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Self-Portrait, 1980, Robert Mapplethorpe. Gelatin silver print. Jointly acquired by the J. Paul Getty Trust and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; partial gift of The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation; partial purchase with funds provided by the J. Paul Getty Trust and the David Geffen Foundation. © Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation

The J. Paul Getty Trust is a cultural and philanthropic institution dedicated to critical thinking in the presentation, conservation, and interpretation of the world's artistic legacy. Through the collective and individual work of its constituent programs—Getty Conservation Institute, Getty Foundation, J. Paul Getty Museum, and Getty Research Institute—it pursues its mission in Los Angeles and throughout the world, serving both the general interested public and a wide range of professional communities with the conviction that a greater and more profound sensitivity to and knowledge of the visual arts and their many histories is crucial to the promotion of a vital and civil society.

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Great Mosque and Hospital of Divriği in Turkey, one of the sites studied by a Connecting Art Histories team led by scholars at the Courtauld Institute of Art. Photo: © istock/uchar

An aerial night photograph of a hillside town. The houses are illuminated from within, and streetlights are visible. The sky is a deep blue, and distant mountains are visible in the background. The overall mood is serene and quiet.

[re] CONNECTING THE MEDIEVAL MEDITERRANEAN

Understanding the history of art lies behind every project that the Getty Foundation supports, from local initiatives like Pacific Standard Time to international initiatives such as Panel Paintings. Scholarship is quiet work that goes on behind-the-scenes, but it is absolutely necessary for the success of public projects that follow. The discipline of art history as we know it today was born in Europe in the nineteenth century, migrated to North America in the twentieth century, and has been developing around the world in more recent decades. Yet there has been unequal participation in an international dialogue about the history of art because many scholars live in countries where their efforts are constrained by difficult economic or political circumstances. Ultimately, this imbalance holds the discipline back and threatens its future vitality. The Foundation's Connecting Art Histories initiative was launched in 2009 to expand the international exchange of ideas about art through various research and teaching programs.



Detail of the facade of the Great Mosque and Hospital of Divriği in Turkey. Photo: © istock/mehmetakgul

One major focus for Connecting Art Histories is the art and architecture of the greater Mediterranean Basin, particularly during the Medieval and Early Modern periods. Several grant-funded projects are redefining scholarship of these periods, overcoming the traditional division between the study of the West and the East, or the Christian and the Islamic worlds. This intellectual segregation can often be traced back to the rise of modern nation-states and their focus on creating national cultural identities, which in turn led to separate and distinct art histories. Recent Connecting Art Histories projects have taken a more holistic view, looking at the ways various cultures interrelated and allowing a rising generation of younger scholars to produce a more integrated history of art in the Mediterranean region that crosses national, linguistic, religious, and ethnic borders.

“We developed Connecting Art Histories to move art history forward as a more global discipline,” said Deborah Marrow, director of the Getty Foundation. “The projects focused on the medieval and early modern Mediterranean are a powerful example of how our support of new methods of scholarly collaboration and intellectual exchange is helping the field break free from the limiting nationalistic models of the past to produce important new research for today’s interconnected world.”

New Approaches to Medieval Art and Architecture

For the Medieval period, three different grant projects exemplify the creation of a more nuanced understanding of the cultural heritage of the Mediterranean region. All are bringing together distinguished international experts with younger scholars from the region.

A team of scholars led by the School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) at the University of London is looking specifically at the art of the Crusader States—a region that is largely composed of present-day Israel, the Palestinian territories, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and southern Turkey. While older histories characterize the Crusader States as a strict boundary between Islam, Judaism, and several Christian sects, the material remains of the past display a deft blending of Eastern and Latin traditions as seen in monumental structures like the Kerak Castle in Jordan or intricately crafted portable objects. The SOAS team is taking a fresh look at the multilayered art of these territories that acknowledges their cosmopolitan past. “What is so exciting about this project is the opportunity it provides for scholars from the different countries of the eastern Mediterranean to come together and take a comparative approach to the material culture that developed from a shared past,” said Scott Redford, the Nasser D. Khalili Professor of Islamic Art and Archaeology at SOAS. “The Getty seminars hold great promise for producing new, forward-thinking research for understanding Crusader era art but also offer the potential to transform the thinking of a rising generation of scholars.”



