

<b>Institution: University of Aberdeen</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 30 - History</b>
<b>Title of case study:</b> Creating Cultural Capital and Economic Benefits Through Biographical Study of the Artist Edward Burra
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Prior to Stevenson's 2007 biography, the work of the mid-twentieth-century artist Edward Burra was neglected within and beyond the academy. Following the publication of this biography, a major reassessment of his work has taken place. This has generated cultural capital, particularly through exhibitions based on Stevenson's research, including the first exhibition of Burra's work for 25 years, and a BBC4 documentary. The rediscovery of Burra has had a material impact on the price of his paintings, generating business for auction houses which, moreover, depend on Stevenson's research (disseminated through consultation) for attribution purposes and auction catalogue entries.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Edward Burra (29 March 1905 – 22 October 1976) has re-emerged as one of the most important painters of the twentieth century. His subjects ranged widely, from street scenes portraying African Americans in Harlem through macabre war scenes to brooding north Yorkshire landscapes. He painted almost entirely in watercolour, a medium which he reinvented and, through his landscape paintings, took far from its Victorian roots. Nonetheless, these choices departed from the more general approach of his modernist peers: oils, the abstract. As a result, and although in his own time he was considered one of England's major modern artists in both New York and Paris, he has generally been omitted from narratives of modernism.</p> <p>In order to address this neglect, during 2006 and 2007 Professor Jane Stevenson (employed at the University of Aberdeen from 1 Oct. 2000-present) undertook a comprehensive re-evaluation of Burra's life and works. The essential research was to study and cross-relate material (letters, ephemeral documents and photographs) in about a dozen archival collections. This research culminated in 2007 in the publication by Stevenson of the first biography of Burra. (1)</p> <p>Two features of Stevenson's research on Burra were particularly important in generating impact. First, it provided a meticulous, archive-based reconstruction of his life's activities, a level of fine-grained detail essential to galleries and auction houses. Due to the disordered way in which Burra managed his own papers, this task required the exploration of a wide range of archives. In particular, Stevenson's work established a meticulously documented chronology of Burra's life which proved invaluable for the attribution and dating of individual paintings – a vital resource for the subsequent usage of Stevenson's research by galleries and auction houses. This archival work has been further discussed by Stevenson in a recent article. (2) Second, most accounts of British twentieth-century art had neglected Burra's work, which did not fit the preconceived categorisations and understandings of the period. As a result, the scale and scope of his achievement had tended to be neglected. Stevenson highlighted the breadth of Burra's creative work, discovering, for example, that he had worked on film as well as stage and costume-design. Her research also re-assessed particular episodes of Burra's career. For example, it became possible to work out when he was in America and what he did there (he is an important witness to urban black culture, and his paintings of Harlem in particular are endlessly reproduced), and hence to date his Harlem paintings. Similarly, she showed how, late in his career, Burra re-invented the genre of landscape painting. This scholarly reassessment opened the way for a broader cultural re-engagement with Burra's work. (1)</p>
<p><b>3. References to the research</b></p> <p>(1) J. Stevenson, <i>Edward Burra: Twentieth Century Eye</i> (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007).</p> <p>Indicators that the output meets the 2* threshold: Andrew Causey positively reviewed it in <i>The</i></p>

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

*Burlington Magazine*, CL (April 2008), a major art historical journal.

Positive reviews were also published in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 16 November 2007; the *London Review of Books* 13 December 2007; *Guardian* 16 November 2007; *Observer*, 18 November 2007; *Spectator* 28 November 2007; *Sunday Times*, 16 November 2007; *Independent on Sunday*, 6 January 2008; and *Daily Telegraph*, 1 December 2007.

(2) J. Stevenson, "I can never find anything among the piles of old paper and general rubbish": Edward Burra and His Archive' in *All this Stuff: Archiving the Artist*, ed. Judy Vaknin et al (Faringdon: Libri Publishing, 2013), 157-170.

**4. Details of the impact**

Prior to Stevenson's intervention, Burra had been neglected not only within academia, but also more generally in the cultural sector. As Rachel Cooke observed in her review of Stevenson's book in *The Observer*, 'Edward Burra is not terribly fashionable these days. No, that's not right: he's neither fashionable, nor unfashionable, but simply forgotten'. (1) The biography, while meeting rigorous academic standards, also possessed a fluid and accessible style. It quickly attracted attention beyond the academy. The book was widely reviewed and it featured on Radio Four's *Book of the Week* programme in late 2007. Following this exposure, three main impacts and benefits have emerged from the book.

