Graduate Student Art History Symposium 2026 (St. Louis, 13-14 Feb 26)

Washington University in St. Louis, St. Louis, MO, Feb 13–14, 2026
Deadline: Dec 8, 2025

Hannah Wier

"'Ghost Stories for Grown-Ups': Hauntings, Afterlives, and Reawakenings".

The Department of Art History and Archaeology at Washington University in St. Louis is seeking papers for its 2026 Graduate Student Art History Symposium (GSAHS). The theme of the symposium is "'Ghost Stories for Grown-Ups': Hauntings, Afterlives, and Reawakenings" and the event will be held in-person on our campus in St. Louis on February 13–14, 2026.
While working on the Mnemosyne Atlas (1925–1929), Aby Warburg characterized his art historical practice as a “ghost story for grown-ups.” As scholars, we are often all too familiar with recurring images, motifs, and ideas that persist in the canon or emerge from the archive as if of their own volition. Similarly, many communities have their own traditions and tales of spirits or spectral encounters that linger in visual culture. Many studies across the humanities have attended to the culture of the afterlife, both literally and figuratively. In his book Specters of Marx (1993), Jacques Derrida introduced the theoretical framework of “hauntology” to consider elements of the social and cultural past that endure and reappear in a manner of ghostliness. Furthermore, sociologist Avery Gordon contends that such hauntings are an index of “dispossession, exploitation, and repression” that reemerge in order to demand being addressed. This symposium seeks to lift the veil by critically engaging with hauntings, afterlives, and ghostliness as both cultural phenomena and a conceptual model for art historical inquiry.

We invite current and recent graduate students in art history, archaeology, visual culture and related disciplines to submit abstracts for this symposium. Submissions may explore aspects of this theme as manifested in any medium, historical period, cultural, and geographical context.
Keynote Speaker: Dr. Patrick R. Crowley, Associate Curator of European art at the Cantor Arts Center, Stanford University

We welcome potential topics from any time period/geographical area that contend with ghosts, phantoms, spirits, or hauntings, including but not limited to:
- Spirit photography
- Ghosts, spirits, and demons in historical folk and religious art
- Spectral images in theatre and cabaret performances
- Paranormal and horror cinema
- The afterlives of artworks, motifs, notable figures, or ideas
- The persistence and/or reemergence of repressed peoples, beliefs, and images
- Art made in the wake of war, genocide, or tragedy

- Mausoleums, tombs, memorials, or other elements of the built environment meant to connect the living with the dead
- The display of human remains, sacred relics, and objects that house spirits in museums, cultural institutions, and tourist attractions

To apply:
Submit a 350-word abstract and a CV in a single PDF file by Monday, December 8, 2025, to Jillian Lepek and Hannah Wier at gsahs@wustl.edu. Selected speakers will be notified by Friday, January 2. Paper presentations must not exceed 18 minutes in length and should be accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation. The symposium will be held entirely in-person at Washington University in St. Louis. Modest honoraria will be provided to student speakers to offset the cost of travel and accommodation.

Reference:
CFP: Graduate Student Art History Symposium 2026 (St. Louis, 13-14 Feb 26). In: ArtHist.net, Nov 6, 2025 (accessed Nov 10, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/51079>.