Comparative Visual Satire: Methodology, Subjectivity and the Global Gaze

An interdisciplinary workshop on caricature, iconography and the politics of seeing

One-day workshop for graduate students at Heidelberg University – March 12, 2027

From novels, essays and plays to cartoons, music, paintings and internet culture, satire has always been society's one of the favourite tools for speaking uncomfortable truths. It travels across borders, opens doors into other cultures and illustrates political and social life. But above all, at its best, it makes us laugh.

Yet the tools we use to read and compare satirical images remain largely inherited from Western traditions of iconographic analysis and rarely interrogate their own situatedness. How can visual forms of satire be studied academically? What are the methodological challenges involved in analysing cartoons from other cultures? How does the subject of study relate to the researcher and vice versa?

This workshop takes these questions seriously. Bringing together PhD and postdoc scholars at different stages of their researches, the workshop aims to create space for methodological reflection alongside hands-on practice. We are particularly interested in what happens when analytical frameworks developed in one cultural context are applied to visual material produced in another and in building more honest, rigorous approaches to that challenge.

As such, we invite researchers working across the fields of visual culture, media studies, art history, literature and cultural studies to join a focused workshop on the methodologies and critical challenges of studying visual satire comparatively and across cultural contexts.

Which topics can be discussed

Topics discussed in the workshop may include the following ones. Though, these do not constitute a limitation. Other topics and research objects are warmly welcomed!

- Comics and caricatures
- Satire on the internet

- Cartoons (films, programmes and magazines)
- Plays
- Operas
- Paintings and art
- Buildings
- Iconographic analysis of visual satire
- Inter- and transmedia approaches
- Comparative and cross-cultural frameworks
- Practice-based and visual inquiry methods
- Subjectivity and positionality
- Race, gender and ethnicity in caricature
- Identity frameworks and satirical representation
- The Western gaze on non-Western material
- Non-Western researcher's Western lens on non-Western material
- Decolonising the satirical archive

It doesn't matter how old the subject of study is or where in the world it comes from.

One thread running through the workshop is the specific set of challenges that arise when Western-trained researchers engage with visual satire produced outside Western traditions. After the workshop, we will have collectively developed a working list of the critical issues and blind spots that this kind of research demands for our further research.

Format

The workshop deliberately avoids the conventional conference structure of presentations followed by brief questions. Instead, we're planning to use a fishbowl format: a participatory, non-hierarchical setup in which both invited contributors and all attendees engage as equals throughout the day discussing the research material.

Each participant is invited to introduce a question, case study, methodological problem or provocation in approximately five minutes. This opening aims to be a starting point instead of a full presentation. What follows is a collective discussion in which everyone contributes from their own perspective, disciplinary background and research experience.

Sessions will alternate between discussion and hands-on experimentation. We are convinced that that approach gives participants the opportunity to test ideas with visual material and to see how different analytical approaches produce different readings of the

same image. Therefore, we encourage you to bring a sample of your research material with you.

The whole workshop will be held in English.

Who should attend

This workshop is open to anyone whose work touches on visual satire, caricature or illustrated media whether from art history, media studies, cultural studies, postcolonial studies, journalism studies or adjacent fields. We welcome researchers especially at early career stages and PhD students and particularly encourage participation from scholars working on non-Western or underrepresented satirical traditions.

Location and time

The workshop will take place over one day in Heidelberg on March 12, 2027. The venue will be the Käthe Leichter Forum, Im Neuenheimer Feld 370, 69120 Heidelberg.

How to apply

We ask anyone interested to submit a brief application to Gamze [gamzealtinyaprak.h@uni-heidelberg.de] and Alexander [alexander.reindl@ori.uni-heidelberg.de] by December 6, 2026.

Applications should include:

- a short paragraph (150–200 words) describing your research topic and subject;
- a brief biography (50–100 words);
- a research object/problem you want to discuss in the plenary.

We look forward to receiving your applications and will get back to you with our decision by December 21, 2026 with further details. Don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions regarding the workshop or the application.