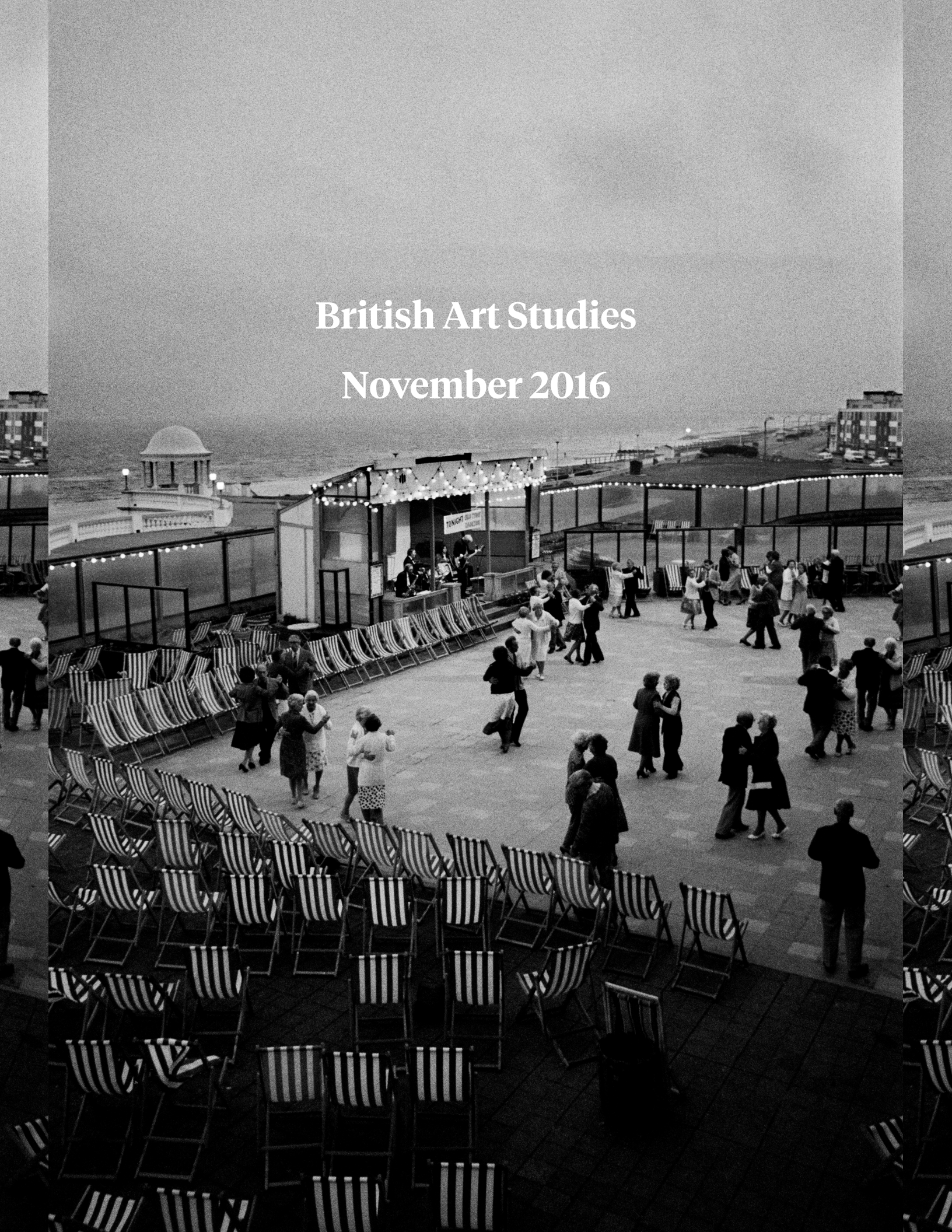
British Art Studies

November 2016



British Art Studies
Issue 4, published 28 November 2016

Cover image: Martin Parr, De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill on Sea, East Sussex, England, UK, 1978. Digital image courtesy of Martin Parr / © Martin Parr / Magnum Photos (LON28062)

PDF generated on 15 February 2024

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Published by:

Paul Mellon Centre
16 Bedford Square
London, WC1B 3JA
https://www.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk

In partnership with:

Yale Center for British Art
1080 Chapel Street
New Haven, Connecticut
https://britishart.yale.edu

ISSN: 2058-5462
DOI: 10.17658/issn.2058-5462
URL: https://www.britishartstudies.ac.uk

Editorial team: https://www.britishartstudies.ac.uk/about/editorial-team
Advisory board: https://www.britishartstudies.ac.uk/about/advisory-board

Produced in the United Kingdom.

