

BOYHOOD:

Re-examining an Edwardian Obsession

Call for Papers:

To coincide with its summer exhibition, *Henry Scott Tuke (7 June – 12 September 2021)*, Watts Gallery – Artists' Village invites contributions to an interdisciplinary virtual event which looks to re-examine the Edwardian obsession with boyhood through the lens of the twenty-first century.

While the boy, as precursor to the man, has always held a certain degree of cultural capital in western history, this reached a particular zenith at the turn of the twentieth century. Edwardian Britain obsessed over the potential and perils of boyhood and youth with extraordinary intensity.

This event aims to contextualise the art of Henry Scott Tuke (1858–1929), an artist best-known today – as in his own lifetime – for his almost relentless depiction of boys and male youths. Generally depicted boating, bathing or lounging naked on Cornish beaches, Tuke's ephebic youths speak to an apparent golden age fictionalised in the visual and literary culture of the day.

We invite contributors to consider how both artists and writers used the young male figure (especially the exposed male body) as an evocation of health, beauty, classical perfection, power, morality, potential or erotic desire in Edwardian Britain.



From the works of J M Barrie and Kenneth Graham to Rudyard Kipling and Arthur Conan-Doyle, early twentieth-century literature is peppered with adventure stories, celebrating lively male-dominated escapades within a strikingly imperial framework of exploration, conquest and victory.

Couched in restless anticipation, countless coming-of-age novels by the likes of E M Forster and H G Wells explore identity, sexuality, gender and societal expectation. Alongside this sits a sub-genre of Uranian poetry which eroticised youthful male beauty and 'boy-love' in ways that are troubling today.

We invite contributors to also consider the education and training of the boy, in the classroom, playground or playing field. How was this informed by developments in medicine and attitudes to health, physical fitness or diet? What was the role of the church and Christianity in regulating boyhood? How were class differences dealt with? To what degree was this driven by political factors, shaped by the structures of patriarchal society and the perceived needs of empire? Crucially, how did this both shape and materialise in the art and literature of the time?

This event aims to both contextualise and reappraise the emergence of the boy as a cultural phenomenon, both within and beyond Edwardian Britain. We invite new perspectives on the complex mass of visual and literary material idealising boys and boyhood at the turn of the 20th century and ask contributors how we interpret, discuss and deconstruct such a white, male and class-bound archetype today?

Boyhood: Re-examining an Edwardian Obsession also invites contributors to engage with the complexities of 21st-century conceptions of childhood, informed by evolving contemporary attitudes toward the definition of a child. How have attitudes to nudity (both in art and life) changed? How do current discussions, especially regarding consent and the safeguarding of children (both as subject and viewer), shape our understanding of and response to the historic creation and reception of visual and literary depictions of boyhood?

This is an interdisciplinary event, and we welcome proposals from anyone working in a related field including both scholars and museum professionals.

Topics for 15-minute papers may engage with the following themes:

- The construction and presentation of boyhood in painting, sculpture, photography, print or other media in the Edwardian era.
- The aesthetic and societal origins and legacies of Edwardian boyhood, from the fin de siècle up to World War One (c. 1890-1920).
- Histories of childhood and changing understandings of adolescence.
- The boy as artist's model or writer's muse: questions of friendship, conditioning and consent.
- Education and training: forming the boy at school, work and play.
- Religion and the regulation of boyhood.
- Health, sport and classicism: ideals and ideologies.
- Edwardian masculinities, the history of sexuality and queer history.
- Society and class differences.
- The imperial boy: locality, nationhood and empire.
- International exchange: European and American art and literature at the turn of the twentieth century.
- Beauty and the male body.
- Attitudes to nudity, nakedness and censorship in art and life, then and now.

Please submit abstracts of no more than 300 words and biographies of no more than 100 words by **Monday 10 May 2021** to abbie.latham@wattsgallery.org.uk

This event is supported by the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art.

Images:

Henry Scott Tuke, *Ruby, Gold & Malachite*, 1902, oil on canvas. Guildhall Art Gallery, City of London.
Henry Scott Tuke, *Our Jack*, 1886, oil on canvas. Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society Tuke Collection.
Henry Scott Tuke, *August Blue*, 1893, oil on canvas. Tate, London; Presented by the Trustees of the Chantrey Bequest 1894.