

2 Sessions at EAHN (Aarhus, 17–21 Jun 26)

Aarhus, Denmark, Jun 17–21, 2026

Deadline: Sep 19, 2025

ArtHist.net Redaktion

[1] Character' in Global Encounters with Architecture, c. 1700-1900

[2] Architectural Objects of Colonial Consumption: The Material and Visual Worlds of Tea, Coffee, Chocolate, and Other Hot Beverages.

[1] Character' in Global Encounters with Architecture, c. 1700-1900

From: Dominik Müller

Date: 21 May 25

The eighteenth century was at once the period when Classical architecture was canonized in the Western world and beyond, and the moment when its supposedly universal ideal came into crisis. The study of competing practices and traditions of various medieval (Romanesque, Gothic, Byzantine) and vernacular architectures in Europe, and the allure of 'Oriental' styles (filtered through *Turquerie* and *Chinoiserie*) challenged the claims of Classicism, as did the encounters with different extra-European building traditions through travel and colonialism. These encounters prompted an avid preoccupation with cultural difference, as evidenced in Voltaire's *"Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations"* (1756), Vico's *"Principi di una scienza nuova d'intorno alla natura delle nazioni"* (1725–1744) or Hume's *"Of National Characters"* (1748).

Before the systematic global histories of architecture of the nineteenth century, and previous to the notion of style, Western authors employed a particular term to describe cultural specificity and difference: 'character'. Stemming originally from the Greek word *χαρακτήρ*, its meaning evolved from the tool with which one carved signs on a wax or stone surface, over denoting these signs themselves, to the imprint these had on a reader or viewer. The distinctiveness of that impact, and the marks of identity of a whole culture in its environment and material culture, was encapsulated by its 'character'. As such, from 1750 onwards the notion of character became ubiquitous in a variety of languages and was used in reference to people, buildings and landscapes, and shared across different genres of writing and scientific disciplines: from travel literature, political theory and ethnography, over treatises of art and architecture, to gardening manuals.

This session interrogates the architectural category of 'character' in the globalizing world of the long eighteenth century, by zooming in on its meanings, implications and complexities in moments of encounter between Western and non-Western cultures and architectures. We draw on recent inquiries into how Western travellers conceptualized non-Western architectures (Brouwer, Bressani & Armstrong, *"Narrating the Globe,"* 2023), but also on works aiming to show how indigenous thinking conceptualized and criticized Western political and aesthetic norms (Graeber & Wengrow, *"The Dawn of Everything,"* 2021).

We are interested in instances of encounter addressing the following questions:

- How have Western accounts used the notion of 'character' to describe non-Western architectures, building traditions, cultures, landscapes and places? How was the notion of 'character' employed for architectures that challenged Western taxonomies and categorizations of architectural style?

- Which are the analogous notions in native languages that have been used to respond to encounters with Western architectures? How were these employed to process cultural specificity and otherness, and to describe, translate, acculturate or criticize Western cultural expressions (including mores and manners) from an indigenous perspective?

We welcome papers dealing with one or more of these questions in the period c. 1700-1900, across geographies.

We are eager to discuss a variety of written, visual and material sources, drawn from various disciplines, to expand the critical history of the term 'character' beyond its well-established place in the history of European architectural theory.

Abstracts are invited by September 19, 2025. Abstracts of no more than 300 words should be submitted directly to sigrid.dejong@gta.arch.ethz.ch, nikolaos.magouliotis@gta.arch.ethz.ch, and mueller@arch.ethz.ch, along with the applicant's name, email address, professional affiliation, address, telephone number and a short curriculum vitae (maximum one page).

Abstracts for presentations should define the subject and summarize the argument to be presented in the proposed paper. The content of that paper should be the product of well-documented original research that is primarily analytical and interpretative rather than descriptive in nature.

[2] Architectural Objects of Colonial Consumption: The Material and Visual Worlds of Tea, Coffee, Chocolate, and Other Hot Beverages.

From: Laura Hindelang

Date: 28 May 25

The session is organized by Anne Hultzsch (ETH Zurich) and Laura Hindelang (University of Bern) as part of the 2026 European Architectural History Network (EAHN conference).

Sipping hot cocoa, grown in present-day Ghana, in 19th-century Poland from a porcelain cup decorated with a castle veduta / Stirring matcha in a ceramic chawan showing a landscape painting in 18th-century Japan / Savouring tea, traded in China against opium, served on a tray on which is painted the scene of an 18th-century English salon.

This session brings together three phenomena: ceramics featuring architectural motifs; the consumption of hot beverages, made from substances, including tea, coffee, and chocolate, which played a significant role in colonial trade and imperial networks; and their spatial environments. Through this specific group of illustrated objects and the built spaces in which they were used, thus bridging material and visual cultures, we seek to tell architectural histories of global colonial entanglements and distinct spatial practices before ca. 1900. European elites from the 16th century onwards began to define themselves through the consumption of exclusive hot beverages that contained an intrinsic trace of an elsewhere; later, their consumption often turned into popular everyday culture. Such ceramics, including porcelain, amalgamate the ingestion of procured addictive substances with the consumption of architectural imagery and, thus, the symbolism attached to architectural spaces. We consider them highly potent objects and environments through which to complicate architectural historiographies, reflecting on who, under which conditions – in

terms also of class, race, or gender – produced and consumed both substance and container.

We explore questions such as: What kind of sceneries were displayed on architectural ceramics? To what extent did these real or imagined spaces relate to the physical spaces of both the production and consumption of hot beverages, including plantations and coffee or tea houses? How can we conceptualize the intimate bodily encounters with architectural porcelain, the processes of ingesting addictive or stimulating substances such as hot chocolate, tea, coffee, mate, or matcha? How can ceramics manifest a space or constitute a spatial practice within the global-colonial networks necessary to produce, trade, transport, and sell not only the beverages but also the vessels? Through these objects and their environments, how can we tell marginalized stories of exploitation, oppression, asymmetrical power relations, use, and abuse – but also of agency and resistance – in relation to architectural histories?

We are interested in papers that reflect on, but are not limited to:

- the architectural imagery on beverage containers like cups, saucers, pots, storage vessels, or trays and slop bowls;
- the spatial practices and environments of consumption and preparation, such as parlour, salon, tea-house, coffeehouse, bedroom, boudoir, or kitchen;
- the spatial practices and environments of production and trade, such as plantations, potteries, ships, and manufactories;
- strategies to expand or contest established architectural histories through intersectional, feminist, queer, decolonial, or other novel theories and methodologies.

We invite papers that centre on a specific object or space and its agency as a prism through which to interrogate broader spatial histories in any geography; we focus on the period from ca. 1500 to 1900 but are also interested in examples outside this time span if they reflect on the above questions.

Abstracts of no more than 300 words should be submitted directly to Anne Hultzsch (hultzs@arch.ethz.ch) and Laura Hindelang (laura.hindelang@unibe.ch), along with the applicant's name, email address, professional affiliation, address, telephone number and a short curriculum vitae (maximum one page).

Reference:

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