

**Session title: NARRATIVE, MEMORY AND COSMOLOGY:  
FIGURATIVE ART IN THE PREHISTORIC  
MEDITERRANEAN**

**Organisers:** Caroline Malone, Queen's University, Belfast, UK  
Simon Stoddart, University of Cambridge, UK  
Sharon Sultana, Heritage Malta, Malta (Chairperson)

**Time:**

**Room:**

**Session abstract:**

This session will examine how figurative art can be employed to move beyond the static image into the elaboration of narratives and performance in the construction of memory and cosmology in the prehistoric Mediterranean. Elaborate iconography is more frequent in urban societies, but there are examples of implicit narrative embedded in the tableaux of some Mediterranean prehistoric art, either through friezes or groupings of figures. In other cases, a reconstruction of performance is achieved by a detailed reconstruction of the context of figurative art either through the products of modern excavation or exceptionally from the re-visiting of the archives of exceptional earlier archaeologists. Case studies will be presented from Malta, the Balkans, Spain, mainland Greece, Sardinia and Cyprus, which illustrate the potential of this more dynamic approach to prehistoric Art.

**Paper abstracts:**

**SCULPTURE IN A CHANGING WORLD OF EARLY NEOLITHIC**

Liliana Janik University of Cambridge, UK

This presentation will explore visual narrative and memory captured in the prehistoric sculptures of Lepenski Vir. I shall explore the way the figurative art was used by prehistoric fisher-gatherer-hunter communities in creating visual traditions that allowed them to negotiate personal and communal identities in the changing world of the Early Mediterranean Neolithic. During the time of the changes, when the old lifeways based on food procuring economies of fishing, gathering and hunting were coming to an end, and being replaced by plant cultivation and animal breeding brought into the region by distant communities, art became a medium for expressing ideologies of life under threat. Sculptures became a visual 'voice' in asserting local communities, their ideologies, cosmologies and ways of life

**METAPHORS OF THE BUILT SPACE. ON THE DOUBLE NARRATIVE  
AND PERFORMANCE OF PREHISTORIC ARCHITECTURE**

Dragos Gheorghiu, Centre of Research, National University of Arts, Bucharest, Romania

Prehistoric architectural analysis often forgets the problems of the act of construction, which may infer a double narrative of built space – the manner of performance, the use of performance space and the impact on the viewer through visual metaphors.

The first metaphors used were images of dominant animals in complex visual narratives, suggesting the incorporation of a powerful energy inside the built features, the animal symbolising the concept of *firmitas*, employed later in classical architecture. Therefore the animation of architectural features through the use of the incorporated animals could symbolise a materialisation of the effort supported by [now animated] architectural structures. Such cosmological messages using animal images or anatomical parts are displayed on stone pillars at Gobekli Tepe and walls at Çatal Hüyük, revealing a hidden narrative relating the enormous forces supported by the pillars and walls, and, subsequently, a message of protection of the interior. Perceived from this opposite perspective, architecture offers a performance, parallel with those performed inside it. The paper will discuss the first archaeological examples of the double narrative at Gobekli Tepe and Çatal Hüyük, comparing them with similar metaphorical examples from classical Antiquity in the Mesopotamian region as well as with examples from Greco-Roman architecture.

## **“FUNCTIONING” IMAGES IN NEOLITHIC GREECE: REALITY OR FICTION?**

Christina Marangou, Athens, Greece

The present paper endeavours to examine possible clues about symbolized action, based on Neolithic material from Greece. Standard examples of figurative art are generally isolated and static, independently of the posture in which they are represented. In other cases, there are composite, uncommon or even unnatural figures, which presumably correspond to either a specific instant in a sequence of events or acts, or a more or less lasting, unusual situation. This event or situation may have really occurred, or have formed part of a seemingly imaginary story. In both lines of reasoning, reality or fiction, a particular true or mythical scene would have been memorized and materialized, fixed permanently in image, as it would have appeared during tangible or invented performance. Possible interpretations of the reasons, uses and functions of such figures remain hypothetical

## **RETHINKING DOUBLE IMAGES IN THE PREHISTORIC MEDITERRANEAN**

Lauren E. Talalay University of Michigan, USA and Tracy Cullen, Hesperia, American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Greece

