Grassroots: Artmaking and Political Struggle (29 Apr–3 Jun 21)

online / Cambridge, UK, Apr 29–Jun 3, 2021
Deadline: Nov 20, 2020

Catherine Spencer, University of St Andrews

In 1987 Margaret Thatcher infamously declared 'there's no such thing as society.' Yet in the decades before and years after, artists and activists vigorously contested such a premise, forging practices that developed forms of social relation as both alternatives to state policy, and to challenge its failures, exclusions and repressions, particularly in relation to constructs of sexuality, race, gender, nationality and class. From artist-led initiatives like Li Yuan-chia's LYC Museum & Art Gallery, Artists for Democracy, Black Audio Film Collective, Hackney Flashers and the Blk Art Group, to the women's peace camp at Greenham Common, to organisations like Format and Autograph, this period witnessed the vital transformation of ways of seeing and visual production through links with grassroots engagement, as well as critical contestations.

The long 1970s and 1980s have been the subject of increasing art-historical attention and reassessment, especially in relation to feminist, decolonial, antiracist and LGBTQ creative practices and critical approaches. Led in particular by histories of Black British art, scholars have developed close contextual readings of exhibitions and art objects from this period in order to attend to form, medium and affect, while consistently articulating how these interact with socio-cultural processes. This research event series aims to build on this to address how intersections between art making and political struggle in Britain from the long 1970s and 1980s have reconstructed epistemologies and aesthetics, and vice-versa, in ways that continue to resonate with the current crisis.

In exploring the relationships between artmaking and political struggle in post-war Britain, we invite papers that might speak to the following themes, as well as welcoming submissions on other topics:

• Organisations/infrastructures
• Representations/abstractions
• Work/activism
• Health/therapeutic practices
• Dis/identification

The series will comprise three interlinked events in April (Thurs 29), May (Thurs 13) and June (Thurs 3) 2021, currently planned to be online (if it becomes possible to hold one of these in-person, it will take place in Cambridge). Please send abstracts of up to 300 words for papers of 30 minutes to Amy Tobin (Kettle's Yard/University of Cambridge) and Catherine Spencer (University

of St Andrews) at grassroots.artmaking@gmail.com by Friday 20 November 2020.

Reference:

CFP: Grassroots: Artmaking and Political Struggle (29 Apr-3 Jun 21). In: ArtHist.net, Oct 21, 2020 (accessed Nov 24, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/23768>.