‘Herbert Read: A Legacy in British Art History’: Curatorial research and Engagement

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Sir Herbert Read (1893-1968)

"[I]n dissipating my talents, I have made it difficult for my contemporaries to recognise the underlying unity of my purpose and my practice. I am left with the hope that someday someone will take the trouble to trace ‘the figure in the carpet’."
Curatorial research

“Dear Mr. Callan,

I have made a catalogue of my paintings and enclose a copy. I have put my own valuations against the items and sent another list to Mr. Charles Gimpel, and asked him to confirm or revise my estimates…”

Letter from Herbert Read to F. Callan, Messrs. Glanvill Enthoven Bottomley Ltd., 25 March 1963

Special Collections, Leeds University Library, BC MS 20c Herbert Read/14/5
Inside pages of Catalogue of Paintings, Sculpture & Drawings, Stonegrave House, 1963
Special Collections, Leeds University Library, BC MS 20c Herbert Read/14/5
COCTEAU, Jean
[Ink] "Le bain de lumièrè (maison de santé)"
"1926. Nght of the night. Amical souvenir au professeur Read de Jean Cocteau"
[signed Jean*]
32 x 25

FRANCIS, Sam

HERON, Patrick
[Oil] [Still life]
"1949"
46 x 91

KLEE, Paul
"Rauferei"
[Pencil]
"1926 J. 1."  
21 x 14.5

MIRO, Joan [?]
20 x 70

MOORE, Henry
[Sculpture]

WARREN-DAVIES, John
[Sculpture]
"Double Figure"

WRIGHT, Austin
[Sculpture]
"Mother and Child"
Jacob Kramer (1892-1962)

“My dear Jacob,
I feel quite ashamed of not answering your letter of a fortnight ago and of not thanking you immediately for the etching. I have had it framed and brought it home today. It looks very well and we all like it very much indeed. I would like to see you doing some more etchings, for I think the medium suits your kind of sensibility. But you know best…”

Letter from Herbert Read to Jacob Kramer, 20 February 1928
Special Collections, Leeds University Library, BC MS 20c Kramer
Edward Wadsworth (1889-1949)

Edward Wadsworth, *Yorkshire Village*, 1914, woodcut
Image credit: University of Leeds

Sir Herbert Read, *Figure Composition No. 1*, 1916,
watercolour and ink
Private collection. Image credit: University of Leeds
Paul Nash (1889-1946)

“I had myself just returned from the Front, and it is perhaps worth recording that my interest in Paul Nash’s work dates from this time. I wanted to see and hear the truth told about our hellish existence in the trenches...”


Special Collections, Leeds University Library, BC Read C2136
Ben Nicholson (1894-1982)

Herbert Read by Howard Coster at No. 3 The Mall, Parkhill Road, Hampstead, 1934
© National Portrait Gallery, London

Letter from Herbert Read to Ben Nicholson, 28 October 1945
Tate Gallery Archives, TGA 8717/1/2/3689

Dear Ben,

You will be relieved to hear that the missing relief is here. It was safely stored in the loft, and there was no excuse for my not remembering it because it is printed all over with brown paper. I am afraid there is no chance of bringing it here.

Letter from Herbert Read to Ben Nicholson, 25 January 1959
Tate Gallery Archives, TGA 8717/1/2/3729

I took the college to Jodk on Monday, on the way to Burnham. Mr. Grimvalld there shall it. Why not "Le Petit Parisien", which is printed quite distinctly across it? I am leaving the question of
Ben Nicholson (1894-1982)

Ben Nicholson, *1963 (drawing)*, 1962, pen and wash

© Angela Verren Taunt. All rights reserved, DACS 2021. Bequest of Benedict Read, 2017. Image credit: University of Leeds
Naum Gabo (1890-1977)

Naum Gabo, Op. 4, 1950, woodcut
The Work of Naum Gabo © Nina & Graham Williams/Tate.
Bequest of Benedict Read, 2017. Image credit: University of Leeds

Letter from Naum Gabo to Herbert Read, 30 November 1950
Yale Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Naum Gabo Papers, YCAL MSS 541, Series I
Naum Gabo (1890-1977)  

Herbert Read at Stonegrave with Naum Gabo’s  
Linear Construction II, c.1960s  
Special Collections, Leeds University Library, BC  
MS 20c Herbert Read/13/16

“...The construction you gave me I brought safely home, and I did not unpack it until I arrived here, and then what a revelation! We are all delighted with it, and so proud to possess “a real Gabo”. It is a particularly beautiful example of your work, and it gives pleasure to everyone who sees it. I did not realise that you were giving me something so marvellous, and we shall indeed regard it as one of our most precious possessions. Thank you a thousand times, from the bottom of my heart...

