

Lecture Series: Abstraction Today (Online, 21 Oct 25–27 Jan 26)

Online, Oct 21, 2025–Jan 27, 2026

www.medienwissenschaft.uni-bonn.de/lehrveranstaltungen/abstraction-today-1

Birgit Mersmann

International Lecture Series: "Abstraction Today. The Real and the Imaginary", organized by Svea Braeunert (Media Studies, University of Applied Sciences Potsdam & University of Bonn), Birgit Mersmann (Art History, University of Bonn) and Jens Schröter (Media Studies, University of Bonn).

With generous support from the Brandenburg Center for Media Studies (ZeM), the Gielen-Leyendecker-Foundation, and Studium Universale at University of Bonn.

With Presentations by Kim Albrecht, Crystal Campbell, Sabine Eckmann, Henning Engelke, David Getsy, Till Heilmann, Evan Hume, Raz Ion, Sven Lütticken, Birgit Schneider, Alberto Toscano, Isabel Wünsche.

From automated navigation to weather forecasts, data visualizations, and painting, abstraction has an undeniable presence in the contemporary world. Yet, it not only represents but also creates worlds. It is an operative concept that likewise possesses an imaginary thrust for perceiving things otherwise. As such, abstraction comes in many different forms: It is an aesthetic, a technology, an epistemology, and a practice. Therefore, it is also a political attitude, a mode of description, a tool of complexity reduction, and an instruction for intervention. Depending on its context and use, it can take on radically different connotations, ranging from dehumanizing to appealing, from affirmative to critical, from incorporated to autonomous.

Taking its cue from the different meanings and applications of abstraction, the international lecture series "Abstraction Today: The Real and the Imaginary" is designed as an interdisciplinary endeavor with a focus on visual media and digital culture. Most digital technologies (like networks, computer simulation or artificial intelligence) and correlated practices are closely connected to different forms of abstraction on different levels. To do justice to the complexity of the phenomenon, the series brings together a group of international scholars, artists, and curators who speak on abstraction today as it unfolds in fields such as art, photography, film, design, image science, visual culture studies, philosophy, and more. Grounding the inquiries into the contemporary conditions of abstraction are contributions focusing on its historical lineage, most importantly its emergence within the discourse of modernism to be understood in its global and postcolonial plurality.

This winter semester 2025/26, Tuesdays, 6:15 to 7:45pm (CET),

online via Zoom:
<https://uni-bonn.zoom.us/j/65632025609?pwd=gEKe7JJPN5Y6cLaCnO15B305rNFRnE.1>

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PROGRAM:

October 21, 2025

Raz Ion (DerAffe & Critical Thinking, Vienna): The Apophatic Real: The Multiverse Reasoning of Radical AI

October 28, 2025

David Getsy (Art History, University of Virginia): Unnatural Relations: Stories of Queer Abstraction in American Art

November 04, 2025

Evan Hume (Photography, Iowa State University): Abstraction and Redaction in Photographic Archives

November 11, 2025

Henning Engelke (Art History, University of Arts Linz): "Zones of Activity": Abstraction, Digital Culture, and Analog Experimental Film

November 18, 2025

Till A. Heilmann (Media Studies, Ruhr University Bochum): Sharpness Abstracted

November 25, 2025

Isabel Wünsche (Art History, Constructor University Bremen): Beyond Western Avant-garde Approaches: Abstraction in a Global Cross-Cultural Dialogue

December 2, 2025

Sabine Eckmann (Director and Chief Curator, Kemper Art Museum at Washington University in St. Louis): Abstraction, Sensation and the Digital

December 9, 2025

Sven Lütticken (Art History, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and Leiden University): Lethal Abstraction and Alter-Abstractions

December 16, 2025

Kim Albrecht (Information Design, Folkwang University Essen): Data Visualization as Abstract Realism

January 13, 2026

Birgit Schneider (Media Studies, University of Potsdam): Making Climate Data Graspable through Visualization and Sonification in Art and Science

January 20, 2026

Alberto Toscano (Sociology, Goldsmiths London): A Practice of Abstraction: Race in the Field of Vision

January 27, 2026:

Crystal Z. Campbell (Art, University of Buffalo): Abstraction, Pareidolia, and the Underloved

Reference:

ANN: Lecture Series: Abstraction Today (Online, 21 Oct 25-27 Jan 26). In: ArtHist.net, Oct 19, 2025
(accessed Nov 29, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/50934>>.