

## **From the sanctuary to the museum: Displaying the sacred**

Spring School, University of Helsinki

20–24 March 2017

### *Call for Applications*

In medieval Christianity, the transcendental manifested itself in materially tangible substances, from the bread and wine of the Eucharist to the relics of the saints. Images, liturgical and devotional objects, and built spaces translated the spiritual message to physical form. Sensory access to the sacred was conditional: the individual's interaction with the divine was orchestrated in a reciprocal movement between concealment and exposure, where the not-seen was as spiritually charged as the immediately visible. Relics lay hidden in altars and reliquaries, the folding doors of altarpieces remained closed for most of the year, the imagery of stained-glass windows and exterior façade sculpture was set so high as to be near impossible to make out from ground level.

In present-day museums, the conditions of display are vastly different. The knowledge regime of modernity demands for exhibits to be fully exposed to view in well-lit display cases, sculpted building elements previously out of reach to be mounted at eye level, and wings of altarpieces to be thrown up to allow a view from all sides. The resulting disenchantment of the objects may be fruitfully compared to the exhibiting in ethnographic museums of sacred and/or ritual objects from non-Western cultures; in contrast to the latter, however, the ontological and ethical consequences for the medieval objects have not raised much scholarly debate.

The course will explore the above issues by interrogating the contexts in which sacred objects have been put on display—or not—from the Middle Ages to the present. Although the primary focus will be on the visual and material culture of the Latin Church, a wider frame of reference will be provided by applying perspectives taken from archaeological and ethnographic discourses on the transfer of ritual objects from their original cultural settings to become part of museum collections. The participants will be expected to engage actively in a dialogue on the implications of different modes of display for the perception and interpretation of the objects, historically and today.

The Spring School welcomes applicants from across the fields of art history, cultural history, ethnography, museology, anthropology, religious studies, and archaeology. Participants are warmly encouraged to bring their own specialities to the table

through project presentations and discussions. A reading list for beforehand preparation will be distributed.

Part of the course will consist of students' project presentations, with comments provided by the teachers and the other students. The participants are required to submit an essay (5–7 pages) on a topic based in their ongoing research. It is an added value if the topic links up to the focus of the course, although this is not a prerequisite.

The Spring School is organized by the Thure Gallén foundation, Centre for the Nordic Studies at the University of Helsinki, Swedish Historical Society in Finland and Glossa Society for Medieval Studies in Finland. Course leader is Professor Lena Liepe (University of Oslo).

Fifteen students (on Ph.D. or Master's level) will be accepted on to the course.

Students receive 5 ECTS points for attending the course and completing the course assignments, including submitting an essay and making a project presentation. Applicants are invited to send a one-page abstract to the coordinator Karolina Kouvola by January 15, 2017. The organizers can provide a travel grant from €100 to €400; to apply, include in your application the reason for applying for the grant, as well as an estimate of travel expenses.

For further information, please contact the coordinator or Prof. Lena Liepe.

Karolina Kouvola, University of Helsinki – [Karolina.kouvola\[at\]helsinki.fi](mailto:Karolina.kouvola[at]helsinki.fi)

Lena Liepe, University of Oslo – [lina.liepe\[at\]ifikk.uio.no](mailto:lina.liepe[at]ifikk.uio.no)