



9TH ANNUAL
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Re-Imagining Greece: Images, Representation, and Meaning



Photo: Stergios Karavatos

Tuesday 28th April 2026
9:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Daphne & George Hatsopoulos Hall, CYA



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Re-Imagining Greece: **Images, Representation, and Meaning**

Committee

Jeff Vanderpool, CYA Faculty Member, Heritage Documentation and Visual Culture

Angeliki Dimitriadi, Academic Director, CYA Faculty Member, Political Science

Kate Donnelly, Academic Writing Advisor, CYA

Colloquium Program Abstracts

9.30 – 11.00 Session I: Reclaiming Antiquity
Moderator: Athena Hadji, CYA Faculty Member, Art History

9.45 Braden Clifford Dwinell

Postbaccalaureate

Love, Death & Rebirth: Understanding the Greek Afterlife through Marriage Imagery

Images played an important role in shaping how ancient Greeks understood both life and death. While literary sources relating to orphic belief are rare and underworld mythology is fragmentary, visual and material culture offers a glimpse into the minds of ancient Greeks on the topic of death. This paper examines chthonic and orphic symbolism in Classical and early Hellenistic Greek art, with particular focus on funerary statues, paintings, pottery, votive reliefs, and ritual objects such as gold tablets, to examine how these works contributed to a greater understanding of Greek mentality around death as a visual language. Focusing on funerary and ritual contexts, this study analyzes iconographic motifs and depictions of myths associated with marriage, death, and rebirth, and will focus on figures such as Persephone, Dionysus, Orpheus, and related chthonic figures.

Through close analysis and contextual archaeological interpretation, these visual materials are considered alongside literary and mythological sources to assess how imagery both reflected and shaped religious ideas. This paper argues that chthonic and orphic imagery not only illustrates mythological narratives but also uses marriage as a symbolic framework for understanding death and rebirth within mystery cult contexts. By examining the transition to the afterlife through the familiar structure of marriage, these images make abstract concepts visually legible and suggest that death and rebirth are a part of a sacred union and initiation. This research will explore how imagery shaped religious understanding of death and what it reveals about mystery cult conceptions of the afterlife as a transformative process.

10.00 Tanner J. Brown

Postbaccalaureate

Masculinity and the Construction of Macedonian Kingship in Pella's Lion Hunt Mosaic

The Lion Hunt Mosaic from Pella dated to the late fourth century BCE constructs Macedonian kingship through the visual language of masculinity within the aristocracy. While scholarship on the Macedonian monarchy has focused on dynastic legitimacy and military leadership, the role of aristocratic masculine culture in shaping royal ideology remains under-examined. The mosaic transforms elite hunting practice into a statement about who is fit to rule. In Macedonian society, hunting was a defining arena of noble identity, where young men displayed courage, endurance, and status before their peers. Ancient writers such as Plutarch and Arrian consistently frame Macedonian rulers, most notably Alexander, in terms of physical bravery and visible bodily risk. Leadership, in these accounts, is inseparable from embodied performance, through close visual analysis of the mosaic's heroic nudity, athletic physiques, and by situating the work within its elite domestic context of the broader Greek world, showing that the image elevates aristocratic male formation into a model of sovereignty. The mosaic does not merely reflect social values; it actively defines political authority as emerging from the disciplined and proven male body.

By placing literary evidence in dialogue with iconographic analysis, it becomes clear that masculinity functioned as a foundational characteristic of Macedonian kingship. The Lion Hunt Mosaic thus reveals how visual culture shaped and naturalized a distinctly gendered ideology of power at the threshold of the Hellenistic world.

10.15 Anna Scott

Postbaccalaureate

Two Traditions, One Brush: Byzantine Persistence in Venetian Crete

From 1211 to 1669, the island of Crete was under Venetian rule, and during this period it became one of the most important artistic centers in the eastern Mediterranean through its production of Byzantine-style icons. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the island attracted artists from the former Byzantine capital, cementing its role as a primary center of icon production. Cretan icons were distinguished by their hybrid character, blending the legacy of Byzantium with emerging Renaissance influences introduced by Venetian artists. Cretan icon painters negotiated Orthodox and Catholic traditions within a shared society, and evidence shows that Greek and Italian artists worked together, often trained in both Renaissance techniques and the Byzantine icon tradition. Iconographic analysis of works by Michael Damaskinos and El Greco, both prominent figures during the height of sixteenth-century Cretan artistic production, illustrates this synthesis of styles.

Both Damaskinos and El Greco retained core elements of the Byzantine icon tradition while incorporating selected Western features. What makes these two artists particularly significant, however, is their ability to work in the reverse direction, producing paintings grounded in Renaissance methods while integrating elements of Byzantine style, demonstrating command of both visual languages.

