

Call for applications: Una Europa Winter School 2027 for doctoral students

Rethinking Cultural Heritage Collections: Complex Histories and New Methodologies

Freie Universität Berlin, 22–26 February 2027

The Una Europa Cultural Heritage Winter School invites doctoral researchers from our alliance working in cultural heritage to apply and meet at Freie Universität Berlin for an immersive learning and group work experience.

Under the theme of “Rethinking Cultural Heritage Collections”, participants will explore the complex histories of cultural heritage collections in Berlin and the use of new methodologies in processing these collections and in creating new ones. The programme includes institutes and projects at Freie Universität Berlin, as well as museums and other city institutions. The Winter School brings together researchers and doctoral students from a wide range of disciplines, including archaeology, digital humanities, history, museology, natural history, library science, and literary studies, and offers a series of seminars, workshops, lectures, and field trips to discuss the impact of technology and—more broadly—the role of replicas in shaping cultural heritage collections and objects.

In an **online pre-workshop meeting in the second week of February**, we will outline our expectations for the Berlin Winter School. In an **online follow-up meeting mid-March**, participants will discuss and summarise the results.

Theme and rationale

How do we document, organise, and present cultural heritage objects in the age of digitalisation? What consequences do new digital methods have for the objects themselves, for how they are perceived, and for their historical contextualisation? How do the traditions of collections and archives—which often span centuries and are closely intertwined with the vicissitudes of history—relate to these contemporary approaches to cultural heritage?

In this regard, Berlin serves as a vibrant laboratory. Extensive collections on the cultures of antiquity, Africa, and the Americas, as well as on natural sciences, are housed in museums, archives, libraries, and universities; their origins and development bear witness to the historical and social upheavals of the past centuries – from the colonial era through the Nazi era to Cold War and post-unification history. When researchers engage with objects in these collections, provenance research and collection histories often complement inquiries of the context of the heritage objects’ creation and use.

Here, **replicas** in the broadest sense – reproductions, casts, facsimiles, models, preparations, or digital derivatives – play an enormous role. They establish a specific relationship with the represented object, which has a direct impact on research; as representatives of knowledge or subjects of discussions, they are indispensable in many sciences and the humanities.

At the same time, the concept of the replica also plays a central role in the growing use of digital methods for the preservation, processing, and presentation of cultural heritage. By digitally capturing entire groups of objects, it becomes possible to systematically answer old research questions and pose new ones, particularly through analysing large datasets, while simultaneously creating new – virtual – replicas with distinct characteristics.

Against this backdrop, the workshop has two objectives: first, to shed light on current research in areas such as the study of manuscript collections using handwriting recognition (HTR) and the application of digital methods in archaeology. Second, it uses the Berlin perspective as a point of departure to examine the history of classifications and reclassifications, of ordering and reordering, that have long accompanied the collection of cultural artifacts and now find expression in the digital realm. In a city where collections have repeatedly been relocated, recontextualised, and reinterpreted, reflecting on the act of collecting itself makes one thing fundamentally clear: there is no neutral, value-free way to compile cultural heritage.

To touch on just a few of the many questions that may arise in the winter school: How can replicas of museum objects be used in restitution debates? How do libraries approach digitisation and classification when dealing with long-established Eurocentric vocabularies? How can the digital presentation of the last photographs of Jewish people taken before their deportation in the Nazi era contextualise those images taken in extremely violent situations, and to what extent does this influence our view of the deportations?

Finally, comparing these issues with a seemingly traditional method of producing replicas can shed light on how we treat virtual forms of knowledge storage. The collection of plaster casts of ancient sculptures has a surprisingly complex history – caught between the canon of the educated middle class and the desire to destroy all copies. Today, scholars are re-examining this history and finding new ways to contextualise and present these casts.

The aim of the winter school is to contextualise the current fundamental changes in how we engage with objects within a historical framework: where and how we view an object, how it is arranged alongside other objects, and what contexts its presentation evokes are essential – and often highly political – questions underlying any scholarly engagement with cultural heritage.

Who can apply?

Doctoral students at [Una Europa partner universities](#) whose research is connected to the field of Cultural Heritage are welcome to apply. Doctoral students of the [Una-Her-Doc Programme](#) are specifically invited to apply.

Deadline

- Application deadline: **September 15**
- Notification of results: by **October 31**

What is the cost of the Winter School?

There is no tuition fee for participants. Each participant is responsible for organising and financing their own accommodation for the duration of the five-day on-site programme at Freie Universität Berlin.

At most Una Europa partner universities, doctoral researchers can apply for Erasmus+ funding for Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs) from their own university. Please note that the availability of funding depends on your home university. They will advise you on the availability and format of funding. Please contact your university's institutional contact at the list below for more information on funding options.

[List of institutional contact points for questions on funding to participate in the Summer School.](#)

Please note: Erasmus+ funding for BIP mobility may not be available for doctoral researchers from KU Leuven. Doctoral researchers from Edinburgh and Zürich are not eligible for Erasmus+ funding but may receive alternative funding from their home university.

Application requirements and submission procedure

Please fill out the [application form](#) by September 15, 2026, and send the curriculum vitae as a separate pdf file to hauke.ziemssen@fu-berlin.de.

How we evaluate your application:

1. Abstract of doctoral thesis (contained in online application form): max. 5 points.
2. Curriculum Vitae (separate PDF): max. 10 points.
3. Motivation letter (contained in online application form): max. 10 points.

Questions?

- For questions related to the content of the Winter School, please contact Hauke Ziemssen via email: hauke.ziemssen@fu-berlin.de.
- For questions related to grant and funding options available, contact your university's contact point from [this list](#).

Credits

After participating and fulfilling all requirements of the Winter School, participants may be eligible for 4 ECTS. Final ECTS recognition is subject to the regulations of each participant's home institution.

Scientific Committee

Prof. Dr. Magdalena Banaszkiewicz, Cultural Anthropology, Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie

Prof. Dr. Giovanni Colavizza, Computer Science, Università di Bologna

Prof. Dr. Alain Duploux, Greek Archaeology, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

Prof. Dr. Mariana Françaço, Museum Studies, Universiteit Leiden

Prof. Dr. Jeremiah Garsha, Global History, University College Dublin

Prof. Dr. Corinna Reinhardt, Mediterranean Archaeology, Universität Zürich

Prof. Dr. Kirsi Saarikangas, Art History, Helsingin Yliopisto / Helsingfors Universitet (University of Helsinki)

Prof. Dr. Niki Vermeulen, History and Sociology of Science, University of Edinburgh

Prof. Dr. Antje Wilton, English Linguistics, Freie Universität Berlin

Local Organising Committee

Dr. Regina Attula, Dr. Stefanie Klamm, Prof. Dr. Antje Wilton, Prof. Dr. Lorenz Winkler-Horaček, Dr. Hauke Ziemssen, and the Una Europa team at Freie Universität Berlin.