

Æstetisk Seminar

Forår 2026

*Torsdage kl. 14.15–16
Institut for Kommunikation og Kultur,
Kasernen, bygn. 1584, Langelandsgade
145, Aarhus C*

Alle er velkomne/All are welcome

*Æstetisk Seminar er tilrettelagt af
Anette Vandsø og Niclas Nørby Jochumsen Hundahl,
Institut for Kommunikation og Kultur
Aarhus Universitet*

5. marts 2026 – lokale 124

Towards an Emotional History of Pictures

Kasper Lægning

For a very long time, emotions and their histories have been largely overlooked within art history. Since the 1990s, the history of emotions (Boddice, Dixon, Rosenwein) – rooted primarily in the discipline of history – has left a strong mark on neighbouring fields within the humanities, yet only rarely on art history itself. James Elkins' essay collection, *Pictures & Tears* (2001), constitutes a notable exception, which, however, has not been followed by comparable studies. Only in the study of contemporary art have theorists – often artists themselves – more extensively confronted emotions as raw material for the artwork, and a pronounced exchange between affect theory and image theory has emerged (Bennett, Doyle, Ngai). Similarly, the emerging field of visual culture studies (Mitchell) has been more receptive to affective dimensions.

In this talk, I argue for the relevance of rethinking not only visual culture but also art history under the sign of emotions. Drawing on both iconic and overlooked paintings, I bring forth qualities of affect and mood that may serve as stepping stones towards a renewed understanding of painting – and, more broadly, of pictures.

16. april 2026 – lokale 112

Hope and manifestos: Reading Ahmed with Ahmed

Kira Skovbo Moser og Niclas Nørby Jochumsen Hundahl

Feminist cultural theorist Sara Ahmed operates with two main lines of inquiry: First, the theoretical tracing of emotions and emotionally charged words and how they come to 'work' on and through us. And second, the feminist approach of asking how we can reinterpret or work differently with these words and workings, theoretically and politically.

This talk will use Ahmeds own approach of (re)tracing, focusing on two particular words: Hope and manifestos.

Hope continuously appears in Ahmeds writing in a double position: As an 'object' of study, termed an "attachment" or "investment", as well as a position or stance she adopts and urges us to adopt. Tracing how hope flows and evolves through her works allows for an understanding of how hope can function.

Next, we investigate how the manifesto works through a reading of 'A Killjoy Manifesto' (2017). The talk will present reflections on what sticks to the manifesto (emotions, affects, histories, ideas); how the manifesto can be a willful subject; and what the manifesto 'comes up against' in manifesting itself.

30. april 2026 – lokale 124

Good Vibes Only: Phenomenology, Algorithms, and the Politics of Legitimation

Robin James

This talk attends to the relationship between biopower's quantitative and qualitative dimensions. My previous work demonstrated the ways sound, as a frequency, was used to translate statistical normalization, or the measurement of the most frequent frequencies in a population, into qualitative terms. This book argues that phenomenological orientation or horizon has a similar function in contexts such as recommender algorithms and the density models used in contemporary AI and Machine Learning where probability is modeled as something other than a normalized distribution. Phenomenology is uniquely well-suited to theorize these models that as Amoore, Cooper, Joque, and others have argued, blend hard math with subjective intuition, as (per philosophers like Shiloh Whitney), phenomenology, unlike affect theory, rejects the strict separation between what we can very loosely call "mind" and "body" (cognitive content and felt sense). These mathematical models have been vernacularized as "vibes", which are qualitative categories that everyone from 2020s social media users to music streaming services use to define the same sorts

of orientations or tendencies that vectors model mathematically. “Vibes” are a lay term for more or less the same phenomenon philosophers call phenomenological orientations or horizons.

7. maj 2026 – lokale 124

Frictions in Houseplant Art: Mediating Domestic Plants – Countering Plant Deafness

Anette Vandsø

While landscape painting is an established aesthetic category with a rich tradition of critical scholarship, the depiction of houseplants in interior paintings has remained largely untheorized. This presentation argues that the establishment of ‘houseplant art’ as a coherent category with its own history and aesthetics, proves to be the fruitful ‘friction’ that uncovers new layers in well-known paintings allowing us to see and study the rise of indoor nature. In *Hidden Plant Stories* we have systematically collected Danish paintings featuring houseplants from 1820 to 1920. Through the exhibition series *Plantfever – The World in the Windowsill* three partnering museums activated the historical material in dialogue with their own museum histories and collections. The presentation examines this as a visual counterculture, that focusses on marginalized plants, challenging not only plant blindness, but indeed the “plant deafness,” that prohibits us from paying attention to the layered stories concerning care, gender, class, coloniality and ecology in which the house plant has its roots.

