

Call for Proposals: The Anthropocene, Cabinet of Curiosities Slam

Rachel
Carson
Center

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Conveners: Center for Culture, History, and Environment, UW Madison; Department of German Studies, UW Madison, the Environmental Humanities Lab at KTH Stockholm, and the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society

We are in the midst of a great reawakening to questions of time—across the spans of geological, ecological, evolutionary, and human history. It is a reawakening precipitated, not by a nostalgia for the past, but by a sense of urgency about the future. The Anthropocene, coined in 2000 by ecologist Eugene Stoermer and popularized by Nobel Prize-winning atmospheric chemist, Paul Crutzen, is one of the most resonant examples of how the urgency of the future has prompted scientists, artists, humanities scholars, and social scientists to engage creatively with the emerging legacy of our geomorphic and biomorphic powers. The advent of this new scientific object—the Anthropocene—is altering how we conceptualize, imagine and inhabit time. The Anthropocene encourages us to reenvision (in Nigel Clark’s phrase) future and past relations between “earthly volatility and bodily vulnerability.” What images and stories can we create that speak with conceptual richness and emotional energy to our rapidly changing visions of future possibility? For in a world deluged with data, arresting stories and images matter immeasurably, playing a critical role in the making of environmental publics and the shaping of environmental policy.

The Anthropocene is just one among many moments in time when new scientific objects have altered humanity’s relationship to the past, present, and future. The coming-into-being of scientific objects such as fossils, radioactivity, genetic mutations, toxic pesticides, and ice cores, to name a few, have precipitated different narratives and imaginings of the human past and the human future. What might a cabinet of curiosities for the age of the Anthropocene look like? What objects might jolt us into reimagining environmental time across diverse scales, from the recent past to deep history? How might certain kinds of objects make visible the differential impacts—past, present, and future—that have come to shape the relationships among human and non-human beings, living in an era of extreme hydrocarbon extraction, extreme weather events, and extreme economic disparity?

The Nelson Institute’s Center for Culture, History, and Environment and the Center for German and European Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison are pleased to be partnering with the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society and the KTH Environmental Humanities Laboratory to host an international workshop that invites artists and writers, scientists and humanists, scholars and activists, to participate in “The Anthropocene, Cabinet of Curiosities Slam.” The workshop will take place in Madison, Wisconsin from Nov. 8–10, 2014. In the spirit of poetry/spoken word slams, contributors will be asked to pitch in a public fishbowl setting an object for the Anthropocene that asks us to rethink humanity’s relationship to time, place, and the agency of things that shape planetary change. How is the appearance and impact of homo sapiens as a geo-

morphic force registered in the sediments of history, the objects around us, and the things yet to be? What emotionally layered Anthropocene objects can surprise, disturb, startle or delight us into new ways of thinking and feeling? What objects speak to resilience or adaptation, to vanishing biota or emerging morphologies? Based on the audience response, contributors will be invited to participate in the design of an Anthropocene cabinet of curiosities as part of a larger exhibit on the Anthropocene being planned by the Deutsches Museum in Munich. Presentations will also form the basis of a collected series of short essays to be published as part of the CHE, RCC, EHL collaborative project on Environmental Futures.

To apply, please submit a 200-word abstract of your proposed object and its importance in opening up questions of time, agency, and/or intergenerational equity in the Anthropocene, along with a visual rendering of the object. Please also include a CV or artist profile. Materials should be submitted to Garrett Dash Nelson, ggnelson@wisc.edu, **by Friday, April 11th**. A limited amount of funding is available to cover the travel costs of participants.