15 Sessions at AAH (Exeter, 7-9 Apr 27)

Association for Art History Annual Conference, University of Exeter, Apr 7–09, 2027
Deadline: Oct 25, 2026

ArtHist.net Redaktion

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[13] Beyond the Hand: Re-considering Authorship through Disability.
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[15] Immersive Realism and its Audiences in the Nineteenth Century.

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[1] Before Moody: Black Artists and British Art History before 1923
From: Lizzie Robles & Freya Gowrley
Date: 25.09.26

According to longstanding narratives of British art history, the history of Black artists in Britain begins with the arrival of the Jamaican sculptor Ronald Moody in England in 1923. Before this date, Black subjects are readily visible —occasionally as named sitters, but more often as unnamed figures within portraits of wealthy white patrons. Yet the presence of Black artists before Moody has been obscured by what Eddie Chambers describes as a process of 'invisible-ising'. This panel asks what it means to write a British art history before Moody—that is, to establish a history of something that has long presumed to be absent.

Emerging research suggests that Black artistic practice has a much longer history in Britain than existing narratives allow. For example, recently digitised archives have brought renewed critical attention to the father-and-son silhouettists William Hamlet Sr and William Hamlet Jr as 'm[e]n of colour' who worked for the aristocracy and royal family from about 1783, whose work has been obscured thanks to the historically low status held by silhouette portraiture. We suggest that these examples stand not as isolated exceptions (or new 'firsts'), but as evidence of a longer history of Black creative production in Britain, obscured

by fragmentary archives and disciplinary hierarchies that have long since ‘invisible-ised’ it.

We invite papers that engage closely with specific artists, creative practitioners, art objects and media that expand and complicate the existing parameters of the history of Black artists in Britain, as well as those reflecting conceptually on the challenges of writing British art history before Moody.

Themes: Black Artists; British Art History; disciplinary hierarchies

Lead Convenor: Lizzie Robles, University of Bristol, United Kingdom

Co-convenors: Freya Gowrley, University of Bristol, United Kingdom

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[2] Invasives at Home: Plants, Borders & Belonging in Contemporary Art
From: Orjana Rudeloff (lead convenor), Emilia Terracciano (co-convenor)
Date: 25.09.26

This panel focuses on plant-human relationships in contemporary art. We invite contributions that shed light on debates around the ambivalent status of invasive plant species and the anthropogenic histories associated with their movement across the British Empire.

Plants are sessile organisms whose survival is predicated on migration and adaptation; they care little about border zones and security areas. In contemporary Britain, no instance of plant mobility has provoked more resistance than the spread of invasive species. From the Latin ‘invadere’ meaning ‘to come into, go into, usurp, attack’, the term carries hostile connotations. Plants ‘in and out of place’, invasives are perceived as intruders and trespassers. Their mobility unsettles humans, exposing the most maligned excesses of anthropogenic cultivation. But when and how did plants become out of place?

Artists and art historians have critically evaluated how the legacies of colonialism have shaped the ways we relate to notions of landscapes, borders, and belonging. We centre plants as biocultural entities with distinct environmental and social histories that have profoundly shaped human cultures. Contemporary responses by diverse artists, including Iman Datoo, Apnavi Makanji, and Yan Wang Preston, reveal how invasives offer a unique lens on the accelerated exploitation of nature in the modern period, compelling us to rethink our putative mastery over the planet. In our current political climate – steeped in anti-migration rhetoric, and the mobilisation of native/invasive categories – xenophobia is rife. Especially welcome are papers that critically examine the afterlives of green imperialism - as they inflect and inform visual art production.

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[3] Cast and Impression: Sculpture and Print in Dialogue
From: Anastasia Belyaeva
Date: 25.09.26

Despite their shared reliance on replication and workshop production, sculpture and printmaking have largely been treated as separate fields within art history. Museum collections, exhibitions, and scholarly literature rarely consider the two media together. Yet both emerged through analogous processes of transfer and reproduction (mould and cast, matrix and impression) and raise related questions concerning originality, multiplicity, authorship, and the status of the copy. While some publications, such as the catalogue

of the 2013 Göttingen exhibition Abgekupfert: Roms Antiken in den Reproduktionsmedien der frühen Neuzeit have explored the reproduction of antique sculpture in points and scholars such as Malcolm Baker have explored points of intersection between sculpture and print (Baker 1995; 2000; 2016), the broader relationship between these media remains underexamined.

