

5 Sessions at RSA (Philadelphia, 11–13 Mar 27)

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Mar 11–13, 2027

www.rsa.org/page/RSAPhilly2027

ArtHist.net Redaktion

The Renaissance Society of America (RSA) 73rd Annual Meeting in 2027.

[1] Claiming the Exotic: Negotiating Material Difference in the Early Modern World

[2] Ecology and Early Modern Art Theory

[3] An Indifferent Nature: Early Modern Ecology Beyond Good and Evil

[4] Gender Unruled: Beyond Essentialism in Material and Visual Culture, c. 1350-1700

[5] New Perspectives in Italian Art

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[1] Claiming the Exotic: Negotiating Material Difference in the Early Modern World

From: Lavinia Gambini

Date: June 16, 2026

Deadline: July 20, 2026

Organizers: Lavinia Gambini, Andreas Berger

When was an object “exotic,” and who got to say so? In the early modern world, foreignness was rarely a settled fact about a thing. It was a claim that could be asserted or downplayed, used to sharpen or blur distinctions, believed, doubted, or ignored, depending on the speaker, audience, and occasion.

This panel explores how individuals put the origins, provenance, and perceived foreignness of things and materials into words and practice, and how social relations – from one-off encounters and intimate exchanges to circles, networks, and wider communities – shaped the terms they chose and were available to them. Building on scholars like Anna Grasskamp, Jessica Keating, Lia Markey, Kate Lowe, and others, this panel investigates the uses (and misuses) of exoticizing and othering terms and vocabulary, asking how these were often variable, situational, and open to contest. Social negotiations could not only shape how objects were described, but also how they were valued, exchanged, collected, displayed, and used. We seek to bring contributors from across disciplines into conversation about what was at stake when people deployed, withheld, or disputed exoticizing claims.

We particularly welcome papers from early-career scholars, including graduate students and independent scholars, on topics including (but not limited to):

- The availability, precision, and vagueness of exoticizing descriptors
- Non-knowledge, uncertainty, and ignorance about the origin and provenance of things
- Strategies for making objects more (or less) desirable and acceptable

- Who could define a thing as exotic, and how such claims were contested

To apply, please submit a short abstract (max. 200 words), a title (max. 15 words), and a brief bio (max. 100 words), along with your PhD or terminal degree date (past/expected), primary discipline, full name, affiliation, email address, and a CV (max. 2 pages) by July 20, 2026.

Contact: lavinia.gambini@unibe.ch

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[\[2\]](#) Ecology and Early Modern Art Theory

From: James Pilgrim

Date: June 17, 2026

Deadline: July 18, 2026

Organizers:

Elizabeth J. Petcu (University of Edinburgh, RSA Field Representative for Environment and Ecology),

James Pilgrim (University of Illinois)

This session will address a topic that has yet to garner sufficient attention from art and architectural historians working in an ecocritical mode: the manifold connections between ecology and early modern art and architectural theory. A notable effect of the 'ecocritical turn' has been the tendency for historians of early modern art and architecture to emphasize materials, practices, and phenomena. Yet ecology is also an idea—an idea of human, animal, and environmental interrelations—that profoundly shaped, and was formed by, art and architectural theory. This session explores that rapport.

The organizers invite proposals for papers that examine any aspect of the connection between ecology and art and architectural theory in early modernity. Possible topics include: ecology and the theorization of animal or landscape painting; environmental determinism and architectural theory; anti-/post-humanist theories of art; alternative cosmologies and hierarchies of genre; ecology and Giorgio Vasari, Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, Karel van Mander, Bernard Palissy, Athanasius Kircher, Federico Borromeo, Bernardino de Sahagún, Alvaro Alonso Barba, etc. We are interested in studies that examine theory not only in text, but also in objects, images, and spaces.

We welcome defined case studies on any geography, 1400-1700, from scholars of any discipline that engages visual, material, and spatial cultures.

Please send proposals for 20-minute papers to epetcu@ed.ac.uk and jpilgrim@illinois.edu by July 18, 2026. Your proposal should include, in a single document (.pdf or .doc):

- Full name and affiliation, including academic department (if applicable)
- PhD completion date (actual or expected)
- Paper title (15 words maximum)
- Abstract (150 words maximum)
- CV (two pages maximum)

The organizers will notify selected speakers after the proposal submission deadline. Speakers will be asked to confirm their participation in late July, ahead of the RSA session submission deadline. The conference will be in-person.

Participants must be current RSA members at the time of the event.

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[3] [An Indifferent Nature: Early Modern Ecology Beyond Good and Evil](#)

From: Javier Patino Loira

Date: June 17, 2026

Deadline: July 25, 2026

In *Against Nature*, Lorraine Daston wrote that humans across different eras and cultures “persistently look to nature as a source of norms for human conduct.” Early modern individuals, whether through the lens of Aristotelian teleology or Christian providentialism, framed nature for sermon audiences and natural history readers as a mirror in which humanity could find symbols indicating its own moral and religious obligations.

