

# MFA **H** *The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston*



William Hogarth, English, 1697–1764, *Industry and Idleness*, Plate I: *The Fellow 'Prentices at Their Looms*, October 1747, etching and engraving, Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, Houston, BF.1983.5.45.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

Graduate students and entry-level and mid-career professionals are invited to submit a 400-word abstract outlining a 20-minute presentation, along with a CV, by Thursday, August 15, 2024, to [rienzisymposium@mfa.org](mailto:rienzisymposium@mfa.org). Selected participants will be notified by Friday, August 30, 2024, and offered a \$600 honorarium for travel and lodging.

All presentations are given Saturday, November 9, 2024, at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Possible themes for investigation may include, but are not limited to:

- Transatlantic trade
- Workshop traditions
- Empire and colonialism
- Technology
- Gender
- Race
- Economics
- Labor
- Class
- Education
- Childhood

For more information, visit [mfah.org/rienzisymposium](http://mfah.org/rienzisymposium).

*Education programs at Rienzi receive generous funding from the Sterling-Turner Foundation, The Brown Foundation, the Carroll Sterling and Harris Masterson III Endowment, and the Caroline Wiess Law Endowment for Rienzi.*

## RIENZI'S BIENNIAL SYMPOSIUM SKILLFUL HANDS: APPRENTICES AND NETWORKS OF LEARNING 1650–1950 Saturday, November 9, 2024

**Call for Papers Deadline:  
Thursday, August 15, 2024**

Rienzi, the house museum for European decorative arts of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, presents the symposium *Skillful Hands: Apprentices and Networks of Learning 1650–1950*.

Until the late 19th century, apprenticeship was the primary way people were trained in craft trades in Europe and the Americas. Formal education was mainly out of reach for many children from middle-class and low-income families. Apprenticeship training, a legal contract between a student and a master craftsman, became an advantageous alternative to traditional education. Apprenticeships were regulated and monitored by European craft guilds established during the medieval period to control craft production. Their influence extended beyond the training period, and apprentices were generally closely linked to master craftspeople through cultural and social ties, including intermarriage. Within the traditional guild system, females, immigrants, Indigenous and enslaved peoples, and children from low-income families were often excluded.

With the onset of the Industrial Revolution, informal apprenticeships were introduced to adapt to innovations and technologies. Colonial expansion provided a range of new raw materials and new demands for skilled labor. Outside traditional European apprenticeship models, skills were acquired through forced migration, local environments, and informal training in various colonial regions. These varied experiences resulted in a diverse network of skilled craftspeople, both anonymous and renowned.

The symposium critically considers the networks of learning available—and unavailable—to diverse groups of people and how access to training and materials through apprenticeships helped to shape craft traditions. Who had access, and who did not? How did skills and ideas travel? How did apprenticeship systems affect the material, form, and quality of crafted objects? How did political, social, and cultural conditions in colonies such as British and French North America, New Spain, and the Caribbean influence trade training modes?