

SHOWCASING ART HISTORY SEASON XIII, 2018 – 2019

Britain ∩ Europe - Encounters in Art

The UK's projected exit from the European union has once again raised the recurring question what it is to be British, and whether 'Britishness' is either a subset of, or incompatible with, 'Europeanness'. ('British' is here used, admittedly anachronistically, as a convenient shorthand adjective for the arts historically produced in what is now England, Scotland and Wales). The fact of Britain's island geography is, of course, undeniable; less clear-cut is the analysis of its cultural relations with the European mainland.

We propose a journey through British art from the medieval period to today, seen through the prism of its myriad and complex relations with the European mainland. Our intention is neither to celebrate one 'cosmopolitan' episode of British art after the other, nor to list the many instances of *mutual* indebtedness between British and Continental art for their own sake. Rather, it is our aim to explore the fascinating story of the nation's developing cultural self, by way of a (necessarily selective) history of British art in so far as it connects or competes with, rejects, and aspires to, the arts of the European mainland.

Autumn term 2018

Britain ∩ Europe - Encounters in Art part I: early middle ages to the 17th century

10 lectures starting 2 October 2018



In this first part of our series, we shall investigate the strong transnational connections fostered by patronage, particularly by the cultural exchanges sponsored by monastic orders such as the Benedictines who closely connected the Christian world by a dense network of pilgrimage routes and religious sites.

We shall look at the international reach of artists and artefacts related to such patronage, and at the beginnings of distinct cultural expressions at home and influential abroad. Among those were for instance the medieval embroidered textiles known as 'opus anglicanum' ('English work') and very distinctive styles of architecture and manuscript illumination. Of course, we shall also explore what it meant for British art to leave that common religious ground, beginning with Henry VIII's break with the Roman Church and by successive consolidations of a distinctly Protestant identity.

The dynastic aspirations and claims of successive British monarchs meanwhile encouraged a different sort of internationalism, by way of their acquisitions of Continental art – most notably exemplified in Charles I's stupendous assembly of European masters – and in the employment of leading foreign artists. The influx in particular of Netherlandish and German artists – from Holbein via Van Dyck to Lely and Kneller - strongly influenced British art throughout the period from the Renaissance to the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Confirmed speakers: Dr Michael Carter, Dr Barbara Furlotti, Professor Jane Hawkes, John McNeill, Dr Tom Nickson, Professor Joanna Story, Dr Richard Williams, Michaela Zöschg

Spring term 2019

Britain ∩ Europe - Encounters in Art part II: 18th century to 2018

10 lectures starting 15 January 2019

A notion of the distinctiveness of British art emerged strongly in the early modern period, at home and abroad, with definitions ranging from the refreshingly individual to the frankly eccentric. Some observers celebrated what they saw as a proudly independent artistic heritage, particularly associated with landscape painting and with a native brand of humour.

At the same time, many artists, patrons and critics argued for the arts produced in Britain to be seen as part of a continuum of 'high' European art, a desire expressed in the traditions of the Grand Tour, and in the foundation of the Royal Academy for instance.

More recently, scholars have debated whether there is a necessary correlation between cosmopolitanism and avant-garde status. Is art 'advanced' only in proportion to its closeness to leading international modern and particularly 'modernist' developments? On that count, where do we place the enduring figurative strand of twentieth-century British art? In the latter part of the last century, London emerged as one of the foremost European centres of contemporary art, British artists were increasingly represented abroad, and a 'new internationalism' was perhaps begun to be taken for granted. In that context, we shall ask whether there was anything specifically 'British' about the 'YBAs' and others representing that scene. Since the referendum on membership of the European Union in June 2016, the question of cultural identity has once again become an urgent concern for many artists. We shall investigate the ideological as well as practical ties many contemporary practitioners have with mainland Europe and discuss what the future might hold for British art post Brexit.



Confirmed speakers: Dr Edwin Coomasaru, Dr Kate Grandjouan, Dr Martin Hammer, Dr Ayla Lepine, Nicola Moorby, Dr Anne Puetz, Dr Chris Stephens, MaryAnne Stevens

Summer term 2019

Britain ∩ Europe - Encounters in Art, summer term: Refugees from Nazi Europe and their Contribution to British Visual Culture

5 lectures starting 30 April 2019



The shorter summer term investigates a particularly significant episode in the long history of British art's relations with the Continent. These lectures will take a close and critical look at the experiences of the émigré artists who came to this country after Hitler's accession to power in 1933, examining not only their achievements and influence, but also the challenges - not to say obstacles - they faced on arrival.

The series will open with an introductory lecture providing a broader cultural and political context for the lectures to follow. These will focus on the experiences of key individuals – John Heartfield, Kurt Schwitters, Oscar Kokoschka, Ludwig Meidner and Marie-Louise von Motesiczky - and the issues raised within the study of mid-20th century British art by the reception of their disparate yet related practices.

The course will coincide with a major nationwide arts festival entitled *Insiders/Outsiders: Refugees from Nazi Europe and their Contribution to British Culture*. At a time when the issue of immigration is much-debated, the Festival - and this short course - will serve as a reminder of the importance of cultural cross-fertilization and of the indelible contribution that refugees can – and do – make to British life.

Confirmed speakers: Monica Bohm-Duchen, Dr Ines Schlenker, Dr Niccola Shearman, Professor Sarah Wilson

Autumn term lectures take place at Somerset House; spring and summer term lectures in our new temporary home at Vernon Square, Penton Rise, London WC1X 9EW – a 12 minute walk from King's Cross & St Pancras underground station. Tuesdays at 7-8pm, followed by Q&A and drinks.