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The objects of our study encompass amuletic Qur’an manuscripts; intricately carved medieval European ivories; 18th to 19th century East Asian incense burners; the 19th century German literary magazine Pan; and the stone inscriptions of Deccan India’s temple makers. Participants in this transregional workshop have a shared interest in the aesthetic and material practices in which these objects were implicated, and in the multisensory experience of their contemporary receivers. We ask how the lens of the senses complements our understanding of print cultures and religious manuscripts, and we explore the intersensory perception of devotional objects and sacred spaces. On the one hand, we engage the materiality of small objects in close proximity to the body and on the other, the body’s habitation of and circulation within monumental architectural spaces and sweeping landscapes. Whereas art historians have tended to privilege and fetishize the visual, we are interested in exploring sensory orders and sensory intersections within the historical moments of our study. We are concerned with the unique contribution that art history as a discipline with its attention to materiality and objecthood, whether of texts, things, or buildings, can make to sensory studies.

While remaining firmly grounded within the approaches of material studies, we invite exchanges with scholars working on sensory studies from a range of disciplinary perspectives including textual history, religion, literary and cultural studies, anthropology, and museum and curatorial studies. And because we intend to be attentive to the blind spots and challenges of this rapidly growing field, our main aim in this workshop is to both develop and interrogate methodologies. In so doing we hope to find ways of approaching the historical, cultural, and spatial specificity of the sensorium.

This is a joint workshop of the research and fellowship programs »Connecting Art Histories in the Museum« (KHI in Florence/Staatliche Museen zu Berlin) and »Art Histories and Aesthetic Practices«.