

Historical Distance Historicism and Anachronism (Florence/online, 6–7 Nov 25)

Nederlands Interuniversitair Kunsthistorisch Instituut (NIKI), Viale Torricelli 5,
Florence, Italy, Nov 6–07, 2025

www.niki-florence.org/in-person-online-conference-the-challenge-of-historical-distance-historicism-and-anachronism/?lang=en

Netherlands University Institute for Art History in Florence, Netherlands
Interuniversity Institute for Art History in Florence (NIKI)

The Challenge of Historical Distance Historicism and Anachronism in the Study of Art.

How can art historians explore, understand, or even ‘feel’ the material evidence of the past? How can we approach the problem of historical distance, of our anachronistic nostalgia and our intellectual desire for pre-modern periods and artefacts? Can we inhabit the time of past artworks, or do artworks constantly re-construct their own times? And what role do contemporary concerns play in our interpretations of the ancient, medieval, and early modern periods?

Numerous recent publications have explored the study of the past through different lenses. They have complicated the idea of ‘historical contexts’ by showing the ability of artworks to simultaneously refer to various time periods. They have also encouraged cross-temporal and sometimes ahistorical interpretations of premodern artefacts in the light of modern theories and concerns. This conference will bridge the ‘historicist’ and ‘anachronist’ camp in an attempt to theorise the thorny issue of time which sits at the core of both history and art history.

The conference is organised in celebration of the scholarship of Prof. Gervase Rosser and in honour of his retirement from the University of Oxford. One aspect of Rosser’s career that we particularly want to celebrate is his prominence as both historian and art historian, and his inspirational interrogation of both disciplines.

Speakers include: Armin Bergmeier (University of Leipzig); Saida Bondini (Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz); Donal Cooper (University of Cambridge); Heiko Droste (Stockholm University); Jas Elsner (University of Oxford); Michael Ann Holly (Clark Institute); Maria Loh (Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton); Keith Moxey (Barnard College); Susie Nash (The Courtauld Institute of Art); Caspar Pearson (The Warburg Institute); Hannah Skoda (University of Oxford); Nancy Thebaut (University of Oxford); Ben Thomas (Trinity College Dublin).

The conference is organised by Costanza Beltrami (Stockholm University), Lia Costiner (Utrecht University), Elena Lichmanova (University of Oxford/British Library) and Michael W. Kwakkelstein (NIKI/Utrecht University).

For online registration and further information please visit <https://www.niki-florence.org/in-person-online-conference-the-challenge-of-historical-distance-his>

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Conference Program

Thursday, 6 November

09:00 Coffee/Tea

09:30 Michael W. Kwakkelstein (NIKI / Utrecht University) – Director’s Welcome

09:45 Lia Costiner (Utrecht University) & Elena Lichmanova (University of Oxford & British Library)
– Introduction to the Conference

Session I – Theories of Time

Chair: Costanza Beltrami (Stockholm University)

10:00 Jas Elsner (University of Oxford) – Between Historicism and Anachronism: Reflections on an Inescapable Dialectic in Art History

10:30 Armin Bergmeier (University of Leipzig) – Anachronisms and Epistemological Critique: From Riegl to Critical Heritage Studies

11:00 Coffee/Tea

11:30 Keith Moxey (Barnard College) – Globalization’s Dilemma

12:00 Discussion

12:15 Lunch

Session II – Conversations across Time

Chair: Dennis Geronimus (New York University)

13:30 Michael Ann Holly (Clark Institute, Williamstown, Mass.) – Pause in Paint

14:00 Hannah Skoda (University of Oxford)

14:30 Caspar Pearson (The Warburg Institute, London) – Past and Present at the Sassetti Chapel: A Fusion of Horizons?

15:00 Discussion

15:15 Coffee/Tea

Session III – Spaces and Objects in Time

Chair: Michael W. Kwakkelstein (NIKI / Utrecht University)

15:45 Ben Thomas (Trinity College, Dublin) – Behind the Image: Time and the Sassetti Chapel in Santa Trinita, Florence

16:15 Susie Nash (The Courtauld Institute, London) – The Libretto of Louis of Anjou: Keeping Time

16:45 Donal Cooper (University of Cambridge) – “Vecchi e sproporzionati”: Dialectics of Time and Space in the Italian Renaissance Church Interior

17:15 Discussion

19:00 Conference Dinner

Friday, 7 November

08:45–09:00 Coffee/Tea

Session IV – Fractures and Continuities

Chair: Gerhard Wolf (Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz)

09:00 Maria Loh (Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton) – Cats and Dogs Living in Harmony: Early Modern Tales of War and Peace

09:30 Nancy Thebaut (University of Oxford) – A Spectrum of Desires: Looking Back at Sex and Gender in the Medieval Past from our Present Moment

10:00 Heike Droste (Stockholm University) – Triangulating Nostalgia: To Diagnose Ruptures in Historical Time

10:30 Discussion

10:45 Coffee/Tea

11:00 Excursion to San Miniato (led by Saida Bondini, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz)

13:30 Lunch

14:30 Final Discussion

15:45 Concluding Remarks

16:00 Reception

Reference:

CONF: Historical Distance Historicism and Anachronism (Florence/online, 6-7 Nov 25). In: ArtHist.net, Oct 4, 2025 (accessed Mar 10, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/50782>>.