

Study Weeks: Graffiti Art in Prison (Palermo, Munich, Florence, Zaragoza 20-23)

Palermo, Munich, Florence, Zaragoza /

Deadline: Jul 19, 2021

Rafael Ugarte, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut

Call for Applications

GAP “Graffiti Art in Prison”

A 6-week-intensive study program for PhD students is being offered by “GAP – Graffiti Art in Prison,” an international and interdisciplinary project funded by ErasmusPlus – Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education 2020-2023.

Application deadline: 19 July 2021

The GAP project connects Palazzo Chiaramonte (Steri) in Palermo, one of the most important cultural sites in Sicily, with artistic expression in prisons today. Graffiti Art in Prison revolves around scientific research, pedagogy, artistic programs, and social engagement. This interdisciplinary structure will impart innovative training and new educational pathways in order to benefit university scholars and enhance their interventions in civil society.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Steri was the site of the Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition and its prisons. The graffiti, a palimpsest of writings and drawings painted on the cell walls, are a corpus of inestimable historical, artistic, and anthropological value. These unique documents form both the core of the project and its point of departure to other sites of inquiry. The program also includes other Inquisition prison graffiti, specifically that of Narni (Italy), Zaragoza and Tarazona (Spain). These prisons held people from the Mediterranean diasporas with different religions and on those walls the prisoners left traces of their presence and messages to be deciphered: a ‘chorus’ of silent voices with different levels of meaning and a high degree of complexity.

In addition, other forms of prison graffiti and wall paintings, both historical and contemporary, will be addressed and compared to other sites of detainment, such as psychiatric hospitals and concentration camps, spaces characterized by conditions of deprivation, separation, lack of freedom, and censorship. Thus, the project encompasses places of confinement in a broad sense and the creative responses to these specific environments in their multiple dimensions: material, corporeal, psychological, political, social, devotional, spatial, and temporal.

One of the project’s important interventions is to expose inmates to contemporary art practices through artistic programs. The goal of introducing such forms of creativity is to improve their living conditions and to contribute to their future rehabilitation and societal reintegration. This project will also heighten social consciousness for art and architectural research and teaching. The recent coronavirus restrictions and space limitations, the violent protests that broke out in the

Italian prisons during the lockdown, and the issue of mass-incarceration and immigration detainment are crises that lend this inquiry into space and control a particular socio-political urgency.

The 6-week-intensive study program for PhD students from different backgrounds and countries plays a key role in the project. This program, organized by the partner institutions of the GAP project, gives participants a broader understanding of the topics related to art in spaces of confinement in the past and present, including the (in)visibility of prison environments, the violence of the wall and its role as a relational tool, visual strategies and textual narratives of self-representation in murals, and the reuse of prisons as spaces for contemporary art. Cultural and methodological issues related to graffiti will be discussed: the relationship between freedom and censorship, the boundaries between art and vandalism, the theory and practice of graffiti as well as their perception and value in different times and places, including their role as political protest and system critique.

The format adopted for the program consists of lectures, seminars and discussion-sessions through an interdisciplinary approach that will allow doctoral students to address their topics from different perspectives and employ different methodologies, while the workshops will enable participants to physically experience prison environments.

The intensive study weeks will take place between October 2021 and January 2023 in Florence, Munich, Palermo and Zaragoza (see below: schedule and topics).

The GAP project invites applications from doctoral candidates in the fields of history, art history, architecture, law, anthropology, theology, psychology, social sciences, heritage studies, material science, medicine and related disciplines. The number of participants is restricted to n. 20, and the selection will be made on the basis of a motivation letter, a curriculum vitae and an interview with the project leader and coordinators.

Each participant is expected to contribute to the intensive study weeks not only with oral presentations and a written paper, but also by actively engaging in the discussions, site visits, and workshops. To enable active participation in the teaching, research, and artistic activities, good knowledge of English is required and basic knowledge of Italian is recommended.

Benefits:

The GAP project will bear the cost of accommodation and will reimburse each participant for round-trip expenses to the locations where the activities are scheduled. The selected students are invited to participate in the entire study program (6 weeks), which can contribute credits to their PhD Program, if applicable.

The applications can be in English, German, Italian or Spanish and must include:

- a motivation letter including a presentation proposal (on a topic of your choice);
- a short curriculum vitae (max 2 pages);
- graduation certificate or a declaration of intention to enroll in a master at the Universidad de Zaragoza;
- evidence of admission to a PhD program or a declaration of intention to participate in a PhD program, accompanied by a letter from the master thesis supervisor.

Please send your application by 19 July 2021 in a single PDF to: graffitiartinprison@gmail.com

For the complete call including the schedule and topics of the Intensive Study Weeks, please follow the link:

<https://www.khi.fi.it/de/aktuelles/call-for-papers-applications.php>

Project Leader: Università degli Studi di Palermo, SiMuA – Sistema Museale di Ateneo

Partner Institutions: Abadir – Accademia di Design e Comunicazione Visiva; Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut; Università degli Studi di Palermo – Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche e delle Relazioni Internazionali; Universidad de Zaragoza, Departamento de Historia del Arte

Scientific Coordination: Gabriella Cianciolo Cosentino

Artistic Coordination: Laura Barreca

Project Management: Gemma La Sita

Scientific Committee: Laura Barreca; María Pilar Biel Ibáñez; Giovanna Fiume; Rita Foti; Ascensión Hernández Martínez; Jorge Jiménez López; Juan Carlos Lozano López; Gerhard Wolf

Associated Partners: COOPCULTURE; Associazione Acrobazie Palermo; Gli Amici di Ambra Agnello Onlus Palermo

Reference:

ANN: Study Weeks: Graffiti Art in Prison (Palermo, Munich, Florence, Zaragoza 20-23. In: ArtHist.net, Jun 20, 2021 (accessed Apr 8, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/34405>>.