

Schwitters in context: the British years

Tate Britain, Clore Auditorium
Saturday 20 April 14.00 – 19.20

This symposium brings together leading scholars in the field to discuss Kurt Schwitters's British period and its broader context. Topics include émigré artists in Britain in the 1940s, Schwitters's connections with British art and artists in London, the relationship between abstraction and representation in his work, and his final years in the Lake District including his work on the Merz Barn.

With support from Newcastle University's Hatton Gallery

14.00 Welcome and Introduction **Olga Smith** and **Emma Chambers**

Panel Schwitters and the émigré artists in Britain

14.20 **Shulamith Behr** *Schwitters: exile, networks, agency*

Consistent with the study of transnationalism and migration in contemporary global practice, trends in exile research are underpinned by network theory, developed in the sociological discipline. Identified as 'actors' in social fields, exiled artists 'perform' in networks that visually encode patterns of emigration and cultural exchange. On occasion, such methodologies are dismissive of subjective agency and this paper evaluates these (seemingly) contesting imperatives in light of Schwitters's experiences in the years 1938 to 1940, between Norway and Britain.

14.45 **Sarah MacDougall** *Engaging the émigré network: Kurt Schwitters and the artist internees of Hutchinson Camp*

This paper briefly examines the practice, teaching and internment-exhibition history of Schwitters and his fellow artist-internees (among them Siegfried Charoux, Georg Ehrlich, Hermann Fechenbach, Paul Hamann, Erich Kahn, Ernst Müller-Blenndorf, Fred Uhlman and Hellmuth Weissenborn) in Hutchinson Camp, Douglas, on the Isle of Man (1940-41). It also explores the impact of the émigré network in Britain as a professional, political and social support for these artists in exile, asking to what extent this furthered or hampered their individual artistic development and careers post internment.

15.10 **Nick Wadley** *Kurt Schwitters and Stefan Themerson*

When Kurt Schwitters and Stefan Themerson sat next to each other at a PEN meeting in London, August 1944, it was a remarkable, chance meeting of two displaced avant-garde poets, kindred spirits. This paper will illustrate and discuss the extraordinary coincidences of both their lives and their creative impulses, and the lyrical brand of subversion they each practised.

15.35 Panel discussion and Q&A chaired by **Jenny Powell**

16.10 Break

Panel *Between abstraction and figuration*

16.40 **Michael White** *'Black and White, and Read All Over: Colour and Meaning in Kurt Schwitters's Collages'*

While Schwitters continually proposed that the fragments from which his collages were made should not be read literally, even when they contain legible textual fragments, this paper will explore how his Merz practice persistently interrelated visual sensation and conceptual sense making, with colour providing fertile ground for exploring the connections between the two.

17.05 **Lloyd Gibson** *Schwitters and the 'Biomorphic Forties'*

(The Merz Barn examined within a context of post-war art practice and theory)

Unlike its Hanover counterpart, the unfinished Elterwater Merz Barn is still to be thoroughly researched, and critical analyses of Schwitters's late abstract works are often formulated from a perspective of his 'heroic' period: the 1920s. This paper proposes that the Merz Barn's visual language is better understood by examining the relief within international contexts of art practice and theory in the mid 1940s, a period which until recently has received little critical attention.

17.30 **Rob Airey** *Why is Merzwall not in Tate Britain*

17.45 Panel discussion and Q&A chaired by **Emma Chambers**

18.20 Closing remarks by **Sarah Wilson**

18.40 **Schwitters film screening programme**

Throw Them Up and Let Them Sing is a recent work by artist filmmaker Helen Petts. It explores the later years of Schwitters's life and work through landscape, collage, sound and walking. With merz-type sounds contributed by Sylvia Hallett, Adam Bohman, Roger Turner and Phil Minton. The film was commissioned by the Hatton Gallery Newcastle and the London 2012 Festival, funded by the Arts Council of England. (29 minutes)

TateShots: *Contemporary Responses to Kurt Schwitters*

TateShots: *Kurt Schwitters's Portraits*

TateShots: *Animations in Archives*



Newcastle
University



Speakers

Rob Airey is Keeper of Art at the Hatton Gallery and is responsible for the permanent collection and delivery of the temporary exhibition programme. He has previously worked at the Government Art Collection, Tate Gallery, Henry Moore Foundation, Public Catalogue Foundation and Royal Cornwall Museum, before starting at the Hatton in February 2009 where he encountered Schwitters Merzbarn Wall for the first time.

