Abstract: Going to the Games in Glorious Technicolor: circus mosaics and the realities of Roman chariot racing

Lecturer: Hazel Dodge

The theme of the circus and chariot-racing are common in Roman art and appear on a variety of media and in a range of contexts: from lamps to glassware, from sarcophagi to terracotta plaques. In particular, there is a corpus of representations of circus scenes in floor mosaics that share standard visual techniques for representing features of both venue and participants. These essentially fall into two broad categories: those that depict the competitors in a static pose, and those showing a race in progress. This lecture will examine the format, meaning and contexts of these two groups of circus depictions, and will particularly focus on those depicting a race within the circus. It will explore their interpretation in terms of circus buildings, spectating crowds, audience participation, and the rewards to be gained from circus competition.

Short bibliography and/or website on lecture topic:

P. Christesen and D. Kyle (ed), A Companion to Sport and Spectacle Greek and Roman Antiquity, Oxford 2014


H. Dodge, Spectacle in the Roman World, London 2012

K. Dunbabin, Theater and Spectacle in the Art of the Roman Empire, Ithaca 2016

D. Potter, ‘Entertainers in the Roman Empire’, in D.S. Potter and D.J. Mattingly (ed), Life, Death and Entertainment in the Roman Empire, Ann Arbor 1999, 256-325