

2 PhD Positions, University of Leicester

University of Leicester, Sep 22, 2025

Application deadline: Jan 13, 2025

Rosemary Shirley, Manchester Metropolitan University

We are pleased to announce two fully funded, collaborative doctoral award PhD opportunities in the School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester. They are open to UK and international students and start in Sept 2025.

[1] Centring the Rural: Organisational Identities, Public Engagement and Curatorial Practice at Wysing Arts Centre, 1989 to today

[2] Collecting Contemporary Art for the Nation: Building the Arts Council Collection, 1950-1989

[1] Centring the Rural: Organisational Identities, Public Engagement and Curatorial Practice at Wysing Arts Centre, 1989 to today

Wysing Arts Centre, www.wysingartscentre.org

Founded in rural Cambridgeshire in 1989, Wysing Art Centre provides alternative environments and structures for artistic research, experimentation, discovery and production. Examining Wysing's organisational identities and curatorial practice as a central case study, this PhD research project investigates the changing relationship between contemporary art and rural places over the last 35 years.

There is little scholarship investigating the relationship between contemporary art and rural places. Art history traditionally centres on the association between contemporary art and the city and when the rural is considered, it is often through the lens of the landscape genre. This project works to enhance understanding

of the complex intersections between rural places, contemporary art organisations, artists and publics.

Central Research Question: What can Wysing Art Centre's organisational identity, approaches to working with diverse publics and artists, and evolving curatorial practices, tell us about the changing relationship between contemporary art and rural places over the last 35 years?

Candidates will have the option to shape the direction of the research in discussion with the supervisors, examples include:

- How has Wysing understood and described itself in relation to its rural location over 35 year history and how has this influenced the organisation's practices of curating/producing contemporary art?
- How has Wysing engaged with diverse artists and publics over time?
- How has Wysing engaged with its rural location in relation to environmental sustainability in the past and how might this relationship inform long term strategies on environmental impact and climate change?
- How can Wysing's histories and practices inform and contribute to wider critical understandings and

networks of rurally based contemporary art organisations?

Process

Key activities include exploration of Wysing's archive and conducting interviews with a range of stakeholders. Candidates have the option to develop interventions into Wysing's events programme to generate collaborative research/dissemination activities and to contribute to the development of a network

of rural arts organisations.

The candidate will be supported to draw on an interdisciplinary range of literature and methods such as art

history, curatorial studies, cultural geography, and organisational studies to construct a framework for understanding the rural and Wysing's place within it as a complex arena of inter-related locations, communities, imaginaries and histories.

Wysing is in the process of re-evaluating its organisational identity in relation to its rural location and understanding how it can shape long term strategies on environmental impact and climate change, the knowledge generated by the project will feed directly into this process. It is also addressing how it can better support artists / publics with a range of access needs, identities and experiences, for whom its rural location may be a barrier.

Places

This project takes full advantage of the collaborative working opportunities offered by an M4C Collaborative Doctoral Award. The candidate will be based within the world leading research community at the School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, where they will be supervised by Dr Rosemary Shirley who has written widely on the relationships between art and rural places. They will be also be supported by second supervisor Prof Becky Shaw, from the College of Art and Design at Birmingham City University, whose expertise as an artist researcher working within different public institutions will be invaluable to the project. The candidate will be able to access and contribute to the vibrant research activities in both these institutions.

The project will also draw on Wysing's well established model for artists in residence, to support the candidate in becoming a "researcher in residence" at Wysing for the duration of the PhD.

The format of this residency can be flexible to suit the candidate's needs. It is anticipated that they would visit Wysing on average once a month, with free accommodation being offered to support this. Whilst onsite, the researcher will be invited to attend Wysing team meetings and regular meetings with Director, Rosie Cooper and Curator, Amy Jones. Periods of time spent at Wysing may vary during the project according to the activities taking place for example more time might be needed at the start of the project and during the archival research phase and less time during the writing up phase.

Person

The candidate may have a background in art history/theory, museum/gallery studies, curating, public practice, arts management, fine art or cultural studies. Experience in archival research and interviewing would be desirable, however a full range of doctoral skills training is available. The project is conceived as a

predominantly theoretical (as opposed to practice based) with the opportunity to bring in some practice-based aspects such as developing research related interventions into Wysing's programme.

