Issue No. 1 Autumn 2008

Research Journal

Edited by Christopher Breward

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VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON

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Editorial

Christopher Breward, Acting head of research,
Victoria and Albert Museum

Welcome to the launch issue of the V&A's annual Online Research Journal. Designed to complement the longstanding V&A Conservation Journal, this new initiative offers a lively forum for the discussion and publication of research undertaken in connection with all aspects of the Museum's activities.

Christopher Breward, Acting Head of Research, V&A

The contents are as diverse as the scope of the V&A's holdings and include in-depth articles on current research policy and practices, on the historical and archival work that underpins major Exhibition planning, and on the rich content of our archives. Focused object-in-context pieces present studies of particular collections and artefacts; and an interview with a maker explores the inspirational uses made of the Museum by artists and designers. I hope you'll agree that they all provide informative insights into the work of our curators, educators and fellows.

The benefits of an on-line format mean that we can incorporate feedback on individual pieces and suggestions for further articles and sections in a proactive and open manner. Inclusion is not restricted to V&A staff, and provided that submissions meet the standards set by our Editorial team and peer reviewers we welcome articles for future issues on the history of art, architecture and design relating to the V&A's collections, public programme or institutional history; features focusing on new acquisitions or objects linked to V&A exhibitions; reflections on the educational or creative industries

role of the Museum and reviews and previews of V&A publications, conferences or displays. Further details on submission are available at www.vam.ac.uk/vandajournal and we can be contacted at vandajournal@vam.ac.uk

The Grammar of Ornament, 'Indian No. 4' (example 11), by Owen Jones

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We hope you enjoy this first edition!

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Owen Jones and the V&A Collections

Sonia Ashmore, Research Fellow, Victoria and Albert Museum

The Grammar of Ornament, 'Indian No. 4' (example 11), by Owen Jones

'Grand Polychromatist-plenipotentiary' and perpetrator of bad taste,[1] and, 'the most learned man, perhaps in all Europe, in Eastern decoration';[2] Owen Jones gained both notoriety and fame in his day. Yet the sparsity of serious historical attention given to Jones is surprising, considering his role in the history of the decorative arts, design education, and the development of the South Kensington Museum, the continuing success of some of his designs (versions of his wallpaper designs marketed in the 20th century by Laura Ashley), and continuing sales of The Grammar of Ornament.[3] The display and Study Day planned at the V&A by the Collections Department

of Word and Image to commemorate the bicentenary of Jones's birth in 2009 will hopefully start to redress this absence.[4]

For a researcher, it is a delight, but perhaps not a surprise, to discover close links between objects in the V&A collections and the work of a figure so embedded in the foundation and philosophy of the Museum. My recent research has focused on the Museum's nineteenth century Indian textile collections and this article will focus on apparently unobserved connections between these collections, Jones's Grammar of Ornament, and his own designs.

Jones, Indian art, and the formation of the V&A collections

As a young architect, Owen Jones was profoundly influenced by his travels and observations in Egypt, Turkey and Spain (notably the Alhambra) in the 1830s. As Michael Snodin has commented, 'His foreign experiences were to lead directly to a set of architectural and design theories which combined the pure romanticism of the East with a scientific approach to design, ornament and colour'.[5] Some of these experiences were vicarious; he did not actually visit India, or indeed many of the countries whose art was represented in the pages of The Grammar of Ornament, first published in 1856. This was not, after all, the age of jet travel. Jones acknowledged in the Grammar that the section on Indian Ornament drew heavily on objects shown in the Exhibitions of 1851 (London) and 1855 (Paris).[6] The Indian displays at these exhibitions were assembled

via the East India Company and an elaborate network of committees and sub-committees in its four Presidencies in India: Bengal, Agra, Madras and Bombay, following an exhaustive classification system devised by the Exhibition Commissioners in London.[7] Textiles and clothing accounted for seven of the twenty-nine classes of materials exhibited.

In 'Gleanings from the Great Exhibition of 1851', published in the *Journal of Design*, Jones reflected on the meretricious values of the European manufactures: 'After wandering through the halls of this most wonderful assemblage of the world's industry, the artist who passes down the nave from east to west will see on either side but a fruitless struggle to produce in art novelty without beauty – beauty without intelligence; all work without faith'.[8]

Jones considered that in comparison, 'The Indian and Tunisian articles were the most perfect in design of any that appeared in the exhibition … a boon to the whole of Europe'.[9] The Indian work in particular showed, 'all the principles, all the unity, all the truth, for which we had looked elsewhere in vain'.[10] In this he echoed a broader admiration of Indian artefacts, especially textiles, which had first come to the attention of a mass public at the 1851 Exhibition, and to that of a more limited audience at the East India Company's Museum.[11] Here was possible redemption from the 'carpets worked with flowers whereon the foot would fear to tread', and other horrors of contemporary industrial production.[12]

It may be useful to describe briefly the method by which Indian objects were brought into the South Kensington Museum following the 1851 exhibition, since Jones was critically involved in this. The

broader context was summarised by Clive Wainwright who, although challenging the assumption that 1851 purchases defined the South Kensington Museum collections, admitted the key roles of Henry Cole, Richard Redgrave, and Owen Jones in their formation.[13] These individuals, together with A.W. Pugin (whose demise occurred during the process) and John Rogers Herbert, formed the committee for selecting objects from the Great Exhibition for the School of Design collection displayed at Marlborough House that was to form a substantial core of the Museum. Time was short. Wainwright has drawn attention to the following entry in Cole's Diary for 8 October 1851: 'Redgrave, O. Jones met and examined French and Indian articles for Schools of Design.' This was done in the exhibition itself, starting at seven o'clock in the morning, before the admission of the public. The following day's entry noted, 'Completed examination of Articles except Indian. Too numerous in good things.' Wainwright noted that nearly a quarter of the £5000 budget allocated by the Government was eventually spent on Indian objects from the exhibition, and of these Indian textiles were very well represented,

accounting for sixty-five out of the 139 items purchased from the display.

A further £500 was spent the following year at the East India Company auction of Indian objects that had failed to sell at the exhibition, although the Times commented that:

> *'The collection comes before the public in a rather depreciated state, and with its chief ornaments abstracted ... The Queen had the best of everything contained in it. The Government Commission made a careful and judicious selection for its Museum of Practical Art ... many rare and valuable contributions were merely lent for the occasion of the Exhibition, and have been restored to their owners. The Company, too, have not been unmindful of their public duties have behaved most liberally to learned institutions and to scientific men'.*[14]

These remaining objects could have been bought at knockdown prices, for as the Times noted, 'Yesterday's sale ... realized ... £800, most of the things going very cheaply, and some (especially the gold and silver tissues) being disposed of at great sacrifice'. The kincobs (silk fabric with patterns woven in a weft thread of gold and silver- wrapped thread), which had been so greatly admired,

> *... fared ill under the rude test of the auctioneer's hammer, the prices they fetched [were] based upon the amount of precious metal used in the decoration. Though our greatest authorities in art manufactures have concurred in pointing them out as masterpieces of taste and skill, they have been bought as useless for any other purpose than what they may bring in the melting pot.'.*[15]

Fortunately, a substantial number of superb kincobs and other woven silks remain in the V&A collections and more were bought in India in the early 1880s.

The Grammar of Ornament and the circulation of Indian art

Although Jones trained as an architect, his surviving reputation has been as a designer and decorator, a maker of books and as an educator. In keeping with the utilitarian and educational motives of Cole, the 'Thirty seven Propositions', or 'General Principals' set out by Jones in the Grammar had as their goal the general improvement of artistic standards through mass education. 'No improvement can take place in the Arts of the present generation until all classes, Artists, Manufacturers and the Public, are better educated in Art', he stated.[16] The underlying idea was that the principles governing the use of design and ornament could be extracted and applied to manufactured objects that would be readily bought by similarly educated consumers. The intention of the Grammar was also that examples of pattern could be extracted from their context, absorbed by the viewer and appropriately reworked or applied to new manufactures, although direct copying was to be avoided.

Exemplary patterns were found by Jones principally in non-European decorative arts. In the words of the contemporary curator J.C. Robinson, 'the contribution to the Exhibition of 1851 from various oriental countries were … recognised as possessing special claims to the attention of the decorative artist, and their superiority, in point of design, over European stuffs, was … for the first time, fully admitted'.[17] At the 1851 Exhibition, 'amid the general disorder everywhere apparent in the application of art to manufactures', Jones found that Indian artefacts

stood out in terms of their 'unity of design … skill and judgment in … application' and, 'elegance and refinement in … execution'.[18] Jones particularly admired the 'equal distribution of the surface ornament over the ground' and the use of, 'the most brilliant colours perfectly harmonised'.[19] Such themes became the leitmotif of the 'good taste' promoted by the South Kensington authorities.[20]

Jones intended the Grammar to reach as wide an audience as possible, particularly in the manufacturing districts of England, and, despite its cost, fifty copies of the Grammar and twenty-five copies of Jones's Plans, Elevations, Sections and Details of the Alhambra (Owen Jones and Jules Goury, 1842–45) were purchased for distribution to Schools of Art in 1857.[21] Thus details of Moorish, Indian, Chinese, Egyptian and many other types of designs could be inspected beyond the exhibition spaces of the capital. In addition, actual objects could also be seen. The establishment of a system of circulating exhibitions in the 1850s allowed for first-hand examination of a wide range of objects. Thirteen of the twenty-one textiles selected for circulation to museums and provincial schools of art in the mid-1850s were from India. Some schools also bought their own examples of Indian textiles, originally shown in the 1851 Exhibition; eleven pieces were bought for the Cambridge School of Art in the 1860s.[22]

The plates depicting 'Indian Ornament' in the Grammar were taken from 'works in metal', 'specimens of painted lacquer work' (from the East India Company collections) and 'embroidered and woven fabrics' shown in 1851 and at the Paris International Exposition of 1855. The sources of 'Hindoo

Ornament' illustrated in Chapter Thirteen however, were architectural, and largely based on museum collections in London, copies of the Ajanta cave paintings, and Ram Raz's History of the Architecture of the Hindus, published in 1834.[23]

The collections as source for the Grammar

During the course of recent research into the formation of the V&A's Indian textile collections, it has been possible to identify a number of objects in the Asian collections which can be directly related to plates in the chapter on Indian Ornament in the Grammar. Although drawn by Jones's pupils Albert Warren and Charles Aubert, and not by Jones himself, the objects were selected by him both for the museum collections and again for the book and deliberate exposure to a wide public. This gives a strong sense of historical continuity to objects in the collections and to Jones's estimation of their aesthetic value.

As already noted, a feature of Indian decorative design particularly admired by Jones and his contemporaries was, 'the equal distribution of the surface ornament over the grounds'.[24] An example of this is a woven silk fabric with repeating flowering plant design from Aurangabad, now in Maharashtra (figure 1) which was illustrated in the Grammar (figure 2). It was purchased from the 1851 Exhibition for £4 and was also illustrated in Henry Hardy Cole's 1874 Catalogue of the Indian collection at the South Kensington Museum as an example of good

design on account of its muted colours, ‘flat’ design and regular repeat typical of the Mughal and Deccani style used in many media including textiles.

Indian Kincob were among the most sensational and admired fabrics shown in 1851 and at subsequent exhibitions. Kincob, an anglicised term of uncertain origin, is a rich silk fabric with patterns woven in a weft thread of gold and silver-wrapped thread (zari), made by wrapping gold or silver wire around a silk core (kalabuttu zari). Kincob was usually sold by weight. One example (figure 3) from Benares (Varanasi) has a gold ground and trellis design in silver, black and red, containing a flower pattern. It was purchased from the 1851 Exhibition for £32.10s (£32.50) and was described as ‘Kinkhob Jhaldar’ (Jhali or jali, trellis or net) in the 1852 Inventory and was illustrated in the Grammar (figure 4). The net or trellis pattern (jali) often referred to as a ‘diaper’ pattern, was a motif considered exemplary and emulated by design reformers such as Jones and William Morris.

Benares (Varanasi) was, and remains, famous for its silk weaving, and a number of examples from its workshops were shown at the 1851 Exhibition. A sumptuous sari (figure 5 , figure 5a) woven from crimson silk and gold-wrapped thread, was purchased from the 1851 Exhibition for £22. The patterned, loose end (pallu) of this of this sari incorporates flower motifs, a floral meander, chevron (khajuri) and floral designs and at least three of these motifs were illustrated by Jones in the Grammar (figure 6, figure 7, figure 8).

A variety of regional Indian textile techniques were shown in 1851, and at later exhibitions, Indian craft workers were brought to Europe to demonstrate their skills to the public. Indian embroidery was greatly admired in Britain in an era when embroidery was both practiced at home and promoted by the Arts and Crafts movement; a number of examples were represented in the Grammar. A motif

taken from an embroidered Huqqa mat (figure 9), is illustrated in the Grammar (figure 10) Embroidered garments from Kutch (Gujurat) were purchased for the Museum from the 1851 exhibition, and at least two of these were illustrated in the Grammar: a curious black satin garment described as an ‘apron’ embroidered with designs of flowers and leaves (figure 11, figure 12, figure 12a) and part of an unsewn skirt made of yellow satin woven silk, embroidered in chain stitch with silk thread (figure 13, figure 14). Embroideries such as these were made by professional male embroiderers from the Mochi (shoemaker) community in Kutch for wealthy Indian patrons.

Other specialised techniques may have been unknown in Britain. Kota, in Rajasthan, which does not have a strong weaving tradition, was, and is still, famous for a fine translucent cotton cloth known as malmal, which imitates the more expensive gold silk brocade. The design is stamped in gum onto the fabric, usually muslin. A layer of gold or silver foil (either real gold or silver leaf or ground mica) is laid on top and rubbed in; the residue is then thoroughly beaten into the cloth so that it will resist wearing. A red muslin turban from Kota, overprinted in gold (figure15) was bought from the 1851 Exhibition for ten shillings (fifty pence); its lattice motif was illustrated in the Grammar (figure 16).

Jones's designs and the Indian textile collections

Besides his architectural and educational work, Jones also practiced a wide range of applied design, including textiles and wallpaper. The influence of Indian textiles is apparent in several of Jones's own designs, besides names such as 'Nizam', 'Sultan', 'Peri' and 'Maharanee' – all textile designs for Warner and probably named by the company.

Jones strongly discouraged the direct copying of the designs displayed in the Grammar, although he thought it was inevitable – a 'dangerous' and 'unfortunate tendency of our time', since it produced designs with no cultural context or meaning.[25] Thus we would not expect Jones's own designs to be mere copies, making it difficult to 'match' them exactly with their probable Indian sources. There are also problems in distinguishing between the many similar and common motifs of Indian textiles – used widely in other media including architectural decoration – such as the trailing vine, diaper or trellis, and various floral repeats, several of which were drawn for the Grammar, and also in 'translating' motifs from woven silks and embroidery to printed and woven patterns. In this respect, a woven silk from Aurangabad (V&A Museum no. 799-1852) can be compared with a floral motif reproduced in the Grammar ('Indian No.4', example 17) and with a wallpaper designed by Jones (V&A Museum no. PDP 8336:106). Despite these reservations, at least two of the wallpaper designs by Jones in the V&A collections (figure 17, figure 19) are very similar to motifs illustrated in the Grammar (figure 18, figure 20). In different media, at least two of the silks designed by Jones for Warner in the V&A's

Textiles collections are very close in design to Indian textiles bought from the 1851 Exhibition. Despite Jones's strictures about copying, 'Maharanee' (figure 21) is almost identical to one of the motifs embroidered on a large silk canopy from Multan (figure 22). And, despite its apparently Greek name, the scrolling leaf and flower motifs in Jones's 'Athens' woven satin furnishing fabric for Warner, 1870–74 (figure 23) closely resemble those found in Indian woven silks such as the woven silk and gold-wrapped thread sari (figurev24) and the related example illustrated in the Grammar (figure 25).

Conclusions

While comparisons such as these can become a self-serving exercise, the identification of Owen Jones's primary source material in the V&A's Indian textile collections has some value. It provides specific evidence of the high aesthetic esteem placed on Indian artefacts, specifically textiles, by the founders of the Museum and the accompanying nationwide programme of art education. It permits a clearer understanding of the meaning of the principles of good design formed by Jones and his colleagues, and in the case of Jones particularly, how these could be translated into manufactured designs. It also highlights the limitations of translating objects into two-dimensional images, however fine the quality of printing in the case of the Grammar of Ornament. For the textile pieces illustrated were three-dimensional objects, with the texture and (highly-valued) irregularities of the hand-made. Furthermore, most of them were made to be worn, to move with the

human body, and to be seen in very different climatic conditions and contexts from those of darkest, gas-lit Victorian England. Seeing these objects next to their 'mechanical reproduction' may bring some of these differences into relief.

In terms of the global migration of design motifs, these examples provide a very specific illustration of the way in which traditional patterns of Asian textiles could be mediated through a network of taste arbiters to reach an exhibition in South Kensington, the pages of a ground breaking design manual, and the domestic design productions of nineteenth-century manufacturers of furnishing textiles and wallpaper.

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[Arts & Humanities Research Council](http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/ "Arts & Humanities Research Council")

Owen Jones and the V&A Collections

Owen Jones's Grammar of Ornament has been an influential design manual for more than 150 years, yet its material sources have not been properly examined. Newly

observed connections between the 'Indian Ornament' illustrated in the Grammar and textiles in the V&A collections, selected by Jones and his colleagues, may enable better understanding of Jones's aesthetic principles, and the sources of his own design work.

Endnotes

1. 'The Crystal Palace'. *Blackwoods Magazine*, September 1, 1854.

2. 'Prospects for Schools of Design'. *Journal of Design and Manufactures*. London, 1849: 89–90.

3. Among the exceptions are Darby, Michael. *Owen Jones and the Eastern Ideal*. PhD Thesis. University of Reading, 1974; Darby M. and D. Van Zanten. 'Owen Jones's iron building of the 1850s'. *Architectura** (1974): 53–75; Schoeser, Mary. *Owen Jones Silks*. Warner Fabrics, 1987; Frankel, Nicholas. 'The Ecstasy of Decoration: The Grammar of Ornament as Embodied Experience'. *Nineteenth Century Art Worldwide* (Winter 2003): 1–32. Flores, Carol A.H. *Owen Jones: design, ornament, architecture, and theory in an age in transition*. New York, 2006. In anticipation of Jones's bicentenary, *Journal of Design History* has recently published two articles on Jones: Jespersen, John Kresten. 'Originality and Jones: The Grammar of Ornament of 1856' 21:2(2008): 143–153, and Sloboda, Stacey. 'The Grammar of Ornament: Cosmopolitanism and Reform in British Design' 21:3 (2008): 223–236. None of these texts identify specific sources for the Grammar however.

4. The Fashioning Diaspora Space research project being undertaken at the V&A and Royal Holloway University of London, investigates the presence of 'South Asian' clothing textiles in 'British' culture in both colonial (1850s to 1880s) and post-colonial (1980s to 2000s) times. Research in the V&A is investigating three sets of acquisitions made between 1852 and 1883: purchases from the 1851 Great Exhibition; John Forbes Watson's Collections of the Textile Manufactures of India (First Series 1866, Second Series 1873–77); and the textiles sent back to South Kensington from India by Caspar Purdon Clarke

during his 1881–82 trip to buy objects for the Museum's Indian collections.

5. Snodin, Michael. Introduction to facsimile edition of *The Grammar of Ornament* by Bernard Quaritch. London, 1997: 8.

6. Jones, Owen. *The Grammar of Ornament*. London, 1856: p.x.

7. *Great Exhibition of the Works of All Nations: Official Catalogue*, vol. II, London 1851.

8. Jones, Owen. *'Lectures on the Results of the Great Exhibition of 1851'*. London, 1853.

9. Jones, Owen. *'Lectures on the Results of the Great Exhibition of 1851'*. London, 1853.

10. Jones, Owen. *The Grammar of Ornament*. London, 1856: 141.

11. From 1791–1858 the East India Company's India Museum was based at Leadenhall Street; in 1858 the collections were transferred to Whitehall, and in 1879 to the South Kensington Museum.

12. Jones, Owen. 'Gleanings from the Great Exhibition of 1851'. Reprinted from *The Journal of Design* (June 1851).

13. Wainwright, Clive and Charlotte Gere. 'The Making of the South Kensington Museum', parts I & II. *Journal of the History of Collections* 14:1 (2002): 3–23, 25–44.

14. 'The Indian Collection [Disposal and Auction]'. *Times*, 1 June 1852.

15. 'The Indian Collection [Auction]'. *Times*, 2 July 1852.

16. Grammar of Ornament. *Proposition* 37.

17. Robinson, J.C. *Catalogue of the Circulating Collection of works of art selected from the museum at South Kensington: intended for temporary exhibitions in provincial schools of art*. London, 1860.

18. Jones, Owen. *The Grammar of Ornament*. London, 1856: 77.

19. Jones, Owen. *The Grammar of Ornament*. London, 1856: 141–2.

20. For recent discussion of Jones's ideas on pattern in relation to design reform and orientalism, see Dutta, Arindam. *The Bureaucracy of Beauty: design in the Age of its Global Reproducibility*. London, 2008: 116–17, and Sloboda, Stacey. 'The Grammar of Ornament: Cosmopolitanism and Reform in British Design'. *Journal of Design History* 21:3 (2008): 223–236.

21. *Board Minutes ... Relative to Acquisition of Art Objects for the benefit of Schools of Art 1852 to 1870* (V&A/AADED 84/34). The price of the

Grammar was £17 10s, but was sold in bulk to the Schools of Art at a discounted price of £10 – £12.

22. *Board Minutes ... Relative to Acquisition of Art Objects for the benefit of Schools of Art 1852 to 1870* (V&A/AADED 84/34).

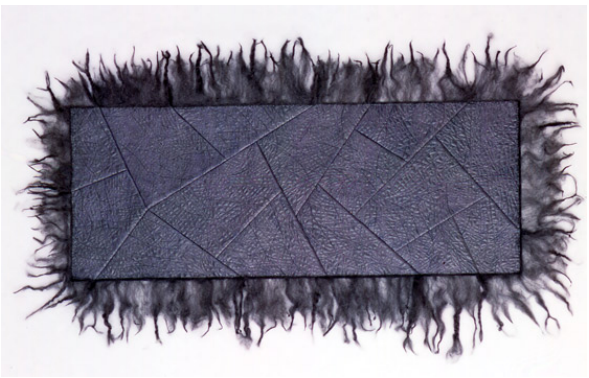
23. Raz, Ram. *Essay on the Architecture of the Hindus*. London, 1834.

