# Expression
## Ausdruck
# 23 – 25 March 2023

**Processes of Form and Mediation in Art**
**Ausdruck als Form- und Vermittlungsprozess in der Kunst**

International symposium
organized by David Misteli
and Markus Rath

University of Basel
eikones Forum
Rheinsprung 11
4051 Basel

eikones.philhist.unibas.ch

## Thursday March 23, 2023

**14:15** **Welcome in the foyer of the Kunstmuseum Basel, Hauptbau**
**Discussions on the theme of «Expression» on site**

## Friday March 24, 2023

**9:00** **Coffee**

**9:15** Section I: Gesture, Blot, Trace – On the Subiconography of Expression
**Moderation: Markus Rath**

**9:30** **Keynote: Yannis Hadjinicolaou (University of Hamburg)**
**Der Fleck als Geste und Spur. Zu einer enaktiven ikonologischen Materialität**

**10:00** **Agnieszka Dziki (University of Warsaw)**
**Unintentionally Imperfect: Hans Leinberger's Bronzes and the Expression of Surfaces in Early Modern Germany**

**10:30** **Coffee break**

**11:00** **Laura Bruni (Tate Liverpool)**
**Jadé Fadojutimi: Blurring the Line between Figuration and Abstraction**

**11:30** **Lisa Cornali (University of Neuchâtel)**
**«The very soul of composition». Agents of expression in John Flaxman's outlines, between figures and outlines**

**12:00** **Section discussion**

**12:30** **Lunch break**

**14:15** Section II: Figurations of Expression
**Moderation: David Misteli**

**14:30** **Keynote: Emmelyn Butterfield-Rosen (Clark Art Institute, Williamstown)**
**Frontality and the Expressive Head**

**15:00** **Christian Scherrer (University of Vienna/eikones, Basel)**
**Anxiety of expression in Le Brun, Descartes and beyond**

**15:30** **Coffee break**

**16:00** **Laura Indorato (University of Basel)**
**Cruel Expression(s). On Soutine's Portrait Painting**

**16:30** **Joseph Henry (City University of New York)**
**Tectonic Expression in Die Brücke's «Quarter-Hour Nudes»**

**17:00** **Section discussion**

**17:30** **Reception at eikones Forum**

## Saturday March 25, 2023

**9:30** **Coffee**

**10:00** Workshop: On the Topicality of Expression for Art History
**Moderation: Markus Rath**

**12:30** **Lunch break**

**14:15** Section III: Expression and Intention
**Moderation: David Misteli**

**14:30** **Keynote: Charles Palermo (College of William & Mary, Williamsburg)**
**Tacita Dean: Apples**

**15:00** **Barbara Stoltz (University of Marburg)**
**Illusion, Virtualität und symbolische Form des Gefühls: Susanne Langers Theorie des Ausdrucks in ihrer Schrift *Feeling and Form* (1953)**

**15:30** **Coffee break**

**16:00** **Paula Stoica (University of Basel)**
**Fehler im System: Zum expressiven Status von Fehlern und Korrekturen in Hanne Darbovens Schreibarbeiten**

**16:30** **Larissa Dätwyler (University of Basel)**
**Revised Intentions. Expression in the works of Henri Matisse**

**17:00** **Section discussion**

**17:30** **Conclusion**

# Abstracts

**Laura Bruni**
Jadé Fadojutimi: Blurring the Line between Figuration and Abstraction

Focussing on Jadé Fadojutimi (b. 1993)'s work, this paper will question the interpretive guiding concept of subject-centered expression associated with Abstract Expressionism, and it will seek to expand the aesthetic concept of expression to consider its social and ethical dimensions. Citing and updating the key elements of the twentieth century Expressionist idioms like grids, webs, transparency and layering, Fadojutimi's distinctive painterly language shifts between abstract gestures and repeated forms, that bear personal references, often hinted at in her titles but barely decipherable by the viewer. Based upon Jadé Fadojutimis understanding of her often monumental works as «emotional landscapes», my paper aims to explore painting's capacity to communicate issues of cultural and personal identity.

**Emmelyn Butterfield-Rosen**
Frontality and the Expressive Head

European art of the late nineteenth-century is marked by a widespread turn toward figural «frontality», a word coined by Julius Lange in 1892 to describe poses avoiding torsions in body. This formal development undergirds the «anti-expressive» character often ascribed to late nineteenth-century figural imagery. How did this turn towards frontality impact presentations of the head as the conventional artistic site for expressivity in the body? Using Paul Signac's *Opus 217. Against the Enamel of a Background Rhythmic with Beats and Angles, Tones, and Tints, Portrait of M. Félix Fénéon in 1890* as a touchstone, this talk explores historical and formal threads of this broad question.

