

Call for proposals: **The art of asking. Strategies of patronage solicitation through the ages in music, literature, visual arts, and intellectual culture**

DL 15 April 2024

**One-day conference, Utrecht University, The Netherlands**

**Friday November 15, 2024**

In many European countries, the cultural sector is working towards establishing a **(renewed) tradition of cultural patronage**. Across the EU, individual makers are experimenting with building a community of private donors through crowdfunding projects or membership schemes. At the same time, many different cultural institutions are now working at engaging with their support circles of minor and major donors. National cultural policies have been following suit, by actively encouraging the establishment of a 21<sup>st</sup>-century 'culture of asking' and 'culture of private giving' in the arts.

**Cultural patronage** has a long, colorful, and complex history. Writers, visual artists, composers, and scholars have sought out the support of rich or well-connected private patrons for centuries, and have interacted with their private benefactors in a variety of ways. **The premise underpinning the conference 'The art of asking'** is the assumption that historical exchange patterns might serve as useful examples of patronage practices for today's makers and cultural institutions – and, moreover, that a better understanding of historical patronage patterns may help contextualize modern day practices.

With this conference, we aim to explore these premises by focusing on one particular aspect of the history of patronage. Whereas most existing research puts the efforts and achievements of the *patron* in the center of attention, we will **concentrate on mapping the strategies of the (potential) recipients of support**. How have artists and thinkers, through the ages, asked their (prospective) private patrons for support? Taking the step to ask a rich or well-connected individual for funding or protection takes courage, tact, strategic thinking, initiative, bravado, and confidence. Even in periods in which patronage was a self-evident part of artistic and academic practice, artists and scholars have always had to think carefully about the best way to approach their benefactors.

Please note that this focus means that **the outcome of the solicitation is essentially irrelevant**. What we are exploring is not whether the response of the patron to the request was positive or negative, the type of gift that followed, or how the relationship developed from there. We will explore the act of 'asking for support' itself.

**We welcome proposals** that help open up discussions about the way(s) creators active in the fields of literature, visual arts, music and intellectual culture, in present and past have historically put forward their requests for backing and protection of private patrons, and have as such helped shape the 'culture of asking' of their times. We are also interested in the factors affecting the creator's asking strategies or choice of (prospective) patrons, and in the historical continuities and discontinuities in the ways creators shaped a 'culture of asking'.

**We therefore warmly welcome diachronic, interdisciplinary and transnational approaches** and are open to proposals from (among others) the fields of musicology, literary studies, art history, cultural studies, cultural sociology, history, anthropology, and cultural theory.

Some conference papers will be selected for publication in a special issue of the [\*International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity\*](#) (Brill).

**Topics may include, but are not limited to:**

- the rationale behind the creator's selection of benefactors
  - o the appraisal of patrons as approachable/inapproachable, generous/ungenerous, sympathetic/unsympathetic towards the creator's work
  - o considerations related to the patron (gender, class, ethnicity, age, wealth, et cetera): is there a preference for female rather than male patrons, or for wealthy, well-connected rather than knowledgeable or cultivated patrons, and how do these preferences relate to the circumstances in which the request is made?
- strategies of approach
  - o by which means did artists and thinkers address their (prospective) benefactors?
  - o through which networks?
  - o employing which methods?
  - o using which media and genres (for instance dedications, prefaces, requests in personal correspondence, open calls or invitations to engage in subscription schemes, or the use of texts, images and videos on crowdfunding platforms)?
  - o employing which mediators or mediating networks?
  - o responding to which existing types of institutional, legal or infrastructural constraints or rules?
- ways of framing and formulating the specific request for support
  - o the 'tone of voice' and negotiation style (matter of fact, cajoling, coercive)
  - o the arguments brought to the table to justify and legitimize the request

**Individual proposals** (deadline 15 April 2024) should include:

1. Title of the proposal
2. A 300-word summary of the proposal's topic and rationale.
3. Name, affiliation, 80-word bio and contact info (address and email) of the contributor.

**Panel proposals** (deadline 15 April 2024) should include:

1. Title of the panel
3. A summary of the panel topic (300 words)
4. A summary of each individual contribution (300 words)
5. Name, affiliation, 80-word bio and contact info (address and email) of both the chair and all individual contributors.

Please submit your proposals in Word format only to [patronagestudies@uu.nl](mailto:patronagestudies@uu.nl) Acceptance will be notified via email by the end of April 2024. A detailed conference programme will be available on the website [mecenaatstudies.sites.uu.nl](http://mecenaatstudies.sites.uu.nl) before summer. Note: online participation is possible. If you intend to participate online, please let us know when sending in your abstract.

**ORGANIZING COMMITTEE**

This conference is organized by Helleke van den Braber (Utrecht University, chair of Patronage Studies), Nina Geerdink (Utrecht University, Dutch Literature), Klazina Botke (Vrije Universiteit/Teylers Museum, Art History), Floris Meens (Radboud University, Cultural History/Musicology) and Arjen Dijkstra (Tresoar, History of Knowledge)