

Performance and Contemporary Art History (Vienna, 11–13 Jun 26)

Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Jun 11–13, 2026

Deadline: Oct 29, 2025

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Performance and Contemporary Art History: Mapping a Critical Subject, Medium, and Method in a Transdisciplinary Field.

Art history has long maintained an ambivalent relationship with performance. As an ephemeral, body- and time-based practice—emerging in the late 1950s and including forms such as New Dance, Body and Action Art, Performance Art, participatory or activist performances—performance continues to elude its categorization. Thus, destabilizing art history's genealogies focused on objects and images, performance poses both a challenge and a potential for the discipline. The conference interrogates art history's position within the transdisciplinary field of performance, and how the study of performance can help the discipline to expand its established methods and canons.

Art historical scholarship exclusively focused on performance remains scarce, and discursive geopolitical asymmetries continue to shape the field. Foundational work—ranging from more linear historical accounts (RoseLee Goldberg) to theory-driven analyses (Amelia Jones) and culturally critical perspectives (Claire Bishop)—has been largely anchored to the anglophone context. These studies tend to focus on a relatively narrow selection of historical case studies, privileging artists' own accounts, high-profile figures, and institutionally validated practices. While such contributions remain important, it is crucial to continue expanding the field by incorporating more intersectionally and geographically diverse voices and case studies.

Contemporary performance's pronounced transdisciplinarity and circulation across disciplinary anchored institutions add further complexity to the performative expansion of art history. Performance studies, theater studies, and dance studies have developed distinct but also partly overlapping genealogies and methodologies, urging art history to define its own case studies and approaches to performance. Such responses, particularly in the European and German-speaking context, remain rare, with the exception of occasional monographs or journal special issues, such as *Texte zur Kunst* on performance's interdisciplinarity (no. 37, 2000) and on its relation to the economy (no. 110, 2018).

Building on such investigations, this conference calls for new approaches to studying and historicizing performance, both as a subject of inquiry and critical method. Situated within art history, it seeks to actively engage with—and encourage engagement from—other disciplines through theoretical and praxis-led research.

Taking place in Vienna, the conference aims to strengthen European performance scholarship while remaining open to contributions from other geographies and backgrounds.

We welcome contributions that critically reflect on their methodologies for studying performance in relation to the discipline of art history and its transdisciplinary field. We invite proposals that pair a methodological reflection with understudied and new subjects, particularly contemporary performance from the late 20th and 21st centuries, and respond to its increasing entanglement in neoliberal logics of reproduction and visibility, situated within the oft-cited multiple crises of the twenty-first century (political, economic, ecological, cultural, among others).

Further possible areas of focus include, but are not limited to:

- Infrastructural conditions of performance
- Institutional frames: inside, outside, in-between
- Questions of space, place, and site
- Questions of the use of the body and its techniques
- Intersectional questions of identity and belonging (class, ethnicity, gender, nationality, and age)
- Entanglements with digital culture and artificial intelligence
- Performance's political potential
- Performance's (presumed) subversiveness and radicality
- Reflections on source materials (e.g., live experience, oral history, mediatized performance, archival materials)
- Media specificity in a post-medium age
- Art-historical categorization and interdisciplinary approaches
- Performance as a broader cultural phenomenon

The conference is envisioned as a nucleus for a future publication and as the starting point for a performance-centered network. The program will include keynote lectures, a workshop, and a live performance.

Submission Guidelines:

Please send an abstract (max. 300 words) and a short bio (max. 150 words) to performanceandarthistory@gmail.com by October 29, 2025. Selected speakers will be notified by November 10, 2025. Papers may be submitted and presented in either German or English. Presentations will be 20 minutes, followed by a 10-minute Q&A session.

If funding is secured, travel expenses for participants may be partially covered.

Organizers:

JProf. Dr. Lisa Beißwanger, Assistant Professor for Art History and Theory at the University of Koblenz, Germany, Mail: beisswanger@uni-koblenz.de

Dr. Lisa Moravec, Senior postdoc, Institute for Art Theory and Cultural Studies, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Austria, Mail: l.moravec@akbild.ac.at

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