**Lisa Cornali**
«The very soul of composition». Agents of expression in John Flaxman's outlines, between figures and outlines

Conceived in late eighteenth-century Rome and widely distributed in Europe throughout the nineteenth century, John Flaxman's outlines reduce visual expression to its elementary formal means. However, the human figure–its forms, gestures, and attitudes–remains the prime agent of expression. At a time when theories on the body as a medium of artistic communication significantly developed, and in a context of fascination with the conjectural origins of language and art, the line gradually acquires a value of its own, although it is never completely detached from the human figure in Flaxman's work. Through the dual focus on the human body and the line, Flaxman's outlines could be approached as a tipping point between two aspects of artistic expression, where the line itself begins to gain values attached to the human form.

**Larissa Dätwyler**
Revised Intentions. Expression in the works of Henri Matisse

Drawing on some controversial thoughts by critic Pierre Courthion (1902–1988) on the relationship between expression, artistic premeditation, and reception in the oeuvre of Henri Matisse (1869–1954), the paper explores the function of visible traces of revision in his works. Thereby, on the one hand, Matisse becomes legible as a linking figure between different artistic approaches on the question of the art work's genesis in the 19th and 20th century. On the other hand, it introduces Matisse's methodical use of pentimenti as an explicit attempt to shape his oeuvre's reception.

**Agnieszka Dziki**
Unintentionally Imperfect: Hans Leinberger's Bronzes and the Expression of Surfaces in Early Modern Germany

Hans Leinberger of Landshut was not able to make much use of the affordances of bronze; however, he did achieve new and quite unthinkable qualities precisely due to his lack of experience. Two figures from the trial period – Madonna and St John – show his experimental approach to the unrecognized properties of the material. Both are characterized by unfinished, porous surfaces, with no traces of chasing or polishing. This paper examines how the expression of imperfection ennobled these unsuccessful attempts and resituates other failures as sought-after collectors' items.

**Yannis Hadjinicolaou**
Der Fleck als Geste und Spur. Zu einer enaktiven ikonologischen Materialität

In diesem Vortrag wird die bildphänomenologische Dimension des Flecks in den Fokus genommen. Die dynamische Prozessualität des Bildes erzeugt durch den unspezifischen Reiz des Flecks als Geste und gar Spur unendliche Möglichkeiten von emergierenden und wandelbaren Ideen. Ein Fleck ist gleichsam Erfinden und Finden durch aktive körperliche Betätigung.

**Joseph Henry**
**Tectonic Expression in Die Brücke's «Quarter-Hour Nudes»**

This paper investigates one of German Expressionism's first aesthetic programs, the *Viertelstundenakte* («quarter-hour nudes»), life drawings from around 1905–06 by the artist collective known as *Die Brücke*. By limiting periods of sketching to fifteen minutes, the artists ostensibly optimized immediate and spontaneous expression. Yet whereas prior fin-de-siècle drawing practices did emphasize the rapidity of gestural mark-making, the quarter-hour nudes often economized rather than liberated form. Considering Die Brücke's architectural education and industrialization in Germany more broadly, this talk argues that the quarter-hour nudes demonstrated the political economy behind one of expression's key paradoxes, the conveyance of supraindividual form through the artist's singularized response to the world.

**Laura Indorato**
**Cruel Expression(s). On Soutine's Portrait Painting**

Throughout his career Chaïm Soutine (1893–1943) kept turning to portraiture and produced a series of images of people whose identities remain largely unknown: Hotel, restaurant, and household employees, for instance, whose uniforms hint at their professional activities. More specifically, Soutine's paintings leverage the foreground to showcase their bodies and faces, which would otherwise be lost to the anonymous whirl of the Paris metropolis – hence semantically layering the thematic address and mediality of his painting. This led Waldemar George (1893–1970), one of his earliest critics, to identify in his artistic expression a cruel judgment of his sitters. My contribution aims not only to understand George's notion of cruelty in painting, but also to examine Soutine's preoccupation with the medial transposition of the figure on the canvas.

