

## PhD studentship, University of York and Tate

University of York and Tate, Oct 01, 2019

Application deadline: May 31, 2019

Susannah Worth

William Blake's Conversations: Friendships, Networks, Followers

Principal supervisor: Prof Jon Mee (York)

Second supervisor: Amy Concannon (Assistant Curator, 1790–1850, British Art, Tate)

The visionary poet, artist and printmaker William Blake (1757–1827) is the exemplary imaginative artist. For successive waves of creative and imaginative people, from the artistic fraternity known as 'The Ancients' that gathered around him at the end of his life, through to very many creative artists working in different media, he has served as a model of the self-sustaining, free-wheeling, authentic creator. But in the present age of austerity, questions of unpaid labour, precarity and justice have been brought to the fore, and existing mythologies of creative independence are being questioned in fresh ways. The thesis would consider the succession of different networks Blake was part of during his life, and the shifting identities that he assumed in those contexts, as apprentice, art student, employee and protégé, as 'The Interpreter' for the Ancients, and as a prophetic figure for modern commentators. This project will offer the chance to scrutinise Blake's work and imagination, by considering the friendships, dependencies, influences and associations which sustained him. It will involve re-examining an icon of Romantic creative isolation in terms resonant with present day creative cultures – in terms, that is, of co-production, collaboration and networks.

The project has been timed to coincide with the opening of the major Blake exhibition at Tate Britain in September 2019, and the re-dedication of a gallery space to the display of his work from Summer 2020.

The key framing questions of this research might include:

What were the different networks that Blake operated within?

What roles did these networks play in forming Blake's art in a practical sense?

What status did Blake hold within these networks, and how did that influence his creative practices? How has Blake's posthumous reputation been shaped by these associations?

What does considering the artist and his artworks within these networks tell us about artistic labour at our own historical juncture?

The shape of the thesis is open to the successful candidate to determine, but s/he would need to be able to work across the literary and visual arts where most of the scholarship on Blake sits. The thesis should also have a strong historical and materialist emphasis, considering the social

history of association and art production as a social practice. The thesis would require close textual analysis, attention to the materiality of artworks, and a readiness to engage with collective biography and social history. Regarding these last topics, we would expect the student to develop a clear methodology, probably involving some form of network analysis based on mass data.

The successful candidate will be expected to participate in the curatorial and scholarly cultures of both Tate and the University of York, especially the Centre for Eighteenth Century Studies. Both have strong track records of symposia and public events dedicated to Blake and his world. The student would be invited to develop the appropriate means of establishing a network around the theme of Blake and his associations, perhaps partially through social media, and certainly in the form of a symposium to be held in year 3 at York.

For entry criteria, how to apply and more information about the studentship and the AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership scheme, please visit <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/studentships2/blake-conversations>

Reference:

STIP: PhD studentship, University of York and Tate. In: ArtHist.net, Apr 12, 2019 (accessed Apr 18, 2024), <<https://arthist.net/archive/20627>>.