This session seeks to bring sculpture and print into dialogue by focusing on their shared processes, technologies, and systems of production. Throughout history, sculptors have turned to print and printmakers to sculpture, while many artists have worked across both media. In each, the artist's degree of direct involvement may vary considerably, with significant stages of production delegated to specialist artisans, printers, founders, carvers, engravers, or casters. Technological innovations, including photomechanical reproduction and mechanical enlargement, transformed the production and circulation of prints and sculptures alike, challenging distinctions between original and reproduction.

At a moment when contemporary artistic practice increasingly transcends medium-specific categories, and when intermedial, material, and decolonising approaches encourage us to rethink inherited disciplinary boundaries, a renewed consideration of sculpture and print is particularly timely.

This session invites papers addressing any period or geographical context. Possible topics include artistic exchanges; workshop practices; reproduction and dissemination; technological innovation; and materiality and touch.

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[4] 'Materiam superbat opus:' playing with material limitations in the medieval world, c.1100-1500
From: Blanche Darbord
Date: 25.09.26

Material limitations are inextricable from artistic creation; this panel at the Association for Art History 2027 Annual Conference proposes an exploration of how artists in the Middle Ages surpassed these limitations in all types of media—stone, ivory, metal, pigment, parchment, textiles—across geographies and cultures. It considers the roles of technique and virtuosity in the production of art, enriching our understanding of the tensions embodied by the expression "materiam superbat opus" (Ovid, Met., 2.5). As surpassing material boundaries is inherent to artistic creation, the “Middle Ages” will not be confined to one specific region.

This panel explores the ways in which manipulating material to overcome its physical limitations was a core concern in the creation and reception of art in the Middle Ages. Art production is fundamentally a form of problem-solving that pushes against the limits of its material, which in turn shapes the audience’s appreciation of a work. Recent publications that offer varied considerations of the topic include Jaeger, C. Stephen (ed.), Magnificence and the sublime in Medieval aesthetics: art, architecture, literature, music (2010) and Britta Dümpelmann (ed.), Crafting Presence: Material Evocations, 300-1300 (2025). Inspired by the pioneering work of Victor Stoichiţă, The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting (1997), it further engages with the concept of self-awareness in art across media and cultures c.1100-1500.

This panel will select papers that together present studies covering a broad geographical and chronological range, including Western Europe, Byzantium, and the Islamic World, c.1100-1500. It encourages focused papers that offer an exploration of specific case studies.

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[5] When the Image Fails: Understanding Ephemeral Manifestations in Premodern Indian Deities
From: Rakesh Das
Date: 25.09.26

When the Image Fails: Understanding Ephemeral Manifestations in Premodern Indian Deities
The session proposes exploring the Indian deities beyond anthropomorphic forms in the premodern context. This panel invites scholarship that moves beyond iconocentric approaches and focuses on diverse modes of expression, i.e., in texts, inscriptions, and non-anthropomorphic (anionic) forms. This panel considers surviving artefacts, such as temple images and texts that sustained due to their agentive and institutional practices and may have received patronage from elites such as kings, priests, artisans and trade guilds. Meanwhile, counterexamples made of perishable and ephemeral mediums such as mud heaps/anthills, bamboo posts, and wooden pillars, are often overlooked and questioned for their non-linear historicity. For instance, the contemporary practices of the Stambheśvarī cult in present-day Odisha, India, are distinct from the deity evoked in Śulkī dynasty copper plate inscriptions as a family deity. Her absence in the classical temple art of the 8th and 9th CE problematizes materiality as an aspect of historical continuity. However, seeing 'material absence' as 'historical absence' within an archaeological or historical context might be an academic oversimplification. Deities were sometimes re-imagined and appeared with new nomenclature across different temporalities. The cases include indigenous deities from southern India, such as Seyyon (Kartikeya, Murugan), Māyon (Krishna) and Kotrāvai (Durgā) that appear in the ancient Tamil texts of the Sangam corpus. They transform from aniconic pillars and hero stones into icons when they reappear in the later Brahminical temple traditions. Such manifestations challenge the binaries of continuity and discontinuity in historical discourse.

