

## ‘within the reach of all’

West, Emma

DOI:

[10.3366/mod.2020.0290](https://doi.org/10.3366/mod.2020.0290)

License:

None: All rights reserved

*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

West, E 2020, 'within the reach of all': bringing art to the people in interwar Britain', *Modernist Cultures*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 225-252. <https://doi.org/10.3366/mod.2020.0290>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

### **Publisher Rights Statement:**

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Edinburgh University Press in *Modernist Cultures*. The Version of Record is available online at: <http://www.euppublishing.com/doi/abs/10.3366/mod.2020.0290>

### **General rights**

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

### **Take down policy**

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact [UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk](mailto:UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk) providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

**‘within the reach of all’:**

**Bringing Art to the People in Interwar Britain**

**Dr Emma West, University of Birmingham**

**Abstract**

The years during and after the Great War saw an explosion in arts organisations attempting ‘to bring the Arts into everyday life’.<sup>1</sup> This essay argues that arts organisations should be seen alongside institutions like bookshops, magazines and galleries as key mediating institutions between modernist artists and writers and the general public. Using the Arts League of Service as a case study, I explore whether it was possible for such organisations to be experimental, educational *and* popular. To what extent could they reconcile their democratic principles with their belief in the transformative power of experimental modern art, design, literature and performance?

**Key words:** arts organisations, institutions, Arts League of Service, democracy, modernism

In 1929, audiences in village halls, municipal theatres and school auditoriums in Northern England and Scotland were treated to a surprisingly daring piece of modernist experimentation. In-between sea chanties, Gaelic and cockney folk songs, Greek dancing and Hardy poems, the Arts League of Service (ALS) Travelling Theatre staged an ambitious production of Ezra Pound’s translation of *Hagoromo*, a Japanese Noh play. Featuring

Japanese-style dancing, painted costumes inspired by prints at the British Museum, dramatic (if rather dim) lighting, and a score by Edward Rubbra, described in the *Leeds Mercury* as ‘mysterious, tinkling, wailing, drumming music on strange instruments’,<sup>2</sup> this bizarre performance mystified and thrilled critics and audiences alike. The *Sunderland Daily Echo* called it ‘a thing of vague, elusive beauty [...] the outstanding item in the programme’; for the reviewer at the *Yorkshire Post*, the piece had ‘all the delicate charm of an old print’.<sup>3</sup> The *Aberdeen Press* were a little more cautious in their praise, admitting that the ‘result is rather bewildering at first, but, as one gets used to it and the theme becomes explicit, its beauty and delicacy of treatment quite conceal any insufficiencies.’<sup>4</sup> The most critical response was from A. S. Wallace in the *Manchester Guardian*, who confessed that ‘we found Mr Ezra Pound’s translation from the Japanese too abstruse and mystical to be wholly intelligible’.<sup>5</sup> In her 1939 book *Travelling Players: The Story of the Arts League of Service*, ALS Secretary Eleanor Elder acknowledged that Wallace’s review came closest to the response of most audiences, who found the play baffling. Although their ‘artist friends were emphatic in their approval’, they ‘had letters from a number of people saying: “Give us something to laugh at. We found your Japanese play too difficult to understand.”’<sup>6</sup>

At first glance, these divergent responses to Pound’s translation – adulation by artists and critics, and bewilderment by the general public – appear to reinforce a traditional conception of modernism as the province of an educated metropolitan elite. Yet the staging and reception of *Hagoromo* is more complex than that: press reports emphasised how much audiences enjoyed ‘every item’ of the programme; the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* noted that ‘if there was again just a touch of the precious about [the programme] there was no doubt of its popularity.’<sup>7</sup> The ‘again’ is significant here: this was by no means the ALS’s first such ‘experiment’.<sup>8</sup> Since their inception in 1919, they had introduced village audiences to poetry by Rabindranath Tagore accompanied by ‘rhythmic gestures’; (*TP* 60) performances of

Anton Chekov's *The Proposal* and *Bear*; and modernist ballets choreographed by Margaret Morris with costumes by Edward McKnight Kauffer. The more vanguard elements of their repertoire were not 'universally popular', but the letters of thanks received, and, most crucially, the fact that audiences came back year on year, demonstrates that there was a demand for the ALS's brand of highbrow variety.<sup>9</sup> Like the case studies in Kristin Bluemel and Michael McCluskey's *Rural Modernity in Britain* (2018) and Neal Alexander and James Moran's *Regional Modernisms* (2013), the ALS explode myths about where modernism was seen, and by whom. They sought to complicate or even collapse the simple division between the rural and the urban, challenging assumptions about the artistic tastes and appetites of rural, provincial or working-class audiences. The ALS were not alone in this crusade: in the aftermath of the Great War, there was an explosion in British arts organisations seeking to bring art to *all* the people. Across the interwar period, groups as diverse as the Workers Educational Association (WEA), British Institute for Adult Education (BIAE), Artists International Association (AIA), the Imperial Arts League, Design and Industries Association (DIA), Council for Art and Industry (CAI) and Civic Arts Association (CAA) agitated for state support of, and wider public access to, the arts. Guided by principles of democracy and decentralisation, they believed in arts provision as a civil right: they campaigned for equal public access to – and participation in – the arts, regardless of whether you lived in Bloomsbury or in the Scottish Highlands.

This essay builds on Rod Rosenquist and Alice Wood's 2016 special issue of *Modernist Cultures*, 'Modernism in Public', in particular Daniel Moore's essay on the 'quasi-state sponsored groups' bringing modernist aesthetics into the domestic sphere, arguing that arts organisations need to be seen alongside magazines, bookshops and exhibitions as key mediating institutions between modernist artists and writers and the 'man on the street'.<sup>10</sup> I take as my central case study the Arts League of Service, using them as a lens through which

to examine broader institutional efforts to ‘bring art within the reach of all.’<sup>11</sup> In large part, the essay simply aims to draw attention to the pioneering work of the ALS, an organisation yet to receive sustained critical attention.<sup>12</sup> Uncovering their history expands our understanding of British modernist networks (members and collaborators included T. S. Eliot, Wyndham Lewis, Paul Nash, Duncan Grant, Edith Sitwell and Marion Dorn), revealing how those networks revolved around administrators and organisers dedicated to bringing avant-garde ideas to a mass audience. Yet the essay also seeks to move beyond the ALS’s engagement with ‘modernism’ to examine the wider tensions and contradictions inherent in interwar arts organisations’ ‘mission’ to bring art to ‘the people’.<sup>13</sup> What did groups like the ALS, DIA or BIAE mean when they referred to ‘the people’?<sup>14</sup> Did ALS members view themselves as part of this group, or somehow separate to or even above them? These groups were formed on democratic principles, but what role did ‘the people’ have in choosing the types of art and culture that was ‘brought’ to them? In other words, did such groups adopt a top-down or bottom-up approach to art education, and did this approach affect whether they achieved their aims?

