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3 Sessions at RSA (San Francisco, 19–21 Feb 26)

San Francisco, CA

ArtHist.net Redaktion

72nd Annual Meeting of the Renaissance Society of America (RSA), San Francisco, February 19-21, 2026.

[1] "Expressing Queer Desire in Early Modern Italy"
[2] "Living and Thinking with Antiquities beyond the Library and the Artist's Workshop"
[3] "Slavery and Material Culture in Early Modern Maritime Asia"

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[1] "Expressing Queer Desire in Early Modern Italy"
From: Marco Pomini
Date: June 20, 2025
Deadline: August 4, 2025

Desire in the Italian Renaissance is ubiquitous, constantly experienced, discussed, and represented. Petrarch, for example, indulges in detailed descriptions of his state of being possessed by desire, while erotic paintings are populated with Cupids shooting the arrows of love. The period has also often been understood as a pivotal moment in the history of sexuality, particularly for the emergence of codified expressions of homoeroticism. At the same time, however, cities like Florence intensified the criminalization of sexual activity between men.

This wealth of literary, visual, and legal material has been thoroughly explored in scholarship on sex, gender, and sexuality in the Italian Renaissance (Barkan 1991; Pfisterer 2009). This panel intends to engage with this historiographic tradition by re-interrogating this material, and it intends to reframe the period by placing the coeval and capacious term desire at the center alongside the contemporary category of queer. What becomes visible in this archive when viewed through the malleable and fluid category of desire? How were forms of desire that go beyond the poles of heteronormativity and codified pederastic models registered?

The encounter between bodies marked by desire creates new forms and meanings, since desire can move uncontrollably and unpredictably. It constitutes a more expansive term for speaking about encounters between different bodies. This panel embraces the difficulty of writing about queer desire in historical perspective and invites scholars to think imaginatively about queer and trans desire in the Italian Renaissance, in both its presence and its absence.

Please send your paper proposals to Marco Pomini and Tati Avesani (mpomini1@jh.edu; tavesan1@jhu.edu) by August 4, 2025.

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Your submission must contain the following:
- paper title and abstract (200-word maximum)
- brief CV
- full name, current affiliation, and email address

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[2] "Living and Thinking with Antiquities beyond the Library and the Artist's Workshop"
From: Hilary Barker
Date: June 16, 2025
Deadline: July 15, 2025

Organized by Hilary Barker and Lillian Datchev

Classical and early Christian antiquities lay scattered throughout the cityscapes and countryside of much of Europe, constituting the fabric of daily life for many during the Renaissance, including individuals who were not antiquarians or artists. Many felt a deep fascination towards antiquity, and this was especially true for residents of and visitors to Rome, a city where physical remains of antiquity were ubiquitous and dominated the landscape, but this was not a uniquely Roman experience. Throughout the cities, towns, and countryside of Italy and Europe, many people had opportunities to see and ponder on remnants of the past civilization. This panel series seeks to reconstruct some of the more quotidian contexts in which antiquities were present in Renaissance life, to understand how figures from across society interacted with them: for instance, how shepherds herded their flocks among Roman imperial tombs, builders fortuitously dug up ancient stones, and patricians hosted dinner parties among ancient busts. We also seek to identify specific episodes of antiquarian discovery and excavation, reconstructing the material circumstances in which they took place and the types of figures involved, including the skills and ideas they brought to bear on their interpretations of the objects. Focusing on sites outside of the scholarly library and artist's workshop, we ask, how did people of all social strata encounter antiquities in the urban and natural landscape? We hope to put the experiences and observations of lesser studied groups, such as laborers, into conversation with those of antiquarians and artists, such as Poggio Bracciolini and Giuliano da Sangallo, who made systematic inquiries into ancient sites and objects.

Questions to be considered may include, but are not limited to:
-What was special about the antiquarian tradition in Rome? How did it differ in places outside of Rome?
-To what extent were Christian antiquities considered historical objects? How did approaches to them compare to those to secular antiquities?
-Can we distinguish between a popular and scholarly antiquarian tradition?
-What kinds of motivations did people of various social strata have in seeking out antiquities? Where did they learn their ideas about antiquities? What skills did they bring to bear on their observations and studies?
-What kinds of records, if any, did Renaissance people make of their observations and studies of antiquities?
-What did it mean to urban dwellers to spend their entire lives surrounded by the material remnants of prior civilizations?

We hope to assemble an interdisciplinary group of scholars, and to this end we welcome submissions by specialists in history, art history, architecture, and all other fields of Renaissance studies.

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Please send the following to Hilary Barker (barkerhilaryd@gmail.com) and Lillian Datchev (led224@cornell.edu) by July 15, 2025:⬚
- full name, current affiliation, and email address.⬚
- paper title (15-word maximum)⬚
- paper abstract (200-word maximum)⬚
- resume (2 pages maximum)

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[2] "Slavery and Material Culture in Early Modern Maritime Asia"
From: Cynthia Kok
Date: June 18, 2025
Deadline: July 20, 2025

Empires are built on enslaved labor—the objects they left behind bear traces of that exploitation. Recent decades have seen renewed attention toward the intersection between enslaved peoples and the production of art and material culture, yet this scholarly focus has concentrated overwhelmingly on the transatlantic context. Less attention has been paid to the material histories of maritime Asia, particularly Southeast Asia, where large populations of enslaved peoples from diverse backgrounds sustained the commercial and cultural life of local communities and colonial port cities. In places like Manila, Batavia, Cape Town, Goa, and Colombo, enslaved peoples created distinctive material cultures that reflected both colonial ambitions and the persistence of pre-existing cultural traditions.

This panel seeks to redress this imbalance by exploring the complex relationships between enslaved peoples and material culture in early modern maritime Asia (c. 1500–1800). We invite contributions that move beyond the commercial contexts of slavery to include the lived experiences, everyday practices, and cultural worlds that enslaved peoples created and inhabited. We ask: How might the material archive shed light on overlooked histories of enslaved agency and resistance? How can craft production and making practices offer new perspectives on the complexities of slavery in sites-of-encounter? What can the persistence of indigenous techniques and aesthetics within colonial production reveal about cultural survival and adaptation under bondage?

Interested participants are invited to submit a titled abstract (max 250 words) and a 2-page CV to joyce.zhou@yale.edu and cynthia.kok@aya.yale.edu by July 20, 2025.

We welcome papers on topics that might include, but are not limited to:
- Women's labor and gendered objects
- Material culture of resistance and subversion
- Hybrid aesthetics and syncretic craft traditions
- Comparative studies across different sites
- Indigenous and non-western frameworks for material culture studies

Reference:
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