24. Jones, Owen. *The Grammar of Ornament*. London, 1856: 79.

25. Jones, Owen. *The Grammar of Ornament*. London, 1856: Preface.

Keepsakes of Identity – Michele Walker ‘Memoriam’

Sue Pritchard, Curator, Furniture, Textiles & Fashion, Victoria and Albert Museum



Memoriam by Michele Walker, 2002. Plastic and steel wire wool. Photograph © Stevel Gorton

Quilt making fulfils a number of roles for the maker and society: the process of making may represent an act of remembrance, a rite of passage (say a wedding or a birth) or provide a forum for overt political or social commentary.[1] Stitching may be a solitary occupation, a moment to reflect or meditate, or a communal activity, as illustrated by the evocative image of the quilting bee.[2] The beautifully crafted quilts produced either in isolation or in communities form part of a cultural continuum that transcends time and place; their makers creating both ‘personal and historical legacies’.[3]

The process of making can also be a challenge, forcing the maker to admit and face up to stark truths and harsh realities, particularly those associated with the untimely or tragic death of a loved one. In this case, the creation of a tangible memorial to a lost family member or friend provides succour in the aftermath of a personal tragedy; the physical act of stitching also acts as a lynchpin on the therapeutic road to emotional recovery. Cloth, with its complex and fascinating history, has long been acknowledged as playing a key role in retaining and communicating both personal and communal memories, those complex narratives which make up our own and our ancestral lives. Kathryn Sullivan Kruger believes that '[A] piece of fabric transmits information about the society which created it in a manner not dissimilar to a written language, except that in this case the grammar is printed in the cloth's fibre, pattern, dye and method of production.'[4] The monumental 'AIDS Memorial Quilt' and 'National Tribute Quilt: A September 11 Memorial' both reflect the collective efforts of individuals and communities to come to terms with tragic and untimely loss, focusing on specific events in recent history. These objects,

with their intimate associations of warmth, comfort and the security of home therefore become public metaphors in times of national and international tragedy and instability.

Collective Memories

Initially organised at a local level in the mid-1980s, 'The AIDS Memorial Quilt' has since evolved into an international project. The extraordinary number of individually stitched panels commemorates the thousands of men, women and children who have died of the disease since 1985.[5] Colleagues, friends, families and lovers have all contributed to what has become known as the world's largest living memorial. Unlike most collective monuments to the dead, the majority of which consist of seemingly impersonal lists of names and dates incised into stone or marble, 'The AIDS Memorial Quilt' is unique in celebrating the individuality of the people who have died. Personal tokens, mementoes and memories are crafted into many of the panels. When the panels are assembled the quilt functions not only as a conduit for the grief and anger of those who have lost a loved one, but also as a celebration of a life lived.

In a unique chapter in the formation of the quilt, fashion designer Rifat Ozbek approached key individuals in the fashion industry to design panels dedicated to colleagues whose deaths had decimated the creative industries. A small publication documents and illustrates a selection of these panels,[6] including some of the written tributes. These poignant and, in some cases, intensely personal dedications, reinforce the power of the medium to bear witness to both individual and universal suffering. Ben de Lisi focused on the loss of a 'silver-haired man [who] was a true friend under all

circumstances … [who] nurtured and nourished us … To say we loved him would be an understatement. To say we needed him would be obvious. To say we miss him … we will always miss him.'[7] Helen Storey directed her anger at the unfairness of the disease, at 'the painful passivity displayed on the faces of children for whom life is defined by disease … A seemingly godless earth to allow a being unable to shape its own destiny.'[8] Exhibited on both sides of the Atlantic, the quilt is also used as an educational tool: as the rate of HIV infection among young people continues to rise, the significance of 'The AIDS Memorial Quilt' continues to resonate, telling 'a story significant to the time in which it was created'.[9]

'The National Tribute Quilt' : A September 11 Memorial (2002)

'The National Tribute Quilt', like 'The AIDS Memorial Quilt', functions both as a personal commemoration and as a symbol of national unity. Initiated by the Steel Quilters in Pittsburgh,[10] the 3 metre × 10 metre quilt includes the name of every

individual who lost their life in the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. Designed as a series of six panels, it has four central panels based on an image of the New York City skyline, complete with the twin towers of the World Trade Center. The central section of the quilt is flanked on the left by a panel which includes the names of passengers and crew who lost their lives on Flights 11, 93, 175 and 77, surmounted by a pair of white doves. The right hand panel commemorates individuals who died at the Pentagon. This panel is dominated by the profile of the head of an eagle, a symbolic metaphor for both the Pentagon and the USA.

The Steel Quilters, a group of four experienced quilters and stitchers, were moved to construct a lasting memorial to the dead while watching media coverage of the tragedy. Kathy Crawford describes being moved by the composure of a co-worker's family whose son had died on his first day working in the World Trade Center; 'The father's strength and composure inspired us to make this quilt, not just for one family, but for all the families who must share in the grief. A quilt which would not only serve as a way to forever remember and pay tribute to those lost, but also give comfort to their families knowing that others truly cared about their loved ones.[11] The Steel Quilters extended their project to the wider community via a website that invited individuals interested in contributing a square to contact them for the name of a victim. Kathy Crawford provides an explanation for the overwhelming response to the project: 'Many block contributors researched the person

to whom they were paying tribute. Many cried while making their blocks, feeling close to someone that they had never met but with whom now they have a bond. Many wrote mails and letters accompanying their blocs, expressing their gratefulness for this project for helping them to get through emotions which many of us have never experienced before.'[12] The complexity of creating a memorial which contains 3466 squares was offset by a grid reference system that enables each name to be located on the quilt and in the accompanying record book (the book also contains the square-maker's name).

Central to the act of remembrance through the creation of memorials is the ability to record the name of the deceased. The unprecedented nature of the tragedy of 9/11added an unforeseen complexity to the creation of 'The National Tribute Quilt'. The Steel Quilters used the list of victims provided by the media giant CNN as the basis for their website appeal. As the list of names was constantly being revised and updated, the task became increasingly complicated. The Steel Quilters' decision to add a disclaimer to the website appeal was both pragmatic and practical – the quilt had gone through a process of modification, as names were removed or spellings amended, and squares were removed or altered to reflect the change. The importance of ensuring that the memory of each individual is correctly recorded is central to the act of remembrance – failure to do this would invalidate both memorial and, metaphorically, the individual.

The success and level of response to the 'The National Tribute Quilt' owes much to the way in which the American quilting tradition is firmly entrenched in the nation's psyche. For many, quilt making is synonymous with the creation of a national identity; it represents the pioneering spirit of the early settlers on their arduous journey west, the mythology of 'The Underground Railroad' quilts [13] and the sense of community personified by the nineteenth-century quilting 'bees'.[14] On continuous display at the American Folk Art Museum, New York, the quilt represents both personal and collective memories.

'Memoriam' – A Personal Testament (2002)

Community projects such as 'The AIDS Memorial Quilt' and 'The National Tribute Quilt' fulfil a specific function in society – a catalyst for emotion and commemoration. When community projects focus on major events with international repercussions, the resulting quilts are recognised and classified as cultural icons. In contrast, Michele Walker's 'In Memoriam', a plastic and wire wool quilt, is more difficult to read. Dedicated to her mother, Walker's referencing of the distressing

symptoms experienced by individuals suffering from Alzheimer's disease is a complex combination of personal narrative, social commentary and traditional quilt making skills.

Trained as a graphic designer, Walker's two publications celebrate both the unknown makers of traditional North Country quilts and the work of contemporary practitioners.[15] Walker, one of a small group of contemporary artists who revived interest in British quilt making in the 1970s and early 1980s,[16] continues to create complex and multi-layered quilts and installations. Lesley Millar, curator of the cross-cultural exhibition 'Cloth and Culture Now', believes that many practitioners who consciously draw on indigenous textile traditions use 'the cultural space presented by the domestic history of the making and use of textiles, to move between [both] the personal and the political'.[17]

'Memoriam' is the last quilt in a body of work which draws inspiration from the patterns, stitches and ethos of traditional quilt making – the incorporation of everyday, cast-off scraps and fabrics used to make both decorative and functional bed covers. Walker's ability to both understand and interpret the origins and traditions of this craft provides her with a medium with which to engage with social, political and environment issues in a way which is both accessible and relevant. Walker states, 'My work deals with re-interpreting the traditional quilt. Inspiration comes from what I experience and observe around me. It is essential that the content of the work reflects the time in which it is made … I aim in my work to challenge the associations and meaning of the word quilt.'[18] An earlier work, 'Waste Not, Want Not' (1993),[19] thus not only engages the viewer in the topical debate regarding recycling, but also references the 'make do and mend' tradition of crafting objects from the ephemera of our everyday lives. Constructed from frozen food packaging, plastic bags, fabric and photocopies, 'Waste Not, Want Not'

is both an emotional and intellectual response to the environmental issues which continue to resonate across the globe. In 'Assault and Battery 3' (2001),[20] Walker again combines her knowledge of the North Country quilt making tradition with direct criticism of battery farming. Made in response to a report published by Compassion in World Farming,[21] 'Assault and Battery 3' is a rectangular quilt constructed from plastic materials, wadding, Vilene and feathers. It is the third in a series of quilts based on factory farming. The imagery, a pair of large white feathers against a black rectangular background, references the 'running feather' quilting pattern used in traditional North Country whole-cloth quilts. The aesthetic reading of the quilt is subverted by the title – an overt commentary on the conditions related to factory farmed poultry, especially turkey rearing.

Walker's interest in traditional British patchwork and quilting extends beyond materials and techniques. Underpinning her research is her fascination with the lives of the often unknown working class women who produced whole-cloth quilts, objects which are, on the whole, unsigned and undated but retain the fading memory of traditional folk crafts of rural and mining communities. Walker's concern is well founded: the seminal 1971 exhibition 'Abstract Art in American Quilts' held at the Whitney Museum of Modern Art in New York may have catapulted the crafted

object into the fine art arena, yet the makers remained conspicuously absent.[22] In contrast, the phenomenal success of the Gees Bend quilts is as much a response to the social history and documentation project, and the ability to trace the lineage of the makers, as it is to the aesthetic quality of the work.[23]

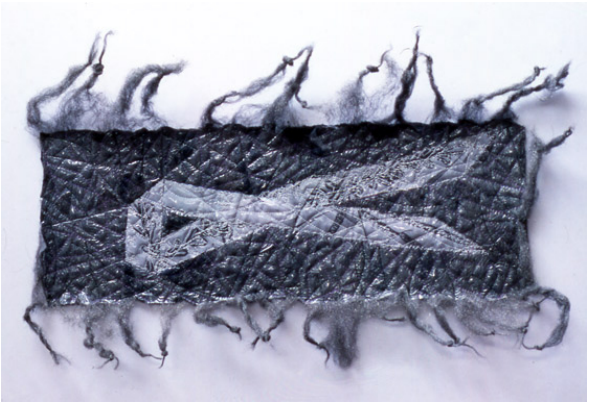
It is this emphasis on 'disappearance' – both physical and metaphorical – that underpins Walker's 'Memoriam'. On the surface, the work can be read in terms of a commemoration of the erosion of traditional skills and the identities of the women who practiced them. Dedicated to her dead mother, 'Memoriam' is firmly rooted in the tradition of commemorative quilts, yet its underlying focus is as much on the loss of an individual's memory as it is on remembrance. Walker's intensely personal yet deeply complex exploration of the distressing symptoms of Alzheimer's disease can in many ways be compared with the origins of 'The AIDS Memorial Quilt' – anger at an apparent lack of support for sufferers from Government agencies and a desire to increase awareness of the disease.

A progressive and fatal brain disease, Alzheimer's destroys brain cells, resulting in serious memory loss, deterioration in thinking and concentration, and severe behavioural problems, and is the most common form of dementia. In discussing 'Memoriam', Walker describes how her mother developed dementia and eventually lost both her memory and her sense of identity, a process which is translated into the stitching of the quilt. The sculptural quality of the stitched layers of clear plastic over the metallic grey of the wire wool acquires a more macabre subtext when it is revealed that the design is based on the pattern of Walker's own skin. Traditionally, quilt makers

would use inanimate objects as aids in drawing patterns to be stitched – the plates, cups, even chair seats which were readily available in every home.[24] Walker has replicated this process, drawing attention to the transitory nature of the life itself by using her own, animate body as a template, creating a surface pattern at once aesthetically intriguing and emotionally unsettling. Equally, the incorporation of wire wool into the work functions as both material (traditional whole-cloth quilts use wool or cotton as wadding) and as a metaphor for decay – the wire wool gradually reacts to exposure to the atmosphere and in time decays. Here Walker draws again on her knowledge of quilting techniques, piecing each section of the quilt in the manner of a late nineteenth-century 'crazy' quilt;[25] an ironic reference to the continuing trend to 'institutionalise' or hide the mentally ill, a reference which is reinforced by the use of the industrial grey wire wool, a colour most often associated with hospitals or asylums. Walker's powers of observation are both acute and disturbing. She describes the meaning behind the twisted and knotted wire wool borders of the quilt, 'As my mother lost her memory she became obsessive about everyday things, small

things that didn't really matter; she would sit and twist and tease her hair. I noticed that many of us obsessively twist our hair without realising, particularly when lost in thought'.[26] This laying bare of an intensely personal narrative, in a medium that is both familiar yet abstract is, in Jane Jakeman's view, 'sometimes uncomfortably negotiated into public space'.[27] Yet Walker's exploration of the self, both in terms of recreating through stitch the patterns of her skin, and referencing the absence of her mother, both physically and metaphorically through the loss of her identity, create an evocative continuum with the unknown makers of the past.[28] The quilt, so often associated with gift giving and traditionally handed down as an heirloom through the female line, and a symbol of familial female heritage, becomes a highly charged and complex study of the relationship between mother and daughter. Walker states 'The "emptiness" of the quilt evokes the void I felt during those years. Working with an uncomfortable tactical material like wire wool seemed to be symbolic of those bittersweet memories. The work was made several years after my mother's death (in

1998); I needed that period of time to distance myself from what had happened and have a period of reflection.'[29]



Study for Memoriam by Michele Walker, 2002. Plastic, steel wire wool, lace. Photograph © Michele Walker

In the study accompanying 'In Memoriam', Walker has included a piece of her mother's wedding veil, looped and stitched to reference the universal remembrance ribbons that started with AIDS awareness. The red ribbon, traditionally worn on World AIDS Day and throughout the year to raise awareness of HIV and AIDS, has been adopted by a number of charities – the meaning behind each ribbon dependent on its colour or colours.[30] The ribbon has also become a symbol of American unity, replicated in the pattern of the American flag and the strapline 'Support Freedom'. Walker has explored the significance of the awareness ribbon in an earlier work 'Remember Me' (1999).[31] However, in this context the use of a personal memento is again symbolic of Walker's ability to move beyond the obvious. Juxtaposed with 'Memoriam', the study is a poignant reminder of both the hopes and fears of a young bride at the start of her new life. As our mothers hand down these physical heirlooms, so too do they hand down our histories in the form of stories and narratives that help to cement our sense of identity. The inability to recall those narratives, the loss of our own histories, challenges the enduring importance of the mother/daughterrelationship and begs the question 'Who am I, where do I come from'?

'Memoriam' has most recently been included in 'The Fabric of Myth' exhibition held at Compton Verney. Antonia Harrison, co-curator of the exhibition, agrees that Walker's use of unconventional materials

challenges our perceptions of the quilt, its ability to evoke memories of warmth and security and our poignant recollections of mothers kissing us goodnight. Yet the scale of 'Memoriam', unlike the monumental 'AIDS Memorial Quilt' and 'The National Tribute Quilt', recalls the domestic and the intimate, as does Walker's decision to display the quilt horizontally, a reference to the quilt's traditional function as bed cover. Walker is adamant that the quilt should be placed on a high plinth, creating the impression of a medieval effigy or the tombs of the great and the good, whose names are forever immortalised in stone and marble. This analogy is again heightened by Walker's use of materials, the exclusion of soft feminine fabrics, chintz and florals, in favour of 'hard' plastic and wire wool. Harrison echoes this comparison, 'The quilt that would normally be passed down through generations retaining memory has instead become a shrine to its loss'.[32]

'The AIDS Memorial Quilt' and 'The National Tribute Quilt' bring private grief and anger to a very public forum. Although criticised by some as overly sentimental,[33] the quilts provide a focus for both commemoration and campaigning. 'Memoriam' is, first and foremost, a work of art: its meaning complex and multi-layered. Yet it also commemorates a very private relationship and personal loss.

Walker believes that her interest in memory and identity, both personal and collective, emerged through the experience of ageing. ‘With the loss of parents you start to question things, to witness my mother’s mental decline was a terrible event but in a way it gave me a new insight. I had taken memory and therefore a sense of identity always for granted, but when you are close to someone who has lost their memory and connection with you as their daughter – well, that sense of loss takes on a different relevance’.[34]

Endnotes

1. ‘The AIDS Memorial Quilt’ and ‘The National Tribute Quilt’ are two more recent examples of community-led ‘protest’ quilts. However, the tradition of stitching quilts which would fulfil both the social and spiritual needs of communities is firmly rooted in the scripture and signature quilts of the nineteenth century. For a discussion of the importance of scripture and signature quilts see Allan, Rosemary. ‘Chapel and Signature Quilts’. *Quilts & Coverlets: The Beamish Collections*. County Durham, 2007: 81–87. See also ‘Quilts Bearing Names and Other Writing’. *Quilt Treasures: The Quilters’ Guild Heritage Search*. London, 1995. The V&A has one scripture quilt in the collection (V&A museum no. T.67-1970).

2. See, for example, Ralph Headley’s oil painting ‘The Wedding Quilt’ (1883) (Private Collection) reproduced in Osler, Dorothy. *North Country Quilts: Legend and Living Tradition*. County Durham, 2000: 25 and Allan, Rosemary. ‘Chapel and Signature Quilts’. *Quilts & Coverlets: The Beamish Collections*. County Durham, 2007: 90.

3. See Stalp, Marybeth C. *Quilting: The Fabric of Everyday Life*. Berg, 2007: 43. In this publication, Stalp, a sociologist and quilter, writes a contemporary commentary on the reasons that women quilt, including an

exploration of personal identity issues such as marriage, childcare, friendship and the ageing process.

4. See Kruger, Kathryn Sullivan. 'Clues and Cloth: Seeking Ourselves in 'The Fabric of Myth'. *The Fabric of Myth*. Compton Verney, 2008: 11. Written to accompany an exhibition of the same name held at Compton Verney 21 June – 7 September 2008.

5. For a discussion of 'The AIDS Memorial Quilt' and a comparison with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington see: Hawkins, Peter S. 'The Art of Memory and the NAMES Project AIDS Quilt'. *Critical Inquiry* 19:4 (Summer, 1993): 752–79.

6. *Always Remember. A Selection of Panels Created By and For International Fashion Designers*. New York, 1996.

7. *Always Remember. A Selection of Panels Created By and For International Fashion Designer**. New York, 1996: 28.

8. *Always Remember. A Selection of Panels Created By and For International Fashion Designers*. New York, 1996:108.

9. See Kruger, Kathryn Sullivan. 'Clues and Cloth: Seeking Ourselves in 'The Fabric of Myth'. *The Fabric of Myth*. Compton Verney, 2008: 11.

10. 'The Steel Quilters' consists of a small group of quilters who work for the United States Steel Research and Technology Center. Based in Monroeville, near Pittsburgh PA, the four women co-ordinated the nationwide project. It took 12 volunteers (all women) two days to lay out the 3466 squares on a grid. It took 250 hours to stitch the quilt together.

11. Kathy Crawford National Tribute Quilt Dedication Speech, July 8, 2002.

12. Kathy Crawford National Tribute Quilt Dedication Speech, July 8, 2002.

13. The question of whether quilts were used to assist enslaved men and women on their journey to freedom has divided academics. For more information see Tobin Jacqueline L. and Raymond G. Dobard. *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad*. New York, 2000 and Brackman, Barbara. *Facts and Fabrications: Unravelling the History of Quilts & Slavery*. California, 2006.

14. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock discuss the role of the quilt in American society in 'Craft Women and the Hierarchy of the Arts', in particular the role of the quilting bee in the local community in Parker Rozsika and Griselda Pollock. *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*. London, 1981: 50–81.

15. See Walker, Michele. *The Complete Book of Quiltmaking*. London, 1985 and Walker, Michele. *The Passionate Quilter*. London, 1990.

16. Walker, together with Jo Budd, Pauline Burbridge and Dinah Prentice exhibited in one of the first pioneering exhibitions to change the perception of British quiltmaking in *Take 4 – New Perspectives on the British Art Quilt*. The Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, September 1998.

17. Millar, Lesley. 'Transition and Influence'. *Cloth & Culture Now*. Surrey, 2008: 7.

18. Walker, Michele. *Personal statement Crafts Council Listing*. Accessed 1 September 2008. http://www.photostore.org.uk

19. 'Waste Not, Want Not' is in the collection of the Sunderland Museum and Art Gallery, Tyne & Wear.

20. 'Assault & Battery 3', in the collection of the Shipley Art Gallery, Tyne & Wear.

21. See Steveson, Peter. 'The Welfare of Turkeys at Slaughter'. *A Report for Compassion in World Farming Trust, December 1997*. Accessed 1 September 2008

22. Parker and Pollock discuss the Whitney exhibition in '*Crafty Women and the Hierarchy of the Arts*', p.71. Interestingly, Jonathan Holstein entitles his publication *Abstract Design in American Quilts: A Biography of an Exhibition*. University of Nabraska, 2002 (my emphasis), a title which further serves to distance the maker from both object and public forum.

23. There are a number of publications documenting the Gee's Bend quilts and covers. See John Beardsley et al. *Gee's Bend: The Women and Their Quilts*. Atlanta, 2002. For a critique of the Gee's Bend exhibitions in relation to cultural politics see Chave, Anna C. 'Dis/Cover/ingthe Quilts of Gee's Bend, Alabama'. *The Journal of Modern Craft* 1:2 (July 2008): 221–54.

24. Rosemary Allan discusses designs on whole-cloth quilts in Allan, Rosemary. 'Chapel and Signature Quilts'. *Quilts & Coverlets: The Beamish Collections*. County Durham, 2007: 99–105. See also Walker, Michele. *The Passionate Quilter*. London, 1990: 10–21. The V&A has several whole-cloth quilts in the collection (V&A museum no.T.133-1932 (South Wales) and V&A museum no.T134-1932 (County Durham)).

25. The vogue for 'crazy patchwork'; the elaborate and colourful combination of silks, satins and velvets swept the UK, America and Australia. Although considered by some to be garish and in poor taste, contemporary reports

hailed it as both fashionable and versatile, being equally suitable for piano covers, antimacassars, sofa pillows and table covers. Often embellished with an accomplished range of embroidery stitches, these cushions and tea cosies provide evidence of the vibrant dress fashions of the period. The V&A has one crazy patchwork table cover in the collection (V&A museum no.T.682-1994).

26. Michele Walker in conversation with the author, 30 August 2007.

27. Jakeman, Jane. 'Soft Architecture. A review of The Fabric of Myth Exhibition'. *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 July 2008.