### **Art and Democracy in Post-War Britain**

‘There is a new spirit abroad’, observed the columnist ‘Tis’ in the September 1919 issue of *Colour* magazine: ‘leagues and societies are springing up everywhere formed for the propagation of Art.’<sup>15</sup> This proliferation of arts associations had already been the subject of a front-page article in *The Athenaeum* in July of the same year, which welcomed the recent formation of the British Music Society, the Arts League of Service, the League of Arts for National and Civic Ceremony and the British Drama League.<sup>16</sup> While their individual aims and areas of interest were diverse, each of these organisations – along with the DIA and CAA, both founded in 1915 – sought to bring art (in its broadest conception) into everyday

life. Each one believed that their chosen art was ‘not something outside ordinary lives, to be enjoyed by the initiated or the leisured few’, but something essential: in the memorable words of the architect and educator W. R. Lethaby, ‘Art is not a special sauce applied to ordinary cooking; it is the cooking itself if it is good.’<sup>17</sup> Art could help enrich the lives of ordinary citizens; it could, in fact, help to *construct* citizens: it was a democratic and democratising force, awakening in the public a ‘spirit of responsibility and civic pride in the culture of the nation.’<sup>18</sup> The miraculous healing powers of art were not confined to individual nations: according to the photographer Adolphe Braun, ‘In Art there exists no difference between the various nations’; as such, the arts ‘should be the means of performing a valuable mission in bringing together all mankind.’<sup>19</sup> In the optimistic, energetic, slightly giddy days of 1918 and 1919, it seemed that there was no social, economic or cultural problem that wider access to the arts could not fix.<sup>20</sup>

These ideas were not new – they can be traced back at least as far as the Arts and Crafts Movement – but the prevailing post-war spirit of optimism, co-operation and reconstruction suggested that, with sufficient state support, these ideas could reach the whole population for the first time. In the wake of the 1918 Representation of the People Act, which expanded the electorate by over 13 million,<sup>21</sup> and following David Lloyd George’s November 1918 pledge to make Britain a ‘land fit for heroes to live in’, the nation was subject to an ambitious programme of reforms designed to ‘lift those who have been living in the dark places to a plateau where they will get the rays of the sun.’<sup>22</sup> It is no coincidence that Lloyd George’s comments here recall Matthew Arnold’s famous definition of culture as ‘sweetness and light’:<sup>23</sup> although not central to Lloyd George’s vision for a more inclusive, democratic and beautiful Britain, art, culture and education nevertheless took on new importance in the post-war world. Proposed reductions in working hours to a 48-hour working week promised ‘immense opportunities of education in the arts and handicrafts’;<sup>24</sup> in a piece on the ALS in

*New Witness*, Paul Nash argued that ‘in view of shorter working days, all workers should enjoy more leisure. [...] There is evident need of offering every one higher forms of entertainment and opportunities of enjoyment, study or practice of any art or craft.’<sup>25</sup> In the broader context of demobilisation, adult education became a new priority: the pioneering 1919 Report argued that ‘*adult education is a permanent and national necessity, an inseparable aspect of citizenship, and therefore should be both universal and lifelong.*’<sup>26</sup> There were real concerns about young men returning from France to work in rural areas; as Eleanor Elder recalled, ‘articles had begun to appear in the newspapers to the effect that demobilised men were refusing to return to their work on the land as they were finding the life in the country too dull. In fact, as a topical song of the day put it: “How are you going to keep him down on the farm after he’s seen Patee?”’ (TP 2) Yet despite the recognition that education, culture and art were crucial to Britain’s social and economic prosperity, by the time the 1919 Report was produced the money had already run out. The Report was commissioned by the Ministry of Reconstruction, but the Ministry was disbanded before it was even published; the following year, the country was plunged into a depression that put an end to many reconstruction projects.

In lieu of the promised state programmes of art, culture and education, arts organisations such as the ALS sought to ‘reach democracy’ by providing a ‘comprehensive and effective educational programme which will bring art within the reach of all.’<sup>27</sup> Central to the ALS’s early post-war aims was their desire to entertain and educate rural and disenfranchised workers: they sought not only to improve the lives of ‘the community’, but also of artists, many of whom had themselves returned from active service to be faced by soaring rents, unemployment and economic depression.<sup>28</sup> But their activities quickly expanded beyond the immediate work of reconstruction: as Elder later remarked, the ALS’s ‘programme was so large that looking back it seems that only a Ministry of Fine Arts could

have carried it out.' (TP 5) Bankrolled by a mix of private donations, membership fees, exhibition and performance ticket sales, and occasional grants from charitable trusts,<sup>29</sup> the organisation was split into two sections: 'The Drama', headed by Elder, a former dancer and teacher at Margaret Morris's dance school, and 'Painting, Sculpture, Architecture and Crafts', headed by Ana M. Berry, a lively South American art enthusiast who first encountered modern art while living in Paris before the war. In addition to the ALS Travelling Theatre, which gave thousands of performances to villages, towns and cities across the United Kingdom, Ireland and 'devastated regions in France',<sup>30</sup> the Dramatic Section established a Play Lending Library from 1923, with the actress and playwright Margaret Drew as librarian, and a bureau which offered advice on staging performances. Under Berry's leadership, the Art Section enlisted help from an Artists Sub-Committee comprising key figures from the Scottish Colourists (J. D. Fergusson), the London Group and New English Art Club (Randolph Schwabe and Harold Squire), as well as those associated with Vorticism (Frederick Etchells, Wyndham Lewis and Edward Wadsworth) and later Group X (the Vorticists, plus Frank Dobson and E. McKnight Kauffer).<sup>31</sup> Together they embarked upon an ambitious programme, including public lectures (figure 1); adult education lectures on the understanding of art by the historian Margaret Bulley at schools, colleges, hospitals and societies; exhibitions of painting, pottery, sculpture, posters and 'practical arts' in London, Oxford, Reading, Edinburgh and Bangor;<sup>32</sup> a Travelling Portfolio of Pictures that members could borrow to exhibit or purchase; and a series of talks on the BBC illustrated by a pamphlet, 'Looking at Pictures', in 1928. Although financial pressures meant that many of their plans were never realised (a block of artists' studios in Chelsea designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, a literary and artistic agency, and a Poster Bureau headed by Edward McKnight Kauffer were all shelved due to a lack of funds),<sup>33</sup> they nevertheless achieved an extraordinary range of activities across their eighteen-year lifespan.



To provide a full account of the ALS's activities is a book-length project; in this essay I seek to focus on just two areas that provide an insight into broader issues facing arts organisations during this period: their lectures and Travelling Portfolio of Pictures, which exposed the difficulties of explaining modern art to the general public, and the programme adopted by the Travelling Players, which raised questions over whether experimental work could ever appeal to a mass audience. In both cases, the fundamental question was the same: what did arts organisations need to do to facilitate a broad public understanding, or even appreciation, of modern art and performance?

### **Explaining Modern Art**

In *Civilising Caliban: The Misuse of Art 1875-1980*, Frances Borzello argues that nineteenth-century attempts to explain art to the people revolved around the image of 'art as a transparent window on the world.' With the advent of avant-garde, non-representational art, it was 'hard to use art to teach lessons about life when the art employed to work miracles was now refusing to do the job.'<sup>34</sup> In order to make modern art intelligible to as wide an audience as possible, then, groups such as the ALS and DIA developed two strategies: firstly, they developed a philosophy of art that was simple enough to explain to 'the people'; secondly, they organised events which immersed those 'people' in 'good' examples of modern art and design. These nascent attempts at adult art education were part of a wider interwar drive to create a public for contemporary art: we could think of essays and books produced for a general audience such as Herbert Read's *The Meaning of Art* (1931) and *Art Now* (1933) or John Gloag's *Industrial Art Explained* (1934) and *Design in Modern Life* (1934);<sup>35</sup> essays on art published in *The Listener* and later collected into *Art in England*, edited by R. S. Lambert (1937); or, later, books series such as Puffin Picture Books (1940-), Penguin Modern Painters (1944-) and Penguin's Things We See (1946-).<sup>36</sup> These publications, alongside exhibitions

promoting modern art and design in an accessible manner,<sup>37</sup> sought to debunk the perception that modern art was “‘Too strange”, or “‘Too difficult to understand”.’ (TP 95) As Theodor Adorno wrote in his 1931 essay ‘Why is the New Art So Hard to Understand?’, the ‘shock’ of the new art’s ‘strangeness and enigmatic form’ meant that the ‘great majority’ understood the new art ‘with difficulty’.<sup>38</sup> His solution was to give consumers more leisure time in which to occupy themselves ‘substantively and extensively with artistic matters’;<sup>39</sup> in the wake of the First World War, groups such as the DIA and the ALS seized the opportunities offered by a perceived increase in leisure time to embark on a programme of formal and informal art education.

