

6th Swiss Congress for Art History (Geneva, 7–9 Sep 26)

University of Geneva, Uni Mail, Sep 7–09, 2026

Deadline: Sep 12, 2025

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The 6th Swiss Congress for Art History will be held in Geneva from 7 to 9 September 2026. Organized jointly by the Swiss Association of Art Historians (VKKS | ASHHA | ASSSA) and the Division of Art History at the University of Geneva, the congress is aimed at art historians, art researchers and experts from all fields (including both practice and theory), and all institutions. You are invited to submit proposals for 20-minute papers within one of the ten sessions. Acceptance decisions will be made by the conveners of the individual sessions, supervised by the advisory board of the 6th Swiss Congress for Art History.

We welcome contributions in German, English, French, and Italian, in the hope of assembling multilingual sessions that reflect the topical and institutional diversity of the field and foster young academics.

Please send an abstract (1 page, max. 3000 characters) and a short curriculum vitae including institutional affiliation and contact details to the relevant session conveners by 12 September 2025. Please also CC the Congress Bureau of the 6th Swiss Congress for Art History in Geneva at vkks2026@unige.ch. All speakers will receive a contribution to their travel and accommodation costs and will be exempt from the congress registration fee.

SESSIONS AT THE CONGRESS

1) Current Methods in Art History Research and Their Renewal

Articulations – Association suisse pour la relève en histoire de l'art

On the 6th Swiss Congress for Art History, Articulations – Swiss Association for Young Art Historians, is offering a section dedicated to current research methods and methodological renewal in the discipline.

Articulations' mission is to serve as a bridge between the academic and professional spheres. This section therefore aims to create a space for critical dialogue, shared reflection, and interdisciplinary encounters through the approaches adopted by young art history researchers.

In recent decades, our discipline has undergone profound changes, both in terms of its subjects of study and its analytical tools. Contemporary research in art history is permeated by questions of gender, race, and alterity, as well as political, social, and economic considerations. These perspectives broaden the field of art history while questioning its very foundations.

Methodologically, researchers must now contend with a profusion of images and new technological, visual and textual regimes. The changes brought about by the digital age, artificial intelligence, massive databases and immersive media are transforming research practices, as well as the ways in which knowledge is viewed, interpreted and disseminated. Interdisciplinarity, by assert-

ing itself, is blurring traditional boundaries and encouraging the emergence of new interpretations and new analytical crossovers.

We therefore wish to place research at the heart of our section and focus on the diversity of approaches and subjects studied by the next generation of researchers: all periods, all media and all methodologies are welcome. Our panel does not aim to present homogeneous contributions, either from a chronological or a thematic perspective. On the contrary, its aim is to capture the current concerns of researchers and how these new questions are contributing to the dialogue within the discipline.

To promote the next generation of researchers fairly, the selection of contributions will take into account the balance between Swiss linguistic regions, institutional diversity and gender parity.

2) Art History Within the Environmental Humanities: Exploring Liminal Spaces Between Land and Sea

Juliette Bessette, Desmond-Bryan Kraege, Maria Stavrinaki, Université de Lausanne

What can art history contribute to the field of environmental humanities? In other words, what specific insights do art historical methods offer into the past and present relationships between human beings and their environment?

Within the European academic context, environmental art history has been slowly emerging in recent years, striking a balance between the well-established fields of environmental history and literary ecocriticism. Yet the visual and spatial arts constitute one of the major nodal points in societies' relation to their environment, providing a privileged area of inquiry for these methods: art history can offer impactful understandings of these relationships, particularly when combined with the life and earth sciences.

This session aims to investigate potential theoretical frameworks for an environmental art history, examining the aforementioned questions through the case of land-sea interfaces, liminal areas that mediate the most significant environmental division on our planet, opposing liquid worlds to the dry land we inhabit. While these intermediate zones have rarely been conceptualized as a field of research within art history, artists – including architects and landscape designers – have frequently engaged with their extremely varied landscapes and ecosystems, which encompass cliffs, beaches, estuaries, lagoons, tidal marshes, intertidal zones, and islands. Besides representational issues (including art's interactions with scientific imagery and cartography) and artistic engagement with living organisms and ecosystems, this session is interested in human consciousness – and exertion – of change within the land-sea interface. Whether variations and displacements of the latter be natural in origin (erosion, volcanic activity, sedimentation – including the Neptunist theory that mountains were formed by the sea) or due to human intervention (constructions, integrations of the shoreline into designed landscapes, territorial planning including reclaimed land, art installations, or other forms of human impact), they indicate the full complexity of these spaces of constant change and precariousness.

