

Surface Work as Crafting Worlds (Norwich, 25–26 Sep 26)

Norwich, UK, Sep 25–26, 2026

Sanja Savkic Sebek, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut

Surface Work as Crafting Worlds: Perspectives on Making and Meaning in the Indigenous Americas

The symposium “Surface Work as Crafting Worlds: Perspectives on Making and Meaning in the Indigenous Americas” brings together specialists in art history, anthropology and archaeology to explore “surface work” as a fundamental dimension of artworks and artistic practices in the Indigenous Americas. Across a range of media and case studies from North, Central and South America, it asks how surfaces operate as active sites of knowledge, relation and transformation, how meaning is structured, transmitted and experienced through them, and how attention to their elaboration can open up new ways of considering the relationships between visual and material culture, signs and communication systems, and knowing and being in the world.

The symposium is organised by Sanja Savkic Sebek, Max Carocci and George Lau at the Sainsbury Research Unit for the Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas, University of East Anglia.

The programme includes contributions by Carlo Severi, Martin Schultz, Johannes Neurath, Davide Domenici, Katarzyna Mikulska, Sabine Hyland, Marcos Martín-Torres, Lisa Trever, with a keynote lecture by Gerhard Wolf.

Further information—such as the programme, abstracts, and registration details—is available on the [symposium website](https://www.sainsburyresearchunit.org/news/surface-work-as-crafting-worldsperspectives-on-making-and-meaning-in-the-indigenous-americas-zlr38):

<https://www.sainsburyresearchunit.org/news/surface-work-as-crafting-worldsperspectives-on-making-and-meaning-in-the-indigenous-americas-zlr38>

SCHEDULE

"Surface Work as Crafting Worlds:
Perspectives on Making & Meaning in the Indigenous Americas"

Sainsbury Research Unit, University of East Anglia
25–26 September 2026

Friday, 25 Sep 2026
(Zuckerman Institute Building, ZICER Room 0.01)

11:00–11:10
Welcome

(Prof. Steven Hooper, Director, Sainsbury Research Unit for the Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas, UEA)

11:10–11:30

Introduction

(organisers Sanja Savkic Sebek, Max Carocci & George Lau)

Session I – Focus: North America

(Chair: Max Carocci)

11:30–12:15

Carlo Severi (École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris)

“Signs of Salience, Signs of Order: Iconic and Aniconic Signs in Native American Graphic Recording Systems”

12:15–13:00

Martin Schultz (University of Potsdam)

“Reconstructing the Two-Dimensional Universe? Creation and Interpretation of Plains Pictographic Art”

13:00–14:15

Lunch (Modern Life Café, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts)

Session II – Focus: Mesoamerica

(Chair: Sanja Savkic Sebek)

14:15–15:00

Johannes Neurath (Museo Nacional de Antropología – INAH, Mexico City)

“Huicholising the World While Distracting the Client: Complexities Involved in Wixárika Glass-Bead Applications”

15:00–15:45

Davide Domenici (University of Bologna)

“The Animated Surfaces of Mosaics and Codices in Late Postclassic Mesoamerica: Technology and Aesthetics”

15:45–16:15

Coffee Break

16:15–17:00

Katarzyna Mikulska (University of Warsaw)

“Encoding Meaning Through Symmetry in a Pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican Codex, Ms. Aubin / Mexican 20”

17:15–17:45

Tour of “Living by the Rule: Contemporary Meets Medieval” exhibition (led by Dr. Ed Krčma, co-curator), meet at Sainsbury Centre main entrance desk

18:00

Reception

(welcome by Prof. Jago Cooper, Director, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts)

19:15

Symposium Dinner (Modern Life Café – pre-booking essential, 9 Sep)

Saturday, 26 Sep 2026

(Zuckerman Institute Building, ZICER Room 0.01)

Session III – Focus: South America

(Chair: George Lau)

09:30–10:15

Sabine Hyland (University of St Andrews)

“Hawa and Ushay: Surfaces in Khipu Aesthetics”

10:15–11:00

Marcos Martín-Torres (University of Cambridge), with Agnese Benzonelli, Nohora Alba Bustamante, Lina Campos Quintero, Sandra Eraso, Catherine Klesner and Mishaël Quraishi

“Beyond Brilliance: Cross-Crafting the Surfaces of Ceramics and Goldwork in the Nariño Highlands, Colombia”

11:00–11:45

Lisa Trever (Columbia University)

“Picture Plane, Meshwork, Membrane: Apprehending the Liveliness of Moche Mural Art”

11:45–12:15

Coffee Break

12:15–13:15

Keynote Lecture (Chair: Sanja Savkic Sebek)

Gerhard Wolf (Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max Planck Institut)

“The Making of Vessel Worlds. Surfacing Space, Displaying Cosmogenesis”

13:15–13:30

General Discussion & Closing Comments

Moderated by Sanja Savkic Sebek, Max Carocci & George Lau

13:30

Lunch (Modern Life Café, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts)

For specific queries or additional information, please contact:

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Reference:

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