**Amateurs, Scientists, Tradesmen, and Artists: The Royal Photographic Society (RPS) 1853-1914**

**Birkbeck, University of London – The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) London**

**The Project**

The Royal Photographic Society (RPS) is the oldest surviving photographic society in the world. In parallel to the Victoria and Albert Museum it is the oldest institution in Britain dedicated to the historical preservation and promotion of photography. However, despite this venerable heritage, the Society has no substantive written history and its important collection remains in large part unexplored. This CDP aims to remedy this situation by rethinking the early evolution of the RPS against formations of culture, class, and the rise of the professions and professional societies in Victorian and Edwardian Britain. It pursues research central to the V&A's work in engaging the public with the RPS collection in the coming years.

Founded in January 1853 as a society open to 'ladies and gentlemen interested in Photography', the RPS was set in motion by a complex array of factors. These included the legacy of the Great Exhibition of 1851 (with its public display of photography as art and science), the desire of amateur photographers to escape patent restrictions imposed by W. H. F. Talbot, and the urge to forge an autonomous space for photography alongside established cultural institutions such as the Society of Arts and the Royal Academy. Initially an elite formation, the doctorate will begin to unpick the pathways of specialisation within the institution against the wider framework of mid-Victorian formations of commerce, art, and science. The aim is to connect the RPS to an existing historiography focused on the rise of the nineteenth-century middle class in Britain.

The student will be able to access a diverse range of training and professional development opportunities at Birkbeck and V&A.