

Flag This! (online/Bern, 23–24 May 25)

Online / University of Bern (In presence & on zoom), May 23–24, 2025

Deadline: Jan 29, 2025

Sarah C. Rosenthal, New York

Flag This!: A Seminar/Workshop on New Directions in Flag Studies.

Applications are open for participation in a hybrid seminar on late medieval and early modern flags and banners, hosted at the University of Bern on 23-24 May 2025. This seminar will bring together art historians, conservators, and curators whose research touches on the visual and material histories of these textiles.

Providing visual order to organize battlefields and signaling affiliations and allegiances, flags and banners served vital functions in the late medieval and early modern world. In both bellicose and celebratory contexts, flags were key objects of representation, embodying civic, personal, and political relationships. The field of vexillology elucidates much about the systems of design and usage of these objects. However, relatively little art historical work has been done to deepen our understanding of how the designs, materials, and creative acts behind these important objects link them to the broader history of images. Importantly, this seminar provides an opportunity for discussion between art historians, curators, and conservation specialists researching flags from different geographic regions, cultures, and religions. In flags, concepts of difference, belonging, and exchange are almost an underlying assumption: These signposts of identity assume both the belonging of those under the banner and the non-belonging of those beyond its purview. How, then, did flags, their makers, and their bearers define these terms? What can art historical approaches offer us here, i.e. how have visual and material qualities related to flags' inherently political functions? To what extent do flags embody a quasi-universal image practice, and how does this complicate histories of exchange and conflict? Because flags participated in varying histories of international diplomacy, colonial violence, and political provincialism, there is much they can also show us about the role of images in processes of global exchange. The stories of the artists and artisans who made them are equally important, forming a history of anonymous thinkers and workers who made political identities visible and tangible. Likewise, since flags are made of inherently fragile materials, they fall apart easily. What did this mean historically for these objects? What challenges did the transience of the medium pose? And which challenges does the fragility of these historical objects continue to pose for museums, conservationists, and art historians today?

The seminar will feature roundtable discussions, brief presentations from in-person participants prepared to share their research, and a visit to the Bernisches Historisches Museum. Please note that although we are excited to convene in person, we recognize that travel could be a challenge for many, and due to funding and space restraints, we unfortunately need to limit in-presence attendance. Regardless, we encourage applicants from anyone studying flag-related topics,

1480-1800, from any place or culture.

Prospective participants are asked to send applications or questions to Sasha Rossman (aleksandr.rossman@unibe.ch) and Sarah C. Rosenthal (scr875@g.harvard.edu) with subject line "Application – Flags 2025." Please send the following:

- Ca. 250 words detailing how the seminar relates to your work and proposing a topic for a short presentation
- 100-150 word bio
- A note indicating whether you would prefer to join over zoom or if you wish to attend in person. If the latter, please specify where you will be based at the time of the seminar.

Reference:

CFP: Flag This! (online/Bern, 23-24 May 25). In: ArtHist.net, Jan 12, 2025 (accessed Aug 6, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/43668>>.