In this presentation, I will place their works within the political and religious context of Crete, showing that hybridity was not a sign of decline but a conscious response to life under Venetian rule. The Cretan School therefore challenges modern assumptions about linear artistic evolution, demonstrating how Greek and Byzantine identity persisted and adapted under Venetian occupation.

10.30 Abigail Wolfe

Postbaccalaureate

Escape from the Jar: Classical and Victorian Characterizations of Pandora

“But [Pandora] took the lid off the big jar with her hands/ And scattered all the miseries that spell sorrow for men./ Only Hope was left there in the unbreakable container...” Thus, Hesiod wrote of Pandora’s infamous deed sometime around the 7th century BCE, lamenting the creation of the first woman from whom all subsequent women are descended. That singular action of Pandora’s cemented her legacy in the wider mythic landscape, catapulting her beyond ancient Greece into the modern western world, embossing her name on jewelry stores and establishing the idiom ‘opening Pandora’s box’ in the vernacular of several languages.

Serving as a muse for artists for millennia, Pandora’s evolution can be visually tracked. Her depictions in art have not remained stagnant, but rather reflect the contemporary cultural anxieties and shifting attitudes to women.

In this paper, I will look at examples of fifth-century BCE and Victorian imagery of Pandora to highlight this change in perception over time. What becomes clear is that Pandora in Classical art is a manufactured object within a fixed order, while in Victorian art she morphs into a lively agent whose decision to open the box, depicted in the imagery, signals the cultural anxiety about women at the time.

10.45 – 11.00 Q&A

11.00 – 11.30 Break for refreshments

11.30 – 13.00 Session II: Reexporting Greece
Moderator: Jeff Vanderpool, CYA Faculty Member

11.45 Ezra Alley

Virginia Commonwealth University

The Oriental Institute Tympanum: On Ancient Greece and the “Torch of Civilization”

The tympanum over the door to the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures at the University of Chicago (previously known as the Oriental Institute) was designed in the early twentieth century by its founder, James Henry Breasted, as a symbol of the institute’s ideals. It depicts representations of East and West civilizations in exchange. On the left, a range of Near East figures bear witness as an Egyptian Scribe passes over a wall fragment to a Greco-Roman figure. Behind him are Greek and Roman figures and scholars, including Herodotus, Alexander the Great, and Julius Caesar. Sheratt and Sheratt (1998) claim the tympanum represents “the encounter between East and West... and the representatives of a western tradition successively manifested,” and the institute itself previously stated it “represents the Eastern origins of the Western writing system.”

By grounding interpretations of the tympanum in post-colonial critical thought, this paper emphasizes how the exchange depicted in the tympanum follows a recurring rhetoric of ancient studies: the “torch of civilization” narrative. The narrative believes civilization began in Africa and spread north through Egypt, the Near East, and then to Greece, where it eventually became the powerful West. The narrative continued to be manipulated by imperial powers well into modern times, most prominently by the Nazi party. By discussing the potency of imagery that relies on a “torch” being passed on to and then from Ancient Greece, this paper aims to deconstruct propaganda of Western supremacy supplemented by ancient history and its studies.

12.00 Madison Fava

University of Pennsylvania

The Digital Amplification of Greek Island Imagery

This paper examines how social media shapes contemporary representations of Greece by amplifying longstanding idealized imagery of the Greek islands while comparatively limiting the global visibility of urban life. The association between Greece and island paradise predates digital platforms, emerging in mid-twentieth-century tourism posters, travel magazines, postcards, and high-profile celebrity visits that promoted whitewashed architecture, blue seas, and leisurely coastal living as symbols of national identity. Rather than creating this aesthetic, platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are using an already established visual tradition.

The central focus of this paper is therefore what distinguishes the digital era: whether social media merely extends earlier representations or restructures how they are produced, circulated, and sustained. The paper argues that social media introduces infrastructural changes that intensify and reorganize national imagery. User-generated content enables travelers, influencers, and local businesses to actively participate in constructing and performing “Greekness,” yet these contributions often reproduce the same visuals. Engagement-driven algorithms further privilege bright, visually consistent island imagery, encouraging repetition and wide circulation. At the same time, personalized feeds shape what different audiences encounter, meaning that urban Greece remains present but less globally amplified than island destinations. These dynamics create a feedback loop in which digital representations influence travel expectations, shape on-the-ground experiences, and reinforce aesthetic norms.

Ultimately, the paper contends that social media represents both continuity and transformations: it builds upon earlier romanticized imagery while intensifying it through participatory production, algorithmic visibility, and continuous digital performance.

