4A_Lab: Art Histories, Archaeologies, Anthropologies, Aesthetics 2023/24

Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut
Application deadline: Jan 3, 2023

4A_Lab

EXTENDED DEADLINE: 3 JAN 2023

The Berlin-based research, fellowship and mentorship program 4A Lab invites excellent early career and mid-career scholars to apply for up to two doctoral and five postdoctoral residential fellowships (10 to 15 months), in the framework of the 2019–2024 focus theme:
Aesthetics, Art and the Ecology of Plants. Environmental, Social, and non-Human Perspectives

or in the general research framework of the 4A_Lab: Art Histories, Archaeologies, Anthropologies, Aesthetics, studied critically with and through archives, collections and environments.

4A Lab is a joint program of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut, (www.khi.fi.it), and the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de) in collaboration with Forum Transregional Studies, the University of the Arts, Berlin (UdK), and other partners. The Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz is an internationally outstanding cultural and scientific institution with unique museums, archives, libraries and research facilities. The Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz is a highly connected Max-Planck-Institute for art historical research, in dialogue with other disciplines, dedicated to the history of art and architecture in transcultural and global perspectives. A prime concern of the Institute's agenda is to combine historical research with critical engagement in current debates and challenges, such as ecology, heritage, urbanization, migration and diversity, media and material cultures, digital transformations and the future of museums.
The 4A_Lab connects disciplines, collections and institutions. It attempts to foster dialogue and exchanges between disciplines, and promotes methodological inquiries in relation to the ecologies of objects or things, collections and archives, in particular – but not only – of those kept in the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation.These include the collections of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (Berlin State Museums), i.e. the Aegyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung (Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection), Antikensammlung (Museum of Classical Antiquities), Ethnologisches Museum (Museum of Ethnology), Gemaeldegalerie (Picture Gallery), Gipsformerei (Plaster Cast Workshop), Institut für Museumsforschung (Institute for Museum Research), Kunstbibliothek (Art Library), Kunstgewerbemuseum (Museum of Decorative Arts), Kupferstichkabinett (Cabinet of Prints and Drawings), Muenzkabinett (Numismatic Collection), Museum Europaeischer Kulturen (Museum of European Cultures), Museum für Asiatische Kunst (Museum of Asian Art), Museum für Islamische Kunst (Museum of Islamic Art), Museum für Vor- und Fruehgeschichte (Museum of Prehistory and Early History), Nationalgalerie (National Gallery, including Hamburger

Bahnhof Museum of Contemporary Art), Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst (Museum for Sculpture and Byzantine Art), Vorderasiatisches Museum (Museum of the Ancient Near East), as well as the holdings of the Zentralarchiv (Central Archive), the Ibero-American Institute, the State Institute for Musicology, the Secret State Archives and the Berlin State Library.
The 4A_Lab invites researchers to study aesthetic or artistic practices and the ecology, materiality, mediality, mobility and agency of objects, and related discourses. It focuses on objects, practices, environments, and narratives (OPEN) in their historical, social and historiographical dimensions, including histories of collecting, display, or dispossession, in a conversation that transcends geographical and chronological boundaries. The program aims to create a space for dialogue for university and museum scholars in order to strengthen transdisciplinary collaborations, to transcend the borders of the 4A disciplines, to combine skills and to foster a conversation between more conceptual and more empirical approaches. The program aspires to promote transversal networking and critical reflections on historical and contemporary challenges and concerns.

For more detailed information, please visit www.khi.fi.it/4A-Lab

2019-2024 Focus Theme:
Aesthetics, Art and the Ecology of Plants. Environmental, Social, and non-Human Perspectives

