

Backstage Sociability in the Book and Art Market (Paris 29–30 Nov 24)

Paris, Nov 29–30, 2024

Deadline: May 31, 2024

Camilla Murgia

International conference: Backstage Sociability in the Book and Art Market, 17th-21st Centuries.

Recent EU laws (such as the 2018 Fifth Directive and the 2019 Money Laundering Regulations) have seen European countries implement national laws on the transparency of transactions in cultural markets. This has put buyer-dealer relationships, as well as dealers and agents' practices, in the spotlight. Reflecting on the backstage sociability of the book and art market, from the early modern period onwards, helps us historicize issues of due diligence and confidence in these markets.

This conference aims to explore how the encounters of practitioners in complex social networks enable the mobility of art objects and books along global, transnational, and local trajectories. The awards and collections made highly visible on the stage of literary prizes and art auctions are curated by the extensive networking behind closed doors between agents and writers, between art dealers and artists or owners, and between professional partners themselves. These ties can be studied as a professional sociability - the historical concept of sociability throwing a helpful light on matters of disclosure and transparency, as well as confidentiality and discretion, which structure the backstage of these markets and their decision-making processes.

We intend to question how these trades fashion their sociability, and how the circulation of trade practices, regulation and norms are linked to the concept of agency - where one party is acting on behalf of or advising another. What mechanisms does this process trigger? According to what criteria do these interactions develop? What are their scopes? This calls for the study of professional kinships and business communities, and trade clusters. We are especially interested in prosopography studies that centre not so much on biography as on the material culture of ledgers, contact books, inventories, contracts, correspondences, etc.

Visualizing and mapping these backstage networks helps centre the agent as a vital information node, a processor, controller, and workstation that can be helpful in conceptualizing the backstage qualities of sociability. We insist here on the global, transnational, and local characters of these dynamics. Our goal is to identify, analyse and discuss the intricacy of these networks as well as the practices they generated.

We also look forward to studies of sociability that delve into issues of training and skills-building

in these trades, and how letters of recommendations, contracts of apprenticeships, and the columns of contact books structure the hidden world of pre-sale and after-sale services, and art and book market careers.

In the wake of the Backstage View conference, convened at the Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, in 2023, we expect to foster exchanges between younger and more advanced scholars, and invite papers investigating (but not limited to) issues, from the early modern period to the contemporary, including:

- ☒ Professional sociability and the culture of partnerships
- ☒ Sociability as discretion and due diligence
- ☒ Collecting practices derived from professional sociability
- ☒ Agents and dealers as negotiators
- ☒ Information networks and social network analysis of the cultural marketplace
- ☒ The bureaucratic and legal framework of cultural markets
- ☒ Economic and legal practices stemming from transnational hurdles (customs, translations, international contracts...)
- ☒ Organization, development, and management of stocks and repositories (permanent and temporary)
- ☒ Compilation and management of stock books and any kind of register (from private to public)
- ☒ Agents as supervisors of hidden figures (sub-contractors, invisible services to the cultural markets)
- ☒ Apprenticeship and careers as social networks on the cultural marketplace

Proposals (up to 300 words), along with a short biography (up to 200 words), have to be sent to Laurence.cossu-beaumont@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr, mmencfel@amu.edu.pl, benedicte.miyamoto@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr and camilla.murgia@unil.ch by May 31st, 2024.

Convenors: Laurence Cossu-Beaumont, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris, Michał Mencfel, Adam Mickiewicz University Poznań, Bénédicte Miyamoto, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris, and Camilla Murgia, Université de Lausanne

Reference:

CFP: Backstage Sociability in the Book and Art Market (Paris 29-30 Nov 24). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 15, 2024 (accessed Jun 25, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/41220>>.