28. maj 2026 – lokale 124

Tropaganda: Art, Colonialism and Battles over History

Mathias Danbolt

Art has long functioned as a battleground for negotiations of power, identity, and history. In this lecture, Danbolt examines how art and visual culture have shaped understandings of Denmark’s colonial past in the Caribbean. Central to the lecture is the concept of tropaganda—tropical propaganda—which names aesthetic strategies through

which beauty, sensuality, and idyll are mobilized to obscure and normalize historical violence and political power relations. Through analyses ranging from eighteenth-century portraits of slave owners and nineteenth-century sugar plantation landscapes to twentieth-century colonial commodity aesthetics, the lecture traces how colonial imagery has consistently worked to separate aesthetics from politics, past from present, and power from history. Danbolt situates these visual traditions within a broader critique of Danish art history's enduring tendency to marginalize colonial history, while also highlighting how contemporary artists have developed critical and reparative strategies for engaging colonialism and its afterlives. More than a century after the sale of the Danish West Indies to the United States in 1917, the lecture argues that colonialism continues to shape Danish visual culture and public debates. As such, Danbolt suggests that colonial perspectives remain essential for a more historically informed understanding of art history, memory politics, and contemporary negotiations of art, identity, and historical responsibility.

BIOGRAPHIES

Robin James is an independent scholar and editor. She's an expert in feminism/gender/race and popular music, pop music and politics, sound studies, electronic dance music studies, and contemporary continental philosophy (especially critical theories of neoliberalism and biopolitics). She is also working on new book project about the alt-rock-to-alt-right pipeline and what has happened to the aesthetics of masculine "cool" in rock music. She received her Ph.D. in philosophy from DePaul University in 2006, spent more than 15 years on the philosophy faculty at UNC Charlotte, and now works in publishing.

Mathias Danbolt is a professor of art history at University of Copenhagen, Denmark. Over the last decade his research has centered on the contact zones between art history and colonial history in a Nordic context, with special focus on memory politics, monuments and art in public space. Danbolt has been leading several collective research projects that examine the effects of colonial politics today, including “The Art of Nordic Colonialism: Writing Transcultural Art Histories” (2019-2024), and “Moving Monuments: The Material Life of Sculpture from the Danish Colonial Era” (2022-26). His latest publication is *Tropaganda: Kunst, kolonialisme og kampe om historien* (Strandberg Publishing, 2025) and the co-authored *Nordmandsdalen: Art, Power and Materials in 18th Century Denmark-Norway* (Fagbokforlaget, 2026).

Kasper Lægning is a theorist in architecture and the arts and a New Carlsberg Foundation Researcher in Art History at Aarhus University. Kasper’s research concerns emotions in art, and he is currently writing a book on genre painting seen in this light. Publications include *Nelson and Modern Architecture: A Belated Encounter* (Routledge, 2024) and contributions *Goodman to The Contested Territory of Architectural Theory* (Routledge, 2022) and *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries Since 1975* (Brill, 2022). He serves on the Editorial Board of the journal *MDCCC 1800* and is one of the General Chairs of the upcoming European Architectural History Network (EAHN) conference at Aarhus University.

Kira Skovbo Moser is a PhD Fellow in Rhetoric at Aarhus University. Her PhD-project is exploring the processes of manifesto-making and what these processes do to the participants involved. Her research is informed by traditional and feminist manifesto theory in combination with participatory action research and collaborations, such as the Danish Arts Foundation funded project “Det Vi Mener” with MidtVest PigeKor. She has published on feminist manifestos in *Women, Gender & Research* and has taught manifesto-making across various

universities and folk high schools in Denmark. She is currently co-editing a special issue of *Rhetorica Scandinavica* on manifestos.

Niclas Nørby Jochumsen Hundahl is a Carlsberg PhD Fellow in Musicology at Aarhus University. His PhD-project investigates how Danish pop artists employed hope as a strategy in the years following COVID-19. Focusing on three male musicians, he explores how hope became a central element in negotiating masculinity, identity and music in Denmark in the 2020'ies. His research is informed by popular musicology, feminist cultural studies of emotion and philosophy. He is currently serving as the Danish delegate to the International Association for the Study of Popular Music.

Anette Vandsø is an associate professor in Aesthetics and Culture, and co-director of the research programme Environmental Media and Aesthetics at Aarhus University. Her current research explores the aesthetics and culture of environmental concerns often with a focus on ubiquitous phenomena of plants and sound. Vandsø is PI on several research and dissemination projects on environmental humanities in collaboration with art museums, including Hidden Plant Stories (2023-2026) partnering Ordrupgaard, the Hirschsprung Collection, and Faaborg museum, supported by the Velux Foundation, and The Garden (2016-2020) in collaboration with ARoS. Latest publications include *The Botanical grotesque*, 2026, the co-authored book *Plantfever – the World on the Windowsill*, 2025, and the projects 'position paper' *Hidden Plant Stories*, 2025.

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