

Events

IMG2025 – IMAGE ETHICS

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On November 27 and 28, 2025, the city of Assisi hosted the fifth edition of the International and Interdisciplinary Conference on Images and Imagination, sponsored by the IMG Network association and organised by the University of Perugia at Palazzo Bernabei. The initiative, organised by a committee comprising Paolo Belardi, Ornella Zerlenga, Valeria Menchetelli, Vincenzo Cirillo, Giovanna Ramaccini, Monica Battistoni, Francesco Cotana, Eleonora Dottorini, Matteo Lanfaloni, Camilla Sorignani, and coordinated by Valeria Menchetelli, took place under the patronage of the Unione Italiana per il Disegno, the City of Assisi, the Sacred Convent of St. Francis in Assisi, the Artemis Interuniversity Alliance, and the REAACH association, confirming the event's distinctly interdisciplinary nature.

The conference took *Image Ethics* as its central theme, offering a critical reflection on the social role of images and on the cultural, political, and design responsibilities of contemporary visual culture; a theme that fits within a landscape characterised by the growing prevalence of images in daily life and by the transformation of the processes of production, circulation, and visual consumption introduced by digital culture. As already highlighted by the reflections underlying the

initiative, images are no longer limited to representing the world but actively participate in the construction of collective perceptions, the shaping of opinions, and the definition of social behaviours. In this context, the conference adopted interdisciplinarity as its primary methodological approach, serving as a forum for dialogue among scholars from diverse disciplines united by an interest in the ethical implications of contemporary visuality.

The choice of Assisi as the venue for the initiative proved particularly significant. The symbolic dimension of the location, explicitly referenced in the conference's academic materials, played a central role in the event's conceptual framework. Giotto's images from the *Stories of St. Francis* in the Upper Basilica were interpreted as historical models of ethical transmission through visual language, transforming the Franciscan city into a cultural space aligned with the themes of responsibility, proximity, and the social communication of images.

The choice of Assisi also appears to be no coincidence with the conference theme. The city is home to the inter-university Master's Degree Program in Planet Life Design / Design per la Vita del Pianeta, promoted by the University of Perugia and the University of Cam-

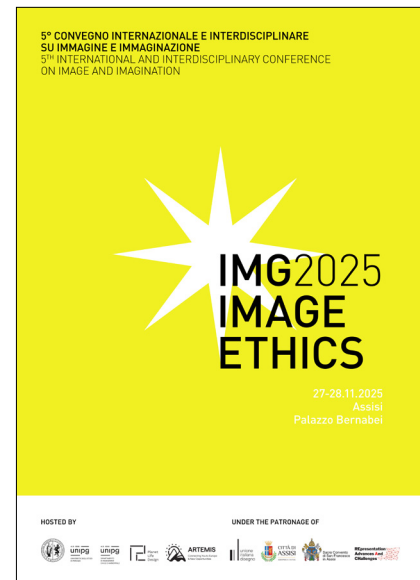


Fig. 1. Event poster.

pania Luigi Vanvitelli and coordinated by Paolo Belardi. The program develops a design-oriented reflection focused on sustainability, ethics, and the social responsibility of design – issues that find significant theoretical continuity with the themes addressed by IMG2025 and with the contemporary debate on the cultural role of images.

The conference opened with institutional greetings from Massimiliano Marianelli, Rector of the University of Perugia; Evangelia Ntzani, professor at the University of Ioannina and institutional representative of the Artemis Alliance; Fra Marco Moroni, Padre Custode of the Sacred Convent of St. Francis in Assisi; Filippo Ubertini, Chair of the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Perugia; Paolo Belardi, Chair of the Master's Degree Program in Planet Life Design; Ornella Zerlenga, President of the Italian Union for Design; Roberta Spallone, President of the REAACH association; and Alessandro Luigini, President of the IMG Network association.

Massimiliano Marianelli's address, which drew upon the thought of Simone Weil as a key to interpreting the conference's themes—emphasising the ethical value of the gaze and the need for a culture of images grounded in attention, awareness, and relationship with others—created the ideal atmosphere for the proceedings to begin.

