



Ruskin's Ecology: Ruskin Seminar, Lent 2019

Inspired by an era of radical change in humanity's relationship with the environment, Ruskin's writings affirm his lifelong concern with ecology. In this, Ruskin's bicentenary year, our seminars for Lent Term will examine the correspondence of Ruskin's thought with the ecological sensitivities of our own time. Fields considered will range from art and architecture to botany and anatomy.

We are pleased to be presenting this new series of events in partnership with Dr Kelly Freeman (UCL) and Dr Thomas Hughes (The Courtauld). We have designed these events to guide the publication of a book that will extend the exploration of some of the core themes we shall be considering this term.

The series includes an afternoon workshop (open to all), which is framed by seminars that introduce and draw together the consideration of Ruskin's significance for ecological ways of thinking, writing, drawing, looking at art and architecture, and gardening – among other things.

For more information, please contact us on 01524 593587 or theruskin@lancaster.ac.uk

Images: John Ruskin, *Peacock and Falcon Feathers* (1873); L.V. Blandy, *Aspen, unidealized*, after Ruskin (1875); John Ruskin, *Oxalis* (n.d.)



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Schedule of events

All events will take place in the Ruskin Library Reading Room

31 January, 16.15–18.00

Surface, Depth and Form in Gothic Naturalism

In this session Dr Thomas Hughes (Courtauld Institute) will kick-off the term's events with a consideration of the importance of Ruskin's ideas about the Gothic to contemporary ideas in architecture and ecology.

21 February, 13.00–18.00

Workshop: Ruskin's Ecology

This afternoon workshop will build on our first seminar by exploring the embeddedness of ecological principles in Ruskin's writings on art and science. Participants include Dr Pandora Syperek (independent scholar), Caroline Ikin (Manchester Metropolitan University) and others. All our welcome to attend this event, which will conclude with a keynote talk at our regular Ruskin seminar time:

16.15–18.00

Ruskin and the Art of Relations

In this keynote Dr Jeremy Melius (Tufts University) will reconsider Ruskin's account of relations in *Modern Painters V* in order to draw out the connections Ruskin grasped between art and the natural world.

7 March, 16.15–18.00

The Mountain's Anatomy: Articulating Skeletons in Ruskin's Ecological Imagination

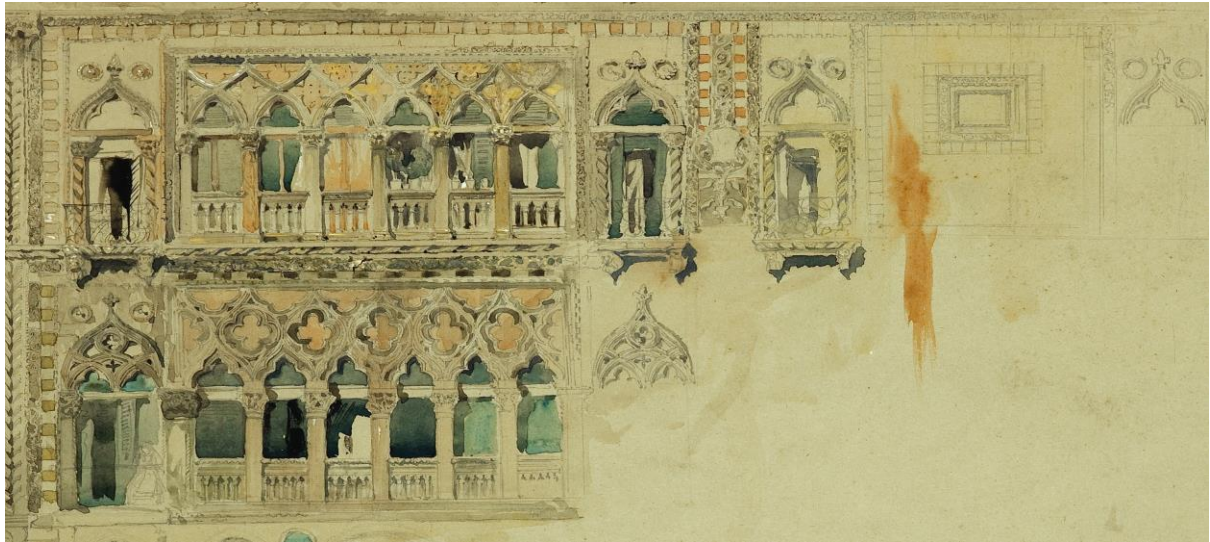
In this session Kelly Freeman (UCL) will draw the series to a conclusion by reflecting on the importance of the concept of the skeleton to Ruskin's explorations of structures in nature, from the animal body to plant and rock formations.

