

## Brancusi, Britain and the Idea of Modern Sculpture (Hertfordshire, 27 Jun 24)

Henry Moore Studios & Gardens, Hertfordshire, Jun 27, 2024

Deadline: Mar 1, 2024

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For this one-day conference we invite new contributions on Constantin Brâncuși's reception in Britain, its wider resonance in modern and contemporary art and the impact it has made on changing definitions of modern sculpture in Britain.

The conference marks the conclusion of the Henry Moore Foundation's research season Brâncuși and Britain, organised to coincide with the major exhibition of Brâncuși's work at Centre Pompidou, Paris in spring 2024.

To date, Brâncuși's contribution to ideas of modern sculpture in Britain has been understood chiefly through the tradition of direct carving, formal simplicity, and 'truth to materials', confining much of the discourse on his work to a narrow set of practices and philosophical concerns centred on sculpture's relationship to the natural world. This conference seeks to complicate and expand such narratives with reference to a broader range of practices, concepts and interpretations of how Brâncuși's work signifies. In doing so, we want to explore how the considered application of critical theory, historiography and object-based study to seemingly well-established figures, histories and practices can support contemporary efforts to rearticulate the position of modern British sculpture in a global context – mapping its depth as well as its breadth, and salvaging a renewed sense of its complexity, relevance and radical intent.

The study of Brâncuși's work since his death in 1957 has benefited from continuous reassessment by artists, theorists and academics in the UK and internationally. Art historians including Rosalind Krauss, Anna Chave and Alex Potts have employed a range of theoretical tools to reframe the sculptor's work, teasing out its dynamics of difference and repetition, transience and permanence, abstraction and embodiment. Studies into Brancusi's use of photography, film and the relational environment of the studio have articulated a more complex relationship between subject and object at the heart of his practice, and positioned his work at the intersection of symbolist, surrealist and Dadaist thought. Over the same period, artists working in Britain – from the New Generation sculptors to Rasheed Araeen and Simon Starling – have cited Brâncuși to engage not only with questions of sculptural form, language and philosophy, but with the legacies of modernism, modernity and globalisation.

### Topics and themes of discussion

Taking these shifting interpretations of Brâncuși and his work as its starting point, this conference aims to provoke broader questions about the relationships between modern British sculpture and

its points of reference in the international avant-garde. How has the modernist canon in Britain been structured by these relationships? How might a shift in emphasis – in the connections, ideas and figures we treat as structural – change our perceptions of sculptural theory and practice? What cultural and social histories can be made available to us through a revision of paradigmatic ideas about modern sculpture and international artists like Brâncuși?

With this in mind, we invite proposals for 20-minute papers related but not limited to the following themes:

- Moments of contact, from early exhibitions and publications of international modern sculpture in Britain to collaborative projects such as Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art and the migration of Central and Eastern European artists to Britain
- Exchanges in the fields of British and Romanian art and culture in particular
- The role of British critics and art historians (e.g. Clive Bell, Herbert Read, William Tucker) in constructing narratives of twentieth-century sculpture
- Brâncuși's position in thought on such topics as vitalism, constructionism, surrealism and abstraction in Britain
- How philosophies of materials and the natural world have shaped perceptions of modern sculpture in Britain
- Innovative uses of film, photography and performance in conjunction with sculptural practices in Britain
- Interpretations of Brâncuși's work and legacy by later British artists

Submit a proposal

To submit a proposal, please send a 250-word abstract and 100-word bio to [research@henry-moore.org](mailto:research@henry-moore.org) by 1 March 2024.

Successful applicants will be notified by 25 March. Speakers will receive an honorarium of £100, and travel and accommodation costs within the UK will be reimbursed.

Reference:

CFP: Brancusi, Britain and the Idea of Modern Sculpture (Hertfordshire, 27 Jun 24). In: ArtHist.net, Dec 8, 2023 (accessed Jul 16, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/40792>>.