

Drawings as Records of Ideas: New Approaches and Techniques

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Public and private collections have frequently prioritized the exhibition quality of sketches, studies and preparatory drawings, emphasizing display and aesthetics. However, there is significant value in examining them through the lenses of material culture and historical documentation, as well as connoisseurship,

The recently completed Stradanus Project at Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum in New York was initially conceived to reconstruct the artist's presumed sketchbooks, but conservation and analysis revealed a broader and more complex story about Stradanus' life, social networks, artistic production, and business practices. In studying the sheets as a whole—the image, text, binding evidence, collectors' marks, linings and even museum hinging—we upended the value that had been assigned to his unfinished work in subsequent centuries. The Stradanus case study offers an alternative scholarly approach to the study of early modern Netherlandish works on paper. Rather than accepting long-held scholarly assumptions about objects or focusing on achieving a specific outcome, an interdisciplinary approach to the study of drawings as multifunctional objects presents an opportunity to uncover new information not just about an artist and a work of art, but about the entire enterprise of art making.

Inspired by this project, we seek participants whose research on works on paper challenges the values that undergird museum collecting practices, such as the importance attached to attribution, prioritization of image over text, arbitrarily defined recto/verso relationships, preservation or reversal of past interventions or restorations, or acceptance of published institutional cataloguing. We welcome paper proposals from academics, conservators, and museum practitioners. Proposals may cover topics that include a focus on works by known and/or as-yet unidentified artists and involve interdisciplinary scholarship. Projects may be in the development stage, underway, or complete, and may vary in scope to focus on a larger body of drawings or a small selection of works in one or more collections.

To submit your proposal, please send an abstract (between 150 and 200 words) along with CV and affiliation to kwanja@si.edu and condellc@si.edu with the subject line "HNA Conference 2027 Proposal."