

2 Sessions at RSA 21 (Dublin, 7–10 Apr 21)

Deadline: Aug 10, 2020

[\[1\]](#) Witchcraft and Demonology in the Art of Early Modern Europe

[\[2\]](#) 'Caught in the Act': the Representation of Action in Early Modern Portraiture

[\[1\]](#) Witchcraft and Demonology in the Art of Early Modern Europe

The visual language of witchcraft, developing in conjunction with the witch hunts in early modern Europe, has been considerably studied in the past three decades. As scholars have often noted, these images speak simultaneously to the artistic and the demonological. These works of art not only were inspired by or responded to cultural and legal notions but also served to shape understandings of both magical and artistic practices and practitioners. Not unlike the heterogeneity of witchcraft beliefs themselves, the images were varied and aimed for diverse purposes, from didactic and moral functions to entertainment and pure expressions of artistic 'fantasia.'

This panel invites papers that investigate how artists tackled ideas relating to witchcraft and demonology ca. 1400–1700, and what meanings viewers might have gleaned from these images. We aim to bring together scholars to discuss the role and signification of these images in order to delve into the range of the rhetorical power, artistic experimentation, and complex iconographies of this captivating subject matter.

Possible topics include, but are certainly not limited to:

- The role of artworks of witchcraft in artists' careers
- Visual language of witchcraft and its transmission throughout Europe
- Representations of unspecified or literary witches (mythology, the Bible, epic poems, etc.)
- Witchcraft imagery and demonology
- The devilish, the monstrous, and the fantastic
- Patronage and collecting of witchcraft artworks
- Social, historical, cultural, artistic, and intellectual contexts of an image of witchcraft

Proposals must include:

- Paper title (15-word max)
- Abstract (150-word max)
- Full name, current affiliation, and contact details
- C.V. (up to 5 pages)

Please submit proposals to Hannah Segrave (hsegrave@udel.edu) and Guy Tal (guy1tal1@hotmail.com) by August 10.

[2] 'Caught in the Act': the Representation of Action in Early Modern Portraiture

Early modern portraiture, far from being a clearly defined and static genre, is characterized by a progressive departure from strictly descriptive modes of representation. The portrait comes to life through the person's dress, posture, and facial expression and by the setting and objects that surround them, as well as by its use, agency and performative qualities. As such, the depicted person's action(s) and 'acting' (visual performance) are not limited to physical movement, but might imply a variety of other elements as well.

The increased significance of action is reflected in theoretical writings and humanist inquiries about the notion of self. From the fifteenth century onwards, the parameters that define persona, behavior and appearance underwent continuous scrutiny and were the object of fierce debate. The human self came to be understood as a versatile being, assuming different roles according to the specific context of performance. Looking at action in portraiture – whether drawn, painted, engraved, sculpted or written - allows us to grasp both the apparent as well as underlying structures of the early modern concept of selfhood.

In this panel, we would like to explore the notion of 'action' with regard to early modern portraiture in Europe. What does action mean and how does it affect the visual representation, the artistic practice of artists working in this genre, and the portrait's reception?

Possible subjects include, but are not limited to:

- the representation of a person's actions
- the role of the background of portraits for action and narrative
- the relation between materiality of the artwork and the suggestion of movement
- hybridity of genres and/or subject-matters (portrait historié, allegorical portrait, tournament or masquerade portraits etc.)
- examples of the agency of portraits
- parallels between visual and literary portraits
- the interaction between word and image (emblematic portraiture and *impresa*), and how it generates movement and action in portraiture
- engravings, paintings and sculpture of illustrious men, group portraits (guilds, military group etc.) as representing 'men and women of action'
- the concept of motion and immobility in early modern portraiture

Practical guidelines

Please submit proposals to Angela Benza (angela.benza@unige.ch), Nicolas Bock (Nicolas.Bock@unil.ch) and Marije Osnabrugge (marije.osnabrugge@unige.ch) by 10 August 2020.

They should include:

- a paper title (max. 15 words)
- an abstract (max. 150 words)
- relevant keywords
- a brief CV (max. one page, including your full name, affiliation, email address, and degree completion date, past or expected)

Reference:

CFP: 2 Sessions at RSA 21 (Dublin, 7-10 Apr 21). In: ArtHist.net, Jul 13, 2020 (accessed Mar 21, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/23416>>.