

**Girton Mountford Humanities and Arts
Communications Prize 2019**

PIONEERING

Friday 8th February 2019

8pm, the Fellows' Rooms

Programme

8.00pm Introduction by the Mistress

1. Kevan DeCuyper
2. Rosalind Helfand
3. Jon Petre
4. Thomas Rialan

Short break

5. Eleanor Absalom
6. Lucy Rogers
7. Linden Disney-Hogg

Audience vote

Judges' comments

Presentation of Prizes

Abstract Prize

The Lawrence Room Prize

Audience Prize

Judges' Prize

Abstracts

1) **Kevan DeCuyper**

The Tate Modern and Cildo Meireles' Babel

It is not possible to discuss 'pioneering' without evoking an historical sense of time, since a pioneer is commonly described as '[a] person who goes before others to prepare or open up the way,' or as 'an innovator'. Both of these possibilities imply the genesis of something new, and posit pioneers as the heralds of productive interventions that steer the flow of time, in a gradual but steady accretion of influences, ever forward. My presentation will engage with Cildo Meireles' sculpture Babel, currently on display in the Tate Modern, to cast this implied historical gaze backwards and examine the darker, less frequently recalled (and seldom anticipated) consequences of innovation and pioneering.

Meireles' sculpture references the biblical story of an incomplete tower, collaboratively-built by a human species united in one language, nearly tall enough to reach the heavens. Offended by this act of hubris, God confused the peoples with different languages and 'scattered them all over the earth' to foil the tower's construction and to slow human progress. While God's linguistic trick succeeds in this endeavour, the confusion that ensues becomes the source all the world's conflict. This story, which is essentially a creation myth explaining the paradox of intercultural violence in a species that obviously possesses an abundance of creative and intellectual potential, resonates with the military origins of a 'pioneer' as one who paves the way for battle. My presentation will reframe the concept of 'pioneering' as at once both essential and precarious, as the innovations of the past (like the discarded technology composing Meireles' Babel) present new challenges that we must overcome, collectively, with an awareness of our shared future.

2) **Rosalind Helfand**

Citizen Science as Pioneering Social Innovation

Scientists are engaging communities in citizen science to gather data about nature on a large scale. But scientists aren't the only beneficiaries of citizen science. As evidenced through programs like the global City Nature Challenge, citizen science is increasingly connecting humans across their communities and the world, transforming how we relate to one another and our environment. What's more, citizen science can empower marginalized peoples, particularly in urban areas, increasing their voice, visibility, and scientific and environmental expertise in collaboration with local institutions. The grassroots nature of long-lived citizen science programs, spread over entire regions, especially encourages effective campaigns for elected officials to develop conservation focused, sustainable policies and reduce environmental harms. The people leading these programs often straddle multiple issue areas: social and economic justice, civil and human rights, environmental justice, species conservation, health, education, biology, nonprofit management, and legislation. In bringing citizen science to bear as a focal point for these areas, these leaders are pioneers in a grand experiment for a new kind of grassroots social innovation with potentially enormous benefits for earth's future. In my presentation, I will discuss and give examples of citizen science models that serve as social innovation through the lens of the Los Angeles County Natural History Museum, where I've long volunteered.

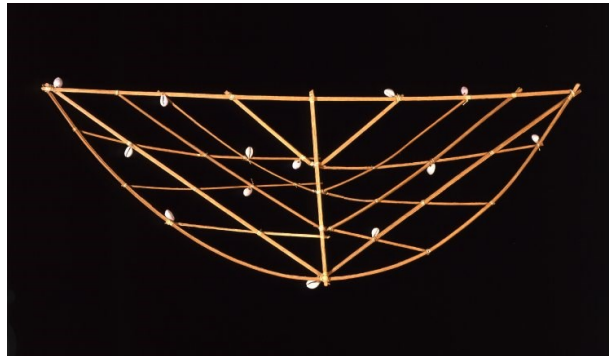
Genesis 11:8, The Living Bible (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.).

