

## Gesture (Oxford, 25–27 Jan 24)

St John's College, Oxford, Jan 25–27, 2024

Registration deadline: Jan 25, 2024

Rachel Coombes, University of Cambridge

Gesture: A three-day investigation.

This conference aims to take the term 'gesture' to task – asking what it means across art forms to make, trace, think, or perform gestures. Notions of the 'gestural' are at the heart of expression, but the assumptions on which the agency of the gesture is based are often overlooked. Arguably, the gesture or gestural sits at a strange intersection between the material and immaterial. As such, it is open to historical, philosophical, aesthetic, affective, and descriptive interrogation. The conference focuses on work that deliberately deals across aesthetic and material forms, unpacking and investigating the contingencies and commitments of gesture.

The programme includes art historians, art practitioners, musicologists, musicians, choreographers, cultural theorists, and literary scholars.

This conference is in conjunction with an exhibition of work by Mark Rowan-Hull, at St John's College, Oxford, and will feature a performance by the artist as part of the conference.

### Programme

Thu, 25 Jan

10:00 - 10:30 Tea/coffee

10:30 - 11:00 Introduction

11:00 - 12:30 Session 1: Extended Gesture

Dr Alice Barron (Violinist-composer, Lecturer in Music, University of Oxford)

Experiencing the Karnatic Violin

Professor Shelagh Vainker (Curator of Chinese Art at the Ashmolean and Associate Professor of Chinese Art in the Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford)

Gesture and Movement in Chinese Calligraphy

12:30 - 13:30 Lunch

13:30 - 15:00 Session 2: Gesture as Excess

Dr Meindert Peters (Post-Doctoral Research Fellow in German, University of Oxford)

'Gestures in León & Lightfoot's Dance Adaptation of Gertrude Stein's "If I Told Him..."'

Dr Nina Danino (Artist and Filmmaker, Reader in Fine Art at Goldsmiths, University of London)

Gesture in Film: Ghosts of Love (2021)

15:00 - 15:30 Tea break

15:30 - 17:30 Session 3: Gesture and Affect

Dr Mark Sheerin (Independent cultural historian)

Gesture Towards Meaning: the Physical Act of Representing Parietal Works

Dr Charlotte de Mille (Associate Lecturer in the History of Art, The Courtauld Institute)

Sensory Gestures

Professor Alastair Wright (Associate Professor in the History of Art, University of Oxford)

Affectless Gesture

18:00 - 19:00

Drinks and nibbles; 'In Conversation: Gesture' with Siobhan Davies (choreographer) and Mark Rowan-Hull (artist)

Chaired by Dr Jennifer Johnson

Fri, 26 Jan

10:00 - 10:30 Tea/coffee

10:30 - 12:30 Session 4: The Anchoring Gesture

Professor Heather Webb (Professor of Medieval Italian Literature and Culture, University of Cambridge)

Gestural Dynamisms In and Around Dante's Comedy

Dr Tim Coombes (Lecturer in Music, University of Oxford)

Anti-mimetics

Amit Chaudhuri (novelist, poet, composer)

Gesture as Inscription and Synecdoche in Indian Classical Dance

12:30 - 13:30 Lunch

13:30 - 15:30 Session 5: Gestures in Time

Professor Eric Clarke (Heather Professor of Music, University of Oxford)

Gesture(ing) in Music(king) – an Ecological Perspective

Professor Timotheus Vermeulen (Visiting Scholar in Art History, Harvard University)

A Gesture is Time (x9)

Dr Lee Trimming (Artist and Tutor, Ruskin School of Art, Oxford)

No to Moving or Being Moved

15:30 - 16:00 Tea break

16:00 - 17:00 Performance

Mark Rowan-Hull performance with Chris Redgate (Evelyn Barbirolli Research Fellow, Royal Academy of Music), Maggie Nichols (singer) and Matthew Collings (art critic and broadcaster), in Garden Quad Reception Room.

17:30 - 19:00 Drinks Reception

Sat, 27 Jan

10:00 - 12:00 Session 6: Detached Gestures

Professor Peter MacDonald (Professor of English and Related Literature and Fellow, University of Oxford)

Grammalepsy

Dr Jennifer Johnson (Junior Research Fellow in the History of Art, University of Oxford)

Professor Jonathan Cross (Professor of Musicology, University of Oxford)

Gesture as Ritual: Avant-garde Music Theatre of the 1960s and 1970s

12:00 - 13:00 Lunch

13:00 - 15:00 Session 7: Gesture in Performance

Professor Jane Garnett (Fellow and Tutor in Modern History at Wadham College, Oxford)

Holding the Sun by the Hand: Insight and the Rhythms of Memory

Dr Rachel Coombes (Graham Robertson Research Fellow in the History of Art, University of Cambridge)

"Like a Prayer": Politics and the Pathologizing of Gesture at La Salpêtrière

Dr Ed McKeon (Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Birmingham City University; Director of Third Ear Music)

Throwing and Catching

15:00 - 15:30 Tea break

15:30 - 17:30 Session 8: Kinaesthetics

Professor Sue Jones (Emeritus Professor of English, University of Oxford) Gestural Remains: Confinement, Narrative, and Kinesthetics from Noverre to Samuel Beckett's "Residua"

Professor Christopher Reed (Distinguished Professor of English and Visual Culture, Pennsylvania State University)

"When You Say Run, I'll Run with You": the Case for Kinaesthetic Empathy

Florence Peake (dancer, choreographer, visual artist)

17:30 - 18:00 Closing Remarks

For the full schedule please visit: <https://www.gestureconference.com/schedule>

To buy tickets please visit:  
<https://www.gestureconference.com/event-details-registration/gesture-a-three-day-investigation>

1 day ticket: £8-10

3 day ticket: £20-25

Refreshments throughout the day are included in the ticket price.

If you have any questions, please get in touch at [gestureox24@gmail.com](mailto:gestureox24@gmail.com).

Reference:

CONF: Gesture (Oxford, 25-27 Jan 24). In: Arthist.net, Jan 10, 2024 (accessed Jun 5, 2025),  
<<https://arthist.net/archive/40915>>.