

**CFP: American Art First! Populism, and American Art and Visual Culture
Eccles Centre for American Studies, British Library, June 19th and 20th June 2019**



Professor Cécile Whiting, Professor of Art History, University of California, Irvine will deliver the keynote, titled 'Regionalist Art and Populist Oratory'.

There will be the opportunity for PhD students to participate in a workshop with Cécile Whiting on the 20th June. Details to follow.

Nobody really believed that reality show billionaire Donald Trump could win the U.S. presidency. But his unashamed, America First populist campaign sung out to a portion of voters never properly considered as a bloc before, and he squeaked in, just ahead of the 'establishment' Hilary. Now for Trump supporters, their unusual hero can do no wrong. Indeed, similarly populist 'alt-right' movements and leaders are on the rise globally: in Hungary, Brazil, Germany, Britain, Russia (kind of), and Turkey, for example; claiming to represent the voice of 'the people,' and defining themselves against the elite and established democratic institutions and methods.

But populism has not always been this way, and nor perhaps will it always be like this. Agrarian reformers, greenbackers, and anti-racists in the American 1890s formed a series of socialist populist alliances which became The People's Party for a while. The Seneca Falls Convention, the Progressive movement, the New Deal (to some extent), and Civil Rights movements, through to Occupy in 2011, all present a liberatory, liberal or leftist populism, also opposed to elites and institutions but in a different way to Teddy Roosevelt, Trump, Nixon or the Tea Party movement. Meanwhile, the 'America First' slogan, for its part, coined in 1884 by an Oakland newspaper supporting a trade war against Britain, became a Republican rallying cry until Woodrow Wilson made it the tagline for American WW1 isolationism. 'America First' has since been used by WW2 conscientious objectors and aggressive assimilationists alike. Populism and its rhetoric, it seems, have a tangled history and an equally complex present.

This symposium addresses the role of art and the visual in all historical manifestations of American populism and its cultures. We want to investigate what *visual* rhetorics, idioms or regimes populism has generated, on all political sides and across U.S. history (perhaps some populisms aren't political; what do *they* look like?). We welcome papers not only on the mobilization of the visual by populist movements, but also on the visual

representation and construction of populism. In what ways have artists and creatives been recruited or influenced by populist movements? How have American populism's various models of imagined community, citizen, nation, and audience been represented in art and visual culture, including film, news media and social media? And does the global and transnational situation of the U.S. affect iconographies of American populism?

Hence, we invite papers on the presence and function of American art and visual culture in populist movements from the Communist Party USA to the Ku Klux Klan; from the American Revolution to hashtag campaigns; and from the Great Plains to the White House; and all points in between.

We invite proposals for 20-minute papers. Please send a 250-word abstract, along with a brief academic CV to savant@sussex.ac.uk by March 14th 2019. We will communicate which papers have been accepted shortly after. We can cover travel costs for PhD students.

The symposium is organised by SAVAnT (School of American Art and Visual Text). Founded in 2016, SAVAnT is a 'virtual' doctoral school with associated faculty across the CHASE consortium (and beyond), dedicated to exploring American visual material across academic disciplines. We positively encourage thinking that incorporates insights and methodologies from different disciplines, including Art History, American Studies, History, English, Film and Cultural Studies, amongst others. More information may be found here <http://savantatchase.co.uk/>