



Call for Papers: Modernist Art Writing / Writing Modernist Art

An International, Interdisciplinary Conference, University of Nottingham, 24-25 June 2019

The sometimes fruitful, sometimes fraught relationships between literature and the visual arts within modernism and the avant-garde have provided rich terrain for scholarly investigation, and for understanding both art and literature within the broader field of cultural production. And yet the various ways in which modernist writers respond to, object to, defend, query, and seek to represent the visual arts through writing have not yet been fully investigated. If, as Jennifer Pap (1997) has argued in relation to Cubism, modernist works of art are resistant to exhaustive explanation and to narrative entry, then how can writing – produced from within modernism or in response to it – best set about representing it?

Following Susan Harrow's edited special issues of *French Studies* on *New Ekphrastic Poetics* (63.3 (2010)) and *Thinking Colour-Writing* (71.3 (2017)), Catherine Grant and Patricia Rubin's special issue of *Art History* on *Creative Writing and Art History* (34.2 (2011)), experiments in creative art writing by T.J. Clark and others, and a renewed interest in creative criticism (as evidenced by Stephen Benson and Clare Connors' 2014 anthology and guide), this conference will examine the relationship between modernism and art writing, both in the past and in the present moment. It will consider the ways in which different forms and genres of modernist writing responded to the visual arts; the legacy of modernism in contemporary practices of art writing; and the ways in which writers, whether academic, curatorial or creative, have engaged with modernist works of art. If, as Baudelaire claimed, the best response to a painting is a sonnet or elegy, then where does this leave art criticism, or the didactic gallery text? How have written responses to works of art sought (successfully or not) to provide equivalents to these, to capture the work of art in words, or to capture the experience of looking? What forms (ekphrastic poetry, artist stories, critical reviews, instructional guides, experimental forms of writing) have these responses taken?

We welcome various forms of intervention considering art writing produced within the modernist period broadly defined, and/or contemporary writing responding to modernist artworks, from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. We are keen to investigate the transnational dimension of modernist art writing and encourage submissions from those working on non-Anglophone cultures. The working language of the conference will be English but proposals for interventions in other languages will be welcome.

Papers may wish to respond to any of the following questions (which are presented as a set of prompts rather than an exhaustive list):

- How has art writing mediated the reception of modernist art across linguistic and cultural borders? What is its role in transnational artistic currents?
- How does modernist art writing 'translate' or mediate the visual arts for different audiences? Equally, how might it resist reductive models of intermedial translation?
- How does modernist art writing depart from traditional models of art criticism ('describe and explain'), or indeed adhere to them?
- What has been the impact of modernist art writing (by figures such as Stein, Mallarmé, Moore, Schwitters, Apollinaire) on contemporary writing?
- To what extent might modernism permit experimental approaches to writing about art? And to what extent might modernist art writing overlap with other genres (poetry, fiction, criticism)?
- Where does art writing stand within the field of cultural production? How does it relate (in terms of its concerns, and its cultural status) to modernist writers' other literary production?
- In what kinds of venue is art writing published, and how do editorial practices (including placement of images) affect its meaning and reception?
- Given the historical exclusion of women from concepts of artistic genius and from art-critical authority, in what ways have women used alternative modes of art writing as a space for self-expression and assertion, to explore text-image relationships, and (in the case of women artists) to assert critical authority over their own work?
- What differences can we perceive between modernist artists' own writings about art, and the writings of those who approach the visual arts from a literary standpoint? What are the approaches adopted (during the modernist period and now) by professional critics, curators, creative writers and visual artists, and how might we most usefully interrogate their art writings? How do we approach the work of practitioners who straddle visual and verbal media?

We invite

- Proposals (300 words) for complete panels (3 x 20 minute papers) or roundtables (5 x 8-10 minute papers)
- Proposals for individual scholarly papers, creative and/or critical interventions (20 minutes)
- Posters or digital exhibits (to be accompanied by 5 minute flash presentations)

We also plan to organise practice-based art writing sessions; proposals to run these are very welcome, as are other ideas.

Please send proposals and queries to the conference email address: modernistartwriting@gmail.com

All proposals should be accompanied by a short bio-bibliography, including institutional affiliation (if any).

The deadline for all proposals is Friday 30 November 2018.

Organising committee: Katherine Shingler, Lila Matsumoto, Lucy Bradnock (University of Nottingham Interdisciplinary Modernism Research Network); Emma West (Centre for Modernist Cultures, University of Birmingham)

Organised in conjunction with Nottingham Poetry Exchange and the Department of Modern Languages and Cultures, University of Nottingham.

There will be a fee to attend the conference; we will aim to keep this as low as possible to ensure that the conference is accessible to all. A reduced rate will be available for PGs/unwaged/unaffiliated delegates.