

Plant Humanities Conference

Speaker Biographies

September 15 – 17, 2022

Dumbarton Oaks

Thursday, September 15

Roundtable on Plant Humanities



Felix Driver, *Royal Holloway, University of London*

Felix Driver is an historical geographer at Royal Holloway, University of London, specialising in collections-based research and public engagement with heritage and science, including projects in partnership with museums and visual artists. He has published widely on the culture of exploration, visions of tropical nature and imperial science. He was Principal Investigator of the Mobile Museum project, a collaborative project with Kew Gardens on the circulation of Kew's biocultural collections, resulting in the Open Access book [Mobile Museums: Collections in Circulation](#) (2021). He recently completed a scoping project on the interdisciplinary potential of [Plant Humanities](#) for the UK's Arts & Humanities Research Council. He is a Fellow of the British Academy and an Honorary Research Associate at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.



Ned Friedman, *Arnold Arboretum*

William (Ned) Friedman is the Arnold Professor of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology at Harvard University and the eighth Director of the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University in its nearly 150-year history. Friedman's scholarly studies have fundamentally altered century-old views of the earliest phases of the evolution of flowering plants, Darwin's so-called "abominable mystery." He is also deeply interested in the history of early (pre-Darwinian) evolutionary thought and is particularly focused on the largely forgotten contributions of horticulturists and botanists.



Jessica B. Harris, *Queens College City University of New York*

Jessica B. Harris is a culinary historian of African-American foodways and the author of twelve critically acclaimed books documenting the foods and foodways of the African Diaspora, including *The Welcome Table: African American Heritage Cooking*; *The Africa Cookbook: Tastes of a Continent*; and *High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey from Africa to America*, which was recently adapted into a Netflix docuseries. A professor in the English Department at Queens College, CUNY for 50 years until her retirement, Harris is currently *professor emerita*. Dr. Harris has received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Southern Foodways Alliance, the Lafcadio Hearn Award from the John Folse Culinary Institute at Nicholls State in Louisiana, and was inducted into the James Beard Who's Who of Food and Beverage in America. Her cookbooks were inducted into the James Beard Cookbook Hall of Fame in 2019 and in March of 2020, she was given a Lifetime Achievement Award by the same organization.



Robin Wall Kimmerer, *State University of New York-ESF*

Robin Wall Kimmerer is a mother, scientist, decorated professor, and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. She is the author of *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, which has earned Kimmerer wide acclaim. Her first book, *Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses*, was awarded the John Burroughs Medal for outstanding nature writing, and her other work has appeared in *Orion*, *Whole Terrain*, and numerous scientific journals. She tours widely and has been featured on NPR's *On Being* with Krista Tippett and in 2015 addressed the general assembly of the United Nations on the topic of "Healing Our Relationship with Nature." Kimmerer is a SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor of Environmental Biology, and the founder and director of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment, whose mission is to create programs which draw on the wisdom of both indigenous and scientific knowledge for our shared goals of sustainability.



Londa Schiebinger, *Stanford University*

Londa Schiebinger is the John L. Hinds Professor of History of Science at Stanford University, and Founding Director of Gendered Innovations in Science, Health & Medicine, Engineering, and Environment. Schiebinger received her Ph.D. from Harvard University, is an elected member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the recipient of numerous prizes and awards, including the prestigious Alexander von Humboldt Research Prize and Guggenheim Fellowship. Her prize-winning books include *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (2004); *Gendered Innovations: How Gender Analysis Contributes to Research* (2013); and *Secret Cures of Slaves: People, Plants, and Medicine in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (2017).

Friday, September 16

Food and Medicine Cultures



Judith Carney, *University of California Los Angeles*

"Furtive Seeds: Africa's Plant Legacies in the Atlantic World"

Judith Carney is Distinguished Research Professor of Geography at UCLA. She has authored more than 100 research articles and two books. *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Harvard University Press, 2001) received the Melville Herskovits Book Award, and *In the Shadow of Slavery: Africa's Botanical Legacy in the Atlantic World* (University of California Press, 2009), the Frederick Douglass Book Prize. Professor Carney is an elected member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. A Fellow of the Association of American Geographers, she is also the recipient of its Distinguished Scholarship Honor, the Historical Geography Award, the Netting Award for geography and anthropology, and the Sauer Distinguished Scholarship Award. Her research has been supported by the National Geographic Society, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, the American Council of Learned Societies, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, and the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society.



