

Introducing Anne Hemkendreis

Interview with [Anna-Sophie Jürgens](#) | Section: [Interviews](#)

Summary: Our newest member to the w/k editorial team introduces herself: the art historian and scholar of Visual Cultural Studies, Anne Hemkendreis. In conversation with Anna-Sophie Jürgens, she talks about her new series Ice as an Agent of Aesthetic Science Communication, which explores the mediation and generation of environmental knowledge at the interface between art and science, contributing to a rising ecological awareness within society.

Welcome Anne! We are delighted that you have joined our team of editors. Can you tell our readers something about yourself?

Thank you Anna-Sophie, I am excited that I joined the w/k team in April. I am a passionate art historian with expertise in the field of Visual Cultural Studies. I work as a research associate for the Collaborative Research Centre on *Heroes – Heroizations – Heroisms* at the Albert-Ludwigs-University of Freiburg ([SFB 948](#)). Recently, I became a member of the Young Academy of the *German National Academy of Sciences* (Leopoldina, [Young Academy](#)) and an Honorary Senior Lecturer at the Humanities Research Centre within the Australian National University ([HRC](#)).

Can you explain a bit more about what you do as a researcher of Visual Cultural Studies?

My pleasure! The short answer is that Visual Cultural Studies is a special field of research within art history and beyond. It focusses on the power of images in various contexts, such as arts, science and popular culture. In my research, I examine the role that images play in different cultural contexts – particularly in our perception of nature. For example: Do images have the power to change our relationship with our environments? Do they have the potential to guide us towards a better future? And more explicitly: What are the strengths, but also the dangers, of visualisations in environmental communication? As I am especially interested in the relationship between natural sciences and arts, I also examine how science, scientific images and arts can work together to strengthen our sense of responsibility for the world.

Fascinating! Tell us something about your current research project: Is there any specific framework that helps you to work interdisciplinary? What are your aims?

Indeed, my research contributes to a fairly new branch within my discipline. My ice project – examining the persistence of polar heroic narrations in art – is part of a movement towards science's stronger engagement with social and political contexts. I hope that, with this wider focus on current social urgencies, my research will contribute to a rising ecological awareness within society and help us to reconsider the ignorances of our own cultural imprints.

In the advent of joining our team, you had already contributed to w/k as an author. What topics are of interest to you?

True! I published an article on the significance of ice in [Wilson Bentley](#)'s experiments. Bentley was an amateur scientist and is today regarded as one of the first atmospheric researchers. I was deeply fascinated by the way he communicated environmental knowledge through aesthetics; I would describe him as a pioneer in early science communication, in the sense that he used uncommon media and

formats in order to interact with a wider audience. Additionally, another article of mine is just about to be published. It deals with the recent aerial performance *THAW* from the Australian Company *Legs on the Wall*, in which a floating iceberg high in the air served as a stage for three dancers.



Anne Hemkendreis (2022). Photo: Vincent Leifer.

What are your plans as an editor?

As an editor, I will introduce a new w/k section entitled *Ice as an Agent of Aesthetic Science Communication*, which explores the mediation and generation of environmental knowledge around (the melting of) ice at the interface between art and science. The focus lies on the question of how artists and scientists use the sensual quality of ice to make abstract scientific knowledge tangible in a new and more comprehensive way. In a nutshell, I am interested in the exploration, perception and mediation of nature in visual cultural contexts with a special emphasis on the cryosphere – which refers to ice and snow in the Earth’s climate system.

Can you elaborate on this a bit further? Do you have another example?

Sure! I am so happy, Anna-Sophie, that you and I have already been active in this fairly new field of research. The ice section deals with various forms of science images and visual art, but also deliberately considers science-oriented performance art, because this is where ice literally appears as a living stage for the generation of environmental knowledge and its communication. Our readers can get a first glimpse into this field of research – which some scholars call the “Ice Humanities” – on the event pages of the three-part symposium series *Ice (St)Ages: Experiencing Environments in Science, Arts and Spectacle* we organised together in 2021 ([Ice\(St\)Ages Event](#)). Readers will also get the chance to learn more about this in our upcoming edited collection with Palgrave Macmillan.

Have you collaborated with artists, scientists and scholars working with scientific and/or

artistic methods in the past?

Yes! I am very eager to work together with artists who are interested in the field of sciences or science/knowledge communication. In the context of our *Ice(St)Ages* conference series, I got in touch with [Mariele Neudecker](#), who is also a visiting artist at the Swiss research institution CERN. I recently wrote an article (in press) about her critical inquiry of scientific research methods and scientific knowledge display. Additionally, in my teaching role, I just finished a collaboration with the amazing artist [Lena Schmidt](#) from Hamburg. I especially love to collaborate with other scholars from the field of scientific communication – such as you, Anna-Sophie – and from my new network at the Young Academy.

To what extent does the new series *Ice as an Agent of Aesthetic Science Communication* fit into the general profile of w/k?

Well, the overall aim of w/k is to thoroughly investigate the interfaces, interconnections and influences between science and art. All art movements – including environmental art and *ice art* – are interesting for w/k if certain criteria are met: if artists of this movement work in a science-related way, if there are collaborations between science and art, or if border crossers between science and art are involved (see here for the [journal's profile](#)). The articles published in the new series *Ice as an Agent of Aesthetic Science Communication* will follow this aim and the established w/k structure and section profiles. This means that the articles are written by scholars or artists, they are about art and artists or scientists. In accordance with the profile of the journal, they may focus on individual works, collaborations, or on theoretical aspects (on the theme of “art and science”). Call me funny, but I was excited to hear that the articles published in this series will have an icy blue frame.

Exciting! Could you elaborate a bit further on the manifold intersections relevant for you?

Of course! Articles in this series may explore, for example, how scientists collaborate with artists on ice-related environmental art, how artists contribute to our understanding of the science-based urgency of ice-related environmental issues, what kind of stories ice artists create using scientific inspiration, and many other possible topics. Also, climate related phenomena which trouble our world – such as climate migration, deep ecology, (dark) tourism or geo-engineering (technologies aiming to reduce climate change) – are exciting topics for contributions if they are connected to the melting of (polar) ice, visual arts and their scientific examination. I am sure there are even more interrelations possible than those just mentioned. I am already excited to start my work with the future authors!

Thank you, Anne, for this wonderful interview and introduction.

Details of the cover photo: Performance of *Legs on the Wall* (2022). Photo: Prudence Upton.

Tags

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