Prehistoric figurines from the Mediterranean have long stimulated discussion on a range of topics, running the gamut from magic and religion, to gender, cosmology, and daily behaviours. For the most part, analysis has focused on single, free-standing

images. Little attention has been paid, however, to the overarching category of double images, particularly those that represent either two identical, conjoined human images or single human bodies with two heads. These unusual figurines, which are found in prehistoric contexts of Greece, Cyprus, Anatolia, the Balkans, and the Near East, do not seem to depict couples of the opposite sex, but are often ostensibly sexless. In this paper the authors consider whether these images might in some cases have been intended to portray identical twins, and how the concept of the “double” may have played out in the larger narratives or concerns of these early cultures

## **REPRESENTING THE BODY: RETHINKING ANTHROPOMORPHIC IMAGERY**

Peter Biehl, SUNY, Buffalo, USA

This paper discusses how studying visual representations of the human body (from the Neolithic and Chalcolithic in Southeastern Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East) can aid us in understanding identity and personhood in the past. The paper looks at anthropomorphism and miniaturization as well as at embodiment and entanglement. It will also scrutinize corporeal and ideational and symbolic attributes of the visual body. It asserts that the only way to advance our understanding of prehistoric personhood is to contextualize anthropomorphic imagery with other materializations of identity in burial and settlement practices and then analyze their short-term and long-term changes.

## **THE SPOTTED ‘GODDESSES’: TRACING BACK A NEOLITHIC NARRATIVE**

Krum Bacvarov National Institute of Archaeology and Museum Sofia, Bulgaria

Two late Neolithic sites (late sixth / early fifth millennium BC) in Bulgarian Thrace have recently yielded rather specific female figurines covered by a dotted pattern, which consists of excised dots in groups of four, closely resembling the rosette patterned coat of a leopard. The leopard species (*Panthera pardus*), however, had never prowled the Neolithic Balkans. Where did the Neolithic farmers in Thrace then take this pattern from as well as some other leopard-related ‘themes’ dating back to various phases of the neolithization process? This presentation will try to find clues and to give answers contributing to the interpretative framework of the leopard pattern in these specific contexts; furthermore, its origins and distribution will be considered in relation to a hypothetical reconstruction of prehistoric religious beliefs and ritual practices.

## **DEATH AS PERFORMANCE IN PREHISTORIC MALTA**

Simon Stoddart, University of Cambridge, UK

The liturgical art of the prehistoric “temples” of Malta was clearly part of an active performance. The richly preserved architecture and portable art permit a

reconstruction of the life rituals which were celebrated there and thoughts about there inspiring cosmologies. A similar case will be presented for mortuary art where more recent excavated evidence can permit a reconstruction of the performative qualities of art, animal and human bone. It is suggested that the performances of mortuary ritual recapitulated life cycle in a series of nested temporal scales. These performances are captured in the selection and formation of the material remains.

## **COSMOLOGY, ART AND PERFORMANCE IN THE TEMPLES OF MALTA**

Caroline Malone, Queen's University, Belfast, UK

Art and image in Temple period Malta extends far beyond the traditional view of the traditional great Mother Goddess, and as this paper aims to demonstrate, animals, monsters, birds and cold-blooded creatures form a rich visual testament to belief and ritual on the islands. Study of context and the archaeological record raise the possibility of interpreting the "art" as part of a multi-layered system of cosmological ideas. Objects functioned within many performative and narrative activities, in ritual and in domestic life, and especially in the context of the Maltese Temple and Hypogea. The art may portray a rich and vivid insight into how imagery and figurative art was used and experienced in constructed spaces and places, and potentially inform about how we can tackle ritual and cosmology in less well preserved cultural contexts in the wider Mediterranean region.

