Digital Art History V (Zagreb, 16-17 Oct 25)

Zagreb, Oct 16–17, 2025
Deadline: Mar 31, 2025

Sanja Sekelj, Institute of Art History Zagreb

Digital Art History – Methods, Practices, Epistemologies 5:
Critical Approaches to Sources in (Digital) Art History.

Organizers:
- Institute of Art History, Zagreb
- University of Zagreb University Computing Centre (SRCE)
- DARIAH HR

Keynote speakers:
- Paul Jaskot, Co-Director, Duke Digital Art History & Visual Culture Lab; Professor of Art History, Duke University
- Chiara Bonacchi, Chancellor's Fellow in Heritage, Text and Data Mining and Senior Lecturer in Heritage; HCA and Edinburgh Futures Institute, The University of Edinburgh.

Since 2018, the Digital Art History (DAH) conference series in Zagreb has served as an inclusive international platform for exchange in the field of Digital Art History/Digital Humanities, addressing specific challenges of conducting digitally-informed research. So far, the four conferences organized by the Institute of Art History, University of Zagreb University Computing Centre (SRCE), DARIAH-HR, and their partners gathered around 150 researchers in Zagreb and online, and have published a number of conference presentations in peer-reviewed thematic issues of the scholarly journal Život umjetnosti, as well as an edited volume, within several research projects. Building on the critical insights and experiences of previous years, the fifth edition of the conference firmly maintains its initial concern and the agenda of inclusivity and diversity within the conferences' programs. This guiding principle came as a response to the structural limitations of the field, faced by researchers in under-funded humanities sectors and GLAM institutions in the European (semi-)periphery, and continues to be relevant amidst growing global inequalities, cuts in humanities and social sciences, and growing threats of appropriation and misuse of the open access and fair science policies by the corporate developers of Large Language Models. Operating within a context marked by disciplinary and geographic disparities, as well as limited access to commercial academic publications, the conference also emphasizes collaboration across varying levels of digital expertise.

The mission of bringing together researchers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, practices, and fields of expertise, is also grounded in the belief that analogue and digital art history are fundamentally complementary. Data-driven research demands transparency about data lifecycles

and inherent biases, which can reveal blind spots in traditional art-historical approaches, where broad interpretations are sometimes drawn from limited or incomplete sources. Conversely, art historiography has long embraced methods rooted in the classification of objects, forms, or individuals into distinct categories (for example, in the production of typologies). Regardless of the perspective we adopt, both analogue and digital approaches involve decisions about inclusion and exclusion in classification, based on the available sources. As Paul Jaskot and Steven Whiteman have recently argued (2024), rather than emphasizing methodological differences, we should examine how each approach engages with and interprets its source material. This perspective invites us to consider when and how a body of information transforms into evidence that supports new conclusions and interpretations. Additionally, the focus on shared fundamental issues is an invitation to reflect on the contradictions present within Digital Art History: the tension between the emancipatory potential of shifting and erasing disciplinary boundaries on the one hand, and the narrowing of the field into a highly specialized niche that requires continuous investment in equipment, tools, and, even more so, into specialized knowledge and skills, on the other. Is it possible to leverage the emancipatory experience of transdisciplinarity to return to the analogue subject and analyses that can be conducted on a more widely accessible, low-scale basis?

Following this line of thinking, this year's conference aims to unite a diverse community of researchers, both analogue and digital, across the broader field of culture to engage in discussing the question of sources that underpin historical scholarship. The choice of sources at the heart of historical work is deeply intertwined with key disciplinary issues, such as the agency of historical actors, the researcher's positionality, and the ethical considerations that emerge from particular lines of inquiry. Therefore, we invite scholars to engage in a discussion on the politics of sources and data, which requires not only transparency, but also reflexivity.

Topics of particular interest for discussion include, but are not limited to:

- The construction of historical narratives in relation to incomplete, inaccessible, or non-existent sources
- Unequal power dynamics in relation to data preservation, and their influence on the production of historical narratives
- Challenges and possibilities of producing evidence at scale to represent marginalized subjects
- The influence of contemporary socio-political and cultural issues in shaping research priorities and source selection, i.e. the extent to which the potential societal impact of scholarly work is factored into these decisions
- Legal, material, and ethical aspects surrounding data availability and data classification processes
- Differences between institutional approaches and community-driven databases
- Citizen science initiatives
- The selection and prior organization of sources (including their production and preservation contexts), and their intersection with the researcher's positionality
- The history of the researcher's interaction with data and sources, and the relationship between types of source material and methods of analysis.

To apply for a 20-minute presentation please submit an abstract (500 words max.) and a brief biographical note (200 words max.) to ssekelj@ipu.hr no later than March 31, 2025. In the biographi-

cal note please clearly indicate your institutional affiliation (if any). We also encourage proposals for panels consisting of 3–4 presentations addressing a common theme. For panel submissions, please provide a summary (500 words max.) of the panel's overarching theme, along with individual abstracts and biographical notes for all participants. We accept submissions on completed, original, and unpublished results, as well as contributions that present work in progress. We welcome abstracts from researchers of all career levels and pathways.

Notifications of acceptance will be announced by April 22, 2025.

Participation in the conference is free and open to all, with no registration fees. While the organizers are unable to cover accommodation or travel expenses for participants, lunches will be provided during the event.

The conference is organized as part of the research project "Digital network, spatial and (con)textual analysis of artistic phenomena and heritage of the 20th century" (DIGitART, 2023–2027) based at the Institute of Art History in Zagreb, funded by the European Union – NextGenerationEU.

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