Crucial to their educational programme was developing a simple way of explaining modern art and design. Although the DIA and the ALS might, in practice, have supported artists and designers who embraced a modernist aesthetic, both organisations sought to develop a set of universal values as opposed to a specific set of aesthetic criteria. Not only was such an approach more inclusive, allowing as it did a broad church of aesthetics within each organisation, but it was also easier to explain and *apply* to everyday life. As early as 1915, the DIA adopted the mantra ‘fitness for purpose’ to describe their functionalist approach: in the words of an early pamphlet, an ‘inkstand easily upset is a badly planned inkstand. A tin biscuit box in the shape of a golf bag is a bad, because a futile, box.’<sup>40</sup> The choice of everyday examples like cookery, inkstands or biscuit tins is significant: from its inception, the DIA and its supporters sought to counter the ‘high falutin’ talk about art as a sort of sealed mystery, unrelated to our everyday needs’.<sup>41</sup> In a November 1916 talk ‘Art and Commerce in Life’, Frank Pick used the example of a pair of boots to show how the universal principles of good design could translate into even the most mundane of objects;<sup>42</sup> this functionalist ideology was encapsulated in the phrase ‘fitness for purpose’.<sup>43</sup> According to

one of its founder members, the businessman and author Harry Peach, this phrase should be emphasised in DIA publicity ‘as the public could understand that’.<sup>44</sup>

Similarly, the ALS sought to emphasise the underlying principles underneath all forms of modern and historical art. Elder and Berry first met through Margaret Morris and J. D. Fergusson; the couple’s belief in the cross-fertilisation of the arts imbues the ALS from its inception. In an October 1917 article in *Art and Letters*, Morris wrote that

I look at dancing from the visual point of view of the artist, seeing movements as combinations of shapes and lines, and ballets as pictures with the possibilities of actual movement added. [...] I then began to teach my pupils drawing and painting, that by the study of form, line, and colour, they should come to understand the shapes and lines they themselves were making while dancing...<sup>45</sup>

These qualities of ‘form, line, and colour’ – alongside the near ubiquitous pre-war concept of ‘rhythm’ – became something akin to a mantra for Morris, Fergusson and their friends.<sup>46</sup> As Elder writes in *Travelling Players*, ‘the Travelling Theatre was linked from the first to an Art Movement, rather than any theatrical tradition [...] The attention given to rhythm, colour, and form, which was completely new to the audiences of that day, was derived from this influence.’ (TP 8) The concepts might seem nebulous, but for Elder and Berry they opened up new opportunities both in art education and for collaboration across the arts. In her posthumously-published *Understanding Art*, Berry argued that ‘rhythm, balance, mass, volume and colour tones’ comprised the ‘fundamental principles which inform the art of all ages’: these qualities comprised a ‘common language which is shared by all’.<sup>47</sup> Teach the public this language, Berry believed, and you could unlock a nascent understanding of any work of art, or indeed any object, in any medium from any period.

When it came to communicating these universal values to the general public, both organisations took a range of approaches, from illustrated lectures to exhibitions and a travelling portfolio of pictures. From 1916, the DIA developed a series of lectures accompanied by lantern slides showing instances of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ design.<sup>48</sup> This model was adopted by the ALS, who employed the medieval art historian Margaret Bulley to give lectures at schools, colleges, and educational groups from 1920 onwards. Writing in *Drawing & Design*, the art critic Amelia Defries described how ‘Miss Bulley finely selected slides of what she calls good and bad art. She tells what she thinks is right and wrong and then asks the audience to disagree with her (if they dare!).’<sup>49</sup> Bulley’s lectures do not survive, but her publications *Art and Counterfeit* (1925), *Art and Understanding* (1937) and *Art and Everyman* (1951) provide an insight into her idiosyncratic lecturing style. These publications involved a side-by-side comparison of photographs of works of art, one of which was deemed to be ‘good’ or ‘true’ art and the other ‘bad’ or ‘counterfeit’ art. In **Figure 2**, Bulley juxtaposes three bowls ranging from a vessel which expresses the ‘rhythmic vitality of art’ (left), to ‘lifeless patterns [...] plastered on the surface’ (middle), to an expression of the ‘forms of nature’ rather than the ‘ordered forms of art’ (right).<sup>50</sup> Even taken alone, this triumvirate hints at the limitations of Bulley’s method: although a well-intentioned attempt to use concrete examples to explain the universal principles of art to a general public, Bulley’s binary insistence on an objective distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ art failed to take individual variations of taste into account. Like in the DIA’s lantern slides of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ design, it was the lecturer who held not just the knowledge about art historical movements, but also the final word on taste. For all the ALS endeavoured to ‘reach democracy’ by providing a ‘comprehensive and effective educational programme which will bring art within the reach of all’,<sup>51</sup> Bulley’s lectures suggest that it was not enough to simply bring the public into contact with art: the public’s responses to that art had to be policed and

corrected.<sup>52</sup> Yet while this binary reduction of art to ‘good’ and ‘bad’ was problematic – Amelia Defries predicted ‘awful results from the spreading of [Bulley’s] present lectures and method’ – it can nevertheless be seen as a genuine (if flawed) attempt to frame modern art in a way that ordinary people might understand.<sup>53</sup>

One method of art education which took a less dogmatic approach was the ALS’s pioneering Travelling Portfolio of Pictures. From 1923, on receipt of two references, the ALS would send applicants a portfolio of original watercolours, drawings, etchings, woodcuts and lithographs for a week’s hire; applicants could then keep any works they wished to purchase and post the other pictures back.<sup>54</sup> As we can see from an advertisement for the scheme (figure 3) the Portfolio included works by leading contemporary artists, from Wyndham Lewis to Vanessa Bell. This scheme, a forerunner of the Artists International Association’s Everyman Prints (1940) and the Society for Education through Art’s Pictures for Schools scheme (1947-1969), brought modern art ‘within reach of all.’<sup>55</sup> Reporting on the Portfolio Scheme, the *Manchester Guardian* emphasised its democratic underpinnings: the scheme presented a ‘chance for the ordinary citizen of moderate means to exercise his taste and judgement and to bring something of the spirit of his own generation in art into the household.’<sup>56</sup> The scheme was designed to make art as accessible as possible, both in geographical terms (the advert notes that the scheme is meant for those ‘unable to attend exhibitions in London’) and in financial ones: prices ranged from one to fifteen guineas, with pictures exceeding five guineas available for purchase in instalments. This democratic approach was mirrored in the ALS’s choice of artists: as the *Pall Mall Gazette* observed, the portfolio represented ‘various groups in the art movement’:<sup>57</sup> these stylistic variations can be seen in the works reproduced in the October 1924 issue of *Artwork*, in which more traditional, realist lithographs and etchings by Robert Bevan and Francis Unwin (figure 4) are juxtaposed against Wyndham Lewis’s Vorticist drawing ‘Woman Knitting’ and George

