

# The Courtauld



## Third Year PhD Symposium

Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2025

The Courtauld Institute of Art, Vernon Square

# Introduction

We are delighted to welcome you to The Courtauld's annual Postgraduate Symposium 2024/2025. Researchers in the final stages of their doctoral degrees will deliver papers emerging out of their research projects. The event is a moment for faculty, students and the public to celebrate innovative research.

**Organised by Hannah Healey and Michelle Zhu, PhD students, The Courtauld.**

# Programme

- 9.30-10.00     **Registration**
- 10.00-10.10     **Welcome**  
**Professor Guido Rebecchini**, Professor of Sixteenth-Century Southern European Art and Head of Research Degrees Programme  
**Hannah Healey** and **Xiaojue Michelle Zhu**, Symposium organisers
- 10.10-11.30     **Panel 1: Political Imaginaries** (Chairs: **Hannah Healey** and **Xiaojue Michelle Zhu**)  
Copyright Meets Reproductive Rights: Käthe Kollwitz and the Abortion Rights Movement in Weimar Germany  
**Xiaojue Michelle Zhu**  
  
Victory Vietnam: The Second Iteration of Artists for Democracy  
**Hannah Healey**  
  
Imagining the Past: Kirill Gluschenko's production of Soviet Utopia  
**Elena Konyushikhina**
- 11.30-11.40     Tea Break  
Research Forum Seminar Room
- 11.40-13.00     **Panel 2: Marks and Materials** (Chair: **Xiaojue Michelle Zhu**)  
  
Measurement Relics, Exchequer Standards, and the "Promise of Sameness"  
**Sophia Adams**  
  
On the Surface: Miniaturised Marks of Making and their Ontological Implications in 15th and 16th century Persian Painting  
**Rachel Alban**  
  
Line, Flesh, and Page: The Literary Surfaces of Barbara Chase-Riboud  
**Bella Kesoyan**
- 13.00-14.00     Lunch (provided for speakers and chairs)  
Research Forum Seminar Room
- 14.00 - 15.20     **Panel 3: Cultural Exchange** (Chair: **Hannah Healey**)  
  
"I put My Seal on This Paper" - The 'Imago Impressa' of Queen Helena  
**Marija Shipley**  
  
From Isfahan to Moscow: The Significance of the Diamond Throne in the Russo-Iranian Transcultural Narrative  
**Olga Gillen**  
  
The Man on the Fish: Water Deities of the Indus River from Khizr to Jhuley Lal  
**Nada Raza**

- 15.20-15.30 Tea Break  
Research Forum Seminar Room
- 15.30-16.50 **Panel 4: Spaces (Chair: Sophia Dumoulin)**
- "A brocade gown of hers and another garment of crimson satin": Doña Juana de Mendoza's donations to the Granada Venegas Chapel  
**Natalia Muñoz-Rojas**
- "Know the World from End to End Is a Mirror": Illuminating the Shrine of Imam Reza in Qajar Iran  
**Reza Daftarian**
- The Looting of the Western Qing Tombs  
**Ricarda Brosch**
- 16.50 - 17.00 Concluding Remarks  
**Professor Guido Rebecchini**, Professor of Sixteenth-Century Southern European Art and Head of Research Degrees Programme
- 17.00 - 18.00 Drinks Reception  
Research Forum Seminar Room

# Abstracts & Biographies

## **Copyright Meets Reproductive Rights: Käthe Kollwitz and the Abortion Rights Movement in Weimar Germany**

Xiaojue Michelle Zhu

This paper explores the roles of copyright in activist art by examining reproductions and appropriations of Käthe Kollwitz's works during the abortion rights movement in the final years of the Weimar Republic. Kollwitz only directly voiced support for repealing the law criminalising abortion on a few occasions in the early 1920s. Nevertheless, her works depicting destitute proletarian mothers proliferated during the height of the abortion rights movement in the late 1920s and early 1930s. By analysing selected cases in relation to copyright (*Urheberrecht*) laws at the time, I examine the legal infrastructure that facilitated the appropriations of Kollwitz's works. Moreover, by considering Kollwitz's support for abortion rights, her previous collaboration with publishers and her process of making facsimiles as an activist working primarily in printmaking, I explore the implications when defending her copyright as an author (*Urheber*) were at odds with her effort to contribute to social justice and women's reproductive rights. This paper argues that Kollwitz's acquiescence in unauthorised reproductions of her works demonstrates that, ultimately, the role of art in advancing reproductive justice took precedence over copyright concerns for the artist, who prioritised reproducibility and accessibility over originality in her practice.

