



CALL FOR PAPERS

Conference IRHiS, Université de Lille

April 3, 2024

The constrained image

Place, form and function of iconography in the decorative and precious arts



The design of an objet d'art is marked by the ceaseless search for balance between functionality and materiality, structure and decoration. Its initial utilitarian dimension - which is its *raison d'être* - proves to be a limiting factor, as the symbolic discourse we wish to assign to it, developed through iconography and ornamentation, comes up against the technical realities of its construction. At first glance, the visualization of an iconographic theme is constrained by the shape of the object it adorns. As it is thought to restrict all creative possibilities, the said shape would logically condemn the objet to being no more than a conventional presence, a reference model tirelessly repeated from one work to the next. However, while it is true that, in the decorative and precious arts, this necessary synthesis imposes clearer stances in the elaboration of stories in images, this does not seem, for all that, to constitute an obstacle on the development of specific narrative modalities. As a result, even if the artist/craftsman's abilities are limited by the form of the object, the symbolic value endowed upon it by the patron remains unbounded.

It is this liminal observation that leads us to question the overcoming of this restricting frame, and thus to analyze the iconographic solutions - adaptations - envisaged to circumvent the primary structural imperatives of the objects. These modifications can sometimes lead to the addition of a semantic stratum not originally present in the textual sources and their exegesis, creating a polysemous discourse by exploiting the ambivalence of certain

motifs. The aim is therefore to interrogate the place of iconography in the decorative and precious arts, without reducing it to its mere decorative ambition, which, although it exists, cannot justify the variations, however minute, art historians often encounter without always knowing how to apprehend them. We will be looking at the nature of these adaptations and the visual narrative processes involved, as well as at the reasons - technical, economic, aesthetic, religious, political, etc. - that motivate the deliberate decision not to use a pre-existing composition that has already proved its worth.

The aim of this conference is to explore the role of iconography in the decorative and precious arts, from its conceptualization by the commissioner to its realization by the craftsman. The purpose is to understand how different sources are brought to images, which must conform to the structural imperatives of the object they decorate. As we wish to encourage a wide-ranging reflection on this theme, we invite researchers from all periods to submit their proposals for papers to engage in a cross-chronological exchange, which we hope will be fruitful.

Terms of participation

This conference is dedicated to PhD students and art historians working on all historical periods. It will take place on April 3, 2024, at IRHiS - Université de Lille, Campus Pont-de-Bois, Villeneuve d'Ascq (seminar room, A1.152). The day will be a hybrid event (face-to-face/distance). Proposals for contributions, in the form of an abstract of around 1,500 characters, accompanied by a biobibliographical CV of around 800 characters, should be sent to the organizers by **January 15, 2024** (e-mail addresses below).

Organizers

Marie-Ange Jésus Duchâtel (IRHiS, ULille) — marieange.jesuduchatel@univ-lille.fr
Lucas Fellag (IRHiS, ULille) — lucas.fellag@univ-lille.fr

Scientific Committee

Étienne Hamon, Professor (IRHiS, ULille)
Patrick Michel, Professor (IRHiS, ULille)
Mathieu Beaud, Senior Lecturer (IRHiS, ULille)