Shulamith Behr is Honorary Research Fellow at the Courtauld Institute of Art. She is a specialist in the study of German Expressionism and has published widely in the field: as joint editor of *Expressionism Reassessed* (MUP, 1993), as curator of exhibitions on Conrad Felixmüller at the New Walk Museum and Art Gallery (Leicester) and at The Courtauld Gallery in 1994, as author of *Expressionism* for Tate Gallery Publishing in 1999 and curator of the exhibition *Gabriele Münter: The Search for Expression 1906-1917*, held at The Courtauld Gallery in 2005. Her research on art and exile is published in the volume *Arts in Exile in Britain 1933-1945: Politics and Cultural Identity* (Rodopi, 2005), which she co-edited with Marian Malet. At present she is collaborating with the Jüdisches Museum Frankfurt am Main on an exhibition of Meidner's works in England ca.1939-1953.

Emma Chambers is Curator of Modern British Art at Tate Britain.

Lloyd Gibson studied Fine Art at Newcastle University in the 1960s, when Schwitters's relief was removed to the Hatton Gallery. Until 2005, he was employed as Reader in Fine Art at Northumbria University. He has participated in exhibitions including the Hayward Gallery's *Condition of Sculpture*, *The British Art Show*, and the *Paris Biennale* and more recently has undertaken projects with commissioning agency Locus Plus, including 'n', at Gruinard Island, Scotland. As a writer his research includes the Merz Barn, Wittgenstein's time in Newcastle, and the life of Zuza Bennisford, an 'exotic' dancer at Newcastle's 1929 North East Coast Exhibition.

Sarah MacDougall is the Eva Frankfurter Research and Curatorial Fellow for the Study of Émigré Artists and Head of Collections at Ben Uri, The London Jewish Museum of Art, and specialises in 20th century modern British and émigré artists. She is co-curator of the exhibition *Forced Journeys: Artists in Exile c. 1933-45* (2009-10) and a forthcoming exhibition on The London Group. She is also the author of a biography on Mark Gertler and is preparing a catalogue raisonné for Yale University Press.

Jenny Powell is Assistant Curator at Tate Britain.

Olga Smith is Curator of Adult Programmes at Tate Gallery.

Nick Wadley writes and draws. Trained as painter and art historian, he taught art history at Chelsea School of Art, London 1962 – 1985, and has published on Gauguin and French 19th century drawing. Wadley has curated exhibitions of Kurt Schwitters, Franciszka Themerson, *The Secret Life of Clothes*, *Gaberbocchus Press*, UBU in UK and Feininger drawings; he has exhibited in London, Buenos Aires, Warsaw and Tokyo. His latest book of drawings is *Man+Doctor* (2012). He was an intimate friend of Stefan & Franciszka Themerson at the end of their lives, has written widely about both, and with Jasia Reichardt looks after the Themerson Archive and estate.

Michael White is a Reader in History of Art at the University of York, specialising on the avant-gardes of the early twentieth century. He is best known internationally for his work on the De Stijl group, including the books *De Stijl* and *Dutch Modernism* (2003) and, with Hans Janssen, *The Story of De Stijl: Mondrian to Van Doesburg* (2011), but has also published on Dada figures such as Johannes Baader, George Grosz and Kurt Schwitters, and has a major study of the Berlin Dada group forthcoming with Yale University Press.

Sarah Wilson lectures in modern and contemporary art at the Courtauld Institute of Art. She published an essay 'Kurt Schwitters in England' for the catalogue of the exhibition Kurt

Schwitters (1995), subsequently republished. She is also the author of *The Visual World of French Theory: Figurations* (2010), *Matisse* (2009) and *Picasso/Marx* is forthcoming. Curated exhibitions include, among others, *Paris - Capital of the Arts, 1900-1968* at the Royal Academy of Arts, London and Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao in 2001-2 and the Pierre Klossowski retrospective exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, Ludwig Museum, Cologne and Centre Pompidou in 2006-2007.

EVALUATION



EVENT: Schwitters in Context: The British Years
DATE: 20 April 2013 14.00-18.30

We look forward to your impressions and comments, which will help us improve our work.

1- Have you been to Tate Britain before?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
2 - Have you attended an event/course at Tate Britain before?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
3 - Are you a Tate Member?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

4 - How did you find out about this event/course?

Tate guide Tate e-bulletin Social Media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)

Tate website Word of mouth Other – please tell us _____

5 - Information about this event, in the guide or on the website, was clear and adequate.	Agree ←————→ Disagree				
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5a – If you disagreed, how do you feel this information could have been made clearer?					

6 - I had an enjoyable learning experience.	Agree ←————→ Disagree				
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7 - I felt engaged with the event.	Agree ←————→ Disagree				
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8 - The event was good value.	Agree ←————→ Disagree				
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9 - How would you rate the overall quality of the event?	Excellent ←————→ Poor				
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10 – Based on your areas of interest, what events would you like to see at Tate Britain in the future?

11 - Any other comments?