Our series for Summer 2019 starting on 9 May will introduce the core themes of our forthcoming exhibition: Ruskin and Steampunk: Recovering Radicalism



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Surface, Depth and Form in Gothic Naturalism

31 January 2019, 16.15–18:00, Ruskin Library Reading Room

Dr Thomas Hughes, Associate Lecturer at The Courtauld Institute of Art, London, UK

Abstract. The central chapter of the middle volume of Ruskin's trilogy *The Stones of Venice* (1851–1853), 'The Nature of Gothic', describes ideal qualities of 'Gothicness' to be used to judge or construct architecture, architectural ornament and even artistic forms generally. Central to this Gothicness is 'Naturalism', the loving experience and interpretation of nature by human hands, hearts and minds. Some stunning work has recently elucidated Ruskin's emphasis on surface and his preference for the solid walls of Veronese or indeed Venetian 'Surface Gothic' over the foliage-eaten lacework of the French, 'Linear' variety. However, I will argue Ruskin theorises kinds of depth residing beneath the surface of Surface Gothic. Ruskin's 'Naturalism' amounts to a theory of the movement of 'form' between the surface and the depth of architectural material. This Gothic movement of form is a political dynamic: it enables the individual workman to work freely and to interpret nature in his (or her) own imperfect, loving way. With this, Ruskin envisages a way out of the nightmare of modernity he sees happening all over Europe and which he reimagines in his part-history, part-myth of the rise and terrible fall of Venice. I will talk about how Ruskin's contradictory though highly generative theory is important to contemporary ideas in architecture and ecology, before concluding that Ruskin's Gothic form is historically unstable and exists in a Venice both lost and found.

For more information, please contact us on 01524 593587 or theruskin@lancaster.ac.uk

Image: John Ruskin, *Ca d'Oro* (1845), Pencil, watercolour and bodycolour; Ruskin Library I996P1590



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Workshop: Ruskin's Ecology

21 February 2019, 13:00–18:00, Ruskin Library Reading Room

Ecology is not a word Ruskin used himself. Yet, as Mark Frost has recently affirmed, Ruskin's concern with the fundamental interconnectedness of things 'anticipates the ambitious multivalence' of modern ecological thinking. The workshop will explore the pertinence of this observation to the study of Ruskin's engagement with the arts and sciences, and it will consider the embeddedness of ecological principles in Ruskin's writings on art and science. Participants include Dr Pandora Syperek (independent scholar), Caroline Ikin (Manchester Metropolitan University) and others. All are welcome to attend this event, which will conclude with a keynote talk by Dr Jeremy Melius (Tufts University):

Ruskin and the Art of Relations

16.15–18:00, Ruskin Library Reading Room

Abstract. When Ruskin published the fifth and final volume of *Modern Painters* in 1860, he offered a conclusion of sorts, but also broke new ground. *Modern Painters V* offers some of Ruskin's most searching treatments of individual paintings as well as his most sustained theorizations of pictorial composition, gathered together under the rubric 'Of Ideas of Relation'. This lecture reconsiders Ruskin's account of relations broadly conceived, and in particular to draw out the connections Ruskin grasped between art and the natural world. On the one hand, it investigates the extended allegory of composition and social comportment offered in Ruskin's analysis of plant growth in *Modern Painters V*. On the other, the paper examines the relational structures Ruskin draws out of high Renaissance Venetian art as complementary to this 'moral history' of plants, focusing especially on his description of the enmeshed composition of Veronese's *Adoration of the Virgin by the*



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Cuccina Family (1571) in Dresden. For this and other paintings, Ruskin attempted to forge a descriptive language that could trace the distribution of compositional links in all their promiscuity, extending from the Virgin down to the family dog along one great 'chain of lowering feeling'. Following those links brings into focus the radical nature of Ruskin's search for an ecology of pictorial structure, one staged in his descriptions less as a system of fixed bonds than an atmosphere of potential affinities—an elastic relationality, if you like, natural as well as social, to which picturing might give provisional form.

