

# AMERICAN ACADEMY IN ROME

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## American Academy in Rome's Galileo Week Convenes Interdisciplinary Conversation about Connections Between Arts, Sciences, and Humanities that Galileo Embodied



*Galileo projected onto Casa Rustica, the site on which the astronomer unveiled the telescope (photograph by Gerardo Gaetani)*

**ROME, ITALY**– March 6, 2025 – This April, the American Academy in Rome, the dynamic international community that supports innovative artists, writers, and scholars living and working together, convenes Galileo Week. This public program of lectures and conversations brings together pathbreaking luminaries in the arts, sciences, and humanities for intellectual and creative exploration in the same interdisciplinary spirit that sparked Galileo's revolutionary discoveries. On the date and at the site where Galileo first demonstrated his telescope in Rome in 1611, this year, the Academy welcomes Edwin S. Wilsey Professor and Chair of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering and founder of the interdisciplinary lab creativeX at Princeton University **Naomi Ehrich Leonard**, leading AI scholar and author of *Atlas of AI*, Research Professor at USC Annenberg **Kate Crawford**, composer **Alvin Curran**, and poet **Erica Hunt** to examine how collective systems—whether biological, artificial, or artistic—make decisions and create meaning in fields ranging from robotics and AI to dance and music.

“Galileo Week expands upon the Academy’s deep-rooted commitment to fostering dialogue across disciplines, pushing its boundaries even further into a dynamic creative space that unites scientists, artists, and humanists. We recognize that these expansive conversations are essential not only for the pursuit of knowledge but also for uncovering fresh perspectives. Through this interdisciplinary exchange, we can model the power of the arts and humanities for understanding more precisely the complex challenges of the twenty-first century,” stated **Peter N. Miller**, President of the American Academy in Rome. “In addition to our public programming, Galileo Week will serve as a short-term residency program—welcoming scientists to the Academy for the first time in its 131-year history. We are proud to launch this new tradition with Naomi Ehrich Leonard and Kate Crawford, whose pioneering research sets the stage for this year’s event. We eagerly anticipate their engaging conversations with each other as well as the visionary minds of Alvin Curran and Erica Hunt.”

Galileo Week 2025 evolves from David Spergel’s inaugural lecture in 2024, which was held on the anniversary of the night in 1611 when Galileo first demonstrated the telescope. This historic innovation occurred in the building

whose ruins lie buried beneath the Academy's Casa Rustica, at the back of the Bass Garden. Spergel's *Physics as Aesthetics, Cosmology as a Historical Science: From Galileo to the Big Bang* investigated the connections between physics, aesthetics, and cosmology's historical nature. In 2025, Galileo Week events will similarly foster interdisciplinary inquiry.

Galileo Week is free and open to the public with pre-registration at [aarome.org](http://aarome.org). The program will be held in English and livestreamed.

#### **GALILEO WEEK 2025:**

##### **Galileo Night Lecture: The Art and Science of Collective Decision-Making**

Monday, April 14

Naomi Ehrich Leonard

Edwin S. Wilsey Professor and Chair of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering at Princeton University

Founding Director, creativeX

Introduced by Mario di Bernardo

Flocking birds, schooling fish, swarming bees, and other animal groups that lack centralized control can nonetheless meet real-world uncertainties with collective decision-making that is fast, flexible, adaptive, and often stunningly beautiful. This lecture will discuss Professor Leonard's theory, which shows how these complex collective behaviors emerge from relatively simple choices individual animals make in response to their neighbors and environment. She will show further how the theory can be **harnessed** in science and art, such as for environmental monitoring with robotic teams and for rule-based improvisational dance. Crucially, Professor Leonard will discuss how her design and art-making experiments inform the science that motivated them. Here, art and science meet and expand one another.

*The lecture will be followed by a conversation between Naomi Ehrich Leonard and Kate Crawford.*

##### **Rhythm Bots**

April 14–17

Naomi Leonard will present a new immersive installation with video, sound, and virtual reality (VR) evoking her most recent experiment, "Rhythm Bots" (2024), a playground for human-robot interaction in which a group of gentle, rhythmically rotating robots synchronize their movement in response to one another and their audience. Video interviews reveal how a group of scientists, scholars, and artists collaborated to create "Rhythm Bots."

##### **Mapping AI: How to See Planetary-Scale Artificial Intelligence**

Tuesday, April 15

Kate Crawford

Research Professor at USC Annenberg, founder of the AI Now Institute, and author of *Atlas of AI*

Generative AI systems are at the heart of a profound shift in how we create, access, and define knowledge. The mass extraction of data across the internet, as well as from libraries and archives, raises pressing questions about who gets to build private AI models on public data. At the same time, AI systems are reshaping the planet in lasting, often hidden ways, becoming one of the largest planetary architectures built by our species and requiring vast amounts of energy, water, data, and labor to function.

This lecture will explore the dual nature of generative AI as a cultural transformation and a material force. Crawford will also discuss her recent research project and visual installation [\*Calculating Empires: A Genealogy of Power and Technology since 1500\*](#), which places AI systems in a historical lineage of empires that used technology to centralize power and reshape societies and ecosystems on a global scale.

### **Artist Conversation: Modelling Collective Decision-Making**

Wednesday, April 16

Naomi Ehrich Leonard, Alvin Curran, and Erica Hunt

Building from Professor Leonard's studies of how flocks, schools, and swarms move, and her model of collective decision-making, she will be in conversation with composer Alvin Curran and poet Erica Hunt about the ways in which group decisions are taken in a creative and collaborative setting. Drawing parallels between the different ways in which animals move together, dancers coordinate themselves on stage, and musicians play along with each other, the speakers will explore how collective decision-making takes place in science, art, and the natural world. This will include thinking about patterns, rhythms, and social and behavioral structures that are able to ground collective decision-making in space and time.

### **About the American Academy in Rome**

Since 1894, the [\*American Academy in Rome\*](#) has functioned as a residential center for research and creativity. Its purpose has always been to enable highly motivated scholars and artists to immerse themselves in the experience of Rome, ancient and modern, and to be inspired by daily exchange with the other members of this creative community. The Academy has made an outsized impact on the intellectual and cultural life of the United States, and its Fellows and Residents have been recognized with 629 Guggenheim Fellowships, 75 Pulitzer Prizes, 54 MacArthur Fellowships, 26 Grammy awards, 5 Pritzker Prizes, 9 Poet Laureate appointments, and 5 Nobel Prizes. Approximately 35 Fellows are selected as winners of the Rome Prize each year by rotating juries in the different fields.

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