Bissill's cartoonish 'At the Gate End Plate' (figure 5). In the words of the *Manchester Guardian*, by aiming at 'catholicity in their choice, with no embargo on the more advanced artists', the ALS were 'performing a valuable public service', educating a mass audience about modern art whilst also offering them a chance to buy an original work that would appreciate in value.<sup>58</sup> The scheme was well-received not only in the press but also among the purchasing public: the *Manchester Guardian* reported that the ALS had sold £140's worth of pictures in the scheme's first two years.<sup>59</sup>

Perhaps the most intriguing part of the 'Travelling Portfolio' scheme was the accompanying pamphlet 'Why Pictures are Needed in Everyday Life': here we can see the organisation attempting to communicate its founding principles to a mass audience. The leaflet attempts to demystify modern art, arguing that it draws on the same fundamental principles as other periods: 'Form, Line and Colour—or in other words, Proportion, Design and Harmony'.<sup>60</sup> The leaflet draws on techniques from advertising and mass-market magazines (and perhaps even Ezra Pound's 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste') to give helpful advice in the form of 'dos' and 'don'ts' to remember when approaching pictures, including 'DO not approach a picture with a prejudiced mind. Let it speak to you. Give it time. Put it aside; look at it to-morrow and find out whether it has anything to say to you.' (figure 6) This supportive and practical advice is a far cry from Bulley's and the DIA's emphasis on 'good' and 'bad' design: there is no sense that there was a 'correct' or 'incorrect' response to these pictures. All of the pictures were, implicitly, deemed to be 'good' by the ALS, but the explanatory leaflet attempts to explain the principles behind the pictures rather than imposing a single interpretation of good taste. The leaflet encapsulates Elder and Berry's approach to art education: both believed that simply by immersing audiences in modern art, they would develop (or awaken an already dormant) appreciation for art. Underpinning their activities was the belief that audiences were intelligent enough to develop an appreciation of modern

art by recognising in them ‘fundamental principles’ present in other areas of everyday life, whether in ‘rugs, chintzes, furniture, cups and saucers, dresses’.<sup>61</sup> From the early 1930s, Berry developed her own series of lantern lectures exploring these ‘fundamental principles’:<sup>62</sup> the lectures, available to hire for one guinea, were a better fit with the ALS’s democratic aims: they could be ‘read by an experienced reader’, thus allowing the lectures to be delivered at meetings of existing groups without obtaining a lecturer.<sup>63</sup> Used in conjunction with the ALS’s ‘Portfolio of Photographs of Works of Art’, available free of charge for a week for ‘Country members’, those living outside metropolitan centres could spend time with, and thus hopefully learn to appreciate, modern art.<sup>64</sup>

In these different approaches to art education, then, we see an organisation – and indeed a sector – exploring how best to increase the public’s understanding of contemporary art. As the 1920s progressed into the ‘30s, the ALS’s Art Section softened from its dogmatic beginnings to something more community-focused: we can see a similar transition in the work of the Dramatic Section.

### **Experimental, Educational – and Popular?**

In its first *Bulletin* (1920), the ALS summarised its aims as follows:

- (i) The Arts League of Service exists to represent the various modern movements in Art.
- (ii) In its work it is both experimental and educational.
- (iii) In its several activities it aims at maintaining a high standard in Art.<sup>65</sup>

Overleaf, they expanded on the second aim, writing that the ‘importance of encouraging experimental work ... cannot be over-estimated.’<sup>66</sup> Here, in a nutshell, is the central dilemma

facing not only the ALS but also any organisation attempting to bring contemporary work to a general audience: was it possible to create or disseminate experimental work on democratic lines? Could experimental work be popular, either in the sense of being enjoyed or even just encountered by the general public? What compromises might be necessary in order to ensure that their educational programme had the broadest possible effect? In this final section, I will explore these questions in relation to the ALS's Dramatic Section: such questions also plagued the Art Section, but the latter had a less direct relationship with audiences, and could therefore to some extent pursue a more experimental programme. The Art Section attempted to reach a broad audience, but its inability to raise enough funds or to attract state support for its initiatives meant that it never succeeded on the scale that it had hoped. Its activities petered out in the early 1930s following Berry's return to Argentina in late 1931. The Dramatic Section, in contrast, was reliant not only upon ticket sales to its performances, but crucially *repeat* ticket sales at (often rural) venues it visited year after year throughout the 1920s and '30s. This direct and sustained contact with audiences, not to mention the fact that they played in intimate venues and often stayed with audience members following performances, meant that the question about whether to educate or entertain audiences could not be avoided. The story of the Dramatic Section is thus one of compromise: we see how their ambitious early aims morphed into something more pragmatic following extended exposure to the types of audience they wished to attract.

In their 1920 *Bulletin*, the ALS set out their approach towards the public, writing that 'it is a more dignified course, and in the end better rewarded, to lead the public taste worthily instead of feeding it with unwholesome or indifferent stuff which, through apathy or perversion, is certain of acceptance.'<sup>67</sup> This dilemma between giving the public what it wants or what it *should* want troubled many interwar institutions, from publishing houses to the



BBC.<sup>68</sup> It was especially present in interwar arts organisations: a *Telegraph* review of the ALS Travelling Theatre from November 1920 warned that the

Arts League of Service is in danger of falling into the stock error to which all such earnest bodies, in common with repertory theatres, are prone. They are so anxious to educate and to uplift that they forget that they must not defeat their own object by coming above the heads of their public. They tend to give that public what in their opinion it ought to want, instead of finding out what it does want and giving it the best of that kind. In that way only can a sound taste be formed and cultivated.<sup>69</sup>

This tension between education and entertainment came to a head at the ALS's one and only London season: a month's residency in the East End in 1920 organised by the Poplar Borough Council in which they played at venues across Poplar, Bow, Bromley and the Isle of Dogs.<sup>70</sup> In *Travelling Players*, Elder recounts their experiences in the East End using passages from fellow ALS actor John Nevill's diary: these extraordinary extracts resemble those of a nineteenth-century missionary, recounting successes (and failures) with the recalcitrant locals. He describes the 'wild, rough, and derisive' 'barbarian hordes' at Bow, who 'cracked nuts audibly, held animated conversations during the plays, and were as ill-disciplined and ill-mannered as could be.' In contrast, the audiences at Poplar and Bromley were deemed 'intelligent', largely because they were 'quiet, attentive and remarkably well behaved'. (TP 99-101) It is no coincidence that Nevill's diary recalls that of a missionary: in *Civilising Caliban*, Borzello argues that the nineteenth-century 'missionary belief' in 'exposing the people to art' was retained into the twentieth-century, only 'in the name of education instead of religion.'<sup>71</sup> In their early performances, the Travelling Players, like Bulley's lectures, sought to police audience responses to the contemporary arts. It was a top-

down approach: the Players decided upon a programme which they thought would ‘uplift’ their audiences, and then placed it before them, aided by a short prologue given before the curtain in which Elder tried to explain elements of the programme to what they perceived to be less educated audiences (*TP* 106, 133).

