

New Histories of Irish Art and Modernism, 1880–1950 (Belfast, 22–24 May 25)

Belfast, May 22–24, 2025

Deadline: Jan 20, 2025

Judith Stapleton

"New Histories of Irish Art and Modernism, 1880-1950: A conference in honor of S. B. Kennedy".

In 1991, the curator and art historian S. B. Kennedy published his seminal volume *Irish Art & Modernism, 1880-1950*. This was the first major text to survey the relationship between modern Irish artists and their European counterparts, tracing the impact of a collection of aesthetic preoccupations loosely termed "modernism" within Ireland. Kennedy's volume examined themes central to the study of Irish art: the relationship between the local and the transnational in Irish artistic movements; the mobility of aesthetic influences across geographies, institutions, and art networks; the existence, or otherwise, of an "Irish school"; and the tensions between modernity, the nation, and the past in formulations of Irish identity.

In the thirty years since the publication of Kennedy's text, the field of modernist studies has undergone rapid transformation. Historians of modernism have conclusively challenged the notion of a single, hegemonic modernist tradition while dismantling many of the implied hierarchies of the field. Most notably, investigations of modernism have been fruitfully expanded by the application of urgent methodological lenses, including the critical perspectives of postcolonial, queer, ecocritical, feminist, and diasporic studies. How have such viewpoints impacted the study of Irish modernism? What work is still to be done?

This conference welcomes proposals from doctoral students, early career scholars, and established figures in the field to present any paper related to modernism in the Irish visual arts from 1880 to 1950. Who were the audiences, protagonists, allies, and antagonists of modern art in Ireland? How did Irish art across the island—north and south, east and west—champion modernism in the arts, broadly construed, across the shifting political and economic milieus of 1880 to 1950? And what new narratives of Irish modern art might be written by considering decolonial, postcolonial, gendered, and intersectional perspectives?

Proposals may address, but are not limited to:

- Critical theories of modernism and modernity
- Irish modernism in its global, transnational, or decolonial contexts
- Gender, desire, and queer theory in Irish art
- Irish art and the technological/digital turn
- Ecology, ecocriticism, and the land in Irish art
- Contested histories of Irish modernism

Innovative proposals that challenge established narratives of Irish modernism are particularly welcome.

Honoring S. B. Kennedy's career as a curator at the Ulster Museum, this conference will be held in Belfast, with programming at Queen's University and the Ulster Museum.

Please submit proposals to Judith Stapleton at jstaplet@nd.edu. Proposals should include the author's name and affiliation, a 250-word abstract, and a short biography. Travel funding may be available upon request. Please submit a brief application for travel support indicating your need and a proposed budget alongside your paper proposal. All materials are due January 20, 2025.

Reference:

CFP: New Histories of Irish Art and Modernism, 1880-1950 (Belfast, 22-24 May 25). In: ArtHist.net, Dec 20, 2024 (accessed Apr 28, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/43607>>.