Perspectives on Art Histories in the Balkans (Paris, 18–20 Mar 26)

INHA - Paris, Mar 18–20, 2026
Deadline: Jun 30, 2025

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PERSPECTIVES ON ART HISTORIES IN THE BALKANS.
Actors, Networks, and Practices from the Early Modern to the Contemporary.

The symposium “Perspectives on Art Histories in the Balkans: Actors, Networks, and Practices from the Early Modern to the Contemporary” is designed to be a forum for dialogue between academic researchers and cultural players. Devoted to the visual art of the Balkans, this will be the first of a series of triannual meetings bringing together in one place the fields of art research and artistic creation. The symposium is organized by a number of French research centers, and will be held at the Institut National d’Histoire de l’Art in Paris. With the goal of stimulating new dynamics of research, it is open to the entire range of topics addressed by such disciplines as art history, the history of architecture, and the history of cinema.

In the absence of a French specific tradition in the art history of the modern and contemporary Balkans, other disciplines (history, sociology, geography, anthropology, political science, and literature and language studies) have filled the void, supplying their various viewpoints on the objects of study. French and Francophone research is, in fact, made up of these contributions, and it is strongly marked by these intersecting methodologies and epistemologies. The same is true geographically, since the art of the Balkans has often been studied as a part of wider areal, political, or confessional frameworks. As a result of these boundary crossings, it has become possible to analyze artistic practices through transdisciplinary and transnational perspectives. Today, a new generation of specialists and researchers, as well as cultural players, are continuing these investigations, with conscious attention given to formal and aesthetic questions.

This conference takes its place, therefore, within the new academic tendency seeking to reevaluate, in terms of content and methodology, the frames of reference underpinning the study of the arts. The approach will be primarily diachronic (following initial artistic creation through its transformations), with the aim of establishing dialogue between studies of imperial dynamics in the modern era and research on the contemporary Balkans. Such boundary crossing will make possible the study of the formal, conceptual, and material development of the artworks by bringing to light borrowings, overlappings, and tensions. By including this wider historical dimension, the conference aims to explore, beyond heritage studies, the multi-faceted materiality of artworks.

Through this event, the conference organizers are hoping to be able to look at the visual art of the Balkans from a comparative and inclusive perspective. The Balkans are to be understood as an

area of creativity with fluid frontiers – a space where art research can be conducted in terms that are global as much as national, regional, and diasporic ("beyond the state"). Such investigations will foreground the study of movements and exchanges, inviting formal and theoretical comparisons and contrasts.

Finally, it should be noted that French research on the Balkans, although certainly enriched by the fact that certain countries in the region are both French-speaking and Francophile, must still confront the question of language. Translation in this area is not extensive, and thus English has emerged as common territory for most specialists. It will be the language used for this first research meeting. At the same time, the conference will provide an opportunity to analyze the stakes involved in such a choice, notably with respect to differing epistemologies. It will provide an occasion, therefore, to foster the interrogation of translation and transfer, and the exploration of specific differences, incompatibilities even, of meaning.

Topic areas may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Formal and Prosopographic Approaches
The numerous histories of the arts of the Balkans lay claim to a long methodological tradition that favors biography and the prosopographic study of artistic careers. In addition to this, there exists a vast literature devoted to formal and formalist studies of the artworks. How are we to see this monographic writing today? Do these works have a contribution to make towards a better understanding of the dynamics at work in the various national contexts? What formal templates are being applied in the various analyses of the arts of the region?

- Movements, Transfers, and Exchanges
In suggesting this topic area, the organizers are looking for papers that will examine instances of influence, transfer, and movement without producing forced comparisons or reducing such cases to binary oppositions. Can a hybrid history, one that simultaneously traces artistic theory and artistic practice, tease out – in terms of influences, shared approaches, and analogies – the relations between the various Balkan scenes and external centers of production? What is the contribution of postimperial and postcolonial studies to our understanding of artistic exchange?

- Constructing Identity, Nation, and Politics
The arts have often participated in the creation and transformation of identities during times immediately following periods of radical change. At the same time, art histories have appeared that have bolstered certain views of national and religious identity, taking one side or another in political conflicts. How are we to interpret and evaluate artists' participation in the various movements involved in these numerous contexts of transition? What has been the role played by artistic practice in the manifestation and management of collective trauma? In what way do European integration and contemporary geopolitical developments bear upon the questions asked by recent artistic productions?

- New Struggles in Society and New Patterns of Commitment
The historiography devoted to the arts of the Balkans is now very much concerned to include topics and methodological approaches that are inspired by current struggles in society. It would seem appropriate, therefore, to ask about the place assigned to feminist and intersectional practices, as well as ecological endeavors, in the arts. What is their role within aesthetic and activist

productions? How do these struggles enter into synergy with other social battles?

- The Stakes of Memory and Heritage
The profusion of narratives of remembrance has had a direct impact on the various stages in the construction of national and religious identities. This is true as much today as it was during the imperial age, and it has gone along, often enough, with a deep rewriting of government policies with regard to national heritage, subject as such policies are to the constructions of history. In the light of these changing contexts, what are the dynamics of remembrance at work in national and/or regional governmental policies with respect to culture and heritage? How do museums and their collections change? How do artists interact with the past? What are the historical and artistic conditions that frame the building of monuments, and what is the role played by the arts in discussions around these witnesses to often dissonant pasts?

- Institutions, Networks, and Sites
Because of the uncertain nature of institutional support for artistic production, cultural actors are forced to develop new strategies of (self-) organization. What can we learn by mapping public, para-official, and alternative institutions? Can we retrace their histories and trajectories? What impact does globalization have on local artistic networks and on recent developments in the art market in the Balkans?

A workshop open to students will be organized around this intersecting national and international research. Participants will be invited to engage in an informal exchange of ideas and to share their thoughts on emerging points of epistemological agreement.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES
Proposals for papers should be written in English and should not exceed one page (Times New Roman, 12, spacing 1.15). Please provide also a short biography of yourself (350 words maximum).

Talks should last 20 minutes and will be followed by a discussion session.

Proposals are due by June 30, 2025, and should be sent to the following address: conferenceartsbalkans@gmail.com

We shall review all proposals during September 2025.
It is expected that the symposium will lead to a publication.

The conference organizers are unable to cover participants' transport and housing costs.

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Reference:
CFP: Perspectives on Art Histories in the Balkans (Paris, 18-20 Mar 26). In: ArtHist.net, Apr 5, 2025 (accessed Nov 9, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/47184>.