Topics can cover any period from Early Modernity to the present, any geographical area, and any medium (including new technologies). We aim for an epistemological reflexivity on the field of art history and its positioning vis-à-vis environmental studies: how can art history take part in the latter, whether by integrating epistemologies from other disciplines to renew our own field or by making use of art history's own tools to develop novel approaches?

3) Towards a Critical and Participatory Museology: Challenges and Perspectives of Co-Curator-

ship

Claire Brizon, Musée cantonal d'archéologie et d'histoire, Lausanne / Université de Neuchâtel, CAS Recherche de provenance; Sara Petrella, Université de Fribourg, Département d'histoire de l'art et d'archéologie / DOCIP – Centre de documentation, de recherche et d'information des peuples autochtones, Genève; Mylène Steity, Université de Neuchâtel, Institut d'histoire de l'art et de muséologie / Fondation du Château de La Sarraz

Museums are places where historical and artistic narratives are negotiated and co-constructed, and they are not merely one-sided showcases of knowledge. In recent years, several exhibitions in Switzerland have adopted a participatory and collaborative approach, most notably in 2024-2025, when colonial history and museum collections were explored in Geneva, Lausanne, Neuchâtel and Zurich. This co-curatorial model, involving researchers, curators, artists and community representatives, marks a significant shift toward a participatory and decolonial museology. It reflects a broader transformation in the role of museums, which are increasingly becoming spaces for intercultural dialogue and co-construction of knowledge.

This model aligns with the new definitions of the museum as places “at the service of society” and “involving the participation of diverse communities” (ICOM, 2022). It forms part of the broader framework of participatory museology, which aims to include people from the relevant communities in every stage of exhibition design and production, along with associated cultural programming. In this context, the voice of the communities concerned is no longer confined to a consultative role but becomes a decision-making force in its own right. This concept of “museum-laboratory”, developed by Clémentine Deliss (2023) and others, challenges traditional methods of knowledge production and suggests a redistribution of roles between institutions and the public.

This session aims to facilitate reflection on the challenges, contributions, and prospects of co-curatorship in Switzerland and internationally by linking it to historical changes in museums, from the encyclopaedic museum to critical and participatory museology. While this approach is particularly pertinent to post-colonial discourse and the repatriation of artefacts, it also forms part of a broader trend in curatorial practices that challenges the authority of curators and the creation of exhibitions. By bringing together Swiss and international experiences, the session will contribute to the debate on the future of museums and their commitment to more inclusive cultural heritage representation.

4) Idioms of Rococo in Switzerland.

Maarten Delbeke, Nikos Magouliotis, and Noelle Paulson, ETH Zurich, Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture, SNSF Project “Swiss Rococo Cultures: Idioms of ornament and the architecture of East Switzerland.” (2025-2028)

The 18th century transformed Switzerland: proto-industrialization brought new material wealth to rural homes, while mercantile elites built mansions to fit increasingly cosmopolitan tastes. Simultaneously, confessionalization continued to alter the religious and architectural landscape. Switzerland was a territory divided by language, class and religion, yet visually unified through the broad adoption of Rococo ornament, from the facades of urban mansions to rural interiors, to decorations for Catholic and Protestant churches.

We argue that the rocaille's ubiquity in Swiss art and architecture should not be seen as the homogenizing effect of a cultural hegemony. Rather, it may be understood as a process where different groups adapted it to their circumstances and generated distinct decorative idioms, which could

serve antagonistic identities. There was not just one Swiss Rococo, but many.

The project "Swiss Rococo Cultures" examines this hypothesis by focusing on East Switzerland, but we are interested in mapping parallel cases throughout the country. We welcome papers that deal with any of the following questions:

- Which agents facilitated Rococo's dissemination? How did the idiom transform through different artistic media and scales, from miniatures to buildings?
- How could Rococo and its iconographies adapt to different social spheres? How was this ornamental repertoire applied to Catholic and Protestant churches?
- How did the Rococo relate to the emerging spirit of Swiss patriotism and nationalism at the time of the Helvetic Society?
- When did the Rococo end? Can its continued use in folk art into the 19th century help us revise canonical chronologies? What do current practices of collection, display and preservation tell us about Rococo's long history?
- How does the specific case of the Rococo in Switzerland challenge notions of the idiom? How might we consider the Rococo to be a visual repertoire that crosses boundaries of geography, language, confession and class?