This panel seeks papers on such indigenous non-Sanskritic motifs and deities that were appropriated by the classical pantheon, include of inscriptions, texts, landscape, and temples. The panel aims to understand how the visual manifestations functioned as layered, non-linear, and asymmetric apparatuses in premodern India.

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[6] African Modernism and Alternative Systems of Mediation and Valuation
From: Kathryn Brown
Date: 25.09.26

Convenors:
Jonathan Adeyemi (Loughborough University)
Kathryn Brown (Loughborough University)

The visibility of marginalised agents in the international art world has often developed through unorthodox platforms that eschewed, challenged or disrupted dominant institutions and epistemologies. Building on foundational work by Okwui Enwezor, Kobena Mercer and Chika Okeke-Agulu, this session explores the career trajectories of modern and contemporary African artists and considers how they have navigated alternative systems, achieved institutional inclusion, or developed independent sources of legitimation for their work. Although the end of the Cold War diminished Eurocentric domination of the international art world, African modern and contemporary art was, until the 21st Century, largely excluded from the mainstream of the international art system. In consequence, its emerging internationalisation and market value

were driven by alternative networks of dealers, art fairs, museums, collectors, artist-run spaces, and individual auctioneers. Partly propelled by the Black Lives Matter movement, modern and contemporary African artists are now included in blue-chip gallery rosters, museum collections, and biennials. Their works are setting record prices in auctions. What factors have influenced these developments? How have markets and museums combined to produce new discourses about contemporary African art and generate increases in its financial value? What role has art history played in shaping market discourses about African modernism and creating new opportunities for artists? We welcome papers from a range of perspectives that discuss the individuals, institutions, and agents who, acting individually or in groups, have mediated the concept of African modern and contemporary art and created systems for shaping its financial and aesthetic value.

To submit a proposal, please see the details on the AAH conference website.

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[7] Making Exhibitions: Institutions, Networks and Exhibition Practices in Europe, 1850–1914
From: Iliana Mejias-Ojajärvi
Date: 25.09.26

During the second half of the nineteenth century, exhibitions became one of the principal means through which artworks, artistic knowledge, professional relationships and institutional practices circulated across national boundaries. Exhibition history has demonstrated that exhibitions can be studied as historically constructed events shaped by systems of selection, institutional structures, practices of display and the individuals involved in their organisation (Mainardi 1987; Greenberg, Ferguson & Nairne 1996; Altshuler 2008). Building on this scholarship, the session shifts attention from the finished exhibition towards the practical and collaborative processes through which exhibitions came into being.
Transnational history has drawn attention to connections, exchanges and processes extending across national frameworks (Iriye & Saunier 2009; Saunier 2013), while approaches to cultural mobility have emphasised the agents, routes and conditions that make movement possible (Greenblatt et al. 2010). Applied to exhibition history, these perspectives invite questions about how artworks, information and exhibition practices moved between individuals and institutions; who facilitated these movements; and how local institutional circumstances shaped them. Correspondence, institutional records, exhibition catalogues, provenance material and contemporary press provide particularly valuable evidence for reconstructing these processes.
This session welcomes papers investigating the making of exhibitions between approximately 1850 and 1914. We particularly encourage contributions based on archival research that examine correspondence, exhibition catalogues, museum and art-society records, collecting practices, institutional cooperation and the circulation of artworks across national and cultural boundaries. Papers may focus on individual exhibitions, organisers and intermediaries, curatorial and selection practices, institutional collaborations, or exhibition-making as a collaborative process.
By bringing together case studies from different geographical and institutional contexts, the session aims to explore how exhibitions functioned as spaces in which professional relationships, institutional networks and artistic knowledge were created and negotiated. Comparative discussion will consider both differences between local circumstances and the connections through which exhibition practices travelled, contributing to a broader understanding of exhibition-making in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Paper proposals should include:

the title of the proposed paper, maximum 20 words
an abstract of no more than 250 words
the name and institutional affiliation of the author or authors

