Fluid Configurations (Kiel, 11–12 Nov 26)

Christian Albrecht University of Kiel, Institute of Art History, 11.–12.11.2026
Eingabeschluss : 01.04.2026

Caecilie Weissert, Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel

Conference: "Fluid Configurations: Port Cities in the Early Modern Period" at the Christian Albrecht University of Kiel, Institute of Art History, November 11-12, 2026.

Organised by: Prof. Dr. Caecilie Weissert (Kiel), Prof. Dr. Bart Ramakers (Groningen)
Funded by: Excellence Cluster ROOTS (Kiel University)

Fluid Configurations conceptualizes ports as aesthetic, material, and epistemic border spaces in which water and land, organization and disorganization, boundaries and their transgression converge in ever-changing constellations. The conference focuses on port cities in Northern Europe during the Early Modern period. It examines how art conveys boundaries in port cities, their configurations, as well as processes of transgression and disruption.

In the Early Modern period, ports appear as highly structured visual and material assemblages. In maps, city and harbor views, travel images, travel accounts, and texts, they are conceived as interfaces between land and sea. These representations configure the port city not merely as a functional site of transshipment, but as an ordering space of perception in which political power, economic interests, and ecological knowledge converge. Artistic and textual practices participate in the production of spatial order by stabilizing the relationship between land and water, framing it perspectively, and charging it with symbolic meaning.

When boundaries and configurations are called into question, they appear fluid. One mode of this fluidity is their crossing – their transgression. A perspective of transgression directs attention to ports as spaces in which orders, boundary demarcations, and attributions are continuously negotiated. As contact zones between land and sea, center and periphery, self and other, port spaces are always also sites of social, cultural, and epistemic transitions. Artistic practices thematize movements and permeabilities that elude spatial, legal, or symbolic boundaries, and present the port as a liminal space in which norms are displaced and meanings renegotiated.

Configurations are also set in motion by disruptive events. A perspective of disruption focuses on moments in which boundaries become visibly fragile or collapse. Storms, floods, and harbor fires mark situations in which technical, political, and aesthetic orders are suspended. Disruption not only renders destruction visible but also sharpens attention to the conditions, limits, and contingencies of order.

The conference proposes reading images and texts of ports not as representations of a pre-given space, but as active configurative practices through which space, medium, and order are brought

into being. In this sense, the port functions not as a motif, but as an operational space of visual and textual practices, in which modes of stabilization, transgression, and disruption are negotiated simultaneously. The focus thus shifts from iconographic meaning or topographical accuracy to the question of what artistic procedures accomplish when they render boundaries, their transgression, and their disruptions visible and open to negotiation at the same time.

Contributions are welcome that analyze harbor spaces in Northern Europe in the Early Modern period as fluid border zones and examine how artistic and textual practices produce, stabilize, or call into question spatial configurations, boundary formations, as well as their transgressions and disruptions. Particular emphasis is placed on papers that understand harbor images and texts as active aesthetic, material, and epistemic practices, and that explore how they render order, transition, and the fragility of boundaries simultaneously visible and negotiable.

Papers will be allocated 20 minutes and discussion for presentation. Work-in-progress contributions are welcome.

Submission:
Proposals are invited in the form of an abstract of no more than 200 words, to be submitted by April 1, 2026 to the conference organizers: Bart Ramakers (b.a.m.ramakers@rug.nl) and Caecilie Weissert (weissert@kunstgeschichte.uni-kiel.de).

Quellennachweis:
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