

‘Material Crisis, Research Crisis: New Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Medieval Wall Paintings’

Wall paintings are rare documents of public art in the medieval past which, remarkably, survive in their original context. However, this has historically made them more physically vulnerable to attack and deterioration. This can make them complex to interpret and can mean that researching them is more difficult than works of art in other media. Yet their study is urgent, as lack of public awareness means that many wall paintings are at risk of disappearing altogether due to a lack of funding and support towards their conservation.

Wall paintings are subject to detailed study by scholars across an expanding range of disciplines including art history, social history, literature, conservation, economic history and heritage science. Scholars across these fields bring diverse, but equally intricate and fundamental, questions to the study of wall paintings. They have different, often highly specialised and complex, methods of analysis at their disposal. Although highly necessary, this acute disciplinary specialisation means that researchers rarely have the opportunity to exchange the motives that drive their work and the daily challenges that they face, or to help each other access and navigate repositories of unfamiliar source material.

This session invites speakers, from across academic fields and heritage sector professions, to present their experiences of working with wall paintings. Whether we are concerned with their iconography, their physical history, the experiences of their earliest audiences or the ageing of their materials, we are all united by our individual vested interests in these fragile remnants of past cultures. We hope this will be an opportunity to share thoughts on how we can use our diverse strengths to help each other tackle the research problems that we face in our own fields. By creating outlets that set aside disciplinary differences, we can work together to ensure that these important works of art can continue to be enjoyed and better understood by future generations.

Papers are welcomed from, but in no way limited to, the following subjects:

- What wall paintings can contribute to society and to social history as a discipline
- Collaborative projects between art historians and conservators
- The relationship between wall paintings and literature
- National and international links in iconography and/ or materials
- The relationship between wall paintings and other artistic media
- The relation of wall paintings to their architectural context
- Medieval wall painting technology and workshop practice
- Deterioration, change, and historical attitudes to wall paintings since the Middle Ages

Abstracts for papers of 20 minutes should be sent to medievalwallpaintings@outlook.com, along with the paper title, name and affiliation of the speaker, and contact details. The deadline is Friday 15 September 2023.