



## The Leicester Graduate Network

# Museum Studies *connect*



## Join us for our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations

In 2016, the School of Museum Studies will celebrate an important anniversary. Over the past fifty years the University of Leicester has become internationally known as a centre for leading-edge thinking and experimental practice in the field of museum studies. Today, the School of Museum Studies is a place for students and staff, researchers and practitioners from around the world to come together to think creatively and critically about museums, galleries and heritage; to explore and investigate, to experiment and create, to question and debate. To mark our fiftieth birthday we invite you to join us in Leicester for our fiftieth anniversary conference and associated events, including a number of pre-conference trips.

Today, no museum is entirely local – all are part of a global dialogue. Old geographical hegemonies and hierarchies are being

swept aside, to be replaced by a new sense of global inclusion which respects, preserves and enhances cultural specificity in the conceptualisation and operation of the museum. Museums now understand that they act in the today: that the pasts they hold and the futures they imagine are negotiated in the now.

To view the museum through the lens of the 'Global Contemporary' is profoundly empowering and fundamentally altering. It provides a new basis for understanding and privileging diversity whether considering audiences, practice or institutional values. It exposes injustice and offers benchmarks and inspiration for social and cultural action. It transforms how we think about media, connection, collaboration and reach. It affects everything and alters the possibilities of even the smallest of museums. It opens new dialogues.

A decade ago, the School of Museum Studies celebrated its 40th anniversary with *The Museum: A World Forum*. It marked a moment when Museum Studies came together as a coherent global field. The result of that conference was *Museum Revolutions*, a book that considered how museums bring about change but also about how they themselves are changed. *The Museum in the Global Contemporary* is different. It speaks to the now – a now that has only been realised with the return of China to the world stage. This historic event gave a sense that the whole planet was for the first time engaged in open communication, where all voices might be heard. So let's talk!

**Book your place here**

### Contents

- 2 PhD Reflections
- 5 Museum Studies 'Family' Photos
- 5 National Galleries - The Art of Making Nations
- 6 Behind the Scenes at the 21st Century Museum
- 6 The Future of Museum and Gallery Design
- 7 New Lecturers join the School of Museum Studies
- 8 Japanese Princess completes year of study at the School of Museum Studies

# PhD Reflections

## Alan Kirwan

I clearly remember when I came to the decision that I wanted to pursue a PhD with the School of Museum Studies at Leicester. It was the summer of 2007 and I was standing on a packed train one morning on my daily commute to work in London. Squashed up against other commuters, I pulled a book called 'Museums, Society and Inequality' out of my bag and started reading. The authors within that book brought me on a journey of just how museums in different countries and continents are embracing a whole host of issues relevant to our societies. Human rights, the inclusion of marginalised and indigenous communities, the recognition of the contributions of disabled people to culture and society, the over-arching power of museums as places of social change all jumped from the pages.

I was to discover that the editor, Richard Sandell, along with his colleagues at Leicester, are in the vanguard of such

thinking about the purposes of museums and I knew I needed to learn from them. As it later transpired, Richard was to become my supervisor during my time at Leicester. My PhD analyses the extent to which Irish museums could be effective tools in the construction of a diverse and inclusive society in that country. I balanced work on my PhD with a full time job as Education Manager for the Museums and Culture Services of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea in London. The extensive theoretical underpinning that I received at Leicester flowed seamlessly into my working life.

For instance, one of the museums I worked in during this time was the stunning Leighton House Museum with its beautiful combination of British and Middle Eastern art and architecture. The artefacts and objects, while precious in themselves, took on a whole new meaning and significance for me in those tense years following the London underground bombings of 2005. Through educational

and public programming I successfully positioned the museum as a public space where suspicion and mistrust between communities is dissolved and dialogue on difficult topics becomes possible.

I currently live and work in Brussels, Belgium, a city that is in temporary 'lock-down' as a result of the after effects of the recent terrorist attacks in Paris. Suspicion and mistrust of the 'other' is once again on the prowl and is something I cannot ignore in my current role as Education Co-ordinator of the House of European History, a project of the European Parliament. I am part of the management team working to create a museum, due to open in 2016, that takes a trans-national and multi-perspective view of European histories. The grounding I received at Leicester is never far from my mind as I try to ensure that this new museum and its programming reflects the complexity and diversity of what it might mean to be European.



## Alex Woodall

It was with some trepidation but also much excitement that I embarked upon my PhD journey in the School of Museum Studies four years ago (having done Art Gallery Studies in 2004-5 after being a secondary school teacher). Since studying for my MA and working at Museums Sheffield, Manchester Art Gallery and Renaissance East Midlands, I kept in close contact with the School, regularly being invited to teach and hosting placement students, all the time hoping that one day I might undertake PhD research. And so I was thrilled to receive an AHRC award in 2011 to enable this to happen.

