

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

San Francisco, Feb 19–21, 2026

ArtHist.net Redaktion

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[1] Living In and Off Others: Parasitic and Entangled Lives in Art, Nature, and Society

From: David Bardeen

Date: 16 Jul 25

Co-organized by Javier Patiño Loira (UCLA) and David Bardeen (LACMA)

Early modern scholars and creators grappled with ambivalent attitudes toward the notion that beings are frequently inhabited by other beings that live in and off them. Traditional, common-sense notions of pain and disease were called into question when, in 1547, physician Girolamo Gabuccini posited that intestinal worms were not merely adversaries but rather the body's means of cleaning its insides. It might have stunned many a farmer and fruit vendor to learn in 1668 that naturalist Francesco Redi believed that the plum's primary purpose was to serve as a nest for the worm that mercilessly consumes and destroys it. Parasitism challenged, and even inverted, the purposefulness that ostensibly structured the world. Yet relations of parasitism informed nearly all forms of artistic and artisanal creation, from cheese-making to wood inlay, and the notion's pervasive use in discourses concerned with ethnic, class, and religious minorities and social interactions more generally could not have been coincidental. Indeed, the idea of living in and off others served to interrogate and challenge traditional views of order in nature and society, reflecting a broader consciousness of the complex patterns of interdependence that underlie both human and non-human existence.

This panel aims to cover a broad, interdisciplinary range of subjects. Contributions are welcome from any fields, including but not limited to art history, literature, history, and history of science; papers may address topics concerning any geographical, linguistic, and cultural area between 1300 and 1700.

Please send your paper proposals to Javier Patiño Loira, UCLA ([jpatinoloira@ucla.edu](mailto:jpatinoloira@ucla.edu)) and David Bardeen, LACMA ([dbardeen@lacma.org](mailto:dbardeen@lacma.org)) by August 4, 2025. Decisions will be notified by August 8, 2025.

Your submission must contain the following:

- paper title (15-word maximum)
- paper abstract (200-word maximum)
- primary discipline
- brief CV
- PhD or other terminal degree completion year (past or expected)
- full name, current affiliation, and email address

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[2] Images in and of Dante's Commedia

From: Rebecca Bowen

Date: 16 Jul 25

Illustrated from its earliest circulation, Dante's 'Commedia' has been a site of inspiration for visual traditions spanning centuries and media. As well as catalysing an array of pictorial responses (from complete narrative cycles to depictions of single characters and canti) the poem itself engages with multiple theories of images: ekphrastic descriptions and dream sequences take place alongside discussions of the science of optics and sight, while explorations of the semiotic value of script endow the very letters on the page with an iconic value that pushes the boundary between visual and verbal communication.

Seeking to explore these pictorial and theoretical traditions in more detail, this panel welcomes papers on topics including, but not limited to:

- Image theories in and around Dante's works
- Text-image relations in illuminations of the 'Commedia', including entanglements between illumination cycles and textual commentaries
- The materiality of specific visual responses to the text (e.g. manuscript illumination, engraving, sculpture, wall painting, etc.)
- The social and historical conditions surrounding particular visualisations of Dante's poem, including the impact of print culture on representations of the poem
- Critical perspectives on the study of text-image relations in Dante and the fourteenth-century

This panel is supported by 'Dante Depicted: A Commentary on Image, Text, and Exegesis Around the "Commedia"', a digital initiative of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz—Max-Planck-Institut. Accepted speakers may be invited to contribute to this digital publication. Proposals are welcomed until 10 August 2025 from researchers working in Art History as well as Italian Studies. Interdisciplinary perspectives are encouraged.

Please submit the following information to [rbowen2@nd.edu](mailto:rbowen2@nd.edu) or [rebecca.bowen@khi.fi.it](mailto:rebecca.bowen@khi.fi.it):

- a paper title (max 15 words)
- paper abstract (max 200 words)
- resume with current affiliation (max 2 pages)
- PhD or other terminal degree completion year (past or expected)

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[3] Environment and Artmaking in Early Modernity

From: Elizabeth Rice Mattison

Date: 15 Jul 25

How did environmental processes affect the production, display, and care of works of art and architecture in the early modern period? This panel brings together 20-minute papers to examine how forces of nature altered, augmented, and even destroyed artworks from the fifteenth through the seventeenth century.

