



## **Materials, Movements, Encounters: Modernist Art Networks and St Ives**

### **Tate Research Centre: Creative Communities Research seminar**

#### **Porthmeor Studios: Borlase Smart Room**

**Saturday 21 June 2014**

£18 / £12 concessions (including lunch)

Advance booking essential. To book, please call 01736 796226 or email [stivesticketing@tate.org.uk](mailto:stivesticketing@tate.org.uk)

#### Schedule

- 09.30–10.00 Registration and coffee at Porthmeor Studios: Borlase Smart Room
- 10.00–10.10 Welcome by convenors Helena Bonett and Rachel Smith
- 10.10–10.55 Keynote lecture  
'Vibrant Matter': The International Networks of British Sculpture  
1915–1965  
Sarah Victoria Turner (The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British  
Art)
- 10.55–11.20 Connected Cultural Histories: Vancouver and St Ives 1901–1965  
Alex Lambley (Falmouth University)
- 11.20–11.45 Art and Life: Inconsistent Utopianism in Interwar Art  
Sophie Martin (University of Bristol)
- 11.45–13.00 Walk to Tate St Ives with tours of the exhibition *International  
Exchanges: Modern Art and St Ives 1915–1965* by curators Sara  
Matson, Rachel Smith and Chris Stephens
- 13.00–14.00 Lunch at Porthmeor Studios with student poster session and  
screening of livefeed film 'Split Infinities' by David A. Paton  
(University of Exeter)
- 14.00–14.45 Keynote lecture  
New Realities: Painting in Paris, 1946–1956  
Natalie Adamson (University of St Andrews)
- 14.45–15.10 'More Putney than St Ives': From Colony to Conurbation  
Catherine Spencer (University of St Andrews)

15.10–15.35 Mapping Modernist Art Writing Networks: Problems and Possibilities  
Sam Rose (University of Cambridge)

15.35–15.50 Tea

15.50–16.50 Panel discussion chaired by Michael White (University of York)

16.50–17.00 Summing up and end

### Keynote lecture abstracts

#### **'Vibrant Matter': The International Networks of British Sculpture 1915–1965** **Sarah Victoria Turner** (The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art)

This paper examines the prominent role that sculpture played in shaping and structuring the international networks of modern art in Britain in the first half of the twentieth century. Taking Jane Bennett's proposition that we need to pay attention to the 'vital materiality' that runs through and across bodies and things, this paper will think about the 'vibrant matter' of sculpture and sculptural production in these years. The attention that sculptors such as Naum Gabo, Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore paid to the materials they used to make sculpture and to issues of materiality is well documented and I will use specific sculptures to think about the relationships between objects, agents and ideas within modernist art networks, both in and beyond St Ives. Writing about sculpture is also significant for my argument about the connective force of sculpture and its materials in the twentieth century and I will also examine how sculpture became 'vibrant matter' for a significant number of art writers and critics in this period.

Sculpture has often been described and conceptualised as a somewhat rooted practice, intimately connected to local landscapes and tied to specific places. Prompted by the questions posed in the exhibition *International Exchanges: Modern Art and St Ives 1915–1965* about the notion of artistic mobility, my paper will offer a different view of sculpture as a restless and relational practice. I will explore how the 'vibrant matter' of sculpture helped create and shape connections between people and objects, as well as across time and space, and was central to the formation of international networks of modern art in twentieth-century Britain.

#### **New Realities: Painting in Paris, 1946–1956** **Natalie Adamson** (University of St Andrews)

In *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004), the philosopher Jacques Rancière observes that, 'Those who exalt or denounce the "tradition of the new" actually forget that this tradition has as its strict complement the "newness of the tradition"'. Rancière's general statement about the vexed relationship of the modern to tradition is given historical grounding in exhibitions such as *International Exchanges: Modern*

*Art and St Ives 1915–1965*. In constructing a modern tradition, the significance of community is evident, as a concrete achievement and as an ideal; for undergirding the networks and collectives of artists, critics and collectors is an immanent and contingent concept of community. Both the real and ideal constructions of community were exceptionally pressured during the immediate postwar years in Paris. Painters had to negotiate the challenge of producing something new and modern, even avant-garde, in an uncharted historical situation, while reckoning with how such an art might also belong to a newly recognisable modernist tradition.