A joint publication by

PAUL MELLON CENTRE

YALE CENTER FOR BRITISH ART

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Cite as

British Art Studies Editorial Group, "Editorial", British Art Studies, Issue 4, https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-04/editorial

One Year On

British Art Studies is one year old. Since launching the journal on 30 November 2015, we have published three “open” issues (including this one) and one special issue. Over 24,000 unique users have visited the journal and accessed its contents. We have published the work of 118 contributors, in a variety of formats. All of this has been made possible through the support of our peer reviewers, Advisory Board, and the numerous institutions, collections, and artists who have made digital images available to us. Each issue is an experiment—in terms of technology, collaboration, image presentation, and content. In this way, the journal is building a community that is interested and engaged in experimenting, as we continue to develop the scope and interfaces of this digital publication. With each issue we are learning from experience, and taking on board feedback.

Over the past year we have added several new features. One of the most substantial of these is the downloadable PDF function, which creates files that mirror as much as possible the online versions of the articles. At first, the journal team was sceptical about introducing this function, arguing that the interactivity of our born-digital journal can only be experienced online. Is the PDF a step backwards, a nervous retention of the “printable” version? Our Advisory Board did not think so and together we conceived of scenarios where PDFs are useful: in situations where internet access is patchy or non-existent; for the use of copies as teaching resources; for hand annotation and preservation in personal and institutional libraries. These kinds of considerations are part of an ongoing dialogue about how the journal is used, what our authors and users want from it, and how it can continue to develop in ways that anticipate and contribute to the future of online scholarly publishing. This has been a creative and rewarding experience—we have learnt so much in just one year.

Developing Digitally

We don't often have a chance to acknowledge the efforts of those involved in the various forms of mental and practical work entailed in the production, circulation, and use of the digital resources that supplement each issue of *BAS*. The collaborative exchanges necessary to create such materials are considerable, as our contributors quickly learn once they are introduced to the small armies of designers and developers enlisted to create content to support their narrative.

Matthew Lincoln and Abram Fox's article has been supplemented by a series of interactive charts that were optimized for web-publishing by Nikita Rokotyan using the JavaScript library D3.js. These responsive charts offer

readers a rich—and hopefully intuitive—visual interface with which to navigate through a large data set from the Getty Provenance Index that might otherwise appear unwieldy.

This issue sees a further incursion into the realm of the “digital humanities” with a three-dimensional model reconstructing a historic interior, which was commissioned for Catherine Roach’s article. Challenged to explore the recreation process at first hand, Catherine has worked with the *BAS* team and George Voicke from Duck Duck Zeus, a London-based game design agency, to create a reconstruction of an exhibition that took place in London nearly two hundred years ago, using a PowerPoint presentation, a floor plan, and an unillustrated exhibition catalogue. The intriguing results raise many questions about how best to approach the reconstruction of lost spaces, which Catherine reflects on in her text.

