The geographies of Englishness: landscape and the national past 1880-1940


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Abstract

This co-edited volume of 14 commissioned essays critically reconsidered shifting relationships between national identity, modernization and landscape to emerge in the period between 1880-1940. Chapters examined, for example, the assimilation of European modernism, assertions of Englishness and themes of both national identity and modernization in the years prior to the Second World War. One of the Yale ‘Studies in British Art’ series, the book derived from a timely and influential jointly organised conference ‘Rethinking Englishness’ held at the University of York in 1997 and the Henry Moore Foundation. The three editors co-wrote the Introduction, each contributed one of the chapters and divided equally the responsibility for editing those additional chapters where subject matter lay closest to their individual areas of expertise. The Introduction maintained that Englishness as a concept is both complex and unresolved but one that artists and theorists within our period continually attempted to define and develop. As such the challenge was made to existing conventional accounts of English modernity and modernism, to questions of cultural value and traditional habits of periodization. Holt’s chapter ‘An Ideal Modernity: Spencer Gore at Letchworth’ (which appeared in revised form as a chapter in her 2003 monograph) questioned conventional polarities between Englishness and modernity and saw Gore’s paintings as striving towards both a metaphorical and pictorial stability, thus resonating with contemporary anxieties about cultural and economic change in the city and country. Northumbria University contributed financial and administrative support to the realization of this project, thus beginning a (still continuing) collaboration with the University of York which has resulted in the organization of several conferences and in the planning for and editorial board management of the journal ‘Visual Culture in Britain’.

Item Type: Book

Uncontrolled Keywords: Landscape painting, English, National characteristics, English, in art,

Subjects: L700 Human and Social Geography

Department: Faculties > Arts, Design and Social Sciences > Arts

Related URLs: * Library Catalogue

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Date Deposited: 04 Aug 2008 13:19

Last Modified: 24 Oct 2017 08:11

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