Artists and architects could take advantage of environmental effects in their working practice, whether harnessing the heat of the sun to speed the drying of a varnish or rays of light in the installation of a painting. Yet, nature could also lead to the loss of artworks, such as during an earthquake, flood, or landslide. Makers' experiences of their local ecosystems, as well as their imagination of foreign ones, could shape their choice of materials or subjects. This session aims to analyze the role of the environment in shaping the creation and reception of works of art.

Submissions are welcome from any range of geographies, media, or time periods. Possible topics may include, but are not limited to:

- the sourcing and stability of materials
- artists' and architects' understanding of climate and weather
- the representation of unusual natural phenomena
- the effects of natural disasters on art and architectural production
- and early modern practices of conservation and repair

Please submit the following to Elizabeth Rice Mattison ([elizabeth.r.mattison@dartmouth.edu](mailto:elizabeth.r.mattison@dartmouth.edu)), the RSA Discipline Representative for Art and Architecture by July 28:

- Title (15 words maximum)
- Abstract (200 words maximum)
- CV (2 pages maximum)

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[\[4\]](#) Roundtable: Rethinking Early Modernity in the Museum

From: Elizabeth Rice Mattison

Date: 15 Jul 25

While monographic exhibitions remain highlights of museum calendars, recent exhibitions of early modern art have also increasingly put objects in dialogue across geographies, social classes, and time periods.

New displays of works have focused on thematic installations, interdisciplinary collaborations, or previously overlooked artists. What does the future of exhibitions and collections installations of early modern art look like? How can curators, academics, and visitors shed new light on early modernity?

This roundtable brings together scholars and museum professionals to consider how the collecting and display of early modern art is changing in museum contexts. Further, this panel examines the contribution of museums to the field of early modern studies as a whole. Each participant in this roundtable will briefly highlight a forthcoming or recent exhibition, followed by a larger discussion about the future possibilities in the museum field. In particular, roundtable panelists will address critical issues, including but not limited to: the museum as site for collaborative research; the potentials and limitations of exhibitions and permanent collection displays; and the future of acquisitions and collections development.

Please submit the following to Elizabeth Rice Mattison, the RSA Discipline Representative for Art and Architecture by July 28, 2025:

- Title (15 words maximum)
- Abstract (200 words maximum)

- CV (2 pages maximum)

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[5] The Animated Sculpture

From: Elizabeth Rice Mattison

Date: 15 Jul 25

Sculpture in the early modern period was not static: figures of Christ with moveable arms, manipulable narrative statuettes, automata for dining tables, all these genres and many others were intended to be moved, played with, and animated. These moving sculptures took part in both religious as well as secular life in the early modern period, collapsing and transgressing the boundaries between the human, the non-human, and sometimes the more-than-human. Through animation, sculpture gained new and distinctive authority with early modern audiences, which could be harnessed for political as well as religious ends. Movement was also essential to developing notions of artistic play and imagination. Yet, amid religious conflict, such animation also made sculpture a target for iconoclasm. This panel aims to bring together papers that consider the various functions and perceptions of animated sculptures from the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries.

Papers that consider animation in sculpture from any geography or time period are welcome. Possible topics include but are not limited to:

- The mechanics and science of animation
- Audience perceptions of automata and moveable sculptures
- The devotional role of sculptures
- Impermanent sculptures made for processions and theater performances
- Cultures of celebration and spectacle with moving sculptures
- Pre-histories of the robot

This session is organized by Adam Harris Levine ([adam.levine@ago.ca](mailto:adam.levine@ago.ca)) and Elizabeth Rice Mattison ([elizabeth.r.mattison@dartmouth.edu](mailto:elizabeth.r.mattison@dartmouth.edu)), RSA Discipline Representative for Art and Architecture. Please submit the following to the organizers by August 4:

- Title (15 words maximum)
- Abstract (200 words maximum)
- CV (2 pages maximum)

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[6] Cultural Reactions to Climate Change in the Early Modern World

From: Emily Teo

Date: 15 Jul 25

The Little Ice Age (c. 1300-1850) was a period of generally cooler climates in the Northern Hemisphere. In Europe, this was marked by harsh winters and wet summers from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. The Little Ice Age had far reaching consequences in the early modern world, resulting in widespread political, economic, and social change (Parker 2013, Brook 2023). Despite the importance of this historical climate event, relatively little attention has been paid to early modern cultural responses.

This paper panel brings together cultural history and environmental history to bring fresh insights into early modern descriptions, assessments, and representations of their climates. For example, English litera-

ture is littered with comments on the harshness and 'tyranny of cold' as well as a 'change of Elements'. Meanwhile, Dutch artists celebrated icescapes and winterscapes, reflecting a more positive reaction to the freezing conditions. In the eighteenth century, French writers called on the government to 'improve the climate'.

We welcome submissions from history, literature, art history, material culture and more. Interdisciplinary approaches and papers which explore global perspectives are particularly welcome. Possible contributions may include:

- descriptions of changing climate conditions
- artistic depictions of frigid conditions
- responses to the Little Ice Age and its effects in literary sources (e.g. travel accounts, diaries, poetry)
- impact of the Little Ice Age on early modern material culture
- assessments of climate deterioration
- theories and attitudes considering the causes of climate change (e.g. as divine act, unmasterable force or human governance)

Please submit your paper title (15 words maximum), abstract (200 words maximum), 2-page CV including affiliation and Ph.D. completion year in a single PDF file to [emily.teo@uni-erfurt.de](mailto:emily.teo@uni-erfurt.de) by July 30, 2025.

Accepted presenters will be notified by Aug 7, 2025.

Panel Organizers: Emily Teo (University of Erfurt), Benjamin Schmidt (University of Washington)

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#### [\[7\]](#) Mythology in court culture of the early modern period – new approaches

From: Barbara Hryszko

Date: 15 Jul 25

The syncretism between mythological themes and Christian culture was a defining feature of the Renaissance and played a significant role in shaping its foundations. This fusion involved the reception of pagan motifs within a Christian cultural framework, most notably, the incorporation of mythological themes into the art and symbolism of royal and aristocratic courts.

This session will focus on the causes and manifestations of classical tradition's integration into early modern European court culture. As mythological themes were adopted and adapted to new contexts, they were often modified and reinterpreted, typically in allegorical and moralising ways. In the visual representation of elites, the use of mythological costume allowed early modern patrons to embody ancient deities. Mythological figures also frequently served as allegories of moral virtues or vices, illustrating the struggle between good and evil and offering moral instruction. This phenomenon echoed the earliest attempt to moralise mythology in the poem *Ovide moralisé*, known from the 15th century onward as the Bible of the Poets. It was inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a work that captivated Renaissance artists and shaped the collective imagination. Mythological references provided a rich web of allusions and classical associations, allowing artists and patrons to enhance allegorical and symbolic resonance.

The session will aim to explore new contexts for the presence of mythology at European courts, particularly in relation to politics, ceremonial practice, propaganda, representation, education, moral instruction, entertainment, eroticism, and beyond. We will explore the presence of mythological motifs in painting, sculpture, the decorative arts, literature, theatre, opera, epistolography, customs, fashion, table culture, and more.

TO APPLY:

Please submit a proposal as a single Word document to Barbara Hryszko (barbara.hryszko@ignatianum.edu.pl) by August 4, 2025.

Your proposal should include

- the paper's title (15-word maximum)
- an abstract (200-word maximum)
- 1-page CV, including your current affiliation, email address, and Ph.D. or other terminal degree completion year (past or expected)

Please note that the RSA requires that those presenting papers at its conference must be members of the RSA.

Accepted presenters will be notified by August 8, 2025.

Reference:

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