Image Making as Knowledge Production (Rome/online, 25–27 Jun 26)

Rome, Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max-Planck-Institut für Kunstgeschichte / Online, Jun 25–27, 2026

Giulia Simonini

Image Making as Knowledge Production: Earth, Heavens, and Body.

How does the act of drawing, engraving, painting, or photographing play a role in thinking and understanding? What is the role of image-making in knowledge production? Across three themes (Earth, Heavens, and Body) we will discuss these questions across in cases from the late Middle Ages to the contemporary.
Each day will start with a presentation by image-makers, to reflect on current visual practices of the context of teaching and learning, and research. The main part of the day will contain historical case studies. And each day will be closed by natural scientists reflecting on the role of image-making as doing science.

This interdisciplinary dialogue between current-day practices and the study of historical practices in art and science have been a driving force behind the research of the Research Group Visualizing Science in Media Revolutions. With its broad temporal and thematic scope, the focus on image-making practices as both a highly skilled and highly creative process has become central to understanding how people gained and communicated knowledge.

Program

Day 1, 25 June: Earth

9:00 Welcome and Introduction
Giulia Simonini (BHMPI)
Elisa Spataro (Sapienza Università di Roma)

Sietske Fransen (BHMPI / Radboud University), The Act of Drawing as Tool for Observation

9:30–10:30 Image-maker presentation with discussion
Chair: Sietske Fransen

Maddalena Scimemi (Università Roma Tre) and Carlotta Torricelli (Università Roma Tre), Space for the hand: Exercises in seeing by Architecture students

Coffee

11:00–13:00 Session 1

Chair: Fabrizio Baldassarri (Sapienza Università di Roma)
1. Leendert van der Miesen (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam), “Merely out of curiosity”: The Natural History Drawings of Jan Brandes (1743–1808)
2. Giulia Simonini (BHMPI), Drawing Beetles and Butterflies: Iridescence in Early Modernity
3. Laura Valterio (Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut), Breeders as Surrogate Mothers: Animal Care and Reproductive Labour in Early Modern Representations of Sericulture

Lunch (for participants only)

14:00–15:30 Session 2
Chair: Antonia Belli (BHMPI / University College London)
4. Alexandre Claude (BHMPI / European University Institute), Making Authoritative Images: Francesco Stelluti, the Lincei, and the Discovery of Petrified Wood
5. Gilles Monney (Independent scholar, Bern), Cold Histories in a Melting World: Alpine Glaciers between Knowledge-Making and Vanishing Imaginaries

Coffee

16:00–17:30 Session 3
Chair: Elisa Spataro
6. Luca Tonetti (Università di Padova), Nidus or Uterus? Visualizing Galls and Insect Generation in Malpighi’s Work
7. Jessie Wei-Hsuan Chen (Huygens / KNAW, Amsterdam), Fertile Earth: Representations of Garden Ground in Seventeenth-Century Botanical Illustrations

Coffee

18:00–19:30 Scientist presentation with discussion
Chair: Eric Jorink (Huygens / KNAW, Amsterdam)
Pierfilippo Cerretti (Sapienza Università di Roma) & Maurizio Mei (Sapienza Università di Roma), When Images become Data: Exploring Hidden Biodiversity

Day 2, 26 June: Heavens

9:00-9:30 Guided tour of the accompanying exhibition in the Sala del disegno, Bibliotheca Hertziana (for participants only)

9:30–10:30 Image-maker presentation with discussion
Chair: Elisa Spataro

Silvia Spezzano (Max Planck Institute for Extraterrestrial Physics, Garching bei München), Imaging Molecules in Interstellar Space

Coffee

11:00–13:00 Session 4
Chair: Eelco Nagelsmit (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam / BHMPI)
1. Stefan Zieme (CNRS – Observatoire de Paris / PSL), The Diagrams of the First Appendix of

