites of autonomous and cooperative life. These ideas were translated and shared through anarchist intellectual networks, including Ōsugi Sakae, whose translation of Souvenirs entomologiques by Jean-Henri Fabre popularised a vision of nature structured by reciprocity rather than competition.

By tracing these intertwined genealogies, this presentation argues for the existence of a Taishō-era socialist aesthetics that has been obscured in postwar art historical discourse. Representations of nature, particularly insects, functioned as symbolic sites for imagining non-imperial modernity, and cooperative forms of life. In excavating this lineage, the presentation reconsiders the enduring impact of these non-war movements on postwar cultural practices, foregrounding an alternative aesthetic imagination rooted in coexistence, mutual aid, and the ethics of collective making.

Hitomi Inoue, 'Fenollosa, Okakura, and Symbolism in the Formation of Modern Japanese Painting'

Japonisme, which spread throughout Europe in the latter half of the nineteenth century, provided the first major impetus for the introduction of Japanese art to the West. However, the Western reception of Japanese art centred largely on formal characteristics found in ukiyo-e rather than on the spiritual and intellectual contexts underlying Japanese artistic traditions.

In contrast, Ernest Fenollosa, who came to Japan as a professor at the University of Tokyo, sought to evaluate Japanese art on a spiritual and philosophical perspective. Having studied Hegelian philosophy at Harvard University and been influenced by the ideas of John Ruskin, Fenollosa understood art as a form of expression through which truth and ideals could be embodied. He therefore placed greater value on Buddhist sculpture and ink painting than on ukiyo-e, arguing that Buddhist spirituality constituted a fundamental basis of Japanese art. Together with contemporary painters such as Kanō Hōgai, he promoted the movement for a new Japanese painting (Nihonga), seeking to create a modern artistic language through the synthesis of Eastern and Western techniques.



Okakura Kakuzō, a student of Fenollosa, further developed these ideas by positioning Japanese art within the broader spiritual culture of East Asian civilization, including Taoism and Zen Buddhism. In The Book of Tea, he emphasized the inseparable relationship between art and religion. His ideas were subsequently inherited by artists such as Yokoyama Taikan and found formal expression in the development of the mōrōtai style. Okakura's question, 'Can one paint the air?', encapsulates a conception of Japanese art that extends beyond realism and aesthetic ornamentation toward the representation of invisible spirituality, atmosphere, and presence. This conception also resonates strongly with Symbolism's contemporary pursuit of the representation of the invisible.

This paper examines the intellectual connections among Fenollosa, Okakura, and European Symbolism, and explores how their ideas contributed to the emergence of a new visual language in modern Japanese painting.

Neungreudee Lohapon, 'Symbolism in the Modern Art of Siam: Italian Artists and Transcultural Encounters'

At the turn of the twentieth century, transoceanic connections between Europe and Asia reduced the journey from the port of Genoa, Italy, to Bangkok, the capital of Siam, to approximately thirty days. In 1897, King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) made his first official visit to Europe, determined to strengthen diplomatic relations with European states.

As Siam pursued a strategic programme of self-modernisation, increasing exposure to European art and architecture accompanied the transformation of its modern infrastructure. Following the King's return, Italian artists, architects, and civil engineers were increasingly commissioned by the Siamese state to collaborate in Bangkok's urban expansion through architectural and infrastructural projects conceived in Western styles. The Venice Biennale and connections with Italian academies of fine arts became important points of contact, contributing both to the formation of the royal art collections and to the development of artistic commissions in Siam. In this context, geographical distance appears to have narrowed through increasingly active networks of artistic exchange, through which Siam also engaged with new cultural paradigms and incorporated them into a broader strategy of cultural diplomacy.