## **IMAGERY AND PERCEPTION: CHANGING FORMS OF REPRESENTATION AND BODILY PERFORMANCE IN PREHISTORIC ITALY**

Katherine Cooper, University of Cambridge, UK

The importance of performance in the construction of social memories and cosmologies in prehistory is certain, yet past actions seem ephemeral and therefore inaccessible. This paper focuses on perception and the body as a shared basis of somatic experience. I argue that by tracing long-term changes in the forms of 'artworks' we can see changes in how people perceived and interacted with them enabling use to consider how the loci of performance might have changed. The visual and perceptual qualities of anthropomorphic imagery changed between the Neolithic and Copper Age in many regions of the Italian peninsula and I suggest this can be related to their important role in the maintenance of social identities. By comparing such imagery and emphasizing perceptual rather than symbolic aspects, it is suggested that images' modes of representation embodied characteristics that suited their role and purpose as focal points in social performances, becoming mediators of performed choreographies, even physically marked or inscribed by performance. It is shown that over this period the increasingly monumental scale of anthropomorphic imagery played a role in defining fixed communal spaces with audiences interacting with and performing around them.

## **IL MESSAGGIO IDEOLOGICO E CELEBRATIVO DELL'ARTE FIGURATIVA NURAGICA (THE IDEOLOGICAL AND CELEBRATORY MESSAGE OF NURAGIC FIGURATIVE ART).**

Anna Depalmas, University of Sassari, Sardinia, Italy

Un tratto caratteristico e significativo delle manifestazioni artigianali ed artistiche della civiltà nuragica è costituito dai *bronzetti*, miniature di persone, animali, edifici ed oggetti d'uso quotidiano. Sono noti più di 600 bronzetti, in costante aumento. Le figure effigiate consentono diversi piani di lettura che vanno oltre la notazione dei tratti e dei particolari dell'abbigliamento e che riportano a gestualità e atteggiamenti propri dell'ambito culturale nuragico.

Le rappresentazioni, pur con un'evidente volontà di ostentazione delle élite, non sembrano riconducibili a cicli celebrativi del gruppo familiare e le manifestazioni legate all'ostentazione delle armi e all'attività della caccia si configurano in modo chiaro come l'espressione di attività proprie di ceti dominanti aristocratici. Tra i soggetti più riprodotti, infatti, vi sono i guerrieri, rappresentati con le armi da cui è facile distinguere ruoli specializzati (arcieri, lancieri, frombolieri).

Diverso valore sembrano avere le iconografie femminili e quelle di offerenti non armati e privi di specifici attributi oltre ad un dono, in genere un pane o un recipiente.

Valenza di ex-voto, visti gli ambiti di rinvenimento, dovevano avere anche gli altri oggetti miniaturistici: numerosi bronzi figurati furono scoperti, infatti, presso luoghi di culto, nei templi "a megaron", nelle fonti e pozzi sacri.

## **ENTANGLED BODIES: THE NARRATIVE FROM NURAGIC SARDINIA**

Isabelle Vella Gregory, University of Cambridge, UK

This paper offers a long overdue re-interpretation of Sardinian bronze figures (*bronzetti*) from the perspective of body studies rooted in social theory. The body is considered to be the locus for identity formation, enabling a reading of both the bronze bodies and the human bodies they represent and interacted with. By using Michel Foucault's theory of the inscribed body and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *hexis*, this paper sheds new light on Nuragic Sardinia. In particular, it offers a study of the treatment of the body and its relationship with space. *Bronzetti* are presented as entangled bodies, part of a complex world of social relationships. By first deconstructing this entanglement, it becomes possible to understand the different structures with which the body interacted. As such, this is also a study of the performing body and the intricacies behind performativity.

## **ORGANISATION OF SPACE AND REPRESENTATIONS OF ART IN THE ROCK-CUT TOMBS (DOMUS DE JANAS) OF SARDINIA**

Giuseppa Tanda, University of Cagliari, Italy

There are numerous representations of art in bas-relief on the walls of *domus de janas*, mainly in the antechamber or the following room, the most important

locations of ritual activity and communication space. These specific locations trace the development of figurative art and ritual embedded in changing social conditions. The multiplicity and uniqueness of the motifs and their location on the walls appear to be expressions of distinct concepts, relating to different times and dimensions of ritual.

The plurality and repetition are probably connected to the celebration of religious events (death/funeral, reorganisation of the tomb/foundation rite, repeated ceremonies etc). By contrast, the execution of one sole motif on an entire wall appears to indicate universal beliefs undertaken at a community level.

This paper will seek to illustrate how chronological and conceptual patterns, interpreted from the spatial organisation of the *domus de janas*, seem to be closely linked to social organisation.