

PhD Position, University of Warwick and Imperial War Museum

University of Warwick, Oct 01, 2025

Application deadline: Jun 3, 2025

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Imperial War Museums (IWM), and the University of Warwick are pleased to announce the availability of a fully funded Collaborative doctoral studentship from October 2025 under the AHRC's Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships (CDP) scheme

This CDP PhD project will offer the opportunity to scrutinise a form of visual propaganda that is relatively under-researched: artistic lithographic print production, both commissioned and independently instigated, during the First World War.

This project will be jointly supervised at IWM by Claire Brenard, Art Curator First World War and Early 20th Century Conflict, Dr Bryn Hammond, Principal Curator of Collections, and at the University of Warwick by Dr Pierre Purseigle, Reader in Modern European History, and Dr Kamila Kociałkowska, Assistant Professor in Art History. The student will be expected to spend time at both the University of Warwick and IWM, as well as becoming part of the wider cohort of CDP funded students across the UK.

The studentship can be studied either full or part-time.

We encourage applications from a diverse range of people, from different backgrounds and career stages.

Students should have a master's degree in a relevant subject or be able to demonstrate relevant equivalent experience.

The studentship is open to both home and international applicants.

/ Project Overview

IWM holds a fascinating but under-researched collection of European fine and popular prints gathered by John Crichton-Stewart, the 4th Marquess of Bute, when he was a diplomat in Paris during the First World War and donated to the museum in the early 1950s. It contains around 3,600 predominantly French prints, representing all aspects of French patriotic print production of the period, most of them lithographs, as well as relief and intaglio prints, and some drawings. It is envisaged that the PhD project will focus on this collection, as well as the museum's collection of British lithographs of the period, mainly instigated by the government's War Propaganda Bureau / Department of Information. These include the 1917 series Britain's Efforts and Ideals by various artists and the work of soldier-artist Gerald Spencer Pryse.

The proposed investigation of these collections will fill in a curiously outstanding gap in the field.

Both scholars of France and art historians have paid relatively little attention to lithography. Moreover, in both Britain and France, the cultural history of the conflict has often underplayed the specificities of artistic production in wartime.

The CDP represents a genuine opportunity to make a significant contribution to the field by scrutinising the lithographs of the First World War in their own terms and helping to contextualise the Bute collection within the wider art collection at IWM. It would position the prints in their context of production (commission, design, printmaking) and explore their dissemination and reception at all relevant levels (domestic, local, national, transnational).

The project will allow the researcher to map the extent and nuances of nationalist and imperialist war propaganda present in artists' lithography in order to produce a transnational study of lithographs of the First World War. It will explore the lithograph as a form of artistic expression on the subject of the war and examine the artists' circumstances, contexts, preoccupations and motivations, showing how lithographic artists worked at the juncture of politics, commerce and art. The project will help to develop a pluralistic approach to wartime propaganda by looking at the production and function of artistic lithography during the war. Such necessarily collaborative visual products challenge the notion of propaganda as an inherently top-down form of communication. It will consider and rethink the complex varieties of patriotism and imperialism by examining the sophisticated visual language that artists employed to appeal to different audiences and agendas. Furthermore, it could also consider the materiality of the lithographic medium, exploring how the physical labour of printmaking and manual manipulation of stone, ink, and acid, enhance the communicative power of prints as a tool of wartime communication.

The student appointed will engage closely with IWM's First World War team and with the museum art curators as appropriate.

Research questions:

Key research questions to be addressed could include:

How do British and French artists compare in their approach, assuming there is any coherence in the approaches of artists by nationality?

What were the motivations in both nations for producing lithographs that express nationalistic sentiment, often supporting government war aims, even when these were seemingly independent creative endeavours?

To what extent, if any, is there any critique of government or establishment aims?

To what extent did this imagery articulate the nations' imperialist ambitions through its imagery, in, for example, depictions of people of different ethnicities?

What does this collection tell us of lithography's communicative capacity?

What is the cultural legacy of these images?

Stylistically, how do the lithographs relate to wider artistic practices of the First World War? To what extent do they engage with the evolving visual language of modernism?

The student will pursue four main research objectives:

1. To produce a transnational study of lithographs of the First World

The project would situate wartime lithographs within their European context. The IWM's collection

can indeed form the basis for an innovative and fruitful transnational investigation into the production of lithographs aimed at audiences across the national and linguistic boundaries of the Entente. However, the study of wartime lithography as a specific art form and artistic practice might also illuminate the endurance and transformation of broader, transcontinental, cultural and material exchanges that the war hindered, such as the trade of lithographic stones. Quarried either in France or Germany (the latter of superior quality), their grain structure – and geological origin – was discernible in the final print. Irrespective of its pictorial content, a lithograph could therefore never be a politically neutral image.

2. To develop a pluralist approach to wartime propaganda

Recent studies of propaganda have re-orientated the term, away from an intrinsically “malevolent forms of persuasion” towards “a central means of organising and shaping thought and perception” (Auerbach, 2014). This is especially relevant to liberal-democratic regimes such as Britain and France where state coercion never fully broke with their pluralist foundations. Inherently collaborative products, lithographs challenge the still-prevalent stereotype of propaganda as a top-down form of communication. They enable a reconsideration of its audience as active consumers who shaped the meaning and effects of propaganda. The diversity of their commissioners illustrates how the war redefined the relationship between politics, commerce, and art. Lithograph artists operated at their juncture and had to respond to their respective agendas and constraints. Chief among them were censorship and self-censorship which affected commissioners and artists alike. Legal rules and social norms affected the nature of the images produced as well as the spaces in which they would be displayed.

