

Lecture Series: Theorising Materiality (Vienna, 11 Mar–17 Jun 26)

University Campus Vienna, Hall C1

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The Lecture Series: THEORISING MATERIALITY – MATERIALISING THEORY, takes place in C1 at University Campus Vienna, Wednesdays from March 11 to June 17, 2026.

Organised by Carolin Bohlmann (Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna), Pia Gottschaller (Courtauld Institute, University of London), Sandra Hindriks (University of Vienna).

Although Technical Art History (TAH) has existed as an established specialisation within art history since the 1970s, when it gained prominence as part of the New Art Histories that challenged dominant art historical narratives and methodologies, it is still often confused with technical studies, conservation science, visual and material culture. While Technical Art History may overlap and incorporate one or several aspects of these other specialisms, its unique opportunity lies in its interdisciplinary, transnational and inclusive approach. TAH fosters a holistic understanding of an artwork's existence as material object embodying an image with a physical history.

An art object's materiality is intricately tied to artistic intent, to concepts of creativity, and to larger historical-theoretical frameworks. In the last decade, important advances have been made in the realm of theorising materiality and overcoming the "hylomorphic model," with close visual examination of an artwork being the starting point for a technical-art historical study that extends to a contextual and theory-based interpretation of these material-based insights, thus transcending factual information-gathering from scientific analysis or visual examination methods. Materialising theory, on the other hand, has remained a somewhat elusive aim, the challenges and rewards of which we would like to place at the centre of manifold explorations in the summer semester of 2026.

The series will consist of 12 lectures delivered by practitioners who have either made significant contributions to Technical Art History or who work in areas of dialogic, relevant intersection, in particular art historians, curators, anthropologists and conservators. Special emphasis will be placed on the in-depth discussion of select art works, covering a broad range of time periods, geographic regions and materials/media.

Questions we hope to address are:

- How can dualistic conceptions of materiality be superseded?
- How can Technical Art History evolve further as field of research?
- How can theory and material/practice be further intertwined?
- What are the pre-conditions, limits and possibilities of a transdisciplinary approach?

- How can an engagement with material theory inform the work of academics and museum professionals alike?
- What new methodologies does TAH afford us, and why does it not have to begin or end with science?
- Which role do documentary sources found in archives and on the internet play in this type of research?

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PROGRAMME:

The lectures will take place on Wednesdays from 16:45 to 18:15 CET.

11.03.2026 – Ursula Ströbele (Hochschule für bildende Künste Braunschweig): "I like to work with pliable materials...". Female Sculptors in Studio Photographs

18.03.2026 – Henrike Haug (Universität Köln): „Ausbeute“ und „Bodenschatz“. Reflections on the Relation between Art, Nature, and Metals in Early Modern Mining Regions

15.04.2026 – Heike Eipeldauer (Mumok Wien): 'I am busy with materials': Material Precarity and Exuberance in the Work of Medardo Rosso

22.04.2026 – Andreas Huth (Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg): Special Offer. On the Flexibility of Clay in the Florentine Quattrocento

29.04.2026 – Karin Leonhard (Universität Konstanz): Smoke and Mirrors? The (in)visible Worlds of David Bailly

06.05.2026 – Ann-Sophie Lehmann (Universität Groningen): Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: A Material Theory for Art History

13.05.2026 – Maryan Ainsworth (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York): Mysteries and Revelations: Jan van Eyck's Crucifixion and Last Judgment

20.05.2026 – Hélia Marçal (University College London): Authenticity and Capital: Unveiling Material Entanglements in the Political Economy of the Modern Museum

27.05.2026 – Yorick Josua Berta (Freie Universität Berlin): Ideal Matter. Art, Bioplastics, and the Hope for Degradation

03.06.2026 – Ron Spronk (Queens University, Kingston):
Revealing Revisions: Mondrian's Transatlantic Paintings

10.06.2026 – Heike Schlie (IMAREAL – Universität Salzburg): "I don't know if I should say unicorn". Intermaterial Identities around 1500

17.06.2026 – Noémie Etienne (Universität Wien): Global Conservation: Histories and Theories

Reference:

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