The Color Pink (Paris, 25 May 27)

Paris, Institut national d'histoire de l'art, May 25, 2027
Deadline: Oct 18, 2026

Juliette Trey

The Color Pink: Uses and Reception Through the Lens of Gender.

The color pink and its uses have undergone certain shifts in how they have been received in Europe. A color that gained its own identity during the first half of the 18th century, pink took the fashion world, the decorative arts, and painting by storm as part of the Rocaille style. Its popularity is evident from the coining of the term ‘rose’ in French – or its European equivalents – to describe this shade, and was brought about by a combination of technical and cultural factors against a backdrop of advances in dyeing techniques and globalized trade (the import of the ‘bois de braise’ dye, the arrival of pink Chinese roses on the flower market, etc.). Over the centuries, although associated with gallant culture, pink became more specifically feminine—even frivolous and controversial—before being reclaimed in its various eclectic variations. This study day aims to reevaluate these associations and the values that were then perceived, claimed, or subverted by creators and thinkers, as well as by other, more marginalized communities—both male and female. The goal is to rethink the ways in which a color—one that to this day carries connotations of values crystallized in the 18th century, when pink was as alluring as it was repulsive—is represented and received.

Conceived as a scholarly prelude to the exhibition on the color pink—co-produced by the Musée Fabre and the Musée d’Art de Nantes and scheduled for late 2028—this symposium adopts a cultural history and gender history perspective to further develop and enrich the exhibition’s themes. This topic will draw on approaches from social and economic history, art history, fashion and decorative arts, gender history, literature, philosophy, and anthropology. It will facilitate the integration of methods for understanding discourses and objects through the participation of museum professionals and academics. Through the interactions between techniques and media, and the dialogues between the arts and the more intimate emotions of the participants in this ambivalent reception, the conference will address a diverse range of objects: pictorial works (paintings, prints, drawings), as well as sculpture, decorative arts (ceramics, painted decorations and textiles, wallpaper...), fashion and costume, and the visual arts (performance, film).

We hope that the proposals will explore the intersections between color studies and gender studies, while also allowing for forays into postcolonial and queer studies. The emergence of the color pink and the prominence accorded to it are strongly correlated with the racial theories at work during the 18th century. While not the central focus of this seminar, this aspect cannot be ignored. Furthermore, the complexities of its reception—at a time when gendered uses of objects are becoming more entrenched—either reinforce or nuance the male/female divide, which assigns

pink the primacy of the “natural” world of young girls. Pink has become the banner of LGBTQI+ cultures, first as a sign of heightened sensitivity—based on essentialist theories of homosexuality associated with the effeminization of masculinity—and later as an expression of pride and advocacy.
Attention will be focused on dialogues across historical periods and various Western contexts, in order to account for the discontinuities, impermanence, and ruptures that occur in the appropriation, assimilation, or rejection of this color—with its specific connotations—within visual and material cultures. Proposals for papers are invited to address one or more of the themes and issues outlined below, though this list is not exhaustive:

- The color pink, its production, and its uses, with the aim of highlighting the material and economic conditions surrounding the emergence and manufacture of this color up to the present day: the mediums, materials, and techniques (colorants, pigments, natural or synthetic dyes); the locations of design, production, and distribution; the taxonomies, terminology, and relationships with other colors; the physical and visual media associated with pink, such as wood, fabric, enamel, and paper, as well as synthetic dyes and new materials like plastic, latex, and chewing gum; the contexts in which the color circulates, is repurposed, and is featured in the media (in hygiene, interior design, etc.)

- Representations and discourses surrounding pink: the rhetoric of adoption, valorization, and rejection of the color; accounts of its intimate and public uses (portraits, caricatures, etc.); associations and confusions with sex and gender stereotypes linked to femininity and homosexuality; relationships to gallantry, eroticism, or romanticism; connections to the natural sciences such as botany and to the anatomical sciences, particularly in racialist considerations regarding skin tone; the vagaries of taste and affinities with kitsch or camp.

- symbolic reappropriations, appropriations, detournements, and misuses: the contrasting connections between the color pink and popular cultures, as well as analyses from the fields of marketing, semiotics, and gender sociology; historical figures, actors, and actresses associated with the color pink; contemporary, subversive, and political reinterpretations of the color in feminist and LGBT cultures; conservative uses associating pink with traditional femininity.

Submission Guidelines
Proposals (title + abstract of no more than 300 words, accompanied by a short bio-bibliography) must be submitted by October 18, 2026, to the following address: rose@listes.inha.fr

Presentations, lasting approximately 20 minutes, may be delivered in French or English.
Travel expenses for presenters will be covered by the organizing institutions.

Organizing Committee: Damien Delille (INHA), James Horton (INHA), Juliette Trey (musée Fabre de Montpellier), Marlen Schneider (Université Grenoble Alpes)
Scientific Committee: Marie Dupas (musée d’Arts de Nantes), Damien Delille (INHA), Mechthild Fend (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt), Aurélia Gaillard (Université Bordeaux-Montaigne), Melissa Hyde (University of Florida), Marlen Schneider (Université Grenoble Alpes), Juliette Trey (musée Fabre de Montpellier)

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