My PhD draws upon my professional experience of gallery interpretation (especially **working with artists to explore collections** and developing use of **Object Dialogue Boxes**) uniquely linking these with my previous academic background in theology. Entitled 'Sensory engagements with objects in art galleries: material interpretation and theological metaphor', I feel very privileged that my research has been supervised by lead thinker in museum materialities, Dr Sandra Dudley. Of course the opportunity for critical engagement with

academic debate and reflection on practice has been absolutely central to my research experience at Leicester. But just as important have been the 'extra-curricular' opportunities presented by simply being in such a dynamic environment: my PhD experience in the School has been one of immersion within a diverse and passionate community.

I have grasped as many opportunities as possible within the School, sharing and developing skills in the process. From overseeing the day-to-day PhD community as student rep, to sitting on the School's research committee, to organising museum expeditions and artist-led workshops, to managing the conference team for **Museum Metamorphosis**, to working as a **researcher with RCMG**, to teaching and assessing MA students' work, I have relished being amongst such a dynamic cohort of PhD colleagues and staff. And because of the supportive nature of the School, PhD students are also encouraged to make their own opportunities, which has enabled curation of the **Mouseion** exhibition, writing articles for various peer-reviewed publications (including the PhD community's **Museological Review**), contributing chapters to edited volumes,

and presenting at various conferences both in the UK and internationally. Four years ago, I would never have thought that a PhD could offer so much.

Perhaps the most powerful and transformative experience of my PhD journey has been researching on a partnership project between the School of Museum Studies and its equivalent in India, the National Museum Institute, New Delhi, which is led by Drs Sandra Dudley and Manvi Seth. **Things Unbound** has enabled me not only to undertake significant object-based research in India, but has also enabled new international friendships and a desire to delve even deeper into this sort of cross-cultural creative and collaborative research in the future.

I have just started work as Special Projects Manager at the Royal Armouries in Leeds, a temporary role that I know will be as challenging as it is rewarding. But I am confident that what I have learnt during my PhD journey in the School of Museum Studies – not least to grasp every opportunity and to make things happen – will constantly be the driving force in my continuing professional practice and research, and I look forward to the next chapter.





## Serena Iervolino

2013 was a memorable year for me. I completed my PhD, simultaneously experiencing a great sense of achievement but also terror. "What's my next challenge?" I wondered. Studying at the School of Museum Studies had provided me with countless opportunities to stretch my abilities, preparing myself for an academic position, such as teaching/marketing, research assistance, conference organisation, and an academic management post.

Writing from Doha, Qatar, where I currently work as Lecturer in Museology and Curatorial Studies and Coordinator of the MA in Museum and Gallery Practice at UCL Qatar, I can confidently state that a Leicester PhD in Museum Studies was life-changing for me.

After submitting my PhD (March 2013), I returned to work for the School, conducting research for Prof. Richard Sandell's forthcoming book and working on a project investigating graduates' career development and employability. "Museum Studies Connect", including its Newsletter and "the Graduate Profile" section you are reading right now, were envisaged in this context.



In spring 2013 I was also "headhunted" as a Postdoctoral Researcher on the Science Museum's Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded All Our Stories project (April 2013 – March 2014), which examined the museum's collaborative practices with several communities or interest groups. I had the unique opportunity to study - at a major national museum - co-creative practices, focusing particularly on a collaboration with the organisation **Gendered Intelligence** and its trans youth group. The challenge would soon become how to balance this research commitment with the teaching role I secured at Warwick University, in September 2013.

As a Teaching Fellow in Cultural Policy Studies (academic year 2013-14), I worked with cultural policy scholars such as Dr Clive Gray, expanding my knowledge of cultural policies studies, a field upon which my research draws extensively, and solidifying my teaching skills developed at Leicester.

In 2014 Dr Ceri Jones (RCMG, University of Leicester) and I were awarded funding through the AHRC for the project **Research in Translation: Public Engagement through Exhibition Displays** (2014-2015), exploring how academic research can be communicated to wider audiences using

exhibition displays. By the time the project actually begun I was moving to Qatar, so my dilemma was how to keep working on it after my "migration".

Earlier in the summer I had landed an exciting lectureship in a rather "exotic" country – possibly a once-in-a-life-time opportunity, or a "great adventure", as some called it. My limited knowledge of the Arab and Islamic world and my interest in museums and issues of cultural identity and cross-cultural understanding made Qatar a fascinating place to be. In teaching museum theory and practice in a country whose museum sector is under development, I would have a unique opportunity to rethink museum theory and practice from a non-Western, Arab and Islamic perspective.

