

Call for Papers: “(Re)searching connections: Artists’ international social networks, 1750-1914”

Academia Belgica, Rome, Italy

Tuesday 30 September – Wednesday 1 October 2025

Submission deadline: 15 February 2025

Notification of acceptance: March 2025

[Website “\(Re\)searching connections”](#)

Thematic focus

“My head has not yet left Rome; nothing I have seen since can compensate for what I have lost,” wrote the painter Joseph-Benoît Suvée (1743-1807) after his departure from Rome in 1778. The dazzling start of his career had taken him from his hometown of Bruges, in the Southern Netherlands, to Paris and then the Eternal City, where he had resided at the Académie de France as a Prix de Rome laureate. What was it that Suvée had gained in Rome, the loss of which he found so difficult to bear? His emotional reflection speaks to more than just physical departure; it evokes the complex web of relationships and connections that had been cultivated abroad. Indeed, for artists of the long nineteenth century, an international sojourn had the potential to be a transformative experience. Outside of knowledge, skills and ideas, the sojourn provided access to transnational networks that included peers as well as many others, from patrons to diplomats. Understanding these networks is essential for grasping their impact on artists’ lives and careers, as well as the social and cultural capital they could leverage.

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The two-day conference “(Re)searching connections” aims to present **recent and on-going research into the social networks of artists who lived, studied, and worked abroad between 1750-1914. We especially encourage the critical examination of these networks while also exploring new avenues opened by digital methodologies and approaches.**

We embrace a broad chronological and geographical scope, inviting insights from the long nineteenth century and various contexts worldwide. The aim is to foster a deeper understanding of how socio-political and cultural influences shaped artist’s networks. Within Europe during this period, Paris and Rome stood out as crucial hubs for artists. Still, their significance should be understood within a comprehensive framework that allows for the constructed images and divergent experiences of these cities over time. Moreover, scholarship on international mobility has shifted attention towards other artistic hotspots and underexamined geographical trajectories, within *and* outside of Europe.

We welcome contributions that analyze the formation and function of social networks, with the intent of highlighting these as fundamental components of artistic practice. Rather than sidelining artistic production and stylistic developments, we aim to approach these through the lens of the social relationships that underpin them. How did artists

establish and maintain networks across geographical and cultural boundaries? What influence did these connections have on their personal and professional trajectories, and how did artists themselves, in turn, impact their networks? What roles did various actors play in these networks, and how may we define and determine these? How did these networks navigate and resolve the inherent tensions between friendship and rivalry, nationalism and transnational exchange, or individual autonomy and collective identity?

In the past decades, scholarship has increasingly recognized the importance of artists' social relations within an international perspective. **The combination of insights from sociology, digital humanities and network analysis with more conventional (art-) historical approaches has offered new possibilities** for understanding the complex social interactions that "make" art history. Along with the concepts of transnationalism and cultural transfer, terms such as 'social capital,' 'sociability' and 'homosociality' have become valuable additions to the critical vocabulary of art historians, offering new insights into the interconnectedness of a nineteenth-century art world beyond national borders. Our conference seeks to build on this momentum by providing a forum for scholarly exchange. By fostering interdisciplinary dialogue and connecting diverse methodologies and findings within the field, we seek to enrich our understanding of how networks operated in the past and influenced artistic practice. For this reason, we invite papers that go beyond the mere presentation of a biographical case study in order to **engage explicitly with conceptual and methodological questions**, reflecting critically on the sources, methods and research tools employed.

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Possible topics

Possible topics for consideration include, but are not limited to:

- The impact of artists' networks on **educational and professional development**, with a focus on artistic training abroad, intergenerational exchanges, mentorship, patronage, and/or the role of academies and other institutions.
- The complex **interplay of identity and community** in artists' networks, which can encompass émigré artists, artist's colonies, the influence of gender, social class and family ties, the physical spaces of sociability, and interpersonal dynamics such as collaboration, competition, emulation, and a sense of belonging.
- Processes of **artistic exchange and adaptation** in artist's networks, whether influenced by cross-cultural interaction or by historical shifts and events such as the rise of nationalistic ideologies, regime change, warfare, and colonialism.
- The **representation and documentation** of artist's networks, with attention to contemporary artworks, visual media, and written historical source material, as well as the digital approaches that enable the visualization and analysis of social networks today.

Conference information

Keynote speakers: Giovanna Ceserani (Stanford University), France Nerlich (Musée d'Orsay)

Scientific committee: Thijs Dekeukeleire (Museum Brugge), Evelien De Wilde (Museum Brugge), Christine Dupont (House of European History), Eva Geudeker (RKD-Netherlands Institute for Art History), Fien Messens (Ghent University and KBR-Royal Library of Belgium), France Nerlich (Musée d'Orsay), Laura Overpelt (KNIR-Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome and Utrecht University), Asker Pelgrom (Nationaal Centrum voor de Nederlandse Buitenplaatscultuur), Veerle Thielemans (Institut national d'histoire de l'art), Laurence Van Kerkhoven (Museum Brugge), Anne Van Oosterwijk (Museum Brugge)

This conference is organized by [Museum Brugge](#) in collaboration with Academia Belgica, as part of the [Apprentice-Master II project](#), financed by the Flemish Government. The project aims to enhance research on international trajectories and social networks of Bruges artists from 1757 onwards, further contributing to Museum Brugge's focus on the long nineteenth century as a central collection pillar. The newly established research center BRON embodies Museum Brugge's commitment to innovative scholarship.

Submission procedure

We invite proposals for 20-minute papers in English or French. If presenting in French, please provide accompanying materials in English. [Proposals should be submitted by 15 February 2025 via the online form](#). Each submission must include a single PDF file with the following components:

- A 100-word biography
- A 300-word abstract
- 1 or 2 relevant images (e.g. artworks, archival documents, data visualization)

Selection criteria: Proposals will be evaluated based on relevance, clarity, novelty, and contribution to the field. We seek papers that reflect critically on the source material and methodologies employed.

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Notification of acceptance: March 2025.

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