

Aesthetics of Solace, Politics of Care (Florence, 11–12 Jun 26)

Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut, Jun 11–12, 2026

Deadline: Feb 28, 2026

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“The world will look different if we move care from its current peripheral location to a place near the center of human life.”

— Joan Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (1993).

Tronto’s claim speaks to care across its aesthetic, ethical, and political dimensions—the central concerns of this workshop. Taking her provocation as both a point of departure and, three decades after *Moral Boundaries*, a point of inflection, we ask how care has made the world “look” different. We aim to examine the deployment of care—often structured along gendered and racialized lines—in relation to enduring questions of aesthetic (self-)formation, as in ancient and medieval practices of *cura sui*, and in relation to perceptibility more broadly.

Solace, likewise, names an interiorized dimension of care and directs us toward care’s affective dimensions. It becomes a means of regulating grief, as in the production and circumscription of lament in classical antiquity and its echoes through early modernity and the present, invoked, for instance, in Helen Cammock’s *Che si può fare* (Whitechapel Gallery, 2019). As “techniques” and “aesthetics” of the self, care and solace alter subjectivities—one’s relation to oneself and to others. This relation becomes especially fraught when solace amounts, as in contexts of religious and colonial violence, to premature absolution.

As these examples show, both care and solace have always been imbricated within social and political forms of regulation, urging us to critically examine the mostly positive interpretations of these two highly charged categories. We might ask: To what extent have the aesthetics of solace and politics of care produced, instead, a depoliticization through care? Beyond its promissory potential, care must thus be approached with necessary ambivalence. Care may function as a mode of silencing or infantilization, as a turn toward the individual at the expense of the social, and as an instrument of propaganda.

These tensions prompt us to consider how care and solace have been made visible and contestable across time. How has the work of art created space for care’s representation and interrogation? How have individual forms of solace, including that of art’s production and reception, been deployed to political ends? When has care, in claiming new ethical potentials, sought to distance itself from earlier aesthetic norms? We also seek to consider the deployment and withdrawal of care under authoritarian or totalitarian conditions—and across institutional and spatial sett-

ings—that have sought to regulate or suppress it. When does care of oneself (re)emerge as a form of political dissidence?

We invite speakers to approach care as historically contingent and politically fraught, resisting purely affirmational or presentist accounts. Proposals may consider the visualization and theorization of care across time and place, with particular attention to the political and institutional forces that have shaped care's visibility and obscuration.

We welcome papers from art history, history, literature and philosophy, and related fields that shed light on the above-mentioned concepts and questions, or focus on single case studies.

Papers should not exceed 25 minutes and will be followed by a discussion.

Organized by Hana Gründler and Alejandro Nodarse Jammal; Research Group "Ethico-Aesthetics of the Visual".

A Transdisciplinary Workshop at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut.

Submission guidelines:

Please send title, abstract (max. 2000 characters) and a short bio summarized in one PDF-document to ResearchGroup-Gruendler@khi.fi.it by 28 February 2026.

Notifications of acceptance will be sent by the middle of March 2026.

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