

Many (More) Antwerp Hands (Antwerp, 22–23 Apr 27)

Antwerp, BE, Apr 22–23, 2027

Deadline: Jul 31, 2026

Emily Hirsch

Many (More) Antwerp Hands: Collaborations Across Media, ca. 1500-1750.

In early modern Antwerp, making was rarely a solitary act. Artists and artisans participated in complex processes of production that relied on an array of specialists, materials, techniques, and areas of knowledge. Collaboration as a dominant organizing principle of artistic creation in Antwerp was critically foregrounded in a 2018 Rubenianum conference, which explored how artists pooled their skills, divided their labor, and forged creative partnerships in one of early modern Europe's most productive artistic centers. An edited volume with its origins in the conference, "Many Antwerp Hands: Collaborations in Netherlandish Art, 1400-1750" (Harvey Miller Publishers), was published in 2021. Both the conference and the book positioned painting, and to a lesser extent printmaking, as its primary media.

In the years since, scholarship on early modern Netherlandish art has increasingly turned its attention to media beyond painting and the graphic arts, while also asking new questions about how those media relate to one another. In particular, sculpture and the decorative arts (metalwork, textiles, and glass, among others) have attracted renewed interest. With this interest, there is also a sharper awareness of how these objects rarely emerged from a single hand, discipline, workshop, or material. Instead, artistic production in Antwerp relied on wide networks of contributors whose roles were integral to the conception, execution, and reception of works of art. Collaboration can thus be read across media, among a variety of specialists, and traversing the boundaries imposed by institutional structures and art historical categories.

It is within this context that the Rubenshuis will return to the subject of collaboration in 2027 for the second chapter of Many Antwerp Hands, broadening the conversation to include the full range of media, materials, intermedial exchanges, and actors that shaped artistic life in early modern Antwerp. This conference will take place in the year of the 450th anniversary of Rubens's birth and look ahead to the planned reopening of the Rubenshuis in 2030, embracing that moment of renewal as an opportunity to imagine a materially diverse and interconnected future for the study of early modern Netherlandish art.

We invite proposals that engage with collaboration across a broad range of media, practices, and perspectives, with early modern Antwerp as their center of gravity. Contributions might address the collaborative making of individual objects, the structures that enabled or constrained collaboration, the movement of designs and materials locally and globally, and the individual actors who

shaped Antwerp's culture of making. Papers may also call into question the spatial or institutional boundaries of artistic collaboration in Antwerp, as well as reconsider the categories through which artistic labor has traditionally been defined and valued. We welcome perspectives from beyond the visual arts, exploring how artisans collaborated with practitioners of the performing and literary arts, or with those working in natural philosophy and the emerging sciences. Finally, we encourage scholarship that sheds light on the contributions of women and underrepresented racial and religious groups connected to Antwerp's artistic economy.

Papers might address, but are not limited to:

Formal networks:

Guilds, academies, and societies as sites where collaboration is facilitated or constrained

Informal networks:

Collaborations between women and through kinship networks (families, marriages, friendships)

The workshop:

Internal organization, division of labor, and collaborative production

Paper as catalyst:

The role of drawing and design in activating collaborative processes

Travel and exchange:

Antwerp artists collaborating across distances and borders; economic networks as channels for collaboration (trade, supply chains)

Conceptual collaboration:

Shared ideas, programs, and intellectual exchange between makers

Material transformations:

How materials change hands, forms, and meanings across media

Interspherical collaborations:

Exchanges between the visual arts and other spheres of making (i.e. natural philosophy, emerging sciences, performing and literary arts)

Paintings as objects:

The painted surface as a material thing that travels, is reworked, and participates in larger collaborative chains (i.e. frame and panel makers, pigment sourcing and making)

Animal materials:

Substances of animal origin and the collaborative networks their use implies

Gender:

Formal and informal roles of women in collaborative artistic production, including in workshops, religious settings, or the domestic sphere

Underrepresented spaces and actors:

Environments and participants not traditionally recognized as sites of art making

Abstracts of no more than 400 words, accompanied by a short academic bio and up to 2 images (if applicable), should be submitted to manyantwerphands2027@gmail.com by 31 July 2026. Abstracts should clearly articulate the research question addressed, the object(s), artist(s), or material(s) under consideration, and the methodological approaches used to examine them. Speakers can expect to be notified by September 2026. Those whose proposals are accepted will be asked to submit a draft of their paper approximately six weeks before the conference. Papers should be in English and 20 minutes in length.

For any questions about the conference and/or its call for papers, please email manyantwerphands2027@gmail.com.

Organized by the Rubenshuis, Antwerp, with visiting researchers
Emily Hirsch (Brown University, United States)
Hanne Schonkeren (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium)
Margot Steurbaut (Rice University, United States)
Annelies Verellen (McGill University, Canada)

Reference:

CFP: Many (More) Antwerp Hands (Antwerp, 22-23 Apr 27). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 3, 2026 (accessed Jun 10, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/52622>>.