Within this historical context, this paper examines the adaptation of Symbolism in the fresco decoration of royal commissions, focusing on the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall. While a Neoclassical architectural language was favoured as an expression of modernity, the interiors reveal a more experimental artistic vocabulary, combining Symbolism with elements of Art Nouveau, references to figures from the Italian Renaissance, and Siamese mythological imagery. This diversity of colours, materials, forms and sources reflect an experimental spirit, in which artists drew upon multiple styles and inspirations to articulate new visual expressions. The fresco representing religious freedom, for example, is imbued with an intense spirituality, sacred devotion and a sense of mystery, articulated through allegorical figures, representations of religious orders, and a range of sacred and enigmatic symbols adapted to the Siamese context. The paper argues, through the case of the Throne Hall, that Symbolism was not simply transplanted from Europe to Siamese visual culture but reinterpreted through a transcultural process in which European and Siamese visual languages were selectively combined, adapted, and transformed.

Francesco Parisi, 'Between Decadence and Symbolism: Giulio Aristide Sartorio and the Reconfiguration of Artistic Language'

This paper examines the emergence of a Symbolist orientation in the work of Giulio Aristide Sartorio during the early 1890s, situating his artistic development within the broader framework of European Decadent culture. Beginning with a departure from earlier Pre-Raphaelite and Neo-Byzantine influences, Sartorio progressively embraced a literary-driven aesthetic marked by psychological intensity, ambiguity, and an attraction to the 'morbid', in line with contemporary Symbolist tendencies.

Central to this transformation was the influence of Gabriele D'Annunzio, whose novels and poetic imagery provided both thematic and conceptual models. Sartorio's involvement in the illustration of L'Invincibile reveals a hybrid visual language in which residual naturalism coexists with emerging Symbolist iconographies, including ritualistic, pagan, and mythological motifs. His graphic and pictorial production from this period demonstrates a growing interest in the body as a symbolic vehicle, moving beyond narrative function toward an intellectual and allegorical dimension.

The paper further explores Sartorio's engagement with contemporary literary sources, highlighting the role of staged imagery and intermedial exchanges in shaping his visual vocabulary. Works such as La danza delle farfalle and Baccanale exemplify a shift toward visionary reinterpretations of naturalistic subjects, often infused with literary references ranging from Edgar Allan Poe to Alfred Tennyson. This synthesis culminates in paintings such as La sirena and L'impassibile, where the female figure assumes the ambivalent role of both muse and destructive force, reflecting broader Decadent conceptions of femininity. Finally, Sartorio's position within international Symbolism is assessed through his connections with artists and intellectuals active in Rome and abroad, including Max Klinger and Elihu Vedder, as well as his participation in exhibitions such as the Salon de la Rose+Croix. His work emerges as a significant contribution to international Symbolism, characterized by a complex interplay between literary imagination, classical tradition, and modern psychological inquiry.

Rachel Passannante, 'Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller and Symbolism'

The Danforth Art Museum at Framingham State University in Framingham Massachusetts is home to the largest collection of works by sculptor Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller (1877-1968). Fuller, born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was an African American sculptor who defied the expectations of her sex and race in the late nineteenth and through the twentieth centuries. This included a three-year stay in Paris studying sculpture, where she was influenced by the 1900 Exposition Universelle, the Symbolist Movement, and sculptors such as Rodin and Carle. Returning to the United States in 1902, she married, moved to Framingham, Massachusetts, and raised three boys, yet continued to have a career as a sculptor, making some of her most well-known pieces during this timeframe that challenged the typical representation of African American in art.

Today, Fuller's works are largely associated with the Harlem Renaissance movement of New York City from the 1910s to 1930s. Yet her artistic style evolved with the culture and time she was in. Her early works, often called gruesome and macabre, fit in with the Symbolism use of exaggerated and expressive forms depicting emotions and feeling over realistic forms. Her later works became more focused on family, realistic busts and figures, and African American themes. However, Symbolism is a style she returned to in several of her works, especially when exploring these African American themes. This presentation will look at several of her works from across her life, including Ethiopia Awakening, Spirit of Emancipation, and In Silent Protest Against Mob Violence, examining how she imbued her works with layers of meaning and emotions.

Elizabeth Pettejohn, 'Rossetti: Symbolist?'

