

The Art & Labour Summer School London July 2022

Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art Yale School of Art Yale History of Art

Is Art Work?

The Art & Labour Summer School is a lively twelve-day programme of workshops, discussions and encounters with historical archives and contemporary practice. It offers the opportunity for art historians and art school students (across all specialisms) to learn from each other, and for UK-based students to connect with their Yale-based peers and with other members of the UK's arts community. The Summer School provides a forum for stimulating discussion and debate on a theme – this year, concerns around art's relationship to labour – that is of interest to both art students and art history students and is relevant to both historical and contemporary art.

Organised by the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, the Yale School of Art and the Yale Department of the History of Art, the 2022 Summer School follows on from 2019's [Artist Collective Summer School](#).

The Art & Labour Summer School will be based in London and incorporate visits to other locations in the UK. We will work through questions around this year's theme in its historical and contemporary manifestations in British art and culture, thinking closely about these questions in relation to global and transnational conditions.

The programme is structured around:

- a series of day-long workshops, in which the participants will work with artists, researchers and scholars
- talks by, and discussions with, art historians, curators, critics and artists
- visits to historical sites, archives and arts organisations
- opportunities for collective reflection and the development of ideas

The emphasis of the Summer School is on creative and collaborative forms of analysis and exchange between participants, who will form a research group around the pressing intellectual, practical and political concerns that the topic of art and labour raises. Accordingly, participants will be encouraged to share their own areas of interest in the topic, and to collectively develop interdisciplinary research methodologies. There will be sessions during and at the end of the twelve days allotted to this participant-led process. These sessions may provide the basis for future outputs – publications, for example – which would offer a permanent expression of the work done in the Summer School.



The Theme for the 2022 Summer School: Art & Labour

The 2022 theme of Art & Labour responds both to the proliferation of conversations around labour and work in art contexts in recent years, and the historical ways in which interweaving or oppositional conceptions of “work” and “art” have come to define understandings of purpose, productivity, value and aesthetics.

In their critique of the industrial revolution and mass production in the nineteenth century, William Blake, John Ruskin and William Morris positioned principles of aesthetics and labour at the centre of critical social projects, as did the early feminists of the Suffrage movement at the turn of the twentieth century. Equally, understandings of the formation of racial capitalism, the role of plantation labour and the slave economy inform how globally connected colonial and postcolonial cultures have been shaped. Victorian artistic engagements with the politics of class and labour in Britain – exemplified in Ford Madox Brown's mid-nineteenth-century painting *Work* – stand in relief against the coterminous systems of colonial exploitation and expropriation that were enabled through cultural constructs of race, gender and labour; and the creative resistance against these systems by colonised peoples.

Across the twentieth century, art's relationship to both work and freedom – its autonomy from the need to have purpose and social function, entangled with “the perennial unfreedom of the whole” – played out in plural movements and at multiple scales. Parallel to the development of post-war global hierarchies of power, wealth and financialisation, in the 1960s and 1970s the politics of labour formed the ground for artists' resistance towards social and cultural inequity, from the “art strikes” of Gustav Metzger and Lee Lozano, to the feminist practices of artists including Adrian Piper, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Mary Kelly and Cosey Fanni Tutti. As growing numbers of people defined by modes of immaterial labour, forms of institutional critique, performance and social practice pursued towards the end of the century by artists such as Andrea Fraser, Carey Young, Tino Sehgal and Tania Bruguera further reconstituted understandings of the work of being an artist.

In the present era of digital capitalism, artists have continued to challenge normative accounts of labour produced in mainstream economic and political discourse. Conversations around art and labour have continued to wrestle with art's aspiration to autonomy, the nature of its critical capacity and its relationship to “life-work”. These debates have taken place in relation to forms of social practice and alongside activist claims for equitable payment for artists; in the address of the expanded field of actors that art production encompasses, from artist assistants to institutional workers and performers; and in the wake of the shifting impact of technology on artistic production. In turn, art historians have increasingly interrogated the work of art making, leading to studies on subjects ranging from studio administration to the global workers supplying artists' materials. Questions of labour intersect here with concerns around gender, race, sexuality and capacity, where artists are both subject to expectations around labour based on their perceived identity, and articulate aspects of their approach to work as a means of resisting patriarchal, racist, heteronormative and ableist conditions.

More About the Programme

- The 2022 Summer School takes place between 18 July and 29 July.
- The programme runs from Monday to Friday during this period, allowing for free time over the weekend. The weekdays are full days, with some evening events.
- Sessions will take place primarily at the Paul Mellon Centre with some additional activities at other locations in the city and beyond.
- Participants' travel and accommodation costs, and the costs of some evening social events, are covered as part of the programme. The logistical arrangements are co-ordinated by Nermin Abdulla, Learning Programme Manager at the PMC. [See the programme FAQs for more information.](#)
- The Summer School will host twenty students in total (five doctoral students enrolled in history of art programmes across the UK; five art students enrolled at UK art schools at graduate level; five PhD students from the Yale Department of the History of Art; and five MFA students from the Yale Art School). The programme welcomes applications from individuals with existing or growing interests in the topic of art and labour. [Apply now.](#)
- It is convened by independent curator, Richard Birkett, and art historian, Georgia Haseldine, working with Sria Chatterjee and Mark Hallett from the PMC. It benefits from the input of other colleagues from participating institutions, including Tim Barringer of the Yale Department of the History of Art and Marta Kuzma from the Yale School of Art.

Application

You can apply if you are currently enrolled as:

- a PhD student in the Yale History of Art Department
- a MFA student in the Yale School of Art
- a doctoral researcher at a History of Art programme in the UK
- a doctoral level art student enrolled at an art school in the UK

Applications for this summer's Graduate Summer School open on 14 March. Please complete and return the [application form](#) to graduatesummerschool@britishart.ac.uk by midnight GMT on 11 April 2022. Offers will be made to participants on 25 April 2022.

The school's theme and programme will change each year. If you have any questions, please email: graduatesummerschool@britishart.ac.uk