

## **New Directions in Women's Art History**

Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> May 2014, Watershed Media Centre, Bristol

This event is based on recently published books in women's art history. It marks an exciting time in the development of this field, which is notable for the diversity of approaches taken and broad range of artists studied. This extends from transnational to inter-generational and archival strategies and includes the study of maternal bodies, femininity, Pop, and the German avant-garde. The authors will talk about their books and the day will include plenty of time for discussion. The symposium will end with a book launch to celebrate.

'New Directions in Women's Art History' is part of the 'Visualising Histories' series, which is run by the Visual Culture Research Group at the University of the West of England. The series aims to increase the visibility of under-represented and as-yet untold histories of creative practice. For more details about the research group see <http://www.uwe.ac.uk/sca/research/vcrg/>.

### **Programme**

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|-------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 10:00 | Registration and tea/coffee                                                                                     |
| 10:15 | Welcome and introduction                                                                                        |
| 10:30 | Rosemary Betterton, 'Becoming Maternal: Looking Back'                                                           |
| 11:15 | Clare Johnson, 'Femininity, Time and Feminist Art'                                                              |
| 12:00 | lunch (not provided but available at the Watershed)                                                             |
| 1:00  | Sue Tate, 'Pauline Boty: Pop Artist and Woman'                                                                  |
| 1:45  | Dorothy Price, 'Women, the Arts and Globalization' and 'After Dada: Marta Hegemann and the Cologne Avant-Garde' |
| 2:45  | Tea/coffee and book launch                                                                                      |
| 4:00  | Close                                                                                                           |

## Abstracts and details of speakers

### **Rosemary Betterton, *Becoming Maternal: Looking Back***

In this presentation I want to reflect on the process of writing 'Maternal Bodies in the Visual Arts' and on some of the themes of the book, including the implications of 'becoming maternal' for artists, personal experience as a starting point for research and my own critical practice as a kind of re-viewing, and the pleasures and perils of interdisciplinary work. I will explore the complexity of tenses of the maternal in both 'becoming' and 'looking back' and its resonance in maternal artworks by Cecile Walton (1920) and Elizabeth Mackenzie (1996-98). I'll finish by reflecting on the arcane process and economics involved in making a book.

Rosemary Betterton is Reader Emeritus at the Centre for Gender & Women's Studies, Lancaster University, and has written widely on contemporary and historical women's art practices and female embodiment. Her publications include the books 'Looking On: Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media' (1987), 'An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body' (1996), 'Unframed: the Practices and Politics of Women Painting' (2004) and 'Maternal Bodies in the Visual Arts' (2014), as well as many journal articles and catalogue essays.

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### **Clare Johnson, *Femininity, Time and Feminist Art***

This presentation will outline the scope and main themes addressed in 'Femininity, Time and Feminist Art'. These include the ways in which feminist art history tells its own story, inter-generational affinities between women artists and femininity as a critically productive concept. The book argues that femininity can be understood as an embodied relationship to time and that this gives rise to new ways to think about criticality. A central concern is to locate feminism in relation to art made since the 1990s, so in the second half of the presentation I will focus on Sam Taylor-Johnson's *Soliloquy III* (1998), which is a photographic work based on Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus*. I will explore the prolonged present tense of the work and ask whether this gives rise to new forms of criticality that emerge from within the smooth surfaces of contemporary culture.

Clare is a Senior Lecturer in Visual Culture at the University of the West of England where she also leads the Visual Culture Research Group. She is author of 'Femininity, Time and Feminist Art' (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and has written journal articles on women artists including Tracey Emin, Vanessa Beecroft, Eleanor Antin, Carolee Schneemann and Yoko Ono.

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## **Sue Tate, Pauline Boty Pop Artist and Woman**

Until recently Pop Art has been seen as an almost entirely male dominated genre, lambasted by feminist critics as inevitably sexist if not overtly misogynist. Yet women did (and do) take pleasure in fashion, film, popular music, interior design; they were (and are) directly addressed by the mass media - Pop's source material – whilst experiencing its gendered, delimiting effects. Clearly women artists would have a distinct take on mass culture and thus an important contribution to make to Pop Art. Yet they have been excluded from or marginalised in both mainstream Pop and feminist art histories.

In my book I consider why those women who did make names for themselves at the time in Pop have, until recently, fallen from the record. I argue that the champions of Pop Art, in the context of Greenbergian certainties, needed to gain distance from 'feminine', trivial mass culture<sup>1</sup> while feminism in the 70s equally had a strategic need to critique (and only critique) representations of women in the media. However, changes in feminist strategic needs and postmodernism's relaxation of Pop's anxieties has finally opened a space for the work of women Pop artists to be seen and appreciated.

In this context the book presents Pauline Boty's life and work, which had been lost to cultural view for nearly 30 years. The life exposes, in the particular, the gendered workings of 20<sup>th</sup> century British culture while the work, by giving form to a female subjectivity, enriches what has been the monocular, male vision of Pop. Boty's work holds in tension a celebration of popular culture experiences (including sexual pleasure) with a critique of the gendered constructions of mass culture – a combination which resonates with contemporary concerns and speaks to a current generation.

Sue is a Visiting Research Fellow in Visual Culture at UWE and a freelance art historian. She is the leading expert on Pauline Boty and recently co-curated the first full exhibition of her work in a public gallery – originating in Wolverhampton Art Gallery the show has travelled to Pallant House and is currently in The Lodz Museum of Art in Poland. It has garnered excellent coverage in the national press and is contributing to a significant revision of Pop Art which, until recently, has only offered a male view on mass culture.

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<sup>1</sup> See Huyssen, Andreas "Mass Culture as Woman : Modernism's Other" in *After the Great Divide*, Palgrave, 1986.

**Dorothy Price (née Rowe), 'After Dada: Marta Hegemann and the Cologne Avant-Garde' and 'Women, the Arts and Globalization: Eccentric Experience' (co-edited with Marsha Meskimmon)**

Although feminist art history has been through enormous changes, developments and theoretical inflections over the last fifty years, what remains at the core of my scholarship as a feminist art historian is still an interest in the ways in which art made by women can challenge, trouble, disturb and celebrate accepted norms within the complex social, political and historical structures in which we all find ourselves. The two publications about which I am going to speak focus on two distinct time periods, high modernism in Germany during the 1920s and diasporic art in Britain since the 1990s. Both publications are informed via my position as a feminist revisionist art historian. This talk will explore what that means within feminist art historical scholarship today and why it still matters.

Dorothy Price leads the Transnational Modernisms Research group at the University of Bristol. She is Senior Lecturer in History of Art and specialises in German modernism and aspects of post-war art in Britain. She is particularly interested in issues of race and gender. She is author and co-editor of several books including 'Representing Berlin: Sexuality and the City in Imperial and Weimar Germany' (2003), 'Women, the Arts and Globalization' (with Marsha Meskimmon) (2013) and 'After Dada: Marta Hegemann and the Cologne Avant-Garde' (September 2013).

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