Elizabeth Hoover, *University of California Berkeley*

“Find Your Sustainers?: Native Plant, Seed, and Food Reclamation”

Elizabeth is an associate professor in the Environmental Science, Policy, and Management (ESPM) department at the University of California, Berkeley whose research, life, and community work focuses on food sovereignty and environmental justice. Based on collaborations with tribal communities across the US, Elizabeth has published books and articles about Native American food sovereignty and seed rematriation; environmental reproductive justice; and tribal citizen science and community based participatory research. Her first book, *The River is In Us; Fighting Toxics in a Mohawk Community*, (2017) is an ethnographic exploration of Mohawk responses to Superfund contamination and environmental health research, as well as community-based efforts to revitalize local food systems. Her second book project, *From ‘Garden Warriors’ to ‘Good Seeds;’ Indigenizing the Local Food Movement* (forthcoming), explores Native American farming and gardening food sovereignty projects, the importance of heritage seeds, the role of Native chefs in the food sovereignty movement, and convergences between the food sovereignty and anti-pipeline and anti-mining movements.



Miranda Brown, *University of Michigan*

“The Veggie Officials—Perspectives on Plants and the Politics of Virtuous Eating in Premodern China”

A historian by training, Miranda Brown completed her PhD in Chinese History at U.C. Berkeley in 2002. She is the author of two monographs, the *Politics of Mourning in Early China* (SUNY 2007) and the *Art of Medicine in Early China: the Ancient and Medieval Origins of a Modern Archive* (Cambridge, 2015), as well as more than 20 articles on various aspects of Chinese cultural history. She is currently working on a book about Chinese food history.



Anatole Tchikine, *Dumbarton Oaks* (Moderator)

Anatole Tchikine is curator of rare books at Dumbarton Oaks, which he joined in 2012 as a member of the Garden and Landscape Studies department. He is responsible for developing, interpreting, and managing the institute’s Rare Book Collection to promote and expand its resources through active support of fellows and researchers. His other duties involve organizing related exhibitions and scholarly events and creating digital content to showcase the Dumbarton Oaks holdings. He also functions as the Garden and Landscape Studies subject librarian. With Yota Batsaki, he is Co-Investigator of the Plant Humanities Initiative.

Legacies of Colonialism and Resilience



Jayson M. Porter, *Brown University*

“The Visible Hand: Coconut Palms, Race, and Capitalism in Mexico”

Jayson Maurice Porter (Ph.D. Northwestern, 2022) is an environmental historian of Mexico and the Americas with focus on oilseeds (such as coconuts, sesame, and marijuana), environmental justice, and ecological violence in the states of Guerrero and Sinaloa. He is an editorial board member of the North American Congress on Latin America and an environmental specialist for Noria Research's Mexico and Central America Program. Lastly, Jayson is a Voss Postdoctoral Fellow in Environment and Society at Brown University and an incoming Presidential Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Maryland, College Park.



Ashanti Shih, *Vassar College*

“Collecting ‘Queer’ Specimens: Recovering Indigenous and Asian Voices from Science Archives”

Ashanti Shih is an Assistant Professor of History at Vassar College. Her work focuses on issues of race, settler colonialism, and the environmental sciences in the twentieth-century Pacific and American West. Shih is currently working on her first book project, tentatively titled “Invasive Ecologies: Science, Preservation, and Settler Colonialism in Twentieth-Century Hawai‘i,” which explores the history of species belonging, natural preservation, and the U.S. national park system in Hawai‘i. Her work has received several awards, including the 2020 Rachel Carson Prize for best dissertation in environmental history from the American Society for Environmental History and the 2020 W. Turrentine Jackson Award from the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association. Prior to her current appointment, Shih held Andrew W. Mellon fellowships at the New York Botanical Garden and Wellesley College, as well as a Society of Fellows in the Humanities postdoc at the University of Southern California.



Rosalyn LaPier, *University of Illinois*

“Plants, Purity & Prayer”

Rosalyn is an award-winning Indigenous writer, ethnobotanist and environmental activist with a BA in physics and PhD in environmental history. She works within Indigenous communities to revitalize Indigenous & traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), to address environmental justice & the climate crisis, and to strengthen public policy for Indigenous languages. Rosalyn is an enrolled member of the Blackfeet Tribe of Montana and Métis.



John Beardsley, *The Cultural Landscape Foundation* (moderator)

A curator, author, and educator, John Beardsley earned an A.B. from Harvard and a Ph.D. in art history from the University of Virginia. He is the author of numerous books on contemporary art and design, as well as many titles on recent landscape architecture. He was an adjunct professor at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design (GSD) from 1998 to 2013, teaching courses in landscape architectural history, theory, research, and writing, and Director of Garden and Landscape Studies at Dumbarton Oaks from 2008 to 2019. Among the exhibitions he has organized or co-organized are “Black Folk Art in America, 1930-1980” (Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1982); Hispanic Art in the United States” (Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 1987); and "The Quilts of Gee's Bend" (Museum of Fine Arts Houston and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2002). While at the GSD, he co-organized the exhibition "Dirty Work: Transforming the Landscape of Nonformal Cities in the Americas" (2008), examining efforts to improve environmental conditions in low-income communities across Latin America.