## **Victory Vietnam: The Second Iteration of Artists for Democracy**

Hannah Healey

The artistic-political group Artists for Democracy (AFD) is best known for their inaugural event, the Arts Festival for Democracy in Chile held in October 1974. Lesser known is a series of further festivals for liberation that began with the 'People of the World Learn from Indochina: Homage to Ho Chi Minh and the Victory of the Indochinese Peoples Arts Festival' in July 1975. In film, poetry, performance and installation, members of AFD staged a celebration of revolutionary victory in Vietnam with works such as British Pakistani artist Rasheed Araeen's installation *Holes in the Earth* (1975). Though replicating the multidisciplinary form of the Chile festival, AFD's festival for Vietnam took place in a second phase of the group under the direction of David Medalla with marked differences to the group's first iteration. While Araeen's installation offered an artistic memorialisation of revolutionary warfare and character, writings produced by Medalla laid out a distinct political position as Medalla grappled with reconciling radical politics with the British political landscape in which AFD existed. This paper looks to Araeen's *Holes in the Earth* (1975) and Medalla's writing to explore how a 'broad front' was embodied in AFD artistically and organisationally.

## **Imagining the Past: Kirill Gluschenko's production of Soviet Utopia**

Elena Konyushikhina

Jean Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality suggests that mediated images of history replace lived experience, making it impossible to distinguish the 'real' past from its representations. The impossibility of full access to the 'real' event opens up opportunities for artists to create alternative narratives, speculative futures and critically engage with the structures of official narratives that shape historical knowledge.

If history is always mediated, to what extent can we claim to 'know' the past, and how does visual culture address this epistemic limit? In the following discussion, I argue that artist Kirill Gluschenko confronts dominant representations by giving voice to the 'ordinary' and showing the 'real Soviet' through small fractures in an official-appearing display. The study examines

the multimedia acoustic installation *Our Days Are Rich and Bright* (2016) that reproduces the atmosphere of a Soviet publishing house during the Khrushchev Thaw. By replicating Soviet design of the 1950s and demonstrating its methods of displaying visual materials, the exhibition provides an immersive live experience. The Soviet image takes the form of what I refer to as the 'Utopian Emplotment'—narratives that integrate historical accuracy with imaginary reconstruction. Applying formal analysis developed by historian Hayden White and Soviet literary theorist Viktor Shklovsky, the study offers an alternative perspective on representations of the Soviet past.

### **Measurement Relics, Exchequer Standards, and the "Promise of Sameness"**

Sophia Adams

In the Middle Ages, measures taken of sacred artefacts – the nails of the Crucifixion, the length of Christ's body, his foot, his tomb – were believed to capture the presence and power of those artefacts. This precise metrical likeness was fundamental to the way that these measures functioned: it was the measures' exact replication of their prototypes' dimensions that made the original present, and thus able to constitute powerful sources of amuletic protection. However, many of these so-called 'measurement relics' are incommensurate with each other – measures of the same artefacts are made to different dimensions. Even so, each was understood to be as 'the same as' its prototype as the next.

This paper, based around a group of measures from nine fifteenth-century English manuscript rolls, will examine the 'promise of sameness' made by those measures, as framed by Emanuele Lugli. It will place them within the broader metrological landscape of late medieval England, particularly focusing on the role of measure in commerce and the Exchequer standards. Weights and measures were closely scrutinised in this period, and were the subject of intense institutional supervision to try and establish common measures across the realm. This paper will analyse the strategies used by secular authorities to attempt to establish 'sameness' in weights and measures and how these conditions apply to the sacred measures in question. I argue that these ultimately point to an incompatibility between modern and medieval understandings of measurement, which were significantly more capacious and echoed similarly distinct understandings of likeness and similitude.

