Written by Annja Neumann, Cambridge Digital Humanities, University of Cambridge, 2023

## Study pack for Digital Humanities and Media Studies students (postgraduate level)

**AFTER ABSTRACTION**: an experimental multimedia performance and a talk by Prof Rüdiger Görner in response to paintings by Ruth Rix and prints by Helga Michie, **2:00 PM on 25 February 2023**, Cripps Auditorium, Magdalene College, Cambridge, accompanying the exhibition CROSS-CONNECTIONS; for further details see here.

**Exhibition CROSS-CONNECTIONS, Opening Hours 1 February - 28 March 2023**
Robert Cripps Gallery, Magdalene College, Cambridge
https://www.magd.cam.ac.uk/events/cross-connections-paintings-by-ruth-rix

Monday to Thursday. Closed on Friday.
- 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM (last entry 11:30 AM)
- 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM (last entry 3:30 PM).

To arrange access to the Exhibition please call at the Porters' Lodge, Magdalene College

Space, physical and digital, has become more hotly contested than ever in post-pandemic times. The paintings by Ruth Rix and prints by Helga Michie challenge space in specific historical contexts such as the Kindertransporte (see list of online links below) but they also speak to the present moment in terms of their constant movement and fluent re-mediation.

Ruth Rix's paintings are permanently in transit. In their moving topographies, 'the elements of landscape, the huts, the hills, trees, clouds, the water of rivers, lakes and seas, are participants, actors in the drama of Ruth's paintings' that resurface across different works (Hugh Rix, 2022, Cross-Connections catalogue, p. 7). The exhibition *Cross-Connections* seeks to materialise these transient spatial relations through a series of events.

For instance, *After Abstraction* re-stages the space of the gallery by inviting viewers – alongside the huts, the hills and the lakes – to participate in the paintings. The performance explores how music, meaning and movement are articulated across different spaces and media in response to Rix's and Michie's works. In many ways, *After Abstraction* interacts with Rüdiger Görner's claim that 'we can no longer afford not to hear what we see' in galleries.

**OPTIONAL Practice as Research (PaR) assignment** for the Digital Visual Cultures Option, and students of the MPhil in Digital Humanities (Cambridge Digital Humanities, University of Cambridge)

**Curatorial model for the digital exhibition of CROSS-CONNECTIONS**

Entries will be judged by a panel of experts. The winner (strongest entry from students) will be considered for implementation on the Magdalene College website.

**Closing date:** 28 March 2023

**Assignment:** Design a curatorial model or a digital element that re-mediates the *Cross-Connections* exhibition into digital forms to be used for an online exhibition (digital images of the exhibition will be available on the virtual learning environment Moodle).

a. How do Ruth Rix's paintings and Helga Michie's prints negotiate space? Do they employ aesthetic principles that relate to the mediation between physical and digital spaces?

b. A number of Ruth Rix's paintings in Cross-Connections create a proscenium that expands beyond the picture pane. Who is an actor and who is a spectator in this visual drama? How might spectators in the gallery become agents in, or of the artworks?

c. Landscape, living space and their moving topographies play an important part in Rix's and Michie's works. How are these landscapes constituted? Do they show cross-connections between the works of mother (Helga Mitchie) and daughter (Ruth Rix)? Design a curatorial model that re-mediates the *Cross-Connections* exhibition into digital forms that can be used to create an online exhibition and or a digital lens to analyse the paintings/prints? (Digital images of the exhibition will be available on the virtual learning environment Moodle)

d. In the experimental performance *After Abstraction*, paintings/prints interconnect with music and an exhibition meets its creation process. It brings musical works into the gallery that Rix listened to while working in her atelier. Use digital tools (for instance video, photography, tablet paintings, AR, 3D images, generative AI) or analogue methods (paper and pen, sculpture etc.) to document the *Cross-Connections* exhibition (during opening hours) OR the multimedia performance (during its second run on 17 March).

Write a short analysis of one of the paintings based on your (digital) practice and by considering how it links space across the past, present and future (given its specific historical context).