The academic year 2014-15 was an intense learning curve. Highlights of the year included receiving the award of one of University of Leicester's College of Arts, Humanities and Law's 2014-15 Doctoral Prize and **Inaugural Lectures** (May 2015), as well as the launch of the exhibition **Research in Translation** at Leicester University (June 2015), marking the completion of the project of the same name.

Soon after that, an opportunity to move my career forward was offered to me, after the resignation of the then Coordinator of the MA in Museum and Gallery Practice at UCL Qatar. Whilst labour-intensive, my new role as Degree Coordinator allows me to lead on the programme's developments and curriculum changes, ensuring that the students learn the skills, knowledge and acquire the confidence to act as critical, responsible, and ethical museum practitioners, and effectively contribute to, and potentially transform the museum sector in Qatar and internationally. This year we have 22 students on the programme, the majority of whom are Qataris, other Arabs or long-term residents many of whom already work at **Qatar Museums**. As both Lecturer and Degree Coordinator, I feel that - from UCL's Middle-Eastern outpost - I can implement and more vigorously disseminate the values that I learnt at the School of Museum Studies, particularly the belief in museums' potential to contribute to social change, as well as those that are dear to UCL.

If you happened to be in Qatar or in the region, please get in touch ([s.iervolino@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:s.iervolino@ucl.ac.uk)) and come to meet/visit us. I should warn you - I might ask you to share some of your experience and knowledge with my students!



## Museum Studies 'Family' Photos

Having recently arrived at the School of Museum Studies as Museum Liaison and Student Support Officer, I have the exciting task of administering Museum Studies Connect! It's a big year for the School with our 50th Anniversary Conference coming up in April. We hope that you'll be able to join us for what promises to be a weekend of global delights, with speakers from Hong Kong, Australasia, Canada and the Netherlands. We'd also really like to use this opportunity to gather together our collective memories of the past 50 years. A graduate myself, I've been looking through the School's photographs. There are many giggles to be had – not least from my own class photo here (second from the left on the back row!) We're now asking you to send your own Museum Studies photos to me at [sa563@le.ac.uk](mailto:sa563@le.ac.uk) sharing any memories you have of your time here, and what you are doing now. I will then upload the best of these to the **website**. Please join in!

Sarah Allard



## National Galleries - The Art of Making Nations

Simon Knell's forthcoming book *National Galleries: The Art of Making Nations* is the first to undertake a globally inclusive, panoramic view of any genre of museum. National galleries, sometimes called national museums of fine art, are now found in almost every nation on earth. Simon considers both the so-called 'great' galleries and smaller institutions that are deeply involved in developing national art and artists. Focusing primarily on exhibitions of paintings around the world, he reveals the role national galleries play in developing national art histories and in weaving art into the nation's sense of itself. The book will be published in January 2016.



## Behind the Scenes at the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum

If you missed the opportunity to sign-up for our highly successful, free online course, 'Behind the Scenes in the 21st Century Museum', then fear not, the six-week, online course is back and will run again from Monday 18th January 2016.

Developed in partnership with National Museums Liverpool and FutureLearn, the course explores some of the issues facing the contemporary museum as well as showcasing the latest teaching and research from the School of Museum Studies, accompanied by cutting-edge case studies from National Museums Liverpool, one of the UK's most forward looking museum services.

Over the six weeks, the course explores issues such as how museums can engage with new audiences, how they can contribute to issues of social justice, human rights and health and wellbeing and how museums

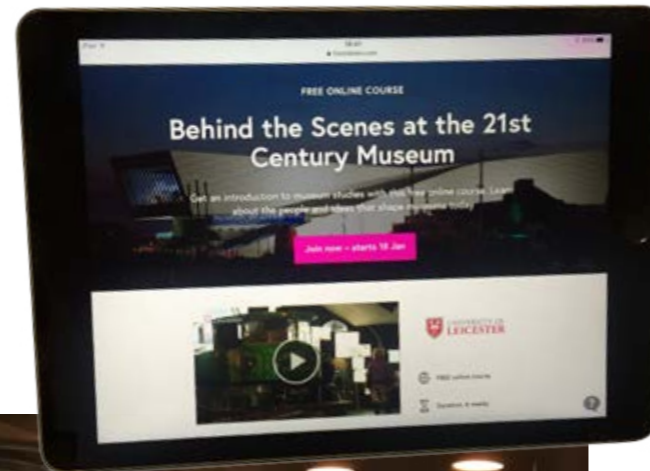
(and museum visitors) operate at an emotional level and what that means for museum staff.

