**The Palm House and the Plantationocene: Kew’s role in the emergence of the global tropical commodity system and its legacies**



*Qualification type*: PhD

*Location*: London

*Funding for*: UK Students / International Students

*Funding amount*: fees and stipend at AHRC rates (for the current academic year 2022-23, the stipend rate is £20,218 (with London weighting). This includes enhanced stipend to cover additional travel costs relating to the project. Please note: this funding amount typically increases with inflation each academic year. The award will cover UK or international fees.

*Closes*: **Friday 13 January 2023, 12 noon**

**The studentship**

This multimodal doctoral research project will explore Kew’s role in the emergence of the global tropical commodity system and its legacies today, feeding directly into the project on the restoration of Kew’s Palm House planned for 2024-28. Focusing on one key plantation commodity (oil palm, rubber or coffee) it will combine archival and museum research (primarily in Kew’s collections but also other colonial and commercial archives) with ethnographic, oral history and (potentially) visual methods. The project has two main aims: firstly, to considerably further the understanding of Kew’s role in the rise of plantation economies and the vast transformations this brought about, and, secondly, to explore innovative ways to communicate the ecological, social and political dimensions of the Plantationocene to a wider public accessibly, engagingly and critically through in situ interpretation and other media. It will address these key questions:

* What was Kew’s role in the emergence of the global commodity and plantation system?
* How did this system reorganize landscapes, lives and political economies in the colonial tropics and in Britain? Who benefitted, who suffered?
* What are the visible, remembered, direct and indirect legacies and present-day repercussions of Kew’s involvement and the global commodity system as a whole? How can centuries of extraction be traced in landscapes, archives and oral testimonies?
* How can a complex, multi-dimensional system be written about and visualized (such as in the Palm House) in a way that is accessible and engaging; that raises critical awareness of the colonial history behind climate and global justice issues of today; and that helps find pathways out of the multiple crises of today?

The student will be jointly supervised by two supervisors at Goldsmiths and two at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew: [Dr Pauline von Hellermann](https://www.gold.ac.uk/anthropology/staff/von-hellermann-pauline/), Senior Lecturer in Anthropology and a recent Leverhulme Major Research Fellow (researching palm oil), with many years of supervision experience; [Dr Ros Gray](https://www.gold.ac.uk/art/research/staff/rg/01/), Reader in Fine Art, Critical Studies and Programme Director of the MA Art & Ecology, with many years of experience in supporting creative practice PhD research (including filmmaking, contemporary art, art practice that involves cultivation); [Professor Mark Nesbitt](https://www.kew.org/science/our-science/people/mark-nesbitt), Senior Research Leader and Curator of the Economic Botany Collection at Kew; and Dr Sharon Willoughby, Head of Interpretation, who will act as advisor on interpretation and the Palm House.

The student will receive training in a wide range of both academic and transferable skills through this collaborative project: in ethnographic and archival research methods, in innovative and engaging visual and written communication, in museum display, curating, outreach and workshop organisation, and in interdisciplinary and academic-practitioner collaborative teamwork.

Kew offers doctoral researchers a rich environment in which they have a work space, excellent access to collections and other resources, and dedicated support services and training. London-based students are strongly encouraged to be embedded in the organisation with a workstation in the Interdisciplinary Research department, as well as (when appropriate) within the Interpretation team. All IT and other technical resources will be supplied.

The named Kew supervisor (Nesbitt) is only one of the researcher’s contacts. Kew humanities students meet regularly, and the Interdisciplinary Research team ensures that all are aware of discipline-specific events and opportunities. In addition, all Kew PhD students are supported by a dedicated PhD officer in the Science Office, who organises training events, parties and an annual symposium. Doctoral researchers also have access to Kew’s wider staff (with deep plant and region-specific expertise) and their international networks. Kew staff also have direct contacts in many archives in the UK and overseas.

At Goldsmiths, the student will be part of the wider graduate student community in Anthropology, Fine Arts and beyond, and will benefit from a lively and stimulating research, teaching and activism environment.

The studentship presents a truly exciting and unique opportunity to contribute to the growing momentum within both academia and heritage towards not only researching and understanding the history of the Plantationocene and its full social and ecological implications at global scale, but also communicating this knowledge to a wider public engagingly and effectively. As such, we anticipate it will make a significant contribution as well as resulting in high employability for the candidate across a wide range of sectors.

Recruitment of under-represented groups to PhD programmes are a high priority for both Kew and Goldsmiths. In assessing applications, we will be attentive to diverse life pathways and open to different forms of research and research outputs, including PhDs by practice.

**The candidate:**

Essential skills/attributes: Applicants should have the ability to put together a cogent and well-informed application and should normally have completed a Masters (for example in anthropology, geography, history, ethnobotany, heritage studies, art or other related fields).

Desirable skills/attributes might include: knowledge of ethnographic and/or archival research skills; practical experience in collections work; art, photography, or film making experience; lived, academic or professional knowledge or experience of relevant global regions and the global commodity trade; ability to work both independently and as a part of a team.

**How to apply**

Applications for this studentship must be made via the Goldsmiths University application form: [www.gold.ac.uk/pg/mphil-phd-anthropology/](https://www.gold.ac.uk/pg/mphil-phd-anthropology/)

Please note that this portal is the generic portal for all applications to the Goldsmiths Anthropology Postgraduate Research programme. For this collaborative studentship, we do not expect a full proposal, but a short outline (ca 1,000 - 1,500 words) of what kind of project you can imagine doing within the existing remit.

**Terms and conditions**

The studentship is subject to UKRI eligibility criteria and will cover home or EU fees and stipend at UKRI rates for a maximum of four years full-time, or eight years part-time study, subject to institutional regulations.

**Informal Enquiries**

Informal enquiries about this collaborative project can be sent to Dr Pauline von Hellermann, at p.vonhellermann@gold.ac.uk