

Paleoarthistory (Rome, 10 Dec 26)

Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute for Art History, Rome, Dec 10, 2026

Deadline: Mar 29, 2026

Tobias Teutenberg

Paleoarthistory: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Creative Co-Productions of Homo Sapiens and Neanderthals.

Recent archaeogenetic research has provided compelling evidence that interbreeding between Neanderthals (anatomically archaic humans) and Homo sapiens (anatomically modern humans) occurred between approximately 70,000 and 50,000 years ago. These models of Neanderthal hybridation, which foreground processes of genetic absorption, prompt questions concerning the social organization and cultural exchange of both human species in their shared habitats. The interdisciplinary workshop aims to integrate this debate into the art historical discourse by focusing on cave paintings, drawings, and mark making in other media and contexts, that may have emerged from this set of conditions.

To date, about seventy groups of Neanderthal engravings from more than twenty sites have been identified. Paleoanthropologists and prehistorians generally interpret them as form of “intentional” and “symbolic behavior.” At sites such as La Pasiega, paleo forensic analysis have made it possible to distinguish between Neanderthal and Homo sapiens hands. Depending on the proposed dating, this raises the possibility that earlier Neanderthal traces were further developed or overwritten by Homo sapiens – extending even to the radical hypothesis of creative co-production.

These questions concern the foundations of our understanding of images, art, and perception: How might Neanderthal markings have served as a point of departure for Homo sapiens' image production? Conversely, how would Neanderthals have interpreted Homo sapiens' paintings? Epistemologically, how can 21st-century observers understand what pre-human images meant to their creators without succumbing to pareidolia? And what further insights or theoretical speculations could we responsibly draw from the interplay between human and pre-human perception and representation?

This interdisciplinary workshop aims to address these and other thought-provoking questions, bringing together perspectives from neuroscience, computer-assisted image theory, evolutionary aesthetics, paleo forensics, paleogenetics, and cognitive archaeology. The focus is on how theories from art history and aesthetics, concerning concepts such as image, symbol, form, style and iconography, as well as the crucial problem of depictive marks and the distinction between naturalism and abstraction, can contribute to the analysis of the corresponding iconic forms of expression. In turn, the study of these hybrid, prehistoric images may offer new understandings to renew and enrich the methods of art history itself.

Submission:

Each paper should be approximately 25 minutes in length, and will be followed by a discussion. Please submit an abstract (up to 500 words) and a brief CV to both Valentina Bartalesi (Valentina.Bartalesi@biblhertz.it) and Tobias Teutenberg (Tobias.Teutenberg@biblhertz.it) by March 29. Acceptance notifications will be sent two weeks later.

The workshop will be held in person at Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute for Art History in Rome on December 10, 2026. We will cover travel expenses up to a certain amount and provide hotel accommodations. A streaming option will be available for remote viewing.

We intend to publish selected papers in a peer-reviewed, open-access volume. To this end, we ask that submissions feature original, unpublished material. Selected participants will be required to submit a written version of their paper approximately five weeks before the event.

Scientific Organization:

Valentina Bartalesi and Tobias Teutenberg (Biblioteca Hertziana). A cooperation between the Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute for Art History and the NOMIS project “Depicted Worlds: The Perceptual Power of Pictures”

Confirmed Speakers:

Michele Cometa (Università degli Studi di Palermo); Whitney Davis (University of California, Berkeley, and Distinguished Scientist and Scholar, NOMIS Foundation, Zürich); Jean Jaques Hublin (Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig); Lambros Malafouris (University of Oxford); Andra Meneganzin (KU Leuven) and Audrey Rieber (Université Jean-Moulin-Lyon-III).

Reference:

CFP: Paleohistory (Rome, 10 Dec 26). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 26, 2026 (accessed Apr 15, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/51848>>.