

5 Sessions & Workshop at HNA (Boston, 14–17 Jul 27)

Boston University & Center for Netherlandish Art/Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA,
United States, Jul 14–17, 2027

Deadline: Sep 15, 2026

Historians of Netherlandish Art Conference 2027

- [1] Material Cultures of the Dutch Americas.
- [2] Museums and Markets: How Nineteenth-Century Sale and Display Made Netherlandish Art.
- [3] Workshop: New Approaches to Landscape Drawings – Towards a Unified Discourse.
- [4] Body Materials, Material Bodies: Thinking Through Flesh in Netherlandish Art.
- [5] Reality Check: Evidentia and the Contestation of Vision in the Early Modern Low Countries.

[1] Material Cultures of the Dutch Americas.

From: Suzanne van de Meerendonk

E-Mail: svdm@queensu.ca

Deadline: September 15, 2026

This session considers objects, artworks and material culture created and/or circulating within the Dutch Americas and its spheres of influence, including the Dutch Republic, the colonies of Dutch Brazil and New Netherland, and the coast of West Africa. The networks of circulation that came into existence within this branch of the Dutch global empire facilitated the movement and merging of materials including textiles, glass, beadwork, stone, pigments, silver, wood, shells, fur, and feathers, that shaped artistic and cultural practices both in colonial contexts and Dutch urban centers.

Topics could include:

The cross-cultural analysis of objects or materials that are not consistently placed in the traditions of Dutch art history, either because these materials have more commonly been considered within the domain of “material culture”, or because they have been subsumed under other national or regional artistic traditions. For papers that focus on artworks produced in the Dutch Republic, we are particularly interested in approaches that push beyond matters of representation, and more critically question how the circulation of materials, people, and/or knowledge through the West India Company and Dutch colonial expansion transformed art and its publics. For instance, how did the availability of—and exposure to—materials, products and artforms from the Atlantic world affect style, theory, patronage, or collecting practices? To what extent did Dutch involvement in the trans-Atlantic trade—whether as consumers or suppliers—impact the popularity and development of genres and artistic media (both in the Northern Netherlands and colonial centers)?

We also welcome contributions that present case studies of curatorial engagement with the Dutch Americas. Examples could include curatorial projects that either center on works more traditionally placed in a material culture context, or bring them into productive dialogue with paintings or other established works

of art in the Western tradition.

Please submit proposals of max. 300 words and 2-page CVs to Suzanne van de Meerendonk (svd-m@queensu.ca) and Hannah Prescott (hprescott@mfa.org) by September 15, 2026.

[2] Museums and Markets: How Nineteenth-Century Sale and Display Made Netherlandish Art.

From: Laura Tillery

E-Mail: ltillery@hamilton.edu

Deadline: September 15, 2026

Session Chairs:

Elizabeth Rice Mattison (Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth) & Laura Tillery (Hamilton College)

When 19th-century art historians and connoisseurs sorted out a history of Netherlandish painting, they created prized collectibles and commodities, fundamentally altering objects' meaning. For curators, scholars, and dealers, such new designations for historic objects and their integration into institutional frameworks changed conditions of viewing and display. For instance, the Netherlandish altarpiece, a multimedia and three-dimensional object, was scattered and divided by various agents. Consequently, scholars and audiences saw isolated paintings. Only recently have scholars reconsidered altarpieces as complex works, reassessing their function and multimedia display. The history of Netherlandish art has thus been predicated on the deconstruction and decontextualization, driven by the 19th-century art market, growth of museum collections, and imperial ideologies.

This session gathers papers that analyze 19th-century exclusions to chart forward new possibilities for our field, especially with respect to collecting and display. How did museum development and collection formation in the long 19th century gave rise to the present-day canon of Netherlandish art? Our leading premise is that museum practices, past and present, are inseparable from how we think, classify, and interpret Netherlandish art. The separation and hierarchization of media, along with formation of national institutions, contributed to the delineation of the field. Moreover, defined in tandem with European imperial ambitions, Netherlandish art took part in nationalist projects.

Papers will address the mechanisms that shaped Netherlandish art in the long 19th century, including acquisition, purchase, marketing, sale, and collecting. We especially welcome papers that attend to larger structures governing the development of Netherlandish art and clarify lacunae we have inherited.

