"Man Versus Wild? Rethinking the Interpretation of Human and Animal Representation in Egyptian Art"

Dr. Jennifer Babcock, Fashion Institute of Technology, SUNY
Sponsored by Conrad & Virginia Barrett and Julia Schroder & Bonnie Palsley.

Lecture: Saturday January 11, 2020 1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Free for ARCE and Bowers Members.
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Bowers Museum, Santa Ana - Norma Kershaw Auditorium
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In the past, certain scholars have argued that ancient Egyptian depictions of domestic and wild animals are shown within postures and situations that emphasize their natural movements and behaviors; this is in contrast to human representation, which follows strict and rigid artistic conventions. This interpretation suggests that the artistic treatment of human and animal representation is different, and that the ancient Egyptians intended to show the dichotomy of order and chaos through the human and animal world, respectively. However, a closer look at these images indicate that some of the same artistic restraints imposed on human representation are also seen in animal representation, such as the use of the canon of proportions, strict register lines, and iconicity. This talk will discuss the scholarly bias toward human representation, and investigate why Egyptologists have taken for granted that animals demonstrate higher levels of artistic freedom when in fact there are numerous examples of seemingly spontaneous human movement and behaviors in Egyptian art as well.

Jennifer Miyuki Babcock is a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of History of Art and Design at Pratt Institute and also teaches at other universities in New York City, including New York University, The New School, and The Fashion Institute of Technology. She teaches survey art history courses that range from prehistory to modern times, and also leads classes that focus on the ancient Mediterranean world and its intercultural exchanges. Prior to teaching, she was a Postdoctoral Curatorial Associate at The Institute for the Study of the Ancient World and has held research and fellowship positions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Fine Arts Boston, and the Brooklyn Museum.
Dr. Babcock earned her PhD at the Institute of Fine Arts, NYU in ancient Egyptian art and archaeology in 2014. Her dissertation, The Imagery of Anthropomorphized animals in New Kingdom Ostraca and Papyri: Their Artistic and Cultural Significance demonstrates how the images of anthropomorphized animals are linked with major aspects of Egyptian art, such as narrative, parody, and aesthetics. Currently, Dr. Babcock is revising her dissertation into a book, and her manuscript, Tree Climbing Hippos and Ennobled Mice: Animal Fables in Ancient Egypt, is in review with Brill Publishers. Her research interests, including the construction of visual narrative and the development of ancient Egyptian iconography, have been supported by faculty development grants and awards from The New School and The Fashion Institute of Technology.