**4.1. Cultural Benefits through Exhibitions.** In the wake of Stevenson's book, there was a revival of interest in Burra in galleries, which generated cultural benefits for visitors. Two exhibitions at Tate Britain featured Burra's work prominently. Between 21 January and 4 May 2008, the gallery ran an exhibition on 'Burra in Harlem'. The exhibition was accompanied by a 'Burra study day' on 29 April 2008 for which Stevenson was invited (on the basis of her 'recent publication') to give a public lecture. (2) From 16 February to 21 August 2011, Tate Britain staged a major exhibition of British Watercolour featuring five Burra paintings. The exhibition attracted 160,036 visitors. As Rachel Cooke noted in the *Observer*, 'When it opened in February, Tate Britain's marvellous survey of watercolours gave pride of place to Burra's landscape, *Valley and River* (1972), and you could tell by the clustered overcoats in front of it that this was one of the pictures people would think about on the bus home'. (3) Following these events, Stevenson's research formed a key foundation for the first major exhibition of Burra's work in 25 years, held at the Pallant House in Chichester between 22 October 2011 and 19 February 2012. The exhibition was re-staged in Nottingham's Djanogly Art Gallery from 3 March to 27 May 2012. Stevenson's book was heavily consulted by the Pallant House Gallery, and she provided an essay for the exhibition's catalogue. In that catalogue the curator, Simon Martin, specifically acknowledged her 'insightful contribution' and noted that 'Jane (as the author of Burra's biography) has been immensely helpful with my queries about Burra's life'. (4) The Chichester Exhibition attracted 28,000 people, and a further 15,000 visitors attended in Nottingham. (7) Visitors to the Chichester exhibition commented:

- 'Superb retrospective of an often undervalued master'
- 'Fantastic!'
- 'Wonderfully protean'
- 'I knew this would be a good show but I didn't dream it would be this good'
- 'Excellent'
- 'Stunning body of work'
- 'Had never heard of Edward Burra until a week or so ago then the BBC4 programme made me want to come and see for myself. Fascinating exhibition, great paintings - so thought provoking' (5)

**4.2. Cultural Benefits: Inspiring A Television Documentary.** The last visitor quoted above had been inspired to visit the Pallant House Exhibition by the documentary on Burra, 'I Never Tell Anybody Anything: The Life and Art of Edward Burra', which aired on BBC4 on 25 October 2011. This documentary originated with Daniel Katz (of Katz Gallery, Bond Street), himself a collector of Burra's work. Having read Stevenson's biography, he commissioned director Phil Cairney to make a documentary that was presented by Andrew Graham-Dixon. Stevenson acted as consultant in the production process, answering questions, suggesting sources (e.g. the inclusion of material

## Impact case study (REF3b)

archived in the British Film Institute), and locations for filming. She also spent a day filming in the Tate Britain Archive, in conversation with Graham-Dixon, discussing letters, and being interviewed at length in the Lefevre Gallery. The hour-long documentary, which was also screened at the Pallant House exhibition, attracted an audience of 252,900. Thus, Stevenson's work inspired a further act of cultural production, facilitated by her expert advice. As a member of the production team commented: 'Your book definitely made everyone sit up and take notice of Edward Burra'. (6, see also 7)

**4.3. Commercial Benefits: Expert Advice to Auction Houses.** A key way in which purchasers of fine art expressed their notice was through a transformed level of demand for Burra's work. The ex-chairman of Sotheby's had 'no doubt' that Stevenson's book 'played a part in the revival of the artist'. (7) The ability of auction houses to cater to this demand was facilitated in fundamental ways by Stevenson's research. Burra did not date his work, and as a result both Sotheby's and Christie's frequently rely on Stevenson's expert advice for the attribution and catalogue entries of individual Burra paintings, as well as citing her research. It is here that the fine-grained detail of her biographical research is crucial to the impact of her research on these users since it creates (as the ex-chairman of Sotheby's put it) 'a specific framework of dating and provenance'. (7) She has provided expert advice for Sotheby's and advice and catalogue notes for Christie's.

- Advice on 'Beelzebub' for Modern British Paintings sale, Sotheby's, 12 July 2008. The catalogue note quotes materials from Stevenson's book.
- Advice on 'Beelzebub', for Modern British Paintings sale, Sotheby's, 25 March 2011
- Advice on dating Burra pictures for the Evill/Frost sale, Sotheby's, 16 June 2011. The catalogue entries for 'The Common Stair' and 'Zoot Suits' state that the auctioneers were 'grateful' for Stevenson's 'kind assistance with...cataloguing'.
- Advice and catalogue notes on 'The Tea Shop', 'The Garden', 'Seeds', and 'Landscape – Dartmoor' were commissioned by Christie's in preparation for sale on 16-17 November 2011.
- Advice and Catalogue notes on 'The Gorbals' and 'The Vegetable Stall', were commissioned by Christie's in preparation for sale, 23-24 May 2012.
- Advice and Catalogue notes on 'Landscape with Red Wheels' and 'Excavation', Christie's, 12-13 December 2012
- Advice and Catalogue notes on 'The Bouquet', Christie's, 11 July 2013 (7, 8, 9).