To examine this complex situation between 1946 and 1956, this talk will pay particular attention to group exhibitions – such as the *Salon des réalités nouvelles*, founded in 1946 – that structured artists' relationships to both the past and the future of painting. Following their introductions to the public at the salons of the resurgent postwar painting scene in Paris, the divergent examples of Pierre Soulages and Nicolas de Staël show how this negotiation with tradition plays out in practice. In their engagement with painting *as it had come down to them*, they worked to make the past make sense to themselves in the present – to make concrete and real the ideal of an abstract community.

#### Speaker abstracts

#### **Connected Cultural Histories: Vancouver and St Ives 1901–1965**

**Alex Lambley** (Falmouth University)

*'Canadian artists weren't too sure who they were, and so were willing to learn from others. Staying in England for a while and then going back to Canada and seeing the differences, helped them to define what Canadian culture and art was.'*

– Donna Balma (first wife of Canadian potter John Reeve)

This paper explores the connected cultural histories of Vancouver and St Ives from 1901 to 1965. The Canadian artist Emily Carr first arrived in St Ives in 1901 and her interaction with the early St Ives School helped to establish Vancouver's cultural foundations upon her return to Canada. She was followed by the modernist Vancouver painters of the 1940s and 1950s – Alistair Bell, Molly and Bruno Bobak, Jack Shadbolt and Gordon Smith – whose works shared an aesthetic with those working in Britain. The story culminates with the arrival and subsequent departure of Bernard Leach's four apprentices from the Vancouver School of Art: John Reeve (who apprenticed at the Leach Pottery, St Ives, in 1958–61), Glenn Lewis (1961–63), Mick Henry (1963–65) and Ian Steele (1963–65). Consideration will be given as to why the connection ends in 1965, looking at, for example, the establishment of the Canada Council for the Arts in 1957 and its aim to establish 'a post-British Empire identity for Canada', as well as the transformation of Vancouver from 'a small Edwardian backwater into the beginning of a cosmopolitan metropolis'.

## **Art and Life: Inconsistent Utopianism in Interwar Art**

**Sophie Martin** (University of Bristol)

Taking as a starting point the international network of artists published in the journal *Circle: An International Survey of Constructivist Art* (1937), this paper will investigate the manner in which modernist rhetoric supported the formation of communal networks, yet simultaneously retained an essential belief in the independent and exclusive creativity of 'the artist'.

In the case of *Circle*, the utopian aspirations of the artists involved were underpinned by socialist ideology, evident in their preoccupation with reconnecting art to life. This egalitarian project, however, was complicated, perhaps thwarted, by a continued insistence on the individuality of artists and art. This paper will conclude by considering to what extent this affected the reception of modernist work in the wider context of interwar characterisations of viewership and the 'general public'.

## **'More Putney than St Ives': From Colony to Conurbation**

**Catherine Spencer** (University of St Andrews)

In 1987 the Arts Council attempted to include a work by Prunella Clough in an exhibition of St Ives painting, prompting the artist to comment warily that if her work related to a specific location at all, then it was 'more Putney than St Ives'. Clough did spend time in St Ives, counting Patrick Heron as an acquaintance, and he also produced a particularly nuanced catalogue essay on Clough's painting in 1989. Far from seeking to shoehorn Clough's work into the framework of a St Ives 'colony', however, this paper asks instead how an understanding of the links between Clough's practice and that of St Ives-based artists such as Heron and Peter Lanyon, including their shared engagement with American abstract expressionism, might help reconceptualise modernist networks and their legacies.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Clough's oeuvre underwent a huge shift in focus from studies of fishermen and industrial workers to abstracted evocations of an increasingly post-industrial environment – or 'urbescape' as Clough appositely termed it. Rather than a series of discrete zones, the terrain of Clough's painting became that of the endlessly exponential metropolitan conurbation, characterised by connections but also by blank spaces, blight and pollution. This paper argues that Clough's intense exploration of the conurbation complicates the binaries of centre and periphery, city and colony: it simultaneously engages a politics of loss, displacement and postmodern fragmentation that can be detected operating dialogically between a range of works encompassing those produced in St Ives.

