

Christopher Woods

Christopher Woods devoted much of this year to Sumerian writing and the typology of writing systems more broadly, his current major research interest. The year began with September's opening of the special exhibit *Visible Language: Inventions of Writing in the Ancient Middle East and Beyond*, which he curated with the assistance of Emily Teeter and Geoff Emberling. *Visible Language* was concerned with the invention of writing from a typological perspective, comparing the Mesopotamian and Egyptian inventions with those documented in China and Mesoamerica, the four "pristine" writing systems. The exhibit — which was accompanied by a comprehensive catalog featuring contributions by a number of Oriental Institute faculty and PhD students — was covered by the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*. Chris gave talks in connection with the exhibit before the Harvard Club of Chicago, the Caxton Club, and the Oriental Institute membership. *Visible Language* completed its six-month run in March. The exhibit was inspired by a broader, long-term research project concerned with describing the Sumerian writing system and its development. Much of the groundwork for the project was laid this spring in collaboration with Andréas Stauder, who is planning a similar, diachronic study of Egyptian writing. In May Woods and Stauder participated in the international writing workshop *Niltal und Zweistromland: Die Anfänge der Kulturtechnik Schreiben im 4. und frühen 3. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* at the University of Bonn, and met with colleagues and potential collaborators in Basel, Zurich, and Geneva. At the annual American Oriental Society meeting in April, Chris presented a paper, "The Morphographic Basis of Sumerian Writing," which describes some of the theoretical underpinnings of the writing project. Chris gave several additional talks of note this year. In March he participated in the Oriental Institute's annual post-doctoral seminar, *Iconoclasm and Text Destruction in the Ancient Near East and Beyond*, describing the earliest evidence for these acts in Mesopotamian sources. Also in March he delivered the annual ANSHE Lecture at Johns Hopkins. And in June he delivered a lecture at the University of Copenhagen's Center for Canon and Identity Formation.