5) Art Trade in Switzerland, 1960 to Today

Roger Fayet, Schweizerisches Institut für Kunstwissenschaft (SIK-ISEA) Zürich/Lausanne; Bärbel Küster, Universität Zürich, Lehrstuhl Moderne und zeitgenössische Kunst; Tabea Schindler, SIK-ISEA, Zürich, Abteilung Kunstgeschichte

In 2024, Switzerland ranked fifth in terms of financial market share in the global art trade, behind the USA, China, the UK and France. Nevertheless, the more recent history of the Swiss art market has been comparatively little researched. This session therefore focuses on developments between around 1960 and the present day. This period was characterized by an upswing in the auction business, the emergence of numerous program galleries, the growing importance of art fairs, and the impact of databases and online trading.

The auction business experienced a notable growth from the 1960s onwards, reflected in the establishment of auction houses such as Koller in Zurich and Dobiaschofsky in Bern, as well as the arrival of major players like Christie's and Sotheby's in Geneva and Zurich during the 1960s and 1970s. During the same period, galleries emerged in the centers of Geneva, Bern, Basel and Zurich, as well as in smaller locations. These galleries were characterized by a specific program and became important mediators for contemporary art. Additionally, the Swiss Art and Antiques Fair, later relocated to Basel and then Zurich, premiered in Berne in 1959. In 1970, Art Basel was established as a fair for modern and contemporary art, and it now dominates this field internationally. Until the 1980s, so-called ethnographic art also formed a significant part of the art trade, often via individuals active in the modern art sector. Recent developments have been characterized by the introduction of price databases, various forms of online trading, and blockchain and NFT technology.

We invite researchers from various disciplines to present new findings, reflect on the future of the Swiss art market and provide insight into current projects in this field.

6) "Real Fictions": Contemporary Art in Digital Culture

Julia Gelshorn, Université de Fribourg; André Rottmann, Europa-Universität Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder)

If art since the 1960s can be defined as fraying the boundaries between traditional mediums and new technical media and as situating the aesthetic object in expanded spatial, social, political and discursive force fields, this turn toward the real and the factual hardly implies a rejection or negation of fiction and fabulation. Quite to the contrary, artistic practices of the recent past – from Conceptualism to “Post-Internet” – invariably implemented and conceived of moments and methods of fictionalization and “make-believe” (C. Lambert-Beatty) beyond the literal and evident. They thereby negotiated between existing realities and alternative worlds that would allow for experiences, sensations and reflections defying the strictures and doxa of the everyday. As Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers quipped in 1968, “Fiction enables us to grasp reality and at the same time that which is veiled by reality.”

Considering this idea of an intangible, alienated reality accessible only in a dialectic “realism” including fiction and fabulation, current developments in digital technology seem to further complicate the challenge of grasping the real: Most notably, the protocols and prompts of “Artificial Intelligence” mark the advent of an age of representation and “immediacy” (A. Kornbluh) in which indices of the real are subjected to the de-realizing simulations and (para-)fictions of “machine learning”. Those proliferating networks of human and non-human actors and the images and imaginaries they produce have literally and figuratively informed a wide range of artistic practices in the last decade (by P. Huyghe,

H. Steyerl, A. Villar Rojas, A. Kurant and I. Cheng, for instance) – works which might be described as engaging with “realisms of relation” (Erich Hörl). If our reality is indeed itself increasingly structured through processes of simulation and fictionalization, it seems all the more urgent to inquire into the critical, epistemic and mnemonic capacities of contemporary art’s “real fictions”. We invite papers investigating the history and theory of artistic strategies since the 1960s from a global perspective.

7) The Archive as Imperative: Methods and Approaches in the History of Art and Architecture in the Middle East and North Africa

Laura Hindelang, Universität Bern, Institut für Kunstgeschichte; Silvia Naef (Prof. Dr. em.), Université de Genève / Universität Basel; Nadia Radwan, HEAD – Genève, Département des Arts visuels

In the context of studying art, architecture, and its practices in the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa), issues related to archives are multiple. Often dispersed, fragile, mobile, destroyed, or censored, the accessibility of archives defines the contours of research and the writing of fragmented histories of art and architecture. This reality is further exacerbated today by conflicts and wars affecting the region, thus highlighting the urgency of preserving multiple narratives through research as well as artistic and spatial practices.

Moreover, for many artists and architects from the MENA region – marked by intense transnational and international circulations – the archive operates on multiple levels; it is present as material, curatorial approach, practice, discourse, and method.

