Just Beautiful and Charming? (Frankfurt am Main, 9-10 Jul 26)

IG Farbenhaus, Eisenhower Saal, IG 1.314, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt, Campus Westend, Norbert-Wollheim-Platz 1, D-60323 Frankfurt am Main, Jul 9–10, 2026
Registration deadline: Jul 6, 2026

Mirja Beck

Just Beautiful and Charming? Gender-theoretical Perspectives on Production, Reception and Representation in Miniature Painting (1600-1900).

Towards the end of the eighteenth century both women artists and miniature painting became increasingly important in public art, but the interrelation between the two has barely been explored to date. A systematic study is still lacking, despite the fact that the proportion of women miniature artists was considerably higher than in other visible art forms. Following Linda Nochlin, we want to discuss: Why have there been so many great women miniature artists (and why do we know so little about them)?
The conference addresses a two-fold desideratum: first, female and queer positions have often been neglected in art history until recently. Secondly, miniature painting, as a particular form between decorative artisanal production, cultural-historical object of daily use and masterful art in small format, is still regarded as less relevant than, for example, large-scale painting. Within a larger art-sociological context, our intention is to shed light on artistically relevant but little-noticed actors in a genre that is underrepresented in research. In doing so, we aim to subject the status of miniature painting to an art historical re-evaluation and expand the research on the topic, which often does not go beyond questions of collecting, style and biography, by social, gender-theoretical and intersectional levels.
The objective of the conference is to discuss miniature painting as an art form which enabled female artists and other members of historically and socially marginalised groups to be active as artists. We aim to open the discourse for new research positions on miniature painting such as gender and queer studies, or the field of material culture. Central to our discussion are aspects of production of miniatures, forms of representation and circumstances of their reception between c. 1600 to 1900.

Organized by Mirja Beck and Ulrike Kern.

PROGRAMME

THURSDAY, 9 July 2026

10:00–10:30 Welcome and Introduction (Ulrike Kern, Mirja Beck)

Panel 1: Accessibility of a Medium

10:30–11:15 Rethinking the Miniaturist: Defining Mary Ann Flaxman’s Practice, Caroline Gould (Sheffield/London)

11:45–12:30 Hedwig Höna-Senft (1855-1923). An Unknown Representative of the Prague Miniature School of the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries, Pavla Mikešová and Olga Trmalová (Prague)

14:00–14:45 Portraits in Circles: Ethel Webling and Her Career as a Miniature Painter in London, Dorian Greenbaum (Boston) and Ulrike Kern (Frankfurt am Main)

14:45–15:30 “… un genre qui laisse immaculés les habits et les mains” – Miniature and Femininity, Mirja Beck (Frankfurt am Main)

Panel 2: A Market for Miniatures

16:00–16:45 Women Miniature Copyists as Quasi-professional Suppliers of the Familial Art Market in England, 1650–1750, Anna Pratley (York)

16:45–17:30 A “Portable Museum” for Sale: Translation Copies, Art Market, and Female Agency in a Series of Enamel Miniatures by Giuseppe Macpherson, Anna Vallugera Fuster (Barcelona)

FRIDAY, 10 July 2026

Panel 3: Medium and Agency

10:00–10:45 (Un)conventional – Giovanna Garzoni's Zaga Christ (1635), Lisa Hecht (Marburg)

11:15–12:00 Gaia’s Fruits in Giovanna Garzoni’s Art, Julia Saviello (Frankfurt am Main)

12:00–12:45 Bravura in Small Size. Skin, Colour, and Touch(es) in the Miniatures of Marie-Anne(?) Fragonard, Marianne Koos (Wien)

Panel 4: Miniature and Memory

14:15–15:00 Media Traces - Mutual Refinement in Miniature Format, Laura Kromer (Konstanz)

15:00–15:45 The Heads of the Revolution: American Miniatures of the Revolutionary Era, Ines Kelly (Karlsruhe)

16:15–16:45 Closing Remarks

For information and registration, please contact: m.beck@kunst.uni-frankfurt.de or kern@kunst.uni-frankfurt.de

Reference:

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