

## Impact case study (REF3b)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Nottingham
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> American and Canadian Studies
<b>Title of case study:</b> Recovering Art: Influencing Curatorial and Archival Practice Around the Collection and Display of Lost and Neglected Black and Latino Art
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>The interdisciplinary study of Black and Latino visual cultures by Professor Celeste-Marie Bernier and Dr Stephanie Lewthwaite has led to the retrieval of lost and neglected art from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and to the display of this artwork for the first time. The research and recovery process has provided new information for curators and archivists who have begun to change their practice to reflect this expanded canon.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>In their roles as Associate Professor (2008-2012), then Professor of African American Studies (2012-present), and Lecturer in American History (2004-present), Bernier and Lewthwaite have published extensively in the fields of African American, Black Diasporic and Latino visual cultures. They have succeeded in retrieving lost and neglected art and artists from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and in mapping alternative art traditions across a range of media, including installation, photography, painting, sculpture, textiles and performance art.</p> <p>Bernier has charted for the first time a tradition of black transatlantic heroism in literary and visual culture (<b>reference 1</b>). This includes the documentation of visual images of Frederick Douglass (<b>references 2-3</b>), proving for the first time that he is the most photographed American of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (rather than Abraham Lincoln or Walt Whitman, as scholars have claimed previously). Lewthwaite has demonstrated patterns of cross-cultural exchange in the arts that have shaped Latino identity politics, new spaces for self-representation and critical responses to dominant forms of modernism and regionalism, also offering a socio-cultural history for this Latino artwork (<b>references 4-5</b>). Lewthwaite's "Art Across Frontiers" special issue is one of few studies to bring African American, Native American and Latino art into comparative and inter-American perspective in a sustained fashion (<b>reference 6</b>). Both scholars have mapped alternative transnational, transatlantic and transcultural flows in American visual culture, and have linked historical and contemporary art scenes with the politics of ethnic representation through their attention to diverse art markets and institutions ranging from cultural tourism to the museum. Through publications and symposia, this body of research has revealed the exclusionary nature of dominant art worlds and archives, emphasising that the marginalisation and disenfranchisement of artists from local and global art markets should remain important and politicized concerns for curators, exhibition consultants and community-based cultural activists. Existing art historical narratives limit our understanding of artistic practice and cultural mobility, and Bernier and Lewthwaite have suggested that the recovery of art plays a critical role in rethinking the canons and hierarches that dominate institutional policy and market demands.</p>
<p><b>3. References to the research</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Celeste-Marie Bernier, <i>Characters of Blood: Black Heroism in the Transatlantic Imagination</i> (University Press of Virginia, 2012) [listed in REF2].</li> <li>2. Celeste-Marie Bernier, "The Face of a Fugitive Slave': Representing and Reimagining Frederick Douglass in Popular Illustrations, Fine Art Portraiture and Daguerreotypes," in Magnus Brechtken (ed.), <i>Life Writing and Political Memoir</i> (Vandenhoeck &amp; Ruprecht, 2012) [listed in REF2].</li> <li>3. Celeste-Marie Bernier, "A 'Typical Negro' or a 'Work of Art?' The 'Inner' via the 'Outer Man' in Frederick Douglass's Manuscripts and Daguerreotypes," <i>Slavery &amp; Abolition</i> 33.2 (2012): 287-303 [DOI: 10.1080/0144039X.2012.669905].</li> <li>4. Stephanie Lewthwaite, <i>Race, Place, and Reform in Mexican Los Angeles: A Transnational</i></li> </ol>

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*Perspective, 1890-1940* (University of Arizona Press, 2009) [listed in REF2].

5. Stephanie Lewthwaite, "Modernism in the Borderlands: The Life and Art of Octavio Medellín," *Pacific Historical Review*, 81.3 (2012): 337-370 [DOI: 10.1525/phr.2012.81.3.337].

6. Stephanie Lewthwaite, "Reworking the Spanish Colonial Paradigm: Mestizaje and Spirituality in Contemporary New Mexican Art," *Journal of American Studies*, 47:2 (2013), 339-362 (part of Lewthwaite's special issue, *Art Across Frontiers*) [DOI: 10.1017/S002187581300011X].

**4. Details of the impact****Dissemination of ideas**

In order to better disseminate their research, Bernier and Lewthwaite have worked to publically redefine the terms "Black" and "Latino". Bernier discussed black stereotypes in the context of 19<sup>th</sup>-century cultural depictions on Melvin Bragg's Radio 4 programme "In Our Time" (**source 1**), while Lewthwaite used her research on the relationship between Latino culture and identity politics for a video lecture on the term "Latino," which received 8000 views between March and July 2013, and prompted an online debate in which viewers reflected on their own identities and the power of ethnic labelling, while questioning assumptions about the meaning of the term "American" as well as "Latino" (**source 2**).

