ArtHist.net

Cultural Complexity and Computational Approaches (Málaga, 30 Jun–2 Jul 26)

Jun 30–Jul 2, 2026
Deadline: Apr 26, 2026

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Cultural Complexity and Computational Approaches: Toward a Systemic and Critical Understanding of Cultural Ecosystems (Complexhibit2026).

Málaga (Spain), 30 June; 1-2 July 2026.
Organized by iArtHis_Lab (University of Málaga), within the framework of the Complexhibit Project, in collaboration with the Telefónica–UMA Chair.

Conference Theme

Complexity is a general property of cultural systems across historical periods. Cultural life has long unfolded through dense interdependencies among institutions and patronage regimes, media and material infrastructures, markets and circuits of exchange, publics and interpretive communities, and the norms and policies that govern cultural legitimacy. Across time—whether in early modern correspondence networks, nineteenth-century print cultures, or today's platform-mediated environments—these interacting forces constitute cultural ecosystems whose dynamics are non-linear, multi-scalar, and historically stratified. They generate emergent phenomena such as canon formation and marginalization, reputational cascades, diffusion and imitation, cycles of attention, unequal circulation, and durable asymmetries of access and preservation.

Over recent decades, the increasing data mediation of cultural activity and the rise of digital infrastructures have made some of these dynamics more visible, more rapid, and in certain domains more measurable—while also introducing new regimes of visibility, new feedback loops, and new forms of inequality. Contemporary technological developments—mass digitization, networked cultural infrastructures, machine-readable standards, and advances in AI and data science—reconfigure cultural ecosystems in ways that increase systemic complexity while simultaneously extending our capacity to render that complexity analytically tractable. They enable the formalization of cultural knowledge, the modeling of systemic dynamics, and the testing of claims against evidence at scales and resolutions that earlier scholarship could only approximate. This shift makes computational approaches methodologically salient not as a replacement for interpretation, but as a means to articulate interpretive arguments with explicit models, traceable assumptions, and empirical accountability.

Against this background, the conference advances a deliberately reflexive research problem:
What does it mean to study culture—rigorously and critically—when we conceptualize cultural

ecosystems as complex systems that can be formally represented, computationally modeled, and empirically evaluated?

A second, closely related question follows:
How can we develop computational forms of cultural inquiry that are simultaneously system-sensitive and historically grounded—capable of formal representation, modeling, and evaluation—without collapsing cultural interpretation into mere measurement?

The conference is anchored in the Complexhibit Project, which develops methods for the semantic integration of heterogeneous sources—such as catalogues, curatorial texts, reviews, institutional records, and digital traces—to enable enriched, comparative analysis of the exhibition domain across contexts and scales. Building on this framework, the conference welcomes contributions that extend complexity-informed perspectives to broader cultural ecosystems, including arts and heritage, cultural industries, archives and libraries, education, mediation, platform cultures, communities, and cultural policy.

The event also commemorates the tenth anniversary of eHAD 2016, the IV International Meeting of Researchers in Digital Art History (Málaga, 2016), broadening its legacy from Digital Art History to computational approaches centered on cultural complexity across historical periods.

Keynote Speakers
- Lynn Rother, Lichtenberg-Professor for Provenance Studies and founding director of the Provenance Lab, Leuphana University (Germany). Her research combines art history, museum practice, and data science to investigate provenance, restitution, and cultural infrastructures.

- Carlos Eduardo Maldonado, Professor of Complexity Science, Universidad El Bosque (Colombia). A leading figure in complexity studies in Latin America, his work addresses the theoretical and philosophical foundations of complexity science and the epistemology of complex systems.

Thematic Clusters (non-exhaustive)
I) Cultural Dynamics and Historical Change
This cluster welcomes research that conceptualizes culture as a system of interacting forces unfolding across multiple scales and historical horizons. We invite work on how cultural forms, reputations, institutions, and interpretive communities emerge, stabilize, and transform over time through circulation, conflict, selection, and accumulation. Relevant topics include dynamics of visibility and invisibility, canon formation and revision, diffusion and imitation, attention cycles, and structural inequalities in access and circulation. We are especially interested in approaches that preserve historical specificity while enabling comparative or long-range analysis—through temporal modeling, event-based perspectives, or other frameworks suited to path dependence, thresholds, and turning points.

II) Cultural Infrastructures, Knowledge, and Evidence
Culture becomes knowable through infrastructures of description and preservation: catalogues, archives, standards, classification regimes, and institutional policies. This cluster invites contributions that examine how such infrastructures shape cultural memory and legibility, including their epistemic and political consequences. We welcome work on formal representations of cultural knowledge and the challenges of integrating heterogeneous sources across institutions and time:

interoperability, conceptual modeling, data quality, and the management of uncertainty. We particularly value contributions that foreground evidence and traceability—provenance, versioning, missingness, and the limits of inference—so that computational claims can be evaluated as historically situated knowledge practices.

III) Cultural Discourse and Interpretation

Culture is also an ecosystem of discourse: criticism, catalogues, press, scholarship, correspondence, institutional writing, and platform-mediated conversation. This cluster invites research that investigates interpretation at scale—how meanings, valuations, and controversies circulate and become authoritative across genres, institutions, languages, and historical contexts. We welcome work that treats discourse not merely as "textual data," but as a site where cultural power, legitimacy, and epistemic authority are negotiated.

IV) Responsibility, Data Governance, and Sustainability

Computational cultural inquiry raises questions of responsibility that are inseparable from methodological rigor. This cluster foregrounds the governance conditions under which cultural data is produced, structured, maintained, and operationalized, including legal constraints, institutional adoption, and the political consequences of automation. We invite contributions that address rights and licensing, sustainability of infrastructures, and critical analyses of bias and epistemic inequality—especially how standards, datasets, and models may reproduce historical exclusions or generate new forms of invisibility.

Submission Types

- Paper Presentations (20 min): Extended abstract, 1,000–1,500 words (PDF), with title, author information, and clear research question.
- Panels / Roundtables (90 min): Rationale (250–400 words), 3–5 guiding questions, participant bios.
- Workshops (Day 1, morning, 2-3 hours): Objectives, intended audience, relevance to conference themes, format.

Important Dates

- Submission deadline: 26 April 2026 (23:59 CET)
- Notifications: 5 May 2026
- Conference: 30 June; 1-2 July 2026

General Information

- Submissions may address any historical period and any cultural domain (arts, heritage, cultural industries, archives, libraries, policy, platform cultures).
- Language: English or Spanish (working language: English).
- Registration fee (accepted contributions): €180.
- Proceedings: Book of abstracts; selected contributions invited to a special issue / edited volume.
- Submit proposals to: digitalarthistory@uma.es

Scientific Coordination

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Reference:

CFP: Cultural Complexity and Computational Approaches (Málaga, 30 Jun–2 Jul 26). In: ArtHist.net, Mar 29, 2026 (accessed May 28, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/52071>.