

2nd International South American Congress of Art History /
17th Conference on Art History

**The Bodies of Affect:
Emotions, Perceptions, and Visual Practices**

Santiago de Chile, November 12-14, 2025

Call for Papers

A few decades ago, Jean-Claude Schmitt, in two influential contributions to art history—a general dictionary on the medieval West co-edited with Jacques Le Goff (1999), and a series of studies published between 1987 and 2000, later compiled in *Le corps des images* (2002)—proposed approaching medieval images as images-bodies (*images-corps*). This perspective not only acknowledges the material character of images and the physical experience they invoke but, more importantly, emphasizes the need to consider their active role within the social fabric and their potential agentive capacity. Schmitt's approach diverges from interpretations that reduce certain images from this period to the static terms imposed by the apparent inertia of things.

Schmitt's work invites us to expand its theoretical implications and, echoing recent ontological debates, examine the visual through configurations that reveal the dynamic flows which images crystallize and intensify. For Tim Ingold, relationships do not occur between discrete 'objects' but rather emerge in the encounter of the vital lines of 'things', always open and in continuous becoming. This approach resonates with the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, in which the concept of 'rhizome' serves as a strategy for dismantling hierarchical modes of thought in favor of a decentered network where multiplicity, randomness, and complexity are foregrounded.

In Deleuze and Guattari's arguments—later elaborated by Brian Massumi and several key figures in the so-called 'affective turn', which partly inspires this congress—affect emerges as a force that triggers transformation, produces unexpected connections, and opens possible paths to new trajectories. Affects, then, are the capacities of bodies to affect and be affected. As such, they are intensities that precede emotions and are distinct from passions. This distinction, however, has not prevented scholars such as Sara Ahmed and Lauren Berlant from linking affects to emotions.

In art history, the study of affect—broadly understood—has a long tradition that predates the emergence of this particular theoretical line, as Matthew Rampley has shown. Inspired by Robert Vischer's theory of *Einfühlung*, Aby Warburg addressed the problem of empathy in Renaissance images, arguing that merely documenting their intellectual context was insufficient for understanding them. However, over time, interest in such approaches was displaced by methodologies such as iconology and the social history of art. This trend began to reverse, in part, when David Freedberg published his emblematic monograph *The Power of Images* (1989), which examined the diverse responses images have historically provoked in viewers. Building on Warburg's anthropological inclinations, Freedberg emphasized the psychodynamic nature of these responses in order to highlight the emotional impact of the visual. By the early 21st century, the affective dimension of images had steadily gained prominence in the discipline, through the work of figures such as Hans Belting, Horst Bredekamp, James

Elkins, and Georges Didi-Huberman. Contemporary studies on the topic have also drawn upon feminism, queer theory, posthumanism, new materialism, neuroscience, and the affective turn itself.

Focusing on the affective power of images offers a way to move beyond the discursive limitations that have often constrained research in visual culture. If under the influence of the linguistic turn their 'interpretation' as sign systems was privileged, then to dwell on the images and the affects they mobilize implies, on the other hand, an emphasis on their relational dimension. For example, among the various possible readings and definitions of the 'affective'—a category encompassing countless related concepts—are the emotional or physical intensities produced by the encounter with an image, or between one image and another. These intensities point to experiences that resist being simplified as problems of representation. In this framework, the bodies and practices involved are heterogeneous, as the discussion seeks to address both the bodies of images and the bodies that interact with them. An approach to the visual that underlines these dynamics allows to examine the material, emotional, and performative processes that shape the world.

In light of these ideas, the 2nd International South American Congress of Art History calls participants to reflect on "the bodies of affect" through the thematic lines:

Affect, Emotions, and Images

Images have the capacity to represent, express, generate, and transform emotional experiences. Visual practices—linked to creation, use, and valuation—stimulate particular affective responses. This panel proposes to study how images represent emotions and how they materialize, fabricate, and intensify them. It invites reflection on the relationship between images and affects, understood as emotions. Some guiding questions include, but are not limited to: What emotions are codified, and how are they codified, in specific historical and cultural contexts? How do the components of an image activate affective responses? How does affect, understood as emotion, shape our aesthetic experience? What tensions arise in the reception of images whose affective codes have been historically and territorially displaced?

