

Abstracts and Biographies

Panel 6: Production, Circulation, Distribution

Chair: Eva Bentcheva

Panel Chair: Eva Bentcheva is an art historian and curator with a focus on transnational archives, conceptualism and performance art histories in South/ Southeast Asia and Europe. She is currently Associate Lecturer in Art History at the Centre for Transcultural Studies at Heidelberg University in Germany, and researcher for the international project 'Worlding Public Cultures: The Arts and Social Innovation.' She completed her PhD in Art History at SOAS, University of London, on 'The Cultural Politics of British South Asian Performance Art, 1960s to the Present.' Her previous positions have included Adjunct Researcher at the Tate Research Centre: Asia, and the Goethe-Institut Fellow at Haus der Kunst in Munich where she co-curated the exhibition *Archives in Residence: Southeast Asia Performance Collection* in 2019.

***Mukti*, South Asian Feminist Art and Activism**

Alice Correia

By the early 1980s there was significant engagement with social and political activism amongst South Asian communities in Britain. Against a backdrop of institutional racism and social unrest, a generation of young South Asian women artists were driven to challenge hegemonic, racist and misogynist stereotypes in their work. This paper will consider the work of Chila Kumari Burman, Zarina Bhimji and Mumtaz Karimjee within the context of their contributions to, and involvement, with the grassroots magazine, *Mukti*.

Established in 1983, the Mukti Collective published a magazine, initially in six South Asian languages, aimed at a broad female audience, which not only disseminated information about readers' rights as British residents or citizens, but also acted as forum for debate and self-expression. Although only seven issues of the magazine were produced, articles addressed such topics as the strictures of arranged marriage; deportations and citizenship rights; female sexual fulfilment; perceptions of lesbianism in South Asian cultures; and incest and child sexual abuse, all presented in a tone of defiant feminism.

I will argue that in works such as *Militant Women* (1981), *She Loved to Breathe - Pure Silence* (1987) and *My Mothers My Sisters* (1987-8), by Burman, Bhimji and Karimjee respectively, each artist demonstrated an active engagement with the issues addressed in *Mukti*; Making close visual readings of individual artworks, I will consider how these artists deftly weave together anti-colonial and feminist issues and provocations to considerable affect.

Cumulatively, the activities of the Mukti Collective, and the artistic endeavours of Burman, Bhimji and Karimjee, may be regarded as significant interconnected moments in the challenge to widely held perceptions of South Asian women in Britain as 'abjectly submissive' (Brah, 1996, p.81).

Dr Alice Correia is an art historian. Her research examines late twentieth-century British art, with a specific focus on African, Caribbean and South Asian diaspora artists. In 2017 she was a mid-career Fellow at the Paul Mellon Centre for the Study of British Art, where she initiated her on-going research project, *Articulating British Asian Art Histories*. Her articles and reviews have appeared in *Art History*; *British Art Studies*; *British Visual Culture*; and *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*. She is the Chair of Trustees of *Third Text* and co-Chair of the British Art Network's Black British Art Research Group. She has worked at the, Tate, the Government Art Collection, and universities of Sussex and Salford. She is currently working as a Research Curator at Touchstones Rochdale on a major project examining the history of Rochdale Art Gallery during the 1980s.

Feminist Collectivism In and Out of Art World Spaces

Jennifer Sarathy

In the late 1970s feminist collectives in Britain established a dynamic discourse on the constitution of gender and gendered labour in the public sphere, mobilizing collective methodologies and the circulation of media to explore and contest societal norms. Some artists chose to work within existing artworld spaces, as with COUM's *Prostitution* (1976) and the *Women's Postal Art Event – Feministo: Portrait of the Artist as a Housewife* (1977) at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), London. These exhibitions utilized networked tactics and a critical approach to media within an institutional setting to force public discourse on gender. Others like the Hackney Flashers and See Red Women's Workshop created alternative infrastructure that operated on the fringes of the art world to support grassroots activism. Posters by See Red from the late 1970s and Hackney Flashers' *Who's Holding the Baby?* (1978) exemplify how alternative networks of production, the dissemination of media and the subversion of advertising aesthetics augmented feminist political action, while See Red's address of both race and gender demonstrates how alternative organizations attempted to address larger structural inequities in British society. By examining these diverse collective endeavours in and out of art world spaces this paper charts the multifarious connections between established institutions, alternative feminist organizations and grassroots activism and their strategic use of circulating media, aesthetics and collective methodologies.

