Becoming visible (Pisa, 9-11 Dec 26)

Pisa, Italy, Dec 9–11, 2026
Deadline: Oct 1, 2026

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Becoming Visible: The Challenges of Queer Legibility in Visual Arts and Cultures.
The Third International CIRQUE Conference takes visuality as a semantic battleground: a disruptor of established meanings, and a vehicle for alternative subjectivities made readable in society. We aim to examine both historical and contemporary practices through which queer subjectivities are, or were, articulated and disclosed using visual strategies of legibility—broadly defined to include fine arts, moving images, digital media, and their intersections with theatre and music. These practices range from quasi-secret codes and forms of semantic resilience developed in historical periods or regions marked by strong patriarchal oppression to more explicit and self-affirmative expressions.

Over the past decade, visual studies have increasingly engaged with theoretical frameworks that challenge linear, historicist models of development, embracing notions of palimpsest and plurality of meaning. Within art history, scholars such as Alexander Nagel, Christopher Wood, and Georges Didi-Huberman, among others, have highlighted alternative temporalities. David Getsy has applied transgender studies to the interpretation of abstract, non-gendered bodies in sculpture. More broadly, anthropological approaches and a heightened focus on vernacular forms have expanded the range of meaningful sources for inquiry. In the broader field of queer aesthetics and political philosophy, concepts such as failure (Jack Halberstam) and resistance to modernist regimes of legibility—alongside the embrace of the anarchic métis (practical cunning), as theorized by James C. Scott—challenge the boundaries of disciplinary orthodoxy. These theoretical perspectives contribute to a platform for discussing tensions, resilience, and layered, palimpsestic codes, as well as strategies for appropriating and redefining (art-)historical languages that queer visualities both inhabit and disrupt.

While the conference welcomes a wide range of topics, we particularly encourage papers that contribute to decentering the predominance of Anglo-American contexts, especially for historical periods before the 1970s. Most recently, The First Homosexuals: The Birth of New Identity 1869-1939, edited by Jonathan Katz (2025), set a milestone in the direction of global inquiry that our conference wishes to pursue. Moreover, we encourage submissions encompassing queer visuality across all human experiences beyond sexuality, including dis/ability, health, social and ethnic conformity, and other cultural categories.

Possible topics may include:

Decolonizing visual expressions from what Richard Francis Burton (1885) infamously termed the “Sotadic Zone”: Italy, Southern Europe, and Mediterranean regions.
Queer subtexts, resilience, or complacency during authoritarian and dictatorial regimes.
Complicating the abstractionist canon in art: fashioning abstract corporealities.
Queer lives and religious experience: shaping imagery, adapting iconographies.
The visual/artistic output of pioneering LGBTQ organizations in various countries.
Regimes of visuality beyond the arts: legal, medical, political.
Hybrid beings and embodiments: beyond the human.
Intermedia fashioning of queer bodies and experiences

Please send a 300-word abstract in English of your proposed paper, alongside your CV, at direttore@cirque.unipi.it by 1 October 2026.

No registration fees will be required!

Reference:
CFP: Becoming visible (Pisa, 9-11 Dec 26). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 13, 2026 (accessed Nov 24, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/54241>.