

## 38<sup>th</sup> German Congress for Art History Munich, 25–28 February 2026

### Call for Papers

#### *knowing*

“Knowing” seems to present more of a challenge than ever before. It is not just that the contents of our knowledge – the things people believe they know – are changing rapidly and that they are constantly reaching new levels of complexity. More importantly, epistemic practices and epistemic orders are increasingly in flux: there is currently a particularly intense renegotiation of how knowledge is generated, validated, communicated, rejected or deliberately distorted; who believes they know what when and how; and how various competing epistemic regimes relate to one another within different social and political (epistemic) contexts. At the same time, within the medial framework of epistemic dynamics, the visual occupies a key position. Its significance also seems to have decisively increased again in recent years. The question is: what role did the (historically emerging) exceptional position of the arts and artistic knowledge have in these contexts and what role can it play in the future? “Knowing” as a process in the broadest sense – featuring competing, plural, contradictory and rarely conclusive findings and convictions – thus presents itself with a new sense of urgency as a central analytical task for established as well as novel art historical fields and approaches.

The 38<sup>th</sup> German Congress for Art History, which will be held in Munich in 2026, addresses these challenges of “knowing”, with their interweaving of contemporary and historical perspectives. Its nine sessions seek to discuss the broadest possible range of questions related to knowledge, the visual arts and understanding as well as the explanation (in the widest sense) of the world: from practical workshop knowledge to the history of the discipline and its institutions to the opportunities and dangers of the digital sphere and AI. The theme of “knowing” additionally permits an evaluation of the development of art history and (interdisciplinary) visual culture studies over the last three decades. All sessions are open to proposals dealing with historical as well as contemporary themes.

The board of the Deutscher Verband für Kunstgeschichte e.V. (German Association for Art History) – together with the Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte (ZI) and the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (LMU Munich) – would like our colleagues to join us for an intense discussion. We are requesting contributions from all fields of work and professional groups in the areas of art history and related disciplines, from people at any stage of their career and from Germany as well as abroad.

Proposals of no more than 2,000 characters (incl. spaces) can be submitted to the association's offices sent by email to **call@kunstgeschichte-kongress.de** as an open or editable file (acceptable formats: .docx, .odt, .rtf, .txt). We additionally ask that you send a brief biography of no more than 2,000 characters (incl. spaces) in a separate file as well as your contact information and, if possible, your personal ORCID.

The selection of proposals (there will be five 20-minute presentations per session) will be carried out jointly by the session heads, the association's board and the local committee.

The selected presenters – insofar as they are trained art historians residing in Germany – are expected to be members of the Deutscher Verband für Kunstgeschichte at the beginning of the year in which the congress is held, at the latest.

Please direct any questions about your submission to the offices of the Deutscher Verband für Kunstgeschichte e.V. in Bonn (**info@kunstgeschichte.org**).

The deadline for all submissions is 6pm (CET) on **8 June 2025**.

## Sessions

### 1. Conflict and Consensus: Histories of Art History

As with the history of any field of study, the path of art history consists of a series of leaps and not a straight line. Findings and convictions are alternately established and abandoned depending on the shifting fortunes of particular methods, models and narratives. This session examines how, at various moments in time, art history has developed as a systematic field of study in a process shifting between conflict and consensus, and it looks at which factors were significant for this development. We look forward to contributions related to the following questions: 1. Who or what generates knowledge in art history? Because the role of individual scholars is usually overestimated, the focus should be on discourses and intellectual collectives that either sustain paradigms or contribute to their replacement. 2. How is knowledge connected and bundled – and how is it deconstructed? Epistemic practices, dynamics and media as well as the instruments of knowledge's establishment and abandonment should be examined (by looking, for example, at encyclopedias and general surveys). 3. What is the relationship between the knowledge of art history and the society outside it? Histories of fields of study tend to only consider factors immanent to scholarship – such as methodological discussions, etc. – to be decisive for the changes they find. But what is the relationship between the art historical knowledge in question and the social debates as well as the economic and (academic) policy decisions that generate, format, subsidise or also prevent it?