In writings from this period, the ALS’s attitude towards audiences vacillated between romanticising what they perceived to be authentic, ‘unsophisticated’, ‘unspoiled’ village audiences, and dismissing small country towns as the ‘least intelligent and most trying audience’, people whose taste had been ‘staled’ by ‘cheap cinematograph performances’ and ‘self-satisfied amateur productions of a useless, trashy kind.’<sup>72</sup> Yet the travelling players *did* establish a dialogic relationship with many of their audiences. Rosenquist and Wood argue that the ‘construction of a public face of modernism’ can only be defined ‘through continued and extended dialogue [between modernists and audiences] within a number of discursive spaces’: as the Dramatic Section matured, it came to prioritise exactly this type of ‘continued and extended dialogue’ with its audiences.<sup>73</sup> They promoted participation by encouraging members to submit manuscripts for one-act plays, and helped budding amateur groups through their play lending library and instructions on how to construct a fit-up theatre using a complicated system of ladders (figures 7, 8). As the players gained more experience, they began to construct performances in collaboration with local organising committees; Elder noted that ‘it was useless to make up set programmes before arriving anywhere, for our local organisers usually had last-minute preferences to be considered and, as far as possible, we had to meet their demands.’ (*TP* 134) Judith Wogan, the third ALS Secretary, described how members of a ‘remote Derbyshire village’ liked John Millington Synge’s one-act play *Riders to the Sea* so much that they asked the players to repeat the play the following night instead of putting on a new programme.<sup>74</sup>

Despite their ‘educational and experimental’ policy, then, the ALS *did* listen to what audiences wanted: it was hard not to, given their close physical proximity to audiences, whether performing in cramped halls or when staying with host families in the villages and towns they visited. As Elder later admitted,

Conditions moulded the form of the A.L.S. Theatre, despite all the carefully laid plans that were thought out for it, and the public imposed its own restrictions by its likes and dislikes. For we found eventually that we were bound by our own box-office receipts just as any theatrical venture. [...] We had to steer an even middle course.  
(TP 247)

In practice, this meant using ‘modern and stylised forms’ ‘in moderation’. Early plans for exhibiting pictures of modern artists ‘in foyers of the halls we played in was abandoned when we saw the conditions under which we had to play, and our simple staging did not permit of experiments in specially designed scenery.’ (TP 247) Although their sets and costumes were often executed in a modern or abstract style – see, for instance, Edward McKnight Kauffer’s backdrop for ‘The Proposal’ (TP 113), or Kathleen Dillon’s costumes for ‘The Twa Sisters of Binnorie’ (figure 9) – these more modest experiments were ‘not the sum total of our early ambition.’ (TP 246-8) Even, or perhaps *especially*, for an experimental company, practical and financial considerations had to be taken into consideration: the travelling theatre, like many such organisations, ultimately had to come into line with public taste, even as they sought to redefine what their public wanted. They never abandoned their commitment to experimental work, as evidenced by their productions of Pound’s translation of *Hagoromo* (1929-30) and scenes from Thomas Hardy’s long poem *The Dynasts* (1933-34), but they

acknowledged that such ‘serious’ works had to be performed alongside works of ‘light entertainment’.<sup>75</sup> (TP 94-95)

Reflecting on the Arts League of Service two years after its eventual demise, Elder suggested that ‘Perhaps with more capital and less popularity the A.L.S. might have done more for the propaganda of modern art – but it would have been at the expense of all that it did achieve.’ (TP 248) Elder’s comments get to the heart of the dilemma that faced interwar arts organisations: was it better to compromise on aesthetics in order to reach (and possibly transform) a larger audience, or to refuse to compromise, and therefore communicate more revolutionary ideas to a smaller audience? The Arts Section largely took the latter course – both of their requests to the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust were rejected because their choice of pictures was deemed ‘unsuitable’ – and therefore failed to raise enough funds to bring ‘art to the people’ on the scale that they had hoped.<sup>76</sup> Elder and the Dramatic Section took a more pragmatic approach: for them, the priority was to reach as many people as possible, not to push a specific aesthetic agenda. That is not to say that the Dramatic Section did not embrace contemporary art, some of which would now be described as modernist, but rather that the Section focused on the *effect* that such works could create in the world. In an academic field in which modernism has muscled out other cultural and aesthetic responses to modernity, it is easy to assume that the ALS were a failure because they didn’t succeed in promoting experimental work to a mass audience. Yet the ALS were not founded to agitate for certain aesthetic forms: they sought, quite simply, ‘to bring the arts into everyday life’, and on that front they succeeded.

The ALS Travelling Theatre was so successful, in fact, that they effectively made themselves redundant. They were committed both to decentralisation and to extending participation in the arts, whether through their simple, artistically-staged performances, designed to ‘gradually develop a feeling for art’,<sup>77</sup> or by offering practical assistance to

amateur groups. The ALS were not alone in promoting participation in the theatrical arts: their sometime collaborators the British Drama League also had a play lending library, ran a National Festival of Community Drama from 1926, and offered short courses in acting and production from the early 1930s.<sup>78</sup> Together, these organisations directly inspired the formation and expansion of hundreds of amateur dramatic groups: within a year of their visit to the isle of Arran, the ALS had inspired no fewer than twenty-two home-grown amateur performances, with eleven teams being entered into the Scottish Drama Festival (*TP* 228). For Elder, this success was, perversely, the ALS's downfall: in *Travelling Players*, she describes how in later years the players were unable to visit towns and villages where they had performed previously because their dates clashed with performances given by new amateur groups. They were 'warned off one city, where a repertory theatre had recently been started, and threatened with a boycott by the local press if we returned to the small hall where we had played [...]. There was only one conclusion', Elder wrote: 'our work was done.' (*TP* 245)

### **Conclusion: Models of Participation**

The success of the ALS's Dramatic Section thus provides an interesting point of comparison with the Art Section, which failed to garner enough state or public support, or to find a successor capable of generating any momentum after Berry returned to Argentina in 1931. Why did the former succeed while the latter faded away? In *Civilising Caliban*, Borzello traces how 'conflicts over whether it is better for the public to make or admire art' have characterised the debate over the 'use' of art since the nineteenth century.<sup>79</sup> In the ALS, we can broadly see both models: the first, espoused by the Art Section, was in the spirit of Samuel Barnett's nineteenth-century 'Pictures for the Poor' exhibitions, in which 'the role of the audience was to look, to appreciate and to listen to the experts point out the glories and

meanings of paintings.’<sup>80</sup> The Travelling Portfolio scheme tried to give audiences the space in which to make up their own mind about modern art, but there was never a sense of genuine dialogue between the ALS’s artists and experts and the general public: they weren’t interested, for instance, in encouraging amateur art. The second model, that of the Dramatic Section, may have started from the ‘missionary belief in art’s power to refine’,<sup>81</sup> but through sustained contact with audiences morphed into something more participatory, one that aimed at giving audiences the tools to put on their own performances. The implicit division between the ALS as artists and performers and ‘the people’ might not have melted away entirely, but this sustained contact meant that they could not ‘condemn’ the general public as ‘artistic dolts and imbeciles out of hand.’<sup>82</sup>

For me, then, the significance of the ALS as a case study goes beyond the impact it might make on modernist studies: it lies, instead, in what we today term (or rather in what university management today terms) ‘public engagement’. Such case studies represent not just an act of recovery or addition: they force us to reconsider our own practice, providing alternative approaches for how to engage with contemporary audiences dismissed as ‘hard to reach’. The ALS may have had a complex and conflicted relationship with their audiences, but they consistently avoided preaching to the converted. They were motivated by a genuine desire to bridge the gap between the metropolitan elite and working class or rural audiences: in an age where such bridges are more desperately needed than ever, what can we learn from their successes and failures? Many of their approaches were undeniably top-down acts of cultural paternalism – Margaret Bulley’s lectures and their East End season spring to mind – but their search for a simple language in which to explain complex ideas about aesthetics; their innovative schemes aimed at bringing art into neutral community spaces, rather than forcing people to travel to established and exclusionary cultural sites; their later practice of producing performances in collaboration with local committees; and the act of community-

building created by staying in their audience's homes, all offer alternative, more democratic models of cultural engagement. While writing this article, I have been co-organising a public engagement event that turns the history of a 1930s building into an experimental performance, and I have been struck by the parallels between the ALS's dilemmas and my own. The central question remains the same: how to engage communities not already interested in avant-garde art, architecture or performance? The work is hard, but sustained dialogue, long-term relationships, neutral spaces, careful attention to language, and an open-minded commitment to genuine forms of mutual exchange and co-production are all key: without these things, such ventures can so easily slip into cultural paternalism. Far from just being a simple addition to our understanding of modernism, then, interwar arts organisations offer something more profound: an opportunity to collapse our research and engagement work, and to enter into a dialogue with these organisations, just as they sought, and often failed, to do with their audiences.

