Towards a Blue Art History

UNIL, University of Lausanne

Juliette Bessette

Call for Contributions – "Towards a Blue Art History".

The visual arts hold a privileged position in exploring human connections to the ocean. Across history, they have expressed ocean emotions and ocean knowledge. In the modern and contemporary periods, they have been associated with its scientific, popular, poetic, mythical, and political approaches. Increasingly, visual studies scholars are surfacing the connections among human practice, the imagination, and the environment to reveal the power of the image, in all its forms, to probe and expand the human relationship with the seas.

The importance and critical role of visual studies within the field of blue humanities, or ocean humanities originated from the interdisciplinary symposium "A Blue Art History" (Marseille, France, 2024, organized by Juliette Bessette, with Margaret Cohen as keynote speaker).
Bringing together insights from ocean sciences and the humanities, as well as from art historians, artists, and museum professionals, it highlights key issues through which art has shaped conceptions of the ocean across different periods and contexts, as well as specific oceanic modes of understanding the world. These issues include the porous boundaries between artistic and scientific representations of the sea, the emotions and ethics of fishing, and the cultural significance of the marine environment and its biodiversity, whether shown in conventional art venues or visited in underwater installations.

"Towards a Blue Art History" is a scholarly platform bringing together contributions from current research on art and visual culture related to the ocean. Its aim is to foster the development of a Blue Art History: a historical approach to the arts grounded in the blue humanities and attentive to how artworks, across periods, articulate and shape human relationships with the sea.

The platform is curated by Juliette Bessette (Université de Lausanne) and Margaret Cohen (Stanford University) and is hosted by the Stanford Humanities Center on Arcade. A more detailed introductory text is available on the platform: https://shc.stanford.edu/arcade/colloquies/towards-blue-art-history

Proposals are welcome from all disciplines, provided they take the ocean as their subject and offer sustained and critical engagement with artworks or visual objects placed at the center of the argument; hence art historians are especially encouraged to contribute. All historical periods and a wide range of visual media are encouraged. There is no submission deadline. Contribution formats are open and can be defined in dialogue with the editors, ranging from written essays to short video capsules, interviews, or other alternative formats (which are especially encouraged), to be discussed collaboratively. Contributions must explicitely help expand and structure the

emerging field of Blue Art History, in line with the perspective outlined in the introductory text on the platform. They should therefore be conceived specifically for the platform.

To submit a contribution idea (no more than 500 words) outlining the topic, corpus, and approach, please write to: juliette.bessette@unil.ch

Reference:
CFP: Towards a Blue Art History. In: ArtHist.net, Dec 12, 2025 (accessed Nov 12, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/51304>.