Under the auspices of the Courtauld Institute of Art, a group of scholars is studying medieval art and architecture from the Caucasus and eastern Anatolia, the crossroads of Europe and Asia. This complex heritage resulted from the intermingling of diverse populations and traditions, along with their artists, architects, and artisans and their ideas of style, form, and meaning. But the history

Inside the Kerak Castle in Jordan, one of the Crusader State monuments being studied by scholars led by the University of London's School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS). Photo: © istock/Arly



Above: The Old City of Dubrovnik in Croatia, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the sites of field research undertaken as part of a Connecting Art Histories grant to Harvard University. Photo: © istock/guppyimages

Opposite: Art historians from the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence research team visit the Shah-i Zinda funerary complex in Samarqand, Uzbekistan. Photo: Mirela Ljevakovic 2012

of the Caucasus as contested space has long held local scholars back in their endeavors to fully account for this fascinating, interconnected past. A key example is the state of research on the Great Mosque and Hospital of Divriği, a UNESCO World Heritage site with distinctive features that have stymied art historians intent on placing the work solely within the context of either Turkish or Islamic art. The building can only truly be understood when it is situated at the intersection of Turkish, Islamic, Syrian, and Armenian building practices and cultural alliances—a tall order given contemporary nationalist, religious, and sectarian conflicts.

“What we’re seeing is a group of emerging professionals from the region who appear to be open to putting old differences aside and embracing new ways of thinking about the artistic legacy of the medieval Caucasus,” said Dr. Antony Eastmond, professor of art history at the Courtauld, who is spearheading the project. At the same time,

organizers are realistic about the mounting tensions in the region and will adjust their research plans as needed given the recent escalations in military activity in the proposed area of study.

The American Academy in Rome brings an additional dimension to the study of art of the medieval Mediterranean: the display of cultural heritage in museums. Interpretation of this heritage in local museums often stresses nationalist agendas, and shifts in the dominant religion are cast as positive or negative. In this region rife with spiritual and ethnic tensions, the organizers of the Connecting Art Histories project at the Academy sought to create a space for professionals from different cultural traditions to reflect together on the study and display of historical artifacts. A series of seminars and group visits to regional collections and archaeological sites allowed participants to question prevailing nationalist narratives, emphasizing instead the international connections of courtly culture and trade. The participants included art historians, archaeologists, and museum professionals from across the Mediterranean, including North Africa, the Middle East, and the Balkan coast. Their work culminated in a public symposium at the Academy in June 2015, in which participating scholars presented case studies about how the formation of modern nation-states has affected the preservation and interpretation of the medieval past.

Globalization in the Early Modern Period

Two additional grant projects are also breaking down barriers to the cross-cultural study of art in the Early Modern period. A grant to Harvard University allowed an international team to conduct



research seminars on the artistic ties that developed along the complex network of waterways connecting Eastern Europe to the Dalmatian Coast, the Mediterranean, and the Black Sea from 1400 to 1700. The region was a critical meeting point for assimilating and linking the cultures of Central Asia with Western Europe, and Christianity with Islam. The project has created a better understanding of the ways merchants, armies, and ambassadors used waterways to transport and exchange objects and ideas resulting in new art forms. “The transcultural approach of the seminars has been eye-opening for our research team,” said Alina Payne, Harvard professor and director of the Villa I Tatti, who led the project. “Together we have embraced broader definitions of place and culture, reaching a greater understanding of the tremendous influence that overlapping Eastern and Western traditions have had on the art and architecture from this part of the Eastern Mediterranean. This new approach ultimately benefits

the field overall, as participants begin to share their research more widely.”

Another project undertaken by the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence involved nearly one hundred scholars from around the world. “Art, Space and Mobility in the Early Ages of Globalization” looked at artistic connections among cultures in the Mediterranean, Middle East, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent from late antiquity to early modernity. This ambitious program unfolded over four years as a series of seminars, workshops, summer programs, and research trips to important historical sites. Field work ranged from visits to Islamic architecture in Spain and North Africa to the medieval Armenian city of Ani and as far east as the Shah-i Zinda funerary complex in Samarqand, Uzbekistan. By studying the movement of cultural objects along trade routes such as the historic Silk Road, the group’s research offers compelling proof that globalization is not only a twenty-first century phenomenon. The makeup of

the expansive research team, which included younger scholars from over a dozen countries, mirrored the diversity of the art it studied and created new professional networks across the world. With the project now in its final phase, organizers are consolidating the team’s work into a comprehensive scholarly publication that will promote a transnational and transcultural understanding of art that is more true to the lived history of the people who created it and utilized it.

As these grants demonstrate, the Foundation’s Connecting Art Histories initiative is allowing a rising generation of younger scholars to reframe the discussion of art in the Mediterranean from the Medieval and Early Modern periods. Together their research is encouraging thoughtful consideration of the interaction of diverse religious and political forces and changing the discussion to produce a more integrated history of art that crosses national borders.