Valeria Menchetelli's opening presentation, titled *Image Ethics. The Social Responsibility of Images* outlined the conference's theoretical framework, situating the debate on the ethics of images within a critical genealogy spanning philosophy, semiotics, visual studies, media theory, and design culture. The presentation focused particularly on the progressive loss of trust in images in the age of digital manipulation and visual hyperproduction, emphasising the need to rebuild a relationship of accountability between citizens, the media, and institutions.

The scientific program was divided into six thematic sessions—*City and Architecture, Environment and Sustainability, Media and Communication,*



Fig. 2. Guided tour of the Basilica of St. Francis led by Friar Michael Lasky (photo by Eleonora Dottorini).

Society and Politics, Memory and Heritage, Education and Care—which highlighted the cross-cutting nature of the ethical issue of images. The distribution of the contributions demonstrated how contemporary visual culture simultaneously engages with the themes of the city, the environment, communication, politics, memory, and care, confirming the role of images as active tools in the construction of social and cultural reality.

Among the recurring themes was a reflection on the relationship between representation and generative artificial intelligence, addressed in the contributions dedicated to the ethical, representational, and environmental implications of new visual technologies. In particular, issues related to image manipulation, the transparency of generative processes, and design responsibility in the construction of digital

visualisations highlighted the urgency of critically redefining the role of drawing in the age of algorithmic automation. At the same time, the contributions dedicated to the ethics of rendering, institutional communication, visual activism, and representations of conflict demonstrated how the contemporary debate on visibility is closely linked to the political and social implications of iconic production. Ample space was also devoted to the themes of education, inclusion, and care, addressed through contributions on visual learning, neurodiversity, tactile images, and Graphic Medicine. In this context, the image was interpreted not only as a communicative tool but also as a relational device that fosters processes of cultural accessibility, empathy, and social participation. At the same time, reflections on cultural heritage and memory highlighted the potential of digital



Fig. 3. Guided tour of the Basilica of St. Francis (photo by Eleonora Dottorini)..

technologies in creating new ways of experiencing and transmitting heritage, while maintaining a critical awareness of visual mediation practices.

The two keynote lectures further expanded the conference's theoretical framework. The presentation *Responsibility and Proximity. Suggestions and Guidance from St. Francis and Giotto* by

Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio (University of Bari Aldo Moro), dedicated to the relationship between responsibility and proximity in the Franciscan and Giottesque traditions, proposed a semiotic-ethical reading of the image as a dialogic and relational practice. The lecture *Anatomy of Fragility: The Body as a Space for Research, Education, and Care* by Stefano Ratti (Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna), centred on the body as a site of fragility, formation, and care, introduced a reflection on the relationship between representation, medicine, and the human dimension of visual experience.

The conference proceedings, published in open access by Publica, bring together approximately fifty contributions organised into the six thematic sections of the conference. The very structure of the publication highlights the desire to foster a collective reflection on contemporary visual culture, treating the image not merely as an aesthetic artefact, but as a critical, social, and political device.

At the conclusion of the conference, a guided tour of the Basilica of St. Francis was also organised, which houses Giotto's famous cycle of the *Stories of St. Francis*. The tour, led by Friar Michael Lasky and centred on a critical reading

of Franciscan ethics, served as a moment of synthesis particularly consistent with the themes addressed during IMG2025, allowing guests to engage directly with one of the most significant historical examples of the ethical and narrative construction of the image in Western culture.

Overall, IMG2025 confirmed the role of the IMG Network as an interdisciplinary observatory dedicated to the themes of image and imagination, while simultaneously strengthening dialogue with the scientific community of Drawing. The conference highlighted how the ethical question of images today represents a structural theme of the contemporary world, capable of traversing the processes of representation, communication, and design. Set against the symbolic backdrop of Assisi, IMG2025 emerged not only as a forum for scientific exchange but also as an open space for critical reflection on the cultural responsibilities of contemporary visual culture. The diversity of contributions presented revealed a scientific community aware of the need to examine the relationship among images, technology, and society, opening new research perspectives on the role of drawing in the construction of a more critical, inclusive, and responsible visual culture.

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