

**VITROCENTRE
ROMONT**
CENTRE SUISSE DE RECHERCHE
SUR LE VITRAIL ET LES ARTS DU VERRE
SCHWEIZERISCHES FORSCHUNGSZENTRUM
FÜR GLASMALEREI UND GLASKUNST
SWISS RESEARCH CENTRE
FOR STAINED GLASS AND GLASS ART



AFIRE

International conference

Beyond the Masterpiece: Embracing Failure in Ceramic and Glass Art

Romont (Switzerland), 13–14 May 2027

Organizers: Francine Giese, Sophie Wolf, Annick Herren (Vitrocentre Romont), and Zuzanna Sarnecka (University of Bern)

Keynote Speaker: Rachel King (The British Museum)

Call for Papers

Deadline for submissions: 31 July 2026

Notification of acceptance: 1 September 2026

The fields of ceramic and glass art have long been shaped by ideals of mastery, control, and perfection. Museums, collections, and scholarship often privilege the ‘masterpiece’ – objects that embody technical excellence and aesthetic resolution. Yet behind every successful work lies a spectrum of experiments, misfires, and unexpected outcomes. These ‘failed’ objects, frequently overlooked or discarded, hold critical insights into artistic processes, material behavior, and the evolving definitions of value in art and craft.

This conference, organized in collaboration between Zuzanna Sarnecka (University of Bern) and the Vitrocentre Romont, invites researchers, artists, conservators, and curators to reconsider failure not as an endpoint, but rather as a productive and revealing dimension of ceramic and glass practice. By shifting focus from perfected objects to those deemed ‘not quite right’, we seek to open new dialogues about knowledge production, material agency, conservation ethics, and contemporary artistic approaches.

Possible questions include:

- How can the value of flawed, damaged, or unresolved objects be reassessed, and how do they challenge established hierarchies of quality and taste?

- How have definitions of mastery and failure evolved across time, cultures, and disciplines, and who determines these categories and according to which criteria?
- Why are failed objects rarely exhibited, and what narratives are reinforced or disrupted when they are included in collections, archives, or exhibitions?
- What can failed ceramic and glass objects reveal about materials, techniques, and processes, and what broader technical, theoretical, or philosophical insights emerge when failure becomes the focus of inquiry?
- How should conservators approach objects already ‘unsuccessful’ at the point of creation, and what ethical and practical challenges arise in their conservation, storage, and display?
- How do contemporary artists engage with failure, and in what ways are unpredictability and imperfection integrated, aestheticized, or conceptualized in current ceramic and glass practice?

We invite contributions addressing the following themes:

- Questioning the notion of the ‘masterpiece’
- Defining and theorizing failure across artistic and material practices
- Learning from failure: failed objects as art-historical evidence and epistemic tool
- Failure as method: strategy, process and expression in contemporary art
- Visibility or absence of failure in museum contexts and scholarly research
- Conservation and restoration of failed objects
- Technical experimentation with fire-based processes and the deliberate production of failure
- Understanding failure through archaeometrical methods

Presentations should be max. 20 minutes and may be given in French, German or English. Please submit a proposal of max. 300 words and a brief curriculum vitae by 31 July 2026 to annick.herren@vitrocentre.ch. Accommodation and meals during the conference will be covered. Participants are expected to pay for their own transportation. Notification of acceptance will be c. 1 September 2026.

For further information, see www.vitrocentre.ch.