



Historians of Netherlandish Art Conference 2027 Call for Sessions

HNA 2027 will be co-hosted by Boston University and the Center for Netherlandish Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. This is the first HNA conference in North America since 2014 and the third conference held in Boston/Cambridge, an established and growing hub for the study of Netherlandish art. We are excited to invite session proposals concentrated around three main themes, detailed below. However, we also welcome session proposals in other areas and we seek to demonstrate and platform the broad range of interests of HNA members.

Theme 1: Contesting the Real in Netherlandish Art

Questions of realism, naturalism, and the limits of these and similar terms have long formed a core of the discipline of Dutch and Flemish art history. From Svetlana Alpers's *The Art of Describing* to debates about the period descriptor *naer het leven*, our field has a sustained interest in interrogating *The Real*. This conference theme encompasses inquiries about verisimilitude, but also, and more broadly, contestations of reality and truth as such in the art of the Low Countries. How did art of the period make or dispute truth claims across secular or religious contexts? How did it confirm or trouble a spectator's perceptions, whether physical, religious, or political? We welcome sessions that explore how artists registered changing understanding of the world through exploration, trade, and colonization; employed materials and technologies with a view to convince or disorient; or served spectators seeking spiritual certainty. Other approaches might focus on past and present "fake news" and misinformation; or Dutch and Flemish art history and connoisseurship in the era of AI. As we struggle with many of these questions in our contemporary media environment, what might scholars of Dutch and Flemish art be able to contribute to discourses beyond art history?

Theme 2: Labor and Class in Netherlandish Art History

With a few important exceptions, the field of Netherlandish art history has been slow to incorporate serious inquiry into class and economic status, both within the context of the early modern period and in the historiography of the discipline. Submissions might address issues of wealth and poverty as expressed through art in the period, the impact of economic disparity on artists' careers and personal lives, research on artists' domestic partners, children, and working-class assistants, the lived experience of immigrant laborers in early modern Dutch cities, the disjuncture between mendicants' poverty vows and the donations of their wealthy patrons, or scholarship of the wealth gap in the Netherlands throughout the early modern era. Alternatively, submissions may consider the role private wealth and collecting has played in the historiography of Netherlandish art history and the formation of the specialization. Papers might reflect on how particular works of art became textbook regulars, how patronage has informed debates about "fine" art versus material culture, or how affluence and art historical canons are intertwined. Panels may also address other critical questions closely linked to economic and structural inequities in the field of art history: How do adjuncts and independent scholars sustain research trajectories alongside their tenured peers and why is their output evaluated by the same metrics despite the discrepancies in their economic situations? What cultural and professional hurdles have hindered academics and curators from recognizing themselves as laborers and participating in labor activism, and how are the sectors responding now? Intersectional approaches that explore class and money alongside Critical Race Theory, Queer, Womens', and Gender Studies, Post-Colonial Studies, Craft History, just as a few examples, are encouraged.

Theme 3: Netherlandish Art History, Objects, and Museums.

For decades art historians have located a "divide" between the academy and the museum. The anxieties of the various "crises" and "turns" in the field of early modern Netherlandish art have frequently been expressed as a tension between theoretical scholarship and "object-based" approaches. This conference, co-organized by Boston University and the Center for Netherlandish Art, MFA, Boston, offers a natural opportunity to interrogate and reevaluate these long-standing debates. How do curators and other museum practitioners work with methods and theories? How do academic scholars work with objects? Do these perceived divisions still exist, or are there other divides that have emerged in their wake? Submissions might focus on, for example, exhibitions and museum initiatives as the impetus for new contributions to the field, or case studies of object-directed inquiry by scholars in

academic settings. Other areas of interest include, but are not limited to, collaborative and cross-institutional research, the role of connoisseurship and curatorial training, the history of collecting Netherlandish art, and examples that reveal how object-directed study can productively coexist with other methodologies.

How to Submit a Session

Each session will be 90 minutes, allowing for three 20-minute papers and time for discussion. Sessions will take place in seminar rooms at Boston University and at the Center for Netherlandish Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Applicants must be HNA members and may submit multiple proposals but may not chair more than one session. Please note that members are allowed to submit proposals for sessions in which they would like to present a paper themselves. Please send proposals of 300 words, clearly stating the goals of the session, along with a shortened CV (1-2 pages) to: hna27sessionsubmissions@gmail.com

Please direct any questions to the above e-mail address.

Deadline: May 8, 2026. Applicants will be notified by the program committee no later than June 15, 2026.

Please consider contributing to HNA IDEA's appeal for contributions to an equitable conference, should you be in a position to do so: <https://hnanews.org/hna-launches-fundraising-campaign/>