

Date& Time: 11 March, 6 pm - 7:30 pm (UK time) [19.00 Spain]

Title: Dancing Emotions: Gender, Materiality, and Visual Culture in Late Medieval Objects

Speaker: Licia Buttà, Rovira i Virgili University, Tarragona
https://www.historia.urv.cat/en/faculty/historia-de-lart/butta/

Summary:

This paper examines a group of late medieval objects decorated with scenes of dance, among them combs, birth trays, gaming boxes, and Limoges enamels. Many of these items were typically intended for a female audience and were used in intimate, domestic, or ritual contexts. Some images draw on narrative sources, such as the novella tradition, while others evoke abstract notions of pleasure and the garden of love through the rhythm and choreography of the figures. By considering how these images interacted with the materials, functions, and gestures of everyday use, the paper explores how dance conveyed and shaped emotions. It argues that these objects offered women a visual and tactile language for experiencing desire, courtship, and sociability, and thus invites a reconsideration of the role of gender in the material culture of the period.

Short Bio

Licia Buttà is Full Professor of Medieval Art History at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili (Tarragona). She holds a PhD in Medieval Art History from the University of Barcelona, a specialization in Archaeology and Art History from the University of Siena, and a degree in Classical Studies from the University of Palermo.
She has held postdoctoral research stays at the Warburg Institute in London in 2010, 2015, and, most recently, 2024, supported by a Postdoctoral Fellowship BE-DGR (2009 BE-1 00275) and

a José Castillejo Fellowship (CAS14/00441). She was Visiting Professor at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris in 2021, under the "Salvador de Madariaga" Programme 2019 (PRX19/00603), and at the Index of Medieval Art at Princeton University in 2025. She has also taught at the universities of Barcelona, Copenhagen, Trento, and Agadir, among others.

She is the author of *Immaginare il potere. Il soffitto dipinto della Sala Magna di Palazzo Chiaromonte Steri e la cultura letteraria e artistica a Palermo nel Trecento* (2022), published with the support of the ICMA-Kress Foundation Grant for Research and Publication, which received the AFCEMS Book Prize for Best Book on Medieval Art 2023 from the Center for Early Medieval Studies (Brno). She is the co-author of *El retaule-tabernacle de Santa Maria de l'Estrella de la Catedral de Tortosa* (Memoria Artium 31, 2023) and of *El teatre del cos. Dansa, espectacle i rituals a la Corona d'Aragó / Il teatro del corpo. Danza, spettacolo e rituali nella Corona d'Aragona* (2022). She edited *Narrazione, exempla, retorica. Studi sull'iconografia dei soffitti dipinti nel Medioevo Mediterraneo* (Palermo, 2013), as well as several special issues of academic journals.

Her articles have appeared in indexed journals including *Storia dell'arte*, *Ricerche di Storia dell'arte*, *Paragone*, *Goya*, *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, and *Perspective: Actualité en Histoire de l'Art*, among others.

Since 2010 she has coordinated the URV research group ICONODANZA. She has been Principal Investigator of the following projects, all funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities: "Traces and Forms of Dance in the Long Middle Ages: Iconographic, Textual and Ethnographic Corpus in the Iberian Peninsula and Its Ibero-American Projection" (FFI2013-42939-P, 2014-2017); "Choreutic Heterotopias, Dance and Performance in the Visual and Literary Culture of the Mediterranean from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages" (HAR2017-85625-P, 2018-2021); and "MUDANZA. Dancing Women. Idolatry and Rituals: Visual Culture and Cultural History of Dance during the Long Middle Ages" (PID2022-140028NB-100, 2023-2026). She is also a member of the interdisciplinary Consolidated Research Group NEXUS/LAIREM: Literature, Art and Representation in the Long Middle Ages (SGR 2021 00970, Universitat Pompeu Fabra), directed by Dr. Maria Morràs.

She currently leads the project "MUDANZA 2. Dancing Women 2: Emotions, Senses, and Secular Rituals between Literature and Visual Culture in the Long Middle Ages" (PID2025-169571NB-I00).

Caption of the photo

Coffret, early 1400s, Made in possibly Siena, Italy, Poplar with gilded and painted gesso, and pastiglia decoration Metropolitan Museum, New York, Object Number: 41.100.188