---

<sup>1</sup> The phrase 'To bring the Arts into Everyday Life' was the Arts League of Service's motto from 1921. See *The Arts League of Service Annual 1921-1922* (London: Pelican Press, 1922), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> 'A Japanese Play at York', *Leeds Mercury*, 15 April 1929, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> 'Modern Strolling Players. Arts League Visit to Sunderland', *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 28 May 1929, p. 2; 'All for Your Delight', *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 27 May 1929, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> 'VERSATILE PLAYERS. Arts League in One-Act Skits', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 28 September 1929, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> A. S. W., 'THE TRAVELLING THEATRE. Arts League of Service at Milton Hall', *Manchester Guardian*, 6 May 1929, p. 13.

---

<sup>6</sup> Eleanor Elder, *Travelling Players: The Story of the Arts League of Service* (London: Frederick Muller, 1939), p. 166. Elder's book provides the most complete account of the ALS's activities over its eighteen-year existence: it will hereafter be cited parenthetically as *TP*.

<sup>7</sup> 'Modern Strolling Players', p. 2; 'ARTS LEAGUE OF SERVICE TRAVELLING THEATRE. Charming Performance in Dundee', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 13 November 1929, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> The ALS described itself as an 'experimental' company from its inception: in 1920, one of its three aims was to produce 'experimental and educational' work; in *Travelling Players*, Elder repeatedly described the Theatre's activities as 'experimental'. See 'Programme and Policy of the Arts League of Service', in *Bulletin of the Arts League of Service* (London: Pelican Press, 1920), pp. 5-7 (p. 6) and *TP* pp. 8, 10, 94. As early as 1923, the ALS had established a reputation for 'experiment': writing in the *Manchester Guardian*, Sam Langford praised their 'daring improvisations and experiments in drama, in music, and in the dance.' S. L., 'The Arts League of Service: Performances in Manchester', *Manchester Guardian*, 9 May 1923, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> The 1936 ALS Bulletin admits that their more 'ambitious productions' such as 'Scenes from the Dynasts' by Thomas Hardy 'cannot be said to have been universally popular'. See 'Arts League Productions', in *The Arts League of Service Bulletin: A.L.S. Travelling Theatre Number* (London: Arts League of Service, 1936), pp. 18-20 (p. 18). Elder also describes the varied audience responses to the ALS's programme in *TP* 101-102, 145 and 166.

<sup>10</sup> In his essay, Daniel Moore explores the 1930s activities of the DIA, CAI, the Modern Architectural Research (MARS) group, and the network around the Isokon building in Hampstead. See "'A New Order is Being Created": Domestic Modernism in 1930s Britain', *Modernist Cultures*, 11.3 (2016), 409-28.

<sup>11</sup> 'Programme and Policy', p. 6.



---

<sup>12</sup> The ALS are beginning to receive critical attention, most notably in Helen Southworth's *Fresca: A Life in the Making. A Biographer's Quest for a Forgotten Bloomsbury Polymath* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2017), pp. 95-103, 119-20, and briefly in James Fox's introduction to British art produced in the aftermath of the First World War, including the explosion in arts organisations, 'Art and Society After the War', in *British Art and the First World War, 1914-1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 133-56 (pp. 149-51).

<sup>13</sup> The *Liverpool Post* outlined the ALS's 'educational mission' on 23 June 1919: see the ALS's pamphlet, *The Arts League of Service* (London: Pelican Press, [n.d.]), p. 7. In its early years, the ALS's aims were repeatedly framed in terms of bringing art to 'the people': see, for instance, *The Globe's* description of the ALS's value as bringing a "programme of first-class character to the people who would not otherwise have an opportunity of seeing anything of the sort" (quoted in *TP* 20), or Thomas Hardy's letter to the *Western Chronicle*, in which he praised the ALS's scheme of 'bringing dramatic art to the doors of the people' ('Personal', *Western Chronicle*, 27 May 1921, pp. 8-9). In *Travelling Players*, Elder refers to 'the people' when setting out the ALS's early aims (*TP* 5, 8-9); on 23 June 1919, a *Daily Telegraph* article on the 'Arts League of Service' noted that the ALS's 'ambition' to 'bring art into every-day life [...] is an aim common to many different societies having the welfare of the people at heart.' (p. 5) Invoking 'the people' was so common during this period that the columnist 'Tis' reported in the September 1919 issue of *Colour* magazine on arts organisations that 'some "experts" are convinced that "the people" are woefully in want of Art and that they would be all the better if they had it; whilst others opine that "the people" have never yet understood Art, that they are constitutionally unable to grasp it, that in fact the people are a vast but entirely negligible quantity—so far as all the higher forms of life are concerned.' ('Tis', 'On the Propagation of Art', *Colour*, 11.2 (September 1919), 24-30 (p.

---

24). In later years, the ALS themselves satirised this tendency in an ‘absurdity’ (a short humorous sketch) in which the actress Judith Wogan dressed up as ‘Miss Fewings, the President of the League for Promoting Poetry for the People in Pastoral Places’. (TP 198)

<sup>14</sup> The BIAE, for instance, organised a series of exhibitions entitled ‘Art for the People’ from 1935, initially part-funded by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, and later by CEMA. In her book, *The Autobiography of a Nation: The 1951 Exhibition of Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), Becky Conekin describes how CEMA’s wartime contributions increased the ‘annual number of touring exhibitions [...] from a pre-war 4 or 5 to 18 in 1941, 30 in 1942, and 42 by 1944.’ (p. 124) For the founding principles of ‘Art for the People’, see *Art for the People. Report of the British Institute of Adult Education experiment in providing three loan exhibitions at Barnsley, Swindon and Silver End* (London: British Institute of Adult Education, [1935]).

<sup>15</sup> ‘Tis’, ‘On the Propagation of Art’, p. 24.

<sup>16</sup> A. H. H. (A. H. Hannay), ‘The Organisation of Art’, *The Athenaeum*, 18 July 1919, p. 613.

<sup>17</sup> Mary Macleod Moore, ‘Wandering Minstrels A La Mode’, *The Graphic*, 14 May 1921, p. 578; W. R. Lethaby, quoted in ‘Some Notes on the D.I.A. Creed’, in *The Beginnings of A JOURNAL OF THE DESIGN & INDUSTRIES ASSOCIATION* (London: Design & Industries Association, July 1916), pp. 6-8 (p. 7).

<sup>18</sup> ‘The Arts League of Service’, in *The Arts League of Service Annual 1921-1922*, p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> Adolphe Armand Braun, ‘Making a Better World’, *Drawing & Design*, 55.10 (March 1920), 51.

<sup>20</sup> The transformative power of art was thought to be so profound that there were calls for it to be enlisted in the most prosaic of places, from public houses to hotel lobbies. See, for instance, Amelia Defries, ‘Public Houses’, *Drawing & Design*, 9.52 (December 1919), 285-6.

---

<sup>21</sup> See Harold L. Smith, *The British Women's Suffrage Campaign 1866-1928*, 2nd edn. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 90, 95.

