

Queer Palimpsests: Rewriting Medieval Art History (Williamstown, 4 Apr 25)

Williamstown, MA, Apr 11, 2025

Deadline: Nov 25, 2024

Luke Williamson

PLEASE NOTE: Extended Deadline: 25.11.2024!

The Research and Academic Program (RAP) at the Clark Art Institute is pleased to invite papers from graduate students for a one-day symposium, “Queer Palimpsests: Rewriting Medieval Art History” on April 11th, to be held in person at the Clark in Williamstown, Massachusetts. In the Middle Ages, palimpsests were parchments whose original text or imagery was effaced in order to reuse their valuable substrate. A transliteration of the Greek word παλίμψηστος (palimpsestos), palimpsest literally means “scraped again,” denoting the process of scraping or rubbing a piece of parchment. Sometimes this repurposing was achieved hastily, leaving behind traces of the original text or image. Beyond its literal meaning, today the term has gained other metaphorical resonances. Collapsing iterations of writing and/or image on the same page, palimpsests evoke questions of temporality, textuality, touch, labor, use, and use value. Queerness has been theorized to—like a palimpsest—decontextualize and reemploy objects. The theme “Queer Palimpsests” evokes this history, and is meant to be capacious. Scholars of medievalism might point to the queerness of refashioning the medieval past for the purposes of a given present moment, while medieval manuscript specialists might find queer case studies of palimpsests or imagistic effacement. We also welcome papers that consider historiography and methodology, treating academic discourse over the decades as itself a kind of palimpsestic process. To what extent does the term “palimpsest” comment on the practice of queer medieval art history itself?

We invite proposals for 20-minute papers from graduate MA, MFA, and ABD students from the fields of art history, architectural studies, queer studies, medieval studies, as well as comparative literature and adjacent disciplines. Interdisciplinary work is welcomed.

Convened by Luke Williamson (Williams Graduate Program in the History of Art, '25) and organized by RAP, this semi-private symposium will privilege time for discussion after talks. It will conclude on Friday evening with a public keynote lecture delivered by Karl Whittington (Professor at the Ohio State University).

The following topics gesture to possible connections with the theme, but are not prescriptive:

- Medievalism and the afterlives of medieval art
- Finding affective/symbolic resources for the present from the medieval period
- Historiographical or methodological investigations, tracing the uses or reuses of queer medieval scholarship

- Instances of reuse, including vandalisms, iconoclasms (architectural, illustrated, etc.)
- Palimpsest theory
- Queer temporality

Interested participants are invited to submit an abstract of no more than 350 words along with a CV to queerpalimpsests2025@gmail.com by 25 November 2024. Accepted speakers will be notified by late December. The Clark will provide and arrange travel, accommodation (Thursday and Friday nights), and hospitality at the event.

Contact Information

Luke Williamson (he/him)

MA Student, Graduate Program in the History of Art

Intern, Research and Academic Program

Williams College | Clark Art Institute

Contact Email: queerpalimpsests2025@gmail.com

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<https://www.clarkart.edu/Research-Academic/RAP-Events/Queer-Palimpsests-Rewriting-Medieval-Art-History>

Reference:

CFP: Queer Palimpsests: Rewriting Medieval Art History (Williamstown, 4 Apr 25). In: Arthist.net, Sep 29, 2024 (accessed Dec 29, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/42775>>.