

The Art History of Art Therapy (Rome, 4-5 Nov 25)

Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute for Art History, Villino Stroganoff, Via Gregoriana 22, 00187 Rome, Nov 4–05, 2025

Deadline: Jan 26, 2025

Matthew Vollgraff

The term ‘art therapy’ was coined in mid-twentieth century Europe, but its history reaches back into the nineteenth century. Its development as a clinical practice was as diverse as it was discontinuous: in different contexts, art therapy could serve as a means of healing and transformation, or as a tool of discipline and pathologization. Over the course of the twentieth century, the methods and institutions of art therapy have spread globally, intersecting with developments in modern aesthetics and art history in ways that remain largely unexplored.

This interdisciplinary workshop brings together scholars in the history of art, the history of the ‘psy’ sciences, Mad Studies and Disability Studies to examine the historical practices of art therapy and their relation to art history and art education. Under what circumstances have the production and reception of artworks been deemed therapeutic, and for whom? How has the diagnostic value of art been established in clinical and education settings? What consequences did this have for patients? And how has art therapy developed also in informal, self-guided, or anti-institutional contexts?

By placing focus on the ‘art history of art therapy’, we aim to illuminate how non-normative modes of perceiving and experiencing the world—particularly those historically excluded from mainstream art historiography—have shaped modern ideas of creativity, embodiment, and perception. It is equally crucial to recognize when and how these histories were enabled by coercive and exploitative structures. The workshop particularly emphasizes the historical agency of disabled and neurodiverse individuals and communities in the elaboration of aesthetic theories and practices.

We invite contributions that investigate the clinical and informal practices of art therapy in relation to the fields of psychiatry and special needs education. The geographical scope is open. While the primary focus will be on the 19th and 20th centuries, proposals that address earlier periods are also welcome. We particularly encourage submissions from speakers with disabilities and will make every effort to accommodate accessibility needs.

Each paper should be approximately 20 minutes in length, and will be followed by a discussion. Please submit an abstract (up to 500 words) and a brief CV to both Tobias Teutenberg (Tobias.Teutenberg@biblhertz.it) and Matthew Vollgraff (vollgraff@berkeley.edu) by January 26, 2025. Acceptance notifications will be sent by the end of February 2025. The keynote lecture will be held by Whitney Davis (University of California, Berkeley).

The workshop will be held in person at Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute for Art History in Rome on November 4–5, 2025. We will cover travel expenses up to a certain amount and provide hotel accommodations. A streaming option will be available for remote viewing.

We intend to publish selected papers in a peer-reviewed, open-access volume. To this end, we ask that submissions feature original, unpublished material. Selected participants will be required to submit a written version of their paper approximately four weeks before the event.

<https://www.biblhertz.it/call-for-papers-the-art-history-of-art-therapy>

Reference:

CFP: The Art History of Art Therapy (Rome, 4-5 Nov 25). In: ArtHist.net, Nov 17, 2024 (accessed Apr 25, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/43151>>.