Avant-garde Art out of the Borderlands (Vienna, 1-2 Oct 26)

Institute for Habsburg and Balkan Studies, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, Austria, Oct 1–02, 2026
Deadline: Feb 22, 2026

Ana-Maria Milcic

[ed. deadline extended]

"Sitting on the Fence: Avant-garde Art out of the Borderlands", Institute for Habsburg and Balkan Studies, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, October 1-2, 2026.

This symposium explores the relationship between avant-garde art and the notion of the borderland, focusing primarily on the period from the turn of the twentieth century to the Second World War, while also considering its continuation after 1945 in what is sometimes termed the neo-avant-garde. While the borderland is understood here in the geographical sense of a territory surrounding the line separating two countries, the symposium also welcomes proposals that approach the borderland as a more conceptual space: a dynamic, shifting, and negotiated zone between two self-differentiating entities, whether political, cultural, or ideological. Borderlands can thus serve as spaces of encounter, mixing, possibility, hybridity, and conflict, not only in terms of how communities and individuals relate to themselves and to one another, but also as a conceptual framework through which knowledge production and dialectical tensions may be examined.

The title, Sitting on the Fence, points directly to moments of artistic, discursive, or historiographical uncertainty, doubt, ambiguity, mixture, conflict, inconclusiveness, impasse, friction, and epistemic indeterminacy. The symposium seeks to explore the avant-garde in such moments, asking how art from borderlands either fails to register the complexity of these spaces or actively engages with their tensions. It examines how art from borderland contexts denies, overlooks, registers, responds to, manifests, navigates, expresses, embodies, illustrates, reveals, or indeed generates moments of indecisiveness, ambiguity, hybridity, fluidity, conflict, or friction, whether between communities, narratives, identities, or political imaginaries. The symposium therefore treats the failure of art to represent such phenomena as equally important to examine as its capacity to render them visible.

We welcome 300-word proposals for individual papers, accompanied by 150-word biographies.
In preparing your abstract, you might consider:

- how different methodological or theoretical frameworks (from decolonial studies and feminist theory to psychoanalysis, phenomenology, or network theory) can expand our understanding of borderlands;

- underrepresented or marginalised geographical regions, especially those removed from major metropolitan centres typically foregrounded in narratives of the avant-garde;
- the possibility of reframing modernity from peripheral, liminal, or otherwise bordered vantage points, and how such perspectives challenge centre-periphery hierarchies;
- the potential of borderlands to disrupt or consolidate the nation-state matrix as a referential point;
- the mobility of artists, objects, and ideas across contested or fluid borders, and the implications of such movement for cultural translation and artistic identity;
- the role of borderland archives, local institutions, or non-canonical actors in constructing alternative art-historical narratives or producing counter-modernities.

Please submit abstracts and biographies by February 8, 2026 to Ana-Maria.Milcic@oeaw.ac.at with "Sitting on the Fence" in the email subject line.

Reference:

CFP: Avant-garde Art out of the Borderlands (Vienna, 1-2 Oct 26). In: ArtHist.net, Dec 11, 2025 (accessed Nov 9, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/51323>.