SENSES

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In the Body of a Courtier

Sensory Experience and Bodily Practice in European Court Residences, 1300–1800

CALL FOR PAPERS — INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP

DATE	**15–16 April 2027**
LOCATION	Schloss Eggenberg, Graz (Austria)
ORGANISATION	COST Action CA24164, *Sensing Europe's Court Spaces at the Crossroads of Past, Present and Future* (SENSES), Working Group 4 (BODY), with Universalmuseum Joanneum – Schloss Eggenberg
WORKING LANGUAGE	English
PARTICIPANTS	max. 25
DEADLINE	**8 January 2027**

How does it feel to be a courtier?

Court studies have long described the court as a space of representation, ceremony and political negotiation. This workshop shifts the perspective from the court as a stage to the court as a physical environment, and asks how life at court was bodily experienced by those who inhabited it. Its frame is the European court between roughly 1300 and 1800.

Court residences were among the most intensely sensory environments of premodern Europe: places of music and noise, of flavours and competing smells, of candlelight and darkness, of silk and fur, of heat and cold, crowding, restrictive dress and prolonged waiting. Yet research has mostly discussed the intended effects of court spaces, their architecture and decoration, rather than what it was like to move through them.

This workshop approaches the multisensory experience of court life from the perspective of the courtiers themselves. It is conceived as a methodological and conceptual exchange between court studies, history and art history, history of music and of material culture on the one hand, and the behavioural and cognitive sciences, experimental psychology, neuroscience, engineering and the digital humanities on the other.

Central questions include:

- How did rank, office, gender, age, disability or illness shape the sensory experience of court spaces?
- Which spaces — staircases, antechambers, waiting rooms, corridors, galleries, chapels, kitchens and dining halls — structured bodily experience, and how?
- How did sensory experience change across scales, from the single room to the residence, its gardens and the wider network of residences? What did travel, the hunt or hours of standing outdoors do to the body?
- To what extent can such experiences be approached through digital modelling, reconstruction and simulation?
- What can behavioural science and experimental psychology contribute to understanding perception and decision-making from a historical perspective, and what would shared methodological standards between historical and empirical disciplines look like?
- How can residence museums and heritage sites convey the bodily experience of the spaces they preserve?

Format

The format prioritises discussion and cross-disciplinary exchange over formal presentation: short input statements of about 15 minutes are each followed by extended plenary discussion.

The workshop takes place at Schloss Eggenberg in Graz, today part of the UNESCO World Heritage site “City of Graz – Historic Centre and Schloss Eggenberg”. Prince Hans Ulrich von Eggenberg, first minister to Emperor Ferdinand II, began the building in 1625; his grandson Johann Seyfried had the interiors completed from 1666 onwards, including more than 500 ceiling paintings. Its enfilade of 24 state rooms retains much of its original baroque decoration and furnishing. Built for an imperial governor and designed to receive the sovereign himself, Eggenberg provides a shared physical reference for the questions under discussion.

A central element is an evening working session in the state rooms under approximated baroque lighting, conceived as a shared experiment. Building on the museum’s candlelight tours, in which the enfilade is lit by more than 600 candles, participants will move through the residence and discuss the potential and challenges of empirically reconstructing historical perception.

We especially welcome contributions that

- explore inter-sensorial experience from an interdisciplinary perspective
- examine the performative and embodied dimensions of court life
- reflect on the epistemology of approaching past perception
- present proof-of-concept projects using digital, virtual or AI-based methods

Who we invite

We invite historians, art historians, archaeologists, musicologists, neuroscientists, perception psychologists, behavioural scientists and acousticians, as well as researchers in olfactory heritage and the digital humanities, simulation experts, digital designers and museum curators.

Early-career researchers are strongly encouraged to apply, as are researchers based in COST Inclusiveness Target Countries. The Action is committed to gender balance and to broad geographical participation across all its activities.

How to submit

Please send an abstract of no more than 300 words and a one-page CV by **8 January 2027** to christa.syrer@kunstgeschichte.uni-muenchen.de.

Participation and funding

Participants need to register via the SENSES Action page of the e-COST platform, free of charge. Travel costs of accepted speakers will be reimbursed afterwards according to COST rules; in addition, accepted speakers receive a daily allowance towards accommodation, meals and local transport.

Further information: https://www.cost.eu/actions/CA24164/

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