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Italiadomani
DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE
E LETTERE



scuola di studi superiori
giacomo leopardi
UNIVERSITÀ DI MACERATA

ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

The SAF is open to:

~ PhD students;
~ Master's students enrolled in Scuole di Studi Superiori Universitarie and - if places remain available - also to those not affiliated with Scuole di Studi Superiori Universitarie.

Maximum number of participants: **25**.

Application deadline: **July 4, 2025 at 12:00 (noon)**.

Participation is free of charge.

Accommodation and meals are fully covered by the Scuola di Studi Superiori "G. Leopardi".

APPLICATION

Applications must include:

~ **a motivation letter**
~ **a Curriculum Vitae** with details of the formative activity the candidate is carrying out (e.g., title of doctoral or Master thesis, exams taken with grades).

All information and updates regarding the application process are available on the website of the Scuola di Studi Superiori "G. Leopardi" or via the QR code provided.



Scientific Committee

Ivana Bianchi,
Carla Danani
/ University of Macerata



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SAF / SCUOLE DI ALTA FORMAZIONE

VISUAL STUDIES: CONTEMPORARY VIEWS AND METHODOLOGIES FOR ANALYZING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMANS AND IMAGES

**14-17
July
2025**

**Aula Verde
Polo Pantaleoni, MACERATA**

In collaboration with

SDA
scuola di dottorato

VISUAL STUDIES: CONTEMPORARY VIEWS AND METHODOLOGIES FOR ANALYZING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMANS AND IMAGES

From 14 to 17 July 2025

The summer school represents a moment of multidisciplinary dialogue on the theme of the relationship between humans and images. It aims to provide students not only with an articulate perspective on the subject, but also a multidisciplinary exposure to methods and tools that allow us to analyze and reflect on the structure of images, the function of images and the power of images.

After providing an overall framework for what “perceiving an image” means, in terms of visual sciences, cognitive semiotics and art history, we will address some specific themes more in detail.

We will analyze [A. Soranzo] in what sense and with which methodologies research into image perception can help to explain, for example, why certain design objects are appreciated, or why Mona Lisa’s smile is ambiguous.

We will see how both perceptual and cognitive aspects play a role in our aesthetic experience of images [I. Bianchi].

We will delve into interesting metacognitive aspects of our relationship with images, such as the ease and fluidity we experience when confronted with some images, and conversely the uncertainty and confusion we experience in relation to others [L. Ball].


We will reflect [I. Verstegen], from

a perspective that brings together art history and cognitive/visual semiotics, on the power of images. Today, scholars and theorists increasingly speak of the power, volition and violence of images and their capacity to act. While recognizing the phenomenal power of visual forms and the ontological power of matter (a theme we will develop at length), we would like, at the same time, to reflect on the importance of accepting the powerlessness of images, bringing to the front considerations about what images can do and what they cannot do – and what only social action can do.

The encounter with a photography director and filmmaker [S. Varanti] and a workshop activity planned as an integral part of the summer school will allow the students to see the direct reflection of these issues in the creation of a work of art. Starting from her documentary ‘Pagine nascoste’ (Hidden Pages) and sharing an in-depth study of some of its sequences, Varani will propose to the students an analysis of a number of visual, narrative and editing choices in order to trace the themes discussed in the academic lectures.

The summer school will also include moments of integrated activities within the Ricci Museum and/or the Buonaccorsi Palace in Macerata.

Talks – Workshops – Discussions

 **14 July** 7:00 p.m. Welcome Buffet
17 July 7:00 p.m. Closing Remarks

Linden BALL is Professor of Cognitive Psychology and Director of Research and Enterprise (School of Psychology and Humanities) at the University of Central Lancashire (UK), where he is also Deputy Director of the UCLan Research Centre for Brain and Behaviour. His areas of expertise are in Thinking and Reasoning, with a special focus on Dual-Process Theories of Thinking, Uncertainty and Strategy Change in Thinking, Metacognition and Meta-reasoning, Creative Cognition and Design Cognition.