### 2. Organisational Structures of Art Historical Knowledge: The History of the Deutscher Verband für Kunstgeschichte as a Discursive Field

The emergence, formation and establishment of art historical knowledge is always subject to processes of inclusion and exclusion which are fostered by organisational structures. The Deutscher Verband für Kunstgeschichte is responding to the task assigned at the general assembly in 2024 – to promote critical engagement with its own history – by offering a session for historical self-reflection on the discipline based on key constellations in the association's history. It invites all colleagues to shape and structure this discursive field in order to use historical analysis to position the discipline relative to the challenges of the present. Here the history of the association is to be conceived in contrast to – but simultaneously in dialogue with – institutional history, organisational history, histories of individual scholarly disciplines, the history of fields of study and the history of knowledge, on the one hand, and contemporary and cultural history, on the other.

Areas such as the following could be explored: formative phases of the organisation (such as 1948/49, 1968–70 or 1989/90); ruptures and continuities; East and West German parallels, differences, contacts; omissions, exclusions, taboos and traumas; European dimensions of scholarly self-reassurance; (infra)structural developments of the discipline; professional groups and questions of professional policy.

Contributions from the whole community are welcome. The aim of this session is to map this terrain with the longer-term goal of developing a history of the association.

### **3. Vision, Visualisation, Verification: Images in the History of a Field of Study**

Images are both central tools in the process of knowledge production as well as a component of the development of theory in the production of knowledge. Since antiquity, illustrations have served in the documentation and modelling of knowledge. Printmaking techniques marked a strong increase in the dissemination and standardisation of systematic scholarly representations. With photography, the 19<sup>th</sup> century marked the emergence of reproductive processes that enabled a revolution in scientific fields like astronomy and medicine as well as form-based disciplines like art history and archaeology by establishing new claims to objectivity and possibilities for documentation. Today computer-generated visualisations, AI-supported visual analyses and 3D technologies have shaped the areas of research and teaching as well as communication about them. This session seeks contributions that look at the transformation of image-based epistemic practices while focusing on their historical epistemological meanings. Relevant questions would include: Who were and who are the producers of scholarly images – within which networks and infrastructures? How were the images made accessible, consumed and utilised? What is and what was historical knowledge worth – also with regard to the manipulation of images and a growing mistrust towards images? How have the demands placed on and the responsibility for images been transformed within a global system of scholarship?

### **4. Knowledge and Agency of Popular Images**

From the pre-modern era to the present, popular images have shaped collective ideas and simultaneously been shaped by them in a dynamic manner. They are pervasive, recognisable and integrated into everyday knowledge as well as cultural practices. They exercise agency within societal debates and have a reciprocal effect back on the art historical “canon”. Their knowledge develops in visual cultures through repetition, circulation and assimilation. Mechanisms of dissemination and transformation will be examined: What content is conveyed by popular images (images of saints, pamphlets, wall decorations, advertisements, key visuals, famous sights, memes, virtual reconstructions, etc.)? How is their interpretation and function changed by their popularity? Which political, economic or cultural strategies make use of them? What forms of agency do they develop within these contexts? Their art historical status is also up for discussion: Which normative ideas of “high” and “low” continue to shape their definition(s)? How do these shape research, museums and heritage conservation? What challenges does this bring in terms of methodology and presentation? This session welcomes interdisciplinary analyses of popular images as active forms of knowledge.

### **5. Know How, Show How: Knowledge of Art Technology in Art and Art History**

With the emergence of conservation science in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, knowledge about the material and technical aspects of artworks attained a new epistemological status by transferring what had previously been primarily empirical skills into the realm of the so-called exact sciences. At the same time, archaeology, sociology and anthropology as well as art historical studies – traditionally fixated on ideas and text – were seeking new ways of approaching the artefact. With

the *material turn*, there has been growing interest in the character of objects as “made things”, in processes and experience, and in theories of *agency* and *affordance*; the field of *technical art history* has since become internationally established. While research can hardly avoid such issues, art technological knowledge still remains largely invisible in the presentation of art.

This session asks questions dealing with various aspects of knowledge about art technology: How does it emerge and how is it passed on (workshop, mobility, transfer)? How is it used in practical terms (changes, conservation, restoration)? Where does it manifest itself (objects, texts, experiences)? Where is it taken into account (research, teaching, museums)? We are particularly looking forward to proposals from colleagues working in conservation science and at museums.

