

Performance, Royalty and the Court, 1500-1800

Thursday 11 and Friday 12 April 2019



Masque designs by Inigo Jones, early 17th century, © Devonshire Collection (Chatsworth)

Next year is the 400th anniversary of the death of Anne of Denmark (1574-1619), a queen consort of the king of Scotland, England and Ireland, who is well known for her patronage of art, architecture and court entertainments, in particular masques devised by Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones. To mark this important anniversary, the Society for Court Studies, with the support of the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and the School of Arts and Department of History, Classics and Archaeology Birkbeck College, is organizing a two-day conference focusing on performance and the courts of the British Isles and continental Europe during the early-modern period, with the opportunity to explore the networks and encounters between courts, both within and beyond Europe. The interdisciplinary nature of the topic necessarily embraces cultural, political and economic history, literature, and the visual and performing arts.

Performance was at the heart of the early-modern period, with the court itself forming a stage for the construction, communication and display of power and privilege; a world in which the social relationships that circulated around rulers, their families and supporters took shape and found expression. Men and women played out a variety of important social, political, military and governmental roles as well as participating in dramatic events, with court rituals and ceremonies providing occasions for demonstrations of authority, prowess and magnificence. The architecture and decoration that surrounded the court, whether permanent or temporary, not only provided a physical setting but reinforced objectives and allegiances, as did dress, accoutrements and entourage. The court also formed a rich source of inspiration for composers, playwrights and actors, whether representing courts in their dramas, playing before the court or devising masques and ballets with courtiers as performers. Equally, art and artistic patronage were of central importance, not only through the direct participation of painters, designers and craftsmen in ceremonies, dramas and other occasions, but also through portraiture and other forms of representation. Indeed, a work of art was often perceived and described as a performance.

In all its senses, performance represented opportunities for individuals and groups to find ways of expressing their ideals, their ambitions and aspirations, their frustrations

and hostilities. This conference aims to bring this sense of opportunity to the study of the early-modern court, thinking in the broadest possible terms about how we can define our approaches and how, by taking the theme of performance as our guide, we can open up the study of the courtly world and its peoples to new scholarship and new audiences.

Suggested themes include, but are not restricted to:

Political ritual and gift-giving
Diplomacy, power play and hospitality
Gender and modes of performance
Loyalties and affiliations
Control and freedom
Identity and values
Court rituals and traditions
Ceremonies, receptions, progresses and processions
Reception, audience and commentary
Drama, dance, music and speeches/addresses
Cultural and social patronage
Chivalric, sportive and martial performance (tournaments, barriers, manège)
Trade, commerce and entrepreneurship
Visual arts as performance
Architecture, interiors, settings and locations



Paolo Monaldi, *Prince James receiving his son Prince Henry in front of the Palazzo del Re*, c.1747-8, National Galleries of Scotland

Please send proposals of no more than 300 words along with a short biography to courtstudiesconference@gmail.com by Friday 7 December 2018.

Convenors: Dr Janet Dickinson, Conference Secretary SCS and Oxford University; Dr Jacqueline Riding, Committee Member SCS and Birkbeck College.

The conference is being supported and hosted by the Paul Mellon Centre, 16 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3JA.