28. In 2000 Walker visited Japan in conjunction with an exhibition about contemporary British quilted textiles. Here she discovered sashiko and became interested in the indigo-dyed garments used for work clothes. A three-year AHRC Fellowship enabled Walker to research sashiko textiles and women who made them. Walker states, 'Similar to those who made quilts in Britain; the majority of these Japanese women lived in working class communities and were considered ordinary and unimportant. Their lives centred on survival. My research into personal histories has only been made possible through friendships that have gradually evolved with a few women who are now in their late eighties or nineties and to whom sashiko is still remembered as being significant in their lives'. (In conversation with the author 30 August 2007). Walker's research culminated in two exhibitions: 'Memory Sticks', Fabrica, Brighton Festival, May 2005, and 'Stitching for Survival' University Gallery, Brighton, October 2007. A full transcript of the Author's interview with Walker by the author accompanied this exhibition.

29. Michele Walker in conversation with the author, 30 August 2007.

30. The purple ribbon used by Alzheimer's disease campaigners has also been adopted by domestic violence awareness, childhood stroke awareness, and pancreatic cancer awareness and to promote religious tolerance.

31. 'Remember Me' is in the Crafts Council Collection.

32. Harrison, Antonia. 'Weaving, unweaving and reweaving: the legacy of Penelope'. *The Fabric of Myth*. Compton Verney, 2008: 39.

33. See Hawkins, Peter S. *The Art of Memory and the NAMES Project AIDS Quilt.*

34. Michele Walker in conversation with the author, 30 August 2007.

James ‘Athenian’ Stuart: The architect as landscape painter

Julius Bryant, Keeper of the Word and Image Department, Victoria and Albert Museum

James Stuart – *View of the back of the Temples of Rome and Augustus*, Pola. 1750-6. Gouache. 29.5 × 47cm. RIBA Library Drawings Collection, SD146/7

For many visitors to the exhibition *James ‘Athenian’ Stuart: the Rediscovery of Antiquity* (Bard Graduate Center, New York, 2006–7; Victoria and Albert Museum 15 March – 24 June 2007) the surprise was not the quality of Stuart’s lost buildings and interiors so much as the striking examples of his art as a painter. The exhibition featured eighteen landscape views, thirteen of which were engraved for the first two volumes of *Antiquities of Athens* (1762; 1787–9) by Stuart and Nicholas Revett.

On loan from the Drawings Collection of the Royal Institute of

British Architects (RIBA), they had never been exhibited as a group before. They have also never been published and discussed as a group.[1] *Antiquities of Athens* set new standards for archaeological publications, boasting measurements to an impossible hair's-breadth degree of accuracy (one thousandth of an inch, a fraction made meaningless by thermal variation in both instruments and buildings). Stuart had returned from Athens in 1755 but felt driven to such exacting standards by a rushed rival publication, 'Les Ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce' by Julien-David LeRoy (Paris, 1758). Stuart's mathematical calculations sharpened up the measured drawings of buildings that had been made by Revett. Stuart's landscape views also seem to have been sharpened up to outdo the views by LeRoy, whose volume was conceived more in the genre of philosophical travel literature. Far more familiar today are the images of another rival, the fantastical views of Rome by G. B. Piranesi, whose 'Della Magnificenza ed Architettura de' Romani' (1761) was published the year before Stuart and Revett's much-anticipated first volume. Lacking Piranesi's awe-struck admirers, shrunken to

exaggerate the apparent scale and sublimity of Rome's monuments, Stuart's views may seem conventional. However, they are worthy of attention and further research in their own right as a contribution to the history of British landscape painting, for their origins in the art of decorating fans, for the unusual use of gouache, and for their exceptional ethnographical content.[2] In their high finish and topographical information they anticipate by two decades the views of Rome and Tivoli by Louis Ducros (1748–1810) that British collectors framed and hung to resemble oil paintings.[3]

James Stuart – *View of the Arch of the Sergii (Porta Aurata) at Pola*. 1750-60. Gouache. 25.5 x 39cm. RIBA Library Drawings Collection, SD146/8

James Stuart – *View of the Temples of Rome and Augustus, Pola.*. 1750-60. Gouache. 29.5 x 47cm. RIBA Library Drawings Collection, SD146/6

James Stuart – *View of the back of the Temples of Rome and Augustus*, Pola. 1750-6. Gouache. 29.5 × 47cm. RIBA Library Drawings Collection, SD146/7

James Stuart – *View of the Amphitheatre at Pola from the west.*. 1750-60. Gouache. 29.5 x 47cm. RIBA Library Drawings Collection, SD146/4

James Stuart – *View of the interior of the Amphitheatre at Pola.*. 1750-60. Gouache. 29 x 46.5cm. RIBA Library Drawings Collection, SD146/5

James Stuart – *View of the Temple of Apollo at Corinth.* 1750-60. Gouache. 29 x 46.5cm. RIBA Library Drawings Collection, SD146/2

James Stuart – *View of the Ionic Temple on the River Ilissus near Athens.*. 1750-60. Gouache. 30.5 x 46.5cm. RIBA Library Drawings Collection, SD145/2

James Stuart – *View of the Bridge over the Ilissus River connecting the Panathenaic Stadium with the city of Athens.*. 1750-60. Gouache. 29 x 46 cm. RIBA Library Drawings Collection, SD146/1

James Stuart – *View of a Stoa or Portico.* 1750-60. Gouache. 26.5 x 38.5cm. RIBA Library Drawings Collection, SD145/5

James Stuart – *View of the Gate of Athene Archegetis, Athens.* 1750-60. Gouache. 30.5 x 46.5cm. RIBA Library Drawings Collection, SD145/1

James Stuart – *View of the Temple of Theseus, Athens from the South West.*. 1750-60. Gouache. 30.5 x 46.5cm. RIBA Library Drawings Collection, SD145/8

James Stuart – *View of the Arch of Hadrian, Athens.*. 1750-60. Gouache. 28.5 x 38.5cm. RIBA Library Drawings Collection, SD145/9

James Stuart – *View of the Theatre of Bacchus.*. 1750-60. Gouache. 27 x 38.5cm. RIBA Library Drawings Collection, SD145/7

James Stuart – *View of the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates or 'Lanthorn of Demosthenes'.*. 1750-60. Gouache. 27 x 38.5cm. RIBA Library Drawings Collection, SD145/4

James Stuart – *View of the Tower of the Winds, Athens.*. 1750-60. Gouache. 31.5 x 43cm. RIBA Library Drawings Collection, SD145/3

James Stuart – *View of the Monument of Philopappus, Athens.*. 1750-60. Gouache. 29.5 x 45.5cm. RIBA Library Drawings Collection, SD145/10

James Stuart – *View of the Caryatid Porch, the Erechtheion, the west end of the Temple of Minerva Polias, and the Pandrosium on the Acropolis, Athens.*. 1750-60. Gouache. 26.5 x 38.5cm. RIBA Library Drawings Collection, SD145/6

James Stuart – *View of the Incantada or Propylaea of the Hippodrome, Salonica.*. 1750-60. Gouache. 31.5 x 46cm. RIBA Library Drawings Collection, SD146/3

Since Stuart's death tradition has held that his failure to establish a Grecian style of design, befitting Britain's new supremacy as head of a maritime mercantile empire, was owing to his own laziness, 'epicureanism' and the determined competition of Robert Adam and William Chambers to promote the Roman school. But for much of his career Stuart saw himself primarily

as a painter. Unlike Adam he was not groomed in a family of architects; unlike Chambers he had no formal training as an architect in Paris. Apprenticed to the French artist Louis Goupy (*c.*1674–1747), his brother William or their nephew Joseph Goupy (1686–1763), Stuart worked as a fan painter in London until he was twenty-seven; he then walked to Rome, painting fans as he went to pay his way. In the published proposal of 1748 for the Antiquities he explains that he and his collaborator, Revett, have been 'at Rome, where we had already employed 6 or 7 years in the study of Painting'.[4] The exhibition included portraits by Stuart of James Lee (Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, University of Glasgow) and a self portrait by Revett (RIBA), the journeyman character of which suggests that both painters may have regarded architectural field research as a necessary career change. Stuart's dual interest, together with his standing as a connoisseur and cicerone, is confirmed by a surviving sketchbook, one half of which is devoted to architecture, the other to drafts of a treatise on Venetian painting.[5]

In the published proposal for *Antiquities of Athens* Stuart offered not only accurate records of buildings and sculpture but also of

each building's 'circumjacent Country' in 'drawings made on the spot … by the hand of an Artist'. Only three of Stuart's seventy-seven notebooks survive and only one of the field sketches for the vedute has been located.[6] Despite Stuart's claim in the Antiquities that they were 'painted on the spot' the differences between the sketch and the finished gouaches suggests that all eighteen may have been painted, or extensively worked up, in London. There he joined the artist circles of the St Martin's Lane Academy, numbering among his friends Hogarth and Reynolds. On the strength of his field research alone Stuart presented and promoted himself as a man of dual profession, not primarily as an architect but rather as a painter. On being elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1758 he is recorded as a 'history painter and architect'. On his election to the Society of Antiquaries the same year he described himself as a 'painter and architect'.[7] His earliest known commission was for portraits of William III and George II for the Rockingham Club (unlocated). In 1758 he painted for Westminster School the stage backdrop for their annual Latin play. In 1763 he succeeded George Knapton as

portrait painter to the Society of Dilettanti (a position he relinquished to Reynolds in 1769 having failed to produce a single portrait) and in 1764 he succeeded Hogarth as Sergeant-Painter of the Office of Works (a post he held until 1782). In 1764 he employed the young James Barry (1741–1806) to produce oil paintings based on his views of Athens.[8] A member of over twenty committees at the Society for the Promotion of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, Stuart served as a judge of the premiums for painting and drawing. Between 1765 and 1783 he exhibited 122 works at the Free Society, including designs, book illustrations and paintings with mythological or allegorical subjects. As none of his easel paintings are located today, these gouaches now provide the best evidence of Stuart's abilities as a landscape painter.

One reason for Stuart's omission from histories of British landscape painting is that gouache (or 'bodycolour') is regarded as a continental tradition, one that falls between watercolour and oil painting.[9] Unlike in 'pure' watercolour, the colours are not mixed simply in water and do not achieve their brilliancy through their translucency over white paper. In gouache, the colours are mixed in water, gum and lead white (after its invention in 1834, Chinese white was used as it did not darken) and can be applied over tinted or blue, grey or buff paper. Working from dark to light, as in oil painting and engraving, the painter in gouache uses an opaque medium and so can correct mistakes. The relative visual weight

and strength of colour of gouache made it suitable for fan painting and it became popular among watercolour painters who sought to compete at exhibitions where their works might be hung near oil paintings in relatively dim interiors.

The ‘father’ of the British school of watercolour painting, Paul Sandby (1731–1809) used gouache for topographical views painted for exhibition from the 1760s. Sandby owned several gouaches by Marco Ricci (1670–1729) who worked in Britain between 1712 and 1716. Ricci’s friend, Joseph Goupy, painted in gouache fans and reduced copies of old master paintings for fashionable society. Another source of this continental influence was the landscape painter Francesco Zuccarelli (1702–88) who worked in Britain in the 1740s and between 1752 and 1773. Collectors also helped introduce the medium to Britain, notably William Windham who, in 1742, returned from Italy to Felbrigg in Norfolk with twenty-six gouaches of scenes near Rome, painted by Giovanni Battista Busiri (1698–1757). Ricci was promoted among British visitors to Venice by Consul Smith, from whom George III acquired over thirty gouaches by the artist in about 1762. Particularly popular among gentlemen on the Grand Tour were the gouache views of Roman monuments painted by Charles-Louis Clérisseau (1721–1820) in Italy between 1749 and 1767. In 1757 Clérisseau travelled with Robert Adam to Split to record the Emperor Diocletian’s palace, which Adam published in 1764.

Stuart’s gouaches record two excursions to survey monuments. Five views are of the Roman antiquities at Pola (now Pula) in Istria, Croatia, where Stuart and Revett practised their recording techniques while waiting for permission to travel from Venice into Greece. Athens had been occupied by the Ottoman Turks for the past 300 years and was a dangerous and unknown land to the

British. LeRoy, by contrast, was to benefit from better relations between the French consul and the Turks. The other thirteen gouaches represent Greek monuments in Athens and Thessalonika. Stuart's vivid, colourful and detailed depictions of the monuments in their contemporary settings, amidst Turkish buildings set off by carefully-observed scenes of local life, must have been astonishing at the time. As images of a country regarded as the birthplace of western culture yet almost unknown to living travellers from the west, Stuart's paintings could have aroused as much interest as the first photographs from the lunar surface. Compositionally, several appear to follow the semi-circular format to which Stuart must have become accustomed as a fan painter. The vivid colours and wealth of anecdotal incident at the centre and base of each image were customary requirements to enhance any fan when wielded by a social wallflower, whether in self-defence or as a source of shared amusement. The screening and framing devices used in some, such as arches or trees in silhouette in the foreground, suggest that the paintings may have

been finished to hang together as a group.

Compared to British topographical watercolours of the 1750s, Stuart's views are exceptional, not only in using the gouache medium but also in the care with which he has created figure compositions and recorded local costume. Paul Sandby may have been influenced by Stuart's example in the figure groups in his topographical watercolours of British antiquities. Michael 'Angelo' Rooker (1746–1801) is known to have used engravings after Dutch seventeenth-century painters to animate his views of ruined abbeys and castles with rustic figures.[10] Through exhibiting at the Free Society and through his publications Stuart could have set a new standard for picturesque staffage. Stuart's figures have an ethnographical quality that anticipates the topographical views commissioned by publishers from J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851). The more immediate heir of Stuart's concern to record both the antiquities and the street life of modern Greece is William Pars (1742–82) who accompanied Revett in a similar expedition between 1764 and 1766 that resulted in the Ionian Antiquities (1769, 1797) which was also sponsored by the Society of Dilettanti.[11]

Stuart and Revett star in their own production, their cameo roles in the gouaches serving to verify their actual presence in Greece. Here is the proof that they heeded Stuart's own advice, as expressed in the published proposal for the Antiquities: 'Artists who aim at perfection must … approach the Fountain-Head of their art'. They first appear at Pola, standing precariously on top of the Arch of the Sergii where Stuart is shown taking notes while Revett measures the monument. In the view of the Monument of Philopappus above Athens, Stuart and Revett wear Turkish kaftans while chatting with James Dawkins while Robert Wood copies down inscriptions. (Dawkins and Wood visited Athens in May 1751 and later published their own books on the antiquities of Palmyra and Baalbec).[12] The visitors may have

been included by way of acknowledgement of Dawkins's sponsorship of the project. This is the least finished of the gouaches and lacks the servant making coffee that appears in the published engraving. This difference further suggests that the gouaches were worked up, if not entirely painted, in London. In addition to the recorded assistance from James Barry, there is the visual evidence of other hands at work in the gouaches, such as the poorly-drawn group of riders in the view of the Temple of Apollo at Corinth.

Revett appears sketching in the foreground of the view of the Theatre of Bacchus. His Turkish dress underlines the artists' presence on site and further suggests both their need to avoid drawing attention to themselves and the years of field study when their clothes would simply have worn out. Stuart chose to present himself on the Acropolis, sketching the Caryatid Porch of the Erechtheion, presumably as this was the source of the Ionic order that he would employ in his own designs. The published text may be indebted to LeRoy's first volume in its sense of travelogue. Stuart describes how his labourers are excavating beneath the caryatids while Turkish officials and spies keep watch to prevent them removing treasures, convinced that there could be no other point in digging.

To the view of the Ionic Temple on the River Ilissus (a monument destroyed by the Turks around 1778) Stuart has added a colourful scene of the Turkish governor hunting with his entourage, a picturesque detail not in the field sketch. While Revett produced the measured outlines of the ancient buildings Stuart took the opportunity of these vedute to

record the landscape setting, the encroaching miscellany of later constructions, the local way of life and to document the extent of their own labours as archaeologists (no doubt, once again, to outdo his rival LeRoy). In his view of the Tower of the Winds, set against the fortified walls of the Acropolis, he shows his workmen excavating the doorway. Stuart and Revett did not simply measure and paint but also had 2,700 cubic feet of earth removed from the interior, taking it down some fourteen feet to its original floor level, and in so doing discovered the tower's original function as a water clock. Stuart also notes that it is now a Turkish chapel where whirling dervishes dance inside. They even took the trouble to dismantle a house adjoining the tower in order to see all eight sides.

Stuart was affable company and could not keep his sense of humour out of his work. The panoramic view of the interior of the amphitheatre at Pola has its foreground filled with a scene of a friar blessing a flock of diseased sheep and in the view of the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates, embedded in the wall of a monastery, a dozing monk seated before a skull enjoys the cool shade of a well-tended vegetable garden.

Art history may have been kind to Stuart in leaving lost his endeavours as a history painter in oils. According to the greatest living painter of the day, Anton Raphael Mengs (1728–79), Stuart was an artist of 'superior genius'.[13] According to James Barry, 'The pictures, and every thing of his

designing, are distinguished by that unaffected air of the ancients, which alone constitutes true taste'.[14] However, Stuart's ceiling paintings in the Tapestry Room at Hagley Hall (1758–9) are in a late rococo mode. His gifts as a landscape painter of detail and colour were put to better use in enriching his designs for interiors at Kedleston.[15] These designs were seen in December 1758 by his rival Robert Adam (1728–92) who learnt from them how to seduce clients with his characteristic colourful presentation drawings of complete interiors. In his designs for Kedleston's interiors Stuart showed that he still fancied his chances as a painter of large oil paintings for he included a history painting showing the capture of Bacchus by pirates (based on the scene in the frieze of the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates) and a double full-length portrait of his patron with his wife. Neither was commissioned. When he did secure a commission, to decorate Georgiana Spencer's closet at Wimbledon House with scenes from Milton (1758, destroyed by fire 1785), Horace Walpole described it as 'villainously painted'.[16] Best known today is Stuart's Painted Room at Spencer House, London, where he and assistants

painted from 1758 grotesque decoration in the spirit of Raphael's garden loggia of the Villa Madama around inset paintings that do not suggest any great loss.

The influence of Stuart's gouaches should not be underestimated as they were available through engravings and included in public exhibitions. Of the 122 works exhibited by Stuart at the Free Society, eighty-two related to the Antiquities of Athens. As exhibition pieces, they would have promoted the authority of Stuart as an intrepid field researcher and the myth of Greece as both the cradle of civilisation and as a nation under alien occupation. There must be many more awaiting rediscovery. After his death seven were included in the sale of Stuart's effects; two were sold at Phillips in 1799. The present group was donated to the RIBA in 1873.[17] They may be consulted in the RIBA Drawings Collection at the V&A.

Acknowledgemer

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Endnotes

1. The paintings are listed in Soros, Susan Weber, ed. *James 'Athenian' Stuart 1713–1718: the Rediscovery of Antiquity*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2006: 591–5 Based on Richardson, Margaret, ed. *Catalogue of the Drawings Collection of the RIBA*, vol. S. Farnborough, Gregg International, 1976. The publication for the 2006–7 exhibition includes distributed illustrations of the drawings but does not include a chapter on Stuart as a painter. Stuart's work as a topographical artist features in the chapter by Frank Salmon 'Stuart as Antiquary and Archaeologist in Italy and Greece'.

2. Reference to Stuart is surprisingly brief in the two classic studies of British watercolours where he is cited as context for William Pars (1742–82): Williams, Iolo. *Early English Watercolours and some cognate*

drawings by Artists born not later than 1785. London, The Connoisseur, 1952: 74 and Hardie, Martin. *Water-Colour Painting in Britain, vol.1, The Eighteenth Century*. London, Batsford, 1966: 89.

3. Ducros, Louis. *1748–1810: Images of the Grand Tour*. Exhib. cat., The Iveagh Bequest. Kenwood, 1985; Julius Bryant, 'Ducros: Master of the Grand-Tour Watercolour', Apollo, CXXII, no. 284, October 1985, p.311.

4. Stuart James and Nicholas Revett. *The Antiquities of Athens*, vol.1. London: J. Haberkorn, 1762, preface, footnote (a).

5. RIBA Drawings Collection SKB 336/2.

6. Stuart's View of the Amphitheatre at Pola, 1750, British Museum, is illustrated in Soros, Susan Weber, ed. *James 'Athenian' Stuart 1713–1718: the Rediscovery of Antiquity*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2006: 120.

7. Cited in Soros, Susan Weber, ed. *James 'Athenian' Stuart 1713–1718: the Rediscovery of Antiquity*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2006:72, 95, no.147.

8. Pressly, William L. *The Life and Art of James Barry*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981: 6.

9. For gouache see Hardie, Martin. *Water-Colour Painting in Britain, vol.1, The Eighteenth Century*. London, Batsford, 1966: 14–15, 105, 110–117.

10. For the changing character of figure groups in British topographical watercolours see Bryant, Julius. *The English Grand Tour*. Swindon: English Heritage, 2005, and by the same author *Turner: Painting the Nation*. Swindon: English Heritage, 199.

11. Hardie, Martin. *Water-Colour Painting in Britain, vol.1, The Eighteenth Century*. London, Batsford, 1966: 89.

12. The finished drawings by Giovanni Battista Borra (1713–70) for Ruins of Palmyra (1753) and Ruins of Balbec (1757), are also owned by the RIBA (volumes VOS/147 and VOS/149).

13. Garlick, Kenneth and Angus Macintyre, eds. *The Diary of Joseph Farington*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979, vol.4: 1554.

14. Pressly, William L. *The Life and Art of James Barry*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981: 47–8.

15. Stuart's designs for country house interiors are illustrated in Bryant, Julius. '"The Purest Taste" – James "Athenian" Stuart's work in Villas and Country Houses'. Soros, Susan Weber, ed. *James 'Athenian' Stuart 1713–1718: the Rediscovery of Antiquity*. New

Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2006: 265–316.

16. Cited in Soros, Susan Weber, ed. *James 'Athenian' Stuart 1713–1718: the Rediscovery of Antiquity*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2006: 297.

17. Originally 20 were donated but two were stolen in the 1960s.

Can a ‘Communities of Practice’ framework be applied to the creative industries as an identified audience for the V&A?