## 6. Counting, Scaling, Automating: Digital Epistemic Processes in Art History

This session explores the epistemological dimension of digital processes and technologies in their historical development within the practice of art history: it asks how the research and presentation of art and images has been changed through digital operations of cataloguing, analysis and (re)construction. The range of possible contributions should expand our understanding of a history of digital knowledge from an art historical perspective by looking at practices that preceded digital data processing in art history (catalogues, statistics, diagrams), for example, or by investigating the epistemic function of digital methods and data in the production of art (“computer art”). In particular, this session seeks to discuss the current use of digital processes and infrastructures, including social media and so-called AI, within the discipline of art history, looking at challenges related to research theory and policy as well as society and ethics.

## 7. “The Study of Images is Effortless”: The “Glocal” Unknown in the Visual Arts

Images and the visual arts play a central role in processes of globalisation: as a means of communication, in the documentation and transfer of knowledge, fuelled by curiosity and aesthetic interest, as a commodity, etc. This emphasis on the role of images in global transfers is not new to the present – travellers of the 16th century were, for example, already confronted with it. It is based (even today, and perhaps now more than ever) on the assumption that perceiving images is a universally homogeneous ability. By contrast, this session seeks to examine the global “incommensurabilities” of image-based knowledge – e.g. the misunderstandings, de-differentiations and dangers that go along with global image transfer – over the centuries. The spectrum of these “incommensurabilities” can range from technical hurdles (an unknown medium is not understood in its form of representation, or equipment for presentation is not available ...) all the way to a deliberate refusal to “ac-knowledge”. This session invites contributions focussing on examples in which the original intention of globally disseminated images is not understood, or is understood differently, by local (or otherwise group-specific) viewers. Such constellations of misunderstanding coupled with apparent effortlessnes imply an exceptional responsibility for the fields of art history and visual culture studies today.

## 8. Concealing and Conveying: Materiality and Epistemic Potential of Containers of Knowledge

How does knowledge manifest itself materially, and what epistemological consequences arise from this? Is cognition predicated on knowledge or does the former lead to the latter – and what possible approaches to these fundamental questions can be enabled through artistic and spatial configurations? This session examines the complex relationships between the material form given to containers of knowledge – be it artworks or spaces – and their role in the production, storage and transmission of knowledge. Particular attention will be given to the dynamics of concealment and disclosure, veiling and unveiling, opacity and transparency, which are operative both in the works themselves and in their practical handling. Who determines access to containers of knowledge and their decoding? We invite contributions that explore these questions through case studies focused on specific works from different genres, periods and cultural constellations. We would especially welcome museological perspectives.

## 9. Knowing as Acting

This session invites contributions devoted to artistic and art historical knowledge beyond textual or oral traditions. This means corporeally based practices of producing and presenting knowledge in historical and contemporary perspectives. This corporeal knowledge can manifest itself in spiritual or non-sacral rituals, performative pieces, choreographies and collective somatic practices. But it can also be about the “making” of art/objects, including aspects like knowledge about the craft of art – elements that are developed collectively or learned and passed on through imitation and repetition. Corporeally situated knowledge is often only noted, archived and reproduced in retrospect, and it can undergo a transformation in this context: from an ephemeral stock of knowledge to a “notated” one. At the same time, forms of knowledge related to the body are often closely linked with queer, indigenous or migrant realities and can thus contribute to other historiographies of art. We look forward to proposals for contributions – experimental forms of presentation are also welcome.

**Mirja Beck, Frankfurt am Main / Manuela Beer, Cologne / Lisa Beißwanger, Koblenz / Dominik Brabant, Munich / Martin Bredenbeck, Brauweiler and Koblenz / Matilde Cartolari, Munich / Burcu Dogramaci, Munich / Gabi Dolff-Bonekämper, Berlin / Sietske Fransen, Rome / Yasmin Frommont, Heidelberg / Christian Fuhrmeister, Munich / Christoph Grunenberg, Bremen / Ruth Heftrig, Halle (Saale) / Andreas Huth, Bamberg / Henry Kaap, Munich / Léa Kuhn, Munich / Franziska Lampe, Munich / LaoZhu (Zhu Qingsheng), Beijing / Omar Nasim, Regensburg / Joanna Olchawa, Munich / Ulrich Pfisterer, Munich / Margarete Pratschke, Berlin and Passau / Georg Schelbert, Munich / Mona Schieren, Bremen / Peter Schmidt, Hamburg / Lisa Marei Schmidt, Berlin / Anna Schreurs-Morét, Freiburg im Breisgau / Ilse Sturkenboom, Munich / Kerstin Thomas, Stuttgart / Barbara Welzel, Dortmund**