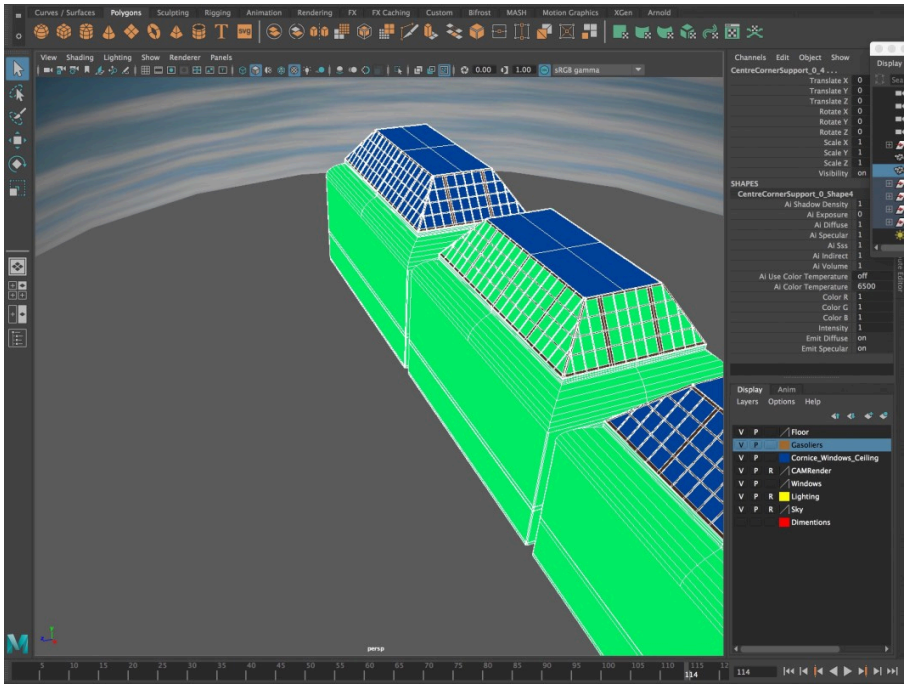

Figure 1.
George Voicke, In-progress 3D model of the British Institution, produced for Catherine Roach's article 'Rehanging Reynolds' in Issue 4 of *British Art Studies*

The close study of artworks has been supported by the integration of zoomable high-resolution images that are incorporated throughout this issue. The technical infrastructure required to generate and present this type of image had not previously been available to our team, but innovative work by the International Image Interoperability Framework (IIIF) consortium has meant that the creation, retrieval, and delivery of high-resolution images is no longer prohibitively expensive. We can now pull in the best quality, most authoritative images directly from participating repositories such as the

library and gallery collections at Yale. We hope that the number of participating institutions in the IIIF consortium will continue to grow, so that our journals, and other digital publishers, can continue to benefit from such open-access content.

Creative Conversations

In this first year of publication, *BAS* and the journal's team have become active participants in the expanding conversation about open-access publishing. In October 2016, *BAS* Editors Martina Droth and Sarah Turner participated in a seminar on publishing art history digitally organized by the online journal *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* and funded by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation and the NYU Center for the Humanities. The event opened with a keynote by Greg Albers, Digital Publications Manager at the J. Paul Getty Trust, which had the purposefully provocative title "Breaking Almost Everything: The Current Practice and Future Potential of Digital Publishing". Greg argued that the entire history of publishing can be seen through the lens of technological disruption and that these early days of digital publishing are no different. He highlighted the culture of experimentation that is prompting the development of new digital tools—and called on art historians to embrace new digital languages, to collaborate, and to become equipped to publish and disseminate their work on digital platforms. As our fourth issue demonstrates, *BAS* is one such space of experimentation and collaboration. The digital projects we have been developing are challenging not only conventional presentations, but also the workflows associated with traditional print journals. Increasingly we find ourselves working with "unfinished" content—ideas that are looking for the right platform. Often we work with contributors from the outset to develop projects in tandem with digital possibilities.

What are the essential items art historians need in their digital toolbox? This was a common question at a recent Digital Art Histories symposium organized by the Early Career Researcher Network at the Paul Mellon Centre. Speakers described the need for experimental approaches—being open to failure, or adapting when something does not work – an essential part of working digitally. Participants shared an attitude of openness and boldness, as well as a sense of camaraderie developing in what keynote speaker Rafe Hallett described as a culture of "digital bricolage".