Juliette Fritsch, Head of Gallery Interpretation, Evaluation & Resources, Victoria and Albert Museum

1 Introduction

The V&A identifies its audience in terms of six definitions of visitor type, which are not mutually exclusive. They are: independent adults, students, families, organised groups, schools and adults from the Creative Industries (CI). Whilst the V&A has a long association, dating back to its foundation, of working with artists and craftspeople, it is only within the last decade that this latter group of visitors has been grouped together under a particular label. Developing an agreed definition of the CI as part of the visitor segmentation post-opening of the British Galleries in 2001 had been somewhat of a struggle, but by 2004 the Museum had a set of six audience definitions, including one for the CI. However, this was an 'internal' definition, so to speak, and during the last decade the nature of the CI has become something debated far wider than within the V&A as an institution. The introduction of the term 'creative industries' in government language in the late 1990s was the beginning of an attempt to bring unity to a fragmented selection of industries identified as contributing significantly to the British economy. Since then, there have been significant developments in policy aimed at nurturing, benefiting from, and ensuring the continued growth and success of, the Creative Industries. Responsibility for this sector lies nominally within the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), but both the Department for Skills and Education (DfES)[1] and the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI)[2] have launched initiatives and commissioned reports investigating the growth of the creative industries sector. The Cox Report, a review of creativity and design in UK business, was published in December 2005.[3] One of the objectives set out in the V&A's 2007–2012 Strategic Plan is, 'to promote, support and develop the UK creative economy by inspiring designers and makers and by stimulating enjoyment and appreciation of design'.[4]

In response to this, and as part of a long-term programme to revisit the definitions of its six visitor categories, in 2006 the Head of Gallery Interpretation, Evaluation and Resources at the V&A launched a research project aiming to redefine the V&A's audience segmentation description of the CI. After an initial literature review was conducted, data was collected over the course of nine months and consisted of three phases:

> *1. In-depth ethnographic interviews and observation with twelve participants from a range of CI professions:*

> - *Jewellery*
> - *Ceramics*
- *Textiles*
- *Film production*
- *Architecture*
- *Web design*
- *Theatre production*
- *Public relations*
- *Auctioneering*
- *Publishing*

2. Guided discussion and accompanied visit to the V&A with three subjects representing three different CI professions:

- *Ceramics*
- *Film production*
- *Architecture*

3. On-line survey of eighty-one participants randomly sampled from fourteen CI professions:

- *Architecture*
- *Advertising*
- *Audio-visual and interactive media*
- *Cultural heritage*
- *Cultural tourism*
- *Design*

- *Fashion*
- *Museums, libraries, archives*
- *Music*
- *Publishing*
- *TV and radio*
- *Visual arts*
- *Performing arts*

The findings from this research project were extensive and complex. This short article will present one aspect only of the findings, which is an exploration of the appropriateness or otherwise of considering the CI in terms of a community of practice. Within the terms of the research, it was necessary to establish this before going on to consider the findings in terms of the nature of the relationship between the CI and the V&A. These latter findings will be presented in a further paper to be submitted to the V&A journal at a future date.

2 Defining the Creative Industries

It was first necessary to identify current definitions for the CI in a wider context external to the Museum. The literature review looked at government publications and reports related to the CI, and explored a number of agencies and forums that have been set up to service the CI.

There were several findings with direct implications for V&A thinking about CI visitors. The first was that they include those not actually involved in a creative occupation themselves (e.g. an accountant at a design agency) and those involved in a creative occupation but not actually working in a creative industry (e.g. an in-house designer working for a city firm). This type of definition dates back to early

thinking about the CI, such as the 1998 report 'Creative Britain'.[5]

The second finding was the inclusion, by agencies such as the Creative Industries Task Force,[6] of industries where creative processes are utilised. Therefore the CI in their broadest spectrum are considered to consist not just of 'core' industries with obvious creative output but also industries employing 'creative strategies'. These are termed 'related' industries and activities and are included in all government strategies for the CI. These first two findings can be said to form a spectrum of 'creative activity' ranging across a variety of type and depth of engagement with creative practice in people's work.

The third significant finding was that, despite much discussion about the potential educational and social benefits to be gained from nurturing the CI in the UK, ultimately economic benefit to the UK is the primary outcome Government Departments responsible for CI initiatives are interested in, as emphasised in the 2006 report by the Entrepreneurship and Skills Task Group (ESTG).[7]

Finally, and in notable contrast, it was found that that many elements within the CI sector do not necessarily label themselves as such. The literature review looked at current magazines and journals associated with sectors identified under CI, such as "Blueprint", "Crafts", "Design History Newsletter" and "Frieze", and found that there was little or no reference to the CI. It also is worth noting that the Office of National Statistics, in a recent publication of figures of the UK workforce segmented by industry, does not have a separate segment for the Creative Industries.[8]

The broad 'creative activity spectrum' identified has attendant issues for anyone interested in working with the CI, and particularly for this research project, because of the enormous variation of scope and activity within the unit of study. This makes it a challenging sector in

terms of visitor profiling for the V&A.

3 Communities of Practice

Given the issues in defining the CI, the researchers used Wenger and Lave's 'Communities of Practice' methodology as a framework to define the research.[9] 'Communities of Practice' is grounded in sociological theory of practical knowledge, and pedagogical theories of situated and social learning. It aims to identify groups of people bound together through knowledge, and is based on a definition of knowledge that includes tacit knowledge that is shared informally through human interaction processes such as storytelling, conversation and coaching or mentoring. Their greatest value lies in intangible outcomes, such as the relationships they build among people, the sense of belonging they create, the spirit of inquiry they generate, and the professional confidence and identity they confer to their members.[10]

However, 'Communities of Practice' also acknowledges that this shared knowledge is dynamic: constantly changed, transformed and updated through these same processes. Members spend little time on searching for solutions to short-term problems because they can get access to help or immediate solutions quickly through their community or communities. Members are also more likely to take risks as they feel they have back up and support from the community of practice. This has the intangible outcome of a sense of trust, which in turn has a tangible outcome of an increased ability to innovate.

There are three indicators of structure for a community of practice:

1. A domain of knowledge with a defined set of issues, which creates common ground and a sense of common identity. The domain also inspires contribution

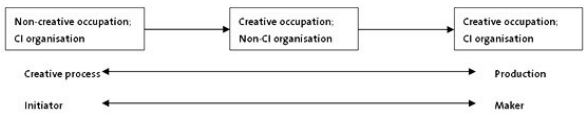
and participation. However, it requires participants to know its boundaries, in order for members to be able to present ideas and pursue common activities.

2. A community that creates a social context for learning. The community interacts and fosters relationships based on respect and trust. An effective community of practice handles dissent productively. Members are able to share ideas, expose ignorance and ask difficult questions. This interaction fosters learning and also a sense of belonging and commitment. However, members remain individual not homogenous, and develop their own specialities and styles.
3. A practice consisting of a framework of shared ideas, tools, information, language, stories and documents. This forms the basic knowledge of the community that all members share and from which development and innovation can spring.[11]

4 Findings: The Creative Industries as a Community of Practice

4.1 The creative activity spectrum.

The spectrum of occupation within the CI can be said to look like this:



The creative activity spectrum.

4.2 The Domain, Community, and Practice across the Creative Activity Spectrum.

Exploring potential indicators of a domain indicating a community of practice, the following shared issues were found to be consistent within the CI:

- The design challenge: pushing boundaries in all areas of practice, e.g. working with new materials such as casting glass in microwaves, 'using new technologies and integrating them into the craft process' (Jeweller).
- The business environment: participants made very clear choices about assuring at least a base level of income. This was perhaps not their ideal practice, but freed them in their other time to follow their own practice, as 'the idea really is that we can say no to jobs that we don't want to do rather than just having to take everything on' (Architect); the practical motivation for this work did not mean they would compromise on quality.
- Validation through peer and commercial success. Participants were very concerned about making the right product for the right audience.
- Validation through 'client' feedback. This was particularly so at the initiator end of the spectrum, as for example an auction house director felt 'well we are seeing it from the sales but we get good feedback, we have had excellent feedback from things but the great thing about (x) is that you can see whether something is working, you can get a good feel for if something's

working from the results of the sales'.

- Personal ambition: the need to constantly push further. The jeweller disciplined herself to do one collection per year during the summer to 'prove to the outside world that I can still do it' (Jeweller).
- Risk taking and innovation: a key motivation and widely recognised indicator of creativity across the spectrum, which encouraged innovation because 'you don't hit brick walls because probably our sheer audacity is doing something that people haven't thought of doing before' (Publisher).
- Enjoying problem solving, rather than seeing problems as blocks to success. A jeweller highly enjoyed and valued this, saying 'it comes very naturally to me, problem solving on the spot'.
- For a majority of makers, but significantly less so for initiators, an academic research element and formal education was integral to the domain. A textiles designer particularly emphasised that 'for me educating is the consequence of the experience as a designer and I think that if I stop designing … I'm not saying that I won't have stuff to give, but in a way that was the process for how I came to education … I think it's a two-way flow and I think that has to keep going, if you're going to be effective'.
- Quality control: performed informally through peer-review and self-discipline.

The above are issues that work well as a shared domain within the communities of practice framework, and during the data collection, particularly in-depth interviews, participants themselves also identified some of these indicators as shared across different creative disciplines. A publisher articulated this as being creative skill rather than specifically discipline-related: 'if you have the medium then you apply that medium, that skill to whatever you are supposed to be creating but the creation process I think is equal across the board in the creative world'.

This research found that nature of the CI domain, as identified through the indicators described above, makes this community of practice more than a set of relationships and goes some way to giving it an agreed identity. This identity fosters commitment to care for the domain, and makes the CI a community of practice, more than a collection of individuals with an informal communication network. However, it was fragile and there was constant flux within this domain. For some participants this was a source of anxiety as well as challenge, because 'it's an industry that changes constantly, it's very easy to fall behind and not be aware of current activities that are part of the working environment' (Textiles designer).

Looking at the nature of the 'community' within the CI, this research found that the network was primarily how people across the entire spectrum tried out new ideas, and tested them. A publisher described 'you know everybody comes up with bad ideas but luckily there is a good filtering process. The more people you talk to, you can weed all those out before they get any further and cost a lot in development'. Within the community, creativity itself was described predominantly in terms of a process, that 'creativity is the thought process needed to produce or provide' an identified outcome (Jeweller). Notably, at the maker end of the spectrum, people defined themselves as academics and had planned to do so, as a jeweller recalled: 'I had applied also already

for the RCA because I wanted to become a teacher really, that was always my plan'. This was part of a desire to pass on skills and intangible knowledge gathered during experience, not just in terms of creative skills but also business skills, considered vital: 'I wanted to feed that back, to channel it back in to younger people to fast-track their experiences in a lot of ways through the experience that I'd had and transmitting those to someone, so that they didn't have to go through the same experience to an extent. That they could accumulate that, based on someone else's experience, that had gone before' (Textiles designer).

Often, the aim of working in the CI was a vocation the participant was aware of from an early age, for example a theatre director who said 'I have a feeling that I have been working towards it all my life'. Surprisingly, being creative was actually seen as only a small part of the criteria for professional success. However, it was the kernel that made all the difference to their enjoyment of work, as 'it's the idea to go back and be able to talk about ideas and spend hours in a whole day talking to people about ideas and process and values and that's a great luxury' (Architect). It is this luxury that allowed participants to innovate.

Mentors played an important role, even during relatively unfocussed times of early professional development. This ranged from sensing a feeling of empathy with like-minded people, to meeting someone particularly inspiring and nurturing. A publisher described: 'I was picked up by a brilliant Dutch

designer from Pentagram. He liked my attitude, I think it was very similar to his and really he gave me an apprenticeship which I am so grateful for'.

Finally, collaboration with others was critical as a way of participants finding their path in the community. Across the data, people described themselves as part of a chain within which they maintained their individual aspect.

The community factor within a community of practice should be essentially a network of relationships that allows exchange of ideas and risk-taking within a safe, non-judgemental environment. The network of relationships in the CI found amongst participants was based on five common elements: ideas, process, experience, innovation, and collaboration. This gives confidence to its members. Members are able to take risks and expose themselves to failure because there is no 'hierarchy' within the community.

The research found that the community network is well established within individual disciplines, but less so across the whole Creative Activity Spectrum. The shared issues identified above are not specific enough to coalesce to form a domain that works across differing disciplines within the community. The lack of these defined boundaries, affecting the community network, is possibly an issue that contributes to a lack of self-identification of the CI with the UK Government concept of CI.

'Practice', the third indicator of a community of practice, was important for the CI across the spectrum. It was the area where the research identified the most unifying factors, for example the huge proportion of participants who read The Guardian (82.9% of on-line participants). Within practice, the notion of a spectrum of process and practice came through strongly. However, it was also where the most complex debate around the nature of creativity itself occurred. Many participants spent a long time in discussion through the various data

collection methods considering creativity, but one jeweller summarised the open-ended nature of the debate by saying 'creativity is easy to assume, but not so to define. The concept is wide open depending on its context and it would be unwise to be so reductive'.

An issue that came up many times was the importance not just of design and practical skills, but also of understanding how to negotiate the field. The need to 'understand the professional, the profession and your role within the profession' (Textiles designer) was critical to people's sense of professional identity. A significant skill was the ability to see a concept through to production, requiring project management and people skills. Being able to foster and maintain an original concept through this was seen to be the ultimate in definitions of creativity. 'For it [the final output] to resemble what you had in mind in the first place is another great leap' (Architect).

This was reflected in the workplaces that were visited as part of the ethnographic data collection. For the most part open plan, sometimes with specific work areas allocated to tasks rather than specific people, all were extremely well organised and had areas where the 'bones' of projects being worked on were exposed. For example, the textiles designer was very clear about separation between what he called 'the workplace', which is the commercial production environment for textiles, and the 'educational environment' which is for teaching, even though physically there may not have been a difference to the untutored eye. All participants talked about cycles of working practice they had developed to ensure multiple project management. An auction house Director described himself almost as the eye of the storm: 'My job is to make sure that it all comes together in a timely fashion and I also work to pull the images together so I can let

all these people know, certainly from the creative side of things'.

Participants felt that their chosen area of design was a matter of application rather than vocation, although working generally in the CI field was a vocation. A ceramicist described herself as a visual artist who predominantly works in clay; a textiles designer had started off training as a ceramicist. This was not just a matter of the type of output but applying creativity across a whole range of skills, as a theatre director described: 'certainly I would advocate that now people are much more, you know you're not trained just to be an actress, just to be this, just to be that, and that there is something creative entrepreneur, cultural entrepreneur, a real subject … you have a much broader view of what you could do'.

Participants were not necessarily specifically formally trained but nearly all mentioned informal continuing development (90.8% of on-line participants). Notably, at the maker end of the creative activity spectrum, participants had been engaging with their creative practice from a very early age. By the time they were 'mid-career' professionals they could easily have been working in various creative disciplines for twenty-five years. This meant that students were already viewed as professionals even by their tutors.

Collaboration in the community was about working as an individual within a collective, with 'like-minded people' rather than in the same discipline. The need to retain individuality was directly related to professional ego, as a textiles designer described: 'I'm happy to work like that in my own design field and then go out and discuss but actually the design process is a quite personal one'. However, in contrast to feelings about collaboration, ambition and self-promotion came through strongly in terms of self-discipline. This combination of seemingly conflicting factors resulted in a key indicator of the CI community of practice, which was that all the participants were very adept at analysing their own

strengths and weaknesses and using collaboration to address them. They were therefore good at finding people with the right skills and knowledge to help them achieve the 'vision' of their practice. A publisher described using his network for this: 'I like people who come up and can be incredibly resourceful, can realise something while still being really resourceful and that is why I like to employ people with a lot of contacts who have worked in and around the creative field'.

It seemed that the primary shared feature of practice was the interest in process rather than product. Whilst people were interested in following their own practice, and organised their work commercially to enable that, they also liked competitions, which they felt set boundaries that challenged their practice and therefore produced better work.

5 Conclusion

This research showed that the Creative Industries closely resemble a community of practice. A notion of a spectrum of creative activity from initiators to makers emerged, and elements within the domain, community and practice varied slightly according to where participants sat on the spectrum. Across the whole spectrum, but noticeably with makers, the idea of creative industry was seen as something applicable across many disciplines. There was very strong self-identification for makers from an early age, which was not necessarily related to the stage of formal training they may have participated in. This was in part because creativity was seen much

more as a process than a product, but also because people were very aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, and viewed collaboration as key to addressing them. This was balanced with an awareness of their own individual skill and unique selling points. Informal recommendation and word of mouth led to the most successful collaboration. Contrary to a generalised view of people who are 'creative', commercial success was more important than commonly assumed.

The creative activity spectrum identified in the research can be thought of as relating to the intellectual property of creative process, as well as to creative production. Significantly, the former can happen without a notably 'creative' output, but with a notably creative outcome, which is what the DCMS was particularly interested in cultivating to encourage economic success.

According to Wenger, the most successful communities of practice thrive where the goals and needs of an organisation intersect with the passions and aspirations of participants. If the domain of a community fails to inspire its members, the community will flounder.[12] However, in this case the domain of shared issues was the weakest of the three indicators. The community was strong but with fuzzy boundaries, and the practice was most defined. For the V&A, this means that it is extremely challenging to nurture a relationship between the CI and the Museum which both contributes to V&A objectives and could also be proven to contribute to Government objectives. Furthermore, and most challenging for the V&A, is the great difference between Government thinking about the CI and thinking

within those industries themselves. However, the benefits of the V&A considering the CI as a community of practice is in the potential the Museum could have to contribute not only to the knowledge management of the CI, the domain, but also to the practice that applies to this knowledge management.

Endnotes

1. As of 28 June 2007 this Department no longer exists and responsibility for formal education has been split across two Government Departments: the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS).

2. As above, from June 2007 this Department has been disbanded and is now called the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (DBERR).

3. Cox, G.S. The Cox Report: Creativity in business 2005 [cited 2007 15 March 2007].

4. V&A Strategic Plan 2007-2012, p.18

5. Authored by the then Secretary of State for the newly created Department of Culture, Media and Sport, Chris Smith. This report specifically identified the role of Government in bringing disparate elements of organisations and industries involved in creative production together, and nurturing it for economic, educational and social benefit to the UK.

6. This was set up by Chris Smith (see note no. 5) to launch inquiries into identified 'creative industries' in order to make recommendations for steps the UK Government could take to aid productivity. For example, the Creative Industries Task Force Inquiry into the Internet, published June 2000.

7. This is part of the DCMS Industries Education Forum. The report identified the CI as the fastest growing sector currently in the UK.

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The value of arts and humanities research to life in the UK: A museum perspective

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Introduction

Arts and Humanities research directly informs the key activities of a national museum like the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A). The Museum serves as an international centre of excellence in the fields of the history of art and design, conservation, learning and interpretation and contemporary creative practice, and its programmes benefit from research that is designed to contribute both to the public understanding and experience of its collections, and to the methodological and theoretical advancement of relevant arts and humanities disciplines. The V&A therefore fosters a proactive research culture, both in developing public outcomes that are underpinned by current scholarship (its galleries, high-profile exhibitions, publications, conferences and website) and in fostering collaborations with academic partners.

As a frequent recipient of Arts and Humanities Research Council and other research grants the V&A is well practiced in recognising and capitalising on opportunities to enhance the value of its activities and outputs through ambitious, authoritative and accessible research programmes. This essay will discuss recent examples of externally-funded projects at the V&A where innovative object, collections, exhibitions and archive-based research has made a demonstrable and positive impact on both specialist knowledge and the quality of the visitor experience, stimulating debate on past and present cultures, and encouraging new approaches to scholarship and the dissemination of expertise in the UK and beyond.

Much recent debate on the value of the public arts sector (including museums and galleries) has focused on its measurable contribution to the national economy via the creative industries, tourism and a vibrant art market, and to the quality of life of individuals and communities. It is certainly the case

that the UK's museums play an important role in raising social capital, encouraging inclusion and kick-starting urban regeneration. Less has been said however, on the ways in which the practice of Arts and Humanities research underpins these initiatives, particularly in the context of the museum exhibition and display. The following case-studies demonstrate the significant impact that such research activities can make via the public presentation of the nation's material and cultural assets.

i. Object-led research

The most distinctive feature of museum-based research is that it is based on objects. Prompted by artefacts from the past, museums have traditionally tended to ask very focused questions about dating, authorship, manufacture, and usage. While this approach was once seen as conservative by academics, in recent years the idea that objects should be given priority – that they should determine the course of research, rather than serving as data – has become more and more accepted. Indeed, many observers agree that there has been a 'material turn' in fields such as anthropology, social history, and even literary studies, comparable to the much-discussed 'linguistic turn' that occurred in the humanities some thirty years ago. The shift towards materiality has encouraged museum professionals and academic researchers to work together more closely than ever before, particularly in the UK. This has been beneficial to all concerned. UK-based museum curators have broadened the range of questions that they ask of their collections, and the focus on objects has similarly transformed the

methods and goals of scholarly research and learning in the British higher education sector.

There are multiple advantages to be gained by placing objects at the centre of a collaborative research project, rather than in the margins. First and foremost, artefacts exert friction on the researcher. General theories are invariably tested by the specificity and concreteness of objects, which rarely conform to expectation. Partly for this reason, object-led research is fundamentally interdisciplinary. Fully accounting for the research potential of even a single object might require contributions by historians of art, culture, science, and economics as well as specialists in conservation and other scientific disciplines.

Mug, dated 1701, probably made in Burslem, England. Museum no. C.120-1938

Take, for example, the decorated beer mug inscribed '1701'. Such an object can be studied, first of all, on the basis of its appearance. Its somewhat old-fashioned decoration in slip (liquid clay) attests to stylistic conservatism in Staffordshire, the place of its manufacture. Yet if we inquire further, we might find that the mug was implicated in new networks of distribution. The materials used to make it may have been sourced from far away, and the finished object sold in a distant city, or even abroad in America and Europe.

We might ask where and how the mug was used. Through the comparative study of objects like this one we can learn about communal drinking habits, the emergence of new venues for socialization, and attitudes towards intoxication. Or we might wonder about the significance of its date inscription, which would lead to questions about attitudes to marriage, childbirth, or political commemoration. The mug would probably have been used across a broad spectrum of society, from the 'plainer sorts' to the upwardly mobile mercantile class. This is a further advantage of object-led research: it often yields evidence of a wider demographic range than textual sources do. In periods where many people were illiterate or semi-literate, or where documents are scarce, objects can often be the only means of accessing the experience of the majority of people – people whose descendants now form a core audience for museum displays and popular histories.

Despite all these benefits, object-based research also poses its own challenges. First and foremost, though museum collections are often defined by the goal of preservation, researchers are forced to think about the objects they hold as dynamic. Unlike most textual forms of historic evidence, material things are subject to constant change through modification, wear and repair.

Though authenticity and originality are prized, the fact is that when it comes to objects from the past, alteration is the norm, not the exception.

The Mazarin Chest, Japan, c. 1640. Museum no. 2-1882

Museum-based conservation offers a disciplinary basis for research into such issues. The techniques of the scientist and the conservator can be used to gain access not only to the moment of an object's creation, but also its entire lifespan: a principle that lies at the heart of the V&A's recent research project focusing on the Mazarin Chest (funded by the Getty Foundation and the Toshiba International Foundation, supported by the Japan Foundation and the Tobunken, and carried out at the V&A, Imperial College, Loughborough University, Dresden Academy of Fine Arts and the Institute of Catalysis and Surface Chemistry, Polish Academy of Sciences). The chest is a most unusual example of seventeenth-century Japanese lacquerwork, of a very high quality that would normally not have been exported to Europe. Its history of ownership permits us to see it in relation to a long series of people and places – from its Japanese makers to its initial owners, the Mazarin family of France, from the Romantic-era collector William Beckford, to the V&A itself (the museum acquired the object in 1882).

