

International Conference

Aesthetics of Scripture: Contemporary Approaches to the Bible and Art



University of Vienna

Dekanats-Sitzungszimmer der Katholisch-Theologischen Fakultät
Universitätsring 1, 1010 Wien, Stiege 8, 2. Stock.

June 8–9, 2026

Organized by the

Center for the Study of Bible, Culture, and Modernity

Network for European Philosophy and the Jewish Tradition

in cooperation with the

Center for Religion and Transformation, University of Vienna

This interdisciplinary conference aims to enter the millennia-long dialogue between biblical narrative and the visual arts. Exploring the practices, products, aesthetics, and ethics that emerged in historically wide-ranging contacts between artmaking and Scripture, as artists interpreted and imagined biblical texts, we hope to sharpen our understanding of the Hebrew Bible’s enduring influence on visual cultures and how visual cultures have affected biblical exegesis. Bringing together—in Vienna, with its world-renowned art museums and rare books libraries—international scholars of biblical, religious, and Jewish Studies, philosophers of aesthetics, literary critics, and art historians, the two-day conference will combine historical and philosophical presentations with object-based discussion, in the idea that the material matrices of visual communication profoundly affect the how and why of pictorial representation. Topics include the theological and philosophical stakes of visual representation; the reception and transformation of biblical imagery across artistic traditions and media; the complex entanglement of text and image; the Bible and biblical exegesis in relation to an “ethics” of the Image; the medium-specificity of narrative, the challenge of modern “biblical” art and the challenges to visibility in a tradition shaped by an imageless God.

Day One · Monday, June 8, 2026

- 9:15 Welcome **Sebastian Schütze** (Rektor, Universität Wien)
Vivian Liska (Center of Bible, Culture and Modernity)
Esther Heinrich and Kurt Appel (Research Center “Religion and Transformation”, Universität Wien)

I. Philosophy and Literature

Chair: *Thomas Sparr* (Suhrkamp, Berlin)

10:00–10:45 **Moshe Halbertal** (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem/ New York University):
Idolatry, Representation and Aesthetics

10:45–11:00 Coffee Break

11:00–11:45 **Arthur Cools** (University of Antwerp):
The Visible and the Invisible in Jacob’s Struggle with the Stranger

11:45–12:30 **Helmut Jakob Deibl** (Universität Wien):
The Discourse of Noah’s Ark

12:30–14:00 Lunch Break

Chair: *Ulrich Baer* (New York University)

14:00–14:45 **Sigrid Weigel** (Leibniz Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung, Berlin):
Walter Benjamin’s Reading of the Viennese Genesis and his Reference to the Viennese School of Art History

14:45–15:30 **Vivian Liska** (University of Antwerp/The Hebrew University of Jerusalem):
The Tower of Babel with Kafka, Hegel and Bruegel

· Tuesday, June 9, 2026

II. History of Art

Chair: *Esther Heinrich* (Universität Wien)

9:00–9:45 **Ilana Pardes** (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem):
Caravaggio’s David with the Head of Goliath: Repentant Kings and Artists

9:45–10:30 **Gal Ventura** (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem):
Vigilant Motherhood and the Afterlife of Biblical Imagery

10:30–11:15 **Jakob Moser** (Universität Wien)
Through the Devil’s Eyes: Bosch and the Bible

11:15–11:45 Coffee Break

Chair: *Wolfram Pichler* (Universität Wien)

11:45–12:30 **Alexander Nemerov** (Stanford University):
Masaccio in Two

12:30–13:15 **Joseph Koerner** (Harvard University):
Picturing Shame

13:15–14:45 Lunch Break

Chair: *Noit Banai* (Akademie der Bildenden Künste, Wien)

14:45–15:30 **Richard Cohen** (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem):
Visual Politicization of the Bible in Contemporary Culture

15:30–16:15 **Noam Gal** (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem):
A (Pink) Kid In Its (Pink) Mother’s (Pink) Milk

We thank the Kunsthistorisches Museum for their friendly support.