Topics may include:

- Collecting practices from the Napoleonic era through WWI
- Collection biographies
- Reconstructing deconstructed objects
- Reproduction histories across media (plaster casts, electrotypes, reproductive prints, photography)
- Auctions, curators, and dealers who acted as agents in forming a Netherlandish canon
- Role of connoisseurship of Netherlandish art
- History of object displays in exhibitions
- Market history of paintings versus other media
- Role of Netherlandish art in the development of national and nationalist collections

Please send an abstract (up to 250 words) and a short C.V. by Sept. 15th to: Elizabeth Rice Mattison (Elizabeth.R.Mattison@Dartmouth.edu) and Laura Tillery (ltillery@hamilton.edu).

[3] Workshop: New Approaches to Landscape Drawings – Towards a Unified Discourse.

From: Alec Aldrich

E-Mail: aldrichalec@gmail.com

Deadline: September 15, 2026

Call for Workshop Participants

Co-chairs: Alec Aldrich, Stanley H. Durwood Foundation Curatorial Fellow, Harvard Art Museums, 2026–28, and Susan Anderson, Curatorial Research Associate for Dutch and Flemish Drawings, Harvard Art Museums

This workshop intends to address the flourishing of landscape studies in recent years and draw together the resulting mosaic of approaches into a unified landscape discourse. In addition to a concerted shift toward eco-critical, anti-colonial, and material approaches to landscape, new vocabularies have emerged in the context of exhibitions, special journal issues, ongoing working groups, and new dissertations—including, but by no means limited to, the “resource landscape,” the “project,” and “makeability”—to historicize a pragmatic outlook on the environment characterized by the intentional transformation and instrumentalization of nature. These scholarly trends have thus greatly complicated well-established methods of engaging the landscape genre, such as the literary categories of the Pastoral and the Georgic, the stridently visual principle of representation “naer het leven,” and the entanglement of landscape and cartography described by Svetlana Alpers as the “mapping impulse.” The present workshop will consider how these new approaches can productively intersect with object-based study and curation through the significant holdings of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish landscape drawings at the Harvard Art Museums. The workshop will be held on-site in the Art Study Center of the Harvard Art Museums.

We seek participants who aim to unite careful study of landscape drawings as objects with these emerging critical frameworks, to both reframe and challenge our understanding of landscape draftsmanship in the institutional space of the museum and its predominant methods of interpretation based in connoisseurship and histories of style. Participants will be asked to each select one or two drawings from this area of the collection, which will be on view and on hand in the Harvard Art Museums’ Art Study Center, and come prepared to present their selection with the goal of integrating their work into a wider landscape discourse, or to otherwise use landscape drawings to think through ongoing problems of interpretation. Discussion and the opportunity for direct study of the selected drawings will be a crucial component of the session.

Objects available for use may be found at the website for the Museums

(<https://harvardartmuseums.org/publications/special-collections/drawings-from-the-age-of-bruegel-rubens-and-rembrandt-the-complete-collection-online>), the printed publications by William W. Robinson, *Seventeenth-Century Dutch Drawings: A Selection from the Maida and George Abrams Collection* (1991) and *From Bruegel to Rembrandt: Dutch and Flemish Drawings from the Maida and George Abrams Collection* (2002), and *Crossroads: Drawing the Dutch Landscape*, edited by Joanna Sheers Seidenstein and Susan Anderson (2022).

Participation limited to 10. Potential participants shall submit a one-page CV and 250-word statement of interest and intent that describes relevant past and current projects, methodological interests, and potential contribution to the workshop. Applicants should likewise indicate a maximum of two Harvard drawings that relate to their existing work or present unresolved sticking points in ongoing research. We encourage

approaches that address the topics and intersections outlined above, but also welcome other possibilities broadly connected to the study of landscape drawing in the Low Countries. Please send applications to Susan Anderson and Alec Aldrich at susananderson@harvard.edu and aldrichalec@gmail.com by September 15, 2026. Applicants will be notified by October 15, 2026.

[4] Body Materials, Material Bodies: Thinking Through Flesh in Netherlandish Art.