The course, which requires a minimum of two hours study per week, offers a wealth of online video and audio content, but most importantly gives you the opportunity to join the conversation with thousands of other learners from around the world. The first run of the course saw over 11,000 people sign up from all over the world. Between them they posted in excess of 44,000 comments.

The discussion was lively (to say the least) and we were delighted to hear such a range of thoughts and opinions from our learners. It was quite clear that our learners did not always agree with us, but that

is what made the course so exciting for us and the thousands of participating learners who engaged in the online discussions.

Already thousands of people have signed up for the course's next run. If you want to join the conversation, you can find out more by visiting [www.futurelearn.com/courses/museum](http://www.futurelearn.com/courses/museum)



## The Future of Museum and Gallery Design

November 2015 saw more than 150 museum professionals, museum, gallery and exhibition designers and museum design researchers from around the world converge on Hong Kong for a conference, initiated and led by Suzanne MacLeod, Head of the School of Museum Studies, to explore new approaches to and future developments in design for the cultural sector. The conference drew together a critical and international mass of expertise from a range of cultural traditions in order to create a dynamic forum for the sharing of ideas and the development of new skills and knowledge. It showcased leading-edge approaches to the design of 21st century museums and galleries, provided a platform for new research and thinking on museum design and generated new insights that will inform thinking and practice across the sector. A book will come out of this extraordinary event – watch this space – and more details of the speakers and partners can be found on the website - [www.thefutureofmuseumandgallerydesign.wordpress.com](http://www.thefutureofmuseumandgallerydesign.wordpress.com)



## New Lecturers join the School of Museum Studies

The School is delighted to welcome two new members of staff, Isobel Whitelegg and Stacy Boldrick. Isobel is an art historian, lecturer and curator. She specialised in Latin American Art at the University of Essex and has published widely on the international reception of art from Latin America. Prior to joining the School of Museum Studies, Isobel was Course Director for the MA in Curating at Chelsea College of Art and Design and a member of the TrAIN Research Centre, University of the Arts London. More recently she was Liverpool John Moores University Research Curator at the Tate Research Centre and Head of Nottingham Contemporary's Public Programme. Isobel's teaching focuses on contemporary art institutions, including museums of contemporary art as well as non-collecting types such as art centres, and biennials.

Stacy has joined the School of Museum Studies as a Lecturer after eight and a half years as Curator of Research and Interpretation at The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. She writes about contemporary

and medieval art and iconoclasm, and has undertaken freelance curatorial work for museums and galleries such as Tate Britain and Aberdeen Art Gallery. Curatorial collaborations range from Wonder: Painted Sculpture from Medieval England (Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, 2002; co-curated with David Park and Paul Williamson) to Art under Attack: Histories of British Iconoclasm (Tate Britain, 2013; co-curated with Tabitha Barber). Publications include Iconoclasm: Contested Objects, Contested Terms (Ashgate, 2007; co-edited with Richard Clay) and Striking Images: Iconoclasm Past and Present (Ashgate, 2013; co-edited with Leslie Brubaker and Richard Clay). She has been an Honorary Fellow in History of Art, University of Edinburgh/Edinburgh College of Art since 2007.

Stacy and Isobel will both be teaching on the School's MA in Art Museum and Gallery Studies, supervising PhD students as well as making broader contributions across the School's research and professional development activities.





## Japanese Princess completes year of study at the School of Museum Studies

One of the School of Museum Studies upcoming graduates is Her Imperial Highness Princess Mako of Akishino. A member of the Japanese Imperial Family, Mako is the eldest daughter of Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess of Akishino and the first-born granddaughter of Their Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko.

As part of her degree programme Princess Mako has also completed a placement at Coventry Museums and collections-based research at New Walk Museum in Leicester.

Speaking at a press opportunity marking the end of her year of taught Master's degree, Princess Mako said in Japanese that her time

at the University of Leicester had been "a wonderful experience".

Head of the School of Museum Studies Dr Suzanne Macleod said: "We have a strong connection to the cultural profession in Japan with many students graduating from our School to take up posts in museums and galleries there and so it felt very natural that Mako should come and follow her interests with us. She has been a pleasure to teach, has worked incredibly hard and should be very proud of her achievements."

Princess Mako will graduate from the University in January 2016 when the University holds its postgraduate degree ceremonies.



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All information in this document was correct at the time of going to press. However, changes and developments are part of the life of the University, and alterations may occur to the programmes and services described in this newsletter.