3. To rethink the complex varieties of wartime patriotism and imperialism

Wartime lithographs provide a remarkable illustration of the sophistication required to analyse the production and reception of the visual language deployed in support of national mobilisation. Lithographs were vectors of conventional nationalist and imperialist symbols and discourses. Yet neither nationalism nor imperialism were fully coherent ideologies. They were also reconfigured in wartime to accommodate the idiosyncrasies of warring coalitions which brought together, for instance, Republican France and Tsarist Russia. Adept at navigating such ambivalences, lithograph artists also proved attuned to their different audiences and to the sensitivities of their allied, national, regional, and sectoral markets.

4. To reconsider lithography’s communicative capacity

The artistic revival of lithography in the late nineteenth century elevated its status from commercial mass-media to a field of experimentation for the European avant-garde. The modernist enthusiasm for the medium stemmed in part from the metaphorical power of print. Lithography is a creative medium borne from a destructive process. This mode of printmaking is fundamentally violent – it involves breaking and grinding stones, etching surfaces with corrosive acid, forcing ink through a mechanical press at great pressure. New research on printmaking explores how the affective force of these systems informs the symbolic power of the final print (Roberts, 2024). The intrinsic brutality of the lithographic medium offers an intriguing lens to view its function as a tool of wartime communication.

Research with Imperial War Museums

This research studentship is one allocated to Imperial War Museums by the AHRC. The successful student will be expected to spend time carrying out research and gaining relevant experience with the partner in IWM London and Duxford as part of the studentship.

The student will be expected to engage with sources and comparable material held at other museums and archives, such as:

- Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris
- Bibliothèque Municipale, Lyon
- Musée du dessin et de l'Estampe originale, Gravelines, France
- Musée de l'Armée, Paris
- Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris
- V&A print collection, London
- British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, London
- Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City

Based on the scope of intended research, the PhD Co-supervisors would work with the candidate on access to other archives at universities or other Institutions as appropriate.

The student will have access to desk space at IWM and will be embedded into the working environment of the museum, gaining invaluable professional insights. They will have access to wide range of training activities, related to for example acquisition, creation and commissioning, conservation management and preservation.

The project will include excellent opportunities for public engagement. These will be decided in consultation with the appointed student to support their future career plans but could include blogs, temporary displays at IWM (onsite and/or online), public talks, participation in 'hands on' collections events at IWM, and contributions to the preparation of learning material and research guides related to the IWM collections studied.

Academic affiliation: University of Warwick

The successful candidate will be affiliated with the Departments of History and History of Art at the University of Warwick. They are among the leading research departments in their subjects in the UK.

The History Department is home to nearly 50 full-time permanent academics with particular strengths in European and cultural history. The student will be part of the European History Research Centre, where they will join other researchers working on the cultural history of conflicts.

The project also closely aligns with the research priorities of the History of Art Department, whose faculty have a particular strength in British art in the 19th and 20th centuries. Its research cluster on "Art and Politics" is a forum exploring the role of art in relation to state, nation and empire. The cluster's activities and network would provide a stimulating theoretical and historical environment, as well as a supportive network, for the student's research. Additionally, the Modern Records Centre at Warwick has considerable holdings of WWI visual culture.

Our departments are part of two doctoral training centre consortia funded by the AHRC and the ESRC. Our Faculty of Arts is also home to its own doctoral training centre (CADRE). The student will have the opportunity to attend the numerous training and development sessions it organises for doctoral students in the Faculty.

If and when relevant, the student will also have access to training opportunities offered across campus by the Digital Arts and Humanities Lab, the Institute of Advanced Studies, the Academic Development Centre, the Warwick Institute of Engagement, and the National Centre for Research Culture.

/ How to apply:

Applications should be submitted through the normal postgraduate research application process. For full information, advice and access to the Warwick University application portal, please visit: <https://warwick.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/apply/research/>

In the research application section of your application, please choose History PhD, course code V1P0, list Dr Pierre Purseigle and Dr Kamila Kociałkowska as proposed supervisors, and the project description as 'Lithographs of the First World War'. In the funding information section, the source should be listed as 'SCHOLARSHIP- AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership PhD Studentship'.

As this award will be jointly managed in partnership with IWM, the University of Warwick will be required to share your application and supporting documents with IWM. All applicants will therefore need to give permission to Warwick to share their personal information in order for their application to be considered. A privacy notice with further information will be circulated following application.

The following documents must be included in order for your application to be considered:

- A covering letter (maximum two pages) outlining your qualifications and suitability for the studentship, particularly in terms of previous experience and future career aims.
- A CV (maximum two pages).
- A sample of your academic written work (around 6,000 words maximum).

To help you apply for this studentship, we have put together a resource with digital images of items in the IWM collection to give you an overview of the type of material you will be working on for this PhD project. The images are for reference only and should not be reproduced or disseminated.

Applications should be submitted no later than Tuesday the 3rd of June 2025 at 1700 (BST).

We ask all applicants to complete a voluntary EDI monitoring form [here](#). All responses are anonymous.

/ More informations:

For informal enquiries about the project, please contact the lead co-supervisor Dr Pierre Purseigle (p.purseigle@warwick.ac.uk)

For queries about the University of Warwick application process, please contact
PGHistoryOffice@warwick.ac.uk

For queries about the interview process, please contact Dr Maria Castrillo (research@iwm.org.uk)

More information about the PhD project:
https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/news/phd_studentship/

The University of Warwick and IWM will jointly assess the applications and hold interviews in order to reach a decision.

Reference:

JOB: PhD Position, University of Warwick and Imperial War Museum. In: ArtHist.net, Mar 27, 2025
(accessed May 20, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/44900>>.