

Renaissance Humanism was an important driving force behind the ideal of bringing antiquity back to life, or restoring the ancient gods to their former glory. Was this resurrection of non-Christian gods merely an intellectual game or should we call it religious practice? Because of the education in the *studia humanitatis*, elites in early modern Italy were well versed in ancient texts relating to Roman, Greek, and other local antiquities; that knowledge was an element of social distinction and many were therefore willing to contribute to new translations and publications or to the decoration of buildings, palazzi, and gardens with reference to the ancient gods. As Ernst Gombrich already noted, Botticelli's *Primavera* (c. 1482), showing Venus and Mercury, was the first non-religious painting after antiquity in a size that had previously been reserved for altarpieces. This raises the question if we should see this as Renaissance polytheism or paganism.

This symposium examines the role of artists in bringing about the ideals of Renaissance humanism. Many Renaissance artists were active in identifying and physically examining antiquities. Treatises of art theory - often written by artists themselves - contributed to both detailed and overview knowledge about antiquity. In this process Renaissance artists may have gained more than textual and visual information alone, that could be described as 'tacit' or 'embodied' knowledge. One could argue, that artistic research played a pivotal role in the process of reintegration of classical textual sources and visual and material culture, which was typical for the Renaissance movement.

What is more, by restoring the classical pantheon of gods, artists may have also contributed to inconsistency of belief and possibly to new forms of paganism. Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood argued in *Anachronic Renaissance* (2010), that Renaissance works of art referring to an ancient past acquire multiple temporalities; Botticelli's 'paintings became instantiations of ancient gestures', so to speak: embodiments of ancient works of art, rematerializing the pagan gods. If we focus on these visual, material and public aspects of religion and not as something people 'believed' in, does that approach give us new insights into Renaissance culture and its complex, possibly religious interest in ancient paganism?

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The conference is open to the public free of charge.
Pre-registration is required to guarantee seating:
niki@nikiflorence.org

Image: Agostino di Duccio - *Mercury*, 1454-1457
Cover image: Matteo de' Pasti - Medal for Leon Battista Alberti, circa 1446

International conference

Visual Humanisms

Dutch University Institute for
Art History in Florence

October 20-21, 2022



NIKI ISTITUTO
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Thursday, October 20

10.00

Coffee/Tea

10.15

Michael W. Kwakkelstein

Director's Welcome

Marieke van den Doel

(University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht)

Introduction

Session 1

Visual Humanism and Paganism

(chair: Gert Jan van der Sman, NIKI)

10.30

Susanna de Beer (University of Leiden, Royal Netherlands Institute Rome) - *Who is Best at Restoring Ancient Rome? Collaboration and Rivalry between Humanist Writers and Visual Artists*

10.55

Han Lamers (University of Oslo) - *The Dotti Greci of Italian Humanism: An Alternative Introduction*

11.20

Discussion

11.30

Marieke van den Doel (University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht) - *Visual Humanism and Paganism: The Case of the Tempio Malatestiano*

11.55

Matthijs Jonker (University of Utrecht, Royal Netherlands Institute Rome) - *Transcultural Visual Humanism: Understanding New World Antiquities through Images*

12.20

Discussion

12.30

Lunch

Session 2

The Experiment of the Renaissance Artist

(chair: Joachim Duyndam, University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht)

13.30

Joost Keizer (University of Groningen) - *What Is a Renaissance Allegory?*

13.55

Elsje van Kessel (University of St. Andrews) - *Visual Humanisms out to Sea*

14.20

Sergius Kodera (University of Vienna) - *Giovan Battista della Porta's Physiognomics and the Pagan Gods*

14.45

Discussion

15.00

Afternoon Tea

Session 3

The Ancient Gods

(chair: Anja Machielse, University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht)

15.30

Kocku von Stuckrad (University of Groningen), **keynote lecture** *Agential Entanglements in Renaissance Art: Locating Ancient Gods in Religious Discourse*

16.20

Discussion

16.30

Reception

Friday, October 21

10.00

Coffee/Tea

Session 4

Botticelli Revisited

(chair: Valery Rees, London School of Philosophy and Economic Science)

10.15

Alessandro Cecchi (Casa Buonarroti) - *Lecture Botticelliane. La Primavera e una proposta per la Villa dell'Ospedaletto*

10.40

Ingrid Rowland (University of Notre Dame School of Architecture) - *Botticelli, Vasari, and the Medici Revival of Etruscan Art*

11.05

Gert Jan van der Sman (NIKI) - *The Visual Language of Botticelli's Primavera*

11.30

Discussion

11.40

Coffee/Tea

Session 5

Harmony of Concurrent Alternatives

(chair: Anja Machielse, University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht)

12.00

Jacmien Prins (Utrecht University) - *Seeing, Hearing, Beauty and Love in Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Symposium*

12.25

Valery Rees (London School of Economic Science) *Reframing the 'Twilight of the Gods'*

12.50

Discussion

13.00

Lunch

14.00

Book presentation Marieke van den Doel, *Ficino and Fantasy. Imagination in Art and Theory from Botticelli to Michelangelo* with **Valery Rees and Anja Machielse**

15.00

Concluding remarks