

On Art Becoming Public (London, 06 Jun 25)

Paul Mellon Centre and Online, Jun 06, 2025

Alice Read, London

On Art Becoming Public is a research project around exhibition histories hosted by the Paul Mellon Centre (PMC) and convened by Claudia Di Tosto (PhD candidate, University of Warwick). The aim of the project is to provide a space for discussion and reflection about the role of exhibitions, the becoming public of art as described by Dr Lucy Steeds (University of Edinburgh), within the production of British art history. Drawing from the Italian philosopher and writer Umberto Eco's theorisation of the exhibition as an act of communication, the Reading Group hopes to open up a dialogue around the exhibition as a medium to be explored in both its denotative (what it does) and connotative (what it means) aspects.

Following the online reading group that ran from September to March, this hybrid one-day symposium will further expand the discussion around methods and approaches to researching exhibition histories through four conversations between two panellists and a chairperson.

As part of On Art Becoming Public, the writer and filmmaker Juliet Jacques was commissioned to make a new short film. The film, which focuses on the International Surrealism Exhibition held at the New Burlington Galleries in London in 1936, will premiere during the symposium. A brief conversation between the convenor of the project and Juliet Jacques will follow the screening.

Panel 1: In 2023, *Queer Exhibition Histories* (ed. Bas Hendrikx) was the first attempt to collect in an edited volume a series of case studies focused on public display projects where "the common denominator is a desire to advance the public presence of LGBTQIA+ causes in museums and society alike" (p. 9). Drawing from this publication, this panel will reflect upon the modes of documentation and archiving of Queer exhibitions in the UK.

Panel 2: This panel aims to look at regional exhibition histories focusing on the making of exhibitions and curatorial practices beyond the confines of London.

Panel 3: This panel will focus on exploring the intersections between British art history and filmmaking, exploring the potentialities that the video format offers to document and research exhibitions. Different to taking a picture of a display or writing a review, filmmaking enables the reproduction of "the kinetic interaction of an audience with a contrived space", that the artist Richard Hamilton identified as one of the crucial components of the exhibition form.

Panel 4: This panel builds upon the discoveries made at the Exhibition Histories event and by the Interpretative Walking Tours Reading Group to further the exploration of the intentions of previous installations; regarding them both as a primary source for exhibition histories but also as crucial documents for the re-enactment of previous exhibitions. This should encourage curators to fur-

ther consider the visual objects that are inserted within the narrative of a show.

Programme

09.30–10am

Arrival/Registration

10–10.20am

Opening Remarks/Introduction (Claudio Di Tosto)

10.20–10.30am

Film Screening – A Short Survey of English Surrealism

10.30–10.45am

In Conversation – Claudia Di Tosto (PhD candidate, University of Warwick and Paul Mellon Centre (PMC)) and Juliet Jacques (writer/filmmaker)

10.45–11am

Comfort Break

11am–12noon

Panel 1: Queering Exhibitions Histories

Chair: Ben Cranfield (Associate Dean for the School of Arts and Humanities, Royal College of Art)

11.05–11.20am

Dominic Bilton (Project Producer, The Whitworth)

(Un)Defining Queer, a Case Study for the “Queer Caring Turn”

11.20–11.35am

Fiona Anderson (Senior Lecturer, Newcastle University)

Archives and “Adventurous Lesbians” in the North East of England

11.35am–12.00pm

Q&A

12pm–1pm

Panel 2: Decentring Exhibition Histories

Chair: Jennifer Powell (Director of the Barber Institute of Fine Arts)

12.05–12.20pm

Hana Leaper (Co-director Exhibition Research Lab, Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU))

Researching Overlooked Regional Exhibition Histories with Early Catalogues from the John Moores Painting Prize

12.20–12.35pm

Ella Nixon (Doctoral Researcher, Northumbria University and the Laing Art Gallery)

The ‘(Un)fashionable’ Local: Regional Practices and the Challenge to Traditional Notions of Artistic Values

12.35–1pm

Q&A

1–2pm

Lunch

2–3pm

Panel 3: The Moving Exhibition

Chair: Lynda Nead (Visiting Professor of History of Art at The Courtauld Institute of Art)

14.05–14.20pm

Ese Jade Onojeruo (Assistant Curator, Young People Programme, Tate) Title TBC

14.20–14.35pm

Lily Ford (filmmaker and independent scholar)

Moving in Parallel

14.35–3pm

Q&A

3–3.15pm

Comfort Break

3.15–4:15pm

Panel 4: Documenting the Exhibition and the Exhibition as Document

Chair: Jonathan P. Watts (PhD candidate at Norwich University of the Arts)

3.20–3.35pm

Saim Demircan (curator, writer and a Techne Doctoral Research candidate at Kingston University)

Remembrance of Things Past: Marc Chaimowicz's Celebration? Realife Revisited, 1972/2000

3.35–3.50pm

Madeleine Kennedy (Curator, Wellcome Collection)

Pansensory Documentation: Can Access-led Practice Help Reimagine How Exhibitions Are Remembered?

3.50–4.15pm

Q&A

4.15–4.30pm

Closing Remarks (Claudio Di Tosto)

4.30–5.30pm

Wine Reception

Event format and access

The event is hosted in our Lecture Room, which is up two flights of stairs (there is no lift). The talk will also be streamed online, and the recording will be published on our website

Reference:

CONF: On Art Becoming Public (London, 06 Jun 25). In: Arthist.net, Apr 25, 2025 (accessed Apr 26, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/49117>>.