Dantis Amor ('Dante's Love', 1860, Tate): The figure of Love, red-haired and golden-clad, with four magenta wings, rests sturdy feet on a green globe. Around him swirl the beams of the sun and the stars of the night, split on a diagonal; from lower right the face of Dante's beloved Beatrice looks up from a crescent moon to meet the gaze, downward from top left, of Christ, crowned with the Alpha and Omega in a sun-disk inscribed with words from the end of Dante's Vita Nuova: 'Qui est per omnia saecula benedictus' ('Who is blessed throughout all ages'). This squareish panel, designed and part-painted, though never finished, by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, briefly adorned a piece of furniture at Jane and William Morris's Red House before being dismantled and sold off. It is a problematical object in numerous ways. And yet, as early as 1860, it accomplishes much of the 'fundamental brainwork' (Rossetti's phrase, in another context) needed to formulate what a later generation of artists and writers would begin to call 'Symbolism'.

Rossetti's name has often appeared in the literature on the Symbolist movement of the later nineteenth century – more frequently, it must be admitted, in picture-books and popular surveys than in the scholarly literature. This paper will argue, however, that Rossetti deserves a key role in our explorations of the movement, not least for the distinctive intermediality of his work – as painter, designer, translator, and poet – and for the distinctive form of his cosmopolitanism – as the Italian who never visited Italy. The paper addresses two reciprocal and co-ordinated questions. How would it benefit the study of Rossetti's work to place it under the label 'Symbolism'? And how, in turn, could the inclusion of Rossetti in a key role change how we think about 'Symbolism' as a literary and artistic movement that flourished after his death in 1882?

Antonio Saborit, 'Symbolism in Mexico'

Mexico City at the turn of the twentieth century: a new generation of writers and artists—the first in decades to enjoy a relative peace in the country—developed its own language and vision of life, drawing upon the vocabulary and passions of Symbolism, and developed a highly critical view of their society. Ultimately, the writers of this generation worked for the press, edited their own magazines, revolutionized the Spanish language, and had a great influence among their peers in Spain, while the artists constructed a distinctive sombre imagery that contrasted with the sunny days of the political dictatorship in Mexico. The idea, in essence, is to offer a group portrait, against the backdrop of its cultural landscape, in the light of the atmospheres of Symbolism.

Mark Samuels Lasner and Margaret D. Stetz, 'Symbolism at the Bodley Head: Two Examples'

This presentation, divided into two sections and between two speakers, will examine the influence of Symbolism on the most important avant-garde British publishing firm of the 1890s, the Bodley Head—run jointly first by Elkin Mathews and John Lane, then by Lane alone—and will use two different examples to



do so. Mark Samuels Lasner's talk will focus on the Bodley Head's 1894 publication of Oscar Wilde's poem, The Sphinx, telling the story of that book's making, reception, and continuing fame, and will emphasize its innovations in visual terms. Issued in two expensive limited editions, it was the first volume designed entirely by the Decadent artist, Charles Ricketts (1866–1931), who was steeped in fin-de-siècle French art and literature, and who was responsible for the typography in three colors, the printing of the text in all-capital letters, the ten illustrations, and the vellum binding. From the outset, it was a material embodiment of Symbolism, a collectible, and the epitome of The Book Beautiful.

The other half of this presentation, delivered by Margaret D. Stetz, will use a later Bodley Head volume, Fantasias (1898) by 'George Egerton' (Mary Chavelita Dunne) to introduce the subject of literary responses to Symbolism by New Women authors of the 1890s. With her keen interest in and acquaintance with innovative works by Scandinavian writers such as Henrik Ibsen and Ola Hansson, Egerton turned away from realism and naturalism in this group of short stories. In tales such as 'The Mandrake Venus', which owed much to Oscar Wilde's Salome, she developed non-realistic modes of narrative and imagery to create a feminist critique of contemporary British culture, targeting in particular its sexual double-standard, and also, in 'The Well of Truth', its hypocrisy on the issue of morality.

Michael Shaw, 'John Duncan and the Intersections of Scottish Celtic Revivalism and Symbolism'

In the summer of 1909, the Society of Scottish Artists in Edinburgh exhibited Heptu Bidding Farewell to the City of Obb by Scotland's foremost Symbolist painter, John Duncan. Duncan's Symbolist fantasy captivated early critics who were drawn to its world building and apparent debts to 'Celtic Legend'. The painting was swiftly purchased by the sexologist Marc-André Raffalovich, then living in Edinburgh having followed his partner, the poet and translator of French Symbolists, John Gray, to the city when he became priest of St Patrick's in the Cowgate. Duncan's Symbolist painting was in good company: Raffalovich had loaned Gustave Moreau's watercolour Sappho (c.1871-72) for display in the Mound galleries.

