THE INSTITUTE OF ART HISTORY

AN OVERVIEW OF ART HISTORICAL RESEARCH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

The Institute of Art History, which combines the research activities of the History of Art subject area and the Hunterian Art Gallery, sits within the university’s larger School of Culture & Creative Arts. Highly successful in the last Research Assessment exercise of 2008, when it was ranked as the leading research unit in History of Art in the UK, a significant recent addition to the Institute has been the establishment of the Centre for Textile Conservation and Technical Art History. The unit’s established art historical strengths have therefore been augmented by an ambitious new emphasis on technical research and analysis. Its key research clusters are now: (1) Twentieth century art, (2) Nineteenth century art, (3) Medieval and Renaissance art and (4) Textile Conservation and Technical Art History. The Institute has strong links with external partners nationally and internationally, including Christie's Education (London), through both project research and partnership working.

The Institute encourages and develops the best object-led research by its art historians within an interdisciplinary environment in which the historical, theoretical, technical, museological and curatorial strands of the discipline are mutually reinforcing. It supports rigorous, methodologically-informed scholarship, manifested in grant-funded research programmes, individual scholarly projects and ambitious exhibition curation. Its newly-developed areas of expertise in technical art history and conservation move beyond traditional art historical approaches, creating links with the physical sciences while providing opportunities for collaboration, particularly with heritage institutions. Considerable investment in new facilities for the Centre for Textile Conservation and Technical Art History underpin this development. The Institute is outward-facing, developing projects that have relevance to non-academic as well as to academic audiences. The Institute also benefits greatly from the presence of the Hunterian, Special Collections and the University Archives, all of which form a platform for research, exhibition, and public engagement.

Key research clusters

1) Twentieth-century art: David Hopkins, Debbie Lewer, Dominic Paterson and Tina Fiske have developed a body of research around the avant-garde (related to the MLitt and PhD programmes offered by this cluster). Establishing an international profile in Dada studies (as exemplified by Lewer’s award of a Senior Humboldt Fellowship in 2009-10 to pursue research on German modernism, or Hopkins’s recent appointment as editor of the ‘Blackwell Companion to Dada and Surrealism’), they have realised numerous published outcomes, including contributions to The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines. Paterson has been actively involved as a critic, working alongside artists and curators in the Scottish contemporary art scene. Fiske’s work on public collections policy, through her work on the National Collecting Scheme Scotland project with Creative Scotland, complements the activity of this cluster, tying it to public support systems for the arts.

2) Nineteenth-century art: This cluster builds on Glasgow’s longstanding strengths in nineteenth-century art. Its scholars work across a range of interdisciplinary areas: for example art and gardens in European and North American art (Clare Willsdon), pathology and medical discourses (Sabine Wieber), collectors and the art market /collecting (Nick Pearce, Patricia de Montfort, John Bonehill). Continued international expertise on Whistler scholarship has been expanded by Margaret Macdonald’s online catalogue raisonné of Whistler’s etchings (2011) and Macdonald and de Montfort’s exhibition on ‘An
American in London: Whistler and the Thames’ (Dulwich 2013, then Addison Gallery, Mass., and Freer Gallery, Washington, USA, 2014). A key research partner for this cluster is the Stirling Maxwell Centre for the study of Text/Image Cultures, of which Hilary Macartney’s research is a core part.

3) Medieval and Renaissance art: The recent appointment of Tom Nichols builds on the research strengths of John Richards and Debra Strickland and the historical field encompassed by this cluster is now c. 1250-1600. This group is currently developing an innovative MLitt titled The Renaissance in Northern Europe and Italy. Nichols’ and Richards’ research engages with historiographic issues in Italian art with an emphasis on key figures (Petrarch, Tintoretto, Titian). There are strong thematic crossovers in the work of this cluster. For instance, Strickland’s innovative work on pejorative representations of non-Christians in medieval Christian art connects with Nichols’ widely published work on representations of the poor and outcast in the early modern period. Sally Rush’s work on sixteenth-century Scottish court culture complements the research of this cluster, whilst external contacts exist with, for example, the Glasgow Network for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, The Society of Renaissance Studies and the international group Cinquecento plurale.

4) Textile Conservation and Technical Art History: This fast-developing area of activity is led by Frances Lennard and Erma Hermens, and has benefitted from new staff and infrastructural investments (Anita Quye: Conservation Science; Mark Richter: Technical Art History; Lesley Miller: Dress and Textile History). Its activities are already making an impact with future areas of research identified through the outcomes of the Getty Foundation Funded Research Network (Lennard, Quye and Hermens, 2010-13) and the launch of the Art, Technology and Authentication Research Group (ArtTA) in 2013, in partnership with the Imaging Spectroscopy and Analysis Centre (ISAAC) within Geological and Earth Sciences at Glasgow (Hermens, Richter, Chung and Tate). Exhibition curation has featured within this cluster, an example being Hermens’ Bosch-Brueghel Project, funded by the EU Culture Fund in collaboration with the Kadirog Art Museum, Tallinn, the National Gallery of Denmark and Kelvingrove Art Gallery, Glasgow (2011-12), and Miller’s curation of the travelling exhibition: Princely Treasures (National Museum of Korea, Seoul, and other locations, 2011-12).

