CALL FOR PAPERS

The MA Program in the History of Design and Curatorial Studies
Parsons School of Design | Smithsonian, National Design Museum

The Parsons/Cooper Hewitt Graduate Symposium

New York, April 17, 2026

The Environmental Turn in Art and Design History

The recent environmental turn in the humanities has moved non-human entities closer to the limelight of art and design historical inquiries. Fauna and biota at large are now frequently examined as viable factors in geopolitical and historical processes and as central to issues of war, migration, trade, diplomacy, and the formation of built environments. Across the interconnected Afro-Eurasian milieu, human-animal entanglements have historically guided material practice, philosophical discourse, and cross-cultural exchange in ways still seldom acknowledged by the scholarly canon. Well into the dawn of modernity, some communities have rejected the presumed centrality of the anthropomorphic image, while others visualized the human figure as inherently intertwined with, or heavily dependent on, the ecological environment.

Our conference seeks papers that engage with this environmental turn. During times of displacement, such as pandemics and climate disasters, makers have continually responded to environmental and economic pressures by returning to their histories of material and visual engagements with the non-human. How does one revisit the place of animal- and plant-derived images, design patterns, and materials in art and design histories and historiographies? How does one (re)write histories of ornament by considering the zoomorphic and biomorphic as a major impetus in image-making?

We invite scholars who embrace interdisciplinary, interregional, and/or intersectional approaches to biomorphic/zoomorphic art and design, from Eurasian antiquity to today. We welcome contributions that explore a variety of media and modes of making, including decorative and funerary art, textile design, performance art, architecture, and other types of visual and material culture.

The keynote presentation for this conference will be given by Dr. Petya Andreeva, Assistant Professor of Art at Vassar College, who will speak on the topic related to this call for papers. Her first book Fantastic Fauna from China to Crimea: Image-Making in Eurasian Nomadic Societies (Edinburgh, 2024) traces the dissemination of animal-inspired images from the nomadic world to China and beyond, and demonstrates that ancient pastoralists played a pivotal role in the shaping of a global Eurasia.

Guidelines for submission:

Please email proposals (with the phrase "Voorsanger Proposal" in the subject line) for 20-minute papers to brodyd@newschool.edu. Proposals should include a paper title, abstract (250 words maximum), author's name, and an abbreviated CV. Please note that titles of accepted papers will appear online, in social media, and in the digital program, and thus should be concise and clearly reflect the contents of the paper.

Deadline for submissions: FEBRUARY 15, 2026 (proposers will hear back by March 1, 2026)

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