

Sparkle, glitter, gleam, glow: Reflective/Refractive Optical Mediums and Effects in Art

Edited Volume

Deadline: Jun 1, 2024

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Glitter and luminous effects can fuel awe-inspiring devotion and promote other-worldly sensations, or in other circumstances may reflect the wealth, opulence, and social hierarchies of the terrestrial world. From Neolithic stone monuments embedded with quartz to reflect moonlight, to Fra Angelico's San Marco angel's wings shimmering with silica mixed into the plaster, to Mickalene Thomas's paintings glittering with rhinestones, art across time and cultures has sparkled and gleamed. Human attraction to glossiness may have evolved from the necessity of locating water. Materials that reflect light may evoke protection from darkness, both literal and figurative. When used in art, the meanings of sparkles and glitter become unstable and paradoxical. Twinkly effects may convey value, disguise cheapness, or pronounce worthlessness (in the case of kitsch, for example). Sparkly trinkets have been implicated in colonial exploitation. Glittering embellishment has signified gender in a range of ways. A glittery appearance may convey brokenness (fractured glass) or refinement (a cut gem). What role do sparkly effects play in situations of devotion or ritual? How do they relate to experiences of wonder or the spectacular? How do human-made sparkles (glitter) compare to natural ones (mica, gemstones, insect wings, water)? Can the effect of glitter be captured in reproduction, or does it have to be experienced in person to be effective?

This proposed edited volume explores sparkles and glitter from a range of mediums and purposes throughout the history of art making. We were inspired by the robust response to a call for papers for our session on this topic at the 2024 College Art Association annual conference. The diversity of the proposals we received for this session suggests there is more yet to explore when it comes to the reflective and refractive in art and art history. This proposed volume interrogates the effects and interpretations of glitter and sparkle in art from a broad range of perspectives, time periods, geographies. We are especially interested in proposals that relate natural history and science to art history and visual and material culture. This assemblage of approaches and methodologies illuminates humanity's enduring fascination with such optical effects, as well as its multi-faceted appreciation for them.

Preliminary groupings of topics include:

- Power: capitalism, theology/religion, colonialism
- Sensory/Experiential Engagement
- Identity
- Semiotics

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ArtHist.net

Please submit a 300-word abstract along with a cv to:

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Initial consideration of abstracts will begin on June 1.

Contributors will be notified of acceptance by July 1.

Reference:

CFP: Sparkle, glitter, gleam, glow: Reflective/Refractive Optical Mediums and Effects in Art. In: ArtHist.net, Mar 23, 2024 (accessed Apr 20, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/41491>>.