Impact: the Institute’s wider influence

The University of Glasgow’s strengths in art history/theory, technical art history, conservation and contemporary collecting policy mean that it is ideally placed to achieve impact beyond the purely academic sphere. In particular, it seeks to have an impact on cultural life and economic prosperity, on public services (especially museums and galleries), on knowledge-sharing and research collaboration with external bodies, and on policy making (in the arts sector). Its ambitions have been fuelled by the university’s commitment to relocating the Institute in its planned Kelvin Hall cultural complex (a £35m investment, which has received a £4.5m Heritage Trust Fund grant towards Phase 1 of its development). This move provides the Institute with exciting opportunities for outward-facing projects such as display of collections, exhibitions, public lectures and conferences.

In recent years the Institute’s research has impacted on diverse audiences, ranging from the nearly 750,000 people who attended Willsdon’s various exhibitions in the UK and Spain to the large numbers who visit Macdonald’s online Whistler catalogue (c 27,000 visits/month). Rush’s advisory work on the high-profile £12m refurbishments at Stirling Castle Palace Project were key to the Palace being named Which? magazine’s top heritage attraction (2012).
A few further highlights are as follows:

**Exhibitions:** Our research has been shared with large public audiences – e.g., Willsdon’s *Jardines Impressionistas* in Madrid, that attracted the biggest audience (332,000) for a British-originated show world-wide in 2011; Bonehill’s *Paul Sandby: Picturing Britain* (10,000 visitors across three venues in 2009-10); Hopkins’s *Childish Things* for the Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh (c 20,000 visitors, 2010-11); and, exhibits at the Hunterian including Edvard Munch: *Prints* (20,712 visitors, 2009) and Rembrandt and the Passion (9,350 visitors, 2012).

**Disseminating our expertise:** We share our research with large audiences, both specialist and non-specialist non-specialist, via a range of outlets. These include widely-circulated textbooks – Hopkins’s *After Modern Art* (OUP, 2000), which has sold over 75,000 copies, and Nichols’ *Renaissance Art* (Oneworld, 2010) – and major contributions to specialist public events, e.g. Hermens’s education programme for the Bosch-Bruegel exhibition at Kelvingrove, Glasgow (2012). An extensive portfolio of media activity includes: Strickland on *In Our Time* (Radio 4, 2012); and Pearce on *The Man Who Collected the World: William Burrell* (BBC2, 2013).

**Policy Advice:** Researchers in the Centre for Textile Conservation and Technical Art History have influenced conservation priorities and resource allocation in organisations such as English Heritage and Historic Royal Palaces. Our expertise has direct applications for museum, art and design collections throughout the world. Lennard, Quye and Richter advise extensively on pigment analysis, dyes, synthetic fibres, etc, directly influencing conservators and conservation and curatorial policy – e.g., Richter is currently developing advisory links with the Prado, Madrid on its early modern paintings.

**Heritage and cultural databases:** The Institute leads the way in developing databases to disseminate its research: e.g., MacDonald’s creation of the online catalogue raisonné of Whistler etchings, or Pearce’s work on the Catalogue of the Chinese Collection of Lady Lever Art Gallery, Liverpool. One of our recent PhD graduates, Perla Innocenti is a partner in international collaborative research networks – including MeLA and ECLAP – which develop digital methodologies and tools to address digital decay, including arts and humanities resources. Mention should also be made of the National Inventory Research Project, led by Andrew Greg, which has been part of the Institute since 2003, and is funded by the Kress Foundation, V&A and University of Glasgow. Outputs include the web-based NICE Paintings: the National Inventory of Continental European Paintings, which receives up to 30,000 visitors/month.

**Key new developments**

**International Reach:** Pearce’s established expertise in the area of Chinese art area is now supported with new investment signalled by the recent appointment of Minna Torma. This dovetails with the establishment of the Scottish Centre for China Research and the Confucius Institute at Glasgow. Plans are also underway for a China Art Research Network (CARN), with colleagues at Glasgow Museums, the National Museums Scotland and Christie’s Education. The Network aims to provide a platform, nationally and internationally, for art historians, archaeologists and museum professionals who specialise in China and who work in object-based research, including history, technical art history and conservation.

**New research area:** A significant departure for the Institute is the development of a specialism in Art Law (Christa Roodt), as part of the unit’s partnership with Christie’s Education in London. We aim to develop inter-disciplinary research strength in Art, Business and Law.

**New and ongoing projects:** There are numerous ongoing projects within the Institute. For a listing see under ‘Projects and Networks’ on our research page.

http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/cca/research/instituteofarthistory/