

Crustaceans in Art

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Contemporary techniques in biological research contribute to an increasingly abstract image of the studied species. However, animals and plants do have aesthetic and symbolic interests and for example, crustaceans have been represented by artists for thirty-five centuries or more. This conference deals with the chronology, systematics and symbolism of their artistic representations. **Chronology**: The earliest as-yet known presence of crustaceans in art can be traced back to ancient Egypt and Assyria. Crustaceans were often present in Roman art from the first century BC to the fourth century AD ; however they were seldom represented during the Medieval period. Their occurrence in art increased from the fifteenth century and peaked in the seventeenth century Dutch and Flemish painting. Crustaceans have since been moderately present in art (except during the Impressionist period, but they were one of the favorite animal subjects of Picasso) and in decorative arts. **Systematics**: Mostly big, frequently captured, edible decapods such as crabs, lobsters, shrimps and crayfish were pictured in art. **Symbolism**: In Roman times, crustaceans were represented as mythological symbols or as members of the marine fauna. Their use as astrological signs was frequent in the Medieval period, and they often were symbolic parts of allegories of water or of mythological or religious scenes during the Renaissance. In seventeenth century Dutch and Flemish art, crustaceans were often an element of genre painting and still lifes, either as part of the edible marine fauna in fishmarkets and kitchens, or as one of the components of food or banquet still lifes. If small and humble species indicate poverty, then crustaceans most often symbolize lavish food, feast, sensuality, luxury and wealth, i.e. affluence. They have also been used as symbols of inconstancy.