The Mazarin Chest project also shed light on differing cultural attitudes to historic objects in the present day. The goal was to develop an integrated approach to the conservation of lacquer objects that respects both western conservation ethics, in which concern with the re-treatability of objects is paramount, and Japanese conservation values, which seek to preserve the cultural

continuity of objects by employing, as far as possible, materials and techniques similar to those used at the time of manufacture. The chest has thus been a basis not only for nuanced historic research but also new international exchanges of knowledge and understanding.

A final advantage of object-led research is its direct connection to physical experience. Every researcher who has worked in a museum knows that handling unfamiliar objects for the first time is among the most thrilling aspects of their work. This excitement is telling us something: through touch, we can begin to ask new questions about those different from ourselves. For those interested in issues such as comportment, the senses, and sexual and ethnic identity, materiality can provide routes into unspoken (and perhaps even unconscious) cultural values. Fashion – a subject to which we will return – is a particularly obvious example. Thinking about the self-regulating function of garments, from the kimono to the corset, is an instance in which research can make the lived experience of cultural difference immediately palpable to all.

ii. Collections-based research

Like the objects which form their content, permanent collections such as those housed at the V&A are not inert. They are a live inheritance that requires constant re-interpretation and new models of communication if they are to speak effectively to contemporary audiences and enhance our sense of the complex, globalised twenty-first-century world as an entity with historical roots and challenging futures. Research is one of the methods by

which we realise the social and cultural value of the assets that museums hold on behalf of the public, an obvious point but one that is too rarely made in press coverage and reviews of headline exhibitions and gallery developments. Two current research projects help to elucidate the relevance of our material heritage as represented in the Museum's collections to the diverse communities of the UK.

'Fashioning Diaspora Space' is a three-year collaboration between the V&A and Royal Holloway University of London. It is funded by the AHRC as part of the 'Diasporas, Identities and Migration' Programme and examines the presence in the UK of South Asian (Indian and Pakistani) textiles intended for use in clothing. In the context of the Museum, the project is expanding knowledge about the V&A's collections of nineteenth-century Indian textiles, not only in terms of identifying the objects, but also through asking how and why these collections were formed, how they have been used in the past and what they might mean to current and future generations of curators, visitors, designers and consumers. This research is also relevant to the holdings of other museum collections from the City Art Galleries and Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester, Paisley Museum and Bath Fashion Museum, to the archives of past and present textile manufacturers at Macclesfield Silk Archives, Warners and J&P Baker, as well as to the work of contemporary fashion retailers.In comparing colonial and postcolonial forms, untangling their genesis, their cultural designations and translations, the project has significant implications for our understanding of wider British material and visual cultures and landscapes.

One of the earliest groups within the Indian textile collections at the V&A consists of examples acquired at the Great Exhibition of 1851. This was the first time that large numbers of the British public had seen what Indian textile producers were capable of. The quality of Indian hand woven silk, embroideries and muslins was unmatched by industrial British textile manufacturers. In the 1860s and 70s many of the South Asian textiles in the collection were cut up and put into two multi-volume sets of textile sample books. These were sent around the country to both inspire designers and manufacturers, and with a view to building up the sales of British textiles to the Indian subcontinent.Forthcoming entries on the V&A website (the non-destructive equivalent of these nineteenth-century albums)about South Asian textiles in the Museum will make relevant images and information on their history, context and use universally available to a UK (and international) audience for the first time since the middle of the nineteenth century.

Embroidered Parsi girl's satin blouse.
Museum no 800-1852

The story of the V&A's South Asian textile collection is typical of diaspora narratives, in its mixture of emulation, destruction, and learning. These processes – both positive and negative – are to be found in many other instances of cultural exchange, international trade and migration. Indian textiles, too, include vivid examples of objects whose very surfaces play out the action of far-flung networks in their materials and decoration. The investigation of a distinctive Parsi Chinese embroidery consisting of a coloured embroidery on white silk depicting birds among foliage shaped for a jubla or girl's shirt reveals longer histories and connections. The Parsis of Bombay (Mumbai) were descendants of the Zoroastrians who emigrated to the Indian subcontinent from Iran in the eighth century. Parsi-owned shipping companies traded with China, returning with highly prized Chinese goods including embroidered textiles. Some Chinese embroiderers also settled in Surat, a port city in Gujarat.This single jubla is thus the complex result of the interwoven histories of four nations in two continents spanning twelve centuries. New interpretations fostered through the focused research of such an object (amongst many others) indicate that it is time to move beyond postcolonial hand wringing and progress in our understanding of a shared human past.

A second example focuses on an aspect of the Museum's practices where research has revealed a previously overlooked area of the V&A's collecting history. The thirty-month-long project, conducted as

part of a Cultural Ownership and Capacity Building Project and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund focuses on identifying and interpreting Africa-related materials within the collections. The undertaking builds on several years of engagement with Black British communities, seeking to build Black and Minority Ethnic audiences for the V&A and to develop collaborations and skill-sharing within the Black heritage/culturalsector.

The V&A has always collected the art and design of Africa. Initially, its collecting focused on the northern part of the continent. Thirteen Tunisian textiles were part of the 1851 Great Exhibition purchases which formed the core of the collection. Ancient Egyptian textiles and glassware and Moroccan and Algerian ceramics and jewellery formed other collecting strands through the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. This same period witnessed a number of key imperial acquisitions from sub-Saharan Africa including religious, ceremonial and decorative items associated with Ethiopia's ruling family acquired through the Abyssinian Expedition of 1868, and thirteen pieces of largely gold regalia, probably associated with the court of the Asante leader, acquired through the British invasion of Kumasi, state capital of Asante, Ghana, in 1874.

More recently, these African acquisitions have been supplemented with objects that reflect the changing political, social and cultural contexts of 'postcolonial' Africa. The Word and Image Department has been particularly active, acquiring prints by African artists including Ben Enwonwu, Tunde Odunlade, Paul

Sibisi and David Koloane. The cultural influence of the African diaspora is also represented in acquisitions of work by Caribbean artists such as Winston Branch and Aubrey Williams and Black British artists such as Maud Sulter, Lubaina Himid, Chris Ofili and Faisal Abdu'Allah. It is hoped that this fresh, research-informed awareness may fuel revisions to the Museum's collecting policy and encourage a more proactive, creative approach to its Africa collections and their future development.

iii. Exhibitions

Placed at the crossroads between scholarly enquiry and communication with a wider audience, exhibitions are ideally located to disseminatethe broad cultural, social and economic benefits associated with the arts and humanities field, positively engaging visitors in a much more direct and immersive manner than other forms of media. Unlike other academic outputs, exhibitions must confront the demands of appealing to very large non-specialist audiences while making specialist knowledge widely accessible. This unique set of circumstances makes exhibitions a particularly challenging and stimulating arena within which to explore the value and impact of research.

In recent years, exhibition-based research within the UK has changed dramatically in character and scope. Museums have been at the heart of a momentous cultural shift which has transformed them from perceived passive recipients of research-led initiatives to frontrunners. Fostered by an increasing number of national and international research funding

schemes and policies designed to generate active collaborations between museums, universities and colleges, this radical transformation raises important questions about the new character and purpose of exhibition-based research. This is the framework within which the groundbreaking exhibition ‘At Home in Renaissance Italy’ (V&A, October 2006 – January 2007) – the result of a four-year research project funded by the Getty Foundation and the AHRC - operated.

The research leading to an exhibition differs substantially from conventional academic research. Centred on ‘things’, the research process must acknowledge that objects are carriers of complex visual, material, cultural and social meanings and that as such they should generate multiple narratives and interpretations. This recognition often demands breaking out of traditional disciplinary boundaries and embracing an interdisciplinary outlook. The research for ‘At Home in Renaissance Italy’ was carried out by a multi-disciplinary team including scholars working within art, decorative arts and architectural history, social history, Islamic studies, music history, archaeology, the history of science, food history and conservation. Exploring the domestic interior in Italy between 1400 and 1600 in all its visual and material complexity, with objects ranging from prestigious old master paintings and sculpture to pins and pastry cutters, the exhibition brought together for the first time the world of Renaissance ‘high’ art and that of domestic material culture. Engaging with household life and everyday experience as well as cultural forms, the exhibition addressed topics as wide ranging as cooking and dining,

marriage and childbirth rituals, gambling, music-making, health and hygiene, collecting and mathematical knowledge.

The project aimed to make a major new contribution to Renaissance studies and to give revived meaning to the outstanding Renaissance collections housed within the V&A.To achieve these objectives the project maximized its investment in original research by focusing on a wide variety of largely unpublished written documents, visual sources and objects. From domestic inventories to cookery books, from celebrated family portraits to popular prints, from ancient gems to chamber pots, the exhibition revealed a new, multi-faceted aspect to Renaissance art and culture.

The multiplicity of research methods and exhibits involved in the project was reflected in the narratives accompanying the display, based directly on primary sources, which suggested different, often contrasting interpretations of the same objects. Replacing the traditional authoritative curatorial voice with a more challenging and active approach, this mode of display aimed at including the viewer creatively in the meaning-making process and encouraging a dialogue between specialists and a wider audience.This curatorial strategy meant that there was a direct continuity from the initial framing of research questions all the way to the labels read by members of the public.

Much recent debate has highlighted the widespread dissatisfaction with traditional arenas of social and cultural exchange and the need for alternative spaces for public discourse. As public events and experiences playing a role in the creation of shared meaning, exhibitions can be seen as a largely untapped force for debate and social cohesion. Exhibitions such as ‘At Home in Renaissance Italy’ can respond to this demand for public engagement with culture in different ways. By presenting historical materials in an exciting and accessible form they can help to

bridge the gap between past and present. By revealing everyday objects, stories or situations that resonate with the life experience of the viewer they can appeal to wider cross-sections of society. By addressing complexity and difference head-on, challenging commonly held assumptions and establishing a dynamic relationship with the viewer, they can provide potent evidence of the value of investing in research into the arts and the humanities.

iv. Creativity and design practice

Museum-based arts and humanities research also capitalises on and creates multiple connections within the creative industries, making links between practitioners including fine artists, graphic, fashion and 3D designers and craftspeople; manufacturers; scientists; retailers; educators; journalists, publishers and media producers. It encourages debate and collaboration across discrete sectors to their collective benefit and offers an inspirational space in which national conversations about creative skills can take place. In the case of the V&A, research projects focusing on fashion have been particularly successful in generating productive dialogue about this high-profile, multi-million pound industry and its economic, cultural and political meanings and impact.

The 'Shopping Routes: Networks of Fashion Consumption in London's West End 1945 – 1979' project was one such initiative. Jointly hosted by the Geography Department at Royal Holloway, University of London, London College of Fashion and the V&A between 2003 and 2006 as

part of the ESRC/AHRCCultures of Consumption Programme, the project had the central aim of providing a new critical history of the development of the West End in the post-war period; widening and complicating existing assumptions, particularly those associated with the powerful myth of 'Swinging London.' The project had a series of focused research objectives, seeking to provide an account of the interfaces between designers, manufacturers, suppliers, retailers, urban planners and consumers in the city. It also sought to develop recent ideas about the spatial contexts of fashion consumption, especially those situated in major metropolises, and to enhance understandings of consumption-led processes of urban renewal and transformation. It had the wider aim of interpreting London's role as a major fashion city in a comparative context, by examining the development of a range of key global sites of fashion consumption within a longer time-frame.

Through a combination of cross-institutional and multi-disciplinary approaches, the research succeeded in providing a much more nuanced and extensive history of a phenomenon that hitherto has generally been approached through nostalgic accounts that focused on over-familiar sites like Carnaby Street and the King's Road, and on

the emergent celebrity culture of the 1960s. It achieved this in a number of ways. First, archival research pointed to the significance of long-term features of London's fashion landscape, situating the seemingly overnight transformation of the city in the mid-1960s in the context of existing structures of retailing, wholesale, promotion and consumer behaviour, some of which had their roots in the mid-nineteenth century. Secondly, it challenged the existing emphasis on individual designers and boutiques, in favour of a framework that emphasised networks and relationships across sectors and traditions, and identified fashion consumption's interactions with other elements of urban change, particularly in architecture, planning and heritage. Thirdly, the project provided a systematic study of the concept of the 'Fashion World City', placing the specific characteristics of post-war London in a wider analysis of fashion's relationship with metropolitan modernity, that continues to have important resonance in the present.

The results of the research were disseminated through a number of channels including books and journal articles. The study of fashion in world cities formed the basis for a major international conference that

brought together academics from a wide range of disciplines, and included studies of New York, Paris, Milan, Tokyo, Moscow, Los Angeles, Shanghai and Mumbai to complement the London focus. Most importantly, in 2006 the project was responsible for a high-profile exhibition on ‘Sixties Fashion’ and an associated website at the V&A. This provided an opportunity to test some of the research findings through an engagement with the Museum’s collections, and through collaboration with designers, journalists and retailers active through the 1950s, '60s and '70s. Both display and website, together with an exhibition book, were designed to reach a broad audience and had a demonstrable effect on the popular imagination, drawing positive press comment and informing the content of the UK school curriculum. The website also provided a way of soliciting memories of the period from the public, and a means of disseminating oral history interviews with key designers, entrepreneurs, journalists and others involved in 1960s London.

In general, the project has formed part of a wider re-evaluation of the political, economic and creative legacy of the 1960s that has taken place in UK academic circles and in the popular mediaduring the past

two decades. But besides providing an important platform for debate on these retrospective issues, ‘Shopping Routes’, particularly in its work on fashion and the concept of the World City, also engaged with wider discussion on contemporary urban policy in relation to what has been termed the New Urban Cultural Economy. What this museum-centered research initiative has identified is the extent to which the drive towards symbolic distinctiveness by competing fashion cities needs to be considered alongside the contradictory forces that stifle urban individuality and creativity. These forces include the hyper-capitalisation of property markets and the increasing power of global corporations in a hugely expanded luxury goods sector.History does have something to teach us.

As the content of the ‘Sixties Fashion’ exhibition suggested, connections between the new symbolic industries (media and advertising) and older craft traditions were much more dynamic in cities like London, New York, Milan and Paris in the 1950s and 1960s, than they were after the massive de-industrialisation of the 1970s and 1980s. The creative networks, flexible production and vibrant consumer cultures of then have been replaced by the corporatised surface sheen of now. So, though ‘Swinging London’ was a small, local affair, its openings for new businesses, its legacy of traditional fashion skills, its affordable

infrastructure and its innovative approach to consumerism offers a genuinely distinctive template to those concerned about the serious challenges faced by UK fashion entrepreneurs in the globalised landscape of the early twenty-first century.

v. The museum as a forum for cultural exchange

Besides functioning as platforms for creative reflection and innovation in relation to the UK's history and current cultural and economic status, museums are also ideal venues for the staging of new cultural interactions beyond national frontiers. As we have suggested in reference to projects on Japan, South Asia and Africa, because objects themselves have always traversed national boundaries they are therefore a remarkably effective way of studying historical and contemporary cultural exchange. Through intelligent juxtaposition, museums can encourage researchers, curators and the public alike to see both difference and continuity across diverse nationalities, ethnicities, and geographies. This has long been a guiding principle of research at the V&A, and informs permanent displays such as the British Galleries (opened 2001), the Jameel Gallery for Islamic Arts (opened 2006), and the new Ceramics Galleries (to open 2009).

The research for two exhibitions, on view this year at the V&A, exemplify this approach. 'Cold War Modern' (opened in the Autumn of 2008 and researched in collaboration with colleagues at the University of Brighton and the Royal College of Art) uses the museum platform to reconfigure understandings of international relations in the recent

past through the prism of design. Concentrating on the highly volatile years from 1945 to 1975, the exhibition will examine the key themes of the period including the task of reconstruction in Europe after the War and the rise of consumerism, demonstrating a continuity with the themes of Modernism as they emerged in the inter-war years (explored in the V&A's 'Modernism: Designing a New World' exhibition of 2006). The strong influence of the Cold War upon popular culture will be shown through graphics, fashion, film, and product design.

Rather than focusing exclusively on the two superpowers that formed the poles of Cold War politics (the USA and USSR), the exhibition looks at countries such as Italy, France, Poland and Czechoslovakia, all of which were shaped by the era's politics but were not necessarily able to dictate them. The recovery of design history from these contexts unveils complex lines of stylistic and technological exchange. The Soviet satellites of the Eastern Bloc, for example, experimented with surprising intersections between modernism and ideology. Across the project's wide geography, art and design during this period played a central role in representing, and sometimes challenging, the dominant ideas of the age.

'China Design Now', on view at the V&A during the Spring of 2008, was an even more clear-cut example of the Museum as a forum for cultural debate and exchange and a vehicle for truly original research. Based on extensive curatorial field-work carried out in Shenzhen, Shanghai and Beijing over a period of four years, and a three-day research

workshop held at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing in 2006, the exhibition provided a snapshot of the last ten years of rapid change in China's creative industries. Despite considerable recent media coverage in the UK (partly due to the upcoming Olympics in Beijing), public understanding of the social and industrial transformations occurring in China is only just starting to take shape. In such a moment there is no substitute for on-the-ground research, and this the V&A has been able to provide in-depth, bringing examples of product, fashion, architectural and graphic design before the British public for the first time. In addition, 'China Design Now' offered insights into the dynamics of emergent design professionalism – and thus offers lessons that might well be applied to the study of other places and times.

Concluding comments

These various case studies demonstrate the vibrancy of arts and humanities research undertaken within just one national institution; many othersimilar examples could be cited from the activities of the V&A, and more broadly across the British museum and gallery sector. What positions inter-disciplinary museum-based research in the UK as unique is its innovative focus on material and visual culture as a

primary focus for explaining broader cultural, aesthetic, economic and political developments; its openness to cross-institutional and inter-disciplinary research as a means of formulating such explanations; and its extraordinary capacity to further specialist knowledge whilst also informing wider public understanding. There is of course much potential for strengthening the research-base of the UK's museum sector, not least through further research that demonstrates the essential link between grounded, scholarly investigation of collections and the experience of the visitor. All must agree however, that the simplistic dismissal of museum outputs as 'dumbed-down' versions of academic research – spectacular but empty entertainment – overlooks the tremendous innovation that underlies museum work in the UK today. This research constitutes an example to our international peers, and a major contribution to the intellectual and cultural life of the nation.

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The film work of stage designer Oliver Messel

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Set design by Oliver Messel for the film *Suddenly, Last Summer*, directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz, Columbia Pictures, 1959. Watercolour on paper. Museum no. S.388-2006

The Oliver Messel Collection consists of around 10,000 individual items and has been housed by the V&A Theatre Collections since 1981. The collection was originally on loan from Lord Snowdon, Messel's nephew, who inherited the collection on his uncle's death in 1978. In 1983 the V&A held a major exhibition using the Messel collection as the source material and including many objects on loan from his family, friends and work colleagues, including his sister Anne (Lady Rosse) and his nephew, Thomas Messel.

In 2005, with the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Friends of the V&A and the National Art Collections Fund, the V&A Theatre Collections purchased the collection from Lord Snowdon. Under the funding agreement, the V&A established a touring interactive display using the collection as an inspiration. The Museum also staged a conference held at the Theatre Museum where V&A curators and Messel's nephew, Thomas, gave papers on Messel's legacy as an interior, film and stage designer.

Oliver Messel (1904 – 1978)

'I attempted to use every device to make as much magic as possible'. Oliver Messel.[1]

Oliver Messel was the leading British stage designer of the mid-twentieth century. He was born on 13 January 1904 to Maud Frances (1875 – 1960) (daughter of the Punch cartoonist Edward Linley Sambourne (1844 – 1953) and Lieutenant-Colonel Leonard Charles Rudolph Messel (1872 – 1953), a successful banker. Messel began his fifty-year career in 1925 and won international acclaim for his exquisite taste and mastery of period style in revues, plays, films, interiors, buildings, musicals, operas and ballets, becoming one of the most sought-after and highly-paid scenery and costume designers of his era.

Messel was a master of illusion and make-believe; from his early childhood he made model houses, furniture and painted maquettes. He could make a chandelier out of sticky paper and fuse-wire, or construct a dancer's head-dress out of pipe cleaners. His nephew, Lord Snowdon, remembers as a child finding a bird's nest in his London garden and on inspection discovering that it had been made by his uncle Oliver, and that the eggs were made of hand-painted china.

Messel was a perfectionist who knew exactly how fabric should be cut and how every stage prop should be made. He often demanded items be remade if they were not to his satisfaction. He worked with every major theatre director of his generation and received a CBE in 1958. He designed nine films throughout his career, each displaying his intrinsic knowledge and research for period detail and his flair for creative inventiveness.

> *'Oliver made a white dress for me with a blue sash worn like a halter, which he made from a wonderful material called lisse, which is finer than organza. He had a sharp eye for what you were and never overdressed me. He made me look like a million dollars'. Eyelyn Laye* [2]

Messel had trained as a painter at the Slade School of Art where his contemporaries included Rex Whistler (1905 – 1944). His formal studies concentrated on life drawing and painting, but he also made masks from papier-mâché and wax for student events. An exhibition of his masks at the Claridge Galleries in London in 1925 led to his first stage commission to design masks for the prestigious Diaghilev ballet production of Zéphyre et Flore, performed at the London Coliseum.

From 1926 onwards, Charles B. Cochran engaged Messel to design costumes, masks and sets for his annual reviews at the London Pavilion. These reviews consisted of songs, sketches and chorus numbers, and provided Messel with ample opportunities to develop and exercise his talent for minute attention to detail, inventive use of materials and imaginative pastiche of historical periods and styles. This would become Messel's trademark in whatever medium he worked.

In 1932, Messel's white-on-white set and costume designs for Helen, an opera bouffe with music by Jacques Offenbach, directed by Max Reinhardt, caused a sensation on the London stage. The production cemented his success and secured a steady stream of prestigious London theatre design commissions from the 1930s to the 1960s.

It was Messel's work on Helen and the 1932 production of Max Reinhardt's wordless medieval play The Miracle that brought him to the attention of film director and producer, Alexander Korda. Korda was founder of London Films and Denham Film studios in Buckinghamshire. He was a figurehead in the fledgling British film industry and was the first film director to be knighted. Messel's first film for Korda was The Private Life of Don Juan, which starred Douglas Fairbanks. It was during Messel's second film for Korda, The Scarlet Pimpernel, starring Leslie Howard and Merle Oberon, that Messel really explored the pastiching of a historical period – in this case the late eighteenth century. Messel was hired especially to design costumes for Oberon, who would later become Korda's wife. The film is a romantic adventure set during the French Revolution with a

supporting cast including Raymond Massey and Nigel Bruce. The costumes for Oberon were daringly low-cut but very flattering. Messel used picture hats to frame Oberon's dark features. They were fanciful and fairylike versions of the Regency period style of dress and this approach to designing and creating costumes would become Messel's own distinctive style over the next thirty years.

