

## Out of Scale (London, 16–17 Jun 25)

The Courtauld Institute of Art, London, Jun 16–17, 2025

Wenjie Su

Out of Scale: From “Miniature” Material Cultures to the Anthropic Principle.

Scale—the relative dimension, magnitude, or scope of objects, and their proportional relationship to the observer—is often perceived through visual and cultural assumptions. As terrestrial beings, we interpret the scale of landscapes, built environments, material artifacts, social structures, and historical events through the lens of our bodies and shared paradigms. Across time, philosophical and religious traditions have long pondered humanity’s place and purpose in relation to both natural and supernatural realms. Yet technological advancements—from maritime navigation to space exploration, from telescopic and microscopic investigations to the detection of cosmic microwave background radiation, and from embodied physical spaces to seemingly boundless digital spheres—have continually pushed us to reconceive the scale of our existence.

This conference brings together studies that examine the art historical, historiographical, and ideological significance of micro-scale and small-format designs, sites, and events. It pursues three key aims: first, to deepen inquiry into the sensorial, spiritual, intellectual, and technical implications of scaling; second, to explore how scale—of originals, reproductions, interfaces, or interpretive paradigms—has shaped the centrality or marginality of specific topics within art historical discourse; and third, to bridge investigations of human creativity with meditations on human existence through the conceptual lens of scale.

Across the global history of visual and material cultures, creatively re-scaled objects have played a central role in conceiving and simulating worlds that surpass our optical and epistemological thresholds, evoking resonances that are profoundly out of scale. By exploring how humans have persistently shifted scales to orient themselves within and across realms, this conference reflects on our inherently limited yet endlessly imaginative perspective—and envisions new pathways for launching beyond boundaries.

Venue: Vernon Square Campus, Lecture Theatre 2

Reserve your free ticket for either day here:  
<https://myaccount.courtauld.ac.uk/packages/fixed/48>

Schedule:

Monday 16 June

9.00 – 9.30: Registration opens

The Courtauld Institute, Vernon Square Campus

9.30 – 9.45: Opening remarks, and introduction to the day

Wenjie Su, Princeton University; Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art (CASVA).

9.45 – 10.45: Keynote – Wei-Cheng Lin, The University of Chicago

10.45 – 11.15: Refreshment Break

11.15 – 13.00: Panel I – Paradoxes of Creativity

Chaired by Hugo Shakeshaft, Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art.

David Mulder, University of Pennsylvania,

'Bite Size: Precision and Predation in Sumerian Cylinder Seals, ca. 2500-2334 BCE'.

Rachel Alban, The Courtauld,

'“Miniature” Resistance: Timurid and Safavid Manuscript Paintings and Defying Intelligible Dimensions'.

Tingting Xu, University of Rochester,

'Is Photography a Miniature World? Exploring Scale in Late Imperial and Early Republican China'.

Filipp Bosco, ICI Berlin,

'Drawn to Scale. Sketches, Projects, and Other (Small) Paper Practices in Contemporary Art'.

13.00 – 14.30: Lunch Break

Provided for speakers and organisers

14.30 – 16.00: Panel II – Resounding Whispers

Chaired by Christine Stevenson, The Courtauld.

Henriette Marsden, University of Cambridge,

'“A Token of Love and Affection”. Miniature Bazaar Stalls and Victorian Models of Giving'.

Annemarie Iker, Princeton University,

'Big and Small in Catalan Modernisme'.

Dalia Iskander, University College London,

'Miniature Antidotes: The Healing Effects of Crafting Across Scales'.

16.00 – 16.30: Refreshment Break

16.30 – 17.30: Panel III – The Measures of the Other

Chaired by Tom Young, The Courtauld.

Rachel Hunter Himes, Columbia University,

'Circumscribed Citizenship: Boizot's Les Noirs Libres and the Place of Black Persons in the Early Republic'.

Lina Koo, University of Brighton,

'Miniaturising Korea: The Development of Korean Dolls in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century'.

17.30 – 18.30: Drinks Reception

Open to all

Tuesday 17 June

9.00 – 9.30: Registration opens

The Courtauld Institute, Vernon Square Campus

9.30: Welcome and introduction to the day

9.30 – 10.30: Panel IV – Tiny Gateways to Sacred Realms

Chaired by Sujatha Meegama, The Courtauld.

Yi Zhao, Hong Kong Polytechnic University,

‘A Path to Paradise: Reevaluating Pure Land Belief in the Northern Dynasties with the Nine-Buddha Halo Miniature Shrines’.

Elena Calvillo, University of Richmond,

‘Scale as a Devotional Catalyst: Giulio Clovio and the Challenges of Judgment’.

10.30 – 11.00: Refreshment Break

11.00 – 13.00: Panel V – When the Overlooked Loomed Large

Chaired by Sussan Babaie, The Courtauld.

Vanessa Alayrac-Fielding, University of Lille,

‘Global Miniatures: Sensing the World with Fans and Snuffboxes’.

Yizhou Wang, Hong Kong Baptist University,

‘Intimate Enchantment: Scale and Affect of Fans in Ming-Qing Literature and Visual Culture’.

Sally-Yu Leung, Tracing Patterns Foundation,

‘The Material Culture of Traditional Chinese Embroidered Hebao (Purses) in the Context of Scale’.

Matthias Krüger, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München,

‘The Souvenirs of the Eiffel Tower, 1889’.

13.00 – 14.30: Lunch Break

Provided for speakers and organisers

14.30 – 16.00: Panel VI – Small Black Mirrors

Chaired by Yizhou Wang, Hong Kong Baptist University.

Matthew Westerby, Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art,

‘Music in Miniature: Musical Notation and Digitized Choir Books’.

Camille Bellet, University of Manchester, and Liz Hingley, University of Southampton,

‘Sensuous Scaling: From Gigantic to Miniature Textures of the Digital Portable Cow’.

Barbara Mennel, University of Florida,

‘Miniature’s Large Installations: Pandemic Curation in the Shelter in Place Gallery’.

16.00 – 16.30: Refreshment Break

16.30 – 17.30: Panel VII – Our Landing Spots

Chaired by Stephen Whiteman, The Courtauld.

Gonzalo Munoz-Vera and Shaun Rosier, Virginia Tech,  
'Miniature to Monumental: The Resulting Overlapping Scales of Coal Extraction and Human Inhabitation in Amonate'.

Bhawana Jain, Central Saint Martins,  
'Ecopoiesis and the Politics of Scale: Land Art, Climate Action, and Embodied Memory in Ladakh'.

17.30 – 18.00: General discussions & closing remarks

Chaired by Wenjie Su, Princeton University/CASVA.

Organised by Wenjie Su, PhD researcher, Princeton University/CASVA; Yizhou Wang, Research Assistant Professor, Hong Kong Baptist University; and Stephen Whiteman, Reader in the Art and Architecture of China, The Courtauld.

This symposium is held in collaboration with the Academy of Visual Arts, School of Creative Arts, at Hong Kong Baptist University, with additional support from the Kingfisher Foundation, the Department of Art and Archaeology at Princeton University, and the Courtauld Trans-Asias Research Cluster.

Reference:

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<<https://arthist.net/archive/49429>>.