

What is the Point of Palaeontology? Discussion Event & Pop-Up Exhibition

Tuesday 18 December, 18:00-20:15

Anatomy Museum & Anatomy Lecture Theatre
King's College London Strand Campus, WC2R 2LS



Featuring discussion with:

Joe Cain, Darren Naish, Elsa Panciroli, Mark Witton & Becky Wragg-Sykes.

And Exhibits from:

John Conway, Richard Fallon, Katrina van Grouw, Beth Windle & Mark Witton.

Palaeontology is currently one of the most high-profile sciences. But how far does it actually help us to understand the world around us? Does palaeontology give us an unparalleled window into nature, the changing environment and evolution? Or does the way that palaeontological research has often been presented – in terms of prehistoric monsters, macho fieldwork and narratives of progress – detract from understandings of science? And how should we research and talk about life's history in relation to the present and future of life?

In this one-evening pop-up exhibition and discussion, we'll be thinking about these and other questions with some leading palaeontologists, artists, historians, and science communicators. Join us to discuss how palaeontology has been used in the past, its place today in discussions of science and nature, and how the role of the field might change in the future.

Event Outline

18:00-20:15 - Pop-Up Exhibition (Anatomy Museum)

In the King's College London Anatomy Museum will be a series of exhibits on display from 18:00-20:15. The artists and exhibitors will be on hand to discuss their work, and some of this will be for sale. There will also be some refreshments available.

18:30-19:30 - Discussion (Anatomy Lecture Theatre)

Between 18:30 and 19:30, there will be a panel discussion in the Old Anatomy Lecture Theatre, where a series of experts – including Joe Cain, Darren Naish, Elsa Panciroli, Mark Witton & Becky Wragg-Sykes – will talk about what their views on the significance of palaeontology, and answer questions and discussion points from the audience.

Getting There

The event will be in the KCL Strand Campus (map and directions here: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/study/campus/strand.aspx>) on the **sixth floor of the King's Building**.

To find the event, go into the main KCL reception on the Strand. There will be a desk to sign in at between 17:45-19:30. The people at the desk will have a list of attendees, so no need to print out your ticket (although bringing it along might save time).

Once inside, walk through the barriers in the reception (ignoring the first staircase on your left) to go into the King's Building. The exhibition space and lecture theatre will be on the sixth floor, which is accessible by lifts. You will see these on your left about half-way down the corridor.

Once you are on the sixth floor, turn right and follow the signs to the Anatomy Museum. You will be directed to the lecture theatre when the discussion segment is about to start.

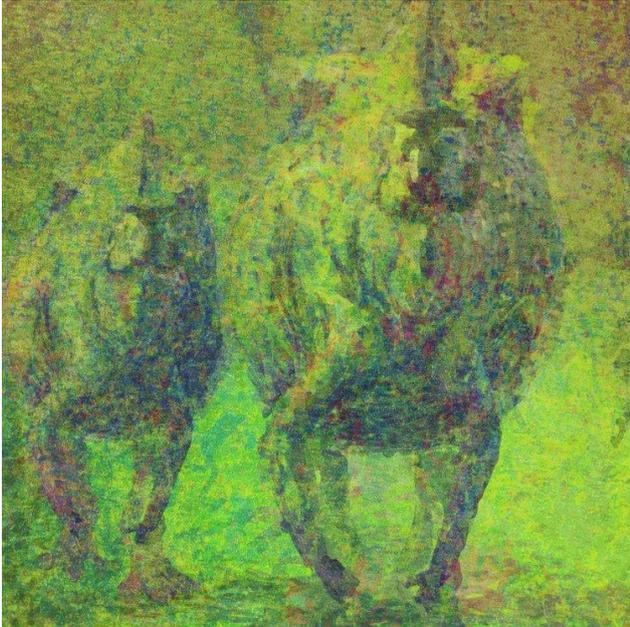
This event is being organized in association with Popularizing Palaeontology Workshop IV (more info here: www.poppalaeo.com), and is funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council. For more details or if you have any questions, please contact chris.manias@kcl.ac.uk