Romeo and Juliet (1936)

Messel's next film project took him to Hollywood and gave him the resources of a major film studio with which to realise his designs in a historical film. In 1935, the Hollywood film studio Metro Goldwyn Mayer was planning a production of William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. Irving Thalberg was Head of Production at MGM and wanted a high profile production for his wife, Norma Shearer, who had been off the screen for a year, having given birth to their second child. Shearer was one of the most popular stars at MGM during the 1930s and she had first choice of any major film the studio was planning to produce. Irving, along with Chief Executive Louis B. Mayer, had established MGM as the most powerful film studio in the world with the famous tag line 'more stars than there are in heaven'. The studio was synonymous with lavish glossy musicals, drawing-room comedies and high quality literary adaptations. For Shearer's return to the screen, two high profile historical projects were considered: Romeo and Juliet and Marie Antoinette. Louis B. Mayer, felt the 'masses' were not ready for

Shakespeare, but script problems on Marie Antoinette delayed the production so Romeo and Juliet was given the green light with a budget of $1,000, 000 dollars. In 1935, this was the most expensive MGM production to date. George Cukor, who had recently scored a hit with a screen version of David Copperfield, was hired to direct.

Cukor was keen for a fresh look for the film, setting it in mid-Renaissance Italy. Having seen Messel's work for The Miracle in New York, he arranged for screenings of The Scarlet Pimpernel and The Private Life of Don Juan for Irving Thalberg and Norma Shearer. Cukor felt Messel's costumes for Merle Oberon were ornate but casual and captured the essence of the period.

As well as actors, writers and directors, MGM had two of the most creative individuals in the history of the Hollywood studio system under contract, Cedric Gibbons and Gilbert Adrian (often credited on films as 'Gowns by Adrian'). As Head of the Art Department, Cedric Gibbons was known for his Art Deco-styled set designs; his loathing of wallpapered sets gave MGM productions a distinct, modern, unfussy 'house style'.[3] Gibbons stipulated in his contract a clause that his name was put to every MGM production, regardless of whether he designed it or not. Messel's arrival from England to design the film caused some initial tension at the studio.

Once Messel was formally engaged on the production, he was dispatched with a camera crew to Italy where he spent three months recording almost 3,000 photos of buildings, squares, balconies, paintings, frescos and drawings. He studied the paintings of Botticelli, Bellini, Carpaccio, Ghirlandaio and Piero della Francesca. Gozzoli's painting Procession of the Magi, was

used as an inspiration to fashion all the costumes for the entrance of the Prince of Verona and his followers at the beginning of the film. Norma Shearer's costumes were inspired by Fra Angelico's painting The Annunciation and her ball gown was adapted from Michele da Veronay's The Betrothal. The level of research undertaken by Messel for the film is evident in the collection held at the V&A, with hundreds of photographs detailing every aspect of Italian imagery that would inspire the design for the film.

Once back in Hollywood, Messel discovered that the studio's principal costume designer, Gilbert Adrian, had already designed all the costumes, but used his charm to complete what he had been hired to do. The costumes in the finished film can be matched with the costume designs that are held in the archive.

The shoot lasted 108 days and the set covered five acres of sound stages. The set department created a near reconstruction of Piazza San Zeno in Verona. Romeo and Juliet was one of the most intricate costuming operations in MGM's history, with more than 1,200 costumes produced for the film on which 500 people worked for two months. Several looms were set up in Los Angeles and two mills were engaged in New York to weave tights all in one piece. A total of 18,000 yards of cotton, silk, satin, velvet and wool went into the costumes for the extras employed to portray crowds of townspeople, soldiers and nobles. One of Leslie Howard's cloaks for Romeo used nine yards of Fortuny cloth imported from Italy. Norma Shearer's costumes required one hundred yards of assorted silks, satins and other materials, all hand-embroidered or beaded to reproduce, as closely as possible,

the embroidery of the time. The 'Juliet skull cap' worn by Norma Shearer was a fashion hit with audiences of the period. During his stay in Hollywood, Messel discovered Dozian's, a shop in Los Angeles that sold, in his words, 'every kind of material ever made'. He bought yards of unpatterned fabric, which was then hand-painted and stitched in the MGM workrooms.

The famous balcony scene in Romeo and Juliet was reshot three times at Thalberg's insistence (he watched the daily rushes of all the films he supervised at MGM) in close-up, medium and long shot and the set occupied 52,000 square feet of sound stage. Many of Messel's characteristic design motifs that he would use throughout his career are visually evident in the film: in the Capulets' ball scene, for example, where Romeo first spots Juliet, ornate flowered garlands hang around the high arched walls.

Norma Shearer employed the English theatre actress Constance Collier on the set to coach her verse delivery. Shearer, not a trained actress, was extremely nervous of taking on such a classical role. Her anxiety, however, was compensated with generally good reviews for her performance and an Academy Award nomination for Best Actress. The film was also nominated in the following categories: Best Supporting Actor (Basil Rathbone), Art Direction (Cedric Gibbons) and Best Film (Irving Thalberg). Nevertheless, Romeo and Juliet made a loss at the box office, although the studio felt that films of this quality added to MGM's prestige. Producer Irving Thalberg died ten days after the Los Angeles premiere of Romeo and Juliet; he was thirty-seven years old.

Watching the film today, the sets alternate between Messel's

romantic interiors and Gibbons's solid, geometric rooms, and the film generally lacks a certain passion, with the emotion of many scenes underplayed. This is possibly due to the period in which it was conceived. Later in his film career, George Cukor stated that out of all his films, this was one to which he would have liked to return.

Caesar and Cleopatra (1946)

Design by Oliver Messel for Cleopatra's head-dress in the film of *Caesar and Cleopatra*, directed by Gabriel Pascal, 1946. Watercolour on paper. Museum no. S.368-2006

In 1944, Messel began work on a film version of George Bernard Shaw's stage play Caesar and Cleopatra. The production was directed by Gabriel Pascal, who became the only director trusted by Shaw to film his plays after successful film versions of Pygmalion in 1938 and Major Barbara in 1941.

> *'Pascal is doing for films what Diaghilev did for ballet'. George Bernard Shaw* [4]

The film starred Claude Rains as Caesar, Vivien Leigh as Cleopatra, Stewart Granger as Apollodorus and a host of strong English character actors in supporting roles. The production was filmed in Technicolor, and remains the only full production designed by Messel that displays his design work in colour.[5] He was engaged to design costumes, props and interior decoration (sets for the film were by John Bryan) and in this production his talent and skill for creating objects from everyday items and transforming them into something 'real' for the screen displays his versatility and creativeness.

During the Second World War, Messel had been stationed in Norwich as Camouflage Officer and it was Messel's experience of designing camouflage which would be used again in designing Caesar and Cleopatra. Under the conditions of wartime Britain, with strict rationing in place and many shops closing down, materials required for the film were not readily available. Therefore, Messel had to extend the 'make do and mend' ethos of wartime Britain into the film's design. Many of the props required had to be created using what was freely available. Authentic-looking antique Egyptian jewelry was created from thin wire, plastic, cellophane and bits of glass. Gold plates and ornaments were made from a combination of gilded leather and papier-mâché. Many of the costumes were contrived from Indian saris, obtained from some of the large department stores in London which where still functioning. Costume-making

workshops were also badly understaffed due to the essential dressmaking workforce having left London due to bombing or on war service.

Fan design by Oliver Messel for the film *Caesar and Cleopatra*, directed by Gabriel Pascal, 1946. Watercolour on paper. Museum no. S.372-2006

Interiors, decorative hangings and bedspreads were printed in hand-blocked Egyptian and Persian designs, curtains of coupon-free gauze were stencilled with authentic patterns of the period in specially mixed dyes. Messel's assistants on the film included Eleanor Abbey, Margaret Furse, Beatrice Dawson, Arthur Boys and Matilda Etches, and the small production team worked extremely long hours to sew individual replica jewels onto the costumes. Messel designed the fringed bed hangings in Cleopatra's bedroom. For the feathered fans used by Cleopatra's handmaidens in the music room scene, he borrowed some of the large fans from the Messel family home, Nymans, in Sussex (these are now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).

Messel's assistants were adept interpreters of Messel's artistic intentions. Hugh Skillan, who designed and created many headdresses for the ballerina Margot Fonteyn, also worked on the headdresses required. Materials used on one of the wigs for Vivien Leigh as Cleopatra include leather, wax, wire, acetate, glass, beads and paint. Finally, over 2,000 costumes were created for the production.

Caesar and Cleopatra was shot under extremely difficult conditions, beginning on 12 June 1944, six days after the D-Day landings. The director Gabriel Pascal wrote to George Bernard Shaw on 22 June 1944 and told him:

‘Last Saturday, I had a narrow escape on the Pharos set which is built out of doors on the studio lot, when a flying bomb landed and exploded 150 yards from the set in a nearby field. Last night the French windows in my sitting-room were blown in and the ceiling in my bedroom has cracked open completely. I am having the same gay start on the picture as I had with Major Barbara during the Blitz. I hope these pilotless planes are not reaching your district’.[6]

Shaw took a keen interest on almost every level of the film, down to the smallest detail. Below is a sample of correspondence between the two during the film:

1 July 1944 : George Bernard Shaw wrote to Gabriel Pascal about one of the characters costumes:
‘Britannus is so hopelessly wrong that he will hold up all the scenes in which he appears until he is redressed. I enclose a suggestion of what he should look like. He must have an academic gown.’

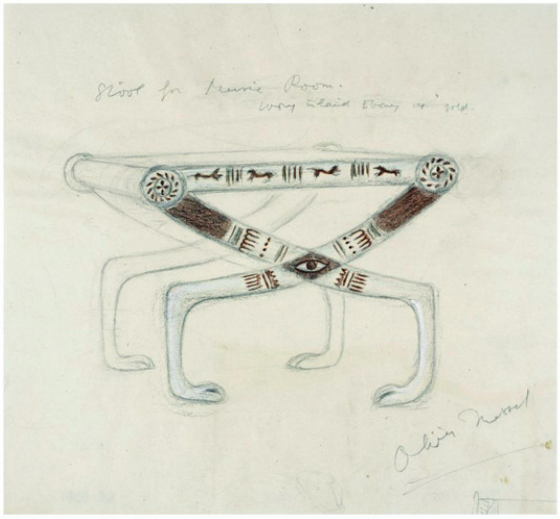
8 July 1944 : Pascal to Shaw:
‘I have discarded the original costume and have had a long gown made for him. His wig I have had remade with red hair, as you suggest, and a new moustache, turning down.’

9 July 1944 : Shaw to Pascal:
‘Britannus’s must be mainly in blue, the shepherd’s plaid is only for the tunic, that is why the blue overall should be an academic gown, opening all at the front [sic]. They have plenty of things in Oxford still.’

23 July 1944 : Pascal to Shaw:
‘I made a new costume, a new wig, and a new moustache for Britannus and am sending you photos of his costume and make-up. The costume is now a lovely cornflower blue.’

26 July 1944 : Shaw to Pascal:
‘Brittanus’s costume is alright now but his moustache is hopeless. He must have Dundreary whiskers – yellow whiskers.’

Shaw’s letter was accompanied by a water-colour sketch of Britannus’s head.[7]



Furniture design by Oliver Messel for the film *Caesar and Cleopatra*, directed by Gabriel Pascal, 1946. Watercolour on paper. Museum no. S.374-2006

The sets for the film which complemented Messel’s interior decoration and costumes were by John Bryan, who had designed Pygmalion and Major Barbara. The ancient Memphis Palace, to which Cleopatra brings Caesar after their encounter at the Sphinx, was the largest interior created for the film. It occupied 28, 000 square feet of floor space and each of its pseudo-granite columns measured nineteen feet in diameter.

A twenty-seven-foot-high mini-Sphinx was created for the film, and when the crew moved to Egypt for exterior shots, the Sphinx was dismantled and shipped over. Once filming was completed the Sphinx was left in the desert to save money on transportation, where it became a photographic background for tourists.

The final cost of Caesar and Cleopatra was £1.3 million, the most costly production at that point in British film history.[8] The film is a testament to Messel’s resourceful and creative inventiveness, working under extraordinarily difficult circumstances and the ability of his team of makers and assistants to interpret his designs into objects

than could be ‘read’ in cinematic terms.

The Queen of Spades (1949)

Set design by Oliver Messel for the film *The Queen of Spades*. directed by Thorold Dickinson, 1949. Watercolour on paper. Museum no.S.391-2006

The film version of Alexander Pushkin’s *The Queen of Spades* is one in a long line of classic British supernatural thrillers such as *Dead of Night* (1945) and *The Innocents* (1961). The story is set in 1806 in St Petersburg and is a Faustian tale of bargains with the devil and ghostly apparitions. The film was directed by Thorold Dickinson, who took over the production at only three days notice. Messel was hired to design the sets and costumes.

From the outset the production was fraught with difficulties and it was not until the film was completed that it emerged as one of Dickinson’s finest films, with Messel’s contribution to the work helping to create one of the most famous British supernatural-themed films of the 1940s.

The production was filmed at Welwyn Garden City, in out-of-date, cramped and badly soundproofed studios. They were situated next to the main railway line so that shooting had to be halted every time a train passed by. The lack of space added to Messel’s headaches but he insisted on designing and building the Countess’s stage coach to full size and not to scale so that it could not be moved more than ten feet in either direction.

The budget ran out before the film was completed and Dickinson was

forced to improvise with some sets which were constantly being torn down and replaced with new ones. In addition, he was working with two performers who had never made films before, Edith Evans and Yvonne Mitchell (although Edith Evans had made a number of silent films, it was her first 'talking' picture). They both found it difficult to adjust to the demands of the camera after their experience on the stage. Edith Evans for example, had been advised by Alec Guiness to let the camera do all the work and so she underplayed drastically and had to be coaxed into expanding her performance. Yvonne Mitchell tended to give her best performance during the first take and found herself unable to repeat her initial performance in subsequent takes. The script underwent numerous changes throughout the production; the original prologue of the film became a flashback, and sequences were cut or transposed, frequently being shot with no real idea of what order they would finally appear in. Under these conditions Dickinson rose to the challenge and was spurred on in inventing visual techniques to drive the story forward.

Dickinson created a number of superb sequences in which he uses suggestion to create terror. The visit

of the young Countess to the palace of St Germain is worthy of the great English horror director James Whale (Frankenstein, The Bride of Frankenstein). Once at the palace, the camera follows the Countess down the cobwebbed corridor until she comes to a huge door, which opens to reveal a gaping blackness beyond. Messel's set design for this sequence created the suggestive and eerie atmosphere that Dickinson was able to replicate on film.

Set design by Oliver Messel for the film *The Queen of Spades*, directed by Thorold Dickinson, 1949. Watercolour on paper. Museum no. S.384-2006

The lighting of the film adds considerably to the atmosphere. It was predominantly low-key, creating some striking chiaroscuro effects, and brilliantly captures the Messel interiors.The cinematographer was Otto Heller, whose films included *The Ladykillers* (1955), *Peeping Tom* (1960) and *Victim* (1961). Heller used a series of wide-angle lenses to suggest space and width where they did not exist, particularly in a key ballroom scene, where camera trickery was used to deceive the eye. The vertiginous high-angle shot of the young Countess's arrival at the palace of St Germain was created because they could not afford to build the palace façade. Instead, they created the effect by putting up a

corner of a wall with a gargoyle on it, directing lights to give the appearance of an open door and then shooting down onto the carriage. Point-of-view shots were used constantly to disguise the fact that many sets were either small or half-built, or in some cases non-existent.

Dickinson often used shots of visual symbolism, common in the silent film era and used by Alfred Hitchcock in almost all of his films. One such key moment is when the Countess, now armed with the secret of the cards, goes to the gambling house. As she flings her crucifix onto a transparent glass table so that it dominates the frame, Dickinson places the camera underneath the table focusing not only on the crucifix being used as a gambling tool, but the ceiling above her head which depicts two huge claws that will now symbolically consume her soul for the remainder of the film.

Mirrors are a recurring motif in the film: characters look at themselves at crucial points and their actions are also frequently seen reflected in mirrors. Such devices provide a visual unity to the film which plays creatively off the sets, the movement of the camera and angle of the camerawork.

Set design by Oliver Messel for the film *The Queen of Spades*, directed by Thorold Dickinson, 1949. Watercolour on paper. Museum no. S.189-2006

The scope of Messel's design in the film is apparent from the set and costume designs held in the V&A collection. Every prop and period detail had been researched meticulously and parts of the set design had a twist. Scenes in the palace of the old Countess had to look as if they had remained

unchanged for fifty years. The gilded, rococo elaboration of her state apartments had to appear mellowed under dust and patina; the vaulted hallway and great staircases within her palace also had to strike a sombre note. The squalor of the serfs had to be represented as did many exteriors, including a bird market and a carriage crossing a bridge, which were all filmed indoors.

When the film opened in June 1949, it received universal praise from the critics. Dilys Powell wrote in The Sunday Times:

> *'The Queen of Spades is something rare in this country, a successful essay in romantic period, Oliver Messel's setting and costumes are among the most beautiful I can remember seeing on the English screen'.*[9]

A young Ken Adam was a production draughtsman on the film. He would go on to design many of the James Bond films, *Chitty, Chitty, Bang, Bang* (1968) and *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964).

At the end of 1950 The Royal Opera House in London presented its first ever production of Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades*, directed by Michael Benthall. As Messel had designed the film, he was the obvious choice for the opera version. For the most significant scene, when the Countess dies, Messel created a masterly conception: he placed her in a giant armchair creating the illusion of her shrunken image.

Suddenly last summer

Set design by Oliver Messel for the film *Suddenly, Last Summer*, directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz. Columbia Pictures, 1959. Watercolour on paper. Museum no. S.387-2006

Messel's last film was based on Tennessee Williams's stage play *Suddenly, Last Summer*. The film was directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz from a screenplay by Gore Vidal with an all-star cast in the leading roles – Katharine Hepburn, Montgomery Clift and Elizabeth Taylor. Filmed in Shepperton Studios near London, Messel's sub-tropical deep-south jungle set for Mrs Venables' house, with its larger than life exotic garden containing huge and menacing plants, was reminiscent in style of his exterior stage settings for The Little Hut, Ring Round the Moon and The House of Flowers. The garden became the main set piece where many key scenes take place, creating an essentially claustrophobic and over-powering presence in the film.

Messel's research into capturing the New Orleans French Quarter atmosphere was as extensive as always. Images of buildings, balconies, squares, gates, and, for the extraordinary garden, photographs of prehistoric forests and plants, are all contained in the V&A collection.Messel once again engaged Hugh Skillan to assist him on the film. Skillan had worked with Messel since 1942; his headdresses were so light and excellent in construction that artists found them comfortable to wear. Skillan worked on making the insect-eating plants and out-sized exotic foliage. Messel made banana leaves with waxed crinkle paper and then mixed them

with real plants; he also made vines from paper twisted round in coils and then covered with pale green flock. Over seventy different varieties of plants were used on the set and mixed with a painted backdrop; the effect was that of a monstrous jungle.

Photograph of a model for the garden in the film *Suddenly, Last Summer*, directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz, Columbia Pictures, 1959. Cardboard, glue, papier-mâché, wax. Designed by Oliver Messel. Museum no. S.394-2006

In one scene which takes place in Sebastian's studio, Messel has placed masks from his 1920s reviews on the desk and on the walls. Among the set designs for Suddenly, Last Summer are more mundane sketches and ground plans for corridors, offices for the hospital in which Elizabeth Taylor's character is being held and exteriors for the fictional location, Cabeza de Lobo. The extraordinary baroque lift in which Katharine Hepburn descends for her first entrance was created with John Claridge, who assisted Messel on many projects including the Dorchester Hotel suite created in 1953.

Winning Messel an Academy Award nomination for set and costumes design, *Suddenly, Last Summer* would be his last film. His successful working relationship with Elizabeth Taylor led Twentieth Century Fox to commission him to design her costumes and wigs for their forthcoming mammoth production of *Cleopatra*, but this had an unhappy end for Messel because his designs were never used and he was replaced on the production by Irene Sharaff who would win an Academy Award for her work.

In the mid-1960s, Messel moved to Barbados and began designing

homes there and for the adjacent island, Mustique (including a villa for HRH The Princess Margaret). His work as an architect would again reflect his inventive use of materials: for his own house he made use of local coral stone.

Messel's creative ingenuity was evident throughout his career in whatever medium he worked. For students of art, design, performance and film, access to this unique collection at the V&A and the availability of his film work on DVD gives new insight into the working practices and techniques of one of Britain's most talented and accomplished stage designers.

Filmography

- 1934 The Private Life of Don Juan
- 1935 The Scarlet Pimpernel
- 1936 Romeo and Juliet
- 1940 The Thief of Baghdad
- 1946 Carnival
- 1946 Caesar and Cleopatra
- 1948 The Winslow Boy
- 1949 The Queen of Spades
- 1959 Suddenly, Last Summer

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1. Castle, Charles. *Oliver Messel: A Biography* (London 1983: 6)
2. Castle, Charles. *Oliver Messel: A Biography*. (London 1983: 58).
3. Cedric Gibbons was nominated thirty-nine times for the Academy Award and won eleven statuettes (he also designed the Academy Award).
4. Shaw, George Bernard. *Meeting at the Sphinx, Gabriel Pascal's Production of Bernard Shaw's Caesar and Cleopatra* (London 1946: vii).
5. At the beginning of 1939, Messel co-designed costumes for the Alexander Korda epic *The Thief of Baghdad* (the other two costume designers on the film were John Armstrong and Marcel Vertes). It was Britain's first Technicolor film and won Academy Awards for Special Effects, Art Direction and Cinematography.
6. Shaw, George Bernard. *Meeting at the Sphinx, Gabriel Pascal's Production of Bernard Shaw's Caesar and Cleopatra* (London 1946:41).
7. Shaw, George Bernard. *Meeting at the Sphinx, Gabriel Pascal's Production of Bernard Shaw's Caesar and Cleopatra* (London 1946:37).
8. Several British actors who appeared in the film went on to become household names; Jean Simmons appears as a harpist in Cleopatra's private chamber, Roger Moore appeared as a spear carrier and Kay Kendall appeared as one of Cleopatra's slaves.
9. Powell, Dilys. Film review for *The Queen of Spades*. *The Sunday Times*, 20 March 1949.

Doing Time: Patchwork as a tool of social rehabilitiation in British prisons

Claire Smith

Figure 4 – Canvas work circle. 2008. Image courtesy of Fine Cell Work, London

There is a longstanding affiliation between confinement and creativity. While restricting the movement of the human form, prisons, workhouses, internment camps, hospitals and asylums have long been the site of great imagination and industry. Nineteenth-century Parisian prisons promoted furniture-making, while in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, British officials in India installed looms in several prisons to produce carpets and textiles.[1] In

2010 a V&A exhibition will place examples of over 300 years of British quilting and patchwork within their historical and social contexts. It will include the 1841 'Rajah Quilt', the only known transportation quilt in a public collection, and a newly commissioned collaboration with the charity Fine Cell Work, designed and made by the inmates of HMP Wandsworth.