This paper explores such crosscurrents between Scottish Celtic revivalism, Symbolism, and queerness in and beyond Edinburgh at the turn of the twentieth century. It begins by contextualising John Duncan's art, illustrating the intersections between Scottish Celtic revivalism and Symbolism, which were as marked in literature as in the visual arts. From here, I detail Duncan's relationships with other enthusiasts of Symbolism, not least Gray and Raffalovich, as well as Duncan's participation in Raffalovich's Edinburgh salon. Reflecting their shared artistic interests, Duncan led much of the decoration scheme for St Peter's Church in Morningside, founded by Gray and Raffalovich.

The connections between Duncan and the Raffalovich salon not only illustrate the Symbolist enthusiasm in Edinburgh, and how Symbolism lent itself to Scottish cultural nationalism, but also illustrate the ways in which Symbolism served as a site to nurture and explore queerness in fin-de-siècle Scotland. The poetry of Rachel Annand Taylor, a friend of Duncan, Gray, and Raffalovich, offers a complementary literary example of intersections of Celticism, queerness, and Symbolism.

Laima Laučkaitė Surgailienė, 'Symbolism in Lithuania: Between National Romanticism and Cosmogony'

Symbolism emerged in Lithuania at the turn of the twentieth century within a complex political and cultural context. It was shaped by the increasingly restrictive policies of the Russian Empire, which fuelled national revival and resistance movements. The closure of higher art studies at Vilnius University deprived artists of opportunities for professional training at home, compelling them to study abroad, where they absorbed foreign artistic influences. Lithuania's geographical position, together with Vilnius's multicultural character, played an important role in the transmission of artistic ideas. The city's population included Polish, Jewish, Russian, and Lithuanian communities, creating a complex cultural environment through which Western artistic movements reached Vilnius, particularly via Poland and Russia. Symbolist tendencies became increasingly visible in the first Lithuanian art exhibitions held in Vilnius between 1906 and 1914. However, Symbolism was transformed through the discourse of National Romanticism, which was closely connected to the Lithuanian national revival.

The paper will focus on the central figure of Lithuanian Symbolism, the painter and composer Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875–1911). His work challenged the boundaries between artistic disciplines as he adopted inter-artistic practices in his search for a synthesis of painting and music. Furthermore, his work moves between figuration and increasingly abstract modes of representation. The presentation will discuss Čiurlionis's final and largest painting, Rex (1909). This work brings together the complex symbolic and philosophical concerns that had developed throughout artist's career. Its imagery incorporates astronomical, pagan, Eastern, and Christian elements, creating a multilayered vision of the universe. At its centre is the image of the ruler of the universe, suggesting a cosmic order that extends beyond the boundaries of the human world. Čiurlionis's work embodies a connection between national cultural identity and a universal, cosmological imagination—one that makes him a unique figure in the history of global Symbolism.

Suzanne Veldink, 'An Artist between two Worlds: Sources of Inspiration for Jan Toorop's Symbolism'

Jan Toorop (1858-1928) is one of the Netherlands' most significant and versatile artists around the turn of the twentieth century. He brought innovation to the traditionally conservative Dutch art world, not only through his own internationally oriented work, but also by organising exhibitions with some of the most progressive artists in Europe.

In this paper I will explore an often-overlooked aspect of this major artist's life and work: Toorop was a colonial migrant and a man of colour who consistently and explicitly referenced his Javanese and Chinese heritage in his symbolist art. Born on the island of Java in what is now Indonesia but was then part of the colony known as the Dutch East Indies, he became a transborder citizen of the world. His Indo-European background and appearance would have been unmistakeable to his Dutch contemporaries. While his success as an internationally renowned symbolist artist continued to grow, art critics often responded to his identity with a mix of fascination and racism. Over the years, Toorop's heritage has faded into obscurity: he has come to be considered a 'white' Dutch artist, despite the important key his roots provide in attempts to understand his work. As the artist himself aptly put it: 'Indonesia has meant a great deal to me. It is impossible to imagine me without Indonesia. My work is fundamentally Eastern.'

