

## **GLASGOW COLOUR STUDIES GROUP**

### **Notes following the Twenty-Eighth Meeting, 24th February 2016**

The twenty-eighth meeting of the GCSG took place in Room 1, English Language, University of Glasgow. Thanks are due to Carole Biggam who organized the meeting, to Rachael Hamilton who introduced the speaker and designed the poster, and to Carole Hough who organized the refreshments.

Our speakers were Prof. Fiona McLachlan, Professor of Architectural Practice; Dr Heather Pulliam, History of Art; and Gordon Brennan, Art, all of the University of Edinburgh.

#### **Prof. Fiona McLachlan, Dr Heather Pulliam and Gordon Brennan spoke on ‘Colour Collection UK: Who Teaches Colour and How Do they Teach it?’**

Their abstract is as follows:

Anyone working with colour, either for research or as part of a creative endeavour, quickly becomes aware of its importance and intrinsically interdisciplinary nature — but to what extent do our teaching curricula and pedagogies reflect this? Over the past academic year, the Colour Collection project has investigated how and where colour is taught within the United Kingdom, focusing on Architecture, History of Art and Fine Art departments. A parallel strand of the scoping project aimed to identify active researchers and research projects, while benchmark visits and interviews sought to understand how colour is taught, the relationship between teaching and research, and possible career paths for students who study colour. This talk discloses our findings and their implications for teaching and researching colour. The project, led by Fiona McLachlan (Architecture), Gordon Brennan (Painting) and Heather Pulliam (History of Art), with Alice Blackwell as research assistant, was funded by the University of Edinburgh’s College of Humanities and Social Science Challenge Investment Fund.

Commentary (by Carole Biggam; checked by Heather Pulliam, Fiona McLachlan and Gordon Brennan)

Colour studies need to be multidisciplinary, and the three Principal Investigators of the University of Edinburgh’s ‘Colour Collection’ project, represent the disciplines of architecture, art history and art.

Gordon Brennan presented an account of the work at Traquair House, Innerleithen, Peeblesshire, where the colours used throughout the house were recorded, with special attention paid to the pavilion in the garden and the library. The aim was to build a colour palette for the house. Similarly, the colour palettes of the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh have been recorded and compared. Another colour topic focussed on the pottery of Emma Gillies, a former student at the Edinburgh College of Art, who painted ceramics in the 1920s and 1930s. The sister of the Scottish painter, Sir William Gillies, Emma was also an artist in her own right.

Prof. McLachlan approaches the subject of colour from the angle of a practising architect. She has published two books on the subject: *Architectural Colour in the Professional Palette* (Routledge, 2012) and *Colour Strategies in Architecture* (Schwabe, 2015), and she is currently involved in the 'Colour Strategies in Architecture' exhibition at The Lighthouse in Glasgow. One approach is to observe colour *in situ*, leading on to hand-painting samples, and then to making collages to produce 'building portraits', for example, of two Basil Spence buildings in Edinburgh. A second approach is called 'visualizations' in which imaginary spaces are created, based on earlier colour research, for example, the 'immersive pop' of the Berlin underground.

Dr Pulliam studies early medieval colour, for example, the use of purple in Carolingian manuscripts raises the question of the source of the pigment. More recently, she has looked at medieval colour from a cognitive psychological point of view, for example, how did the monks meditate on them? How does colour translate from one culture to another, for example, illustrations of paradise / heaven using woad for blue?

The Colour Collection project identified areas of expertise in Edinburgh across disciplines. A list of institutions involved in colour studies was collected, during which 134 institutions were considered, such as those concerned with the history of art, general art, architecture and so on. Their teaching methods and research were both considered. Almost nobody is teaching colour in architecture – only one institution was found, namely, the Architectural Association in London, where Antoni Malinowski teaches colour through the use of pigments. Oxford Brookes University had a good course but its leader has now retired.

Relevant to the history of art, Cheryl Porter runs a workshop on pigments in Italy. Some people are teaching colour in the historical context, for example, Spike Bucklow of the Hamilton Kerr Institute, the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, and Christina Duffy, an imaging scientist at the British Library. Another potential project in Edinburgh is a pigment garden of dye-plants, currently being planned. In addition, Norwich University of the Arts does not teach colour as such but is concerned with pigments, and the University of Lincoln's School of Art and Design is now picking up on colour too, especially in the work of Michael Crick-Smith. The Royal College of Art has a colour reference library which is important for work with textiles and printing, and the Slade School of Fine Art, UCL, runs materials and pigments workshops.

## News

If you have suggestions for, or offers of GCSG meetings (any format) for the next programme, please contact Carole Biggam at [c.p.biggam@btinternet.com](mailto:c.p.biggam@btinternet.com) Please note that we attempt to produce a balanced programme (i.e. different disciplines) and do not necessarily accept talks in the order in which they are offered. Nonetheless, all offers are most welcome and will be acknowledged and recorded.

Please report any colour-related news on our discussion list at [ColourStudies@jiscmail.ac.uk](mailto:ColourStudies@jiscmail.ac.uk) Do feel free to ask the membership any colour questions or to begin a discussion on a particular topic.