All of the objects in the exhibition will provide evidence of the ways in which individual makers have responded to their environment, not least in the case of those makers who are working within the unique surroundings of the prison. This paper will focus on the particular work of Elizabeth Fry as a prison reformer in the nineteenth century, her connection to the Rajah Quilt, and offer a consideration of the HMP Wandsworth commission in the light of this history.

Elizabeth Fry and the British prison system

The use of confinement as a punishment for crime is a relatively new concept, and one closely tied to the transportation of convicted felons: a process that started in the eighteenth century and continued for over 200 years.[2] The largest movements were to America in the eighteenth century, and then to Australia in the nineteenth century.[3] Although the actual punishment was a term of hard labour, many of the earliest prisons were developed as collection points for those awaiting

trial or transportation.[4] In these early prisons, no distinctions were made between prisoners who might be awaiting trial, debtors, and convicted felons. Furthermore, there was no classification of prisoners based on sex or age.[5] Conditions were summarised by the reformer John Howard in 'The State of the Prisons in England and Wales' as 'filthy, corrupt-ridden and unhealthy'.[6]

Throughout the first three decades of the nineteenth century, Britain witnessed the growth of reformatory theory as a basis for prison discipline, and an increasing interest in rehabilitation initiatives.[7] Texts on the subject of prison reform circulated within society, many of which were characterised by both moral fervour and first-hand accounts of prison conditions.[8] In particular, the reformer Elizabeth Fry started to stress the humanitarian needs and rehabilitative potential of prisoners, propagating the benefits of social mobility and improvement in the wake of years of punishment and retribution. Fry was born in Norwich on 21 May 1780. She was raised in a Quaker household, and became a minister and preacher for the Society of Friends in 1810. Her interest in prison conditions began after visiting Newgate Prison in 1813 and witnessing the living conditions of women and children.[9]

Fry's particular focus was the improvement of conditions for women inmates. Her reform methods involved the establishment of several ladies committees: small groups of women who visited prisons on a regular basis to work directly with inmates, often taking food and clothing with them, but predominantly offering teaching and guidance. In 1821 Fry formed the British Ladies Society for the Reformation of Female Prisoners, which formalised the opportunity

for women outside the prison to identify with members of their own sex and offer aid and instruction where possible.[10] The women of the Ladies Society donated sewing supplies which included tape, ten yards of fabric, four balls of white cotton sewing thread, a ball each of black, red and blue thread, black wool, twenty-four hanks of coloured thread, a thimble, one hundred needles, threads, pins, scissors and two pounds of patchwork pieces (or almost ten metres of fabric).[11]

Fry's jurisdiction aimed to replace the primacy of punishment, violence and repression used to regulate social relationships with a pastoral model encouraging education and rehabilitation, affiliation and empathy:[12]

> *'... the female, placed in the prison for her crimes, in the hospital for her sickness, in the asylum for her insanity, or in the workhouse for her poverty, possesses no light or common claim on the pity and attention of those of her own sex, who, through the bounty of a kind Providence, are able to do good.'*[13]

These comments respect a community consciousness shared between women at various levels of society. Fry's subsequent observations emphasise the importance of providing adequate education and instruction during a period of incarceration, in the understanding that this would lead to a pattern of behaviour desirable during social reintegration. Annemieke van Drenth and Francisca de Haan have suggested that this aspect of Fry's work can be seen as a secularised variation of the pastoral care developed in the traditions of Christianity and

Quakerism.[14] Adopting a stricter form of Quakerism in 1799, Fry's fundamental belief was that divine revelation was immediate and individual, terming such revelation the 'inward light' or the 'inner light'. Fry's Quakerism rejected a formal creed and stressed inward contemplation as the route to salvation.[15] Needlework can be seen as a tool which offered not only a practical skill, but also an enlightened state of contemplation, whereby the focus required for the act of stitching would have allowed the maker to enter a mental space removed from the everyday.

There are numerous objects in public collections that testify to the therapeutic value attached to the needle, but less research has been carried out on the particular choice of patchwork as a tool of reform.[16] Fry herself was keen to highlight patchwork as an excellent choice for the women of Newgate:

> *'Formerly, patchwork occupied much of the time of the women confined to Newgate, as it still does that of the female convicts on the voyage to New South Wales. It is an exceptional mode of employing the women, if no other work can be procured for them, and is useful as a means for teaching them the art of sewing.'*[17]

Fry draws a subtle distinction here between patchwork and other forms of needlework. While patchwork is useful as an instructional tool (something that the sampler excelled at), it is exceptional in employing and occupying the women. The creation of intricate patchwork required a heavy investment of time. With a lack of

active employment, the experience of prison life for many in the early nineteenth century was reduced to the soul-destroying slippage of hours into days. Fry was keen to instil in the prisoner the transformative potential of this experience, turning simply 'doing time' into the positive experience of having the time in which to do something, and restoring a sense of control and independence to the inmate.

Integral to the success of Fry's scheme was attaching value to this time spent: the union of a creative agenda with financial remuneration for the 'industries' carried out by the female inmates. These plans were initially resisted:

> *'Objections have been made, by some persons, to the employment of prisoners, on the ground that it may be the means of depriving some of the industrious poor of the means of an honest and respectable maintenance.'*[18]

However, Fry sought to persuade prison authorities of the motivational benefits of paid employment.

> *'It is to be hoped, however, that such objections will, ere long, cease to be urged; for it is abundantly evident, that unless the time of these poor females, who have abandoned themselves to idleness and vice, be fully occupied while they are in prison, there can be little or no hope that their confinement will lead to their reformation. Without this important aid to prison discipline, their attention will still be directed to the criminal objects which have previously occupied them, and much of their time will probably be spent in contriving plans for*

> *future evil. We cannot promote the reformation of such persons more effectively than by making them experimentally acquainted with the fruits of industry … Some remuneration for their work, even during their continuance in confinement, will be found to act as a powerful stimulus to a powerful and persevering industry.'*[19]

Fry's appeal was successful, and set a precedent for contemporary needlework initiatives.

Fry was not alone in advocating the necessity of financial remuneration for those who took up needlework within the prison. John Francis Maguire was the Mayor of Cork in 1852. In the wake of Ireland's National Exhibition of the same year, and the successful display of several prison quilts\ he published a text which aimed to highlight 'the advantages of industrial employment in public institutions, especially those intended for purposes of reformation'.[20] In the instance of Cork County Gaol, he notes that:

> *'Previous to the year 1847, this gaol was, like others in the country, a place of punishment, rather than of reformation. Despite the zeal of the Governor and the solicitude of the chaplains, it very rarely happened that any unhappy creature out of the many thousands committed to its walls, left its gate improved either in mind or morals.'*[21]

While a 'select few' of the prison population were employed in 'industrial occupation' (making clothes and carrying out some daily prison duties), it was not until 1847 that a stronger campaign for rehabilitation was put into place:

> *'From 1847 up to this year, the inmates have made every article required for their own use, and that of the institution; including male and female clothing of all kinds, in linen and woollen fabrics; bedding, ticken [*sic*], canvases, blankets, &c … By this alteration in the system of management, every person in the gaol was put to work at some*

> *one or other useful employment, instead of being confined, as hitherto, to oakum-picking and stone-breaking, the two grand specifics for the cure of all classes and degrees of public offenders …'*[22]

The result, according to the author, was 'the good order of the gaol and the improved conduct of its inmates.'[23]

> *'The boys are taught, for two hours each day, necessary branches of education, besides receiving an industrial training which, in most cases, they had no opportunity of receiving … And this is the way to reach the object which society should have in view – the reformation of those who it is compelled to punish by its laws; for it is not by degrading a man, that he is to be redeemed and elevated, but by awaking within him whatever good crime or misfortune may have left.*[24]

The emphasis here is on active employment, aimed to improve the inmate's well-being, social interaction within the prison, and the likelihood of rehabilitation upon release. Maguire highlights the potential of the prison to act as an educational and reformatory institution, propagating a familiarity with the production of goods and the world of trade. The eventual display of the Cork Gaol quilts in the National Exhibition of 1852 implies that Maguire was effective in engaging the inmates with the wider industrial economy (and the associated principles of spectacle, commerce and display), despite their confinement. His terminology of redemption and elevation is also reflective of Fry's socio-religious discourse, suggesting mental focus as the routes to salvation. These approaches stress the prison as a rehabilitative rather than punitive environment, forwarding the needle as one of the primary tools of utility and reform.

The Rajah quilt

Fry's extensive accounts and diaries offer an insight into the use of needlework in prisons in the nineteenth century, but today there is relatively little testimony available from the convicts with whom she worked. Often this information is bound up in the objects that the prisoners created. One such object is the only known transportation quilt in a public collection; the Rajah Quilt.

In 1841, patchwork provisions were carried on board the Rajah, to be used by some of the 180 women prisoners on board. The ship left Woolwich on 5th April and arrived in Hobart, Van Diemen's Land (present day Tasmania) on 19th July with 179 women prisoners, and it is thought that up to twenty-nine convict women may have worked the quilt.[25]

The quilt was acquired in 1989 by the National Gallery of Australia, who believe that it may have been produced under the guidance of Miss Keiza Hayter.[26] Hayter had worked at the Millbank Penitentiary, and was given free passage on board in the understanding that she dedicated her time to the improvement of the prisoners. On the recommendation of Fry, Hayter joined the journey to Van Diemen's Land to assist Lady Franklin in the formation of the Tasmanian Ladies' Society for the Reformation of Female Prisoners.[27] The message inscribed on the quilt suggests that Hayter may have continued the educational practices of the Ladies Society,

TO THE LADIES
of the
Convict ship committee.
This quilt worked by the Convicts of the ship Rajah during their voyage to van Diemans Land is presented as a
testimony to the gratitude with which
they remember their exertions for their

welfare while in England and during
their passage and also as proof that
they have not neglected the Ladies
kind admonition of being industrious.
June 1841

The quilt suggests a desire to enter into the processes of creation and renewal beyond the instructive space of the prison, while also paying homage to the patronage of the Ladies Committee. The quilt was intended to travel back to Britain as a gift, documenting the safe passage of both the female convicts and Fry's message to the shores of Van Diemen's Land. Whether or not Fry saw it before her death is unknown, but it also spoke to a wider audience about the 'fruits of industry', claiming the relevance of Fry's message beyond the walls of Newgate.

The quilt measures 325 × 337 centimetres. It is designed with a central square of Broderie Perse (appliquéd chintz), with twelve frames radiating outwards to form a medallion quilt (a patchwork quilt with a central panel framed by multiple borders).

Broderie Perse coverlets seem to have been particularly popular in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Two examples are now held by the V&A, and are thought to date from the first half of the nineteenth century. The first (V&A museum no: T.382-1960) is a white cotton coverlet, appliquéd with block-printed chintzes. The central panel contains a peacock, and the frame surrounding this is divided into smaller square compartments containing flowers, Chinese vases and other Chinoiserie motifs (such as birds, trees and small figures in Chinese dress). The outer border of the quilt has a bright red ground printed in black with a classical design of urns, and an eagle and lyre design. Work undertaken at the Museum by Barbara Morris at the time of acquisition dates the textiles, many of which were printed at Bannister Hall near Preston, to

between 1804 and 1811. The red and black 'classical' border was printed for George Anstey, a leading London linen-draper, in 1804. The Chinese vases come from two fabrics printed at Bannister Hall in 1805 and 1806. Family history undertaken by the donor suggests that the quilt may have been made for an affluent Lancashire family between 1811 and 1815.

The second relevant coverlet in the collection dates from around 1820, and shows a variety of printed cottons appliquéd on a white linen ground (V&A museum no: T.399-1970). The appliquéd prints are mostly flowers, but brightly coloured block printed birds have also been used on the outer border. These fashionable coverlets display the freedom to choose the textiles for the benefit of the design, declaring the household's access to luxury goods. The Rajah Quilt similarly draws on the popularity of Broderie Perse as a technique, and the desirability of printed cotton chintzes.[28] Carolyn Ferguson has undertaken detailed research on the Rajah Quilt for the Quilter's Guild of the British Isles, and suggests that although it is extremely difficult to say where the fabrics were acquired from, it is likely that the ladies of the Convict Ship Committee would have sourced them from the Manchester merchants operating from warehouses in the Cheapside area of London.[29] In particular, Ferguson suggests that the four birds shown on the central panel connect to the printed cottons produced in Manchester, such as those inspired by the prints of John Potts.[30] Such printed cottons would have provided a visual reference to the world of trade and commerce, connecting these women to a cross-section of contemporary textile technologies and markets.

It is also important to note that the Rajah Quilt was not a singular example of patchwork created

during transportation although, as discussed, it is the only known example in a public collection. As Ferguson notes, a convict on board the 'Brother' (1823) sent Fry a calabash as a gift and recorded that she used the patchwork quilt she had made on her bed, while Surgeon Wilson on the Princess Royal reported that many of the women made patchwork quilts and some of them were left behind on the ship.[31] Furthermore, in 'The Fatal Shore', Robert Hughes describes a court scene enacted by convicts on deck for the purposes of entertainment; 'cathartic parodies in which the 'judge', robed in a patchwork quilt with a swab combed over his head for a wig, his face made up with red-lead, chalk and stove-backing, would volley denunciations at the cowering 'prisoner'.'[32] Hughes also describes the appearance of the great hulls as vast floating 'street tenements', with 'lines of bedding strung out to air between the stumps of the masts'.[33] These accounts suggest the presence of patchwork on the visual landscape of the ship, integrated into performances and part of the daily routine of the convict. Each surviving quilt acts as a vessel for its respective narrative, testifying to the convict's endurance of their journey and the handing down of

individual accounts of life at sea.[34]

The Fine Cell Work commission

The recent Fine Cell Work commission for the V&A engages with this complex history of patchwork produced during confinement. Fine Cell Work is a Registered Charity that teaches needlework to prison inmates. It is based on the vision of Lady Anne Tree, a longstanding prison visitor, entertainments officer at HMP Wandsworth and a prison inspector who continues to support and guide the charity. Fine Cell Work operates through a philanthropic model that reflects Elizabeth Fry's emphasis on community consciousness. Volunteers work with small groups (of around eleven or twelve) inmates, teaching various needlework skills. Quilting and patchwork skills are taught to all-male groups at HMP Wandsworth. Prisoners involved with the charity carry out their needlework while confined to their cells. Once trained, inmates can be responsible for difficult commissions and support other inmates who are still learning. As one of the inmates enrolled on the scheme points out, one of the benefits of this structure is that it 'is more consistent and reliable than say education classes because you can do it when you want and in your own time. You can learn from other people.'[35] The act of stitching allows the maker to reclaim time as his own. In an environment of finite choices and extensive periods of isolation, this allows the maker to transform hours of confinement into a period of productivity and creativity. At the centre of the Fine Cell Works ethos sits this notion of the individual inmate: the creator, producer and stitcher.

Integral to the success of the charity is the fostering of a sub-culture within the prison that returns to the basic principles of Elizabeth Fry's

reforms: the fruitful relationship between creativity and industry. Prisoners are paid for their work. This 'generates skills and independence, while also allowing them to save for their release', hence reducing the likelihood of a return to crime.[36] Prisoners often send the money that they earn from Fine Cell Work to their children and families, or use it to pay debts or for accommodation upon release.[37] They also develop a skills base that may be useful to them beyond the prison gates. This includes not only the practical aspects of stitching, but also engagement with design initiatives, working to project deadlines and collaborative interaction with the volunteers who instruct them.

The footprint of the V&A commission is based on the Panoptican design of Wandsworth Prison. The quilt will be sewn and designed by inmates across the prison estate, supported by V&A Curator Sue Prichard. The project appears in the wake of several collaborative initiatives between museums and prison charities seeking to reduce the number of inmates who re-offend. In 2006, the Museum of London curated the 'Mind's Eye', featuring twenty-five paintings and fourteen pieces of creative writing by inmates of HMP Wandsworth. Working in collaboration with professional artists and writers, the inmates offered remembrances of London following a series of workshops with artists and writers.[38] The exhibition was part of a three-year programme supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund to engage people at risk of

social exclusion with their heritage.[39]

Prior to this, the 'Black Box' project (2002–03) involved museums and galleries in East and West Sussex working with prisoners from Ford Prison in Arundel, 'to create personal museums of the imagination'.[40] Participants were invited to take part in a series of workshops led by poets and supported by museum staff and artists. Inspired by artefacts brought in from museum collections, they worked 'only with images and words'.[41] Participants were encouraged to organise and interpret an imaginary space, dividing it into separate 'rooms' to house 'significant, precious and hated things'.[42] The project was funded by the MLA South East (Museums, Libraries and Archives), with the aim of engaging 'hard to reach' audiences with local collections. The MLA also funded and supported 'Project Hero' during the same period, described as 'creative reader and writer development courses around graphic novels and artefacts for young offenders who were disaffected with education'.[43] The Museum of Reading and Reading's Prison Library worked with young men in the Separated Prisoners Unit at HM Young Offenders Institute, Reading. External evaluation suggests that the pilot project 'raised the young men's self esteem and enhanced their key skills in literacy, creativity, communication and social interaction'.[44] Since 2003, the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge has been working with a number of prisons throughout England on the 'Virtual Egypt' project.[45] Sally-Ann Ashton, a specialist in Egyptology, has been collaborating with prisoners and prison education departments to develop educational resources (in particular, a virtual walk through of the recently refurbished Egyptian galleries). The resulting material will be used for project work in prisons, and also as a public resource. The project combines 'specialist knowledge with specific cultural experiences to provide learning opportunities and methodologies adapted to those unable to visit

museums but of value for much wider application'.[46]

Furthering the potential of projects that bring together design-led and social rehabilitation initiatives, a recent exhibition entitled 'The Creative Prison' explored the ways in which contemporary architecture could offer solutions to current prison conditions.[47] The project was developed by architect Will Alsop, artists Shona Illingworth and Jon Ford, and led by the arts organisation Rideout (Creative Arts for Rehabilitation). Collaborating with the staff and inmates of HMP Gartree, Leicestershire, 'The Creative Prison' examined how the design of prisons 'informs their effectiveness and challenges attitudes to current prisoner rehabilitation'.[48] The resulting development of an imaginary prison suggested the ways in which architecture could improve safety, interaction and educational activity. It also encouraged prisoners to think proactively about the theme of rehabilitation through film and sculpture.[49]

In all instances, the emphasis has been on engaging the prisoners with their personal and collective memories, particularly in relation to museum collections, while also increasing their skills base and encouraging a proactive approach to reintegration into the community. The V&A and Fine Cell Work collaboration continues in this vein. The emphasis of the project is on creative expression, personal reflection and community, centred on the act of bringing the participants together to quilt and share their experiences. Recent feedback from stitchers suggests that the resulting acts of communal discourse reinvigorate the prison environment as a site of creative energy. One participant commented on his enjoyment of quilting 'with so many different people', recognising that 'each has their own perspective'.[50] For this individual, the act of quilting represents the opportunity to forge links with fellow prisoners:

> *'It gives you a purpose to relate to other people. It's difficult talking to strangers but if you can*

> *do it with a reason it helps. You get more sociable because you're chasing people for materials! … You can learn from other people and teach them something as well. You feel you've advanced your knowledge and experience.*[51]

Large periods of confinement restrict each prisoner's opportunity to share and attain knowledge and skills, but the co-operative act of creating the quilt engenders a dialogue focused on acts of progression and knowledge.

Each prisoner involved with the commission has the opportunity to design and stitch their own hexagon, which will then be pieced into the larger template of the quilt. Hexagons already completed by prisoners demonstrate a clear conversation with both the history of the British prison system and contemporary discourses on trade and authority. Moving away from the submissive tone and general acceptance present in the inscription of the Rajah Quilt, the HMP Wandsworth Quilt offers a critical engagement with the system in which the prisoner is encased. The following design displays the longstanding association between labour and prison life.

Figure 1: Embroidered hexagon. Coloured silks on white cotton ground. 2008. Image courtesy of Fine Cell Work, London

The overbearing hand of authority (Figure 1) dominates the physical landscape, overtly referencing the hard and monotonous prison tasks of marching and rock-breaking promoted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as punishing/suitableforms of employment for prisoners.

In placing the hand in plain view, the stitcher also encourages a contemplation of the absolute

importance of the hand in the life of the prisoner (both metaphorically in the hand of authority, and literally as the tool of salvation for the stitcher). Many of the hexagons return us to the image of the hand or the physical impression left by it.

Figure 2 – Embroidered and appliquéd hexagon. Coloured wool thread and cotton patches on white cotton ground. 2008. Image courtesy of Fine Cell Work, London

Here (fig. 2), a fingerprint is surrounded by borders of DNA, references the heightened interest in the scientific identification of the criminal (through fingerprinting and recent developments in forensics). It also suggests wider discourses on personal freedom, and government initiatives to introduce tighter forms of identification.

Other hexagons (fig. 3) engage directly with the action of the probation board, and return us to the process of stitching by bringing the needle and thread to the foreground to present the tools of the maker.

The diversity of these designs demonstrates the continuing appeal of the needle as a tool of both subversion and salvation, and the critical dialogue initiated by the prisoners challenges current attitudes to prison life.

Figure 3 – Canvas work hexagon. 2008. Image courtesy of Fine Cell Work, London

Many reflect on the ongoing presence of punitive measures in the face of growing external and internal pressures on the prison system, including steadily increasing numbers of inmates (and serious overcrowding) and constraints in public expenditure.[52]

Within this environment, the enduring appeal of the needle as a tool of salvation is a claim supported by documents from prison inmates working with Fine Cell:

> *I'm a life-serving prisoner and for years I have been trying to escape. I have tried numerous cell hobbies which promptly ended up discarded in the corner of the cell as so much rubbish. Due to depression, most of the time I've been unwashed, unshaven, teeth not cleaned, hair not combed, as often as not my cell has been dirty and stinking. I've had no possessions, nobody to love me, just hanging onto a futile, empty and miserable existence.*

> *Every night I've asked God to have mercy on me and not to make me endure another day. I've wept and I asked why I was in this world, I am good for nothing, no money, no family and with no-one I could go to for help. I just couldn't understand why I should go on living. Then something happened to me.*

> *I was lying in my cell one evening when a bloke came in and asked if I can help him. I didn't know the fella, but he had helped me with cigarette papers and teabags. He explained how he'd broken his glasses and needed to finish a pattern he was sewing for the in-cell charity course. Although I class myself as being very butch and sewing so very feminine, I figured I owed him, so I agreed to help him finish his work. He showed me what it was I had to do, I made him promise not to tell*

> *anybody and I hid it in a cupboard in my cell. About nine o'clock I got it out and started sewing. Before I knew where I was they started unlocking us for breakfast, a whole night had come and gone with no thoughts of suicide, and no tears of melancholy.*

> *How good it is to be alive, to feel that I am accomplishing something and my life has real meaning. Nobody really enjoys an aimless life, a life without purpose, do they? Around the world millions of people are working hard and trying to find happiness in living.'*[53]

For this individual who perceives himself emotionally and physically trapped, the needle offers focus and purpose, and the possibility of mental 'escape' from the monotony of prison life. Initially ashamed of engaging in what he perceives as gendered work, the prisoner develops a strong sense of fulfilment and achievement based on the act of stitching.

