

## **Panel 10**

### **Identities and Representations**

#### **The Expressive Body of Stigma: Gesture & Pose in the “Gypsy” Motif in Modern History**

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In this paper, I explore how ethnic stigma is intermedially constructed through gesture and pose in visual representations of Romani characters in fine art, caricature, and opera from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. Researchers typically assume static features like skin colour, clothing, or accessories as sole signifiers to analyse visual Romani stereotyping. I reconsider the assumption in the context of features that indicate movement – particularly gesture and pose – as constructing stigma, contributing to the fields of media and art history as well as antigypsyism studies. For this purpose, I examine different cases of visual media in history. It becomes evident that certain bodily expressions became recurring motifs, and these were often unique to the representation of Romani characters. For example, the figure of the female “Gypsy” dancer emerged as a hybrid fantasy, blending aspects of Italian folk dance, Spanish flamenco, ballet, and belly dance. Similarly, the trope of the “Gypsy” fortune teller sometimes relied on gestural conventions that the modern viewer may not immediately decipher, while past audiences understood them due to cues established by the fine arts and picked up in caricatures. Ideas of Orientalist and Mediterranean mystery, and sensuality shaped these portrayals. I conclude that the intermedial coding of gesture and pose was significant to constructing the “Gypsy” motif throughout history. Accordingly, there are discourse evolutions tied to intermedial traditions that shape Romani stigma to the present day.

#### **Biography**

Johannes Valentin Korff’s research interests include antigypsyism studies, media history, and historical culture in popular media. He completed his doctoral studies at University College London in 2025. His dissertation topic was Romani stigma in global visual media since 1945. Contact: [johannes.korff.22@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:johannes.korff.22@ucl.ac.uk)