<sup>22</sup> 'Mr. Lloyd George on His Task. Comradeship Rather than Coalition.', *The Times*, 25 November 1918, p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew Arnold, 'Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism' in *Culture and Anarchy and other writings*, ed. by Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 53-211 (pp. 78-9).

<sup>24</sup> Thomas L. Tudor, 'THE MIND OF A NATION: II. The Great Reaction', *Drawing & Design*, 10.53 (January 1920), 14-15 (p. 15). In April 1919, a Provisional Joint Committee (PJC) formed of representatives from trade unions, employers, cabinet ministers and civil servants voted unanimously to enshrine the 48-hour working week into law. This announcement prompted much discussion about how best to fill these new leisure hours (see, for instance, Tudor above and Nash below), but legislation was not passed and the PJC resigned in protest in 1921. See Rodney Lowe, 'The Failure of Consensus in Britain: The National Industrial Conference, 1919-1921', *The Historical Journal*, 21.3 (September 1978), 649-675 (pp. 655-56).

<sup>25</sup> Paul Nash, 'The Artist and the Public. III. The Arts League of Service', *New Witness*, 23 May 1919, p. 72.

<sup>26</sup> *A Design for Democracy: An abridgement of a report of The Adult Education Committee of The British Ministry of Reconstruction commonly called THE 1919 REPORT* (London: Max Parrish, 1956), p. 55, emphasis in original.

<sup>27</sup> 'Programme and Policy', p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> In his article on the ALS, Paul Nash quotes an early ALS circular in which they wrote that 'the object of the Arts League of Service is to establish a closer bond between the Community and the Artist'. See Nash, 'The Artist and the Public', p. 72. Ana M. Berry

---

discusses the challenges faced by artists in the immediate post-war period in ‘A Survey. Some Younger Artists and the A.L.S.’, in *Design and Art* (London: H. R. Grubb, 1928), pp. 46-55.

<sup>29</sup> The ALS’s first tour was financed by a £25 donation given to Elder following a talk at a Theosophists meeting (*TP* 8-9); in 1921, an appeal for donations brought in £300 from ‘members of our audiences all over the country ranging from half a crown to twenty or thirty pounds.’ (*TP* 62-3) Yearly membership fees were set (and remained) at £1 1s. for Ordinary Members and Affiliated Societies and 10s 6d. for Professional Members and Associate Members; this income was supplemented by ticket sales to performances and exhibitions. The most substantial support came from the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust (CUKT), who gave several grants in the first few years of the ALS’s existence (£900 in 1921 and £500 in 1924 for village tours; £200 in 1923 and £2000 in 1928 for the ALS headquarters; and £2400 in 1924 for a second touring company); from 1930-33 they guaranteed the ALS’s tours against losses due to the economic depression (£366 in 1932, £150 in 1933). From 1934 the CUKT stopped supporting the Travelling Theatre and no further grants were made until they folded in 1937. The CUKT Minutes, all of which are now digitised, show that ALS tours made a profit from 1924 to 1930, at which point they were deemed self-sufficient; after 1930, the economic downturn meant that their tours failed to make a profit. See *Carnegie United Kingdom Trust Archive* < <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/search-archive/> > [accessed 5 April 2019].

<sup>30</sup> The tour to ‘devastated regions in France’ is described in ‘THE DRAMA’, in *Bulletin of the Arts League of Service* (1920), pp. 13-22 (p. 15). In the same article, the procedure for booking an ALS performance is outlined on pp. 21-22. From 1920, most tours were organised by the ALS’s Veronica Wynne in conjunction with either individuals or local

---

societies ranging from the Labour Party to the WI to Operatic Societies to branches of the League of Nations.

<sup>31</sup> It is unclear the extent to which the Artists Sub-Committee assisted Berry in the work of the Art Section; I have not found evidence of their specific involvement in ALS activities.

<sup>32</sup> The ALS held an ‘Exhibition of Practical Arts’ at the Twenty One Gallery, London, from 17 November to 6 December 1919, featuring ‘specimens of various crafts’ including ‘rugs, pottery, china painting, painted furniture, decorated and carved articles for use, etc.—besides designs for textiles, electric fittings, lettering, etc.’ Those exhibiting included Artists Committee members Kauffer, Dobson, Wadsworth and Schwabe alongside Paul Nash, Anne Estelle Rice, Jessie Dismorr and many others: see ‘EXHIBITION’, in *Bulletin of the Arts League of Service* (1920), pp. 12-13.

<sup>33</sup> For more on Mackintosh’s unrealised plans for a block of artists studios, see ‘M339 Scheme for a block of studios and studio flats for the Arts League of Service’, *Mackintosh Architecture: Context, Making and Meaning* (University of Glasgow, 2014) <<https://www.mackintosh-architecture.gla.ac.uk/catalogue/pdf/M339.pdf>> [accessed 25 October 2018]; Richard Emerson, ‘The Architect and the Dancer, Margaret Morris, Mackintosh and the South of France’, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society Journal*, 98 (Spring 2014), pp. 21-31 (pp. 22-23); and Margaret Morris, *The Art of J. D. Fergusson: A Biased Biography* (Perth: Farquhar and Son, 2010), p. 125.

<sup>34</sup> Frances Borzello, *Civilising Caliban: The Misuse of Art 1875-1980* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 122.

<sup>35</sup> John Gloag’s *Design in Modern Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1934) collected BBC talks on town and municipal planning, domestic architecture, interior design and dress. Contributors included Frank Pick, the Modern Movement architect E. Maxwell Fry, the social housing expert Elizabeth Denby and the curator and art historian James Laver.

---

<sup>36</sup> For more on Puffin Picture Books, see Paul Stiff, 'Showing a New World in 1942: The Gentle Modernity of Puffin Picture Books', *Design Issues*, 23.4 (Autumn 2007), 22-38.

<sup>37</sup> The interwar period gave rise to a huge number of art and design exhibitions intended for a mass audience, whether displaying paintings ('Exhibition of Children's Drawings', London County Council, 1933; the BIAE's series of 'Art for the People' exhibitions from 1935 onwards; 'Modern Pictures for Modern Rooms', 1936), industrial or interior design ('Exhibition of British Industrial Art in the Home', DIA, 1933; 'Art and Industry', Royal Academy, 1934; 'Design in Everyday Things', the Royal Institute of British Architects, 1936), or graphic design (the London and North Eastern Railway [LNER] Annual Exhibitions of Posters, 1923-; 'British Advertising Art', 1924; 20 years of Underground Posters at Burlington House, 1928). All of these exhibitions have to be seen in the larger context of the Ideal Home Exhibitions (1908-), Empire Exhibitions (Wembley, 1924; Glasgow, 1938), and international expositions or World's Fairs (Paris, 1925; Chicago, 1933; Paris, 1937; New York, 1939) that continued throughout the interwar period.

<sup>38</sup> Theodor Adorno, 'Why is the New Art So Hard to Understand?' (1931), in *Essays on Music*, ed. by Richard Leppert, trans. by Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 127-34 (p. 127).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>40</sup> 'Some Notes on the D.I.A. Creed', in *Beginnings of A JOURNAL*, pp. 6-8 (p. 7).

<sup>41</sup> Sir Kenneth Anderson, quoted in Design and Industries Association, [*Minutes of the inaugural meeting*], (London: Design and Industries Association, 1915), n. p.

<sup>42</sup> Frank Pick, 'Art in Commerce and in Life' (November 1916), London, V&A Archive of Art and Design, AAD/1997/7/96, pp. 4-6.

<sup>43</sup> The DIA's philosophy was heavily influenced by the Deutscher Werkbund: see *A New Body with New Aims* (London: Design & Industries Association, [1915]).