Jennifer Sarathy is a PhD Candidate in Art History at the CUNY Graduate Center, New York. Her doctoral research addresses artistic interventions in rural and urban landscapes in 1960s and 1970s Britain. Her work considers the impact of the fall of Empire on representations of the land, drawing parallels between representations of space and contentious postcolonial debates over borders and citizenship. Using the landscape to historically and thematically connect a wide range of artists and media her writing establishes a dialogue between the London avant-garde, feminist activism, and early Black British Art. Her chapter "Remapping the Public Sphere: Conceptual Art in 1970s London" is forthcoming in the volume *Charting Space: The cartographies of conceptual art* (Manchester University Press, 2021).

Reading Aesthetics: magazines and the women's art movement

Victoria Horne

My current research tracks the creative and intellectual networks that feminist art periodicals coalesced in 1970s and '80s Britain. Magazines, newsletters, pamphlets: these throwaway serial publications are usually produced in response to an informational lacuna, to fill a gap by sharing knowledge and resources among a community of interested readers. The 'new' art historical landscape of that time was built on such politicised periodical networks, and studying these magazines means studying that intellectual history in the very moment of its production.

This paper will offer a close visual reading of the magazines associated with the UK women's art movement (such as *FAN: Feminist Arts News* and *WASL: Women Artists Slide Library Newsletter*). These anti-aesthetic, grassroots publications had more in common with punk zines than the glossy magazines and journals of the mainstream art-world, and their jagged pages evidence a deep suspicion of the visual realm, of representation and mass media. This DIY aesthetic was partly determined by financial constraints and lo-fi production technologies such as stencils, stapling, Letraset, xerography and early desktop publishing. Yet, I want to formally consider these print materials, reflecting on the extent to which they had a determining role in shaping how the UK women's art movement looked *at* art and its history, and how feminist art looked *to* audiences.

Victoria Horne is a senior lecturer in art and design history at Northumbria University Newcastle. Her writing has been included in *Art History*, *Feminist Review*, *Journal of Art Historiography*, *Third Text* and the *Journal of Visual Culture*. She is the editor of 'Danger! Women Reading: Feminist Encounters with Art, History and Theory', published by *Women: A Cultural Review* (2019), and co-editor of *Feminism and Art History Now* (IB Tauris, 2017).

The Status and Future(s) of Queer Photography in Britain in the Eighties

Flora Dunster

In 1986, *Creative Camera* printed a roundtable titled 'What is the Status and Future of Documentary Photography in Britain in the Eighties?' Four years after the publication of *Thinking Photography*, Victor Burgin's gesture towards mapping the burgeoning field of photo theory, *Creative Camera*'s interlocutors offer a less congruent outlook. Picture editors and Magnum photographers argue for hard-hitting photojournalism, contrasted by figures like Simon Watney and Jo Spence, who interrogate 'documentary' on terms harmonized with Burgin's critical anthology.

Thinking about how visual culture was used to re-imagine social relations during the long 1980s, and in response to British state policy, this paper takes the rift which occurred around the meaning of 'documentary' as its fulcrum. Considering the legacy of forums like *Thinking Photography*, and that in *Creative Camera*, the paper will unpack how the task of re-figuring the term 'documentary' spilled into a broader re-figuring of the social, focusing on queer art and politics. Faced with pressures including Section 28 and the Primarolo Bill, I propose that assessing the meaning of documentary practice became a crucial tool for organising and re-imagining queer community.

Attending to publishing projects – including *Stolen Glances: Lesbians Take Photographs*, *Ecstatic Antibodies: Resisting the AIDS Mythology*, and *Love Bites* – this paper reflects on the circulation of images through print media, and in the wake of such contemporary debates. I will explore instances within these books, including Tessa Boffin's adherence to Stuart Hall's proposal that marginalised communities might produce documentation in the face of representational paucity, rather than grasp for non-existent precedent, and the controversy surrounding the 'truth' of Del La Grace Volcano's sex scenes. The paper argues that conversations pertaining to the nature of documentary practice were atomized and disseminated through photography publications, impacting the shape and tone of queer culture in the UK during the long 1980s.

Flora Dunster is a writer and researcher, working on queer and feminist British photography in the 1980s and '90s. She lectures on art history, critical theory, and photography at institutions across the UK. In 2019, she completed a PhD titled "Hurled Toward the Future: The Queer Subjunctive in British Lesbian Photography, 1987-1996." As a 2020 Paul Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow, she is adapting this research for publication. Recent publications include the essay "Do You Have Place? A Conversation with Sunil Gupta" in *Third Text* (2021), and a chapter on the pamphlet series "Lesbians Talk" is forthcoming in an edited collection on feminist and queer activism in the 1980s, from SUNY Press.