

IDEA, Université de Lorraine, France

Invited Professor 2026

“Ekphrasis Today: Ecological and Postcolonial Approaches”

« L'ekphrasis aujourd'hui : Approches écologique et postcoloniale »

Prof. Dr. Gabriele Rippl (University of Bern, Switzerland)

[https://www.ens.unibe.ch/about\\_us/staff/prof\\_dr\\_rippl\\_gabriele/index\\_eng.html](https://www.ens.unibe.ch/about_us/staff/prof_dr_rippl_gabriele/index_eng.html)

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The research unit IDEA (Interdisciplinarité Dans les Etudes Anglophones), of the University of Lorraine, France, will be welcoming Prof. Dr. Gabriele Rippl, from the University of Bern, Switzerland, as Invited Professor in January-February 2026.

Prof. Rippl has offered to give a series of lectures and seminars devoted to ekphrasis and entitled “Ekphrasis Today: Ecological and Postcolonial Approaches”, which will be held on the CLSH in Nancy and Campus du Saulcy in Metz, as well as online.

### Description

Ekphrases and references to images already existed in late Greco-Roman antiquity, when this rhetorical mode of speaking was used to describe objects, people, places, and time. By aiming at *enargeia*, ekphrasis enabled speakers to bring absent objects before the listeners' mental eyes, and served to rouse their emotions by making them eyewitnesses. Since then, the term “ekphrasis” has undergone a severe narrowing-down of its meaning and today mostly refers to “*the verbal representation of visual representation*,” as James A. W. Heffernan's widely accepted definition has it. As a second-degree, often highly self-reflexive mode of representation, ekphrasis frequently serves as a conceptual space for negotiations of poetics, visual regimes, power relationships, and epistemological set-ups at a given place and time. As a textual strategy of highlighted visualization, it serves the management of attention and reinforces “comprehension, memory and emotional response” (Brosch 343).

Ekphrases are encountered in a plethora of Anglophone literary texts today, in poetry as well as narrative fiction. They also come with or without pictures and in different shapes: while they are often long and detailed evocations of (existing or fictive) paintings, photographs, maps or other artefacts, sometimes they happen to be nothing but short and stenographic references. Ekphrasis has proven to be an extremely elastic poetic device and mode of writing, which, across its history of nearly three millennia, easily adapted to an abundance of cultural, poetic and aesthetic changes—and even to the emergence of new media in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries such as photography, film, the computer, and social media. Instead of becoming superfluous, ekphrasis has witnessed a meteoric rise in literary, artistic, and scholarly circles since the 1980s. This confident co-existence of ekphrasis alongside easily available images proves that this specific form of contact between media, which now goes under the name of “intermedial reference” (Rajewsky; Wolf) has more functions than ‘merely’ describing absent images. By examining several pertinent and highly acclaimed contemporary Anglophone literary texts, we will distill a selection of different functions that ekphrases have at a time when images are generally accessible on the World Wide Web (for those who live in countries with stable internet connections) and have the potential to migrate globally.

Among the promising contemporary approaches to ekphrasis are those by scholars working in postcolonial and transcultural studies, who have widened the scope of ekphrasis studies considerably by linking aesthetic and formal aspects of literary ekphrasis with questions regarding racial, ethical, affective, cultural, socio-political, epistemological and ideological issues. Postcolonial Anglophone narrative fiction and poetry grown out of migrational and transcultural contexts are often replete with self-reflexive ekphrases, long and short ones, explicit and covert ones, detailed and abbreviated ones. Their objects are paintings and drawings but also photographs and other visual phenomena such as TV and film stills. Equally promising are new approaches to ecological literary texts which use and ‘green’ ekphrasis to engage readers in questions of pressing environmental and ethical concerns.

Primary sources include 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century narrative fiction by Margaret Atwood, James Bradley, NoViolet Bulawayo, A. S. Byatt, Teju Cole, Jamaica Kincaid, Richard Powers, as well as poems by Pascale Petit, and others.

## Schedule

Session 1: Lecture “Intermediality studies and word-and-image research today”

Session 2: Seminar “Word-image research: concepts – theories – close readings”

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Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2026, 5-7pm

Session 3: Lecture “Description and Ekphrasis today”

Session 4: Seminar “Reading contemporary ekphrastic literature: narrative fiction and poetry”

Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> 2026, 5-7pm

CLSH de Nancy et visioconférence

Session 5: Lecture “Ekphrasis and the Anthropocene”

Session 6: Seminar “Greening ekphrasis: analyzing ecological literary texts”

**Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2026, 5-7pm**

Campus du Saulcy, Metz et visioconférence

Session 7: Lecture “Postcolonial Ekphrasis”

Session 8: Seminar “Visuality and the hierarchies of power: contemporary Anglophone literature and the recalibration of vision”

**Monday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2026, 5-7pm**

CLSH de Nancy et visioconférence

## Format

Two-hour sessions weekly, January-February 2026. Each of the four lectures is paired with a seminar. While the lectures will provide *tours d’horizon*, the seminars will serve to discuss literary examples in depth.

## Selected Publications