## **Mapping Modernist Art Writing Networks: Problems and Possibilities**

**Sam Rose** (University of Cambridge)

Beyond geographical or physical networks, art writing of various sorts has long been recognised as crucial to the dissemination and nurturing of modernist artistic thought. But despite increased interest in twentieth-century British periodical culture, and in the activity of individual 'art writers', the picture of the

scene taken as a whole is still unclear. The *Burlington Magazine's* 'Art Press in the Twentieth Century' conference and Tate's 'Art Writers in Britain' project have been typical in their focus on individual journals or writers. The idiographic – case-based – approach common to art history has seemed so far also to determine work on art writing.

This paper attempts a first step in the direction of a broader analysis. Taking a more distant view, the focus will be on a consolidated and unified sense of the situation: what were the full range of places that people could write and read about art, and what evidence can be put forward for the actual readerships and forms of cultural capital associated with each? Based on the experience of a previous (unsuccessful) attempt to provide such a general picture of the scene, it also asks to what extent such a goal might actually be achieved, and how both recent research on art writing and publishing and recent advances in digital humanities may help.

### Livefeed film

#### **Split Infinities**

**David A. Paton** (University of Exeter)

*Split Infinities* is an hour-long live film, broadcast from Trenoweth Dimension Granite Quarry, near Penryn in Cornwall. During the lunchtime showing, quarryman and artist-researcher David A. Paton will be hand drilling and splitting a block of granite using pre-mechanisation tools. The quarrymen who used to split the granite in the quarry were called 'banksmen'. Granite blocks are split according to a grain – a grain whose structure works differently depending on which axis is being split. Splitting granite is thus a dialogue between the banksman's honed skill sets and the granite's crystalline matrix established during its molten formation.

*Split Infinities* is part of David's ongoing investigation into the sentient properties of matter. This new work uses commercially available technologies to explore more-than-human material networks, and examines the geological interface between the human and the digital.

### Biographies

**Natalie Adamson** is a Senior Lecturer in Art History at the University of St Andrews and Deputy Editor of the journal *Art History*. Her research is focused upon art, politics and cultural history in twentieth-century France. Recent publications include: *Painting, Politics, and the Struggle for the École de Paris, 1944–1964* (Ashgate, 2009); *Academics, Pompiers, Official Artists and the Arrière-garde: Defining Modern and Traditional in France, 1900–1960*, co-edited with Toby Norris (CSP, 2009); 'Vestiges of the Future: Temporality in the Early Work of Pierre Soulages', *Art History* 35/1 (February 2012); and 'Édouard Pignon and Herbert Read', in *Édouard Pignon: Catalanes à Collioure, étés 1945–1946* (Somogy, 2013).

**Helena Bonett** is a curator, writer and lecturer undertaking an AHRC-funded collaborative doctorate at the Royal College of Art and Tate on the legacy of the sculptor Barbara Hepworth. Helena is an Associate of Tate St Ives' Artists Programme and in 2013 convened a Tate Research seminar focusing on the preserved studios at the Hepworth Museum. Prior to her current studies, Helena was Research Curator at the Royal Academy of Arts, lectured at University of Kent and has published on British art and modernism. She is co-convenor of the seminar, *Materials, Movements, Encounters: Modernist Art Networks and St Ives*.

**Alex Lambley** is a doctoral candidate at Falmouth University. The working title of her thesis is *Mingei and its Transnational Reception: The Translation and Appropriation of Mingei Theory and Practice by Bernard Leach's four Vancouver Apprentices (1958–1979)*. She is also an Associate Lecturer in Craft Histories and Theories at Falmouth University and Research Fellow at the Leach Pottery.

**Sophie Martin** is a PhD candidate in Art History at the University of Bristol working on British art 1880–1945, specifically on developments in art theory and critical writing. She has given papers on modern British art at a number of conferences, most recently on Edwardian art criticism and on the presentation of sculpture in the journal *Circle*. She is a co-founder of the *Art Writing Writing Art* research cluster at the University of Bristol, which explores the intersections between art, writing and art history.

