

William Blake's Conversations: Friendships, Networks, Followers

Tate and the Department of English and Related Literature, University of York, invite applications from eligible candidates for a full-time collaborative PhD studentship, funded for 48 months by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, to commence 1 October 2019.

The visionary poet, artist and printmaker William Blake (1757-1827) is the exemplary imaginative artist. For successive waves of creative and imaginative people, from the artistic fraternity known as 'The Ancients' that gathered around him at the end of his life, through to very many creative artists working in different media, he has served as a model of the self-sustaining, free-wheeling, authentic creator. But in the present age of austerity, questions of unpaid labour, precarity and justice have been brought to the fore, and existing mythologies of creative independence are being questioned in fresh ways. The thesis would consider the succession of different networks Blake was part of during his life, and the shifting identities that he assumed in those contexts, as apprentice, art student, employee and protégé, as "The Interpreter" for the Ancients, and as a prophetic figure for modern commentators. This project will offer the chance to scrutinise Blake's work and imagination, by considering the friendships, dependencies, influences and associations which sustained him. It will involve re-examining an icon of Romantic creative isolation in terms resonant with present day creative cultures, in terms, that is, of co-production, collaboration and networks.

The project has been timed to coincide with the opening of the major Blake exhibition at Tate Britain in September 2019, and the re-dedication of a gallery space to the display of his work from Summer 2020.

The key framing questions of this research might include:

- What were the different networks that Blake operated within?
- What roles did these networks play in forming Blake's art in a practical sense?
- What status did Blake hold within these networks, and how did that influence his creative practices?
- How has Blake's posthumous reputation been shaped by these associations?
- What does considering the artist and his artworks within these networks tell us about artistic labour at our own historical juncture?

The shape of the thesis is open to the successful candidate to determine, but s/he would need to be able to work across the literary and visual arts where most of the scholarship on Blake sits. The thesis should also have a strong historical and materialist emphasis, considering the social history of association and art production as a social practice. The thesis would require close textual analysis, attention to the materiality of artworks, and a readiness to engage with collective biography and social history. Regarding these last topics, we would expect the student to develop a clear methodology, probably involving some form of network analysis based on mass data.

The successful candidate will be expected to participate in the curatorial and scholarly cultures of both Tate and the University of York, especially the [Centre for Eighteenth Century Studies](#). Both have strong track records of symposia and public events dedicated to Blake and his world. The student would be invited to develop the appropriate means of establishing a network around the theme of Blake and his associations, perhaps partially through social media, and certainly in the form of a symposium to be held in year 3 at York.

Principal supervisor: Professor Jon Mee (University of York)

Second supervisor: Amy Concannon Assistant Curator 1790–1850, British Art at Tate)

Entry criteria

Potential applicants must have a master's degree with Distinction, with at least 70% achieved or predicted for the dissertation.

Applicants may come from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds (e.g. English literature, history of art, sociology of culture, political theory, museum studies, media and communication studies, cultural studies, conservation), but it is expected that the successful candidate will be able to clearly explain the relationship between their existing training and the topic of the studentship, and to indicate how their present research interests relate to the proposed topic area. Applicants who have experience of working in the field would be particularly welcome.

The project can be undertaken on a full-time or part-time basis.

To apply

Applicants should complete the [online form](#), choosing the 2019 October option, full-time start date, and upload:

- A full CV;
- research proposal of no more than 1,000 words, outlining a particular area or approach that they would like to pursue;
- a writing sample of up to 5,000 words;
- an academic transcript;
- details of two referees;
- if relevant, proof of English language proficiency.

Attachments should use the following file name convention:
[Surname]_CV and ***[Surname]_Research_Proposal***.

The deadline for applications is Friday 31 May 2019.

Please ask two referees to email signed references (from their institutional email accounts) to english-enquiries@york.ac.uk. The deadline for receipt is **Friday 31 May 2019**. The responsibility for ensuring that references are received by the deadline rests with the candidates.

Interviews for shortlisted candidates will be held in June/July at Tate Britain.

Only complete applications received, with both references, by the deadline, can be considered.

More information

For informal enquiries relating to the studentship, please contact Professor Jon Mee at jon.mee@york.ac.uk. Questions regarding the application process should be addressed to the Departmental Manager, Cathy Moore, at english-enquiries@york.ac.uk, with 'York-Tate CDP' in the subject line.

The successful student will join a large cohort of Collaborative Doctoral award students at Tate, as well as the thriving postgraduate community at the University of York. For more information about doctoral students at Tate see [Studentships](#).

Applicants will normally be restricted to candidates from the UK and EU countries.

The award is subject to the AHRC's terms, to which applicants should refer before applying (see the [Research Funding Guide](#)).

The studentship is funded through the AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership programme and includes tuition fees up to the standard Home/EU amount and an annual maintenance grant. The doctoral stipend for 2019/20 has been set as £15,559 (inclusive of CDP maintenance payment). Other funds to support research training activities and professional development are available.

Note that overseas students are not eligible for AHRC awards (except under specific circumstances) and EU students who are not UK citizens are eligible to receive fees only.