Saturday, September 17

Aesthetics, Ethics, and Spirituality



John Fappas, *Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens*

“The Nature into Fragrances: Plants, Perfumed Oils and Ceremonies in the Ancient Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean”

Dr. Ioannis Fappas studied History and Archaeology at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. He also has received a Masters, a PhD, and a PostDoc from the same institution. During his doctoral studies he received training in Mycenaean Linear B script at the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford, where he also conducted research on the archaeology and cuneiform epigraphic corpora from the ancient Eastern Mediterranean. He has published numerous articles on various subjects as well as a monograph on the manufacture and use of perfumed oils in Mycenaean Greece and the ancient Near East during the 14th and the 13th centuries BC. He is deeply engaged in excavation projects, international interdisciplinary research projects and museum exhibitions. Since June 2018 he has been working as Curator of Prehistoric Antiquities at the Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens.



Sumana Roy, *Ashoka University*

“A Hundred Years of Abyakta: The Forgotten Legacy of Jagadish Chandra Bose”

Sumana Roy is the author of *How I Became a Tree*, a work of nonfiction, *Missing: A Novel*, *My Mother's Lover and Other Stories*, and two poetry collections, *Out of Syllabus* and *V. I. P.: Very Important Plant*. She is Associate Professor of English and Creative Writing at Ashoka University.



Temitayo Ogunbiyi, artist

Temitayo Ogunbiyi explores the relationships between environment, line, and representation. Moving between mediums, her work links current events and anthropological histories, and aims to build diverse communities. Ogunbiyi is the recipient of a Graham Foundation Grant (2022), a Digital Earth Fellowship (2020), a Smithsonian Artist in Research Fellowship (2018), and a Ford Foundation Fellowship (2014). Her artwork has been exhibited at the Madre Museum (Naples, Italy), the 2nd Lagos Biennial, the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts, the Centre for Contemporary Art Lagos, the Perm Art Museum (Perm, Russia), and the Fries Museum (Berlin). Her installation, composed of 39 works on herbarium paper and vitrines, is currently on view in the 12th Berlin Biennial, and she is preparing for solo exhibitions at the Van Abbemuseum and the Noguchi Museum. Her forthcoming publication, *Position the Proverbial*, presents proverbs in conversation with visual art. Ogunbiyi lives and works in Lagos, Nigeria with her young family.



Diana Sorensen, Harvard University (moderator)

Diana Sorensen is James F. Rothenberg Professor of Romance Languages & Literatures and of Comparative Literature. Before joining the Harvard faculty in 2001, she taught at Columbia and Wesleyan Universities. She was Dean of Arts and Humanities in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences between 2006 and 2016. She is a specialist in nineteenth- and twentieth- centuries Latin American literature, comparative literature, and cultural theory. Her current work deals with mobility, material culture and the transformations of the global in the twenty first century. Her edited book, [Territories and Trajectories: Cultures in Circulation](#) was published by Duke University Press in 2018. She has sat on the board of several arts and humanities organizations, such as the Silk Road Project, the National Humanities Center, and Wellesley College.

Environment and Biodiversity



W. John Kress, Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History

“Biodiversity Exploration, Species Discovery, and New Technologies: Plant Humanities in a Rapidly Changing World.”

Dr. W. John Kress is Distinguished Scientist and Curator Emeritus at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History and co-chair of the Earth BioGenome Project, an international effort to generate complete genomes for all species of plants, animals, and fungi on the planet. He was Curator of Botany for over thirty years and formerly served as the Interim Under Secretary for Science at the Smithsonian and Director of Science in the Grand Challenges Consortia. Dr. Kress received his education at Harvard University (B.A., 1973) and Duke University (Ph.D., 1981) where he studied tropical biology, ethnobotany, evolution, and ecology. He is a taxonomic specialist on the tropical Zingiberales and his current research is focused on biodiversity genomics, conservation, and the Anthropocene. Among his over 250 scientific and popular papers are his books *Plant Conservation: A Natural History Approach*, *The Weeping Goldsmith*, *The Art of Plant Evolution*, and *The Ornaments of Life: Coevolution and Conservation in the Tropics*. His most recent book on climate change and society is *Living in the Anthropocene: Earth in the Age of Humans*. He is a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and is currently Visiting Scholar at Dartmouth College and the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University.