Tate, "'Babel'", Cildo Meireles, 2001', Tate <<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/meireles-babel-t14041>> [accessed 28 January 2019].

3. Jon Petre

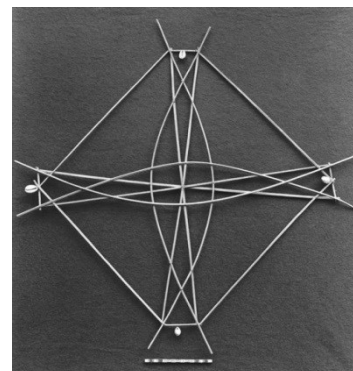
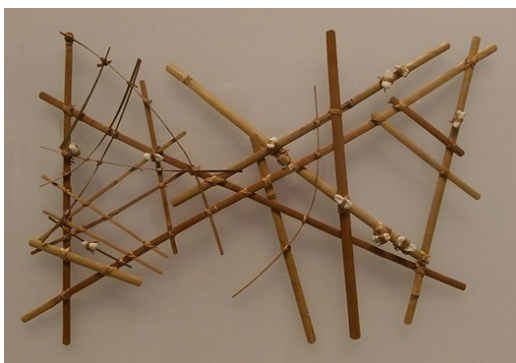
The Stick Charts – Marshall Islands Navigational Tools

Held at: Cambridge University Library Special Collections, Royal Commonwealth Society Collection; British Museum, London; Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology, Berkley, California.



Pioneering, in many senses, is about looking forward, guiding others, and finding new approaches to the world and the problems we face within it. This is nowhere more in evidence than the “stick charts” of the Marshall Islands people, variations of which exist across the Pacific diaspora. A traditional handicraft construction of sticks, palm fibre and cowrie shells, the stick charts depict an accurate map of ocean currents and relative locations of islands, emphasising ocean currents and relational qualities rather than objective data. Since ancient times, these charts have enabled the Marshallese to navigate incredible distances across the Pacific, without the aid of compasses, astrolabes, or modern tools. The sticks represent ocean currents, while shells signify island chains. Lightweight, ingeniously designed with locally available materials, the stick charts rely upon generations’ worth of traditional knowledge about the nature of the oceans, as well as a respectful understanding of humankind’s place within the natural world. They testify both to the resilience of their makers and to their intimate, co-operational relationship to their environment.

With the use of these stick charts the Marshallese were pioneering in every sense of the word. Though modern methods have rendered the stick charts obsolete, the uniqueness of their design – unlike any Western mapmaking – provides a valuable lesson in the present day, continuing to educate future generations on the value of fresh perspectives. They demonstrate how innovative thinking and pioneering ways of seeing the world could help solve some of the most stubborn environmental crises faced today.



4. Thomas Rialan

“Eye idols”

The “eye idols” from the Lawrence room were excavated in Syria in 1937, and arrived in college in 2010. Consider, for a moment, their remarkable existence. At the time of their birth, 4000 years before the common era, they were peers with the pioneering scribes who developed cuneiform script. The earliest generation of authors whose numbers grew as the first city states in human history were sprouting across Mesopotamia, building great libraries and palaces, where scholars broke new ground in mathematics, and astronomy. In their early adulthood, 35 centuries ago, the idols were watching as Hammurabi, king of Babylon, created the first law codes as we know them. Their large eyes surely looked on incredulously when, just over 2000 years ago they met one of the most remarkable pioneers of ancient times, Alexander the Great was storming across the region, on a voyage to the edge of the known world. The idols’ large elliptical eyes, are a testament to their wisdom, and insatiable curiosity, still watching after millennia. Now, in their old age, I cannot help but think that they look at us with an imperceptible smile of satisfaction, as we kneel down in the Lawrence room to look them in the eyes. They silently watch over as we perpetuate a tradition; an institution that has pioneered women’s rights, that stands for openness, equality, and, of course, the curiosity that defines these idols, a curiosity that they will never stop sharing, as they stare at us insistingly.