Affect, Materialities, and 'Object-Images'

The material qualities of images influence how creators, users, and audiences relate to them. Building on recent debates in the archaeology of art, this panel explores how images, when approached as objects, facilitate specific interactions, incorporating aspects such as physicality, multisensoriality, and operability. Some questions include, but are not limited to: How does the relationship with the material reality of 'images-objects' shape the affective experiences of individuals? How does an 'image-object' model and become modeled through concrete interactions with other bodies? How do interactions with visual materialities generate emotional, bodily, and/or sensory transformations? In what ways do 'image-object' affect and become affected by their relationship with the world in specific contexts?

Affect, Bodies, and Performance

Contemporary post-linguistic debates on the vital, the vibrant, and the animate suggest a more complex conception of the living and its affective dimension of such phenomena. In this context, radically material experiences with bodies and their actions unfold alongside the emotional processes they elicit—often simultaneously. Theoretical and

historiographical approaches increasingly emphasize the implicit or explicit roles of non-human bodies in these practices, challenging assumptions of passivity and apoliticism. This panel invites to consider some of the following questions: To what extent has visual culture been constructed around bodies as agents of affect? How do bodies and their performances connect affectively with human and non-human forces? To what degree must we rethink subjectivity and autonomy to better understand case studies that foreground the agency of bodies, both past and present?

Affect, Heritage, and Memory

Heritage, understood as a dynamic social phenomenon involving multiple interacting agents, can stabilize or disrupt identities, memories, and senses of belonging. This panel invites reflection on the relationship between sensoriality, memory, emotion, cognition, and visualities in heritage spaces—especially considering their ethical and ideological dimensions. Questions to consider include, but are not limited to: What is the relationship between affect and memory, and how does it shape the understanding of heritage? How do heritage sites function as affective infrastructures that mediate collective memory? How might an affective approach to heritage help us reconsider the politics of inclusion and exclusion in memory practices? In what ways can affect help reframe the role of heritage in the context of the climate crisis?

Affect, Spatiality, and Dwelling

The spatial dynamics of lived environments—architectural, urban, or natural—emerge as key settings for the production and transformation of affective relationships. This panel invites reflection on the aesthetic, historical, and social processes that shape such interactions, including responses to forced displacement and architectures of resistance, particularly in the face of the climate crisis. Other topics may include the role of design in emotional well-being, the affective dimensions of inhabiting space, and the ways in which collective experiences are shaped through spatial practices like public art or community projects. Key questions include, but are not limited to: How do affects shape perceptions and experiences of dwelling in urban and rural spaces? What roles do images, visual practices, and material objects play in the construction of affective environments? How do visual imaginaries and narratives structure affective relationships between bodies and spaces?

Organization:

Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez, Chile

Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero, Argentina

Universidade Federal de São Paulo, Brasil

Universidad de los Andes, Colombia

Museo Histórico Nacional, Chile

Organizing Committee:

María José Chiesa Alfaro, Daniel González Erices, María José Pascual Bosco, María Eugenia Ruiz Jara y Juan Pablo Vilches Cornejo.

Papers Submission: Until July 31, 2025 to the e-mail cisha@uai.cl.

The proposal must include the author(s), their institutional affiliation, title, and an abstract between 300 and 500 words. A preliminary bibliography should also be included. Please indicate the relevant thematic line of the Call for Papers. Once the notification of acceptance has been received, the full paper must be submitted by 27 October 2025 to the same email address: cisha@uai.cl.

Modality of the event: Hybrid (virtual/in-person).

Contact: cisha@uai.cl