Na□īr al-Dīn al-□ūsī's (1201-74) Ta□rīr al-Majis□ī
2. Eric Jorink (Huygens / KNAW, Amsterdam), Christiaan Huygens and the Mystery of Saturn's Ring: Observation, Visual Thinking, and Peer Review
3. Antoine Gallay (Université de Lausanne), Making the Incommensurable Tangible: Visualizing the Solar System in Christiaan Huygens's Cosmotheoros (1698)

Lunch (for participants only)

14:00–15:30 Session 5
Chair: Lena Heinlein-Müller (Goethe Universität, Frankfurt am Main)
4. Odile Lehnen (Durham University / The Royal Society), A Seat at the Table: Collaborative Observation in the Herschel Household
5. Marvin Bolt (Independent Scholar, USA), In Defense of the Inhabited Sun: Visualizing William Herschel's Strange Idea

Coffee break

16:00–17:30 Session 6
Chair: Sietske Fransen
6. Nina Caviezel (BHMPI / Universität Basel), From Dust to Data: Cleaning as a Visualizing Practice in Astronomy 7. Charlotte Bigg (CNRS, Centre Alexandre Koyré, Paris), Blurry Skies

17:30–18:00 Guided tour of the accompanying exhibition in the Sala del disegno, Bibliotheca Hertziana (for participants only)

18:00–19:00 Dinner in Villino (for participants only)

19:00–20:30 Scientist presentation with discussion
Chair: Tanja Michalsky (BHMPI)

Peter Galison (Harvard University, Cambridge, MA), Image Knowledge: Filming Black Holes

Day 3, 27 June: Body

9:30–10:30 Image-maker presentation with discussion
Chair: Giulia Simonini

Gemma Anderson-Tempini (Artist, UK), Body-Mapping the Mycobiome

Coffee

11:00–13:00 Session 7
Chair: Silvia Marchiori (British School at Rome)
1. Briana Brightly (Harvard University, Cambridge, MA), Drawing the Buddha, Drawing the Body: Image-Making as Method in Tibetan Anatomy
2. Daniel Santiago Sáenz (Columbia University, New York), American Bodies as Exempla in New Spain and New France: Visual Methods, Pedagogical Paradigms
3. Francesca S. Croce (Universität Wien), Staging Anatomy: Image-Making and Imperial Display in the Josephinum, Vienna

Lunch (for participants only)

14:00–16:00 Session 8
Chair: Elisa Spataro
4. Fabrizio Bigotti (Center for the Study of Medicine and the Body in the Renaissance, Pisa / University of Exeter), Harmonious Configurations: Geometrical Reasoning in Renaissance Anatomy and Beyond
5. Noemi Di Tommaso (Università degli Studi di Milano), When the Eye Draws: Autograph Images and Experimental Knowledge in Francesco Redi (1626–1697)
6. Jennifer Marine (Menil Drawing Institute, Houston, TX / University of Virginia), Guided by Ghostly Hands: Process, Production, and Evidence in Spirit Drawing and Photography

Coffee

16:30–18:00 Scientist presentation with discussion
Chair: Sietske Fransen

Erin Schuman (Max Planck Institute for Brain Research, Frankfurt am Main), Seeing is believing: how images changed our understanding of the inner workings of the neuron

18:00-18:30 Concluding Words
Sietske Fransen

Location: Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max-Planck-Institut für Kunstgeschichte, Villino Stroganoff, Via Gregoriana 22, 00187 Rom
Public event without registration.

Please follow the event also online through our Vimeo Channel:

25.06.26 https://vimeo.com/event/5909494
26.06.26 https://vimeo.com/event/5909500
27.06.26 https://vimeo.com/event/5909503

Scientific Organization: Research Group "Visualizing Science in Media Revolutions", Sietske Fransen (Bibliotheca Hertziana), Giulia Simonini (Bibliotheca Hertziana), Elisa Spataro (Sapienza Università di Roma)

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