Proposals must be submitted through the AAH 2027 Paper Proposal Submission Form by 23:59 UK time on Sunday, 25 October 2026:

https://app.oxfordabstracts.com/stages/82494/submitter

Session details:

https://forarthistory.org.uk/58-making-exhibitions-institutions-networks-and-exhibition-practices-in-europe-1850-1914/

Lead Convenor:
Iliana Mejias-Ojajärvi
University of Helsinki, Finland

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[8] Art and the Altered Earth: Landscape Practices in a Changing Climate
From: Sadia Pasha Kamran
Date: 25.09.26

Convenor: Sadia Pasha Kamran, Forman Christian College, Pakistan
Themes: Landscape Art, Anthropocene, Ecocriticism, Art Activism, Environmental Studies

Anthropogenic climate change has fundamentally transformed both the physical environment and the cultural imaginaries that shape our understanding of landscape. As a result, the tradition of landscape representation is undergoing significant redefinition. This panel investigates how landscape art across different regions and historical periods both responds to and records environmental crisis, foregrounding the genre's evolving role as witness and agent amid ecological precarity.
Rejecting the notion of nature as a passive backdrop, the session invites papers and artist presentations that examine landscape practices negotiating human-induced environmental change. Topics may include contemporary uses of satellite imagery, data-driven digital mapping, eco-critical installations, AI-generated geographies, as well as reinterpretations of plein-air painting, printmaking, and early industrial photography. By bringing together scholars and practitioners, the panel fosters interdisciplinary dialogue that bridges historical, artistic, and technological approaches.
Rather than imposing a single theoretical framework, the session encourages diverse analytical perspectives, including eco-criticism, spatial history and postcolonial geography. By highlighting multiple regional and temporal viewpoints, the discussion aims to reveal how landscape art reflects, critiques and anticipates shifting ecological realities.
This session is designed for scholars, artists, curators and educators working at the intersection of art history and environmental studies. By generating new dialogue and sharing innovative research and practice, "Art and the Altered Earth" seeks to expand the boundaries of landscape art and reimagine its functions in the context of global environmental crisis.

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[9] Feminist and Queer Reception of Classical Greco-Roman Corporeality

From: Alex Lednicky
Date: 25.09.26

Rooted in the Greco-Roman classical tradition, the mid-nineteenth century saw considerable developments in the British nude, due in part to the arrival of the Parthenon Marbles in London and increased global presence of the British Empire. From early examples of nude paintings based on classical subject and style, there is a clear objective for artists to emulate the mathematically calculated, idealised proportions of statues from Antiquity. In doing so, the corporeality and sexuality of the, primarily female, bodies depicted become bound within the inanimate containment of a statue; they become unmoving, submissive, and under the jurisdiction the artist and audiences' gazes, losing their autonomy and individual personhood.
In turn, contemporary artists' appropriation and reception of the Classics demonstrates a rejection of the containment of perceived female sexuality in statues. Instead, artists, especially queer artists, embrace a dynamic which 'celebrate[s] bodies as a site of sensing and feeling, a locus of interpretation conditioned by its individual experience' (Ella Haselswerdt, 2024, 438).
This session invites papers on feminist and queer receptions of classical Greco-Roman corporeality from the mid-nineteenth century to the present-day addressing issues of transness, disability, crip theory, and decoloniality, as well as curatorial approaches and exhibitions from any time period. How has the classical tradition been used to reflect anxieties surrounding feminism, queerness, and atypical bodies? In what ways have interpretations of the classical tradition been used to legitimise the policing of bodies across time and space? How have these corporeal depictions reflected or triggered concerns over the virtuosity of the nation?

Lead Convenor: Alex McLachlan Bourke, University of St. Andrews, United Kingdom
Co-convenors: Alex Lednicky, University of St. Andrews, United Kingdom

Themes: Classical Reception, Corporeality, Feminism, Queerness, Transness, Contemporary Art, Curation

Format: Four 20-minute papers followed by an open Q&A and discussion with panel members and audience.

