Women’s Eyes. Patronage and Matronage (Rome, 1 Dec 26)

Fondazione Ernesta Besso, Largo di Torre Argentina 11, Roma, Dec 01, 2026
Deadline: Sep 15, 2026

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International conference:
Women’s Eyes. Patronage and Matronage: Women and the Visual Arts from the Middle Ages to the Contemporary Era.

Convened by Manuela Gianandrea, Raffaella Morselli, Raffaella Perna, Chiara Piva, Lisa Roscioni, Alessandro Taddei.

The growing attention devoted to women in art history has profoundly reshaped the interpretative paradigms of the discipline over the past decades. Alongside the recovery of women artists, patrons, and collectors who had long remained at the margins of the canonical narrative, scholarship has progressively turned towards investigating the conditions that enabled women’s participation in artistic life, examining their relationship with institutions, systems of artistic training, professional practices, collecting, the transmission of visual culture, and the construction of art-historical memory.

This scholarly orientation is now reflected not only in international academic research but also in numerous research and exhibition projects. Since 2014, the AWARE – Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions project has made a decisive contribution to reconstructing a more inclusive history of art by promoting research, archives, and digital resources dedicated to women artists and other protagonists of visual culture. Likewise, exhibitions such as Roma pittrice. Artiste al lavoro tra XVI e XIX secolo (Museum of Rome, 2024–2025) and Now You See Us. Women Artists in Britain 1520–1920 (Tate Britain, 2024) have demonstrated that recovering individual biographies represents only one aspect of a broader rethinking of the discipline, bringing to the forefront issues such as artistic training, access to artistic institutions, professionalization, the art market, art criticism, and the processes through which the art-historical canon has been constructed and transformed over time.

The concept of patronage has likewise undergone a significant historiographical evolution. In Patrons and Painters (Francis Haskell, 1963), patronage is established as a key interpretative framework for understanding artistic production. The work of art is no longer understood solely as the expression of an artist’s individual creativity but rather as the outcome of an ongoing dialogue with the needs, ambitions, and strategies of patrons, thereby repositioning the relationship between art and society at the centre of art-historical inquiry. Building upon these premises, Paint-

ing, Power and Patronage (Bram Kempers, 1992) further expands this perspective by interpreting patronage as a structural component of the artistic system. The conference therefore seeks to provide a forum for discussion of these issues, fostering dialogue among art history, the history of institutions, museology, historiography, material culture studies, and the digital humanities.

From a different perspective, Alain Boureau (Il patronage nella storia delle donne, 1989) proposes patronage as a relational category for women's history, introducing the concept of matronage to analyse the ways in which women participate in constructing networks of influence, prestige, and mediation. Since the 1990s, studies on women's patronage have expanded considerably through the contributions of Catherine King (Renaissance Women Patrons, 1998), Sheryl Reiss (Beyond Isabella, 2001), and numerous other scholars, who have investigated the role of women as patrons, collectors, and promoters of the arts. The most recent application of this perspective to art history is offered by Adelina Modesti (Women’s Patronage and Gendered Cultural Networks in Early Modern Europe, 2024), who identifies "gendered cultural networks" as an interpretative framework for reconstructing the familial, dynastic, and cultural ties within which women's patronage developed.

It is within this context that the Women’s Eyes project takes shape, adopting patronage as an interpretative category through which to understand the diverse ways in which women have contributed to artistic culture. The term does not refer exclusively to artistic patronage in the narrow sense but encompasses the full range of practices that influence the production, circulation, preservation, promotion, reception, and transmission of the arts. From this perspective, matronage does not constitute a separate category from patronage but rather highlights its specific manifestations within women's experience, making it possible to consider together figures traditionally studied separately—including women artists, patrons, collectors, religious women, salonnières, scholars, gallery owners, curators, and cultural promoters—within a shared reflection on the many forms of women's participation in artistic culture from the Middle Ages to the present day.

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THEMATIC AREAS

1. Patronage, Matronage, and Practices of Artistic Culture
This section welcomes contributions exploring the diverse ways in which women have supported, shaped, or promoted artistic culture across different historical contexts. Topics may include patronage, collecting, the promotion of artists, practices of cultural mediation, the relationship between art and power, contexts of sociability—including courts, salons, religious environments, and intellectual circles—and, more broadly, the various ways in which women have fostered the production, circulation, and reception of works of art.

2. Women, Institutions, and Artistic Professions
This thematic area examines the relationship between women and the institutions that, across different historical periods, regulated the education, production, and dissemination of artistic culture. Contributions addressing academies, guilds, confraternities, monasteries, courts, exhibitions, museums, galleries, foundations, art schools, and universities are welcome, with particular atten-

tion to processes of access, recognition, professionalization, and participation in cultural life.

3. Collecting, Material Culture, and Representation
This section brings together studies devoted to the role of women in shaping visual and material culture through the formation of collections, the art market, exhibition practices, heritage preservation, and the dissemination of artistic models. Contributions addressing the languages of representation, self-representation, the formation of taste, and the reception of works of art in different historical contexts are also encouraged.

4. Historiography, Archives, and the Memory of Women in the Arts
The final thematic area reflects on the ways in which women's presence in the arts has been documented, interpreted, transmitted, or erased over time. Contributions may address artistic literature, documentary sources, archives, correspondence, catalogues, exhibitions, curatorial practices, digital projects, and, more broadly, the processes through which art-historical memory has been constructed, revised, and transmitted.

Participation is particularly encouraged from PhD candidates, postdoctoral researchers, and scholars in the early stages of their academic careers.

Proposals must be submitted by 15 September 2026 and should include the title of the paper, an abstract of no more than 3,000 characters (including spaces), a brief curriculum vitae of no more than 1,000 characters (including spaces), and three keywords. Each presentation will have a maximum duration of 20 minutes.

Proposals will be evaluated by the Scientific Committee of the Women's Eyes research project. Applicants will be notified of the outcome of the selection process by 30 September 2026.
Selected speakers will receive reimbursement of round-trip travel expenses, up to a maximum of €350 per participant.

The conference proceedings are scheduled for publication in 2027. The Scientific Committee will select the most outstanding contributions, which will be developed into essays of 20,000–30,000 characters (including spaces), to be submitted by 15 February 2027.

All required materials should be sent to:
conferencewomeneyes@gmail.com

Scientific Committee: Manuela Gianandrea, Raffaella Morselli, Raffaella Perna, Chiara Piva, Lisa Roscioni, Alessandro Taddei.

Organising Committee: Martina Cittadini, Michela D'Agostino, Lorenzo Grimaldi, Tommaso Gristina, Sofia Morelli, Giovanni Pacini.

The conference is organised within the framework of the 2024 Sapienza University Large Research Project Women's Eyes. Patronizing the Arts in Rome from the 5th to the 21st Century, coordinated by Raffaella Morselli.

Reference:
CFP: Women's Eyes. Patronage and Matronage (Rome, 1 Dec 26). In: ArtHist.net, Jul 20, 2026 (accessed

Nov 22, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/53516>.