



CALL FOR PAPERS

Art of the Sacred

Multidisciplinary Approaches to
Religious and Spiritual Artistic Activity

Conference organized by CESAR, between 15th and 17th
of May 2026, hosted by the Hungarian Academy of Arts
Research Institute of Art Theory and Methodology, Budapest

The Central European Symposium for the Academic Study of Religion invites submissions for its upcoming conference, hosted by the Hungarian Academy of Arts Research Institute of Art Theory and Methodology (38 Budakeszi street, district 12 Budapest, Hungary), between 15 and 17 May 2026.

The intersection of art and religious/spiritual activity is a profound and enduring feature of human culture. Religion acts as a mirror through which spiritually inclined individuals and societies can understand their surroundings and discover deeper meanings in the phenomena they experience. In this process, art functions as a powerful conduit through which ultimately ineffable meanings can be directly expressed and communicated.

This historical engagement is vast and has been a consistent aspect of humanity. Its earliest signs can be seen in the megalithic cultures of ancient civilizations. Stone circles, menhirs, funeral and hunting art are notable markers of this affinity. In the medieval period, Christianity expressed itself through art with illuminated manuscripts, numerous temples, and towering cathedrals. In other cultural contexts, stupas and decorated places of worship employed unknown techniques: calligraphy, ceramics, or even Dreamtime Art. The Renaissance brought humanist interpretations of the sacred, while later Baroque channeled religious fervor as the Counter-Reformation emphasized art's devotional, dramatic, emotional, and awe-inspiring qualities. In the East, art evolved similarly complex directions: the Edo-period Rinpa school popularized new techniques like lacquerware.

Meanwhile, in Africa, the Kuba Kingdom's liminal masked dance ceremonies involved carved wooden masks, vibrant clothing, and a distinct movement culture. Later, Romanticism and early global cultural exchange blended spiritualities and religious expressions. The past century has made this relationship even more complex, as traditional forms of religious folk art encounter challenges and a need for revitalization in a rapidly globalizing world. With the emergence of modern and contemporary art styles—such as Abstraction, Surrealism, Expressionism, and later, Conceptual Art—the sacred is often approached less devotionally and more with irony or personal meaning. As abstract spiritualists and contemporary artists explore global faith traditions, political theology, and post-secular ideas, the dialogue between art and religion remains central to expressing human existence in contrast to something greater than ourselves.