Many of the Fine Cell Work stitchers acknowledge not only the reassuring rhythmic repetition of the act of sewing, but also the cultural meaning attached to the objects that they produce. There is often a great poignancy for participants in offering up their own time and designs for public consumption, and the realisation that something important to them is appreciated by the rest of society. A prisoner's comment that 'we're like a forgotten community' acknowledges the shared experiences of those within the prison walls, but also the strong sense of alienation that comes into being when entering or leaving the prison gates.[54] For this reason, the Fine Cell Work participants sew in the knowledge that the HMP Wandsworth Quilt will be on view in a public exhibition in 2010, striking a connection between the exhibition audience and the prisoners who helped to create it. As part of the permanent collections at the V&A, it will also form a lasting legacy for these men, tying together personal memories to form a collective document of prison life as it stands in 2010.

In dialogue with the Rajah Quilt, it is hoped that the HMP Wandsworth Quilt will encourage an understanding of quilts as part of a hybrid history of creative practice. The HMP Wandsworth Quilt both resonates with the complexity of this history, remembering the skills and experiences of past prisoners, and explores the continuing relevance of the prison as a site of creativity.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Sue Prichard at the V&A and Katy Emck at Fine Cell Work for their knowledge and support with this paper.

Endnotes

1. For example in Paris in 1834, female and male wood gilders struck the patron of a furniture shop who had contracted prison labour. 'Gazette des tribunaux', no. 2734 (23 May 1834), cited by DeGroat, Judith A. 'The Public Nature of Women's Work: Definitions and Debates during the Revolution of 1848'. *French Historical Studies* 20: 1 (Winter, 1997): 35. A report from 1913 on the prison system in India suggests that in Poona 'the industries are varied. Men were weaving a fine rug, the director chanting the indications of the pattern from a manuscript, while the weavers responded antiphonally and placed the threads, and so the figures grew to the rhythm of music'. See Henderson, Charles Richmond. 'Control of Crime in India'. *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology* 4: 3 (September, 1913): 387 and 394.

2. For an overview of how our ideas of punishment have changed over time see Norval Morris and D.J. Rothman, *The Oxford History of the Prison: the Practice of Punishment in Western Society* (Oxford, 1995).

3. Between 1718 and 1775 around 30,000 convicts were transported to the West Indies and North America for periods of between seven and fourteen years.

From 1787, around 160,000 convicts were transported to Australia over a period of 80 years. See Nick Flynn and Douglas Hurd, *Introduction to Prisons and Imprisonment* (London, 1998), pp.29–30.

4. When transportation to the American colonies was interrupted in 1776 by the American War of Independence, old sailing ships known as 'hulks' had to be brought into use on the Thames. In 1779 an Act introduced a new concept of hard labour for prisoners in the hulks, commencing with dredging the river Thames, and made provision for the building of two penitentiaries. There was considerable delay in building these institutions. Transportation to Australia became possible in 1787, thus relieving the pressure on the hulks, so it was not until 1816 that construction of convict prisons commenced. Hulks continued to be used until 1859 and at one time contained 70,000 prisoners, many being French prisoners of war captured after the defeat of Napoleon. See Amy Edwards, 'Home Office: 1782–1982' (London, 1982), p.2. Document available via HM Prison Service Website.

5. Ibid.

6. John Howard, 'The State of the Prisons' (1777).

7. Evidence exists of the particular relevance of commercially-orientated needlework to these initiatives. In the Great Exhibition catalogue of 1851, several examples of quilts and needlework were displayed by the inmates of Richmond Lunatic Asylum, and further examples by the Royal Victoria Asylum for the Blind. See *The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, 1851: Official Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue in Three Volumes*, Vol. 2 (London, 1851), pp.569 and 570. Richmond Lunatic Asylum also displayed quilts at Ireland's 'National Exhibition of 1852', along with the Dublin District Lunatic Asylum, Richmond Female Penitentiary and Cork County Gaol. See John Francis Maguire, *The Industrial Movement in Ireland, as Illustrated by the National Exhibition of 1852* (Dublin, 1853), p.258.

8. The reformatory view of prisons between 1815 and 1835 was in the large part characterised by the zeal of religious societies. For example, the Society for the Improvement of Prison Discipline and the Reformation of Juvenile Offenders was active during this time, and its committee included well known Quakers and members of the Church of England such as Joseph Fry, William Allen, Samuel Guerney, Thomas Hancock, Samuel Hoare, Thomas Foxwell Buxton, Lord Suffield, William Crawford, Johnand Walter

Venning and Francis Cunningham. For a further account see William James Forsythe, *The Reform of Prisoners 1830–1900* (London, 1987), p.17.

9. Thomas Timpson gives the following account of Elizabeth Fry's initial impressions: 'The part of the prison allotted to them was a scene of the wildest disorder. Swearing, drinking, gambling, and fighting, were their only employments; filth and corruption prevailed on every side.' See Thomas Timpson, *Memoirs of Mrs Elizabeth Fry: including a history of her labours in promoting the reformation of female prisoners, and the improvement of British seamen* (New York, 1847), p.29.

10. Peter Gordon and David Doughan, *A Dictionary of British Women's Organisations: 1825–1960* (London, 2005), p.29.

11. Robert Bell, 'The Rajah Quilt'.

12. Such practices in prison work originated amongst wider social reform movements, such as calls for the abolition of slavery. See Annemieke van Drenth and Francisca de Haan, *The Rise of Caring Power: Elizabeth Fry and Josephine Butler in Britain and the Netherlands* (Amsterdam, 1999), p.169.

13. Elizabeth Fry, *Observations on the Visiting, Superintending, and Government, of Female Prisoners* (Norwich, 1827), p.7.

14. Annemieke van Drenth and Francisca de Haan, *The Rise of Caring Power: Elizabeth Fry and Josephine Butler in Britain and the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999).

15. Ibid.

16. For example, the V&A holds a sampler stitched by Elizabeth Parker. The sampler tells the story of its maker in red stitches on a neutral ground. She describes her family, the violence and 'cruelty' that she encounters when she enters into service at the age of thirteen, and her thoughts on taking her own life. The narrative ends ambiguously, with Elizabeth contemplating 'what will become of my soul'. For further information on the sampler see Maureen Daly Goggin, 'One English Woman's Story in Silken Ink: filling in the missing strands in Elizabeth Parkers circa 1830 sampler', 'Sampler and Antique Needlework Quarterly' vol.29 (Winter 2002).

17. Elizabeth Fry, *Observations on the Visiting, Superintending, and Government, of Female Prisoners* (Norwich, 1827), p.51.

18. Ibid, p.49.

19. Ibid, pp.49–52.

20. John Francis Maguire, *The Industrial Movement in Ireland, as Illustrated by the National Exhibition of 1852* (Dublin, 1853), p.258.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid. pp.259–60.

23. Ibid. p.260.

24. Ibid. pp.260–61.

25. Information from the Australian National Quilt Register. Further information is held at the National Gallery of Australia on the Rajah's voyage and the women transported to Australia.

26. Ibid.

27. Robert Bell, 'The Rajah Quilt'.

28. In the case of some of the square patches, tiny pieces of chintz have been pieced together to give the appearance of complete squares, or supplemented with plainer cottons.

29. Carolyn Ferguson, 'A Study of Quakers, Convicts and Quilts' in 'Quilt Studies' 8 (2007), pp.54–5.

30. Ibid. There is also a subtext to the quilt in that the fashionable textiles and broderie perse design clearly connect with a strand of society for whom travel and exploration widened access to luxury goods, while for the makers of the Rajah quilt, journeying across the globe brought with it a huge amount of trepidation.

31. Carolyn Ferguson, 'A Study of Quakers, Convicts and Quilts', Quilt Studies 8 (2007), p.45.

32. Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore* (London: 2003), p.154.

33. Ibid., p.138.

34. The later examples of the Changi quilts, created by women in the internment camps after the surrender of Singapore to Japanese troops in 1942, affirm the close affiliation between quilting and systems of communication. Although these women were prisoners of war rather than convicts, each patch communicates the survival of a woman, her endurance, her time passed, and her refusal to disappear from the visual landscape. One of these quilts is now held by the British Red Cross Museum in London. See http://www.redcross.org.uk/.

35. Annette Holland and Rebecca Price, Fine Cell Work Newsletter (London, 2006).

36. Ibid. Government statistics suggest that six out of ten prisoners reoffend with two years of their release, and economic pressures are often cited as one of the main reasons. Recent policy documents such as 'Reducing Re-offending Through Skills and

Employment' (2005) and 'Reducing Re-Offending Through Skills and Employment: Next Steps' (2006) set out how education and learning can contribute to this goal. These documents are accessible via the Ministry of Justice's 'Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills' website (cited 2008)

37. Annette Holland and Rebecca Price, Fine Cell Work Newsletter (London, 2006).

38. For further information on the exhibition see http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/English/EventsExhibitions/Past (cited 2008). Liza Ramrayka offers an analysis of the exhibition and its relation to reform initiatives, and suggests its high success rate. Of the 15 inmates who started the project, 11 completed the course. The weekly attendance rate was 86%, and 50% of those who completed an evaluation for the Museum of London said that they had acquired useful knowledge or skills 'to a high extent', while the same proportion said they had done so 'to a good extent'. See Liza Ramrayka, 'Unlocking potential', *Museums Journal* 39 (November 2006), pp.38–41.

39. Liza Ramrayka, 'Unlocking potential', *Museums Journal* 39 (November 2006), p.38.

40. http://www.mlasoutheast.org.uk/whatwedo/equality/ (cited 2008)

41. http://www.mlasoutheast.org.uk/whatwedo/equality/ (cited 2008)

42. Liza Ramrayka, 'Unlocking potential', *Museums Journal* 39 (November 2006), p.39.

43. http://www.mlasoutheast.org.uk/whatwedo/equality/ (cited 2008)

44. Ibid.

45. Further details on the project are available via http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/dept/ant/egypt/vir (cited 2008)

46. Ibid.

47. The exhibition ran at the Architecture Foundation's Yard Gallery, from 19 January to 16 February 2007. See http://www.architecturefoundation.org.uk (cited 2008)

48. http://www.architecturefoundation.org.uk (cited 2008)

49. Ibid.

50. Conversation between Fine Cell Works and an anonymous contributor to the HMP Wandsworth Quilt, transcribed by Katy Emck. In an email to the author, 28 August 2008.

51. Ibid.

52. Amy Edwards, Home Office: 1782–1982 (London, 1982), p.7. Document available via HM Prison Service Website (cited 2008)

53. Anonymous, ‘Letter from a Prisoner’ http://www.finecellwork.co.uk/ix/letters_article/author_letter_from_prisoner_page.htm (cited 28 August 2008)

54. Conversation between Fine Cell Works and an anonymous contributor to the HMP Wandsworth Quilt, transcribed by Katy Emck. In an email to the author, 28 August 2008. (LETTER FROM PRISONER_PAGE)

In Conversation: Dorothy Hogg, Artist in Residence

Sophie Leighton, Curator, Sculpture, Metalwork, Ceramics & Glass, Victoria and Albert Museum

Dorothy Hogg, Artist in Residence

I peer through the doors of the sparkling new residency studio in the V&A's Sackler Centre for arts education, where artist Dorothy Hogg is working. Dorothy, a jeweller and metalworker, was awarded a six-month residency here, and has made it her mission to create an inviting workspace. Images of her jewellery line the walls and real examples stand out in cases and on boards, revealing her processes and current work. Examples of workshop booty are pinned up on the wall, alongside explanations of past and future projects linked to Dorothy's residency at the Museum.

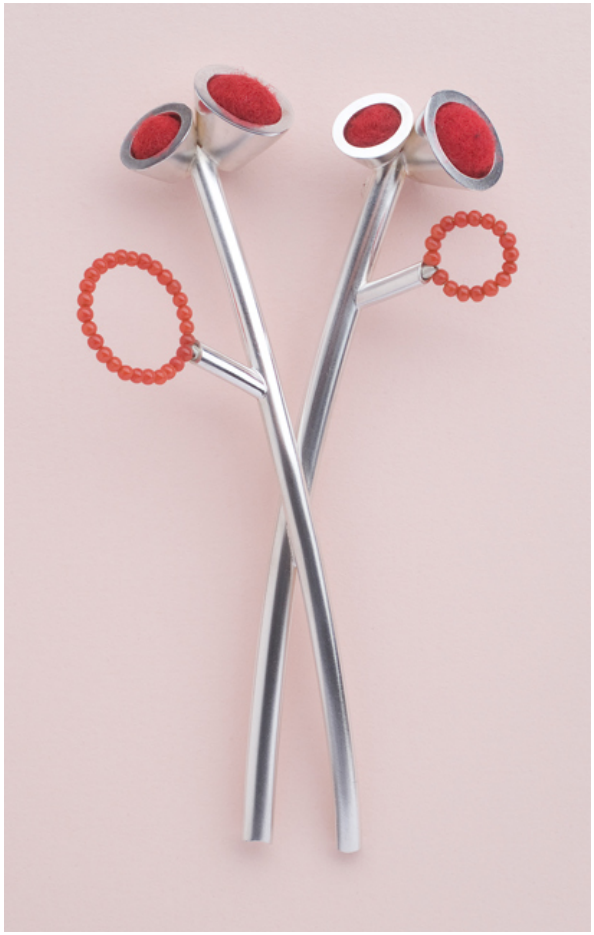
'This came at a good time for me' Dorothy says. She recently retired from her post as head of the Silversmithing and Jewellery Department at Edinburgh College of Art, where she had been since 1985. Official retirement has enabled her to take up opportunities such as this residency, utterly breaking away from her normal routines, environment and ways of working.

Dorothy is internationally recognised as a teacher and as an artist. 'I'm a teacher. That's what I do,' she explains. I don't have to ask much as Dorothy talks me through her work, anticipating my questions, revealing her thoughts and directions, and asking for my opinions.

Dorothy's CV reveals a lifetime of success as a world-renowned maker. In 2001 Dorothy was awarded an MBE for services to Jewellery and Silversmithing. Throughout her life, Dorothy has juggled home, teaching and her own creative practice, also finding time to curate exhibitions, sit

on educational and craft boards, and promote Scottish Jewellery across the world, by curating exhibitions, for example the two incarnations of the internationally touring exhibition of Scottish jewellery and silversmithing *100% Proof* in 2001 and 2006; and by her support of exhibitions such as Silver of the Stars. This was an internationally touring exhibition of work made in Scotland in collaboration with Scottish celebrities. It came to the V&A in 2007.

Dorothy leads me through a brief history of her jewellery and working processes. She shows me a case she calls her 'Jewellery Sketchbook': a beautiful display of three-dimensional ideas; trial runs of techniques and designs. 'Artists have sketchbooks,' she remarks, 'but I wanted to show visitors how metalworkers work'. Dorothy makes sketches in a book, and then, before creating a piece of work, will often trial pieces of her design by making a model or three-dimensional 'sketch'. This case reveals Dorothy's interest in the minute details of each object as well as highlighting her technical abilities. She likes to try making parts of an object to see how they work. She is fascinated by craft processes.



Brooch, *Artery* series by Dorothy Hogg MBE. Artist jeweller Dorothy Hogg is the V&A's first artist in residence in partnership with the Craft's Council. Dorothy is a well-known jewellery artist working primarily with precious metals.

The direction Dorothy's work takes expresses ideas which relate form to the human body. The sources for these formal interactions spring from a fusion of the subconscious with her visual experience. She explains that while she is at the V&A, she is not looking for inspiration but for a resonance with objects.

For Dorothy, design is a process of combining her ideas, influences and interests with what is happening internally. She points out examples of her early work of the 1960s and 1970s which are very angular. 'I think this style shows that I was quite stressed then,' she considers. Dorothy is clearly aligned to the world of contemporary jewellery in which objects express an artist's response to the world. This is in contrast to more traditional or commercial jewellery-making, where the maker's personality is hidden beneath conventional designs which often function to highlight the wealth and status of the owner.

In the 1960s Dorothy used enamel frequently, often the translucent plique-à-jour enamel. She liked the way that when a particular plique-à-jour enamelled ring was worn, light cast coloured shadows onto the skin. In the 1970s though, to use a Scottish term, she 'scunnered herself [became tired] of enamelling'. The process of grinding paste and producing enamelled angular shapes became too burdensome, Dorothy

explains.‘But who knows, I may go back to it’.

A later series of work shows Dorothy’s strong interest in the inherent versatility of a piece of jewellery. ‘Spirit Level’ is a series of jewellery that incorporates delicate metal loops that slide along silver bars. Dorothy likes the way that the jewellery changes depending on who wears it and how it is worn. A lot depends on the wearer, but of course Dorothy can’t predict who will wear each piece. ‘You can only make them for you and see what happens’.

‘I’m pretty obsessed with hollow forms’ Dorothy confesses, talking of her more recent work in particular. She makes thin oval tubes of silver, shaping them to her designs. They are organic, flowing forms. ‘I’ve noticed there is often a tension between lines or forms moving in opposite directions in my work’. Proportion is very important. Aiming at something beyond the aesthetic, Dorothy is not only creating ‘something that looks nice – there’s a kind of private language going on’.

Memento Mori by Dorothy Hogg, MBE. Silver and red felt.

Dorothy uses colour too. In this recent tubular collection, entitled the ‘Artery Series’ and incorporating pieces such as ‘Memento Mori’, she uses red felt. ‘Not because I like the colour red, but because it is important to use red for its symbolic value’. She used red beads for the neckpiece in the Artery series commissioned for Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery’s collection.

In this piece it looks as though the beads are simply and deftly embedded in the silver cone-shaped openings of the neckpiece. In fact the technical detail involved in internally fixing the beads in place by means of a basket structure attached to a handmade spring is incredible. Dorothy is a meticulous metalworker, and her patience and skill are manifest.

The residency at the V&A has given Dorothy extensive access to the Museum's collections. She explains that she is not always interested in the historical dates and details of pieces of the jewellery collection, as much as their aesthetic and technical qualities. She is visually moved. When 'devouring the collection', as she puts it, she was drawn to objects such as a plain ring. 'It was a very simple ring of lovely proportion but it had changed dimension by being worn. You could see it had a history'. Dorothy is interested in the stories that objects can tell.

Dorothy looks at objects through maker's eyes. Another piece that caught her eye was a seed pearl necklace (right) strung together with horsehair. In this case she was intrigued by the messy patterns that the knots created at the back of the necklace.

Necklace, England, about 1815. V&A Museum no. M.290-1976. Seed pearls mounted on mother-of-pearl.

Dorothy is not intending to emulate these pieces but is fascinated by their design and how they were

made. She finds enormous pleasure in looking closely at objects.

Since being at the V&A Dorothy has left behind her Edinburgh studio equipped with everything she needs as a silversmith. In the Museum flames are restricted, making annealing and soldering metal impossible, and so Dorothy has been in her words 'liberated' during this period to make work using materials other than metal. As metalworking is such a measured process, this break has given Dorothy an opportunity to experiment and 'loosen up, be a bit random', even if only temporarily. At the moment she is busy creating 'Sackler jewels' as she calls them, delicately sewn out of discarded plastic packing materials. She found plastic tubing from the new Sackler Centre chairs discarded in a skip outside the Museum, and carried them up to her workshop to experiment.

Using recycled materials works well within the framework of the residency and the outreach work she does. They are easily accessible and don't necessarily require any special skills to transform them. Dorothy wants to increase access to the processes and techniques of jewellery making. She wants to encourage people to recognise the potential of materials they find. 'Things can look amazing without doing much to them', Dorothy comments as she drapes a fragile piece of netting around her neck, suddenly transforming it into an elegant choker.

Dorothy has a blog on the V&A website that she calls Jewellery Resonances. It contains a wealth of information about her and the residency. Dorothy aims to use it to encourage people both to use recycled materials and to transform unlikely materials for Jewellery making. She would like website visitors to 'find, make and wear' and send in a photograph.

Despite the fact that Dorothy can't use a large flame, she is still using metal in the workshop. She has to employ simpler techniques, which in any case are easier for the public to

work with. In a recent three-day workshop with wire, Dorothy encouraged her students to experiment, investigating linking and chain techniques to create decorative structures, chain mail, and knitted structures in wire, trapping and attaching objects to create their own pieces.

Workshops play a large part in the residency. For the official opening of the Sackler centre on the weekend of 26–9 October 2008, Dorothy is going to run an activity for 4,000 visitors called the 'Chain of Talent' project. An oversize chain will be suspended through part of the Museum and visitors will be invited to make a charm to add to this 'charm bracelet chain of talent'.

Ornament, England, about 1850. Museum no. M.115-1951. Ornament in the shape of a spray of flowers in gold, silver and diamonds.

For another workshop, Dorothy was inspired by Lady Cory's corsage ornament (right), a star piece in the V&A's William and Judith Bollinger Jewellery Gallery. It is an enormous nineteenth-century bodice ornament in the form of a bouquet, encrusted with diamonds on springs that tremble elegantly with the movement of the wearer. I can see that Dorothy is interested in how this piece of jewellery changes in sync with the wearer's movements. Dorothy recognises the potential of this quivering jewellery and how it

could be applied to a project for school children. They will develop designs for brooches and door plaques, and the separate elements of the designs will tremble on small springs. Some examples are pinned to her wall, demonstrating the impressive effects achieved with basic materials. It must be great fun too.

Since the residency is supported by the Crafts Council, as well as running workshops and making her own work, Dorothy is involved with various creative mentoring schemes for emerging crafts people, run by the Crafts Council and Cockpit Arts. She is also involved with the organisation Innovative Craft, an initiative led by Amanda Game to develop events and exhibitions that will highlight excellence, achievement and innovation in craft.

The residency at the V&A is certainly wide ranging, and has exploited Dorothy's skills as both an artist and teacher. She has proven her versatility and creativity in adapting to new materials and techniques, and what is conveyed in our brief meeting is how well Dorothy can gauge people's interests and enthuse them about jewellery. In just an hour she has opened my mind – and I want to learn more.

Where will the residency lead Dorothy? She has immediate plans. She will be showing her work at Goldsmiths' Hall, London, in May 2009 and is currently curating an exhibition at Contemporary Applied Arts (CAA Gallery, London) to open in June 2009. Dorothy has enjoyed her time at the V&A and feels that for her, 'a door has been opened to a new set of visual experiences and opportunities'. I am looking forward to seeing what comes next.

For more information on Dorothy see the Craft Scotland Website

Dorothy is at the V&A from June to November 2008.

The Craft Residencies are supported by the Crafts Council and this is the first in a series of three. The Residency Programme is supported by The Paul Hamlyn Foundation and The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. The Residency Studios are open most Fridays and one weekend each month.

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