**Retrieving previously neglected art and influencing institutional decisions about its collection and display**

In early 2010, Lewthwaite recovered artwork by local Dallas-based Mexican American sculptor Octavio Medellín while on a fellowship at Southern Methodist University (SMU). Her discovery highlighted the need for archivists at the SMU Hamon Arts Library's Bywaters Special Collections to develop more inclusive and representative archival resources, and supported their decision to expand the digitization of the Medellín archive. The head of the Bywaters Special Collections stated that "Lewthwaite's research has validated the decision to digitize the Medellín archive and is evidence of the project's value" (**source 3**). The Digital Collections Developer added that Lewthwaite's research provided "documentation to support the funding of continued digitization efforts" by "demonstrating how the digital collection can promote the study of Mexican-American art, Texas regional art, and art history" (**source 4**). Lewthwaite's research has since helped promote the recovery of Medellín as a Texas modernist. An art historian, who has included Medellín in a forthcoming book as a result of Lewthwaite's research, explained that Lewthwaite "did much to 'recover' [Medellín] as a truly bicultural modernist" and that she had successfully situated his work "within a broader, international sociological and cultural context" (**source 5**).

Between 2010 and 2013, Bernier retrieved more than 150 photographs of the black abolitionist Frederick Douglass, most of which were long-lost and never published. Bernier's research has contextualised these many photographic portraits as Douglass launching a black heroic tradition in visual culture. The recovery process has included the identification of images that were uncatalogued and unrecognized as Douglass, and the dating of rare images for archivists at the collections that hold the photographs. In one of many examples of consultation, Bernier helped archivists at Michigan's Clements Library understand the significance of a rare Douglass photograph that the library displayed for the first time. Her insights added "another layer of meaning" to "a never-before-seen image", explained the librarians. The "investigation" undertaken with Bernier "makes the image more intriguing" and the library appreciated Bernier's advice that the scrapbooked photograph in its original form "may have been an ambrotype, although there's a considerable likelihood that it was a daguerreotype, which would make the original image an even greater rarity" (**source 6**).

**Creating networks around Black and Latino visual culture that lead to new practice, exhibitions, and areas of knowledge**

As well as working with archivists on recovery, Bernier and Lewthwaite have brought together archivists, curators, museum professionals, artists and academics to share research and ideas about African American, Black Diasporic and Latino art and artists. Bernier worked with Black

British artists, the Institute for North American Studies at King's College London, and the Rothermere American Institute (RAI) at Oxford University (as Senior Visiting Research Fellow in 2013) to offer a number of public events and initiatives that helped to reshape curatorial thinking. For example, as a result of Bernier's Terra Foundation-sponsored conference, "Art Across the Black Diaspora: Visualizing Slavery in America" (RAI, May 2013, attended by 60 people) which brought together artists, curators, art critics and scholars, one black British artist claimed that Bernier is "transforming the way that the work of artists and curators from the black diaspora is critically discussed in studios, galleries and museums," especially by encouraging audiences to connect black art with "political histories." She added: "By consistently giving artists a most valuable platform upon which to share the critical challenges of practice and process, theory, history and politics, [Bernier] has allowed space for the development of future partnerships and the possibility of new ways to connect with future audiences" (**source 7**). In an example of early-stage impact that will be developed over the next three years, Bernier also partnered with the Institute of International Visual Arts (a leading UK contemporary visual arts organisation) to produce a new archive of interviews with black British artists, many of whom were interviewed for the first time.

A curator who attended Lewthwaite's Terra Foundation-sponsored international symposium, "Art Across Frontiers: Cross-Cultural Encounters in America" (April 2011; 28 attendees) has since used the work presented at the symposium to organise a public lecture and exhibition on the Guyanese artist Frank Bowling at Tate Britain titled "Focus: Frank Bowling" (April 2012-March 2013). The Bowling exhibition generated a series of online resources, including an artist's interview, a TateShots video interview, a long form interview in *Frieze Magazine* (May 2012), and reviews in major UK newspapers and magazines (*The Guardian*, *Independent* and *TimeOut*). The curator said of Lewthwaite's symposium: "These connections are invaluable. As a curator, I need to be attuned to how exhibition practices vary widely in different national contexts. One of the major outcomes from the symposium was the chance to gain feedback on this research whilst working on the [Bowling] exhibition. 'Art Across Frontiers' was a useful method of connection for me with scholars working in the UK and in the Americas" (**source 8**).

##### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Bernier's radio appearance (viewed 12/11/13), available from: <http://castroller.com/podcasts/InOurTime6/3033826>
2. Lewthwaite's video lecture with viewer debate (viewed 12/11/13), available from: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=VldVM4vNh3A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VldVM4vNh3A)
3. Head of the Bywaters Special Collections, Hamon Arts Library, SMU (contact details on file).
4. Digital Collections Developer, Central University Libraries, SMU (contact details on file).
5. Art historian, Baylor University (contact details on file).
6. Comments on Bernier's photograph consultation (viewed 12/11/13), available from: [www.law.umich.edu/newsandinfo/features/Pages/Douglass\\_artifact.aspx](http://www.law.umich.edu/newsandinfo/features/Pages/Douglass_artifact.aspx)
7. Artist and Curator who benefitted from Bernier's network creation (contact details on file).
8. Curator who benefitted from Lewthwaite's network creation (contact details on file).