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**British Art Network Seminar
Artists as Reformers in Britain c.1850–1914**

**Monday 30 October 2017 11.00-17.30
Watts Gallery - Artists' Village
Down Lane, Compton, Guildford, Surrey GU3 1DQ**

The British Art Network brings together professionals working with British art from the 16th century to the present day. The aim of the Network is to contribute to the sharing of expertise, research and ideas across cultural organisations; to enable improvements in curatorial skills and collection knowledge; and to foster greater collaboration between partners leading to enriched understanding and enjoyment of British art for audiences across the UK and beyond.



George Frederic Watts *Mammon*
1884–5. Tate

This seminar explores how Watts and other British artists projected their aesthetic authority into social and political fields. While the political commitments of designers such as William Morris are well documented and readily relatable to their practice, the links between fine artists and the political sphere remain poorly understood. In what ways were transfers of power between the artistic and the political effected? Which causes were appropriate for artists to engage with and which were beyond their reach? How do artists' political affiliations shift our understanding of their careers?

The seminar brings together contributions from art historians, researchers and curators to explore artists as reformers in Britain c.1850–1914, taking the artist George Frederic Watts (1817–1904) as a starting point. Watts's fame as Britain's leading Symbolist painter was put to use in support of an extraordinary range of causes from animal rights to dress reform, in locations ranging from Whitechapel to Cape Town.

The event is programmed by Nicholas Tromans, Brice Curator and Beatrice Bertram, Curatorial Fellow, Watts Gallery.

Programme

- 10.30 – 11.10 Registration and welcome tea and coffee at Watts Gallery
- 11.15 – 11.20 Welcome from Alistair Burtenshaw, Director, Watts Gallery – Artists' Village
- 11.20 – 11.55 Introduction to the seminar, tour of the exhibition *G F Watts: England's Michelangelo* with curators Nicholas Tromans and Beatrice Bertram

Session One: Making a Difference

- 11.55 – 12.00 Introduction by chair Nicholas Tromans, Brice Curator, Watts Gallery
- 12.00 – 12.20 Chloe Ward, Queen Mary, University of London

How Art Makes Political Impacts:

Suffrage Images and a New Methodology for Assessing their Influence

One of the greatest challenges art historians face is to demonstrate art's influence. While an artist's thinking and working processes may be well recorded, the life an image leads beyond the artist's studio—the thoughts and actions it spurs amongst its viewers and the consequent impacts it generates—is much more difficult to trace historically. This quandary is of particular concern for scholars working on reformer artists who intended their artworks to have political effects. Drawing on Raymond Williams' notion of 'structures of feeling', this paper will propose a new methodology for evaluating art's impacts. Applicable to studies of political images in any period or region, I will illustrate it through a case study about the work produced by the suffragist artist Alfred Pearse between 1909 and 1914. I argue that these images made direct political impacts and played a real and significant role in winning British women the vote.

- 12.20 – 12.40 Elena Cooper, CREATE, University of Glasgow

Painters and the Legislative Reform of Copyright 1850-1911

This paper explains the intense involvement of British painters in the legislative reform of copyright from the 1850s (the campaign culminating in the Fine Arts Copyright Act 1862) to the codification of copyright in 1911. Far from just a means of securing their own economic interests, copyright reform was also an opportunity for British painters to assert their authority over broader cultural questions, particularly the designation of artistic status. Copyright reform became imbued with cultural politics, bound up with debate about the cultural authority of institutions like the Royal Academy of Arts to decide on questions of artistic status more generally. Further, in also spanning gaps left by the criminal law, nineteenth century copyright reform involved painters engaging with broader interests raised by art market fraud more generally including the public interest in safeguarding the economic value of physical art objects.

- 12.40 – 13.00 Panel Discussion and audience Q&A
- 13.00 – 13.45 Lunch (provided)
- Session Two: G. F. Watts as Artist and Activist**
- 13.45 – 13.50 Introduction by chair Cicely Robinson, Assistant Curator, Watts Gallery
- 13.50 – 14.10 Colin Trodd, University of Manchester

Love and Life: G. F. Watts, Social Activism and the Religion of Humanity
How do we account for the distinctiveness of Watts' late works, many of which insist upon the living relationship between artistic and social development? More specifically, why was Watts drawn to a particular mode of expression, one in which 'symbolic' painting becomes a matter of representing the nature of human sympathy? And is it the case that many of his late works attained some kind of classic status because they coincided with wider forms of social enquiry and address? This paper addresses these questions by examining Watts' interest in the culture of altruism in relationship to the actualities of late Victorian public thought. Through a discussion of *Love and Life* and cognate images, it indicates how, why and in what contexts Watts created the means to engage with those critical discourses devoted to overcoming selfishness.

