

Aestheticized Motherhood:
Representations of Motherhood in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

The panel explores the aestheticization of motherhood in (late) Georgian and Victorian England. Although at the end of the eighteenth century the notion that maternal instinct is a *natural*, biological state slowly replaced the earlier, biblical rationalisation of maternity, it nonetheless lived on in pictorial depictions. Portraits of mothers drew on the conventions of devotional pictures of the Madonna and the child, and deliberately imitated the Old Masters, such as Michaelangelo or Raphael. The mother was thus ennobled through a religious frame of reference, and maternal instinct was elevated to a spiritual plane and depicted as timeless.

Dóra Janczer Csikós will look at the cult of motherhood and its visual representations in medical depictions and paintings at the end of the eighteenth century.

Éva Péteri will discuss the Victorian concept of “the angel in the house” and ideal motherhood, and the way it is presented in Ford Madox Brown’s unfinished painting *Take Your Son, Sir*. The picture echoes the traditional Madonna and child depictions, celebrating motherhood. Yet, it also evokes a sense of embarrassment in the viewer, due to the lack of motherly affection that gives the picture a stunning ambiguity.

Franciska Linszky will explore the representations of motherhood through Julia Margaret Cameron’s (1815-1879) selected photographs which evoke the Madonnas by the Old Masters. Cameron was a pioneer in early photography, and raised eleven children: five of her own and six orphaned children.

Mubashara Khan will examine the mother-figure of the 'ayah' in paintings and photographs from British India, studying the complex maternal role the ayahs played in Anglo-Indian households.

BIO

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