

On Unstable Ground

Deadline: Mar 15, 2021

Benjamin Tilghman, Washington College

Every work of art is grounded in some way. Whether we are examining the earth on which it stands, the substrate beneath its surface, the foundation of its ideologies, or the justification for its existence, art historians seek to excavate the grounds of an object. We do this even as the ground continues to shift under our own feet. We may move to higher ground to avoid flooding or to elevate our moral stance; we can cover a lot of ground in a high-speed vehicle but might chafe at having to do so in a survey course; we work to ensure that our changing beliefs, conclusions, and opinions are as well-grounded as the electronic equipment through which we communicate them. Whether as a metaphor, as an action, or as a material fact, we ignore the ground at our own peril: it is never as firm as we might wish to believe it is.

This special issue of *Different Visions* will present essays considering the unstable, unreliable circumstances of the ground in medieval art. Understanding “ground” as a surface upon which humans act, we invite essays that examine it as a formal artistic, environmental, or conceptual phenomenon, or more. Authors might consider the particular ways in which the ground is depicted as unsteady or changeable in pictorial art, or perhaps examine its curious absence in some imagery. They might also, or alternatively, meditate upon the ground as a visual phenomenon—against which figures are set and articulated—or as the physical substrate upon which a work of art is created. We are also eager to consider the ground as a geographical phenomenon. How do works of art articulate unstable terrains (in the form of boundary markers, perhaps), contend with tectonically dynamic landscapes (especially in the Mediterranean basin), or dramatically shift the ground themselves (as with earthworks)? Similarly, how might the experience of walking across shifting sands, uneven pavements, or worn floors have shaped people’s encounters with buildings, urban areas, or landscapes? Another potential area for exploration is the underground inhabited by living creatures, the dead, or hoards, which have the capacity to unsettle the ground as they re-emerge.

This collection will also serve as an occasion to consider critically the grounds upon which the field of medieval art history has constructed itself. On what grounds have certain topics been historically dismissed as not pertinent to the study of medieval art? How might the ongoing critiques of the traditional geographic, religious, ethnic, and racial definitions of “medieval art” be understood as a radical regrounding of the field?

Authors are invited to offer proposals of no more than 500 words by March 15, 2021. Authors will be notified of acceptance by no later than April 1, 2021 with full submissions due for preliminary editing by September 1, 2021, with peer review proceeding afterward. Please send proposals to Rachel Dressler (dressler1066@gmail.com) and Ben Tilghman (btighman2@washcoll.edu).

Different Visions is an open-access journal that aims for inclusive publishing and welcomes a variety of approaches and topics reflecting the diversity of medieval visual and material culture. More information about the mission and scope of the journal is available [here](#), and the peer review process is detailed [here](#).

Reference:

CFP: On Unstable Ground. In: Arthist.net, Feb 17, 2021 (accessed Jul 13, 2025),
<<https://arthist.net/archive/33423>>.