Research Seminar "The Medici and Their Worlds" (Paris, 24 Sep–10 Dec 26)

Paris, Galerie Colbert, INHA, Sep 24–Dec 10, 2026

Sefy Hendler

The Medici and Their Worlds.
Joint research seminar Hicsa (Panthéon Sorbonne) and the Medici Archive Project.

Throughout most of their reign, the Medici Grand Dukes strategically oriented their gaze toward the East rather than the West, prioritizing the preservation of their maritime hegemony in the Mediterranean rather than trying their fortune in and across the Atlantic. Archival records inform us that one of their major concerns, as well as a source of endless fascination, was the Ottoman Empire, especially Constantinople and the sultans, from Suleiman the Magnificent to Ahmed III. Current scholarship has actively interrogated this very dichotomy: the interplay between aversion to and fascination with the Sublime Porte. At the heart of this discourse lies the concept of perception, continuously shaped by a vast matrix of fragmented news narratives and stimulated by an ever-growing accumulation of books, maps, and material culture. In their attempts to decipher the sultans and the complex power dynamics encompassing war, religion, diplomacy, economic interests, and cultural exchange, the Medici ended up inventing them.

In recent years, historians of the Medici and scholars working in related fields have traced this specific modus operandi to 'worlds' situated outside traditional Tuscan-Ottoman diplomatic, financial, and cultural spheres. Scholars have explored Medici awareness of the Americas; Medici-Persian diplomatic networks; epistolary exchanges between the Indian subcontinent and the Tuscan court; artistic and political ties between Tuscany and the Maronite community in Lebanon; trade routes across the Black Sea; the geopolitical influence of Sephardic merchants acting as Medici intermediaries and maintaining deep roots in the Saadi Sultanate of Morocco; and the (sometimes) patchy accounts of merchant-travelers in East Asian and African territories.

The 'Medici and Their Worlds' seminar, conceived by Alessio Assonitis (MAP, Florence) and Sefy Hendler (HICSA, Paris) is a multi-year initiative seeking to explore Tuscany's interactions with territories to the north, south, east, and west through collecting practices, art objects, and material culture. Particular attention will be paid to how awareness of the world outside the Palazzo was constructed, mediated, and transformed, and how the Medici engineered spaces specifically calibrated to shape perceptions of otherness.

The sessions will take place from September to December 2026 at the Galerie Colbert, salle Julian (6 rue des Petits-Champs / 2 rue Vivienne, 75002 Paris). Admission is free and no registration is required.

Thursday, 24 September 2026, 11am-12h45pm
Sefy Hendler (HICSA Paris 1), Alessio Assonitis (MAP) and Gwladys Le Cuff (Paris 1 – INHA)
Introduction: Who Were the Medici, and What Did the “World” Mean to Them?

Thursday, 1 October 2026, 11am-12h45pm
Sefy Hendler (HICSA Paris 1)
The Medici and the Jews: Between Myth and Reality. The Case of Joseph the Patriarch

Thursday, 8 October 2026, 11am-12h45pm
Sefy Hendler (HICSA Paris 1)
The Medici and the Holy Land: A New Look at the Medici Altar

Thursday, 15 October 2026, 11am-12h45pm
Gwladys Le Cuff (Paris 1 – INHA)
Cultural Exchanges, Diplomatic Gifts, and the Hegemonic Projects of the Medici Popes Leo X and Clement VII

Thursday, 22 October 2026, 11am-12h45pm
Gwladys Le Cuff (Paris 1 – INHA)
Eastern Cultural Presence in Italy and the Medici Collections of Islamic Art

Thursday, 3 December 2026, 11am-12h45pm
Alessio Assonitis (Medici Archive Project)
Searching for the Other in the Medici Archives (1537–1743): Letters, Inventories, and Maps

Thursday, 10 December 2026, 11am-12h45pm
Valentina Conticelli (Uffizi Galleries)
The World in a Room: Cabinets, Laboratories, and Chambers of Wonders in the Theatre of Knowledge of the Uffizi Gallery

Reference:
ANN: Research Seminar "The Medici and Their Worlds" (Paris, 24 Sep-10 Dec 26). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 23, 2026 (accessed Nov 24, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/54377>.