Ivana BIANCHI is Professor of General Psychology at the University of Macerata, where she also teaches a Course on the Psychology of Cognitive Processes focused on the Psychology of visual arts. Her research interests are in the Experimental Phenomenology of Perception, the Perception and cognition of opposites— with a special focus on spatial perception and the perception of opposites between visual configurations (including mirror perception), and on the role of opposites in thinking to stimulate creativity, art appreciation and problem solving.

Alessandro SORANZO is currently Professor at the Department of Physics at the University of Calabria. He does research in Cognitive Psychology, Experimental Psychology and Psychophysics. He has written a series

of works on how we perceive and appreciate visual stimuli (shape aesthetics) and on the role of individual differences in perceptual and aesthetic judgments. He has proposed a convincing novel interpretation to explain Mona Lisa’s ambiguous smile, grounded on psychological principles of perceptual organization.

Ian VERSTEGEN is the Associate Director of Visual Studies at Pennsylvania University, School of Art & Sciences. He works on early modern and modern art history, theory and historiography. He has written a series of works on art and psychology, including *Arnheim, Gestalt and Art: A Psychological Theory* (2005), *Cognitive Iconology: When and How Psychology Explains Images* (2014), and *Arnheim, Gestalt and Media: An Ontological Theory* (2019). Verstegen’s current writing and teaching are focused on the cognitive semiotics of images and pictures.

Sabrina VARANI is a Director of photography and documentary filmmaker who currently teaches at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bari. She has lived and worked in France and has collaborated on many Italian and international productions, both on her own projects and with many other directors. Her films mostly explore gender, social and historical issues.

VISUAL STUDIES: CONTEMPORARY VIEWS AND METHODOLOGIES FOR ANALYZING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMANS AND IMAGES

14 July

7:00 - 7:45 pm

Welcome greetings and introductory round of participants (speakers and students).

Buffet.

15 July

9:00 am - 1:00 pm

Alessandro Soranzo will touch on the following topics: psychophysics, so-called perceptual “illusions,” constancy of color and shadows, leading up to the analysis of the smile of Leonardo's Mona Lisa. In these 4 hours, he will alternate between lectures and small group activities for participants

2:30 - 6:30 pm

Ivana Bianchi will address the issue of aesthetic appreciation, highlighting the kinds of variables and methods used in psychology research to study this human response. After a first, more 360-degree introductory part, she

will delve into the issue of “liking” according to the Pleasure and Interest Model of Aesthetic appreciation (PIA) and will focus on two hypotheses of cognitive intervention to increase viewers' interest in the work (a completed and an ongoing research, both conducted in collaboration also with Ian Verstegen). All of this part will be conducted after engaging participants in a hands-on experience.

16 July

9:00 am-1:00 pm

Linden Ball will start from the metacognitive aspects envisioned in the PIA model and will talk more generally about the ways in which our subjective experience of “perceptual fluency” and “conceptual fluency” can drive judgments of liking and creativity. He will also explore some of the neural mechanisms that underpin fluency experiences. In covering these topics, he will include break-out sessions where participants can experience for

themselves the kinds of visual materials that are used in his experimental studies of aesthetic appreciation.

2:30 - 6:30 pm

Ian Verstegen (who will deliver his lecture at Palazzo Buonaccorsi) will reprise the cognitive themes developed in the previous part, but supplementing them with ideas and concepts related to art history and cognitive/visual semiotics. He will focus in particular on the power of images, bringing to the foreground considerations about what images can do and what they cannot do - and what only social action can do instead. This part will be carried out by also looking at artworks displayed in the Civic Museums of Palazzo Buonaccorsi.

17 July

9:00-12:00 am

Starting with her documentary film “Hidden Pages” and sharing an in-depth look at some of its sequences, **Sabrina Varani** will offer students an analysis of some

visual, narrative and editing choices to trace the themes covered in the previous SAF lectures.

12:00 am- 1:00 pm

Joint reflections by **Ball, Bianchi, Soranzo** and **Verstegen** based on Varani's talk and documentary.

2:30 - 3:30 pm

Individual or small-group work of the students to develop hypotheses for research projects that apply the topics and methodologies discussed (with supervision of the faculty present)

3:30 - 5:30 pm

Presentation of the work to the class group, with teachers' comments

6:00 - 7:00 pm

Ian Verstegen: Open event at Palazzo Buonaccorsi

7:00 pm

Closing Remarks