Visiting Scholars' Seminar Series 2022-23

**Report to ASMCF**

The recipients of the 2022 Visiting Scholars' Seminar Series award Sarah Arens (Liverpool, previously St. Andrews), Jeff Barda (Manchester) and Joseph Ford (ILCS) reflect below on the purpose of the seminar series and its outcomes.

The question of what writing and art can do in terms of shaping the world we live in, has been at the core of debates in French and Francophone writing and visual arts in recent years. In their recent book, *What Forms Can Do* (2020), Shirley Jordan and Patrick Crowley immediately link any study of literature to its capacity to ‘pre-empt’ and ‘give shape’ to the world. For Pheng Cheah (2016), meanwhile, world literature is defined by its capacity to continually make and reshape the world. A focus on form, and in particular experimental form, means engaging with attempts not simply to imagine the world as it is, but to radically alter the minds of audiences who see the world as unchanging, or in an inevitable state of decline.

‘Giving Shape to the World’ was a series of seminars that brought together established and new voices in French and Francophone writing, visual arts and poetry with several academic centres of research in the UK interested in the broad question of the relationship between writing, the visual arts, translation and world-making. By focusing on a series of forms, from the realist to the experimental novel, from experimental poetry and the visual, from texts tackling issues ranging from social violence to colonial history, to the role of the translator in rendering literary and visual form across languages, the series drew attention to the increasing predominance of narratives and forms of social and political world-making in French and Francophone literature and visual arts.

We launched the series in March with an ‘in conversation’ event with the Goncourt prize-winning Franco-Moroccan author, Leila Slimani. Chaired by Nicholas Harrison (KCL) and skilfully facilitated by Adina Stroia (Newcastle), this was a lively and timely conversation about the lines between Slimani’s personal life and her writing, the place she occupies as a ‘Francophone’ writer in the heart of Parisian publishing, and the writer’s political work since she was appointed President Macron’s personal representative of to the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF). Hosted by the Institut Français in London, the event brought together scholars, creative writers, politicians and ambassadors from across the members of the OIF. A recording of the event can be found [here](https://www.institut-francais.org.uk/events-calendar/whats-on/talks/giving-shape-to-the-world-with-leila-slimani/).

The second event, with Quebecois writer Eric Plamondon was a hybrid panel discussion between the writer, Jean-Michel Gouvard (Bordeaux Montaigne) and Yan Rioux (Librairie du Québec à Paris). The discussion focused on new Quebec fiction, its crossing of multiple genres, experimental/reflexive style and how these features have brought a new French and global readership to Quebecois writing in recent years.

The penultimate event, a conversation with Suzanne Doppelt, one of the major voices in contemporary French poetry, explored how combining literature and photography alters ways of seeing and being in the world. Discussing her latest book, *Et tout soudain en rien*, with Jeff Barda (Manchester), the event held at the Institut Français explored the multiplicity of the gaze through the photographic enigma in Michelangelo Antonioni’s film *Blow-Up*.

The final event, with Barly Baruti and Ivanka Hahnenberger, cartoonist/author and translator of *Madame Livingstone: Congo, la grande guerre*, will take place online in the autumn, co-hosted by Sarah Arens in Liverpool and Laurence Grove at the Stirling Maxwell Centre for the Study of Text/Image Cultures at Glasgow.

The overall aim was to reimagine what a visiting seminar series could look like by pairing creative writers and poets with scholars based at a UK or French institutions, and in which their work was being researched or taught. We are very grateful to Nicholas Harrison (KCL), Adina Stroia (Newcastle), Jean-Michel Gouvard (Bordeaux Montaigne), and Laurence Grove (Glasgow) for agreeing to work with us and for so brilliantly chairing/facilitating the conversations.

The series was explicitly designed to demonstrate the importance of being together in a productive space of scholarly and intellectual exchange in an age where we have been increasingly dispersed and fragmented. To this end, we have been delighted to work directly with the Institut Français du Royaume uni and the Délégation du Québec in London to deliver these events alongside the Institute of Languages, Cultures and Societies and are grateful for their practical and financial support.

**Links to event pages/recordings/average numbers attending**

Leila Slimani: <https://www.institut-francais.org.uk/events-calendar/whats-on/talks/giving-shape-to-the-world-with-leila-slimani/>

Attending: 80

Eric Plamondon: <https://ilcs.sas.ac.uk/node/12294>

Attending: 30

Suzanne Doppelt: <https://www.institut-francais.org.uk/events-calendar/whats-on/talks/contemporary-french-poetry-in-conversation-with-suzanne-doppelt/>

Attending : 30

**Budget allocated and spent**

Due to various changes in personal circumstances/availability of colleagues who agreed to take part in the series, it has been necessary to alter plans during the course of the seminar series.

The original allocated sum from ASMCF was **£2,490**.

So far, **we have spent £1,531.59** (disbursed via ILCS) and are requesting to **carry forward a further £440** (to cover the professional fees for the invited practitioners at the final event in the autumn).

**Please note that ILCS is required to claim the existing spend before financial year end in July 2023.**

Please find a full spending report below:

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| **Item** | **Planned** | **Spent** |
| Leïla Slimani: Paris-London by train | £200 | £200 |
| Suzanne Doppelt: Paris-London by train | £200 | £115.00 |
| Eric Plamondon: Bordeaux-London by plane + Gatwick-central London | £200 | £200 |
| Jean-Michel Gouvard: Nantes-London by plane + Gatwick-central London | £150 | £150 |
| Ivanka Hahnenberger: Dublin-Edinburgh by plane | £150 | Unspent |
| Accommodation for scholars/practitioners | £750 | £600 |
| Dinners, costed at £30 per head, per scholar/practitioner | £150 | £120 |
| Drinks reception, costed at approx. £6 per head (estimating 30 attendees per event) | £720 | £617.20 |
| Practitioner fees @ £220 x 5 | £1100 | £660 (x 3 = Slimani; Plamondon; Doppelt) |
| Jeff Barda: Manchester-London by train | Unplanned spend, due to unavailability of other colleague | £80.59 |
| **Totals** | £3,620 | £2,742.79 |
| *Minus* contribution from UoL Cassal Fund | £780 | Actually in receipt of £861.20 |
| *Minus* contribution from Delegation du Quebec | £350 | £350 |
| **Totals** | **£2490 (amount awarded from ASMCF)** | **£1,531.59 (amount being claimed June 2023)** |