

Materiality as Decor: aesthetics, semantics and function

Call for papers for the second conference hosted by ERC Grant DECOR (no. 681269), June 3rd-6th, 2020, Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel

Material is the substance of the world of things. In the case of man-made objects and architecture, materiality is an inherent aspect of their function, aesthetics, and semantics. Consequently, the choice of specific materials can be considered an important feature of design. From an ancient perspective, the choice of appropriate materials was of primary importance. Ancient sources reflect a general recognition of materiality as an aesthetically perceived, semantically loaded and functionally bonded category. To date, this complex comprehension of the material world has not been adequately represented in archaeological research. The ambition of the colloquium *Materiality as Decor* is to focus on the decorative use of material in relation to the qualities of aesthetics, semantics and function.

The entities under investigation range from objects and paintings to buildings and other architectonically designed spaces. Papers considering topics based in Italy and the western Mediterranean between the 2nd century BC and Late Antiquity are welcome. For this purpose, five sessions have been defined:

Session 1 Performance of materiality

The world of things is bound to material. Materiality is always a category of perception. However, in some cases, materiality is brought to the fore by specific strategies of "staging." This session seeks to analyse different architectural settings and object categories in which materiality gains a decorative quality.

Session 2 Imitation of materials

The relevance and significance of materials becomes particularly evident through their imitation. However, imitation introduces an artificial (often ornamentalised) material aesthetic, creating a value in its own. This section examines this specific tension between real and fake.

Session 3 Transformation of surfaces. Architectonic structure vs. appearance

There are two different strategies to treat the surfaces of architectures and objects. On the one hand, the materially defined structure and texture – the surfaces of walls or objects – can be exposed and gain an aesthetic quality. On the other hand, the architectural structure can be camouflaged by revetments and object surfaces can be modified (e. g. gilded). However, in many cases the revetments refer to the structure that they hide – e. g. a faux-ashlar stuccowork on top of ashlar masonry. This section examines this tension between "below" and "above."

Session 4 Material follows function?

The choice of specific materials must meet basic functional requirements. In the case of huge vaults, the architectonic form is directly related to a specific material: *opus caementicium*. Consequently, the "efficacy" of the material is "displayed" implicitly even if it is not visible. Weapons produced in materials that augment their

destructive potential represent another clear example. However, the material "logic" can be undermined for specific aesthetic, semantic-communicative or economic reasons. The use of fragile, thin glass for the production of vessels makes little from a functional perspective. The fragility of the material, however, enhances its social value and contributes to a specific aesthetic.

Session 5 Material and semantics

Material, like decor in general, does not only produce aesthetic effects, it also conveys meanings. These meanings are the result of social negotiations. New/old, local/foreign, traditional/innovative, and cheap/expensive are relative categories that can be applied to materials, and the perception of these categories is dependent upon the specific social and cultural contexts of actors and perceivers. This section discusses some potential semantic attributions to materials, focusing in particular on how meanings changed over time.

For this colloquium, we have chosen a special form of presentation/discussion: we ask all accepted speakers to submit their written contribution (in English, approx. 45,000 characters, including spaces and footnotes) one month before the colloquium takes place, on May 9th, 2020. Participants are expected to read all written contributions beforehand.

During the colloquium itself (**June 3rd-6th, 2020**) we ask for short presentations of 15 minutes. For each contribution, we will have 45 minutes in total, so there will be plenty of time for discussion.

The ERC Grant DECOR and the Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel will cover the cost of transport and lodging for all participants.

Please send an abstract (300 words) of your proposed paper along with your contact details and a short academic CV to hielscher@klassarch.uni-kiel.de by **October 1st, 2019**.

The conference is organized by Annette Haug, Adrian Hielscher and Taylor Lauritsen. DECOR is an ERC-funded research project examining decorative principles in Roman Italy between the 2nd century BC and the 1st century AD. Details regarding the ERC project in general, see <http://www.klassarch.uni-kiel.de/de/decor>