Summer School: A Place in Time (Lille, 6-8 Jul 26)

Lille, University and Palais des Beaux-Arts, Jul 6–08, 2026
Deadline: Apr 30, 2026

Léon Rochard

A Place in Time: A Summer School for the Study of Women and Temporalities in Early Modern Europe.

"I'm just a woman, loaded down with household cares; Yet I still love to read good books, though time's so scarce I seldom can indulge in such a luxury. A man is privileged here as I can never be. […] So while I sit and read, I also scale the fish and sew and mend our clothes while writing verse like this."

In an answer to an admirer of her work, Dutch writer Aurelia Zwartte (1682—after 1768) somewhat humorously suggested that her daily chores make her free time so scarce that she resorts to writing and mending clothes at the same time. Such explicit acknowledgement of the way gender affects one's experience of time is not novel in the early-modern period. As books of civility rose in popularity, women's time became increasingly codified by schedules that ruled their chores and moments of worship, and by theories and guidelines about each stage of their lives. Oftentimes, the aim was to keep them constantly busy to uphold the respectability of the household and avoid impure thoughts.
Simultaneously, alternative ways for women to spend their time were explored by male and female advocates alike in the context of a European querelle des femmes. As one of the central themes of the querelle, conversations around women's education raised the crucial question of how women should spend their time. Education treatises and European philosophy were sites of debate over how women's time should be divided among their chores, intellectual pursuits, and spiritual life. Widowhood was also a moment that, perhaps most of all, raised the question of how women with greater jurisdictional freedom could orient their lives and time while avoiding idleness. In short, women's time was scarcer than men's, as English writer Mary Astell aptly concluded: "we cannot […] suffer the least minute to escape us" (Astell 1697, p. 80).

This sense of urgency points to a differentiated experience of time depending on one's gender and class, but also to an awareness of this gender and social gap. And while they were especially numerous in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, women in power were equally conscious of their limited agency over their own time, as they were often under more scrutiny or placed in precarious political positions as regents or appointed governors, acting not only as temporary agents but also as intermediaries between a masculine power and the people they governed. Maria de' Medici suffered from this in exile, as she struggled to control her image and legacy through reminders of her ties to power, portraying herself as the regent of France, widow of a king and "mother of three crowns". In doing so, she presented herself as the link between past and future power,

emphasising her indispensable role by appropriating two symbolically powerful stages of a woman's life, motherhood and widowhood. Likewise, research has often underlined how crucial Habsburg women were in the family's strategies of political alliances as well as their awareness of their role in perpetuating its power and image. In Madrid, Queen Elisabeth of France's devotion to the Virgin echoed the rhythm of her own maternity to showcase her role in the perpetuation of the dynasty and her predecessor's legacy.

These considerations point to the potential of research where questions of gender, time, and power intersect, especially for the early modern period. While certain frameworks offer promising insights into a plurality of temporal experiences informed by one's social milieu, they often overlook gender as a determining factor. However, in the past few decades and with the centrality of time in queer studies, several contributions have centred the relationship between time and gender. Adaptations of these frameworks to case studies have proved particularly fruitful in demonstrating women's references to different temporalities to assert their legitimacy and power. Such an approach could reveal alternative ways of exercising power by intervening in time on a different level — waiting, temporising, retiring, etc, which would highlight manifestations of agency even in actions or situations that modern researchers may overlook.

The goal of this summer school, organised with the support of the Institut du Genre, the FNS/Sinergia project "Capturing the Present in Northwestern Europe (1348—1648)" and HARTIS (Université de Lille), partnered with the Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille, is to help doctoral students develop an interdisciplinary reflection on the intersection between gender and time in the early-modern period. Our approach combines the results of the project AGENART: "La agencia artística de las mujeres de la Casa de Austria, 1532—1700" with ongoing research within the project "Capturing the Present in Northwestern Europe (1348—1648)". With the help of invited keynote speakers, workshops around secondary literature, primary written and visual sources (notably from the Palais des Beaux-Arts's collections), and discussions around the candidates' research, we aim to foster interest in this framework and complexify approaches to gender studies and key themes such as the question of agency or the inscription of women in history. This summer school will be structured around three main themes:

Theme 1: rhythmic lives
This theme proposes a conceptualisation of time as a question of rhythm, which makes it possible to conceptualise differentiated experiences of time as defined individually and externally. How were biological rhythms conceptualised culturally? What other rhythms were imposed on women, and were they sites of negotiation? How were women's lives divided and conceptualised, and how did women personally engage with these abstract categories? What social factors weighed in on the definition of normative rhythms? How did women negotiate their own rhythms or suspension in normative rhythms? Crucial to this theme is questioning temporalities often conceptualised as a-historical, such as ageing or pregnancy, which in turn challenges bioessentialist views of women's lives.

Theme 2: thinking in the long term
This theme centres women's engagement with the sometimes distant past or future, and notably questions of heritage and legacy. How did women's strategies of self-imaging incorporate the past and the future? To what extent were they sensitive to their relationship to history, and how

did that play into the way they chose to spend their time? Were they aware of the precariousness of their power or situation, and did they look for other ways to make it last or build a legacy? What conflicts did they encounter in doing so, and did they have agency over their own image? Were there attempts at writing a history or anthology of important women, and if so, on what terms? What biases do primary sources present for us when reconstituting the lives or works of early--modern women?

Theme 3: time and power
This theme investigates the extent to which gender intervened in women's power over various temporalities. Did women's specific modes of accessing power engender different possibilities of negotiating with time? Were there cases in which gender did not matter? Were there cases of time-sensitive competition with men of similar power? Were political hierarchies reflected in differentiated experiences of time?

Organisation and Activities

Dates: Monday 6 to Wednesday 8 July 2026
Place: Université de Lille (Campus Pont-de-Bois, Villeneuve-d'Ascq) and Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille
Activities and outputs:
- Presentation (10 minutes) followed by a 20-minute discussion for each participant
- On-site discussions around objects in the Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille, notably in the graphic arts and numismatic collections, with a presentation of the collections by each curator
- Keynote presentations, notably by Dr Catherine Powell-Warren
- Reading workshop and methodological discussion
- Publication of each participant's bio and written presentation on the "Capturing the Present in Northwestern Europe (1348—1648)" project website.
Funding: lunch, coffee breaks, and dinners are covered by the organisers for all participants. We encourage participants who are not based in Lille to ask their institutions to cover transportation and accommodation.

How to apply

This summer school is open to both doctoral students and master's students who wish to pursue a PhD, specialising in the human sciences and the early modern period, with no requirements in terms of nationality or institution. Both English and French will be spoken.

Applications, in English or French, should be sent before 30 April 2026 to both Agathe Bonnin (bonninagathe@gmail.com) and Léon Rochard (leon.rochard@univ-lille.fr). They must contain the following, in PDF format:

- CV (maximum three pages)
- A description of the current research project, thesis, or dissertation (max. 3 500 characters) with an indication of the potential interest of this summer school to the project
- An abstract for a presentation connected to one or several of the three proposed themes (max. 3 500 characters). It can be a case study, a methodological interrogation, a paper project…

The selection committee will inform the candidates of their decision in early May 2026.

Reference:

ANN: Summer School: A Place in Time (Lille, 6-8 Jul 26). In: ArtHist.net, Apr 3, 2026 (accessed Nov 13, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/52153>.