

6. Forum Kunst des Mittelalters

Frankfurt am Main, Sept 29 – Oct 2, 2021

SINNE / SENSES

Call for Sessions

(deadline: June 1st, 2020)

The arts and the senses have always been reciprocally related to one another. In the Middle Ages, sensual encounters with art and architecture offered a variety of ways to perceive, comprehend and structure the world. Pledging to relics enclosed in precious reliquaries, incorporating color from Byzantine icons, distinguishing the holy space by swinging golden polished censers, wearing inwardly decorated jewelry on the body or ringing the church bells to make audible the presence of God – such actions leave no doubts about the significance of the senses in the Middle Ages, and furthermore bring to light the role of art within such operations.

Although the senses and their interplay are well defined in theoretical treatises, theories are of limited use when it comes to understanding the sensual perception of images, objects, and spaces. While, for instance, the knowledge of God is described as a dematerialized act, the senses were nevertheless used to obtain and mediate spiritual insight. Since antiquity, seeing has been the dominant sense, as the works of authors such as Aristotle, Plato, Augustine and Isidore of Seville suggest. This privileged position was further ascribed by cultural and art historical research over a long period of time. Nevertheless, in recent years, studies on materiality have argued that the dominance of this one singular sense misrepresents the multisensory nature of medieval art. The 'close-up' senses such as tasting and touching are as essential for the understanding of artefacts as the 'distant' senses of seeing, hearing and smelling. In particular, liturgical and courtly ceremonies offer convincing evidence that processes of production and reception are related to multisensory experiences. The role of the senses in the architecture and decoration of sacred space has been reevaluated not only within Latin Europe and the Byzantine Empire, but also within Islamic dominated regions. Furthermore, in order to comprehend the codex, one of the leading media throughout the Middle Ages, questions of sensual perception through tasting and sometimes kissing of its different elements such as parchment and paper, as well as textiles, leather, metal and ivory have also proved to be essential.

For the 6th Forum Kunst des Mittelalters, which will take place from September 29th to October 2nd, 2021 in Frankfurt, we would like to invite discussions on the role of sensual perception and the interplay of senses in medieval image and object cultures as well as in architecture, including topics from interreligious and cross-cultural perspectives. Studies on individual senses and the ways in which they played, guided, deceived and disturbed sensual perception are welcome, as well as proposals which privilege a multisensory and synesthetic approach. We furthermore ask for proposals that discuss the methodological challenges that arise from these perspectives. Furthermore, which possibilities do digital methods offer for understanding historical contexts of perception, e.g. through virtual reality or the reconstruction of auditive and oratorical spaces? This includes studies on the increasing popularity of multimedia concepts in exhibitions that question how the historicity of sensual approaches could be represented and, beyond that, how it could help to reveal new interpretative frameworks.

Please send your submission (max. one page) for a session with max. two organizers per session by June 1st, 2020, to mail@mittelalterkongress.de.

After the selection of sessions, the Call for Papers will be announced in July 2020.

Organization: Kristin Böse and Joanna Olchawa (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt) with different partners from Frankfurt am Main as well as the Deutscher Verein für Kunstwissenschaft e.V.

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