12.15 Ellyse Johnson

Hope College

Jeff Koons and the Commodification of History in Contemporary Art

Jeff Koons is a contemporary American artist renowned for reusing images from art history and pop culture in large, highly polished sculptures. Koons' pieces tend to inspire heated debate because they exist simultaneously as contemporary art and as part of the global art market. The upcoming exhibition at the Cycladic Museum of Art, in collaboration with Koons's work, has inspired this paper, particularly given the museum's focus on ancient artifacts and prehistoric figurines. Seeing Koons' work displayed alongside these historical objects prompts old questions about how artists today reinterpret and reuse past pieces in modern artworks. Using a Marxist perspective, this paper explores how Koons' reinterpretations of historical works, specifically from his Gazing Ball series and the Venus of Lespugue collection, align themselves in correlation to modern ideas about commodification and cultural value in contemporary fields. Many critics argue that Koons simply turns historical images into expensive art objects.

However, this paper will explore the idea that Koons may be intentionally showcasing how the art market works. By using reflective materials, bright surfaces, and monumental scale, his sculptures underline the visual appeal of luxury and drama. At the same time, his references to ancient and historical pieces propose the idea that he is still engaging with and acknowledging the importance of these objects while showing how they can exist within modern networks of exchange and consumption.

12.30 Charlotte Hagen

University of Iowa

Bringing the Underworld to Life through Video Games: Visual and Narrative Development in *Hades*

If you asked someone in antiquity to imagine the underworld, they would have a very different image than what one might picture today. In this paper, I will explore how indie game studio Supergiant Games underwent “developing hell” to create critically acclaimed roguelike *Hades* (2020). More specifically, I will explain how it marries ancient underworld depictions with our modern perceptions of the Greek world and its afterlife. *Hades* follows Zagreus, son of Hades, and his attempts to break out of the underworld to reach family on the surface. Zagreus is primarily referenced in antiquity through Orphism, which the game references and expounds upon heavily. Using well-known myths as a vessel to teach lesser-known ones, Supergiant Games unite many different and contradictory myths to tell a new, cohesive story about uniting and healing a messy family.

By examining how magic and secret cults fit into the gameplay loop and story, analyzing how legendary figures are portrayed, and showcasing artist Jen Zee’s references to classical art trends, I will illustrate how the *Hades* game creates a visually interesting underworld that engages with esoteric myths to reflect modern anxieties about work, life, and family.

12.45 Q&A

13.00 – 14.00 Break for lunch

14.00 – 15.00 Session III: Reperforming Greekness
Moderator: Aimee Placas, CYA Faculty Member, Anthropology

14.15 Selma Becarevic

Washington University in St. Louis

Adorning Greek Culture: How Drag Queen Personas Push Back Against the Social Standard in Greece

The visual language used by drag queens in Greece to express their personas and incorporate in performances is staged as a deliberate defiance and deconstruction of Greece's social hierarchies and gender roles rooted in its cultural identity. They weaponize their personas and performances as political statements and resistance in the face of the trauma they have faced as a part of the queer community. Using their personas as this tool forces people to look face-on and gain a tangible representation of something cultural; they are not just merely performing, but rather, they are reclaiming the symbols and ideas that have historically ostracized queer and trans Greek communities. Furthermore, by combining different elements of what Greek cultural identity is, they create a mirror transforming these tropes into a form of reclamation. The concept of the macho man or the housewife gets reclaimed by the queer body and transformed by the queen and her performance. Through overexaggeration, these figures are stripped of their heteronormative power and are turned into a form of satire and self-expression.

By incorporating articles, documentaries, and firsthand accounts, I will be discussing how drag queens use their personas and performances to deliberately subvert the rigid archetype of Greek masculinity and the traditionalist expectations upheld by the orthodox church.

14.30 Jaein Ku

Cornell University

Law, Image, and Legitimacy: Visual Governance in Contemporary Greece

Modern law often presents itself as logical, textual, and distinct from images and aesthetics. Yet, legal scholars have increasingly argued that the law and the image are enfolded within one another: legal authority and legitimacy are not only articulated through text, but also produced, mediated, and contested visually. This paper applies that framework to contemporary Greece, arguing that they exercise this form of visual governance by controlling how images are authorized, produced, circulated, and perceived.

Drawing on heritage and border images, and regulation, the paper examines how Greece manages—or fails to manage—its public appearance in ways that consolidate legitimacy before both domestic and international audiences. Within the heritage domain, classical imagery associated with legality and justice is itself governed through the discretionary authority of the Ministry of Culture. Therefore, the state regulates the visual reproduction of antiquity, shaping not only representations of Greece's past, but also its contemporary legitimacy. At the same time, political cartoons published during the financial crisis exposed the limits of this effort, depicting Greece as squandering the symbolic capital of its classical past. Within the border domain, Greek authorities in 2020 restricted photographic access and journalistic documentation in Lesbos encampments, limiting the ability of images to bear witness to the state practices carried out in the name of sovereignty and security. In this way, restricting images functioned as a means of mediating state legitimacy by limiting its evidentiary power.

Taken together, these domains demonstrate that in contemporary Greece, law does not merely regulate images but derives authority and legitimacy through them.

14.45-15.00 Q&A



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