Since 2008, the price of Burra paintings has grown dramatically. For example, Burra was one of the stars at the Evill/Frost sale on 15 June 2011 (the greatest collection of 20th-Century British art ever to come to the market). Of the £37.8 million total, Burra's 'Zoot Suits' sold for a record £1.8 million. (10) From January 2008 to September 2011 the Auction Houses Index found that the value of Burra works had increased by 191 per cent. (10). Both the individual sale values and the rise in the index price of Burra's work highlight the economic value generated for these auction houses facilitated by Stevenson's research.

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

(1) Quoted material and Rachel Cooke's assessment of the neglect of Burra prior to the publication of Stevenson's work can be found in Rachel Cooke, 'He was always streets ahead', *The Observer*, 18 November 2007: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/nov/18/biography.features>

(2) An invitation to Stevenson from Tate Britain Adult Programmes, 7 December 2007 (available on request) corroborates her role at the Burra study day and the connection to her publication.

(3) The quote can be found in Rachel Cooke, *The Observer*, 23 October 2011: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/oct/23/edward-burra-pallant-house-review>; for visitor figures for the Tate Watercolour exhibition, see: <http://www.sal.org.uk/fundraising/dissemination/exhibition/>

(4) See Exhibition Catalogue, Simon Martin, 'Curator's Acknowledgements' in idem, *Edward Burra* (Chichester, Lund Humphries with the Pallant House Gallery, 2011), p. 173 for the quoted acknowledgement of Stevenson's contribution.

(5) The reviews and testimony quoted here can be found on the Pallant House Website:  
<http://pallant.org.uk/exhibitions1/past-exhibitions/2011/edward-burra/edward-burra/visitor-comments>

(6) E-mail correspondence (available on request) between Dilley and Stevenson and the Production Assistant and Researcher for the Documentary corroborates the role of Stevenson's research in the production of the documentary, the visitor figures for the Pallant House Exhibitions, and the viewing figures for the documentary.

(7) E-mail correspondence (available on request) between Stevenson and the ex-Chairman of Sotheby's UK, including quoted material, confirms the value of Stevenson's research for the functioning of the art market, the link between her book and the revival of interest in the market, and the role of her work in inspiring the Katz Gallery Documentary.

(8) Correspondence between Stevenson and the Associate Specialist, Christie's, UK, corroborates and illustrates Stevenson's work for the auction house as listed in the text.

(9) Formal public acknowledgements of Stevenson's assistance with preparing sale catalogues can be found in all of the following Sotheby's and Christie's auction catalogues:

- Catalogue notes for 'Beelzebub', Modern British Paintings Sale, Sotheby's, 12 July 2008, cite Stevenson's book:  
<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:fKp92iF9qqkJ:www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.notes.L08141.54.html+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk>
- Catalogue notes for 'Flamenco Dancer', 20<sup>th</sup> Century British Art Sale, Sotheby's, 10 December 2008, quotes material from Stevenson's book:  
<http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.pdf.L08144.html/f/29/L08144-29.pdf>
- Catalogue notes for 'The Common Stair', and 'Zoot Suits' at the Evill/Frost Sale, Sotheby's, 16 June 2011, acknowledge Stevenson's contribution:  
<http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.pdf.L11144.html/f/1/L11144-1.pdf>  
<http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.pdf.L11144.html/f/21/L11144-21.pdf>
- Catalogue notes for 'Flowers in a Bar', Sotheby's, 15 November 2011, cites Stevenson's book:  
<http://www.sothebys.com/it/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.pdf.L11142.html/f/23/L11142-23.pdf>
- Catalogue Notes on 'The Gorbals' prepared by Stevenson for Christie's Sale, 23-24 May 2012:  
<http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/paintings/edward-burra-the-gorbals-5560410-details.aspx?from=searchresults&intObjectID=5560410&sid=c30f4ea1-5410-45c4-85d8-8a85247b0de4>
- Catalogue Notes on 'Landscape, Dartmoor' prepared by Stevenson for Christie's Sale, 16 November 2012: <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/drawings-watercolors/edward-burra-landscape-dartmoor-5502352-details.aspx?from=searchresults&intObjectID=5502352&sid=c30f4ea1-5410-45c4-85d8-8a85247b0de4>
- Catalogue Notes on 'The Bouquet' prepared by Stevenson for Christie's Sale, 11 June 2013:  
<http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/drawings-watercolors/edward-burra-bouquet-5702085-details.aspx>

(10) For the figures on the result of the Evill/Frost sale, see 'Evill-Frost raises the Mod Brit bar', *Antiques Trade Gazette*, 20 June 2011:  
<http://www.antiquetrade gazette.com/news/2011/jun/20/evill-frost-raises-the-mod-brit-bar/>; for the changing price of Burra paintings, see Colin Gleadell, '20/21 British Art Fair: No holding back Modern Britain', *The Daily Telegraph*, 12 Sept. 2011:  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/artsales/8758403/2021-British-Art-Fair-No-holding-back-Modern-Britain.html>