---

<sup>44</sup> Harry Peach to Cecil Brewer, 31 December 1915, quoted in Michael T. Saler, *The Avant-Garde in Interwar England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 74. Saler traces the development of the phrase ‘fitness for purpose’ from the 1830s onwards, via A. W. N. Pugin, Henry Cole and John Ruskin, in his chapter ‘Morris, The Machine and Modernism, 1915-1934’, pp. 61-91.

<sup>45</sup> Margaret Morris, ‘Dancing as an Art’, *Art and Letters*, 1.2 (October 1917), 45-7 (p. 47).

<sup>46</sup> Fergusson was the founding Art Editor of John Middleton Murry and Katherine Mansfield’s *Rhythm* magazine from 1911; in his account of the Little Theatre movement, Richard Emerson writes that they ‘were linked by friendship and a common aim, which was “the restoration of rhythm as the greatest force in art.”’ See Richard Emerson, *Rhythm & Colour: Hélène Vanel, Lois Hutton & Margaret Morris* (Edinburgh: Golden Hare Books, 2018), p. 35.

<sup>47</sup> Ana M. Berry, *Understanding Art*, ed. by Judith Wogan and Bride Scratton, in collaboration with Eleanor M. Elder (London: The Studio, 1952), p. 16.

<sup>48</sup> Due to water damage, only some of the DIA’s lantern slides survive today. Those that remain can be found at the V&A Archive of Art and Design, AAD 3/20-1978 – AAD 3/24-1978.

<sup>49</sup> Amelia Defries, ‘Notes and News’, *Drawing & Design*, 2.21 (January 1922), 729-37 (p. 735).

<sup>50</sup> Margaret H. Bulley, *Art and Counterfeit* (London: Methuen, 1925), p. 23.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Programme and Policy’, p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> The phrase ‘goods and bads’ is taken from Bulley: according to her, a ‘games-captain of a public has been known to send a message through his headmaster begging for a third lecture on “goods and bads,” because he was just beginning to understand the differences between them.’ See Bulley, *Art and Counterfeit*, p. viii.

---

<sup>53</sup> Defries, 'Notes and News', p. 735.

<sup>54</sup> 'The Arts League of Service', *Drawing & Design*, 3.34 (February 1923), 357.

<sup>55</sup> See Hana Leaper, "'Old-fashioned modern": Claude Flight's *Lino-Cuts* and Public Taste in the Interwar Period', *Modernist Cultures*, 11.3 (2016), 389-408 for another instance of an interwar print series designed to bring modern art to the people.

<sup>56</sup> 'Bringing Pictures to the Public', *Manchester Guardian*, 13 April 1922, p. 6.

<sup>57</sup> 'EXHIBITIONS ON TOUR. Art Stepping-stones.', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1 May 1922, p. 11.

<sup>58</sup> 'Fine Art for the Moderate Man', *Manchester Guardian*, 10 July 1924, p. 8.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> 'Why Pictures are Needed in Everyday Life' (London: H. R. Grubb [n. d.]), [p. 1].

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Berry, *Understanding Art*, p. 16.

<sup>63</sup> 'ART SECTION.', *The Arts League of Service Bulletin: A.L.S. Travelling Theatre Number* (Nottingham: Stafford, 1932), pp. 33-36 (p. 36).

<sup>64</sup> 'OBJECT OF THE ARTS LEAGUE OF SERVICE', *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37 (p. 37).

<sup>65</sup> 'Programme and Policy', p. 5.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>67</sup> 'Art and Internationalism', in *Bulletin of the Arts League of Service* (1920), pp. 3-5 (p. 4).

<sup>68</sup> See, for instance, Arnold Bennett on publishing in *What the Public Wants: A Play in Four Acts* (1909; repr. New York: George H. Doran, 1911); Rose Macaulay, 'The Press and the Public', pp. 201-4 and Rebecca West, 'The Future of the Press IV: The Journalist and the Public', pp. 196-201, both selected and edited by Patrick Collier in *Gender in Modernism: New Geographies, Complex Intersections*, ed. by Bonnie Kime Scott (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Rod Rosenquist and Alice Wood, 'Introduction: Modernism in Public', *Modernist Cultures*, 11.3 (2016), 299-311 (pp. 303-4); and D. L. LeMahieu, *A Culture for*



---

*Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain Between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), in particular pp. 143-88 on the interwar BBC.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Arts League of Service. Performances at Poplar.’, *Daily Telegraph*, 3 November 1920, p.

5. Other commentators from this period reflected on the tendency of arts organisations to impose their taste onto the public: see, for instance, *A Design for Democracy*, p. 60 and ‘Tis’, ‘On the Propagation of Art’, pp. 27-28.

<sup>70</sup> The East End had long been the site of attempts to ‘elevate’ the working-class population through art. See Borzello, *Civilising Caliban*, pp. 117-19.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., pp. 119, 116. In a 1921 letter to the *Spectator*, Rosa M. Barrett described the Travelling Theatre as ‘a true missionary work’. (Rosa M. Barrett, ‘The Arts League of Service’, *Spectator*, 30 July 1921, p. 138.)

<sup>72</sup> St. John Erskine argued in 1921 that the ALS ‘must go back to the country, where English Drama began, where there was a fresh unspoiled audience, and stimulate the country to produce drama’. See ‘Three Years’ Work’, in *The Arts League of Service Annual 1921-1922*, pp. 17-20 (p. 20). Elder’s assessment of audiences in country towns comes from Eleanor Elder, ‘The Travelling Theatre’, in *Arts League of Service Bulletin 1923-1924* (London: H. R. Grubb, 1924), pp. 12-14 (p. 13).

<sup>73</sup> Rosenquist and Wood, ‘Introduction’, p. 306.

<sup>74</sup> ‘The A.L.S. Travelling Theatre’, in *Arts League of Service Bulletin: Special Theatre Number* (London: Stafford & Co, 1926), pp. 15-16 (p. 16).

<sup>75</sup> Elder outlined the advantages of programmes which balance different types of entertainment in the introduction to her edited volume *Entertain Yourself: Suggestions to Amateurs. Prepared by the Combined Arts Groups* (London: National Council of Social Service, 1945), pp. 3-4.

---

<sup>76</sup> Although not affiliated with any particular artistic movement, the Art Section's preference for experimental art led the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust to reject grant requests to fund the Travelling Portfolio and Travelling Exhibitions. In 1924, the CUKT Music Sub-Committee declined a request for £365 because they 'were not convinced that the examples of pictorial art favoured by the League would appeal to the general public'; in 1926, the 'Directors of Education of the L.C.C. and the county of Kent had both reported that the type of picture advocated by the League was wholly unsuitable for educational purposes'. As such, the request 'was not entertained.' See James Norval, 'Minutes of Meeting of the Music Standing Sub-Committee' (13 June 1924), in *Minutes & Annual Report – 1924*, pp. 13-20 (pp. 18-19) and James Norval, 'Minutes of Meeting of the Music Sub-Committee' (17 June 1926), in *Minutes & Annual Report – 1926*, pp. 11-17 (p. 16), both available at *Carnegie United Kingdom Trust Archive* <<https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/search-archive/>> [accessed 5 April 2019].

<sup>77</sup> 'Work Accomplished', in *Bulletin of the Arts League of Service* (1920), p. 20.

<sup>78</sup> For a brief history of the British Drama League, see E. Martin Browne, 'The British Drama League', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 5.3 (October 1953), 203-6.

<sup>79</sup> Borzello, *Civilising Caliban*, p. 5.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>82</sup> 'Tis', 'On the Propagation of Art', p. 28.