

Sensory Perception in the Early Modern World (RSA 2011)

Niall Atkinson

Call for papers - RSA - Montreal, 2011

The conventional study of the history of art and architecture depends upon attentive visual analysis, and yet as the emergent field of sensory studies has shown, such analysis may be profoundly enriched when we expand our investigation to consider the evidence of embodied experience. This opens up new realms for research where the boundaries are anything but fixed: as Michel Serres has suggested, even our notion of the senses themselves remains radically open to debate. Overturning the traditional concept of the senses as the gates of knowledge, Serres instead suggests that the senses can be better understood as the principle means by which “the body mingles with the world.”

In this session, we will consider how ideas and knowledge, social relations and identities, were registered, interpreted, and transformed by the human sensorium during the Renaissance, a period often characterized as a momentous advance in the categories of human understanding and experience. As Walter Ong has observed, each culture teaches its members how to “organize the sensorium productively for intellectual purposes.” By investigating the presence and function of sensation in Renaissance culture, ideas, and practices, we will explore how sensory perception helped to create meaning in the early modern world.

Please send a brief CV and 150 word abstract to Niall Atkinson (nsa6@cornell.edu) and David Karmon (dkarmon@holycross.edu)

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Reference:

CFP: Sensory Perception in the Early Modern World (RSA 2011). In: ArtHist.net, May 18, 2010 (accessed

Mar 20, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/32691>>.