

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
CALL FOR PAPERS**

Publics of the First Public Museums (18th and 19th Centuries). Visual Sources

June 5th & 6th 2025



Pedro Kuntz y Valentini, *Interior of the Prado Museum* [detail], 1833. Museo Nacional del Prado

The founding period of modern museums has emerged as a vital field of research in recent decades, generating significant scholarly publications from an international perspective. In this context it is important to highlight the current work of the Swiss National Foundation research project *Visibility Reclaimed. Experiencing Rome's First Public Museums (1733-1870). An Analysis of Public Audiences in a Transnational Perspective*, with whose team the Museo Nacional del Prado is pleased to co-organise this conference. This Call for Papers invites scholars to contribute to a dynamic international forum with a focus on the visual sources of early museum audiences, encompassing both well-established and newly discovered materials. As a pioneering institution in the Hispanic context, the Museo del Prado welcomes this opportunity to re-examine its own visual history in dialogue with other similar institutions of the period.

Organised by: Museo Nacional del Prado & Università della Svizzera italiana

MUSEO NACIONAL
DEL PRADO



With the support of
Swiss National Science Foundation



Venue and Dates

Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado
June 5th-6th, 2025

Direction

Carla Mazzarelli (Università della Svizzera italiana, Accademia di Architettura, Istituto di storia e teoria dell'arte e dell'architettura)
David García Cueto (Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado)

Co-organisation

Centro de Estudios del Prado (MNP)
Accademia di Architettura, Istituto di storia e teoria dell'arte e dell'architettura (USI)

Secretary

Gaetano Cascino and Luca Piccoli (Università della Svizzera italiana)
Itziar Arana Cobos (Centro de Estudios, Museo Nacional del Prado)

Contact

visibilityreclaimed@gmail.com
congreso.visibily@museodelprado.es

Formalising proposals

Contributors are invited to submit an abstract (max. 2,000 characters, including spaces) accompanied by a brief CV (max. 1,500 characters, including spaces) and a minimum of three keywords to: **visibilityreclaimed@gmail.com**
Application will be evaluated and communicated by the Conference Directors.

Accepted languages

English, French, Italian, Spanish

Deadline for abstract submission

20 January 2025

Notification of acceptance

3 February 2025

The Conference entitled *Publics of the First Public Museums (18th and 19th Centuries). Visual Sources* is an integral part of the research project *Visibility Reclaimed. Experiencing Rome's First Public Museums (1733-1870). An Analysis of Public Audiences in a Transnational Perspective* (FNS 100016_212922) directed by Carla Mazzarelli. Marking the third of three encounters (*I. Institutional Sources; II. Literary Discourses*), this workshop delves into the examination of visual sources, vital to understanding the forms of representation of early museums and their publics. We intend to investigate a vast range of visual sources, from views of internal and external spaces to architectural and display projects, from caricatures to illustrations published in catalogues, guidebooks, *voyages pittoresques* up to the (self)representation of publics, museum staff (directors, custodians, *ciceroni*) and artists within the museum.

Visual sources have long represented a privileged source for investigating the origins of the first public museums and the impact on their publics. However, in the light of recent studies aimed at deepening the material history of the museum and the encounter of the public with the institutions, these sources deserve a closer scrutiny in both methodological and critical terms. As museums sought to define and engage their publics, visual sources often became both a mirror and a mould; they reflect and shape institutional and societal perceptions, contributing to build up the idea of museum but also to give a depiction of practices of access to public and private collections in Europe and in the World. The Museo Nacional del Prado welcomes this initiative as it has been involved since its foundation in 1819 in the process that the Conference analyzes. The well known paintings that represent the spaces of Museo Nacional del Prado, since its opening, such as those of Fernando Brambilla, are an important starting and comparison point for the theme at the center of the Conference discussion.

On the other hand, paintings depicting 'quadrerie' have been a codified genre at least since the 17th Century. Such artworks have also been read as sources for the study of the evolution of the display during the Early Modern Age, but they also represent reference models for artists on how to represent the interiors of museum spaces, their publics and staff.

In particular, the aim of the Conference at the Prado is therefore to answer the following questions:

- In what terms can visual sources be used as a starting point for a broader reflection on the definition and progressive evolution of the way of looking and experiencing the spaces of collecting and museums, increasingly opened to a general public from the late XVIIIth century?