BUDAPEST
15–17 MAY 2026

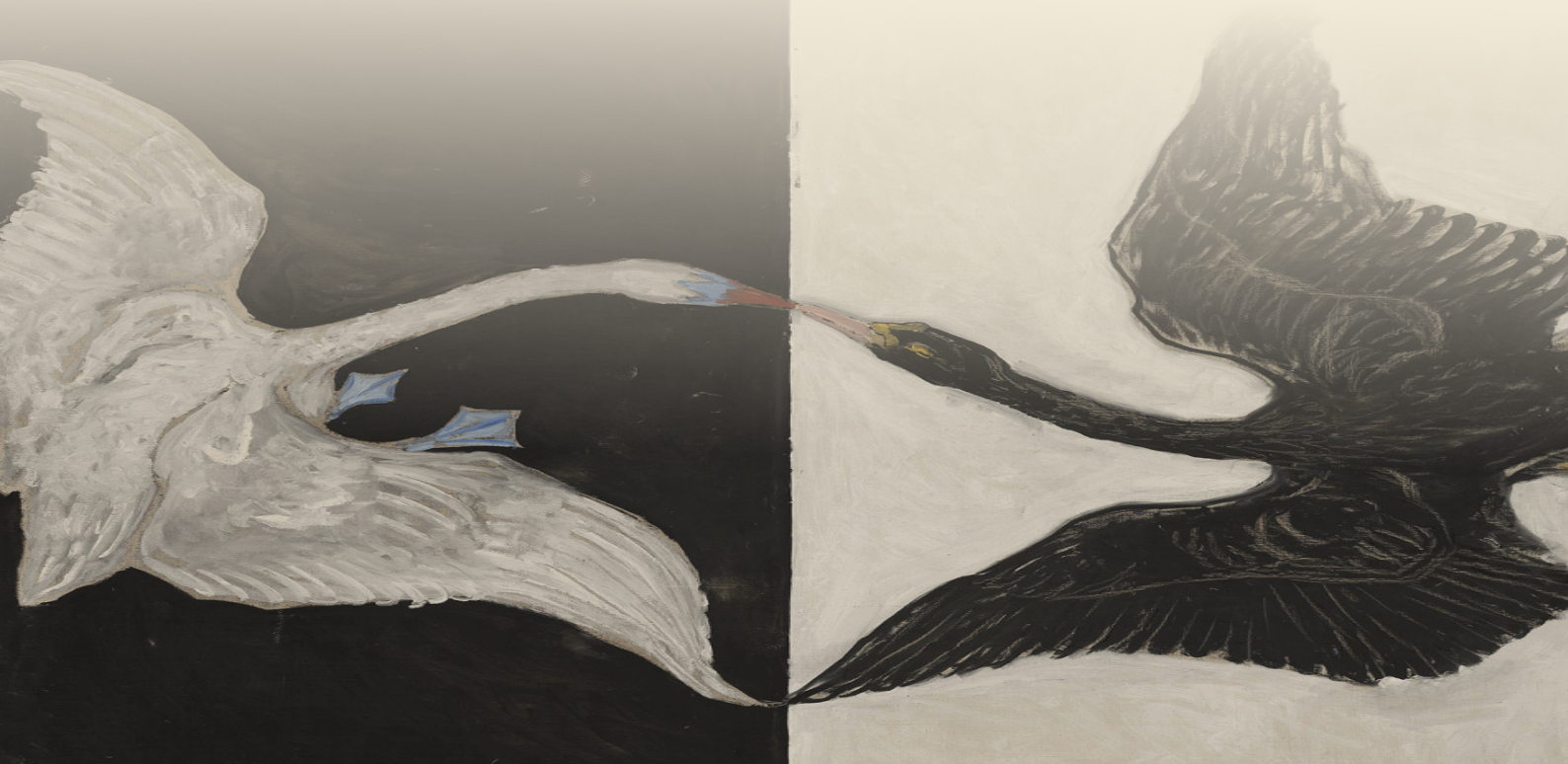


Our interdisciplinary conference seeks to explore the dynamic and often contested relationship between the spheres of art, religion, and spirituality across the ages. We invite submissions from young scholars, PhD students, and late Master's students in Art History, Religious Studies, Theology, Cultural Anthropology, Folklore, Sociology of Religion, Social and Political History, Philosophy and Psychology of Religion, Comparative Cultural Studies, Architecture, Musicology, Literature, Theater, Film Studies and any related fields that examine how artistic practices approach, interpret, embody, and transform humanity's understanding of the sacred.

We welcome proposals on, but not limited to:

- **Theories of the Image and Text:**
Iconoclasm, visual devotion, the nature of the holy image (icons, idols, relics), and visual epistemology. Contributions and emotional dimensions of religious textuality.
- **Challenges of Silence in Art Theory:**
Methodological challenges posed by investigating religious non-textual or non-vocal forms of art.
- **Ritual Performances and Bodily Movement Culture:**
The role of art objects and aesthetic practices within religious ceremonies, dance, music, movement, and physiological motion as embodied spiritual experience.
- **Sacred Space and Architecture:**
The functions, design, soundscape, and experience of temples, churches, mosques, shrines, and other places of worship.
- **Challenging or Affirming Power:**
Examining how sacred or spiritual art is used to provoke public debate, verify or criticise power and authority.
- **Materiality and Sensory Experience:**
The role of materials, color, light, and the senses in shaping religious art and aesthetic engagement.

- **New Frontiers of Faith - Contemporary, Digital and AI Art:**
The negotiation of religious themes, spirituality, or critiques in new media, including how artificial intelligence shapes the depiction, interpretation, and affects the dissemination of religious art.
- **Interfaith and Transcultural Exchange:**
Artistic interactions, appropriations, and dialogues between different religious and spiritual traditions with the aims of understanding and negotiating conflict.
- **Devotional Arts:**
The creation, circulation, and reception of objects designed for private or public piety (e.g., illuminated manuscripts, altarpieces, pilgrimage items).
- **Identity and Representation:**
The portrayal and negotiation of cultural identity, race, and gender in religious and spiritual artistic forms. The competing forms and different interpretations of sacred texts.
- **Nonreligion's Art:**
Spiritual or religious art-based practices employed alongside the frontiers and outside the conventionally defined borders of religion. Humanistic, atheistic, and politically defined forms of art, invoking a sense of "aesthetic transcendence."



Keynote Speakers:

Prof. emer. Eileen Barker **OBE FBA FAcSS**

London School of Economics
Professor Emeritus of Sociology with
Special Reference to the Study of Religion;
founder of INFORM

Prof. Dyron B. Daugherty

Pepperdine University, Divisional Dean
(Religion and Philosophy Division)
William S. Banowsky Chair in Religion;
editor for Bloomsbury Religion in North
America Project

Organizing committee:

Janka Balázs, László Gergő Bialkó, Mohamed Farrag,
Sára Heidl, Filiz Kahraman, Miklovicz Attila,
Márk Nemes, Karsten Schuil, Jose Antonio Lorenzo Tamayo

The conference is held in person. Organizers advise all participants to be informed about current travel and Visa regulations. Organizers reserve the right to change the format of the event in case of any unforeseen difficulties; in such changes, participants will be promptly informed.

Submission Guidelines:

We invite submissions for 20-minute paper presentations

Abstract submission form

To participate in the conference, please first register by completing the form below:
<https://forms.gle/mxhwGtr7pMnxIugk9>

Abstract requirements

Abstracts: no more than 200 words outlining your argument, methodology, and main results. The abstract should include the full title of the presentation, the applicant's full name and institutional affiliation, any necessary supporter or grant statements, and 3-5 keywords (excluding any footnotes or bibliography).

Formatting requirements:

[*.docx] file format, 12pt font size, Times New Roman font type, with justified paragraphs, 1.5 line spacing

Application deadline: 2026.02.28.

Feedback

Feedback on acceptance will be provided until 2026.03.15. via e-mail.

Date of the event:

15
to
17 | **MAY**
2026

Venue:

Hungarian Academy of Arts
Research Institute of Art Theory and Methodology
38 Budakeszi Street, District XII. Budapest, Hungary



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