



Painting Through the Ages: Techniques, Materials and Practices of Wall Painting

International Conference Call for papers

Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium – 4-5-6 March 2027

From the earliest traces of human expression on cave walls to contemporary urban murals, from ancient wall paintings to medieval and Renaissance frescoes, the act of painting walls is one of humanity's most enduring practices. Across cultures and centuries, wall paintings have served not merely as surface decoration and protection, but also as spaces of communication, representation, technical experimentation, and material innovation. Despite the immense chronological, cultural, and conceptual distances that separate these traditions, mural painting consistently raises fundamental questions about working practices: how images are conceived and transmitted, how materials are selected and prepared, how painters organise their work, and how technical knowledge is transmitted.

This conference seeks to explore paintings executed directly on walls, rock surfaces, and other fixed architectural or parietal supports, from Palaeolithic cave art to contemporary murals, by focusing primarily on techniques of execution and material practices rather than on purely stylistic or iconographic aspects. Its objective is not to construct artificial genealogies between distant traditions, but to foster a transperiod, cross-cultural and interdisciplinary dialogue between specialists working on different chronological periods and cultural contexts but sharing tools, approaches, methodologies and questions.

By bringing together archaeologists, historians, art historians, conservators, heritage scientists, materials scientists and practitioners, the conference aims to reflect on broader tendencies, continuities, and ruptures in mural painting practices across time. Particular attention will be given to workshop organisation, technical gestures, material choices, preparation methods, pigments, binders, supports, and processes of execution.

A second major objective is methodological: to encourage discussion on how painting techniques are studied, documented, and interpreted today. Special emphasis will be placed on analytical approaches, including physico-chemical methods, whose growing role has profoundly transformed our understanding of historical painting techniques, but also digital and imaging technologies and experimental archaeology. By confronting perspectives from different disciplines, periods, and methodological traditions, the conference aims to create a shared space for critical reflection on both painted walls themselves and the tools we use to study them, offering an opportunity to reflect on methodological convergences and disciplinary differences, including terminology, analytical protocols, and interpretative frameworks.

Proposals

Communications are most welcome in English, French or Italian in three different formats: long papers (30 min), short papers (15 min) or posters.

Four different topics will be privileged:

- Painting materials and techniques across a broad cultural, geographical and chronological range, from the Palaeolithic to the modern era;
- Pigments, binders, and mortar recipes; identification, provenance, application;
- Painters' identity and status; workshop practices and dynamics;
- Studying wall paintings in the twenty-first century: methods of conservation, analysis and dissemination.

Integrative and synthesising presentations offering broad perspectives or general overviews will be particularly encouraged in the long-paper format, especially as introductory contributions or for state-of-the-art, methodological, and cross-cutting reflections. Single case studies will preferably be presented as short papers or posters.

The conference is intended as an **in-person event** in order to foster direct scholarly exchange and discussion among participants. Consequently, presentations are expected to be delivered on site. Exceptionally, remote presentations may be considered in duly justified cases, particularly where mobility constraints or other significant circumstances prevent attendance in person. Requests for online participation will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by the Committee.

Submissions should include the **title and abstract** of the contribution, together with the authors' **full names, institutional affiliations, and contact information**. Authors should indicate whether their proposal is intended as an oral presentation (long format or short format) or a poster.

Abstracts, **limited to 2000 characters**, need to be accompanied by a representative **picture** and by any other supporting material considered pertinent.

Proposals should be submitted no later than **31 October 2026** to:
paolo.tomassini@uclouvain.be

The Scientific Committee will review all submissions and inform authors of its decisions not later than 5 November 2026. Accepted papers and posters will be published in the Conference Proceedings.



Location

The city of Louvain-la-Neuve in Belgium and the facilities of UCLouvain offer a particularly meaningful setting for such reflections. The city is itself marked by a remarkable tradition of contemporary mural art, making it a living environment in which wall painting continues to shape public space and collective experience, with numerous large-scale works integrated into the urban landscape by artists such as Claude Rahir, Roger Somville, and François Schuiten, and more recently by Maud Mulliez, who recreated in the hall of the Faculty of Letters in 2024 a [full-scale Roman wall painting experimenting Roman materials and techniques](#). The event also takes place ten years after the conference [La peinture murale antique: méthodes et apports d'une approche technique](#), creating an opportunity not only to revisit the methodological questions raised a decade ago, but also to broaden the discussion beyond Antiquity and foster a wider transhistorical dialogue.

How to get to Louvain-la-Neuve: <https://www.uclouvain.be/en/sites/louvain-la-neuve/access-and-mobility>

Registration

A **registration fee of 50 €** will be asked to participants presenting a paper or a poster, **25 € for students**. The registration fee gives access to the conference, lunch, coffee breaks and conference material. Travel, accommodation, and meals outside of the conference time are the responsibility of the participants. Registrations will be paid on the acceptance of the proposal directly to the university.

For any question, please feel free to contact Paolo Tomassini (paolo.tomassini@uclouvain.be)

Organizing Committee

Paolo Tomassini – F.R.S. FNRS – UCLouvain

Martina Marano – UCLouvain - UNamur

Julian Richard – UNamur

Scientific Committee

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Eleonora Del Federico – Pratt Institute – New York

Simone Dilaria – Università degli Studi di Padova

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Martina Marano – UCLouvain - UNamur

Maud Mulliez – Université de Bordeaux

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