

Abstracts and Biographies

Panel 3: Work/Activism

Panel Chair: Amy Tobin

Panel Chair: Amy Tobin is a Lecturer in the Department of History of Art, University of Cambridge and Curator, Contemporary Programmes at Kettle's Yard. She has published her research in *Tate Papers*, *MIRAJ*, *Women: A Cultural Review* and *Feminist Review*, along with books chapters in numerous edited books. She is the co-editor of *London Art Worlds: Mobile, Contingent and Ephemeral Networks 1960–1980* (Penn State University Press, 2018) with Jo Applin and Catherine Spencer and *The Art of Feminism* (Chronicle and Tate, 2018) with Lucy Gosling, Helena Reckitt and Hilary Robinson. In 2019–20 Tobin was the Terra Foundation for American Art–Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art Anglo-American Art Fellow. She is currently working on a book project on Anglo-American Feminism and Art-making in the 1970s and another on Sisterhood and Art.

Artists for Society, Society for Artists: The Artists' Union (1972–1983)

Neylan Bağcıoğlu İzgi

The 1970s saw collaboration and local, grass-roots activism become common in radical art in Britain. Concomitant with anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-nuclear efforts, a group of Leftist artists challenged social and financial elitism, patriarchy and inequality in both the art world and British society by producing praxis-led artist projects in lieu of art objects.

In the early 1970s, there was a significant gap between cultural production as it was understood and practiced by artists, and the way in which it was supported by cultural policy. Founded by artists partly as a response to this discrepancy, the Artists' Union (1972-83) promoted an ambitious project to make cultural labour part of the wider demand for unionization at the time. The intention was to recalibrate the social position of artists by bringing them closer to the working class, ultimately as a way of reorienting arts away from bourgeois institutions such as museums and commercial galleries.

Although it came at a time when unionisation was waning, the foundation of the Artists' Union was a significant effort that utilised collaboration and local, grass-roots activism to challenge social and financial elitism, patriarchy and inequality in both the art world and British society at large. While, the Artists' Union had its shortcomings—many of which were instrumental in its demise—I argue that shedding critical light on the radical and democratising art practice the Union promoted begins to accord proper recognition to artists and projects that have hitherto been marginalized in the existing scholarship. Furthermore, by contextualising the Union within the socio-cultural background of the 1970s with this paper, I hope to aid contemporary practitioners and current debates on the politics of participation.

Neylan Bağcıoğlu İzgi is an independent critic, copywriter, editor and translator for organizations such as Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, Istanbul Modern Museum,

Apple, and *Radikal Newspaper*, and is a member of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA). She has recently received her doctorate degree from the University of Cambridge with her dissertation titled “Politics of the Project: Radical Art in Britain (1972–79)”. Currently based in London, Bağcıođlu İzgi continues to contribute to publications and exhibition catalogues.

No one is free until everyone is free: The Case of Shirley Read

Naomi Pearce

In the early 1970s, artists in London worked together to establish studios in former industrial buildings across the city. This model, and its role within gentrification, has been well- documented in scholarship. Women administrators, often pivotal figures in the infrastructure of such organisations, and the impact of their work, has been largely ignored. This paper challenges their marginalisation from the perspective of Shirley Read; photographer and caretaker of two SPACE studio buildings: The Dairy, Prince of Wales Crescent (1971–76) and 10 Martello Street, London Fields (1979–1990).

Using the format of an amateur crime scene investigation, I ‘make a case’ for Read, staging the studio as a crime scene complicit with violent acts of gentrification and sexual oppression, whilst using this narrative form to expose the disciplinary logic of historical knowledge production. Dividing material into Scenes and Exhibits, I explore how photographs and administrative documents created by Read are ‘material witnesses’ (Schuppli, 2019, p. 10) marked by tensions between personal liberation and collective action; from the agency afforded by the live-work studio and its defiance of heteronormative domestic life, to the lack of solidarity shared by artist and squatting communities. Punctuating these Scenes and Exhibits are extracts from *Martello Street*, a mystery novella which fabulates material from Read’s case to produce counter-narratives. This strategy takes up Saidiya Hartman’s call for researchers to challenge archival loss by ‘imagining what cannot be verified’ (2008, p. 12).

My investigation is conducted using a forensic feminist methodology, combining archival research, interviews, critical fabulation and situated writing. This approach connects my own experiences as an administrator to those of Read, with the aim of cultivating a somatic knowledge of cultural memory, working to impress feelings and sensations onto the reader as an act of commemoration.