Yet nature also elicited more ambivalent kinds of response. The panel “An Indifferent Nature” recovers a counter-strain of early modern thought in which nature struck observers as fundamentally indifferent to principles other than those guaranteeing its own persistence. Nature appeared normative in economic rather than moral terms, its underlying forms of reciprocity governed by survival rather than virtue. If the ubiquity of predation made the pervasiveness of violence plain, other relations harbored the potential to compromise received views on nature’s purposiveness entirely. Intestinal worms, the physician Girolamo Mercuriale remarked, were natural in themselves (as living animals) yet against nature (*praeter naturam*) in tormenting and consuming the host. Compounding the difficulty, belief in spontaneous generation meant that the parasite’s victim was also its parent, as with the caterpillar devouring the leaf that first gave birth to it. These and similar moments register, obliquely and uneasily, a form of order that contemporaries often called “nature’s economy,” sustained by the efficient but indifferent weft of creation and destruction, and seemingly admitting of no moral recuperation.

We welcome proposals from a variety of disciplines – art history, history, literature, history of science, others – grappling with the early modern awareness of a nature indifferent to good and evil.

Send paper proposals to Javier Patiño Loira, UCLA (jpatinoloira@ucla.edu) by July 25, including title, abstract (200-word maximum), CV or bio, PhD completion year (past or expected), name, affiliation, and e-mail. Notifications sent by July 28, 2026.

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[4] [Gender Unruled: Beyond Essentialism in Material and Visual Culture, c. 1350-1700](#)

From: Sara Berkowitz and Jericho Jennifer Nelson

Date: June 18, 2026

Deadline: July 24, 2026

Gender is a social construct that has always disobediently aligned with an equally constructed biological dimorphism. Yet gender essentialism – the sense that some roles, like motherhood, are inherently female, and others, like kingliness, are male – has lingered in scholarship on early modern material and visual culture. Elizabeth I is famously recorded, for example, to have said she had the heart and stomach of a king inside the weak and feeble body of a woman; scholars have often reiterated such essentializing distinctions even as they celebrate female empowerment and unearth suppressed feminist histories.

Theorists outside of art history like Anne Fausto-Sterling and Agustín Fuentes have dismantled the binarism of biological sex, and literary scholars like Simone Chess, Will Fisher, and Colby Gordon have opened up trans-theoretical approaches to early modern studies. Inspired by and re-thinking the work of Roland Betancourt, Kathleen Perry Long, Timothy McCall, and Patricia Simons, among others, this panel asks: why have pre-modern art historians less fully turned toward a more contingent and complex understanding of gender? Are there relevant differences between material, visual, and textual production with regards to gender presentation? Are there things scholars today might learn from the ways early modern agents themselves complicated the genders expected of them and of others?

Given the role of European settler colonial governance in enforcing dimorphic biological determinism, we are especially interested in papers that address case studies from global majority cultures and/or colonial contexts. Can decolonial and anti-ableist gender frameworks like those of Karen B. Hanna, Maria Lugones, Sami Schalk, and others connect more directly with early and pre-modernity? We are also interested in papers that challenge our premise: how might art history's long tradition of feminist studies, and of critically reading period gender construction, be reframed as contributing to this turn toward post-essentialist gender studies?

To submit a paper proposal, please email co-organizers Sara Berkowitz (sberkowitz@widener.edu) and Jericho Jennifer Nelson (neon@udel.edu) by July 26, 2026.

Participants will be notified by August 4, 2026.

Your email should include the following:

- Full name, current affiliation (if applicable), and preferred email address
- PhD completion date (past or expected)
- Paper title (15 words or fewer)
- Abstract (200 words or fewer)
- CV (2-page version)

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[\[5\]](#) New Perspectives in Italian Art

From: Ilaria Andreoli

Date: June 18, 2026

Deadline: July 15, 2026

Organizers:

Ilaria Andreoli (INHA, Paris), Paris and Kelley Helmstutler (University of Vermont)

Proposals on any area of Italian early modern art (1300-1700) are welcome.

We are particularly interested in scholars working in new methodologies, new areas of study, or innovative approaches to more traditional areas of Renaissance studies.

This session aims to create a space for emerging scholars (recent Ph.D.s or Ph.D. candidates) to present their work. The intention is to provide new scholars with a forum to present their work, possibly for the first time at an international conference. Panelists will receive mentorship in preparation for the panel, including receiving constructive feedback from senior scholars in their area of expertise in advance of the conference.

Paper proposals must include:

- paper title (15-word maximum)
- paper abstract (150-word maximum)
- resume (.pdf or .doc upload)
- PhD or other terminal degree completion year (past or expected)
- full name, current affiliation, and email address.

Proposals must abide by the word limits and include all parts of the submission requirements.

Papers are a maximum of 20 minutes in length (approx. 8-9 pages double-spaced, 10 pt font).

Please submit the above to ilaria.andreoli@gmail.com and khelmustu@uvm.edu by July 15, 2026.

We will notify applicants of their status on July 20, 2026.

By July 30, those accepted will confirm and join RSA, if they are not already members

(<https://www.rsa.org/page/JoinRSA>)

If accepted, panelists will be expected to send their papers and powerpoints to the organizers and senior reviewer six weeks before the conference (by February 15, 2027).

Panelists will do a run-through of their papers two weeks before the conference via Zoom.

Participants can only give one paper at the RSA conference, per RSA guidelines.

Speakers must become RSA members and register for the conference to speak at the conference and they can

Reference:

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