From: John White and Emily Hirsch

E-Mail: jw72@princeton.edu

Deadline: September 15, 2026

In the early modern period, materials were often described through bodily metaphors: alabaster, ivory, and wax were compared to the human body for their softness, sheen, or color. These affordances engendered the use of these materials for carving or modelling small, hand-held bodies. Discourses on the arts also explored how to make depicted bodies appear more real, or flesh-like, across media: Peter Paul Rubens' treatise *De Imitatione Statuarum* (ca. 1615) described how painters should aim to capture the elasticity of skin in their paintings, an effect that Rubens identified as often neglected by sculptors, while Gerard de Lairese's *Groot Schilderboek* (1707) expounded on the "koleur de naakten" for bringing bodies to life.

This panel invites papers that link materially-grounded approaches to artmaking with notions of embodiment. How did early modern Netherlandish sculptors, painters, and other artists seek to represent or 'flesh out' the human body by way of organic materials? What were the possibilities or limitations of these materials, and how did they shape artists' techniques or theories? Conversely, how did bodies shape the perception of materials? Did depictions of the body seek to be life-like in terms of visual similarity, or could 'the real' also be located in the affective or haptic dimensions of materials that evoke the texture, weight, or sense of the body?

By thinking through the myriad ways that materials can be like the body, this panel ultimately seeks to expand conversations around materiality and mimesis in Netherlandish art. Papers might take a single-object approach to understanding a maker's strategies for realizing flesh or, alternatively, might look across artists and objects to reveal how certain materials lent themselves to certain bodies. We also encourage approaches that contend with the unreal or uncanny through the materialization of nonhuman, animal, or monstrous bodies.

Please submit abstracts of no more than 500 words and two images, along with a brief bio, to emilyhirsch@brown.edu and jw72@princeton.edu. Papers should be 20 minutes in length.

[5] Reality Check: Evidentia and the Contestation of Vision in the Early Modern Low Countries.

From: Eelco Nagelsmit

E-Mail: e.d.nagelsmit@vu.nl

Deadline: September 15, 2026

Artists and viewers in the early modern Low Countries inhabited a world where natural observation and the marvelous often coexisted without contradiction. As new empirical and optical sciences promised clarity and objectivity, painters, printmakers, and theorists simultaneously cultivated modes of making and viewing art that invited wonder, enchantment, fantasy, and reverie.

This panel seeks to explore how Netherlandish art and visual culture negotiated the tensions between evi-

dentia – the power of making present, certain, and true – and the imaginative, dreamlike, or even magical qualities that animated depictions of the (natural) world. Artists experimented with new techniques and visual vocabularies to evoke nature's vitality and strangeness, oscillating between meticulous observation and visionary excess. They conjured spaces where seeing became a kind of enchantment – where the act of looking blurred the threshold between empirical truth and visionary experience. Others incorporated newly discovered species from colonial territories into landscapes and still lifes, both in an effort to satisfy a curiosity for the wondrous and to make sense of expanded realities.

Contemporaneous scientific discourses reframed what it meant to see. Instruments (i.e., telescope, microscope) expanded human perception and revealed realities previously unknown. Yet these discoveries also unsettled confidence in the senses, revealing vision's fallibility and prompting renewed fascination with illusions and dreams. At stake is the dual sense of evidentia in the early modern imagination: both as a rhetorical technique of vivid demonstration and as a claim to visual proof or trustworthy witness.

This panel proposes to reconsider Netherlandish art as a terrain where evidentia and enchantment were intertwined, producing not a progressive march toward naturalism but rather an ongoing negotiation between visibility and vision. We invite proposals that examine case studies of a single artist or work, reconsider theoretical texts on evidentia and visual persuasion, or situate these issues within broader philosophical, devotional, historical or scientific contexts. Equally welcome are interdisciplinary approaches connecting art history with the histories of rhetoric, magic, science, religion, and literature.

Please submit an abstract of no more than 300 words and a short CV (1-2 pages) by September 15 to e.d.nagelsmit@vu.nl ; evdhoorn@delft.nl ; and AKnaap@mfa.org with the subject line "HNA Conference 2027 Proposal".

Reference:

CFP: 5 Sessions & Workshop at HNA (Boston, 14-17 Jul 27). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 4, 2026 (accessed Oct 26, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/53558>>.