

Pseudo-Scripts. (Il)legibility and Ornamentation (Pisa/online, 2–17 May 25)

Pisa / Online, May 2–17, 2025

Gregor Meinecke

May 2–3, 2025 (Pisa/online); May 9, and May 17, 2025 (online).

Ornaments and their (il)legibility have long intrigued scholars of visual culture, gaining traction in scholarship (e.g. Necipoğlu, Payne 2016). Pseudo-scripts in particular—lines that resemble writing but are ultimately in toto or partly illegible—have become a privileged focus of interest when approaching the broader phenomenon.

This conference explores the appearance of script and asks why it is so compelling, even when it is stripped of its content. Whether in painting, sculpture, architecture, or any other media or technique, pseudo-script appears across a wide range of objects and materials – its function often depends on how it was applied in these different forms. Often, the appearance of script carries multilayered meanings, referring to something “beyond”. The act of imitating a particular script may evoke various interpretations and place objects in a specific (assumed) cultural or geographic context.

With this conference, we seek to investigate pseudo-scripts, ornaments, and their (il)legibility from a broad, interdisciplinary, and transcultural perspective. Instead of insisting on finding definitions, this conference is about the plurality of definitions, methods, and interpretations; it’s about the multilayered meanings reflected in the very objects we study: lines, ornamentation, script, and pseudo-script, and their (il)legibility.

Note: All times are indicated in CEST (Amsterdam/Berlin/Rome).

Friday, 2 May 2025

At Scuola Normale Superiore, Sala Azzurra & Online

9:45 am: Greetings & Introduction

- Francesco Caglioti
- Gregor Meinecke, Luca Palozzi, and Vera-Simone Schulz

The Iconicity of Arabic in Transcultural Contexts I

Chair: Francesco Caglioti (Scuola Normale Superiore)

10:30 am – 11:00 am

- Rebecca Wrighton (University of Rhode Island), The Arabic Kāf: A Case Study in Epigraphic Patterns on Early Islamic Ceramics.

11:00 am – 11:30 am

- Alex Dika Seggerman (Rutgers University-Newark), Photographic (Il)legibility of Florence Pseudo-Arabic at the KHI Photothek in Florence.

11:30 am – 12:00 pm

Coffee break

The Iconicity of Arabic in Transcultural Contexts II

Chair: Luca Palozzi (Università di Pisa)

12:00 pm – 12:30 pm

- Nan Han (Central Academy of Fine Arts, Shanghai), Between Legibility and Illegibility: Arabic Lettering in Neapolitan Panels.

12:30 – 1 pm

- Michael Kiefer (University of Heidelberg), Inscribing the Emperor – The Semiotics of Pseudo-Kufic Ornaments on Middle Byzantine Items of Dress.

1pm – 2:30 pm

Lunch break

The Aesthetics of Early Modern Mediality I: Bodies & Demons

Chair: Elke Morlok (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt)

2:30 pm – 3 pm

- José Gabriel Alegría (Stony Brook University/Bibliotheca Hertziana), The Dark Script of the Mystical Body: The Aesthetic Role of Inscription in the Mundus Archetypus (1574)

3 pm – 3:30 pm

- Jakob Moser (Austrian Academy of Science), Demonic Illegibility. Pseudoscript and Temptation in Bernardo Parentino's St. Anthony.

3:30 pm – 4 pm

Coffee break

The Aesthetics of Early Modern Mediality II: Artistic Signatures

Chair: Gregor Meinecke (Scuola Normale Superiore/Universität Hamburg)

4 pm – 4:30 pm

- Paolo Celi (University of Padua), Writing in Bronzino's Paintings: A Paleographic Analysis of Models and Hidden Meanings.

4:30 pm – 5 pm

- Joanna Sikorska (Department of Prints and Drawings, National Museum Warsaw/University of Warsaw), Early Printed Signatures. Between Self-Fashioning and Encryption.

5 pm – 5:30 pm

Coffee break

Beyond Legibility: Asemic Writing and Cultural Critique

Chair: Gregor Meinecke & Luca Palozzi

5:30 pm – 6 pm

- Charlotte Langersdorf (London/Düsseldorf), Writing at the Interface: Rethinking Interaction through Asemic Writing.

6 pm – 6:30 pm

- Regine Ehleiter (Berlin/Witten/Herdecke University), Between Reading and Viewing: The Asemic Writing of Mirtha Dermisache's Artists' Publications.