Drawing on Howard Becker’s analysis of standards in communities of cultural practice, I suggest Read troubled conventions by blurring the categories of administrative and artistic labour, home and studio. Contesting Read’s description of her own photography as a ‘thin thread’ through her career, I weave creative and administrative evidence together, producing a cloth that expands the category of what an artist and their place of work might be.

Naomi Pearce is a writer and curator who collaborates with artists to produce exhibitions, books, performances and events. Projects include *56 Artillery Lane*, Raven Row, London (co-curated with Amy Budd) and *OSTEON*, Matt’s Gallery, London. Her essays, reviews and fiction have been published by *The Happy Hypocrite*, *The White Review*, *Film and Video Umbrella*, *Art Monthly*, *Art Review* and *SALT Magazine*, amongst others. In 2020 she completed an AHRC-funded practice-based PhD researching women administrators, artist studios and gentrification at Edinburgh University. She is a member of the Rita Keegan Archive Project, a social history and curatorial collective that seeks to preserve and share the collections of artist Rita Keegan, forthcoming activities include an exhibition at South London Gallery in September 2021.

'Slides, money, tell them what we're doing': The Beginnings of the Women Artist's Slide Library
Lily Evans-Hill

This paper will examine primary materials relating to the founding of the Women Artist's Slide Library (WASL). This includes the earlier constitutions of the collective and collection that are referred to as the slide collective and the slide registry respectively, which were later formalised as WASL. These materials are used to create a dossier of these primary documents that trace the history of the slide library as carried by various groups formed in London such as the Women's Workshop of the Artist's Union, The Women's Art Collective and finally, the Women Artist's Slide Collective and frames these as belonging to an impetus and desire for a slide collection that concluded as the WASL. I will also track the WASL through its residences at the Women's Art Alliance and the Women's Research and Resource Centre, as well as in the homes of the collective.

Using the motive of desire, this paper will think about the ways in which the shared urgency for a slide registry can be traced through various sources that preside in the current collection of the Women's Art Library. An analysis of these sources will also serve to write a history of the formation of the library through the people and places involved in the feminist art movement of the 1970s. In addition, this paper explores the founding of the slide library through the idea of the expanded notion of the group: I want to propose that the network of participants of the feminist art movement in the UK all contributed to the plethora of small group projects, including the formation of the slide collective and registry.

Lily Evans-Hill is a Postgraduate Researcher and Associate Lecturer in the Art Department at Goldsmiths, University of London, where her research focuses on the politics of collaboration in feminist art. She is a member of Group Work: Contemporary Art and Feminism research network, the Feminist Library collective and the working group of the Feminist Duration Reading Group. She convenes the Feminist and Queer Archives Research Network with Hatty Nestor. Her research is funded by CHASE/AHRC.

Collective Grassroots Feminist Strategies Countering Media Images **Na'ama Klorman-Eraqi**

This paper suggests that despite political differences among the feminist factions of the British Women Liberation Movement's in the 1970s, media images were viewed as having significant impact on the socialization of women and therefore as a necessary target of feminist politics.

My study centres on feminist counter-media practices and presents them as a potent strategy for feminist empowerment. I argue that photography in particular served as an activist tool for emancipation from mainstream media portrayal of women and from their oppressive gender stereotypes. My presentation addresses feminist opposition against media images, raised for example by the photography collective *The Polysnappers* that criticized adverts such as the Gigi underwear billboard which was accused by feminists of being an invitation to rape. This ad depicted a woman walking in the street at night and looking defiantly at the camera, and the same woman unbuttoning her coat and revealing her underwear. *The Polysnappers* response was producing a work in which dolls aim ammunition at the Gigi ad and at other similar ads. Also explored is the socialist feminist collective *The Hackney Flashers* that used photography to expose the ideological underpinnings of media images of working class women and to raise public awareness to their social needs. Also addressed is *Format Photography Agency* that used photography and feminist collective tactics to humorously disrupt gendered expectations from various professions.

This paper concludes that the time's feminist counter-media activity employed grassroots strategies that wished to cultivate collective feminist identification. This activity intended that feminist photographs would encourage women to expand and subvert their social possibilities. My analysis is situated within the political role of photography in 1970s Britain, the critique of the ideological functioning of advertisements, debates on 'the sexual politics of representation,' and social historical events.

Na'ama Klorman-Eraqi is a lecturer in the Department of Art History at the University of Haifa. Among her publications: *The Visual Is Political: Feminist Photography and Countercultural Activity in 1970s Britain*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2019; she also published articles, in journals such as *Feminist Media Studies* and *Photography and Culture*. Her research interests include political intersections between feminism, protest movements and photography, as well as social-political aspects of contemporary art.