

## ESNA 2022 (The Hague, 19–20 May 22)

RKD - Netherlands Institute for Art History, The Hague, May 19–20, 2022

Deadline: Dec 17, 2021

Rachel Esner

European Society for Nineteenth-Century Art Conference 2022

Ways of Studying: Towards New Histories of Nineteenth-Century Art

In the autumn of 2020, the Van Gogh Museum, in collaboration with ESNA and the University of Amsterdam, organized a series of roundtable discussions that from various angles sought to address the question of “diversifying” the canon of nineteenth-century art and making art-historical practice more “inclusive.” The aim of these meetings, followed up in January 2021 by the annual ESNA Winter Seminar on the same topic, was to formulate concrete research strands, which, rather than simply broadening the nineteenth-century canon, would substantially change it. Ideally, these would give direction to university teaching, exhibitions, and collection building over the next five years.

It soon became clear, however, that the terms “diversification” and “inclusion” were in themselves problematic, as they imply that the current disciplinary system would remain intact. One might study art from other parts of the world or by “Other” creators, one might expand the canon, but the idea that the history of nineteenth-century art followed a certain developmental pattern, one that culminated in an avant-garde that then went on to shape Modernism, would not necessarily be affected. Instead, one might better seek to fundamentally decolonize the history of nineteenth-century art. This term, too, is not unproblematic: it has a particular historical dimension, but in recent times has come to stand more generally for a call to both recognize and challenge hierarchies in and beyond the academy and the art world, not only those resulting from concrete actions in the (colonial) past but also those linked to questions of class, gender, race, and ethnicity. Ideally, a decolonized history of nineteenth-century art would not only add new voices and objects to the existing canon but would productively mobilize the awareness of the ways in which what we study, teach, and display reflects European hegemony. Although this topic is clearly not new, even in the study of nineteenth-century art, specific recent events and debates, as well as fundamental shifts within both academia and society at large, lend it a particular sense of urgency.

The study of the nineteenth century can look back on a history of self-renewal and has in the past been the vehicle for the revitalization of the field of art history as whole. In this sense, we see this conference – together with those organized by our colleagues in other parts of the world – in the tradition of the so-called “new art history.” We seek to build on the studies of the seminal figures of the 1970s, 80s and 90s, those who brought new methods to bear on research into objects both known and unknown and thereby changed the perspective on the period as a whole.

The annual ESNA Conference 2022, *Ways of Studying: Towards New Histories of Nineteenth-Century Art*, will expand on this initial phase of reflection, setting it in an international context. We understand the conference as a kind of laboratory, a place for experiment and exchange. Taking a two-pronged approach, we seek papers that take case studies as their starting point, but which also pinpoint and further explore the implications of these new discoveries for the field in general. In this way, the conference will present new information and address questions of methodology, i.e. “ways of studying”.

We seek papers which can serve to disrupt and restructure the field of nineteenth-century art history both in terms of content and method. Proposals should therefore explicitly address the wider implications of the chosen case study.

Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- makers from diverse ethnic and gender communities
- works of indigenous or first-nation artists
- neglected objects, media, and genres
- examinations of institutional structures and non-canonical spaces of display
- rethinking geographies of creation
- networks and exchange between Europe and the global south

We particularly encourage the input of junior scholars.

Please submit an abstract of 300 words and your CV by 17 December 2021 to [esnaonline@hotmail.com](mailto:esnaonline@hotmail.com).

Selected speakers will be contacted in January 2022.

Reference:

CFP: ESNA 2022 (The Hague, 19-20 May 22). In: ArtHist.net, Oct 18, 2021 (accessed Jul 8, 2025),

<<https://arthist.net/archive/35067>>.