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[10] Along the Ecological Grain: Art and Empire in Southeast Asia
From: Brianne Cohen
Date: 25.09.26

Brianne Cohen, University of Colorado Boulder, brianne.cohen@colorado.edu
Philippa Lovatt, University of St. Andrews, pcl2@st-andrews.ac.uk

Art historical writing on ecology has boomed recently, from studies on Land and Eco Art to scholarship on the Anthropocene through new materialist or Indigenous eco-frameworks, and compendious edited volumes on ecologically engaged art. While this work has transformed understandings of environmentally oriented art, it largely focuses on Euro-American contexts and present-day crises, with Global South histories remaining underexamined—including the imperial systems largely responsible for producing today's cascading socioenvironmental damage. "Along the Ecological Grain" takes inspiration from Ann Laura Stoler's exhortation to read with the archival grain, or to read along the colonial archive's grain with care through ethnographic immersion, rather than extractive mining (Along the Archival Grain, 2010). This is not to adopt colonial epistemic frameworks as common sense, but rather to read the granular epistemic anxieties imbedded within such structures.

This AAH panel invites papers on contemporary and diasporic Southeast Asian art that look to longer histories of imperialism and ecological violence in the region. Participants could propose topics on (but not limited to) contemporary artwork engaged with the enduring harms of Southeast Asia's entrenched plantation complex (rubber, palm, coffee, etc.), mining extraction (tin, limestone, nickel, etc.), damming, wildlife trafficking, aquaculture, or chemical toxins (pesticides, fertilizers) through warfare and/or industrial agriculture. How are artists unearthing and highlighting more invisible, hidden, or neglected histories of aggression inflicted on the landscape by imperial regimes (British, Dutch, French, American, etc.)? In light of such histories, how are artists proposing alternative ways or epistemologies of living more sustainably with a more-than-human environment?

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[11] Gender, Faith, and Artistic Patronage in Japanese Buddhism and the Ottoman Empire
From: Selin Ozdemir
Date: 28.09.26

Session Convenor: Selin Özdemir (Tohoku University, Japan)

This session explores women's artistic patronage and the ways in which faith, particularly beliefs about the afterlife, shaped the commissioning of religious art and architecture. Focusing on Buddhist Japan and the Ottoman Empire, it asks how gender and religious belief together drove artistic production.

Possible questions include: How did women turn personal piety into lasting artistic and architectural legacies? How did ideas of salvation and the afterlife shape commissioned works? How do gender and religious authority intersect in the making of sacred art?

While the session centres on Japan and the Ottoman world, we also welcome comparative and cross-cultural approaches, including case studies from other non-Western contexts.

The session will consist of four 20-minute papers, each followed by five minutes of questions.

How to submit: Proposals must be submitted via the AAH 2027 Call for Papers Proposal Submission Form (Oxford Abstracts): https://app.oxfordabstracts.com/stages/82494/submitter
Please select Session 46 "Gender, Faith, and Artistic Patronage in Japanese Buddhism and the Ottoman Empire" from the "Session Name" dropdown list.

Session details:
https://forarthistory.org.uk/46-gender-faith-and-artistic-patronage-in-japanese-buddhism-and-the-ottoman-empire/

Full Call for Papers: https://forarthistory.org.uk/conference-2027-exeter-aah-2027-call-for-papers/

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[12] Artisanal Histories Intersecting Archaeology and Art History: Reflections from fieldwork in South Asia
From: Lola Cindric
Date: 26.09.26

Both the disciplines of archaeology and art history engage with temporality, space, society, and culture to offer perspectives on material culture. The orientalist approach towards material culture in South Asia, conveyed through studies carried out by and for the colonial regime, has pervaded the methodologies of

both disciplines and still informs the way we contribute to archaeology and art history nowadays. The critique of the colonial knowledge paradigm demanded a reorganisation of the existing disciplinary practices, resulting in an institutional division between archaeology and art history despite their shared roots. A possible response to the distinct approaches of the disciplines of archaeology and art history is to bring perspectives from material culture studies, which also marks a departure from 19th-century orientalist methods. A common aspect of art history and archaeology is the use of classifications as a methodological tool for understanding the past. This is not without a critique, and by all accounts, it is most often artificially created to provide the insights. Yet it also acts as a means of dividing artisanal or craft practices, which belies the fluid relationship across materials and crafts. In an attempt to bridge archaeological and art historical methodological inquiry, we posit artisanal histories as a crucial link between them. Primarily tacit and sensorial, the bodily knowledge of artisans connects archaeological objects, archival material, historicity and contemporaneity. Commitment to immersive fieldwork with artisanal communities not only expands the scope of historiographical inquiry but also shapes the perceptions, experiences, and thought processes of the researchers.

