Rembrandt's Material Worlds (Herstmonceux Castle, 3-6 Jun 27)

Bader College, Herstmonceux Castle, East Sussex, UK, Jun 3–06, 2027
Deadline: Nov 15, 2026

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International Northern Baroque Bader Colloquia.
With generous support from Bader Philanthropies, the Bader Chair in Northern Baroque Art at Queen's University, in collaboration with the Alfred Bader Research Centre at the Rembrandt House Museum, Amsterdam, is seeking papers for the international colloquium Rembrandt's Material Worlds, to be held at Bader College, Herstmonceux Castle, East Sussex, UK, from 3 to 6 June 2027.

The material turn is transforming how art historians understand works of art and the worlds from which they emerged. Materials are no longer treated merely as passive vehicles for images or ideas. They carry their own histories: of extraction and cultivation, manufacture and exchange, skilled and unskilled labour, sensory experience, use, deterioration, and repair. This makes it possible to connect the physical fabric of an artwork—from paper fibres and wooden panels to pigments and animal products—to wider histories of labour, commerce, empire, and ecological systems that brought them into an artist's workshop.

Rembrandt scholarship has long been attentive to material evidence. The Rembrandt Research Project reshaped understandings of attribution, authorship, and workshop practice through technical investigations across multiple areas of inquiry. New analytical technologies and archival discoveries now invite different questions that challenge previously accepted definitions of Rembrandt's oeuvre. The reconstruction of Rembrandt's house, with reference to the inventory of his possessions taken in 1656, has likewise illuminated the interdependence of household, workshop, collection, and commercial enterprise, revealing engagement with everyday objects, local and global crafts and industries, cultures of collecting, and practices of natural and philosophical inquiry. Rembrandt's experiments with plates, inks, papers, pigments, wood and canvas and supports reveal an intensely physical and experimental engagement with art making.

Rembrandt's Material Worlds asks what happens when we approach Rembrandt's paintings, prints, and drawings not simply as images but as physical things produced through collaborative labour and complex material infrastructures. How did pigments, timber, metals, textiles, animal substances, and paper reach the workshop? What forms of knowledge and labour transformed them into artworks? How have his works continued to change through use, display, trade, movement, conservation, environmental exposure, and the activity of nonhuman agents such as fungi, microbes, and insects? And how might these material histories connect Rembrandt's workshop to the wider ecological, commercial, colonial, and intellectual worlds of the seventeenth century?

The colloquium welcomes papers that reassess existing scholarship or offer new discoveries in the light of new archival research, technical examination, and emerging approaches within material studies. Possible topics and research methods include, but are not limited to:
• materials, making, and artistic process;
• sources, materials, and production of pigments, binders, grounds, canvases, wooden panels, copper plates, paper, and ink;
• scientific approaches to attribution and connoisseurship;
• technical art history;
• new imaging and analytical technologies;
• workshop practice, collaboration, and the material conditions of authorship;
• technologies of production and forms of skilled and unskilled labour;
• Rembrandt's printmaking practices, including plates, papers, inks, printing, and the production of different states and impressions;
• Rembrandt as collector, entrepreneur, or dealer;
• "Saskia's Enterprise": Saskia Uylenburgh, Hendrickje Stoffels, and the household as a material and commercial enterprise;
• material evidence of empire, colonial commerce, and environmental extraction;
• ecocritical approaches and the environmental humanities;
• human–animal relations in artistic materials, processes, and representations;
• material imitation, transformation, and artifice;
• conservation, deterioration, and the changing physical lives of artworks;
• dendrochronology and the histories of wooden supports;
• the shifting landscape of attribution and the material parameters of authorship;
• the relationship between depicted objects and the material culture of Rembrandt's world.

The colloquium's goal is to bring together art historians, curators, conservation scientists, and conservators working from different methodological perspectives. We welcome contributions from emerging researchers and graduate students as well as senior scholars. Our aim is to create a collaborative environment in which new ideas, conversations, and future projects can emerge. While the colloquium will provide the foundation for a planned edited volume, we envision it as an intellectual incubator: a forum for testing, refining, and extending ideas rather than presenting finished arguments.

As an edited volume will result from the conference, we ask contributors not to present work that has already been published.

Please send a 200-word abstract and CV to Stephanie Dickey (stephanie.dickey@queensu.ca), Tomasz Grusiecki (tomasz.grusiecki@queensu.ca), and David de Witt (d.dewitt@rembrandthuis.nl) by 15 November 2026. Those selected for the colloquium will be notified by 15 December 2026.

Attendance will be limited to a maximum of 20 participants. A travel allowance will be provided, and accommodation will be fully covered.

Reference:
CFP: Rembrandt's Material Worlds (Herstmonceux Castle, 3-6 Jun 27). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 19, 2026 (accessed Nov 24, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/54219>.