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WHEN WORK IS WORSHIP: TECHNOLOGY, LABOR AND THE FIGURE OF VISHWAKARMA — ‘MAKER OF THE UNIVERSE’

Wednesday 21 August
9.30–11am

Speaker

Professor Ken George,
Australian National University

Location

Marie Reay 3.03, Kambri Precinct
ANU

Registration not required

Although Vishwakarma worship in India has long been associated with hereditary artisan castes and their hand tools, his presence has moved beyond craft workshops and into workplaces associated with the country's infrastructural systems and networks: factories, engineering schools, design studios, public works departments, and industrial parks. The increasingly public visibility of Vishwakarma worship across India since 1900 shows unmistakable ties to the rise of industrial capitalism in that country and to promulgating an ethos of technological skill and craftsmanship among the broad workforce. In this context, the figure of Vishwakarma is part of an ethical armature for contemporary techno-economic systems. Meanwhile, this god has figured, too, in over a century of scholarly works that set him apart from the predations and perils of industrial capitalism. The aim of this paper is to rethink the historical and socio-theological warrant for the god's techno-ideological location in disciplinary literatures, in shrines, and on the factory floor.

Speaker

Ken George (Ph.D., Michigan) is Professor of Anthropology in the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific, having served previously at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Harvard University, and as Editor of the *Journal of Asian*

Studies (2005-2008). Ken's ethnographic and art historical research in Asia began with a decade of work on the cultural politics of ritual violence in highland Sulawesi, Indonesia. He subsequently conducted a long-term collaborative project on contemporary Islamic art and art publics across Southeast Asia. His research has been supported by the Social Science Research Council, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton. Ken's books include the prize-winning *Showing Signs of Violence: The Cultural Politics of a Twentieth Century Headhunting Ritual* (1996); *Spirited Politics: Religion and Public Life in Contemporary Southeast Asia* (2005, co-editor); and *Picturing Islam: Art and Ethics in a Muslim Lifeworld* (2010). His current research with Kirin Narayan has been supported by an ARC Discovery Project Award and explores the intermingling of religion, artisanship, image, ethics, and technology in India. He is also gathering materials for a book on the theopolitics of art in object-oriented lifeworlds and public spheres.

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