SAVAH 2025: Practices of Entanglement (Pietermaritzburg, 25–27 Sep 25)

Centre for Visual Arts, University of KwaZulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa), Sep 25–27, 2025
Deadline: Apr 11, 2025

Jessica Lindiwe Draper

The 38th Annual SAVAH Conference: Practices of Entanglement.

The term entanglement has been widely used in academic discourse across multiple disciplines – postcolonial studies, anthropology, philosophy, art history, physics and beyond. It often refers to the complexity of relationships between histories, cultures, and identities, with Karen Barad extending these ideas to apply to what she calls agential realism, where concepts of entanglement (or intra-action) describe how entities emerge through relationships with other entities, challenging traditional distinctions between subject/object, human/nonhuman.

Nicolas Bourriaud applies entanglement to contemporary art, arguing that artists navigate and intertwine multiple cultural and historical references, making art a process of relational engagement rather than fixed meaning. Achille Mbembe, on the other hand, applies notions of entanglement to postcolonial and decolonial thought, as a means to demonstrate how Africa's colonial past and present are inextricably linked, producing complex subjectivities and overlapping temporalities. Conceptualisations such as these challenge linear narratives of history and explore how colonial and postcolonial conditions are mutually constitutive.

The concept of entanglement has gained traction in art history, especially in relation to postcolonial theory, global art histories, material culture, and the decolonial turn. Okwui Enwezor's curatorial work, such as Documenta 11 (2002), foregrounded the idea of art as a site of entangled histories, where space and meaning are in constant negotiation. Mieke Bal proposes that the interplay between visuality and textuality is a fundamental aspect of interdisciplinarity, and this dualism is also central to the discipline of art history, which at its core involves writing about visual things. The tension produced through the entanglement of verbal and visual languages has also been foregrounded since the Practice Turn insisted on the ability of creative practice to produce original knowledge.

The 2025 SAVAH conference aims to pull at these entangled threads and connections in order to begin an untangling that might reveal the richness of the layers in between. In the spirit of creative curiosity, we ask that submissions focus on the many possible questions rather than the conclusions. We welcome provisional research in progress and hope that the conference will be a platform for knowledge sharing and exchange. We also, therefore, welcome submissions that think through some of these webs across disciplines, and are interested in novel research of any kind

that extends beyond the themes outlined below.

Abstract submissions could focus on (but are not limited to) the following topics:

• Visual and Verbal Entanglements: Language, Image, and Knowledge Production
• Postcolonial and Decolonial Art Histories
• Materiality and Entangled Objects
• Entangled Histories and Temporalities
• Materiality and the Making of Entanglements
• Entangled Objects, Archives, and Memory
• Decolonial Entanglements and the Politics of Space
• Curatorial Entanglements: Exhibitions, Practice, and Knowledge Sharing
• Entangled Performances of Self and Society
• Other Novel Research and Experimental Approaches to Entanglement

We invite papers and visual presentations from scholars, researchers, and post-graduate students. Practice-led research is particularly welcome. We also invite contributions from SAVAH members on current research that engages topics not included in this call for papers.

Please submit an abstract of between 300 and 400 words via the savah.org.za website by 11 April 2025. Successful applicants will be notified by 30 April 2025. For any queries please contact conference@savah.org.za.

Reference:
CFP: SAVAH 2025: Practices of Entanglement (Pietermaritzburg, 25-27 Sep 25). In: ArtHist.net, Mar 23, 2025 (accessed Nov 14, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/44887>.