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Shark in Art: creature vs. culture

INSTITUTE OF AVANCED STUDIES

A public lecture by Vivienne Westbrook
Associate Professor, National Taiwan University



Sharks have excited the imagination of literary and visual artists for centuries. There are literally thousands of references to sharks in poetry, drama, novels, painting and sculpture. Since the twentieth century they have been appropriated for film, TV and advertising campaigns, but often in ways that have increased the perception of sharks as monstrous man-eaters.

An unconscious elision of the real shark, about which we still know relatively little, and the shark within human culture, about which we all know something, has generated many misconceptions about real sharks. Those who work with them closely often refer to them with admiration and affection. They are acutely aware of the fact that it is the cultural representation of sharks that has facilitated their exploitation, some species of which are now on the verge of extinction.

This lecture will draw attention to the distinction between the monster that we have created and the real shark. It will explore some of the many representations of sharks in a variety of artforms as a means of understanding the complex role of sharks in culture, the human emotions that they evoke, and the impact of representation on their existence.

About Vivienne Westbrook

Vivienne Westbrook is an Associate Professor at National Taiwan University where she lectures on cultural adaptation from the Renaissance through to the twenty-first century. She is the recipient of numerous international awards, including a British Academy Award, National Science Council Awards and a Presidential Award for her Contribution to the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. She has published on subjects as diverse as English Reformation Bible translation through to adaptations of Sir Walter Raleigh across the range of expressive media. Her project *Shark in Art* brings her to The University of Western Australia this semester, where she is researching the cultural responses to and emotional contexts for sharks with the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions.

Event Details

Date: 27 May 2013
Time: 6 to 7pm
Venue: Webb Lecture Theatre,
Geography Building, UWA
Parking: P18 & P19, Fairway entrance 1
Cost: Free, but RSVP essential.
Book online
ias.uwa.edu.au/lectures/westbrook



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Emotions make history

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