

Exploring Tradition (Rome, 8–10 Feb 27)

Piazzale Aldo Moro 5, 00185 Roma, Feb 8–10, 2027

Deadline: Jun 30, 2026

Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

Exploring Tradition: Genealogies, Tensions, and Reinterpretations in Art-Historical Discourse.

The PhD Candidates of the Art History Program at Sapienza University of Rome are pleased to present the First International Doctoral Conference in Art History: Exploring Tradition: Genealogies, Tensions, and Reinterpretations in Art-Historical Discourse, to be held on February 8-10, 2027. The initiative and thematic choice stem from the necessity to question the concept of tradition, subjecting it to critical scrutiny and exploring its continuity and moments of rupture within the art-historical discourse.

Tradition, defined as the «transmission over time of customs and practices, models and norms» (Treccani), is often perceived as an immutable heritage, accepted and rooted in common consciousness. Yet, this concept stands as an ambivalent structure: on the one hand, it represents an indispensable identity model, a continuity that establishes and orients social and cultural practices; on the other, it can turn into a dogmatic form, hindering the emergence of the new and imposing normative models of transmission. Tradition thus develops as a complex phenomenon resulting from heterogeneous processes of mediation, reinterpretation, rupture, and reinvention; it does not coincide with mere preservation of the past, but rather takes shape as an active force that informs the present. According to Stravinsky, “a real tradition is not the testimony of a concluded past, but a living force that animates and informs the present [...]. Far from implying the repetition of what has been, tradition presupposes the reality of what endures [...]. Tradition thus guarantees the continuity of creation” (Stravinsky, 1942). However, such continuity is frequently traversed by tensions. As Harold Bloom argues, tradition is not merely a legacy or a process of benevolent transmission: it is also a conflict whose outcome is survival or inclusion within the canon. He interprets this dynamic of clash and encounter in an Oedipal key, identifying as inevitable the irruption of what he defines as the “anxiety of influence” (1973) in the relationship between artists and their predecessors.

In relation to the connection between collective memory and tradition, the problem of “invented traditions” also occurs: retrospective constructions that, while responding to contemporary needs, legitimize themselves through an apparent continuity with the past. Tradition thus becomes a space of negotiation in which relationships between memory, identity, and power are constantly redefined, and where processes of inclusion and exclusion play a decisive role in the construction of cultural canons. Considering contemporary cultural transformations, the theme of tradition calls for a critical reflection on its functions and its limits: between continuity and discontinuity, between inclusion and exclusion, between memory and oblivion.

The conference aims to investigate this complexity from a broad and cross-disciplinary perspective, capable of encompassing different periods, from antiquity to the Middle Ages, from the early modern period to contemporaneity, and of encouraging dialogue among diverse disciplinary fields. This call for papers invites participants to critically examine the categories of “tradition” and “innovation,” moving both within and beyond the canon, to compare the historically and geographically Western framework with alternative narratives.

Proposed thematic areas

1. Constructing tradition

Thinking of tradition not as something immutable but as a construction: through which processes is the past selected and transmitted? Which institutions, practices, and devices (critical, exhibition-related, educational, etc.) contribute to defining and legitimizing it? What is chosen to be preserved, according to which modes, and what is instead consigned to oblivion? The focus is thus on tradition as a result of historical and cultural influences, rather than as a neutral inheritance.

2. Problematic inheritances

How is tradition experienced and navigated? In what ways do cultural practitioners engage with complex and/or conflictual inheritances (in terms of adherence, distance, rejection, and/or rewriting)? The conference, therefore, invites participants to reflect on tradition as an object of ethical and political debate, as well as an aesthetic one.

3. (Re)narrating tradition: narratives at the margins

Which voices are traditionally recognized, and which are marginalized? Which dominant narratives shape tradition?

4. Geographies of traditions

How is the relationship with the past articulated in different geographical contexts (contaminations, migrations, invented traditions, practices of appropriation, etc.)? Are there cases in which what is considered tradition within a given cultural system becomes a tool for innovation in other contexts? From this perspective, tradition emerges as a field of identity negotiation, in constant tension between local dynamics and global processes.

5. Forms, media, and agents of tradition (practices, materiality, knowledge)

How is tradition inscribed in media, languages, and material practices? What is the role of artistic, editorial, critical, and architectural devices in its transmission and transformation? Additionally, this strand seeks to investigate how technical knowledge and professional expertise contribute to the ongoing reworking of the past. Tradition thus manifests both as an abstract concept and as a concrete process mediated by specific actors and tools.

Participation guidelines

This Call for Papers is open to PhD candidates from Italian and international universities working in the fields of Art History (Medieval, Early Modern, Contemporary), Museum Studies, Visual, Critical, Cultural Studies, History of Conservation and Restoration.

Proposals, in either Italian or English, must be submitted no later than June 30, 2026, to:

convegnodott.artesapienza@gmail.com.

The subject line of the e-mail should read: Surname_Title of your contribution. Please submit your proposal in a single PDF document including your abstract (max. 300 words), a reference bibliography (maximum 5 titles), and a short bio (max. 150 words). Please always indicate your name, surname, and academic affiliation (or PhD program). Results will be announced via e-mail by September 15, 2026.

Selected participants will be required to submit their final contribution by November 30, 2026. The contributions will be evaluated by the scientific committee through a double-blind peer review process. Publication of the presented papers is planned; however, participation in the conference does not guarantee publication, which will be subject to selection by the committee. The conference will take place at Sapienza University of Rome on February 8-9-10, 2027. Each presentation will last 20 minutes and will be followed by a discussion.

Participants are expected to cover their own travel, meals, and accommodation expenses. The conference days will be organized thematically. The final program and panel structure will be published in December 2026.

For further information or enquiries, please write to: convegnodott.artesapienza@gmail.com.
Scientific Committee: Irene Baldriga, Eliana Billi, Francesco Freddolini, Manuel Antonio Castiñeiras Gonzalez, Massimo Moretti, Raffaella Morselli, Raffaella Perna, Carla Subrizi, Alessandro Taddei.

Organizing Committee: Giorgia Abbate, Delfina Balistreri, Matteo Bucci, Francesca Bufano, Sofia Carbonera, Martina Cittadini, Romana Mastrella, Adele Nicolais, Irene Quarantini, Caterina Schiera, Giulia Zimei.

Reference:

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