**Picturing Java (Wo)man: Visual Reconstruction of Colonial Paleoanthropology**

**Fiona Asokacitta,**a and \*Professor Haydon Cherry (PI) b

*a History and Art History Department, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, 60208*

*b History Department, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, 60208*

*email: fionaasokacitta2021@u.northwestern.edu \*PI: haydon.cherry@northwestern.edu*

Abstract: The question of man’s origin has plagued philosophers, scientists, and intellectuals alike for centuries. After Charles Darwin’s revolutionary Origin of Species (1859) and The Descent of Man (1871) were published, fossil discoveries became paramount in establishing the connection between humans and earlier life forms. However, despite decades of progress, the absence of the ‘missing link’ between apes and humans confounded scientists. In 1891 Dutch paleoanthropologist and geologist Eugene Dubois discovered what was claimed to be the missing link in the Dutch East Indies. He dubbed the fossil he discovered in Trinil, Java “Java Man” (*Pithecanthropus erectus*). Java Man was later found to be a subspecies of Homo Erectus, but for a time debate raged regarding its place in human ancestry. Although Dubois’ discovery was limited to the skullcap, molar, and femur of Java Man, multiple artistic renderings of what the prehistoric hominid may have looked like populated textbooks, scientific journals, and museums. These purportedly scientific reconstructions of the missing link were extrapolated from scant empirical evidence. Nonetheless, images of Java Man played a crucial role in reifying the 'missing link' between modern humans and apes–both for scientific and lay communities*.* Through these images, *Pithecanthropus’* position as ‘ape-man’ was widely accepted at the end of the nineteenth century. Reconstructions in the twentieth century and beyond familiarized popular audiences with the concept of human descent from apes.Drawing on History, Art History, and Visual Anthropology, this project analyzes how visual reconstructions of Java Man produced between the end of the nineteenth century to the present were, and are, producers of knowledge within the intellectual history of evolution.