As we develop *BAS*, we are also developing new relationships between and amongst our authors, editors, technologists, and, we hope, our readers. In February 2017, Martina Droth and Sarah Turner will chair a session at the College Art Association conference in New York entitled "Editing Journals in a Digital Age" which will explore many of these issues with the editors of other journals—print, digital, and hybrid—to think through how the processes of

editing and producing journals is necessarily adapting to keep pace with changes in how we publish, and in how research is done, thought about, and presented. The session is sponsored by the Association of Research Institutes in Art History, which has itself been exploring ways of supporting digital art history, with a prize for electronic publications. The ecosystem of open-access digital journals is inherently collaborative, rather than competitive. Together, journals such as those represented at the workshop in New York—*Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, *Journal18*, *Triple Canopy* and *BAS*—are redefining what a journal is and can be. It is not surprising that digital publishing is writ large across CAA's programme. Tom Scutt will contribute to "Getting Started in Publishing Digital Art History", a professional development workshop intended as a forum for interested researchers and authors to ask questions, get advice, and be put in contact with experts and collaborators. We look forward to all of these discussions and to learning from them.

Embedding Events

One of the aims of *BAS* is to create feedback loops between the research activities of the Paul Mellon Centre and the Yale Center for British Art, extending the conversation and opening it up to a larger audience. Issue 4 puts this into action by drawing upon our recent international conference "Photography and Britishness", which was held at the Yale Center for British Art on 4–5 November 2016. Traditionally, publishing conference proceedings and edited anthologies is a notoriously protracted process, often with years intervening between the event and its published form. Here, instead of awaiting polished texts worked up from conference papers, we have published the recordings of the event, and embedded it into an issue that is rich with debates about photography.

The collaborative process of developing the conference also led to other outcomes. The photography historian John Tagg, with whom we worked on the programme, instigated this issue's Conversation Piece, a provocation about photography between theory and the archive since the 1970s. Some of the respondents also spoke at the conference; others extend the conversations well beyond that event's focus on Britishness. Martin Parr, our keynote speaker, has created the covers for Issue 4, drawing upon the rich archive of photographs he has made over forty years of photographing places and people in Britain. While this issue is not exclusively focused on photography, the conference has given us the impetus to highlight work in this area—something our institutions are not traditionally associated with. What came through emphatically are the diverse ways in which scholars are not only approaching interpretations of "Britishness", but of the medium of photography itself.

Looking Ahead

In the coming year of *BAS* we will continue to develop best practices for our journal. The "behind-the-scenes" work is as crucial as the front-end, ensuring that *BAS*'s practices and policies are as robust and progressive as its design and technical infrastructure. Partly, this involves anticipating the needs and concerns of our authors. We recently updated our Policy page to reflect our investigation into the upcoming 2022 Research Excellence Framework (REF) guidelines, aware that authors based in UK universities must plan their research submissions years in advance. By virtue of our content being freely and digitally available upon publication under a non-commercial licence, we are happy to confirm that *BAS* is a "gold level" journal for the purposes of the REF (more information about which can be found here). We hope this brings a level of clarity to authors considering publishing with the journal. Our ethos is supported by Yale University's Digital Collections Center Open Access policy, which states that the "preservation, transmission, and advancement of knowledge in the digital age are promoted by the creative use and reuse of digitized content for research, teaching, learning, and creative activities."

We have also followed the practices of publications such as the *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art*, *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, and the *RIHA Journal*, by encouraging submissions in languages other than English. Although the journal only publishes research in English, we aim to support scholars researching British art in all languages, and will make every effort to have such submissions peer reviewed, and to continue to support translation of articles selected for publication.

In looking ahead, the editorial team depends upon diverse conversations that play out in conferences, publications, and networks in the arts and digital humanities. This autumn, the British Art Network and Contemporary Art Society hosted a seminar on aspects of displaying and preserving sound art, which introduced the team to principles of best practice in a subject area we have yet to tackle, but hope future authors will pursue. Digital publishing offers new opportunities for incorporating sound and moving images into articles in ways that we are only just beginning to explore.

BAS is a journal dedicated to publishing research on "British art". But just as the borders of a digital publication are open and porous, so is the stated focus of our remit. Our first issue opened a discussion around the provocation "There's no such thing as British Art"; with Issue 4, we continue the debate, not least through our conference *Photography and Britishness*, and the Conversation Piece "Exit Theory". From the outset, we have sought to open our field to international scrutiny, and to ensure an international reach of authors and readers. Such conversations about art and culture are increasingly vital.

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