Events on campus

From poetry to policing, the subjects discussed at Birkbeck’s public lectures have inspired debate and online coverage. Here are some of last year’s highlights

Arts Week

“Birkbeck Arts Week 2012 was a chocolate box of assorted events for an arts enthusiast to pick from, a platform for students and tutors across the arts courses to engage in a more open setting, with tutors expressing the very latest research through a particular theme or object for their session,” wrote MA Cultural Studies student Rosalyn Croek, on the Birkbeck Events blog, in a post about the week’s final event: Cross Dressing in Silent Film: Ernst Lubitsch’s I Don’t Want to Be a Man! Rosalyn was one of many students, alumni and guests who wrote about this year’s events on Birkbeck’s new Events blog.

Loose Muse: Four Women Poets
By Emily Best, MA in Modern and Contemporary Literature – edited blog post

The debate rages on about whether there is a ‘canon’ of women writers. During Birkbeck Arts Week, in a little room at 43 Gordon Square, four lady wordsmiths made their case in favour. The event was a showcase for some of the finest she-poets in the capital to showcase their work amongst a small audience, discuss their poetry and open up the floor.

The event opened with Birkbeck lecturer Kate McLoughlin, whose poetry collections Plums is a response to William Carlos Williams’ great American fridge-note-poem This is Just to Say. Kate’s 58 variations on a reply to Williams, which also allude to Picasso’s reimagining of Velázquez’ Las Meninas, explore the variances and nuances of domestic interaction. Kate moves beautifully and sensitively from flippant to epic, on occasion nearing parody, engaging wholly with Williams’ poem but at the same time reclaiming what Williams leaves unsaid and open-ended.

Following Kate was Agnes Meadows – a force of energy in the room, inspiring and welcoming. Agnes went from recounting the fear of sleeping through bombs in Palestine in They’re Bombing the Port Again at Gaza to the pain of watching a sibling get your man in Juliet’s Sister. The passion and sensitivity in these poems tell of a woman who has lived and of a poet who feels and writes to the tips of her fingers.

In a complete change of pace, Sally Blackmore came next. Her son, who is in the army, recently got sent to Afghanistan and Sally found that her writing provided a tool for dealing with this. The first poem she read, Soldier, had a bittersweet wariness and grace to it that seemed borne of a mind that had always worked in verse. Here was a woman who took pain and fear in her hand like a proverbial nettle and refigured them as something good. The final poet on the bill was Camilla Reeve. Again, Camilla brought a different energy to the room. Though Camilla has an aura of earnest seriousness about her, her poetry had a lyrical, tender and humorous quality. Winter Angel was a particular favourite and, on further research, I discovered Dark Bird Turning and fell a little bit in love. Camilla’s poetry concerns itself with trajectories of emotion and the rudiments of relationships between people and places and things. It is entirely and only what it needs to be.

I left feeling that the four women proved, each in their own way, that every voice is there to be reclaimed and used as necessary; and at a time when women are still fighting for those voices, reclamation is as important as ever.

For more blogs from Arts Week, visit: www.bbk.ac.uk/artsweek

To read the full blog post, visit: www.bbk.ac.uk/loosemuse
Business Week

Blueprints for economic recovery and successful entrepreneurship were shared during a busy Business Week in June 2012. Leading economic commentator Will Hutton, Principal of Hertford College, University of Oxford, and Chair of the Big Innovation Centre at The Work Foundation, emphasised the consequences of ‘bad capitalism’ and explained during his lecture how ‘good capitalism’ can solve these problems. Hutton called for fairness, productive entrepreneurship, and transparency, and said that the future lies in the knowledge economy.

Professor Andrew Pettigrew, of the Said Business School, University of Oxford, called for stronger links between academia and business, when he delivered the Alec Rodger Memorial Lecture. He said academics should be aware of the social, political and economic context relevant to their research.

Popular events involving Birkbeckians included lectures about volatile commodity prices (Professor Helyette Geman), Birkbeck’s Computer Science Department (Dr Roger Johnson), and there was a panel discussion about innovation and entrepreneurship in London (Professor Helen Lawton Smith and Dr Pierre Nadeau).

Professor Philip Powell, Executive Dean of Birkbeck’s School of Business, Economics and Informatics, says: “We were privileged to hear from many influential speakers about today’s economic challenges and possible solutions.”

Law on Trial

The latest thinking on popular protest, policing tactics and the London riots of 2011 were all discussed during Law on Trial – a week of legal talks in June 2012. The lives and motivations of people on the streets during the riots were explored in a lecture by Professor Tim Newburn, of LSE, about the Reading the Riots research project conducted by LSE and The Guardian. He spoke of anti-police sentiment, looting and criminal damage, and warned that riots are “more, rather than less, likely” in future, because underlying conditions have not changed.

Professor John Pitts, of the University of Bedfordshire, assessed the impact of living in gang-affected neighbourhoods and analysed during his presentation the evidence influencing policy.

Lawyers also challenged controversial UK police tactics against protestors, such as kettling, during a discussion chaired by Birkbeck’s Professor Bill Bowring. During his inaugural lecture, Birkbeck’s Professor Matthew Weait explored how HIV and AIDS have been constructed as a legal problem, despite being first and foremost a public health issue.

Professor Mike Hough, Co-Director of Birkbeck’s Institute for Criminal Policy Research, says: “This year’s Law on Trial offered many insights into the 2011 riots, showcasing research that implicated social injustice and deficits in police legitimacy as significant causal factors.”

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To find out about Science Week, visit: www.bbk.ac.uk/eventsblog/scienceweek