

Picture postcards: a colour and collage workshop

Convened and Introduced by Susan Reid (Independent scholar, UK)

This workshop is interested in picture postcards as material objects that carry images across physical and cultural distances. Ostensibly postcards bridge the space between sender and recipient, although the viewer may also experience a sense of dislocation and absence. We might perceive a distancing effect between the exotic or noteworthy images displayed on picture postcards and the contrasting more mundane, everyday life of both sender and recipient. On the other hand, picture postcards were symptomatic of mass-produced modernity that during their heyday in the first two decades of the twentieth century amounted to what we might now describe as a 'viral' phenomenon; indeed in 1899 a British commentator noted that 'The illustrated postcard craze, like the influenza has spread to these islands from the Continent, where it has been raging with a considerable severity'.

In some ways, then, it might seem unexpected that Lawrence was an enthusiastic adopter of this form of popular culture, especially as postcards are usually formulaic in their framing of photographs – often displaying idealized images. As Timothy von Laar writes, 'making a postcard image isn't a passive act of receiving an image ... it is an act of deciding the importance of something and how best to represent that image'. We will have an opportunity to experience that act of representation for ourselves in the collaging workshop led by Rebecca Loweth* in just a few moments – so have your coloured papers and glue sticks at the ready!

In turn, what does the choice of postcard say about its sender? Until 1902 the entire back of a postcard was given to the address and the message was primarily conveyed by the image on the front. In Lawrence's case though we rarely attend to the images on the hundreds of postcards he sent to family and friends throughout his adult life. For instance, yesterday Christopher Pollnitz showed us those fascinating photographs by Dennis Forrester but only the back of one of Lawrence's postcards that sent to him – what, I wonder, were the postcard images on the front and how might they add to the visual dynamic of that particular relationship? And so to prompt us to consider questions like this and to approach Lawrence in a visual way, I asked **Jonathan Long**, who as many of you will know is an important collector of Lawrence books and materials, to show us some of the picture postcard images he has recorded over the years.

*It is also a great pleasure to introduce artist **Rebecca Loweth**, who graduated from the Slade School of Art in 2015 – the same school of course that Lawrence's friends Dorothy Brett and Mark Gertler attended 100 years earlier, along with various members of the Bloomsbury Group! I had great fun at a postcard workshop that Rebecca ran for a Slade conference earlier this year – the theme was colour and poetry and although Lawrence wasn't mentioned, I thought particularly of how Lawrence saw colours more vibrantly than they appear to most of us. Kathleen Vella mentioned during her presentation this morning how when Lawrence copied paintings, he invariably used much brighter shades than the original. Rebecca has very kindly agreed to tailor a workshop for us here today, which I hope you will find stimulating amidst all our verbal discussions.