Exhibits

John Conway

'Obscuring Palaeontology'

johnconway.co

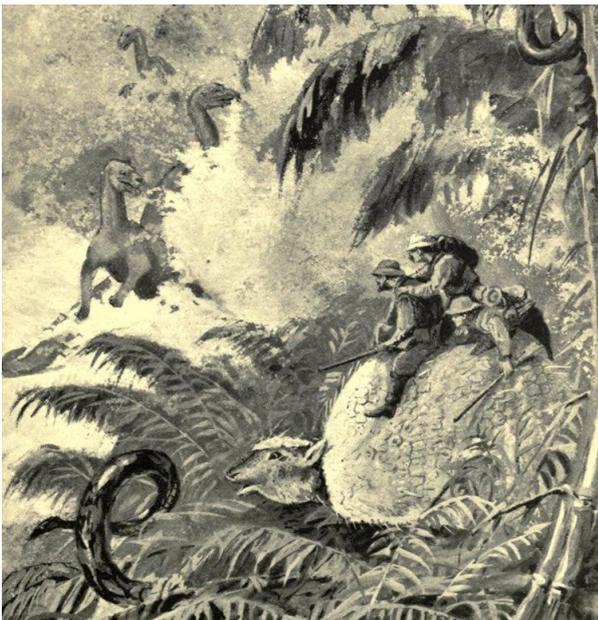


Is an art-first approach to palaeontology interesting?

Is it any good?

Richard Fallon

'As Dead as the Dinosaurs'.



This display shows how, between the late nineteenth and the mid twentieth centuries, dinosaurs became symbols of evolutionary backwardness. Palaeontologists no longer associate these dynamic animals with outdated ideas like 'racial senility,' but narratives and concepts developed in this period remain with us, from fiction in which dinosaurs are gunned down with hi-tech weaponry to the world of political cartoons, where dinosaurs remain one of the ultimate insults.

Katrina van Grouw

‘A Two-way Mirror: back from the future, forward to the past.’

www.unfeatheredbird.com



I'm not a palaeontologist.

My work's concerned with living animals: bird groups still in existence, and very, very modern domesticated animals. Yet despite both feet being firmly planted in the present, palaeontology has, over the last few years, woven itself into the fabric of what I am and what I do. There's no escaping it.

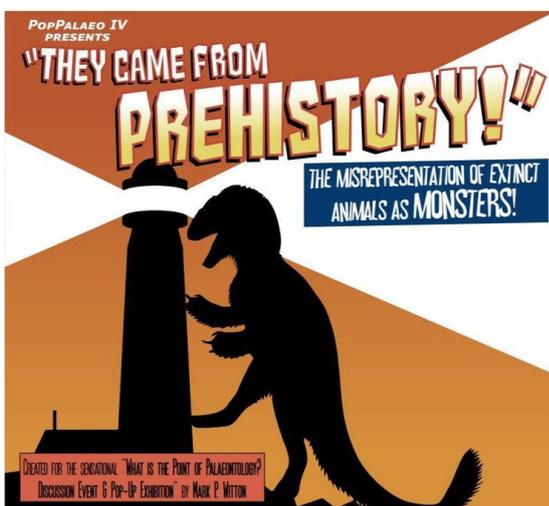
The modern animals I write about and illustrate can only be fully understood in the context of the far greater multitudes that came before. Likewise, the traits that we see in the living animals around us – even apparently ‘artificial’, made-made animals, like fancy pigeon breeds – can shed light on the morphology of those long extinct.

Palaeontology is not a separate discipline from the study of living animals; it's an integral part of it.

Mark Witton

‘THEY CAME FROM PREHISTORY! The misrepresentation of extinct animals as monsters’

www.markwitton.com/



Artistic portrayals of extinct species are often characterised by ‘monsterisation’ of their subject matter. In these works, illustrative choices are made to depict fossil animals as ferocious, intimidating-looking creatures with violent habits and savage behaviours. How credible are these takes on prehistory when compared to what we know of living and extinct animal behaviour and appearance? Where does this desire for palaeoartistic ‘monsterisation’ stem from? And what impact might portraying real (albeit extinct) species in this way have on our perception of the modern natural world