Reveal Your Shape, O Formless One: Using Digital Technology to Re-Paint Cycladic Figures

The Folded-Arm Figurines (FAF) of the Cyclades (ca. 3000BCE) are famous examples of the dangers that looting can have on the understanding of archaeological artifacts. The massive looting of these objects for their similarities to modern art aesthetic in the 1920s through the 1960s, as well as the large forgery market this incurred, has led provenance to be unknown thus clouding the interpretations of the objects. While looting cannot be undone and time cannot be rewound, digital technology can help researchers attempt to re-place the objects into a simulated environment and space to return the color to the pale ghosts of our past.

The purpose of this presentation is to demonstrate the power of three-dimensionally modelling a known replica of a FAF from the University of Arkansas Museum Collections, paint a number of known examples of motifs and decorations on the model and place the model in a virtual environment. The current application is a prototype of a Virtual Reality application utilizing free assets to quickly craft an environment to place the 3D models to give a sense of space. Further, this presentation looks to show the efficacy of digital technology in understanding the past and how replicas of artifacts can be suitable stand-ins for the real object especially in a case where the legality and legitimacy of the objects is a potential concern. The pedagogical purpose of an application such as this is to give students an immerse way of handling artifacts and seeing them in a replicated real-world scene to get a better connection to the tactile nature of FAFs.