

VIII. FORUM KUNST DES MITTELALTERS CALL FOR SESSIONS

WORK | ARBEIT

SPUREN, KONSTELLATIONEN, WERTUNGEN
TRACES, CONSTELLATIONS, VALUATIONS

23.-26. September 2026

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IDEA

From a region with a significant medieval character and a post-industrial present we want to address the question whether the term ‚work‘ could be of any benefit when applied to the practices of medieval art production and their social and economic context. At the latest with the development of urban culture in the 12th/13th century, the concept of a society based on the division of work began to replace traditional forms of social differentiation - a process that was theologically founded in the 12th century and accompanied by a revaluation of art, craft and creativity.

From an art historical perspective, we are interested in the following:

Firstly, what information can be gained from the medieval artefacts. What traces of work have been preserved on the artistic products themselves and what can we learn from them? What about the survival of contemporary materials and working tools?

Secondly, we ask about the specific working routines and processes. What was the relationship between the different actors involved in art production, what can be said, for example, about corporate commissioning and collaborative or collective production processes? And how were these processes embedded in social constellations (for example in a monastic or courtly context)? What role did gender relations or the origin of migrant artists or workshops play?

Thirdly, it is crucial to analyse the social position of the producers and the esteem in which they were held. What claims were formulated by the artists themselves, be it through signatures or inscriptions, be it in the self-produced representations of artistic work and their producers?

In the light of the corresponding results, the question can be asked once again as to whether the persistently asserted epochal difference between the Middle Ages and the early modern period, ‚craftsmanship there, art here‘, can be maintained.

Suggestions that go beyond this brief outline are of course welcome, and we would also like to see the breadth of our professional fields represented. We would like to encourage younger researchers in their qualification phase to apply for a session chair position.

SUBMISSION

Proposals for sessions of max. 350 words (plus contact details) can be submitted **until 20 May 2025** to <https://www.dvfk-berlin.de/forum/>. The sessions will be selected in July 2025 and the calls for papers for all sessions will be sent out in August. Each session will have one chairperson and a maximum of three speakers. Further information will follow at <https://www.dvfk-berlin.de/forum/>

FURTHER SUGGESTIONS

Traces: This keyword could be used to discuss research approaches and results that are linked to the analysis of objects, materials and the technical processes and contemporary work routines that can be deduced from them, as also transmitted by art-technological written sources (such as the so-called 'Schedula diversarum artium' or Cennino Cennini's painting treatise). In addition, approaches to 'experimental art history' would be of interest here, which deal with the reconstructive research of preserved 'traces' of art production or pose the question of the forms of work that have remained largely 'traceless', for example in the field of ephemeral arts, which secured a livelihood for many artists. In this context, we would also explicitly invite experts from the fields of conservation and restoration, art technology or experimental archaeology to apply.

Constellations: The focus, however, should also be on the relational aspect of 'work'. With Bruno Latour one could speak of 'worknets', in which the relationships between the various actors only become effective through action. In the process of working and creating, not only artists, commissioners and addressees, but also material, technology, body and senses are constantly interwoven. Recipes for workshop practices should be considered here, as well as training and processes of knowledge transfer. While certain artistic procedures can still be reproduced today - for example in the Dortmunder Kunstwerkstätten - the Bochum Leibniz WissenschaftsCampus 'Resources in Transformation' also raises the question of the current perspectives that can arise from medieval sustainability practices. The recent attempt to restore Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris has once again raised the awareness of the fact that building practices in the Middle Ages were friendly to resources and climate.

In addition, it is of interest how precisely artistic work processes were embedded and institutionalised in medieval societies and what the customary and legal forms in which they took place looked like. In the background are ideological concepts and social forms of organisation of 'work', which were defined differently depending on the context (monastery, court, commune, *Bauhütte* ...), but conversely also shaped the texture of their surroundings – for example the division of work in the medieval commune and its districts and streets divided according to crafts, which were essential for creating identity. We also need to ask about occupational profiles, employment relationships and self-employment, the materials used and their significance for the status of the artefacts, but also about gender relations in the field of artistic production or the role played by visiting masters and workshops. Personal and institutional networks are able to shape and determine the surrounding conditions, as are the challenges of political crises or changes in media, but also traditional routines - factors that also have an impact on the transfer, exchange or development of expertise.

Evaluations: From its origins our disciplinary culture has been essentially shaped by the evaluation of the various forms of artistic work, and the historical findings are essential for an updated appraisal of the 'value of art'. For example, we should ask what criteria were used to judge art production and how we obtain this information. Was it a matter of material or technical aspects, or inventiveness and aesthetic appropriateness, or the negotiation of basic human concerns or the claim to a kind of creativity comparable to that of the *Deus opifex* or *fabricator*? Written sources such as Wibald of Stablo's correspondence with a goldsmith (but also work contracts, account books, inventories, etc.) can provide insight, as can the aesthetic appearance and the representational content of the art products themselves. What do we know about how wages were measured or how the valuation of artistic work differed according to institutional context or genre? Were there standards of value that differentiated between collectively organised production and the individual artist, between 'work' and 'idea', and are there hierarchical differences to be identified?

The conference environment of the Deutsches Bergbaumuseum in Bochum with its exhibition rooms should also encourage discussion about **art mediation**. Handicraft, open-air and local history museums in particular are often in a precarious situation due to the decreasing number of experts in their trades, although knowledge of historical work procedures and cultures could be made productive in contemporary society. Both the Dortmund study focus on art didactics and education in art and also research practices at the Leibniz ScienceCampus in Bochum suggest thinking about how material analysis and the practical understanding of medieval working methods can be effective in art mediation. We would like to invite relevant experts to lead session and give talks.

This cooperation event within the RuhrAllianz will take place at the Deutsches Bergbaumuseum, the Haus der Archäologien and the Kunstmuseum in Bochum as well as at the Reinoldi Church and the university exhibition floor of the 'U' in Dortmund.