In his recent exhibition at Kunsthaus Zürich, the artist Walid Raad offered a performance-visit inviting the public to explore the multiple dimensions of the histories of art. He had previously approached the question of the archive through the Atlas Group (1989-2004), a fictional research center preserving and interrogating both real and imagined archives. Similarly, the exhibition “Performing Colonial Toxicity” by Samia Henni at ETH Zürich presented an installation highlighting archives that interrogate the mechanisms of spatialization and circulation of censored information. By placing archives and their performative activation at the center of their approach, artists,

architects, and researchers reveal unexpected connections that challenge and transform established historical narratives.

This session examines the role and potential of archives in the study of art and architectural histories of the MENA region, as well as in contemporary practices by inviting contributions addressing the following questions:

- How can we map these complex and fragmented archival trajectories?
- What methodologies allow for understanding the narratives crystallized within them?
- How can the cross-analysis of archives from heterogeneous networks enrich a critical rereading of artworks, architectural projects, their actors, and networks?
- How can these archives be conceived as a critical concept for artistic and architectural approaches in the MENA region?
- What potentials do archives reveal within the context of the exhibition space?

We strongly encourage contributions focusing on specific case studies or offering theoretical reflections on methodologies in relation to these questions. Special attention will be given to decolonial approaches that provide original perspectives on circulations within the MENA region and dynamics of appropriation, as well as issues related to collections and archive accessibility.

This session is organized by Manazir platform, an inter-institutional network dedicated to visual arts, architecture, and heritage of the MENA region (www.manazir.art).

8) Political Fabrics: Craft, Gender, and Contested Narratives

Chonja Lee, Université de Neuchâtel, Institut d'histoire de l'art et de muséologie; Corinne Mühlemann, Universität Bern, Institut für Kunstgeschichte

Textile objects have long served as vehicles of political messages – whether as diplomatic gifts or goods traded from the Islamic world and Asia, later tailored into garments for the elite and clergy, as large-scale tapestries, flags, and banners, or as subversive protest textiles such as quilts or tatreez. Recent artistic approaches have contextualized the commemorative functions of fabrics and addressed identity politics through their materiality. This session explores how the materiality, techniques, and motifs of textiles contribute to the construction of political, social, and cultural narratives in both European and non-European contexts, particularly that of the Islamic world from the Middle Ages to the present.

Of particular relevance is the close relationship between textile arts and gender politics. Since antiquity, textile work has been associated with the female sphere, reinforcing distinctions between “feminine” craft and “masculine” artistic production. At the same time, textile techniques have created spaces for subversive practices that challenge and renegotiate social and political hierarchies. This gendered dynamic is also reflected in the history of textile studies itself: unlike many other fields of art history, textile research has been largely shaped by women, primarily through textile conservators and curators in museum contexts rather than within universities. This raises broader questions about disciplinary hierarchies and the visibility of textiles in art historical discourses.

This session invites scholars to examine textile objects and the historiography of textile studies as politically charged agents, focusing on their materiality, production, and use, as well as their integration into social, economic, and gendered networks. Adopting a transcultural perspective, this session aims to explore the interplay between artistic creation, political intent, and the societal reception of textile artifacts, thus encouraging the development of alternative narratives.

9) Troubling Desires: Queer and Trans Approaches to Medieval Art

Clovis Maillet, HEAD – Genève; Nancy Thebaut, University of Oxford; Pauline Guex, Centre Maurice Chalmieu en sciences des sexualités de l'Université de Genève (CMCSS)

Over the past several years, gender and sexuality studies have been casting new light on the history of medieval art. Madeline Caviness has shown that medieval theories of gender and sexuality have the potential to reconfigure the modern linking of (binary) gender and (homo/hetero) sexuality, paving the way for a recognition of the fluidity of identities across time. Robert Mills has identified and studied a visual culture of the medieval concept of “sodomy” (Mills 2015). Roland Betancourt has considered the ways that several Byzantine manuscripts demand an intersectional approach through the lens of trans and queer theories (Betancourt 2020). Leah DeVun has in turn analyzed images of animals that question the binarity of gender in medieval thought (DeVun 2020). Ostensibly well-known images have been enriched with new interpretations, and previously unpublished sources have been brought to light. In response to and as a continuation of this research, various exhibition projects on these topics and methods are emerging, including *Spectrum of Desire: Love, Sex, and Gender in the Middle Ages* (The Met Cloisters, October 2025 – March 2026).

This session aims to foster exchanges between those who work on gender and sexuality in the field of medieval art history. It is premised on the idea that the tools required to study premodern sexuality and gender in and as related to the visual arts are not necessarily those that have been so central to modern and contemporary histories of these topics. As such, this session aims to present a series of case studies that offer new approaches to works of art and explore medieval configurations of sexuality and gender that are distinct from and complementary to contemporary studies in this field.