### **On the Surface: The Ontological Implications of Polished Surfaces and Miniaturised Marks of Making, from the Manuscript Paintings of Prince Baysunghur and Beyond**

Rachel Alban

Miniaturisation is often considered only in terms of external dimensions – as the shrinking of an object from some kind of normative size to the most diminutive proportions. However, in the art of Persian painting during the 15th and 16th centuries, the miniaturising impulse extended to every aspect of the image, from small-scale figures and settings, to intricate patterns and fine details. At the furthest extreme, the holistic miniaturised mode involved the miniaturisation of marks of making, resulting in a flawless, apparently self-made surface. The effect was heightened by the unique practice of polishing the picture surface, both during and after painting.

It was under the patronage of the Timurid prince, Baysunghur (d. 1433), that the immaculate, detail-oriented surface-scape of Persian painting was established, allowing for the development of much greater miniaturisation and intricacy later in the 15th century. While many scholars have admired the flawless surface-quality of the paintings in Baysunghur's manuscripts, this aspect of their artistry has usually been seen as rather superficial, feeding into 20th century narratives of Persian painting as decorative in nature – that its beauties are all 'on the surface'. This presentation focuses on these easily-overlooked surface qualities, but argues that these features

were not only admired by contemporaries as feats of artistic prowess. In fact, the highly detailed, polished surface served to associate Persian manuscript painting with Islamicate theories of the high-status - and smaller - images that originated in the mind and appeared only on mirror-like surfaces. In this way, the immaculate surfaces of Baysunghur's paintings represented neither dull replications of ordinary reality, nor a superficial fantasy of ornament, but indicated instead the intensified, meaningful images which form the catalytic interface between the material and intelligible worlds.

### **Line, Flesh, and Page: The Literary Surfaces of Barbara Chase-Riboud**

Bella Kesoyan

This paper explores the dual mindset of Barbara Chase-Riboud as both poet and artist, with a particular focus on her engagement with the book as medium and concept. Chase-Riboud defines abstraction as "an intellectual accumulation of non-representative ideas." Her compositions—whether sculptural, textual, or graphic—are rooted in conceptual thought, expressed through distinct formal languages. These concepts often center on historical figures such as Malcolm X, Josephine Baker, Anna Akhmatova, Alexander Pushkin, and Cleopatra. However, these figures do not function as historical references alone; rather, they serve as vessels for broader artistic and political expression. Focusing on her Cleopatra sculptures and poems, this paper examines how Chase-Riboud's identity as a writer has shaped her treatment of the book object. It also investigates the significance of the act of writing in her practice, especially through her use of longhand as a gestural, expressive line.

### **"I put My Seal on This Paper" - The 'Imago Impressa' of Queen Helena**

Marija Shipley

In the thirteenth century, implicit in the concept of 'imago impressa' was the idea that the true essence of a sealer's portrait on their seal was not found solely in the visual representation but rather in the form itself and the material bearing the image. One of those seals, attached to the letter sent by queen Helena to the officials of the Adriatic port of Dubrovnik in 1268, exhibited unprecedented iconography that in the extant corpus of queenship seals does not have a comparable example. Helena's seal represented more than just a bureaucratic convention; it highlighted the interconnected aspects of queenship in thirteenth-century Europe. By exploring the wide network of models found across different geographical areas and the familial ties associated with Queen Helena, this paper will demonstrate how these elements, in conjunction with the context of her letter, illustrate her unique perspective on agency.

### **From Isfahan to Moscow: The Significance of the Diamond Throne in the Russo-Iranian Transcultural Narrative**

Olga Gillen

The Diamond Throne, made between 1657 and 1659 in the workshop of the Armenian merchant family Shahrimeanin New Julfa, Isfahan, was presented to the Russian Tsar Aleksey Mikhailovich Romanov (r. 1645 -1676) in 1660 by the eldest son of the family, Zacharia Shahrimean. Commissioned by Mohammad Beg, the Grand Vizier of the Safavid administration (1654-1661), in response to the Tsar's order to Shahrimean family to source precious stones in India for the Russian court, this throne is discussed in recent Russian scholarship as the most sumptuous of the three thrones presented to the Russian Tsars between 1604 and 1660 by the Safavid court and Armenian merchants. Scholars suggest that the throne was chosen for its opulence, likely aiming to secure lucrative trade concessions for Safavids generally, implying that it lacked any political or deeper commercial messaging agenda. This paper shifts focus away from the throne's lavishness and presents its most unusual and unique artistic features as a politically, commercially and culturally charged proposition for illuminating

the intricate dynamics in the Russo-Iranian narrative in the mid-17th century. In this discussion, Safavid Isfahan and its material-cultural richness forge implements of diplomacy beyond the obvious capacity for objects to dazzle.