What are the underlying staging principles of the exhibition or how was the *After Abstraction* event choreographed? Is it possible to adopt these staging strategies for an online exhibition of *Cross-Connections*?

Material for further study:

Rüdiger Görner: After Abstraction. The Soundscape of Shapes in Works by Ruth Rix and Helga Michie [excerpts from performed talk on 25 February 2023].

R.G. will offer semi-analytical and poetic reflections on the art of Ruth Rix and Helga Michie. His approach will be a prismatic one in the sense that he will suggest different perspectives on these canvasses and prints relating them to (trans-)literary interpretations.

A poem by Ilse Aichinger that will be used to engage with Rix's paintings and Michie's prints in both the talk and performance:

Ilse Aichinger
**Beyond**

*for Clemens Podewils*

Preserving
how the lines
between grass
and the grass-covered stone
run,
between the gaps of branches,
and those of the forkings off,
between the sounds of light and shade.
Tracing the celebrations
of mourning and joyfulness,
the ridges
and the signs of smoke above,
until they have
become but one,
discovering themselves,
no downfall.

(Translated by Rüdiger Görner)

*(to be performed in the Robert Cripps Gallery in the Exhibition "Cross-Connections")*

[...]

Music (IV)

(4)  Amid conversations falls the shadow of silence. It divides and binds; it dissolves and reconfigures as a haze. I look at drawings as if they were phonographies, at colours as if they were clusters of voices. A room of one's own is meaningless without a voice of one's own, a voice in search of the one and only sentence as a configuration of words dipped in colours lined up until the lines become part of a score, strings of instruments thereafter. Strange that galleries are silent. Should there not be a constant humming of viewers translating what they see into muted sounds, transforming themselves into hummingbirds before paintings, extracting their colours thus enriching their plumages further and further.
As we can no longer afford not to hear what we see.

Music (V) […]
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Below is a list of online links which provide historical context of the artists' work.

1. *The Precipice Behind*. Film about **Ruth Rix** by Andrew Snell:

*Ruth Rix was born in Leamington Spa. As a young girl, she was constantly on the move with her mother, the artist Helga Michie. Living in rented rooms in shared houses witnessing frequent comings and goings and hearing shocking stories of the fate of the family members who had stayed behind in Vienna. Her paintings reflect this fractured world of moving huts and see-through houses.*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmazIPkuUGg

2. Information on twins **Ilse Aichinger** and **Helga Michie**. 'Tomorrow becomes today and today becomes yesterday.' Text by Sabine Apostolo
https://www.jmw.at/en/news/tomorrow_becomes_today_and_today_becomes_yesterday

3. Information on **Helga Michie**
https://kuenste-im-exil.de/KIE/Content/EN/Persons/michie-helga-en.html

Two poems by Michie, from https://korrespondenzen.at/concord/

Vienna

Thoughts circular and of stone
for sparrows to pick crumbs
within their contexts.
Intentions are done with,
uncertainties stuck rigidly into ponds
stand justified,
though the wild prickly heart of cut hedges
bordered by hills of plasticine does beat.
But how did time come in?
Through key-holes perhaps,
and who will be emperor
two-thousand years hence
in that city of blistering bubbles?

For Ruth

Do you remember
how we caught that hour
in a pool of light?
And do you know
that I have got it now,
that I smuggled it
across the years
hidden in a basket
filled with apples?

Nat Jobbins composed a vocal-performative piece in response to Rix's paintings:

# It would take longer than this (so, so long)

nat jobbins

find a friend and walk with them.
sing one of these phrases over and over again as you explore the room.
sing to one another, to objects you pass by and also to people you encounter on your walk.
slowly search for other friends, and when you find a whole choir, sing page 2.

magnificent and expansive and commanding. sing each phrase once, together, and
breathe between them, outside of the meter

ad lib. around the wind. cue singing as written, getting more distant all the time

when your words have been fully fed away, sing the tune of the fragment
you wandered with on page 1 to the words EAT YOUR ANCESTORS WITH SPICES.
do this four times, getting louder, and disperse when you are done