

The Lives and Afterlives of Teaching Collections (Milan, 29–30 May 2026)

Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan, May 29–30, 2026

Nicoletta Leonardi, Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan

The Lives and Afterlives of Teaching Collections: Art Academies as Laboratories of Cultural Heritage

The international colloquium *The Lives and Afterlives of Teaching Collections: Art Academies as Laboratories of Cultural Heritage* brings together historians, conservators, and artists to reflect on the material, institutional, and intellectual legacies of academic teaching collections.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, European art academies assembled extensive holdings of paintings, sculptures, photographs, books, plaster casts, drawings, prints, and instruments of various kinds. Conceived to train artists and artisans, these materials formed complex pedagogical ecosystems in which making, copying, and observing were deeply intertwined. In many cases, such holdings were closely connected to, or even formed the nucleus of, newly founded museums of decorative and industrial arts, turning the academy itself into a laboratory where teaching, research, and exhibition converged.

Over the course of the twentieth century, however, many of these collections suffered neglect, dispersal, or even destruction, particularly following modernist and neo-avant-garde critiques of academic tradition. Once central pedagogical and research devices, and powerful instruments of cultural and ideological transmission, they gradually became marginal both within artistic practice and within art-historical scholarship.

The colloquium reconsiders academic teaching collections not as obsolete remnants, but as critical witnesses to the evolving relationships between pedagogy, heritage, and cultural identity. Established within the universalist paradigms of the Western canon, they now invite renewed interpretation through contemporary historiographic perspectives. Viewed in this light, they reveal complex material and epistemic histories shaped by fragmentation, displacement, reinterpretation, and institutional transformation.

Adopting a comparative and transnational perspective, the colloquium examines shared dynamics and local specificities across central European contexts, with particular attention to the gendered, colonial, and national frameworks that shaped the production, circulation, and interpretation of didactic models and copies. It also addresses the intertwined lives and afterlives of teaching materials, tracing their transformation from tools of artistic formation into cultural artefacts and heritage assets. At the same time, it considers how study collections illuminate broader questions of absence, power, and representation, while emerging fields of inquiry open new perspectives on these materials, situating them within contemporary cultural debates.

A central focus will be the historical moments through which these collections were produced, transformed, or damaged. Events, conservation histories, and institutional trajectories mark each collection as a distinct material sedimentation of time, while processes of loss and destabilisation provide a crucial interpretive lens through which their meanings and uses can be reconsidered.

By fostering dialogue among historians, conservators, and artists, *The Lives and Afterlives of Teaching Collections: Art Academies as Laboratories of Cultural Heritage* seeks to reactivate the legacy of art academies as living laboratories of knowledge and creativity. The colloquium will examine how these collections may be studied, preserved, and reimagined today—linking historical pedagogies with contemporary artistic practices while opening new perspectives for research, documentation, and critical reflection within higher arts education.

The Lives and Afterlives of Teaching Collections: Art Academies as Laboratories of Cultural Heritage is organized within the framework of the project *IartNET – International Platform for Artistic Research and Cultural Heritage at Italian Higher Arts Education Institutions*, funded by the European Union – NextGenerationEU and coordinated by Nicoletta Leonardi. The colloquium is organised by the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, in collaboration with Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London.

PROGRAMME

Friday, 29 May 2026, 10:00 – 18:20

10:00 – 10:15 | Introduction

Anna Mariani, Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera

10:15 – 11:00 | Opening remarks

Giovanna Cassese, Accademia di Belle Arti di Napoli / National Council for Higher Artistic and Musical Education

11:00 – 11:20 | Coffee break

11:20 – 12:20 | Teaching Collections as Epistemic Infrastructures: The IartNET Project

Nicoletta Leonardi, Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera

Response | Anne McCauley, Princeton University

12:20 – 12:40 | Q&A

12:40 – 14:00 | Lunch

14:00 – 15:00 | The copy of Michelangelo's Last Judgement (Paris, Ecole des Beaux-Arts), from Sigalon to the After Michelangelo exhibition: a laboratory for artistic teaching

Alice Thomine-Berrada, Beaux-Arts de Paris

Response | Ilaria Andreoli, INHA Paris

15:00 – 15:20 | Q&A

15:20 – 15:40 | Coffee Break

15:40 – 16:40 | Envisioning the Past from the Future. The Transhistorical Path and Curatorial Practice within the Vienna Academy's Collections

Sabine Folie, Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien

René Schober, Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien

Response | Jitka Šosová, UMPRUM Academy of Art, Architecture, and Design in Prague

16:40 – 17:00 | Q&A

17:00 – 18:00 | Changing status: tracing 258 years of the Royal Academy Cast Collection

Eliza Bonham Carter, Royal Academy of Arts, London

Hannah Higham, Royal Academy of Arts, London

Response

Gerardo de Simone, Accademia di Belle Arti di Firenze

18:00 – 18:20 | Q&A

Saturday, 30 May 2026, 10:00 – 13:15

10:00 – 10:30 | Value of the Copy: Hybrid Pedagogy, Reproduction, and International Exchange in Contemporary Art Education

Martin Westwood, Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London

10:30 – 10:45 | Q&A

10:45 – 11:00 | Coffee Break

11:00 – 12:45 | Round Table Discussion

Chair | Mick Finch, Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London

Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld, Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen

Nicola Lo Calzo, École nationale supérieure d'arts de Paris Cergy

Linda Fregni Nagler, Accademia Carrara di Belle Arti, Bergamo

Carl Johan Hogberg, KABK, Den Haag

12:30 – 12:45 | Q&A

12:45 – 13:15 | Closing remarks

Eric de Chasse, Beaux-Arts de Paris

13:15 – 14:30 | Lunch

Reference:

CONF: The Lives and Afterlives of Teaching Collections (Milan, 29-30 May 26). In: ArtHist.net, May 9, 2026 (accessed Jun 21, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/52420>>.