10) Class Relations and Materiality in Art

Charlotte Matter, Universität Basel, Kunsthistorisches Seminar

While art history has increasingly reconsidered its methods from the perspectives of gender, sexuality and race, renewed interest in the significance of class and classism has only recently emerged. Drawing on the work of scholars such as Julia Bryan-Wilson, Danielle Child, Angela Dimitrakaki, Jacopo Galimberti, María Inés Plaza Lazo and Janet Zandy concerning the working class in art, this session examines how class can serve as a lens and methodological framework for analysing art. The focus of this session is on materiality.

How does the availability – or inaccessibility – of certain materials, resources, and technologies affect artistic production? In what ways have art history and art criticism considered materials in relation to class, distinction and value? To what extent have they constructed or revised material hierarchies? How have artists expressed their social origins and class solidarity through their choice of materials? In turn, how have others appropriated, and sometimes exploited, a working-class identity? How can we rethink “poor”, perishable and reused materials in art from the perspective of class? Which materials are considered “low”, and to what extent do classist prejudices intersect with questions of gender, sexuality, race and disability?

This session will address these and other questions. A closer look at materiality will provide new avenues for exploring art from a class perspective. In doing so, the section aims to address the intersection of class with other forms of structural discrimination. Nicole Seymour’s reflections on the material and symbolic significance of glitter for marginalised communities, for example,

provide a useful point of reference for such intersectional thinking. On the other hand, contributions that examine materiality in relation to privilege and wealth, and consider class not solely as an issue of the working class, are equally welcome.

The session aims to encourage consideration of how art materials comment on, and sometimes reproduce, social inequality and the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion.

11) Postmodern Landscape Architecture. Current Fields of Research in Garden History and Garden Conservation

Johannes Stoffler, ICOMOS, Arbeitsgruppe Gartendenkmalpflege; Dunja Richter, Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Gartenkultur (SGGK); Dave Lüthi, Université de Lausanne, Section d'histoire de l'art

As part of the 6th Swiss Congress for Art History, we invite you to submit proposals for papers for the session "Postmodern Landscape Architecture. Current Fields of Research in Garden History and Garden Conservation".

Which historical artefacts are considered significant – this is a discussion that society must continually revisit. A discourse on the elusive and "unfinished" era of postmodernism is long overdue in landscape architecture. The works perceived today were created between the 1970s and the 1990s. They are characterized by the environmental movement and the transformation processes of post-industrial landscapes. Their themes range from social participation to a focus on history and collage.

Due in particular to the growing pressure on land use in urban areas, the built evidence of postmodernism, its green spaces, gardens and squares, is in danger of disappearing before its heritage value is even recognized. The session aims to contribute to a discourse on this young heritage. The goal is to exchange research findings and experiences on garden history and garden monument preservation. This discourse is particularly important with regard to possible additions to monument inventories. The session will address the following topics:

1. Garden History

Characteristics, meanings and contexts of postmodern gardens: typological and stylistic features, discourses of the time, international exchange, plant assortment, interaction between professions, social conditions.

2. Garden Conservation

Experiences and strategies in dealing with the garden heritage of postmodernism: inventorying, preservation worthiness vs. preservation feasibility, invasive neophytes of postmodernism, plant use and construction techniques, changes in use.

The aim of the session is to launch a broad discussion on the research and handling of postmodern landscape architecture. We welcome contributions from the fields of art history, landscape architecture, architecture, urban planning and monument preservation.

We look forward to receiving your inspiring proposal!

Congress Direction: Régine Bonnefoit (VKKS / Université de Neuchâtel); Frédéric Elsig, Marie Theres Stauffer, and Giovanna Zapperi (Université de Genève).

Congress Organization: The scientific assistants of the Division of Art History at the University of Geneva; Catherine Nuber (VKKS).

Scientific Advisory Board: Jan Behrendt, Marie-Eve Celio-Scheurer, and Milan Garcin (Musée d'art

et d'histoire, Genève); Régine Bonnefoit (VKKS / Université de Neuchâtel); Lionel Bovier (Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Genève); Babina Chaillot-Calame (Service cantonal des monuments historiques du Canton de Genève); Frédéric Elsig, Marie Theres Stauffer, and Giovanna Zapperi (Université de Genève); Joanna Haefeli and Lada Umstätter (HEAD – Genève, Haute école d'art et de design); Urte Krass (Universität Bern).

Please find the detailed Call for Papers at:

<https://www.vkks.ch/de/aktivitaeten/kongresse>

Reference:

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