Dr Jeremy Melius is Assistant Professor in the Department of Art and Art History at Tufts University, USA

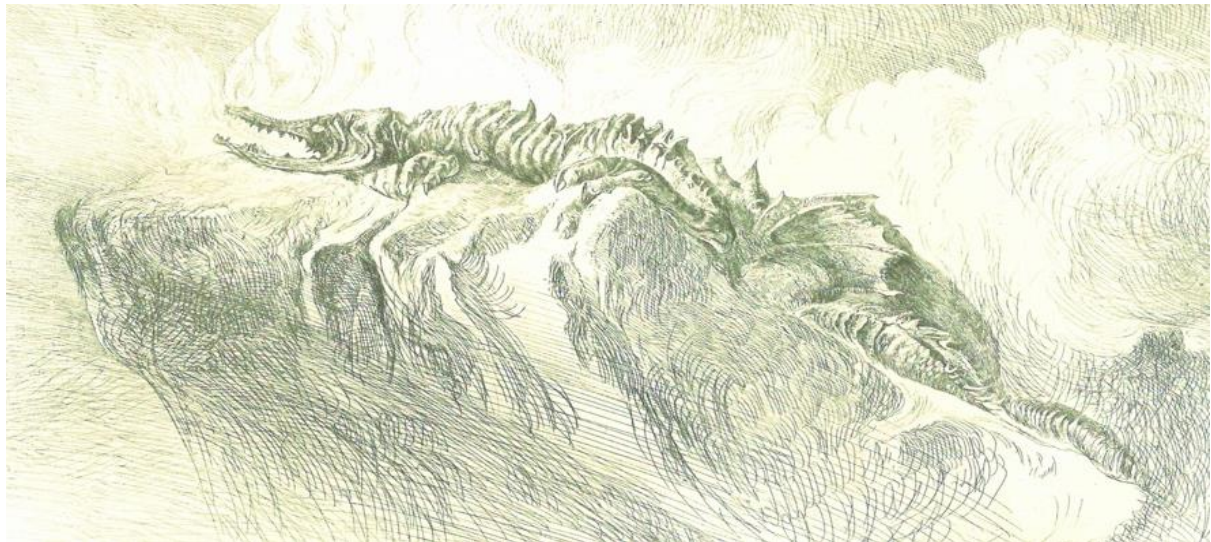
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Image: John Ruskin, *Twig of Beech Leaves* (n.d.); Ruskin Library I997P0003



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The Mountain's Anatomy: Articulating Skeletons in Ruskin's Ecological Imagination

7 March 2019, 16.15–18:00, Ruskin Library Reading Room

Kelly Freeman, Doctoral Researcher in the History of Art, University College London, UK

Abstract. Metaphors are an integral part of language. The literary critic and art historian Elizabeth K. Helsinger argued that, for Ruskin, 'metaphors express visual information important to the painter-topographer in the form of a strong distinctive impression, a central thought that is the mark of imaginative vision' (*Ruskin and the Art of the Beholder*). As a consequence of his unique imaginative vision, perceptive power and particular observational skills, John Ruskin utilised the skeleton metaphor recurrently in his works. The word – skeleton – invokes the very essence of a thing; the very lines of its make-up, the essence of its articulated structure. For Ruskin, it became a term for addressing structures in nature, from the animal body to plant and rock formations. The image of the skeleton also seems to embody the very notion of gothicness: savage, changeful, natural, grotesque, rigid and redundant. In this paper I will discuss the significance of the skeleton metaphor in Ruskin's writings, lectures and drawings. In Ruskin's own account, drawing provided a means of seeing the 'composition' of nature and, as I will argue, the skeleton metaphor became for Ruskin a means of seeing organic entities and the structure of nature in a particular way. The organic materiality of the metaphor, typically bone (in bodies) and iron (in buildings), allowed Ruskin to think holistically and ecologically about skeletons, enabling the unification of 'mental expression' with 'material form' that he so desperately sought in *The Stones of Venice*.

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Image: John Ruskin, 'Quivi Trovammo', engraving, after J.M.W. Turner, *Modern Painters*, vol. 5 (1860), pl. 78



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