

Phillippa Pitts
Project Prospectus
Word Count: 933

Dangerous Misrepresentations:
The Blitz Myth's Continuing Influence on our Post 9/11 World

What is the Blitz Myth?

Britain was never invaded during World War Two. Yet the nightly bombings of the island claimed 62,000 civilians lives. That number is equal to almost a quarter of the war's armed service fatalities. What emerged from this trauma was a shared national and international memory of "Blitz spirit." Londoners banded together, gritted their teeth and endured. After 9/11, this poignant image was seized by contemporary politicians: Rudy Giuliani, George W. Bush, Karl Rove, and Tony Blair. In today's social and economic hardship, "Keep Calm and Carry On" is everywhere, on T-shirts, mugs, and posters.

Unfortunately, the Blitz myth is just that: a myth. No history is free from historicity, yet the Blitz's story has been uniquely compromised. Both personal and public records were deliberately and strategically falsified. The government destroyed and misrecorded information in order to trick spies and defectors. Individuals were convinced that it was their patriotic duty to write for posterity, filling diaries and letters with the appropriate stalwart sentiment. This confluence of misinformation creates a compelling narrative which has continued to deceive and persuade politicians, artists, writers, and even scholars.

Post 9/11, this myth has colored our vision of the past and become a lens through which we perceive our present. It provides an unattainable mirage of psychological stoicism, class unity, and civic order. It incorrectly aligns our expectations, clouds our judgement, and interferes with our ability to respond to today's traumas.

About This Project

My thesis is a reclamation of three artists who represent very different experiences of the Blitz. Henry Moore was a wealthy and government-funded artist, visiting London frequently but living in relative safety some 30 miles north. Francis Bacon was a volunteer air-raid warden, witnessing the daily carnage first-hand. Pacifist William Spradbery was charged with keeping up spirits through the iconic printed public advisory posters.

Each of these artists currently possesses a stable and accepted canon that either ignores or misrepresents their wartime experience. Their reclamation will illustrate much-needed reforms in art history methodology when handling liminal moments of trauma, conflict, and war. It will also illustrate how pervasive, insidious, and deceptive the Blitz myth is. Thus, the material gathered has implications both for my field and for the greater public. When I return to museum work after graduation this May, I hope to adapt it into a physical or digital exhibition in service of the latter goal.

The execution of this project relies upon investigating and querying the discrepancies between sources: primary and primary, primary and secondary, and secondary and secondary. The third category is already well supported by the excellent Tisch Library reference staff and the Art History faculty. However, the first two comparisons cannot truly be achieved without access to the archival record, little of which is digitized. With this grant, I hope to travel to five major London collections. There, I will be able to view complete sketchbooks and collections, as well as diaries, letters, and unpublished manuscripts. With additional funding, I hope to extend my trip to visit Leeds, to visit additional collections regarding Henry Moore. The proposed trip would take place over the course of a week in January.

I will complete this project with or without funding. However, without your support, travel will be financially impossible. Thus, the primary sources I will have access to will be those selected, excerpted, and published by those working within the rhetoric of the Blitz myth. As such, my conclusions will be somewhat provisional and the project's impact on scholarship in my own field and those adjacent will be lessened.

Proposed Research Sites and Archival Holdings

London Sites	Archival Holding
British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings (London)	20987 Henry Moore, the 'Shelter' sketchbook, 1940-1941; Art.IWM PST 5887 Henry Moore, War Drawings
Henry Moore Archive (Perry Green)	HMA Correspondence 1917-1986
Tate Gallery Archive (London)	TG 92/344: Drawings of Henry Moore - The Henry Moore Gift. TGA 9120 Henry Moore, correspondence relating to Unit One, 1933-1935; TGA 8812 Henry Moore, correspondence with Lord Clark, 1938-1978; TGA 8821 Henry Moore, correspondence with Sir Michael Sadler, 1933-1942; TGA 8414 Correspondence and papers of Ronald Alley put together in the process of writing his catalogue raisonné of Francis Bacon, 1962-1963; TGA 20043 Material from Bacon's London studio including annotated source materials and photographs, c. 1950-1999, TG 92/168 Tate Exhibitions: Papers and Correspondence. Francis Bacon. A Retrospective Exhibitions: 24 May-1 Jul 1962. TG 92/322 Tate Exhibitions: Papers and Correspondence. Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud: 16 Aug-Oct 1977.
Imperial War Museum, Department of Documents (London)	IWM: ARCH 17 Manuscript for book on poster design, c. 1937; IWM: DOC 11404 Private Papers of W E Spradbery, various undigitized works by W E Spradbery
London Transport Museum (London)	Original poster collection, 5000 in total including a wartime art sub-selection.
Additional Sites	Archival Holdings
Henry Moore Institute (Leeds)	Letters, personal and business, 1935-1952; Letter relating to the Yorkshire Artists' Exhibitions, 1953; Letters (2), 1950.
The Hepford Wakefield (Wakefield)	letters from and between Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore, press cuttings, photographs, exhibition catalogues, and other ephemera. Currently largely uncatalogued.

Prospective Budget

Expense	Cost
Airfare to London	\$900
Travel to and between London research sites (7-day Zone 6 Oystercard)	\$89.71
Travel to Henry Moore Foundation (Perry Green)	\$40
Housing (with friends and family)	\$0
Meals and miscellaneous expenses	\$150
Minimum total	\$1179.71
<i>with additional funding</i>	
travel to Wakefield (Coach bus)	\$35
2 night stay in Wakefield	\$110
Reduction in London travel costs*	\$0
Total with additional funding	\$1324.71

The \$479.71 difference between this grant's maximum and my total costs will be met with either personal funds or additional funding that may be secured in the interim.

*The 7-day Zone 6 TravelCard is less expensive than purchasing 5 round-trip cards, thus there is no reduction in travel costs with a 2-day excursion to Wakefield.