

**Institution: UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM**

**Unit of Assessment: D34 Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory**

**a. Context**

Art History at the University of Birmingham (UoB) has an established tradition of engaging with non-academic audiences through its research; its objectives are:

1. **to have cultural impact**, enriching cultural life regionally, nationally and internationally by:
  - a) working with galleries, libraries, archives, and museums that can **disseminate the results of research** and **engage with a wide range of audiences** (from the general museum- and gallery going public to particular groups, such as school pupils, those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, community groups, the hearing and visually impaired);
  - b) **engaging with national and international press and media**
2. **to have social impact** by shaping working practices in non-HEIs through, **working with professionals in public institutions** (galleries, museums, libraries, archives) and **businesses** in ways that have led them to reflect on and change working practices
3. **to have economic impact** by **enriching the cultural offer** made to tourists and the business opportunities available to SMEs.

The city of Birmingham and the West Midlands have been particularly prominent in this regard, and enhancing cultural, social and economic life in the region has been central to our activity, but the impact of research has also been international in scope. The principal instruments through which research has had impact have been:

1. **Close collaboration with cultural institutions** on the staging of exhibitions and associated events programmes that promote public understanding and engage with wider public audiences
2. **Leadership of the Digital Humanities Hub** whose £2.4m ERDF project and £250k AHRC project involve collaborative development of digital outputs for cultural institutions in partnership with academics and SMEs
3. **Involvement in television and radio broadcasts**, nationally and internationally.

The department is based in the Barber Institute of Fine Art and Music. The Barber Institute has remained a vital instrument for enhancing the cultural life of the region. Since 1998 staff have curated over 60 temporary exhibitions showcasing and interpreting works in the Barber collection, or loan exhibitions or artworks which, dispersed nationally and internationally across varied collections, would otherwise be inaccessible. However, for REF2014, we have chosen as case studies collaborations that exemplify our work with institutions wholly external to the University.

**b. Approach to impact**

Impact activities (including the case studies) follow the a strategy in place since RAE2008 that initially prioritised collaboration with regional partners but which has increasingly developed national and international partnerships. Supported by the University and the College (including a dedicated impact officer, CAL R&KT office staff and the Digital Humanities Hub) we have achieved a strong record of impacting on cultural life regionally, nationally and internationally. Specifically:

**Collaboration with non-HEIs and Engaging with Professionals in the Public Sector.**

Joint projects with; the Library of Birmingham (LoB), the largest public library in Europe, and Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (BMAG – now Birmingham Museums Trust, BMT, the largest private museum trust in the U.K.), and the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists (RBSA). The AHRC-funded Museums and Galleries Research Network on Matthew Boulton (2009) enabled **Clay** to develop his research on 18<sup>th</sup>-century visual culture in conjunction with staff of UoB and beyond, librarians, archivists and curatorial staff of the partner institutions (as well as invited international scholars), leading to **Clay's** exhibition *Matthew Boulton and the Art of Making Money* at the Barber in 2009. This developed into the £282,000 AHRC-funded *Suburban Birmingham: Spaces and Places 1880-1960*, led by **Clay** and **Berry** (drawing on the latter's research into

## Impact template (REF3a)

domestic spaces), in collaboration with LoB and BMAG/BMT. The project enabled curatorial, library and archive staff at the partner institutions to undertake research into their collections, with support and mentoring from **Clay** and **Berry**. The design of new galleries at BMAG/BMT incorporated research findings from the project. This collaborative arrangement led to 3 AHRC-funded collaborative doctoral awards with LoB, BMAG/BMT, and the RBSA, and the formation of the Digital Humanities Hub, led by **Clay**, whose £2.4m ERDF grant is in partnership with LoB, BMAG/BMT, the Worcestershire HIVE, the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, and a network of over 120 SMEs, and whose £250k AHRC grant supports 19 academics working with 19 SMEs and 19 small cultural organisations. More recently through his work as CI of the AHRC-funded Iconoclasm research group **Clay** has been advisor to the Tate Britain *Art under Attack. Histories of British Iconoclasm* exhibition (2013). Cross-sector collaboration with regional museums was examined, too, in a conference on Regional Curating (2013) at the Barber organised by **Rampley** and BMT and funded by the UoB Institute of Advanced Studies, with participation from a wide array of museum professionals regionally and nationally.

### Dissemination of Research and Engagement with Audiences

In addition to **Hamilton's** exhibition *Turner and Italy* (one of our impact case studies), curating exhibitions has been central. This has included events at other venues (e.g. **Hamilton's** *Volcano: From Turner to Warhol*, Compton Verney, 2010) but the primary vehicle has been the Barber Institute. Although Barber exhibitions such as *Northern Lights* (2009; 17,529 visitors) or *Thomas Fearnley* (2012; 15,870 visitors) have been international in scope, many have focused on the cultural and artistic history of Birmingham and the West Midlands and thus enriched public understanding of the region's culture. *Behind Closed Doors* (2008; 18,621 visitors) examined private art collecting in Birmingham, foregrounding the city's role as a major centre of art consumption. *Matthew Boulton and the Art of Making Money* (2009) examined coinage as a medium of visual culture and Birmingham as a site of mass image production in the 18th and early 19th centuries. *Objects of Affection* (2010; 10,976 visitors) examined the career of John Brett in light of the vicissitudes of the art market and the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists in the later 19th century. *Court on Canvas: Tennis in Art* (2011; 22,981 visitors) celebrated the invention of lawn tennis in Edgbaston and set the history of artistic depictions of tennis in the context of the cultural and social history of the sport. Average annual visitors to the permanent collections (based on the figures for 2009-2011) are 53,268. Total visitor numbers to loan exhibitions since 2008 have been 278,346. The drive to engage with more diverse audiences has led to collaboration with institutions of art & design education, resulting in exhibitions such as *New Art West Midlands* (2013) and the *Function* series of photographic exhibitions (2011-).