This panel welcomes contributions from researchers, students and scholars in archaeology and art history interested in tackling the difficulties inherent to documenting past artisanal techniques. We encourage presentations involving research grounded in hands-on practice and fieldwork, primarily attentive to the perspectives of makers in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, alongside India.

Themes: Archaeology, Art History, Artisanal Knowledge, Know-How, South Asia

Convenors:
- Rajarshi Sengupta, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, India
- Smriti Haricharan, Associate Professor, Dept. of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, India
- Lola Cindric, Assistant Professor at the Department of Social Sciences of Liberal Arts (SSLA), Institute of Business and Administration (IBA) Karachi, Pakistan

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[13] Beyond the Hand: Re-considering Authorship through Disability
From: Pierre Von-Ow
Date: 26.09.26

The hand articulates art history's entire system of value, which is established around manual labour and marks. Drawing manuals published since the early modern period teach how to train a dexterous hand through repeated inscriptions of lines, while art historians seek—at times forensically—traces of the artist's touch in their productions. Across periods and media, however, images have been made using other body parts: the mouth, the shoulder, the nose, the foot, prostheses and assistive devices. When the maker's body departs from the norm, art historians tend to read workmanship from a biographical lens, often discussing it as wondrous feat rather than expanding the scope of artistic technique.

This session asks what becomes of authorship, skill, dexterity, and attribution when the trained, normative hand is neither the work's origin nor instrument. What happens to connoisseurship when the autograph mark is made by other means? How might attention to non-normative making reshape discourses around artistic production?

We welcome papers from any period, medium, or geography, on artists who worked without hands or with disabled hands; the use of prosthetic, instrumental, and assistive practices in representation. Our shared aim is a session in which complex embodiment sets the terms.

Themes: Disability studies, Embodiment, Authorship

Additional format comment: Sessions of four 20-minute research papers, each followed by 5 minutes for questions.

Lead Convenor: Virginia Marano, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Germany
Co-convenor: Pierre Von-Ow, University of St Andrews, United Kingdom

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[14] Gifts to the Sacred: Portable Objects and Material Patronage across Religious Traditions
From: Zahra Khademi
Date: 26.09.26

Religious institutions have long been shaped by the donation and endowment of objects, buildings, and artistic commissions. From gifts to Islamic waqf foundations to church treasuries, reliquaries, monastic collections, and temple endowments, acts of giving played a central role in the creation of sacred spaces and their material cultures. Yet these practices are often studied within separate regional, religious, or disciplinary traditions.

This session contributes to the Association's commitment to a broad and inclusive art history by bringing into dialogue scholarship on sacred endowment across Islamic, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and other religious traditions. It focuses on how such objects functioned as expressions of artistic patronage and material devotion across different religious environments.

The session asks how rulers, elites, religious communities, and individual devotees used movable objects such as textiles, metalwork, ceramics, manuscripts, jewellery, and other precious or everyday items to express piety, authority, memory, and belonging. It also considers how these objects were incorporated into the visual and material environments of shrines, churches, temples, monasteries, and pilgrimage centres, and how their meanings were shaped through display, circulation, and continued use.

We welcome papers on objects endowed to shrines, churches, monasteries, temples, pilgrimage centres, and other sacred institutions across West, Central, and South Asia, and the Mediterranean. Comparative approaches are especially encouraged, particularly those that trace connections across traditions or examine parallel practices of endowment and display.