Letter from Herbert Read to Naum Gabo, 27 April 1958
Yale Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Naum Gabo Papers, YCAL MSS 541, Series I
“Dear Herbert,
I have just come home from Paris where I have a small exhibition of Tempera-drawings and lithographs, and my greatest pleasure was to find your letter and your text for the New York catalogue. I do not know how to thank you for this foreword, it seems to me that it is the very best introduction imaginable.

With a little drawing, which a friend of ours is going to send you from London, Doris and I wish to express our present joy.”

Letter from Hans Erni to Herbert Read, 13 December 1958
Special Collections, University of Victoria, SC100-8.36
“As I write two pictures face me on the wall, one a pure abstraction by Ben Nicholson, the other a surrealist fantasy by Paul Delvaux. By chance their colours harmonise, if there is any contradiction in their forms, it must correspond to a contradiction in my own mind, for both appeal to me with equal force.”

Letter from Herbert Read to Eric Finlay, 22 May 1960
V&A National Art Library, 86.NN.59
Herbert Read at Stonegrave with Barbara Hepworth’s *Single Form*, c.1960s
© Photographer unknown. Image credit: University of Leeds
Digital exhibition

‘Man Behind the Moderns: the Art Collection of Herbert Read’
Gallery display

Display
‘Man Behind the Moderns: the Art Collection of Herbert Read’; with special display of additional material for early career research symposium, November 2022
Two-Minute Treasure video (above), blogs and social posts (right)
Collaborative Research Season:

‘Reassessing Herbert Read’

Organised in collaboration with the Henry Moore Institute and the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art

Reassessing Herbert Read

Winter 2022 & Spring 2023

This research season aims to give scholars, both emerging and established, a chance to work from a contemporary perspective. It also seeks to revisit his achievements and indirect and virtual access to his archive.

About this season

The impetus for this research season is the forthcoming launch of the University of Leeds’ digital exhibition on Herbert Read (1886-1966) and the themes it will address. The Henry Moore Institute has been a leader in the field of纪念碑 and abstract sculpture and hence will be a central focus of the research season.

This research season will feature a series of seminars, workshops, and discussions on Read’s life and work, with a particular focus on his role as a critic, writer, and collector of modern art. Participants will have the opportunity to engage with Read’s archives and to explore the ways in which his ideas have informed and influenced contemporary art.

This research season is co-organised by the Henry Moore Institute and the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, and is supported by the University of Leeds. It will run from Winter 2022 to Spring 2023.
‘New Approaches to Herbert Read’ early career research symposium (2 November 2022), in collaboration with the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art
Online talk by Dr Shantel Blakely (Rice University School of Architecture, Houston); Film screening of ‘To Hell With Culture’ with talk with film maker Huw Wahl and Alice Miller (Hyde Park Picture House) – held at Leeds Central Library
‘Man Behind the Moderns’ - archive show-and-tell event (28 February 2023) with *Yorkshire Post* coverage
Imagined archives

Ruth Burton discusses the Herbert Read collection at the Star Gallery, Burton (above) and ‘Imagined Archives’ event (8 March 2023 - right)

Discussion

Imagined archives: transatlantic conversations about the Read collections

Wednesday 8 March 2023
18:00-19:00
Online
Touch-Space conference

Touch-Space Conference (29 March 2023)
Courtesy of Henry Moore Institute
Thank you!

Digital exhibition
‘Man Behind the Moderns: the Art Collection of Herbert Read’
https://spotlight.leeds.ac.uk/herbert-read

Collaborative research season
‘Reassessing Herbert Read’

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Herbert Read admiring Paul Klee’s Resting Ships at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1962
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