In recent years, plants, their ecology and human interactions with plants have been studied in a new light, in a planetary perspective, from the beginnings of human history and in the horizon of the debates on the Anthropocene. This includes research on the manifold aesthetic and artistic practices related to or based on plants.
While plants are important factors in human history, humans are leaving their imprint on the history and ecology of plants. The absence, presence and temporalities of vegetal life have always had an impact on settlements as well as urbanization processes. Moreover, plants are dominant elements in the human transformation of landscapes and environments. They are central for the history of colonialism, especially in the form of plantations. They are also protagonists in the making of – real and imagined – gardens across cultures. Plants interact with the human body and its sensorial, perceptive and biochemical apparatus, be it by means of drugs or via food and air. Flowers and fruit are significant elements or even agents in a history of smell and perfume. Plants are not only indispensable for the future of nutrition, they also come with a long past of cultivation processes that includes bioengineering.
For all of these reasons, plants and plant life have been a constant field of investigation and knowledge production, be it by practitioners such as farmers, or by scholars, such as biologists, or amateurs. The understanding of plants can be gendered or socially and culturally distinctive, with specific knowledge systems relating to certain plant environments. They come together with classification systems, taxonomies, forms of collecting and display, as in the case of botanical gardens. Not only knowledge, but also aesthetic categories have been (and will continue to be) an eminent factor in the processes of the perception, description, cultivation and appreciation of wild and cultivated plants. Artistic production and aesthetic practices based on or relating to plants are thus fields that deserve further exploration across time and space, be they historically driven by religious approaches, political interests, romanticizing views, modernist thought or eco-activism.

Artworks can rely on plants via materials like wood, pigments or dyes, textiles and canvases. Plants appear in herbaria, drawings or photographs or in still life painting. They are represented on tiles and pots or in architecture and all kinds of decoration. In fact, plant life or plant morphology forms the basis of the theory and the practices of ornament (or ornamentation), and might be discussed also in terms of a theory of beauty. Seeds, germination, growth are only some of the concepts or metaphors induced by plant life. Moreover, plants serve as protagonists in literature, in poetry and music as well as in religious contexts across cultures and geographies, as part of rituals or of religious veneration (bamboo, lotus, maize, pomegranate, yam, vines or sacred trees). These cultural practices can be part of larger social, political and economic developments or constellations. In fact, plants and crops are major components in economies and thus are often at the center of social tensions or transregional conflicts.
The program welcomes projects from a wide range of topics relating to plants that place emphasis on aesthetic processes, environmental studies, ecological inquiries, history of thought, and material culture, from the 4A disciplines but also from philosophical or literary studies, in transregional perspectives.

Candidates
Applicants should have obtained their master's degree or their doctorate (within the last seven years prior to their application) in one of the relevant disciplines. Applications are welcome from all regions, with various disciplinary formations, such as Art History, Aesthetics, Archaeology, Anthropology/Ethnology, History and neighboring fields dealing with artifacts, artistic production, material culture, and aesthetic practices relating to objects, images, languages, architectures and nature/culture. A reference of the proposed research project to the collections of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation's institutions is highly welcome. Applicants should be interested in engaging in reflexive research, while pursuing their individual projects within a transdisciplinary and transregional context. They are expected to participate in the program activities, such as regular seminars, site-specific workshops and conferences. In the overall context of the 4A Lab program and the framework of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, the fellows will be part of a creative, intellectually stimulating and discursive environment.

The Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz is an equal opportunity employer. It is committed to standards of good scientific practice, the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, and a respectful work environment.

Fellowships
The fellowship starts in May 2023 or September 2023 (10 to 15 months). The fellowships (including travel expenses) follow the guidelines of the Max Planck Society. Organizational support regarding visas, insurances, housing, etc. will be provided. Successful applicants become 4A Lab Fellows at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz and at the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz and are expected to take up residence in Berlin. The working language is English.

Application Procedure
To apply, please upload the following documents exclusively as one PDF file:
- Curriculum vitae (in English)
- Letter of motivation (in English)
- Project description (no longer than five pages, in English)

- Sample of scholarly work (an article, conference paper or dissertation chapter, ca. 20 pages)
- Names and contact information of two referees (including their e-mail addresses)

The complete application should be submitted by 15th December 2022.

Successful candidates will be notified by February 2023.

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Reference:
STIP: 4A_Lab: Art Histories, Archaeologies, Anthropologies, Aesthetics 2023/24. In: ArtHist.net, Nov 16, 2022 (accessed Nov 15, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/37940>.