### **The Man on the Fish: Water Deities of the Indus River from Khizr to Jhuley Lal**

Nada Raza

The image of a bearded man in embellished robes wearing a golden crown, seated atop a pink or red lotus flower which in turn rests atop a smiling yellow fish, is revered as the representation of *Jhuley Lal*. This figure is considered the *ishta dev* or preferred deity of the Sindhi community, particularly in the Hindu diaspora. When the province fell towards Pakistan, after the independence from the British Empire in 1947, *Jhuley Lal* emerged through exile from Sindh and areas bordering the river Indus. Most recently, his avatar has also begun to appear as a borrowed motif in recent contemporary art practices within Pakistan, exploring the indigenous mythologies related to sacral traditions around the mercurial and essential river. This attempt at a visual genealogy of this increasingly popular deity finds correspondence and interreligious entanglements within Mughal era and later depictions of the enchanted figure of the immortal Khwaja Khizr, believed in Sufi tradition to bear knowledge of the elixir of life. As visual depictions of the turbaned, bearded saint in green robes standing on a solemn gray fish have receded from popular circulation, this paper argues that the stature of the seated figure adapted from shared riverine belief systems appears to be both expanding and also shifting in ideological significance.

### **“A brocade gown of hers and another garment of crimson satin”: Doña Juana de Mendoza’s Donations to the Granada Venegas Chapel**

Natalia Muñoz-Rojas

In the 1704 floorplan of Granada’s former Cathedral church, consecrated within the city’s former Friday Mosque, the chapel belonging to the Granada Venegas *morisco* family is prominently situated to the right of the High Altar. Although the mosque where the chapel once stood and its ornaments are no longer extant, the numerous descriptions provided by travellers and documentary evidence offer insight into the chapel’s magnificent decoration. Among the mentioned ornaments, textiles hold a prominent position, particularly the garments donated by Doña Juana de Mendoza Ayala (d. 1509), a lady of the court of Queen Isabella of Castile and the first wife of Don Alonso de Venegas (d. 1534), born Ali Omar ben Nasar.

These ornaments are listed in the clause of Don Alonso’s will, which was in turn recorded as part of the will of his descendant, the first Marquis of Campotejar. The inclusion of these objects in these documents underscores their significance and supports theories positing the pivotal role of Christian women in integrating Granada Muslim converts into Castilian society. This paper proposes an interpretation of the garments donated by Doña Juana de Mendoza to the Granada Venegas Chapel as key tools to her descendants’ self-fashioning, used as evidence of their identity as heirs of Muslim Nasrid Kings and Old Christians.

### **“Know the World from End to End Is a Mirror”: Illuminating the Shrine of Imam Reza in Qajar Iran**

Reza Daftarian

The Shrine of Imam Reza, the holiest site in Iran, was transformed in the Qajar period (r. 1786–1925) through an expanded and increasingly complex practice of illumination. While Safavid (r. 1501–1736) and Afsharid (r. 1736–96) patrons had already endowed the shrine with hanging lanterns, candelabras, and wall sconces, Qajar rulers and donors introduced a wider array of lighting implements, including chandeliers, crystal lamps, and eventually electric



fixtures, that reshaped how light moved through the tomb chamber and surrounding halls. These luminous additions interacted with the mirrored surfaces of *ayeneh-kari* to produce an intensified sensory field responsive to ritual movement and devotional tempo. The mirrored muqarnas dome above the tomb became a crucial node in this luminous architecture, refracting and dispersing each flicker of light to draw pilgrims into heightened proximity with the sacred. The rising prominence of the *mosharef-e roshanayi*, the manager of the shrine's lighting, who was increasingly allocated independent resources and financial support, further attests to the central role that illumination played in the devotional and administrative order of the funerary complex. Drawing on endowment records, narrative accounts, and architectural evidence, this presentation examines how Qajar lighting initiatives reoriented the shrine's spatial and perceptual dynamics. By tracing how the holy sanctuary came to be inhabited through reflection and radiance, this talk reconsiders light itself as a devotional medium that shaped proximity, directed attention, and gave sensory form to the experience of the sacred.

## **The Looting of the Western Qing Tombs**

Ricarda Brosch