Alastair Wright, ' "Je est un autre": Gauguin, Martinique, and the Colonial Origins of Symbolism'

Paul Gauguin, a central figure in French Symbolism, is best known for his ruthlessly exploitative relationship to the people and culture of Tahiti. This paper turns instead to his earlier stay in Martinique in 1887. What Gauguin found there – a colonial society shaped by republican citizenship, racial mixture, and an increasingly prominent mixed-race middle class – confounded his expectation of a tropical idyll where he would encounter pure 'otherness'. I argue that Gauguin responded to this unsettling complexity through two related strategies designed to maintain the illusion of his own white superiority, strategies that became fundamental to his developing Symbolist practice.

First, against the evidence of his own observations, Gauguin insisted upon a fantasy of absolute racial difference, a move that saw the naturalist scrutiny associated with Impressionism cede to the Symbolist primacy of the Idea. Colonial realities were overwritten by the schema of the racial 'other'. Second, he appropriated what he perceived as the privileged position of Martinique's mixed-race population and reformulated it in terms of his own divided subjectivity, enacting in a colonial context Rimbaud's famous formulation, 'je est un autre'.

I argue that the colonial encounter in its specifically Martinican form should thus be seen as a key factor in the development of Gauguin's Symbolism. Both Symbolism's elevation of the Idea over naturalistic observation and the artist's fascination with an 'othered' self can be traced to his attempt to master – and imaginatively resolve – the racial and political uncertainties of colonial modernity.

IMAGE CREDITS:

(Cover/Back) Sir James Jebusa Shannon (1862-1923), Violet Manners, Marchioness of Granby, oil on canvas, 1896, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Jan Toorop (1858-1928), Two Figures, drawing, c.1895, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

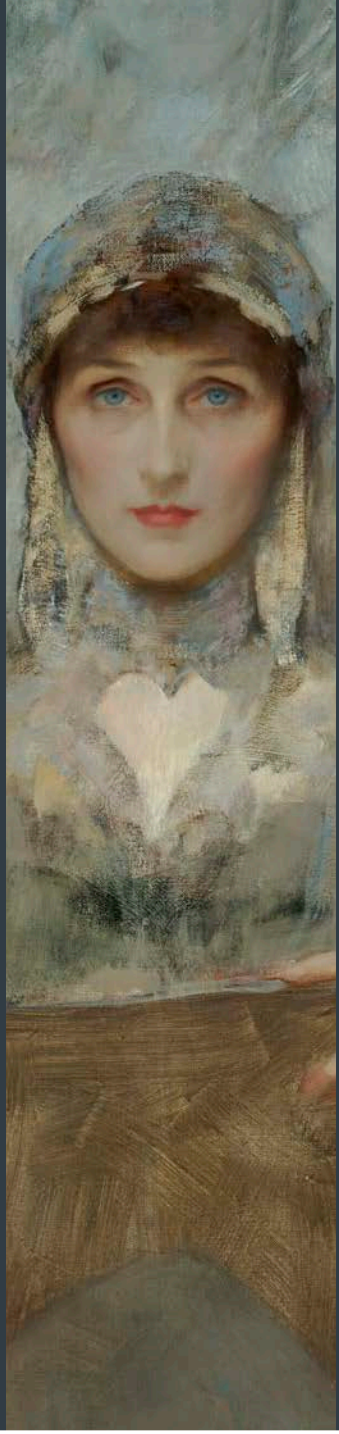
Jan Toorop (1858-1928), O Grave, where is thy Victory? Drawing, 1892, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Eugène Grasset (1845-1917), Apparitions brooch, enamelled gold and ivory, 1900, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Yoshijiro Urushibara (1889-1953), Queen of the Night, colour woodcut print, c.1923, V&A Museum, London

Gerhard Munthe (1849-1929), Daughters of the Northern Lights, tapestry, 1903, Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo

Clement Massier (1844-1917), Ye Bat Friend - A Portrait of WC, lustred ceramic, c.1890, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford



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