

Disruptors: Fractured Images and Migrant Wordl (London, 1 Sep 26)

London, Ben Uri Gallery and Museum, Sep 01, 2026

Deadline: Apr 12, 2026

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To accompany the exhibition "Disruptors: Fractured Images and Migrant Wordl" (14 May–4 September 2026) at Ben Uri Gallery and Museum, London, and the longstanding research on immigrant artists in the UK conducted by the Ben Uri Research Unit, the Unit is organising a one-day symposium of the same name on 1 September 2026. The exhibition includes the following artists: Li Yuan Chia, Henri Chopin, José Maria Cruxent, Hugo Dachinger, Samuel Dresner, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Astrid Furnival, Dom Sylvester Houédard, Tam Joseph, Alfred Lomnitz, Hansjörg Mayer, David Medalla, Gustav Metzger, Hormazd Narielwalla, Astra Papachristodoulou, Kurt Schwitters, and Osman Yousefzada.

This symposium explores the relationship between words and images in modern and contemporary art from 1900 to the present, with a particular focus on first- and second-generation immigrant artists working in the UK, as well as artists engaging critically with the theme of immigration in the British context. It asks how artists have forged new visual and textual forms that blur the boundary between what counts as a word and what appears as an image, while simultaneously unsettling dominant notions of belonging and Britishness.

Disruption is understood here in two interlinked ways. First, as a creative strategy that reconfigures the traditional relationship between words and images by displacing text from its conventional linear order, allowing it to migrate across surfaces, materials, and media, and by pushing images beyond their customary borders. Second, disruption is approached as a lived condition of migration, in which language and identity are destabilised and remade.

The neologism 'wordl' fuses the terms 'word' and 'world'. It is coined in the spirit of the historical avant-garde's restless experimentation with languages and images and combined with the experience of migration and arriving to a 'new world'. The term also evokes errors and productive misunderstandings associated with non-native speech and moments where slips open up new aesthetic and political possibilities.

Potential speakers might consider how words and images are used in relation to movement, migration, displacement, exile, and refugee status, alongside the following themes, though not limited to them:

- Intimate, emotional, and private expressions of migration and intergenerational transmission.
- Bureaucratic language as a visual object (visas, forms, and asylum documentation transformed into artworks).

- How words and images are combined in pro-migrant and anti-racist activism, protest, and visual politics.
- Practices that might be considered 'outsider art', operating beyond established institutions and networks but continuing the radical experiments with text and image.
- The afterlives of the historical avant-gardes after the Second World War and into the present in migrant and diasporic contexts.
- The sensory experience of language beyond written text including sound, accent, rhythm, breath, and voice.
- Visual syntax and pictorial grammar, analysing how compositional structures mirror linguistic rules.
- Ekphrasis and (mis)translation in multilingual diasporic contexts.
- How established critical and theoretical approaches in art history can be combined with new linguistic methods in creative ways.

Please submit a 300-word abstract and a 150-word biography by 12 April 2026 to anam@benuri.org, with 'Symposium abstract' in the email subject line.

A selection of papers presenting previously unpublished research will be invited for expansion and publication in an edited volume planned for the beginning of 2028. Further details will be confirmed closer to the symposium. Please note in your email whether your presentation is based on new or previously published research.

Reference:

CFP: Disruptors: Fractured Images and Migrant Wordl (London, 1 Sep 26). In: ArtHist.net, Mar 8, 2026 (accessed Apr 29, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/51914>>.