Contact: Dr Rosemary Shirley, Rosemary.Shirley@Leicester.ac.uk

Further details about the project:

https://www.midlands4cities.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/SHIRLEY_WYSING-M4C-2024_2025-CDA.pdf

Further details about the M4C award: <https://www.midlands4cities.ac.uk/our-offer/>

For information about how to apply, see: <https://www.midlands4cities.ac.uk/apply/>

[2] Collecting Contemporary Art for the Nation: Building the Arts Council Collection, 1950-1989

Arts Council Collection, <https://artscouncilcollection.org.uk/>

How do you collect art that is ahead of its time? Over 1950-1989, the Arts Council Collection committee acquired artworks by artists who became important to other national collecting institutions often only much later. This PhD research project explores the committee's support for avant-garde movements and for equity of representation.

Established in 1946, the Arts Council Collection is a national collection consisting of over 8000 modern and

contemporary artworks by 2300 artists. This project examines the growth of the Arts Council Collection through new archival research into four decades of the collection's acquisition history between 1950 and 1989. It aims to explore acquisition strategies prioritising avant-garde movements (including British Constructivism, the British Black Arts Movement and feminist art practice), regional art collectives and equity of representation of diverse ethnicities and gender.

Building on recent research exploring relationships between art practices, art movements and acquisition histories such as the Black Artists and Modernism project (2015-2018), this project examines for the first time

four decades of the acquisition history of a single national collecting institution, the Arts Council Collection

(ACC). Under-researched as a collection, the ACC is a timely subject not only for reasons to do with longstanding social and political questions around national acquisition policy formation, but also because the ACC is moving both its art collection and archive to one site in Coventry over 2024-26, making archival and collection-based research possible in one place for the first time. Applicants will need to have a knowledge of, or substantial interest in, 20th-century and/or contemporary art history and/or a familiarity with artist archives or art museum collections.

Process:

The main research question this project raises is: how were national art collecting interests defined in the Arts

Council Collection between 1950 and 1989, particularly in relation to avant-garde movements and equity of

representation of diverse ethnicities and gender? Additional questions include: What can the ACC archive tell us about the behaviours and attitudes of the acquisition committee during this period? What does the archival

material reveal about ACC's acquisition history and how it responded to regional artist-led activities and organisations?

To answer these questions, the successful applicant will use archival historical methods to explore how lesser-

known stories of British artistic practice are embedded in the ACC. More specifically, the approach to the project involves documenting the activities of the evolving Arts Council Collection acquisitions committee, charting the works that were collected, and mapping these acquisitions against social, political, cultural and art historical trends over four decades (1950-1989) to explore the committee's early support for avant-garde movements and for equity of representation. Applicants should have or be willing to acquire archival research skills.

Place:

The successful applicant will gain extensive academic and professional curatorial skills from the co-designed

project and supervisory team consisting of Stacy Boldrick and Isobel Whitelegg in Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, globally renowned for its innovative, interdisciplinary research in art organisations and

the broader museum sector, with Naomi Vogt in History of Art at the University of Warwick as the third academic supervisor and Alona Pardo, the practice-based supervisor, at ACC.

Based at ACC for between 3 and 18 months to undertake physical archival research for the PhD project, with the timeframe to be decided in the first year of the project (2025/6), the researcher will contribute to Team research project review meetings, undertaking the collation of research data and compiling information for project report.

They will work within the area of specialism of 20th-century British art and/or collections histories to develop and create a comprehensive timeline of acquisitions and committee members from 1950 to 1989.

Main Duties and responsibilities will include: collecting research data (this may be through a variety of research methods, such as archival work, literature reviews, and research interviews); analysing research data ;

presenting research outputs (in writing and orally), ensuring full and accurate references are included; engaging in review and feedback processes; overcoming problems that may affect the achievement of research objectives and deadlines; planning and managing their own research and administrative activities in an efficient and timely fashion; promoting equality and value diversity, acting as a role model and fostering an inclusive working culture.

Person:

The successful candidate will have knowledge about and some experience of conducting primary archival research (essential), of working with 20th-century and contemporary artistic archives (desirable), an understanding of the wider historical, political and cultural context of 20th-century British art and be committed to developing new inclusive and diverse perspectives on the collection.

Contact: Dr Stacy Boldrick, slb89@leicester.ac.uk

Further details about the project:

<https://www.midlands4cities.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/Collecting-Contemporary-Art-for-the-Nation-Building-the-Arts-Council-Collection-1950-1989.pdf>

Further details about the M4C award: <https://www.midlands4cities.ac.uk/our-offer/>

For information about how to apply, see: <https://www.midlands4cities.ac.uk/apply/>

Reference:

JOB: 2 PhD Positions, University of Leicester. In: ArtHist.net, Nov 7, 2024 (accessed Dec 16, 2025),

<<https://arthist.net/archive/43104>>.