

Beyond the Wall (Porto, 16–17 Apr 26)

Porto, Portugal, Apr 16–17, 2026

Deadline: Nov 14, 2025

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Beyond the Wall: Critical Perspectives on Digital Approaches to Modern Mural Heritage.

Murals created in Europe by public and private commission in the middle decades of the 20th century are today a form of heritage that presents distinct challenges. Their study, conservation and dissemination to broad audiences have long been undermined by various factors. Changes of ownership, tenancy and/or function of the buildings housing them have rendered many works inaccessible, neglected or vulnerable to destruction. Others, having survived to this day in publicly visible locations, often constitute instances of difficult heritage, their iconographies associated with ideological frameworks that can clash with contemporary values. Moreover, the intrinsically architectural nature of mural works has often precluded this form of art from exhibition circuits, further preventing public engagement with the mural through curatorial strategies. As a result of this combination of factors, the artistic and social significance that the modern mural had in its time remains little understood, while its continued presence within the built fabric of our towns and cities calls for a much needed discussion on its current societal value and preservation needs as heritage.

Digital and computational technologies have now opened up a field of possibilities for moving these artworks out of their relative obscurity and into the academic and public arena. Building on the momentum generated by the Art for the Community conference (Ljubljana 2024) for the study of modern mural works in Europe, and as part of the Mural in Motion exploratory project [2023.11110.PEX], this conference seeks to foster a critical reflection on the role of the digital to address these questions. What do digital approaches bring to the study, dissemination and conservation of the mural? What new issues do they raise in trying to address currently identified ones? What impact does digital mediation have on the way academia and society at large perceive and relate to this form of art and heritage?

Contributions on any subject dealing with these questions are encouraged from scholars, heritage professionals, curators, and practitioners, both from a theoretical and an applied perspective, including case studies based on current or planned research, curatorial or conservation initiatives involving murals. While the focus of the conference will be the mural in 20th-century Europe, theme-relevant proposals are equally welcome on this form of art from any chronology and geo-cultural context, as well as on other forms of art and heritage presenting similar issues.

Interested participants are invited to submit a 300-word abstract for a 20-minute presentation, together with a 150-word bio note, to muralinmotion@fcsh.unl.pt by 14 November 2025. The Sci-

entific Committee will review the proposals and communicate results by 12 December 2025.

The two-day event (16-17 April 2026) will be held at FBAUP, Faculdade de Belas Artes da Universidade do Porto (Porto University School of Fine Arts). Participants will be warmly invited to attend either of two guided tours of the Mural in Motion project exhibition on show at the conference venue, on Wednesday 15 April (17h) or Saturday 18 April (10h). Coffee breaks and a light lunch will be provided on both conference days.

This conference is organised as part of the exploratory research project Mural in Motion - Bringing Modern Mural Heritage Back to Public Life: A Critical Approach to Computational and Digital Tools for Art Historical Curatorship (January 2025 to June 2026). The project is hosted at the Art History Institute, NOVA FCSH / IN2PAST, funded by Portuguese national funds through FCT – Foundation for Science and Technology, I.P., DOI <https://doi.org/10.54499/2023.11110.PEX>

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