

Call for Papers
International Conference

Leonard Cohen 2026

Global Perspectives on a Multi-disciplinary Artist

**Ghent University, Belgium
October 6-8, 2026**



CONFIRMED KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Robert Lecker (*McGill University*) & Sherry Simon (*Concordia University*)

Call for Papers — Leonard Cohen 2026, Global Perspectives on a Multi-disciplinary Artist International Conference, October 6-8, 2026

The ten-year anniversary of Leonard Cohen's death in November 2026 invites renewed critical reflection on his life, work, and significance today. The past decade has witnessed a surge in publications on Cohen for both academic and general audiences, posthumous releases of music and the publication of an early novel, as well as his appearance in the works of other artists as both inspiration and antagonist. A singer-songwriter, poet, novelist, and visual artist, Cohen was both an icon of his home city, Montreal, and a citizen of the world. Now, as in his lifetime, his art resists divisions between nations and audiences, media and genres, philosophies and religions, academic disciplines and styles of fandom.

Despite Cohen's own efforts to overcome such divisions, writing on his work often reiterates them, separating literature and music, global and national influences, and academic and general audiences. Moreover, commemoration itself risks settling into a fixed narrative, smoothing over the contradictions and productive tensions that animated Cohen's work when he was alive and was continually recontextualizing his creations. A decade after Cohen's passing, the challenge is to resist this tendency toward stabilization and instead to rekindle the dynamism and ongoing evolution that characterized his artistic practice.

Focused on re-evaluating Cohen's work and legacy in ways that attend to multiple aspects of his art and its reception, this conference aims to bring together scholars working across disciplines and the globe. We welcome proposals focused on all aspects of Cohen's poetry, fiction, music, visual art, and performances, as well as on his life and legacy. In the spirit of this international conference and of Cohen's artistic practices, we are especially interested in critical approaches that cross disciplinary borders and push the boundaries of Cohen scholarship in new directions, including but not limited to the topics below:

RECEPTION/TRANSLATION:

Who cares about Leonard Cohen, and what do they care about? How is Cohen's work reshaped or reimagined as it circulates transnationally, across diverse contexts and audiences, whether in translation or not? How might recent developments in translation studies illuminate the implicit translations embedded within Cohen's literary oeuvre (e.g., the conversations between F. and the narrator in *Beautiful Losers*), the multilingual dimensions of his musical compositions (e.g., the Hebrew chanting in "You Want It Darker"), or the interactions between music, language, and other multimodal elements?

ADAPTATION/COLLABORATION/REMEDIATION:

How have Cohen's works been revived, revised, and repurposed by other artists, including by artists working in different media? How should we understand Cohen's own practices of remediating himself, from poetry to song, from word to image? How did Cohen collaborate with other artists, for example through his own adaptations of works and traditions as well as his translation of ideas across different media? In what ways have technological innovations, changes in the music industry, and Cohen's collaborations with musicians, producers, and technicians shaped the creation, development, and reception of his musical works?

LOCAL AND GLOBAL SETTINGS:

While Montreal, Hydra, and L.A. remain the places most associated with Cohen, he travelled widely and for different reasons, to Cuba to witness a revolution in 1961, for example, or to Fredericton, New Brunswick, to launch his comeback tour in 2008. How did specific places inspire Cohen and where do they show up in his work? How can we read the details of place within Cohen's art, despite his attempts at universality and his habit of editing locations out of his music (with prominent exceptions, such as Manhattan and Berlin)?

INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES AND CRITICAL METHODS:

What areas of study and theoretical lenses are best for analyzing the variety of Cohen's art as well as the nuances of his performances and career? How should contemporary scholars grapple with questions of gender, sexuality, race, colonialism, oppression, and power, which appear throughout Cohen's oeuvre? How do critical methods and interdisciplinary approaches to individual texts or moments in Cohen's career alter understandings of his legacy?

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MATERIAL CULTURE:

From the Kleenexes stuffing shoes and bras in The Favourite Game to the memorabilia sold during Cohen's final tour, how does material culture situate Cohen's art within specific times and places as well as modes of signification and networks of circulation? How is Cohen's legacy constructed in and through physical objects? What role do his graphic works play in this context? Material analyses may also consider how Cohen's art was made and circulated, the materiality of his archive.

RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY:

Cohen's life and work were shaped by diverse religious and philosophical traditions, from the Catholic milieu of his native Montreal and his Jewish heritage to the Buddhist and Advaita Vedanta practices he explored through encounters with Kyozan Joshu Sasaki Roshi and Ramesh Balsekar. How can the intersections of spirituality, religious practice, and artistic creation be understood in Cohen's oeuvre, and how do these traditions inform his poetry, songwriting, and public persona?

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Please submit your proposal to cohen2026@ugent.be by April 30, 2026. Participants will be notified of acceptance or rejection in May. There will be a registration fee.

We invite proposals for a variety of presentations:

- **Individual Papers of 15-20 minutes:** Please submit a 300-word abstract and 150-word bio.
- **Panel Proposal:** Panels consist of 3-4 speakers, each giving a presentation of 15-20 minutes on a common topic or question. Please submit a 500-word summary of the panel's organizing idea as well as 150-word bios for each confirmed speaker and the title of their papers.
- **Roundtable:** Roundtables are opportunities for organized conversation and debate over a broad question or idea. Prepared remarks should be limited so that the roundtable privileges the exchange of ideas among panelists and the audience. Proposals for roundtables should include a 250-word summary of the topic as well as 150-word bios for each confirmed participant.
- **Creative Proposals:** We are open to other kinds of presentations and ways of sharing ideas. Please be in touch if you have an idea that does not fit with the options listed above.

CULTURAL EVENT

On October 7, we are delighted to present a special cultural evening in collaboration with the Handelsbeurs, the historic concert hall in the heart of Ghent. The programme (in English) will combine live music by acclaimed artists Lara Chedraoui (Intergalactic Lovers) and Floris De Decker with interviews and personal testimonies by author Christophe Lebold and other world-renowned Leonard Cohen specialists.

Highlights also include a screening of the very first documentary on Leonard Cohen, alongside a range of complementary activities.

This Leonard Cohen Night is organised in partnership with the independent and celebrated bookshop Paard van Troje and is part of Re:Context, a brand-new cultural series that showcases leading writers who have recently published influential non-fiction works on jazz, improvisation, global music, and the broader cultural worlds that surround them.

More info soon available here: www.haconcerts.be/en

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TEAM

MAIN ORGANIZERS

- Francis Mus – Ghent University (francis.mus@ugent.be)
- Kait Pinder – Acadia University (kait.pinder@acadiau.ca)
- Joel Deshaye – Memorial University (jdeshaye@mun.ca)

OTHER MEMBERS OF THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

- Frederik Dhaenens (Ghent University)
- France Schils (Ghent University)
- Tessa Van Nieuwenhuyze (Ghent University)
- Dirk Van Hulle (University of Antwerp)
- Michel Delville (Liège University)

This conference is an interuniversity collaboration between Ghent University (Belgium), Acadia University (Canada), Memorial University (Canada), the University of Strasbourg (France), the University of Antwerp (Belgium), and the University of Liège (Belgium).

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

- Colin Hill (University of Toronto)
- Christophe Lebold (Université de Strasbourg)
- Elly McCausland (Ghent University)
- Tom Toremans (KU Leuven)
- Andrew Bricker (Ghent University)
- Birgit Van Puymbroeck (VU Brussel)

CONTACT

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