**Charles Palermo**
**Tacita Dean: Apples**

A common understanding of Tacita Dean's *Floh* (2001) sees it as a postmodernist tribute to the indexicality of photography and of photography's concomitant openness to chance. Building on readings of a photographic project, *Four over One* (2010), by the Los Angeles-based photographer Phil Chang and of Dean's own short film *Michael Hamburger* (2007), this paper challenges the common view. At issue is the question of what we might call the work's voice—not a term often used in connection with photography.

**Christian Scherrer**
**Anxiety of expression in Le Brun, Descartes and beyond**

In focusing on Charles Le Brun's famous *Conférence sur l'expression* (1668/1698) and particularly his painting *Les Reines de Perse aux pieds d'Alexandre* (1661), I want to reflect on their display of passions as an «alphabet of masks» (Hubert Damisch) and as part of a courtly culture of dissimulation wherein courtiers seek to master their anxiety at uncontrolled expression through painting. Against this background, I argue that Le Brun's figurations of the passions do not, in fact, contradict Descartes' contemporaneous dismissal of the very possibility of the deciphering of facial expressions in his *Passions de l'âme* (1649), and that one may find further examples of «expressionist» art that betray a latent fear of expression and a desire to preserve emotional discretion.

**Paula Stoica**
**Fehler im System: Zum expressiven Status von Fehlern und Korrekturen in Hanne Darbovens Schreibarbeiten**

In einer langwierigen, sich über Jahre hinweg erstreckenden Schreibpraxis, so wie jene Hanne Darbovens, sind Fehler nahezu unvermeidbar. Dass fehlerhafte Blätter nicht neu beschrieben wurden, erscheint vor dem Hintergrund einer konzeptuellen und somit nüchternen und ‹maschinellen› künstlerischen Praxis paradox. So stellt sich die Frage, ob sich die besagten, ‹autorisierten› Fehler als eine (rudimentäre) Form von Ausdruck im Rahmen einer konzeptuellen Praxis der ersten Stunde begreifen lassen. Und sofern sie sich als solche erweisen würden, wovon wären sie dann Ausdruck?

**Barbara Stoltz**
**Illusion, Virtualität und symbolische Form des Gefühls: Susanne Langers Theorie des Ausdrucks in ihrer Schrift *Feeling and Form* (1953)**

Der «Ausdruck» ist in Susanne Langers (1895–1985) kunsttheoretischem Buch *Feeling and Form* von 1953 der eigentliche Parameter, der das Kunstwerk zum Kunstwerk macht: Der Ausdruck ist kein Output der Gefühle, der in erster Linie Gefühle beim Publikum auslöst. Die Philosophin begreift den Ausdruck des Kunstwerks vielmehr als ein komplexes Organ, welches das Gefühl in einer virtuellen Form symbolisiert. In diesem Beitrag wird der Ausdruck als Fundament in Langers Theorien und deren zukunftweisende Prinzipien insbesondere für die Gegenwartskunst und die zeitgenössischen kunsttheoretischen Diskurse erörtert.

# Expression – Processes of Form and Mediation in Art

«Expression» counts among the key aesthetic concepts of modernity. Tensioned between intentional acts and accidental creation, the idea that expression mediates between the individual and the world in art has been widely discussed, defended, and disputed since the late eighteenth century. Yet even in early modern art, numerous visual phenomena can be observed that can be described as expressive processes of form creation, including subiconographic pictorial structures such as gestural, or informal applications of color as deliberate means of expression. Against this background, the international symposium «Expression – Processes of Form and Mediation in Art» aims to investigate artistic processes of form making from the early modern period to the present day that either specify or reflect particular modes of expression in art.

Whereas structuralist approaches initiated in the mid-twentieth century increasingly questioned the interpretive guiding concept of subject-centered expression, the societal acknowledgment of diversified subjectivities in recent decades, and the relevance of marginalized identities in today's methodologies of art history, call for a reassessment of expression as an aesthetic concept. In contrast with the common neuroaesthetic conflation of expression and emotion, the conference seeks to consider expression as a way to conceptualize art as a site of intermediation between notions of «interior» and «exterior» reality as well as between self-determination and the determination of others. We aim to expand the aesthetic concept of expression to consider its social and ethical dimensions and to explore its art-historical and art-critical value in times of increasing diversification and heterogeneity.

International symposium organized by
David Misteli (david.misteli@unibas.ch) and Markus Rath (rath@uni-trier.de).

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