

## The Working-Class Avant-Garde, Edited Volume

Deadline: Apr 29, 2022

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The idea of a working-class avant-garde may seem a contradiction to some. The avant-garde, so often an elite realm of the arts, has proved to favour those with the requisite social, cultural and economic capitals to succeed in this competitive arena. Indeed, studies such as John Carey's divisive text, *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (1992), have understood the high intellectualism of the twentieth-century avant-garde to have developed as an exclusionary response to the improved education of the mass populace: a means to retain the divide between the masses and the elite. Its obscurity has furthermore been thought inconsistent with working-class cultures and collective ideals. This OLH Special Collection, 'The Working-Class Avant-Garde', confronts this perceived divide by examining the avant-garde artists and writers who were born into the conditions of the working-class.

In 2020/21 it published its first collection of papers on figures representing a diverse scope of practices including D.H. Lawrence, John Rodker, and Robert Colquhoun, to Mark E. Smith, Archie Hill and Garth Evans. All the wide-ranging contributions recognised the fluidity of the term 'working class', as well as its changing conditions and relationship to artistic practices throughout the twentieth century.

We are inviting the second round of submissions to this Special Collection for papers examining contributions to the twentieth-century British avant-garde by artists and writers of working-class heritage, as relative to their own generation. Equally, as the definition of 'avant-garde' may well be contested, we propose an inclusive and flexible understanding of the term.

We are especially interested in studies examining female artists and writers, as well as figures from ethnic minorities. Alongside this, studies of lesser-known figures of the avant-garde are encouraged in addition to those examining established figures (such as Mark Gertler, David Bomberg and YBA artists). Papers examining the conditions of working-class artists during the twentieth century are also welcomed.

We aim to address questions including whether their background influenced their practice, or whether it was rejected in favour of a depoliticised aesthetic? Who were the patrons, institutions, art schools and collectives who supported these figures? How did the cultures and ideas of the working classes influence the development of British art throughout the twentieth century? In what ways do artists and writers conceive of themselves and their work globally in terms of international class solidarity? And, in what ways are 'working-class interests' conceived across borders, cultural spheres, and international boundaries?

Final research articles should be approximately 8,000 words in length (including references).

The deadline to submit proposals (max. 250 words) is Friday 29th April, 2022. Following this, the final deadline for the full article will be 12th February 2023. Please note that articles will be peer reviewed, edited and published as they are received, so early submission is encouraged. The collection editors welcome informal enquiries regarding potential proposals.

Proposals and enquiries should be sent to Alex Bickley Trott at: [atrott@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:atrott@brookes.ac.uk)

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Reference:

CFP: The Working-Class Avant-Garde, Edited Volume. In: ArtHist.net, Feb 5, 2022 (accessed Jul 16, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/35843>>.