

Art, Anxiety, and Protest in the Edwardian Belle Époque (New Haven, 2 Mar 13)

Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut, Mar 02, 2013

Deadline: Jan 7, 2013

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Graduate Student Symposium

The belle époque, the long summer garden party of the Edwardian afternoon, when there was a lightness in the air, when "the fruit was ripe and we were eating it"; all that was a class-based, wishful misremembering across the chasm of 1914-18.

-Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-14*

In retrospect it may seem a belle époque, but no époque is altogether belle to those who are living through it, and the Edwardian period shares our century's right to appropriate Auden's phrase, "The Age of Anxiety."

-Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*

This one-day graduate student symposium considers the visual arts in Britain and its empire, America, and Continental Europe between 1901 and 1910 - the era marked out by the reign of the British monarch Edward VII - in relationship to the intersecting social, economic, sexual, political, and psychological tensions and anxieties of the period.

The opening decade of the twentieth century is still often perceived as a golden age of luxury, glamour, and relative social stability, before the cataclysm of World War I. The historian George Dangerfield, investigating the "strange death of liberal England," conversely argued in 1935 that it was also a period of crisis that saw, inter alia, an upsurge in militant trade unionism, the agitation for women's suffrage, the origins of fascism, impending constitutional crisis, and imperial unrest. Similar tensions were felt across Europe and the Americas during this transitional period.

This symposium will consider the ways in which the first decade of the twentieth century came to be interpreted both as a golden age and an age of anxiety and protest, and how the visual and material culture of the time registered ambivalent feelings about the state of society in Britain and beyond.

The symposium coincides with the opening of *Edwardian Opulence: British Art at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century*, the first major international exhibition in more than a generation devoted to surveying the full depth and breadth of the visual arts in Britain during the first decade of the twentieth century. The exhibition itself aims to overturn such diametrically opposed notions of the Edwardian period as either a golden age or a period of upheaval, showing instead that these are

two points on either end of a continuum along which many new and viable perspectives of art and culture of the period may be plotted. While the exhibition focuses on the artistic production, consumption, and display of the cultural elite, this symposium will also consider the material and visual culture of protest and opposition.

Papers are invited on topics relating to Britain and its empire, the United States, and Continental Europe (especially France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, and Scandinavia).

Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- nostalgia for the past and avant-garde radical change in the arts
- notions of luxury and decadence in Britain and America since the 1880s
- the anxiety of empire (e.g., the Boer Wars; the Congo reform movement)
- the femme fatale, the "new woman," feminism, and suffragism
- racial politics, eugenics, and the Nietzschean idea of the superman
- art at the dawn of psychoanalysis
- the interplay between art, science, and the occult (e.g., Theosophy)
- popular culture; working-class culture
- photography and early cinema
- British socialism and the arts (e.g., Fabianism and culture)
- Early Modernism and the Arts and Crafts movement

We invite proposals for 25-minute papers on this theme from graduate students working in any discipline. Special consideration will be given to papers examining the topic in relation to British art and culture. Cross-disciplinary and comparative studies are particularly welcome. Please e-mail abstracts of no more than 300 words by January 7, 2013.

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Travel funds for speakers are available upon application.

Reference:

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