For the session details, see:
https://forarthistory.org.uk/47-gifts-to-the-sacred-portable-objects-and-material-patronage-across-religious-traditions/

Please submit your abstract (maximum of 250 words) for a presentation of about 15-20 minutes via the AAH 2027 Call for Papers Proposal Submission Form by 23:59 UK, 25 October 2026. See full details here to submit a proposal: https://forarthistory.org.uk/conference-2027-exeter-aah-2027-call-for-papers/

For further questions, email the convenor at: zahra.khademi@courtauld.ac.uk

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[15] Immersive Realism and its Audiences in the Nineteenth Century
From: John Plunkett
Date: 26.09.26

This session considers immersive realism and spectatorship practices as a transmedial nineteenth-century phenomenon evident across painting, theatrical spectacle, prints, and popular exhibitions such as panoramas, dioramas, peep media, stereoscopy and magic lantern projection. This immersive aesthetic sought to create the sensation of 'being there', collapsing the distance between the viewing subject and the image, which nevertheless remains tantalizingly beyond reach. There has been important scholarship in this field (Grau 2002; Huhtamo 2013; Barringer and Trumpener 2020); however, parallel developments in art history, theatre history, and media archaeology remain fragmented across disciplinary boundaries. At the same time, engagement within fine art and cultural heritage sectors has tended to operate independently of academic discussions. The session seeks to bring together insights from these diverse fields.

Immersive realism has often been implicated in the 'disciplining' of modern subjectivity, a position exemplified in the work of Jonathan Crary. According to this view, the new visual technologies trained the sensorium into industrialised spectacle and disembodiment (Crary,1999). However, recent studies emphasise its experimental nature and potential for play (Barnaby, 2017), counternarratives, and co-creation (Smyth, 2022; Newey, 2026), while drawing attention to the regional, gender, and class differences that shaped the experience of spectators (Plunkett and Kember, 2025). The session has a twofold focus. It seeks to recover the distinct range of nineteenth-century immersive arts, but also focuses on questions of affect, agency, and identity, asking how these might complicate our understanding of immersive realism, a discussion fittingly located in proximity to the Bill Douglas Cinema museum.

Themes: nineteenth-century spectacle; immersive realism; spectatorship

Additional format comment: Half or full day session of 20-minute papers, each followed by 5 minutes for questions.

Lead Convenor: Patricia Smyth, University of Exeter, United Kingdom
Co-convenors: John Plunkett, University of Exeter, United Kingdom
Hayley Bradley, University of Manchester, United Kingdom

To submit a Paper to this Session, please follow the guidance on the AAH website and complete the AAH 2027 Call for Papers Proposal Submission Form.

The 2027 Association for Art History Annual Conference is open to all, and anyone may submit a paper to one of the existing 112 sessions highlighting a broad range of the latest scholarship in art history.

Submitting a Paper
Submit via the AAH 2027 Call for Papers Proposal Submission Form by 23:59 UK, Sunday 25 October 2026: https://forarthistory.org.uk/conference-2027-exeter-aah-2027-call-for-papers/
Submissions are managed through Oxford Abstracts.
Select your chosen session from the Session Name dropdown list.
After the deadline, papers will be shared with convenors via the platform, and convenors will contact you with their decision.

What to Include in Your Proposal

Session title

Abstract title (max 20 words)

Abstract (max 250 words)

Author name(s) and presenting author

Affiliation (or independent/freelance)

Country of residence

Telephone number

Social media handles (optional)

Any access requirements

Please use clear, straightforward language, avoiding jargon and acronyms. UK English please.

Session Formats

Sessions typically include 3–8 papers, each 20 minutes + 5 minutes Q&A.

Sessions may mix formats (papers, discussions, debates).

Sessions run for half or full days.

Tickets & Funding

All convenors and speakers must purchase conference tickets.(available December 2026). Registration details will be announced in December.

Convenors may convene one session only; speakers may speak in one session only.

Early-bird tickets available until 6 February 2027.

Bursaries available for doctoral and early-career researchers.

Speakers may apply for an AAH grant (scheme under review in Autumn).

Full List of Sessions (1–112)

Full session abstracts are available on the conference website:

https://forarthistory.org.uk/conference-2027-exeter-aah-2027-call-for-papers/

Any questions, please contact conference2027@forarthistory.org.uk

Reference:

CFP: 15 Sessions at AAH (Exeter, 7-9 Apr 27). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 28, 2026 (accessed Nov 24, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/54451>.