Pre-modern Art Histories of Migration and Exchange (Helsinki, 20-22 Oct 25)

Helsinki, Oct 20–22, 2025
Deadline: Feb 28, 2025

Ylva Haidenthaller

"Pre-modern Art Histories of Migration and Exchange: moving images, objects, and artistic expressions from, to, and between the Nordic countries".

The tradition of writing national art histories is a contested legacy that continues to shape as well as limit our knowledge of pre-modern periods. While ideas of hierarchies of center and periphery still dominate Nordic art historical surveys, we now know that cultural heterogeneity and the migration of images, people, objects, and ideas are constant features of our visual and material culture.

To give just a few examples, the training of pre-modern artists and craftsmen was based on geographical mobility and global influences. The courts of Stockholm and Copenhagen were centers of artistic production that celebrated expressions from all over Europe. Artists and craftsmen from other backgrounds were particularly valued (Noldus 2005). At the same time, Denmark and Sweden were also part of the European colonial project, both in their ambitions to conquer and rule geographical areas within and outside Europe to be turned into provinces and colonies, as well as in the plundering of, for example, Sámi objects to be collected in cabinets of curiosities (Snickare 2022). Furthermore, the printing revolution and global trade allowed popular images to “go viral” and to be used as models by local painters, so that the same religious motifs were copied and translated for paintings in churches from the Low Countries to Norway and Latin America (Hyman 2021; Porras 2023). Nevertheless, many histories of migration and exchange remain to be researched.

For this session, we invite papers with transnational, regional, and non-hierarchical perspectives on the production, uses, and meanings of art, visual and material culture in periods up to the early nineteenth century.

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Please submit your proposal to session chairs by 28th of February 2025.

Keywords: pre-modern periods, destabilizing hierarchies between center and periphery, questioning national art history writing, migration, exchange

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