Saturday, May 3, 2025

Museo San Matteo, Scuola Normale Superiore & Online

10 am – 1 pm Visit of Museo Nazionale San Matteo (speakers only)

Piazza San Matteo In Soarta, 1, Pisa

1 pm – 2:30 pm

Lunch break

Proceeding at Scuola Normale Superiore, Sala Azzurra & Online

Decoding Iberian Pseudo-Scripts: Spirituality and Authorship

Chair: Vera-Simone Schulz (Leuphana Universität/KHI Florenz)

2:30 pm – 3 pm

- Sarah Flitti (Sorbonne Université Paris), "The Epigraphic Invention of the Sepulchre: Fifteenth-Century Altarpieces from the Crown of Aragon".

3 pm – 3:30 pm

- Isabel Ruiz Garnelo (UNED Madrid), Script and Pseudo-Script in the Master of Alzira: spirituality, ornamentation, or a tool for identifying authorship?

3:30 pm – 4 pm

- Pablo Violero Rodríguez (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), (Pseudo)scripts in the Iberian ornamentation in the Late Middle Ages.

4 pm – 4:30 pm

Coffee break

Letters, Marks, and Meaning: Exploring Inscriptions in Contemporary Art I

Chair: Flavio Fergonzi (Scuola Normale Superiore)

4:30 pm – 5 pm

- Marta Smolińska (Magdalena Abakanowicz University of the Arts, Poznań), Epistemic Trauma:

Illegibility as a Subversive Strategy Against Censorship in Eastern European Art of the 1980s.

5 pm – 5:30 pm

- Mela Dávila Freire (University of Fine Arts Hamburg), Eigenschriften and other “Blank Writing” Works by Irma Blank.

Friday, May 9, 2025

Online

Transcultural Echoes I: Pseudo-Scripts and Visual Communication Across Eurasia

2 pm – 2:30 pm

- Yuefeng Wu (Johns Hopkins University), Writing Mongol in Medieval Assisi: Picturing the Universal Church at the Basilica of San Francesco.

2:30 pm – 3 pm

- An Tairan (Princeton University), The Unnatural Brushstroke: Athanasius Kircher, Late-Ming Seal Scripts, and the Origins of Chinoiserie Pseudoscripts.

3 pm – 3:30 pm

Coffee break

Letters, Marks, and Meaning: Exploring Inscriptions in Contemporary Art II

3:30 pm – 4 pm

- Jane Boddy (Saarlandmuseum Moderne Galerie, Saarbrücken), Rethinking Pseudo-Scripts: Material Messages of Ink and Form in Oskar Hollweck's Drawings.

4 pm – 4:30 pm

- Kate Nesin (New York City/ Department of Modern and Contemporary Art, Art Institute of Chicago), Sense/Sensibility: A Typology of the Writing-Like in Cy Twombly's Work.

4:30 pm – 5 pm

- Giovanni Lusi (Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa), Cy Twombly's letters. Missives and Capitals.

Saturday, May 17, 2025

Online

Transcultural Echoes II: Pseudo-Scripts across Afro-Eurasia

2:30 pm – 3 pm

- Rabiou Yussuf (Ahmadu Bello University), Arabic (Pseudo-)Scripts in Nigerian Art: Tracing Mamluk Metalwork Influence on Metalwork Objects in Northern Nigeria.

3 pm – 4 pm

- Round Table Discussion: Arabic and Pseudo-Arabic Script in Contemporary Art in West Africa.

4 pm – 4:30 pm

Publication & Future Thoughts

An international conference at the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, the Museo di San Matteo, and Online

Concept and organization: Gregor Meinecke (Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa/ Hamburg University), Luca Palozzi (Università di Pisa), Vera-Simone Schulz (Leuphana University Lüneburg/KHI Florenz)

Zoom-Links:

Friday–Saturday, May 2–3 2025 (Scuola Normale Superiore & online)

<https://eu02web.zoom-x.de/meeting/register/cXZ3QPC8QROZ76RUICzfrw>

Friday, May 9, 2025 (online)

<https://eu02web.zoom-x.de/meeting/register/zfJsFfY7RpSNeJCRMHaGLA>

Saturday, May 17, 2025 (online)

<https://eu02web.zoom-x.de/meeting/register/M-xZRcncQKm1GDDclZ0fFA>

<https://www.sns.it/it/evento/pseudo-scripts-illegibility-ornamentation>

Reference:

CONF: Pseudo-Scripts. (Il)legibility and Ornamentation (Pisa/online, 2-17 May 25). In: ArtHist.net, May 1, 2025 (accessed Aug 2, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/49167>>.