5) Eleanor Absalom

Arctic Pioneers: from the United Kingdom to the North Pole on a woman’s wish

A motley collection of rusty tins, broken pocket-watches, a replica medal and one embroidered handkerchief does not immediately bring to mind the spirit of pioneering. But look deeper, and these objects reveal a tragic tale of pioneers from very different walks of life. Located in the Polar Museum (Scott Polar Research Institute), the objects are from Sir John Franklin’s ill-fated 1845 Arctic expedition to find the fabled North-West passage, and the successive rescue missions to uncover the expedition’s fate from 1847-1859. Vital tools and supplies for the pioneering explorers and scientists on these expeditions, the objects enabled us to go to the furthest reaches of the known world and record and understand what we found there. But they also embody a journey much closer to home. That of Lady Jane Franklin (Sir Franklin’s wife), who campaigned for the rescue missions that would go on to find these items and uncover what happened to Franklin and his men, as well as contribute significantly to our understanding of the Arctic region. She managed this at a time when being female was seen as inferior, and where strict societal protocols limited her ability to intervene. The objects represent Lady Franklin’s struggle as a woman to be taken seriously and listened to - a struggle that still resonates with many women across society today. But, of course, they also represent her and the crew’s successes. They are a reminder and an inspiration of what can be achieved with pioneering spirit and determination.

6) Lucy Rogers

Counting Commitment: Girton College's Early Subscribers

Girton College is the result of a highly collaborative project to enact the beliefs of a group of pioneering women and their supporters; the college subscription account book for 1869 to 1875, held in the Lawrence Room, provides a visual representation of the co-operation involved in the foundation and development of one of the first residential higher education institutions for women. The long lists of different names reflect the essential role of community in the college's early years, and remind us of its continued importance to the identity of Girton today. Important proto-feminists such as Jessie Boucherett and Barbara Bodichon are present, but the names of less well-known individuals who showed belief in the endeavour through their contributions are also included. The account book is written in the hand of Emily Davies, whose pioneering spirit led her to take on the challenge of expanding higher education, but the entries themselves represent the many others who supported her project and thus were pioneering in their own way. The figures for each entry vary, and the book therefore acts as a reminder that one does not need to give the most money or time in order to be a part of something important. This early account book provides more than interesting financial detail; it demonstrates a shared commitment to an ideal, and to the innovative practical realisation of that ideal, which is only possible through the dedication of a community to inspiring and enacting change.

7) Linden Disney-Hogg

Pioneering – The women who changed mathematics

For much of history, women have been discouraged and turned away from mathematics. Indeed, Sophie Germain's parents believed the subject was harmful to young women! This talk will then be a celebration of pioneering women in mathematics, the work they have done, and the impact they have had on the future. On the way we will see the important place that Girton has in this history, from Sarah Woodhead (one of the Girton Pioneers), to Dame Mary Cartwright, who served as the mistress of Girton from 1948 to 1968.



Margaret Mountford (née Gamble) read French and German in her first year and Law for subsequent years at Girton 1970-1973, before embarking on a legal career which culminated in her being a Partner in Corporate Law at Herbert Smith (1983-1999). Dr Mountford has held a number of non-executive directorships, notably at Amstrad, where her associations with Alan Sugar led to her appearing as one of Lord Sugar's advisors in the first five series of the UK version of *The Apprentice*. Since leaving *The Apprentice* in 2009, Dr Mountford has pursued research in Papyrology and was awarded a PhD degree from UCL. Writing in the *Girton Review* in 2007 she says: 'If asked to recommend a career in law or TV to an aspiring graduate, I know which one I'd choose'...

We are very pleased to acknowledge sponsorship from
Dr Margaret Mountford

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