**Sara Matson** has been a curator at Tate St Ives since 2003. During this period she has curated and/or delivered numerous exhibitions, displays and accompanying publications, managed all national and international tours and run the initial residency programme at Porthmeor Studios in 2003–9. She is co-curator of *International Exchanges: Modern Art and St Ives 1915–1965* at Tate St Ives (2014).

**David A. Paton** is a visual artist with a specialism in stone working. Alongside public and private commissions sited nationally, he has been awarded a number of ACE grants for artist-led projects. David's practice-based doctoral project, at the University of Exeter's Cornwall Campus, is titled *The Quarry as Sculpture: The Place of Making*. His research is focused on Trenoweth Dimension Granite Quarry, near Penryn in Cornwall, where he is investigating human/matter relations through a range of creative, ethnographic and geographical methods. David has developed a long-term relationship with the quarry through the everyday practices of labour and skill development, from which deeper material and human interactions inform his sculpture and modes of making.

**Sam Rose** completed his PhD at the Courtauld Institute of Art in March 2014, and is now a Research Fellow at Peterhouse, Cambridge. He is currently working on a book on formalism, aestheticism, and art writing in twentieth-century England. Related articles have appeared or are forthcoming in *Art History*, the *Burlington Magazine*, and the *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*.

**Rachel Smith** is undertaking an AHRC-funded collaborative doctorate with Tate Britain and the University of York. The title of her thesis is *Connecting St Ives c.1948–60: Common Ground and International Exchange*. She completed a BA at Magdalene College, Cambridge and an MA at the Courtauld Institute of Art. She is co-curator of *International Exchanges: Modern Art and St Ives 1915–1965* at Tate St Ives (2014) and co-convenor of the seminar, *Materials, Movements, Encounters: Modernist Art Networks and St Ives*.

**Catherine Spencer** recently completed her PhD, entitled *Fieldwork: Performing Social Science in North America 1961–1975*, at the University of York. She is a Lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Art at the University of St Andrews. Her research interests include performance and conceptualism, the relationships between art and sociology, and abstraction. She previously studied for an MA in Modernism in Britain with Professor Lisa Tickner at the Courtauld Institute of Art, and retains a strong interest in British art since 1945.

**Chris Stephens** is Head of Displays and Curator of Modern British Art at Tate Britain. He has published on and made exhibitions of a range of mid-twentieth-century British art. Exhibitions have included *Barbara Hepworth Centenary* at Tate St Ives (2003), *Henry Moore* at Tate Britain (2010), *Picasso and Modern British Art* at Tate Britain (2012), and *Kenneth Clark – Looking for Civilisation* at Tate Britain (2014). He is co-curator of *International Exchanges: Modern Art and St Ives 1915–1965* at Tate St Ives (2014).

**Sarah Victoria Turner** is Assistant Director for Research at the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art. Previously, she was a lecturer in the History of Art Department at the University of York. She has a wide range of interests revolving around art in Britain from 1800 to 1950, specialising in cultural relationships between Britain and India and the display and reception of Indian art in Britain, the focus of a forthcoming book, provisionally entitled *Indian Impressions: Encounters with South Asia in British Art, c.1900–1940*. She is co-principal investigator on the AHRC-funded network *Internationalism and Cultural Exchange c.1880–1920*, along with several other networks.

**Michael White** is a Reader in History of Art at University of York working chiefly on the interwar avant-gardes with a special interest in De Stijl and modernism in the Netherlands. He was consultant curator of the 2010 Tate Modern exhibition *Van Doesburg and the International Avant-Garde: Constructing a New World*, advised the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag on the display of its permanent Mondrian and De Stijl collections, and is working with Tate Liverpool on an upcoming Mondrian exhibition. Michael is the author of *Generation Dada: The Berlin Avant-Garde and the First World War* (Yale University Press, 2013) and the co-editor of *Virgin Microbe: Essays on Dada* (Northwestern University Press, 2013).

#### Poster contributors

**Thomas Briars** (University of Sussex)

**Percy Darukhanawala** (Courtauld Institute of Art)

**James Finch** (Tate / University of Kent)

**Enrico Tassi** (Tate St Ives)

Supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and The Barns-Graham Charitable Trust

