Medieval Art History after the Interdisciplinary Turn

University of Notre Dame, IN, USA
Deadline: Jan 15, 2013

Richard Leson

Call for Papers:
Medieval Art History after the Interdisciplinary Turn
University of Notre Dame, March 28-29, 2014

This conference brings together a diverse group of scholars representing Byzantine, Islamic, and western European fields to consider the methods and insights of medieval art history in disciplinary terms and in dialogue with the interdisciplinary practice of medieval studies.

In the spring of 2014 it will have been twenty years since Jeffrey Hamburger and Michael Camille confronted the relationship of medieval art history with medieval studies in a volume of conference proceedings, The Past and Future of Medieval Studies (Notre Dame, 1994), and twenty-six years since Herbert Kessler's authoritative assessment of the state of medieval art history in the Art Bulletin (1988). Since these landmark statements, the interdisciplinary character of medieval art history has become "a given" for new generations of scholars trained in the field. At the same time, a decided "turn" to the visual and material has become increasingly evident throughout medieval studies, as scholars in other disciplines have selectively embraced or appropriated domains of evidence and methods of visual analysis and material interpretation once regarded as the purview of art historians.

In light of these developments, this conference seeks papers that critically examine the convergences and divergences that mark the intersection of medieval art history and a broader tradition of interdisciplinary medieval studies ever more invested in visual and material evidence. What modes of analysis and argument distinguish medieval art history from other art historical fields and from the interpretation of material and visual evidence practiced, variously, by other medievalists? How might older traditions of art historical inquiry reinvigorate an expanding conversation about medieval works of art and material culture? And perhaps above all else: what can an interdisciplinary practice of art history now contribute to medieval studies?

Adhering to the tradition of forward-thinking inquiry promoted by the Medieval Institute at the University of Notre Dame, this prospective – rather than retrospective – conference aims to frame new questions, formulate future research agendas, and identify lacunae in the current state of our knowledge that require new approaches, and new work.

As a forum for rigorous but collaborative dialogue, questioning, and critique among participants,

we hope the conference will encourage lively intellectual and collegial exchange, that will ramify in ongoing conversation, future collaborations, and publications.

Submission Guidelines

Submissions are invited for the following conference panels. Proposals of no more than 300 words, along with a two-page CV, should be sent to the organizers of the appropriate panel no later than January 15, 2013. Multiple submissions will not be accepted.

Panels

Objects, Agency, and Efficacy

Panel Organizers:

Beate Fricke, University of California-Berkeley (fricke@berkeley.edu)
Cecily Hilsdale, McGill University (cecily.hilsdale@mcgill.ca)

What work did objects do in medieval culture? What made an object efficacious? Art historians have begun to take seriously objects, including amulets, talismans, ex-votos, funerary effigies, astrolabes, eye glasses, decorative armaments, furniture, textiles, as well as the sacraments of the Christian church and a wide range of medieval counterfeits, that raise important questions of agency, efficacy, and authority. This session seeks papers that engage questions of aura, efficacy, and authority in relation to the production, instrumentality, perceived animation and participation of medieval works and subjects in material and visual culture. While anthropologically informed habits of analysis have proved useful in relation to these issues, the session also welcomes alternative approaches.

Medieval Art History in the Expanded Field

Panel Organizers:

Eric Ramírez-Weaver, University of Virginia (emr6m@eservices.virginia.edu)
Christopher Lakey, Johns Hopkins University (clakey@jhu.edu)

As the field of art history evolved during the twentieth and now twenty-first centuries, the range of objects considered by art historians expanded greatly, transgressing the bounds of a canonical series of acknowledged “masterpieces.” Simultaneously, with the appearance of departments devoted to visual studies and visual culture, together with the new emphasis given to interdisciplinarity, works of art, architecture, and material culture increasingly appear as evidence in the work of other disciplines. Given these developments, can we identify medieval art history’s disciplinarity? Do we want to? How, as medievalists, do we practice art history in this expanded evidentiary and methodological field? Can we envision an “art history” of physical beauty in the Middle Ages? How would an art historical account of the medieval natural landscape or night sky proceed? What might traditional art historical concerns with questions of style or quality contribute to medieval art history in the expanded field? And how do disciplinary modes of analysis succeed or fail when confronted with historical works or phenomena that stretch the boundaries of what has traditionally been recognized as the “stuff” of art historical argument? This session invites papers

that take up questions of disciplinarity and evidence by means of specific case studies or focused historical or historiographic cruxes.

Technique, Technology, and Process

Panel Organizers:

Richard Leson, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (leson@uwm.edu)
Danielle Joyner, University of Notre Dame (djoyner@nd.edu)

How might renewed consideration of artistic and artisanal techniques and processes affect our vision of the material, visual and intellectual cultures of the Middle Ages? Could art historians better integrate insights from the history of science and archaeology with traditional connoisseurial attention to facture in our interpretations of medieval works of art, architecture and material culture? Can we imagine a new critical formalism in which sustained engagement with artistic and artisanal processes, techniques, and technologies yields a different vision of our objects and monuments? How might such an attention to the making and facture of medieval works transform our understanding of the role of the "hand" in the making of historical cultures? This session welcomes papers that investigate making, artifice, and the specific formal constitution of medieval works of art.

Ornament and the Decorative: When the “minor” is major

Panel Organizers:

Alicia Walker, Bryn Mawr College (awalker01@brynmawr.edu)
Aden Kumler, University of Chicago (akumler@uchicago.edu)

Might the Middle Ages, broadly construed, be best described as an “age of ornament”? While historians of Islamic art have long attended to the function and/or significance of ornament, historians of European medieval art have yet to develop robust accounts of ornament or “the decorative” in medieval material and visual culture. So too, recent work has foregrounded the importance of so-called "minor arts" in the medieval period, challenging the primacy of architecture and book arts in the history of medieval art. This session invites papers that interrogate field-specific habits of thought in relation to the art historiography of ornament and “the minor arts” in the Middle Ages, that consider how “the minor arts” and the "ornamental" were central to medieval aesthetic experiences, or otherwise question how scholarly presumptions concerning media, mimesis, &/or the utility vs autonomy of works may influence our vision of medieval art and material culture.

Reference:
CFP: Medieval Art History after the Interdisciplinary Turn. In: ArtHist.net, Oct 20, 2012 (accessed Nov 18, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/4032>.