- 14.10 – 14.30 Beatrice Bertram, Curatorial Fellow, Watts Gallery

With or without apologies: the adoption and adaptation of G. F. Watts's imagery in politics and reform post-1890
This paper seeks to interrogate the ways that Watts's allegorical imagery was appropriated and deployed for political commentary and protest in the period from the 1890s onwards. To what extent were such political campaigns successful? Did they bolster or challenge Watts's contemporary status as a figure of cultural authority? Why did the artist's transcendental artworks lend themselves to be fashioned to suit a variety of purposes? These questions will be explored through specific case studies of pertinent imagery, showcasing the diverse range of reform projects and political events with which Watts's works were associated – with or without his backing – from the controversial Armenian question, to animal rights and the British economy.

- 14.30 – 14.50 Panel Discussion and audience Q&A

- 14.50 – 15.05 Tea and coffee break

Session Three: Artists and the Suffrage Campaign: Two Case Studies

15.05 – 15.10 Introduction by chair Beatrice Bertram, Curatorial Fellow, Watts Gallery

15.10 – 15.30 Anne Stutchbury, Independent Curator and Researcher

Frescoes and posters: Examining Mary Sargent Florence as artist and activist 1900-1910

This paper investigates the relationship between Mary Sargent Florence's art and political beliefs during the first decade of the twentieth-century. It examines a series of working drawings that she produced around 1901 for the Old Oakham School fresco series that was completed in 1907. Although the eight panels which tell the story of Gareth and Lynette from St. Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, do not directly reference her political beliefs in the same way as her suffrage posters, this case-study discusses the underlying connections between the two. It probes Sargent Florence's engagement in the labour-intensive practice of Buon fresco or 'true fresco' as an example of her conviction that women can compete with men on an equal basis. It was a driving force that not only shaped her artistic creativity but also her identity as an independent, free-thinking woman.

15.30 – 15.50 Laura MacCulloch & Michaela Jones, Royal Holloway, University of London

Art and Women's Suffrage: A Case Study of the Artist Christiana Herringham (1852-1929)

In 1889, Millicent Fawcett and many in her circle signed the Declaration in Favour of Women's Suffrage. This included Herringham and the two women, Annie Swynnerton and Ethel Webling, commissioned by Herringham to produce portraits of her sons. In 1907, Herringham was a founding member of the Artists' Suffrage League. The organisation created propaganda for the cause, counteracting negative stereotypes of feminists. Herringham's embroidering of banners for the League allowed her to combine her artistic work with her political convictions without sacrificing her femininity. In the same year, she was also a founding member of the Women's Guild of Art along with many members of the Artists' Suffrage League. This paper will explore how Herringham's aesthetic endeavours were intertwined with her political beliefs and will utilise new research undertaken for the forthcoming Herringham exhibition and Michaela Jones' PhD thesis.

15.50 – 16.10 Panel Discussion and audience Q&A

16.10 – 16.20 Closing Remarks and Thanks

16.30 – 17.30 Drinks Reception

Travel

Recommended trains:

09.45 train from London – arriving Guildford 10.23 – First mini bus collects at 10.25 and drives to Watts Gallery

10.00 train from London – arriving Guildford 10.33 – Second mini bus collects at 10.50 and drives to Watts Gallery

Then leaving Watts after the seminar finishes at 16.30

1st mini bus leaves 16.35 in time for 17.00 and 17.17 trains back to London from Guildford

After the drinks reception finishing at 17.30

2nd mini bus leaves 17.35 in time for 18.00 and 18.17 trains back to London from Guildford

For directions to Watts Gallery please visit <https://www.wattsgallery.org.uk/>

Watts Gallery – Artists' Village, Down Lane, Compton, Surrey, GU3 1DQ

Tel 01483 810235

If you need to contact Fran Laws on the day please phone 07951 430872