Rosetta Elkin, *Pratt Institute*

“Blowout Beardtongue: The Glitch in Conservation Management”

Rosetta’s work aims to elevate the role of plants in human life by exploring the concealed characteristics of their behavior. As a designer and a scholar, her work experiments with the ways in which we compose our worlds, blurring the traditional boundaries between academic research and applied practice. Elkin is the author of *Plant Life: The Entangled Politics of Afforestation* (University of Minnesota Press, 2022) which describes the geopolitical ambitions of tree planting programs. An earlier publication, *Tiny Taxonomy* (Actar 2017) reflects on the scale of individual plants in landscape architecture. She is also a research Associate at Harvard’s Arnold Arboretum. Her work has received numerous awards including the Graham Foundation Grant, Harvard Climate Solutions Award, the Garden Club of America Rome Prize and has been exhibited widely in venues such as the Victoria & Albert Museum, Les Jardins de Metis, Chelsea Festival, and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.



Gary Paul Nabhan, *University of Arizona*

“What Plant Humanities Can Do to Curb the Extinction of Ecological Interactions Among Humans, Plants & Their Mutualists”

Gary Paul Nabhan, PhD. is an Arab-American ethnobotanist, conservation biologist, contemplative ecologist, and Ecumenical Franciscan Brother who lives on Planet Desert. He has published over 30 books and 150 refereed journal articles that link the natural sciences with traditional ecological knowledge, the arts, and humanities. He holds the W.K. Kellogg Endowed Chair in Borderlands Food and Water Security at the University of Arizona and is a Senior Fellow with the Borderlands Restoration Network. His work linking biodiversity to cultural diversity through community-based collaborative conservation and biocultural restoration prompted the Utne Reader to list him among 30 innovators making the world a better place in which to live. He grows more than 150 fruit and nut varieties and desert succulent crop species at his private experimental "torture" orchard to evaluate them for their adaptations to our Braised New world.



John McNeil, *Georgetown University* (moderator)

J.R. McNeill, University Professor at Georgetown University, has authored or edited more than 20 books, including *Something New Under the Sun*, listed by the *London Times* among the 10 best science books ever written (despite being a history book); and *Mosquito Empires*, which won the Beveridge Prize from the American Historical Association; and most recently *The Webs of Humankind*. He has served as president of both the American Society for Environmental History and the American Historical Association, and is an elected member of both the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Academia Europaea. In 2018 he received the Heineken Award for History from the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Closing Remarks



Peter Crane FRS, Oak Spring Garden Foundation

Sir Peter Crane FRS is President of the Oak Spring Garden Foundation in Virginia, an estate of Rachel Lambert Mellon that includes an exquisite garden as well as an exceptional library focused on plants, gardens, and landscape design. He was at the Field Museum in Chicago from 1982-1999, and Director of The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew from 1999-2006, before being appointed University Professor at The University of Chicago. In 2009 he was recruited as Dean of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies (now Yale School of the Environment). Peter Crane was knighted in the UK for services to horticulture and conservation in 2004. He is a member of several national science academies and the recipient of honorary degrees from universities in the UK and US, including an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University in the UK. He received the International Prize for Biology in 2014.



Romita Ray, Syracuse University

Romita Ray is an Associate Professor of Art History at Syracuse University. Her research interests center on the art and architecture of the British empire in India, history of science, landscape and animal studies, the Anthropocene, post-colonial theory, Orientalism in art, and material culture. She is an editorial board member for the *Journal of South Asian Studies*, a member of the Advisory Committee for the Indian Council of Historical Research (New Delhi, India), and an Executive Board Member at Large (2021-2024) for the [American Society for Eighteenth Century Studies](#) (ASECS). Author of *Under the Banyan Tree: Relocating the Picturesque in British India* (2013), Ray is co-editing *Empire and Cultural Change: Visual Arts, Film, and Architecture*, a four-volume project with Jos Hackforth-Jones (forthcoming 2024). She is also writing a book about tea in colonial India tentatively titled, *Leafy Wonders: Art, Aesthetics, and the Science of Tea in India*.



Yota Batsaki, Dumbarton Oaks

Yota Batsaki is the executive director of Dumbarton Oaks. She is also Principal Investigator for the Plant Humanities Initiative at Dumbarton Oaks, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (2018-2022). Previously, she was a Fellow and Director of Studies in English at St. John's College, Cambridge. Her research interests lie in Enlightenment literature and philosophy; the cultural histories of plants; and the movement of people, objects, and ideas in the eastern Mediterranean. Among her publications are three co-edited volumes: *The Botany of Empire in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Dumbarton Oaks, 2016); *Imperial Geographies in Byzantine and Ottoman Space* (Center for Hellenic Studies, 2013); and *Fictions of Knowledge: Fact, Evidence, Doubt* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2011). Her current research project focuses on plants in contemporary art. In 2002, Batsaki co-founded the Harvard Summer Program in Greece, where she continues to teach.