

PhD Position, Bern, Artistic Failures in Renaissance Ceramic Workshops

Application deadline: Sep 27, 2024

Zuzanna Sarnecka

A Full-Time PhD position on the SNSF-funded project "Artistic Failures in Renaissance Ceramic Workshops" (AFIRE) led by Dr. Zuzanna Sarnecka, Institute of Art History, University of Bern .

The history of Renaissance art is often told as a story of triumph, of technical problems solved, perhaps laboriously, but successfully. But could Renaissance artists ever afford to fail? The proposed project will analyse ceramic workshops that operated in different parts of Central Europe during the sixteenth century to integrate failed experiments and non-linear processes of artmaking into the history of European art. The making of tin-glazed earthenware was a lengthy and complex process and sixteenth-century ceramicists remained uncertain about the outcome of their efforts, as they had to rely on many variables, including the quality of clay bodies, pigments and glazes, and on the skill of professional kiln masters responsible for firing their ware.

The AFIRE project will highlight the interconnectedness of Central Europe where from the 16th century patrons and artists strove to establish local production of tin-glazed earthenware at the highest level. The project seeks to create an overview of the types of technical failure across artistic workshops in areas considered peripheral by mainstream art history, areas as distant from each other as Lesser Poland, Moravia and Istria. Those areas were characterised by different geological conditions, political systems, economic potential, and religious practices.

The AFIRE project will showcase failure as a driving force of aesthetic pursuit. It will integrate ceramics into early modern narratives of the making of art and connect artistic activity in lesser-studied areas and in a long-neglected medium to arrive at a better understanding of the artistic output of early modern Europe. The research will foreground the technical, social and economic circumstances of the making of art. In order to address the complex issues related to the process of making of ceramics, the project will develop new research methods, which transcend the traditional boundaries of art history.

The PhD Candidate will work on an interrelated subproject of this research program, provisionally titled: "The Workshop as a Site of Experiments and Failures". Their regional focus will be sixteenth-century Istria. The PhD candidate will be encouraged to join paleography and archival studies courses. They will participate in the scientific measurements conducted in Pula, Croatia to gain insight into non-invasive methods of analysis of ceramics, namely X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy. The PI will support the PhD candidate in the research phase and in the writing of the final PhD thesis.

The PhD Candidate will conduct fieldwork in Italy and Croatia, will attend the Renaissance Society of America annual meeting in Philadelphia in 2027, as well as will benefit from funded research stays in important reference libraries in Switzerland and abroad.

In addition, intensive collaboration of the project team is planned, with regular meetings, joint work on the dissemination of the project's findings through workshops and publications. Residence in Bern or Switzerland is therefore mandatory. (If a move to Switzerland is necessary, this should be arranged by the start of the project). The project language is English. Very good language skills in Italian are required, and knowledge of Croatian and Serbian will be advantageous.

Tasks include

- the writing of a PhD thesis
- the participation in the activities of the project (jours fixes, reading courses, project presentations, workshops, lectures, conference)

Required are

- An above-average Master's degree in art history, conservation of cultural heritage, history, archaeology or related fields
- Fluent oral and written communication skills in English
- Very good reading skills in Italian, knowledge of Croatian and Serbian will be advantageous
- A willingness to undertake research trips to Italy and Croatia
- A residence in Switzerland or the willingness to move to Switzerland
- Reliability and the ability to work in a team
- A willingness to participate in a German language course organised by the University of Bern (for non-German speakers)

We offer

- A close collaboration in an inspiring project team with international contacts
- Intensive and supportive doctoral supervision
- The opportunity to contribute to the conception and realization of innovative research
- A central workplace
- Salary according to SNSF guidelines
- Funding for research trips, research in reference libraries, paleography course and international conferences attendance

Please e-mail the following documents as a single PDF file by September 27th, 2024 to: zuzanna.sarnecka@unibe.ch

- Letter of motivation
- Curriculum vitae
- Sample of your work (either your Master's thesis or thematically relevant seminar papers)

The applicants will be informed about the outcome of the application process on September 30th. Short-listed candidates will be invited to an online interview, which will be held on October 7th. The selected candidate may begin their employment on October 15th or on an agreed date soon after that.

For information about the position, please contact: zuzanna.sarnecka@unibe.ch

Reference:

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(accessed Jun 20, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/42484>>.