- What kind of visual representations of the publics in museums are privileged by institutions at the origins of their foundation?
- When and how can we recognize forms of self-representation and/or visual promotion of museum, its spaces and its staff?
- What can the images depicting the spaces of collecting and the first public museums tell us about the evolution of visitor's gaze and of their encounter with the institutions?
- We welcome papers offering new insights on the following topics and materials:
 - The role of artists and architects specialized in the genre of the 'museum' view (paintings and prints). In particular, we will appreciate specific insights not only into the backgrounds and careers of specific, lesser-known personalities, but also into the methods they developed to 'portray' the museum and their audiences and any relationships they had with institutions.
 - Architectural plans/sketches/drawings as a vehicle for the study of museography in relation to publics. From the drawing of ideal museums to the design of first public museums, we are interested in exploring how, through the study of published and unpublished graphic materials, we can reconstruct a history of museography for the public, at its origins.
 - Facing each other: artists vs general publics. We are interested in investigating how the publics are represented in the first images depicting the museums, focusing in particular on the theme of the "encounter of the audiences" and the interrogatives that may emerge regarding gender, identity and culture issues within the early museums. In this context we are also interested in the role of satire and caricatures and what they can tell about social reception of museums, their staff and audiences.
 - The role of illustration in periodicals, guides, catalogues, novels and literature in general dedicated to the museum and the related topic of "*Museums at Hand*" (maps, postcards, souvenirs, "portable museums"). We are interested in how visual narratives of the museum have been constructed to make it more accessible to the public. In particular, we encourage proposals on the relationship between visual and written narratives.
 - The role of Early Photographs in/of the Museum. We are also interested in exploring how photography contributes to disseminating the image of the museum to a wider public but also the material history aspects of its use in the museum.

With a spotlight on interdisciplinary and transnational approaches, the Prado Conference calls for a deeper probe into the visual and material realms of museums, emphasizing the interplay between visual sources, literary discourses and artworks, collections, display, space, staff and audiences "narrated" or "observed" in the museum of the 18th and 19th centuries.

We aim to broaden the horizon by drawing parallels with analogous visual documentation from other cultural spaces that the project seeks to study in comparative terms. This includes libraries,

academies, galleries, private collections, villas, both ancient and modern monuments, archaeological sites, places of worship, theatres, ateliers, and more.

Key points to consider are:

- To foster dialogue around the most recent research endeavors on the topic, we especially encourage submissions from doctoral candidates and early-career researchers, who are currently delving into original themes and sources resonant with the workshop's objectives.
- Preference will be given to applications showcasing interdisciplinary research approaches. This encompasses the melding of Art and Architectural History with Material History, Literature, Intermedial Studies, Tourism Studies, Geography and beyond.
- Submissions emphasizing Digital Humanities are highly regarded. This includes, but is not limited to, cataloguing projects, databases concerning in particular to visual sources, the visiting experiences and audiences of the first public museum in comparisons with other institutions and places (e.g., libraries, academies, galleries, villas, ancient and modern monuments).
- We highly value case studies adopting transnational and/or transregional perspectives. Proposals exploring underrepresented geographies within the sphere of Museum Studies are particularly encouraged.
- The primary focus of this Conference is on the 18th and 19th centuries. However, topics on the 17th and the early 20th century are also welcome, provided they maintain a strong engagement with or connection to these two centuries.
- Please note that for the selected candidates on Call there is no registration fee but reimbursement for travel and accommodation is not included.

The Conference is part of the **Research Project**: *Visibility Reclaimed. Experiencing Rome's First Public Museums (1733–1870). An Analysis of Public Audiences in a Transnational Perspective* (SNSF 100016_212922)

Project Direction and scientific coordination: Carla Mazzarelli (Università della Svizzera italiana, Accademia di architettura di Mendrisio, Istituto di storia e teoria dell'arte e dell'architettura) carla.mazzarelli@usi.ch

Project Partners: Giovanna Capitelli (Università di Roma Tre), Stefano Cracolici (Durham University), David García Cueto (Museo Nacional del Prado), Christoph Frank (Università della Svizzera italiana), Daniela Mondini (Università della Svizzera italiana), Chiara Piva (Sapienza Università di Roma)