Each exhibition was supported by activities that sought to maximise impact by communicating directly with audiences. Art history staff and PhD students have offered: (1) Public lectures; (2) Educational visits and workshops; (3) Free guided tours; (4) Informal talks in exhibition gallery spaces; (5) Free Study days – with invited external speakers; (6) Weekend 'art school' days. Activities and exhibitions are evaluated by systematic collation and analysis of feedback from visitors as well as monitoring of coverage in national and international press and media.

### Involvement in Media

Researchers have maximised opportunities presented by media to promote public understanding. This has ranged from involvement in regional television (e.g. BBC Midlands Today, where **Rampley** was interviewed on public art, and **Clay** on the Digital Humanities Hub) to engagement with national and international media producers. **Clay** was interviewed on BBC Radio 4's *Front Row* (May 2009) on the Matthew Boulton exhibition (also featured on Radio 3's *Nightwaves*). **Hamilton** was interviewed on the BBC Radio 4 *Today* programme (November 2011). He also features as advisor and participant in the documentary film, *The Genius of Turner: Painting the Industrial Revolution* (BBC 2, April 2013) and the film *J M W Turner: Snow Storm - Steamboat off a Harbour's Mouth* (NHK TV, June 2013). His work on Turner has also been a central source of information for the *Turner* biopic by Mike Leigh (due to be released in 2014).

### c. Strategy and plans

The strategy will continue to be based on the three-pronged approach outlined earlier. Specifically:

### **Collaboration with non-HEIs and Engaging with Professionals in the Public Sector.**

The relationship established with Birmingham museums, archives and libraries will continue; in 2012 **Clay** secured £40k follow-on funding from the AHRC for 'Suburban Birmingham: Hands On,' but the focus will be expanded to encompass other institutions nationally and internationally. It has already had international impact: **Clay** was advisor to the 2012 City of Chicago Cultural Plan (Chicago being the sister city of Birmingham), and the Birmingham model of cross-sector collaboration has been adopted in the Plan, and a range of Chicago and Birmingham cultural organisations (including the Smart Museum (University of Chicago), the Oriental Institute (University of Chicago), the Art Institute of Chicago, Loyola University Museum of Art, the National Public Housing Museum, LoB, BMT, the National Trust) are partners on a £1.9m application submitted to the AHRC (outcome pending) with **Clay** and **Hemsoll**. Other emerging projects with international partners include **Rampley's** work on central European museology, based on collaboration with a network of institutions, including the National Museum in Cracow, the Moravian Gallery in Brno, the Hungarian National Museum and the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb. These are named partners in a large grant on Exhibitionary Cultures in Austria-Hungary submitted to the AHRC (outcome pending) and the project will involve collaborative research with museum curators into the history of exhibitions in their own institutions, as part of a critical reflection on their historic institutional missions.

### **Dissemination of Research and Engagement with Audiences**

The Barber Institute will continue to be key to maximising the impact of history of art research, playing a crucial role in enhancing the cultural well-being of Birmingham. Exhibitions are planned for 2015 on Vuillard (curated by **Berry**) and on Expressionist works on paper (curated by **Smith**) for 2016. In order to enhance the capacities of the Barber as a major public arts venue a £15million refurbishment is planned, to improve facilities and exhibition space. Building work is scheduled to begin in 2016/17.

### **Involvement in Media**

**Clay** has written and presented a one hour documentary on French revolutionary iconoclasm that will be shown on BBC4 in the winter of 2013/14, the BBC are proposing a series to follow, and BBC Radio 4 have expressed interest in producing a documentary based on his essay for the AHRC Suburban Birmingham project

### **d. Relationship to case studies**

The case studies exemplify our approach to impact. *Suburban Birmingham* illustrates how **maximising impact has been built into research** from the outset, in which major regional public cultural institutions not only disseminate research outcomes, but have also been collaborators, with museum, library and archive staff working under the leadership of University staff. The **Turner** case study illustrates the **promotion of research** already undertaken by working with institutions and organisations that are able to disseminate research findings to the general public as well as more tightly defined groups. The predominant form this has taken has been exhibitions in public art museums in Britain, the United States, Italy and Hungary, but additional channels have been found in television and film production companies, including the BBC and Nippon Television. This approach parallels our wider research strategy, which has been to maximise opportunities presented by collaboration with external partners to ensure that a small research unit can maintain a prominent public profile with both academic and wider audiences and play an active role in the enhancement of cultural life and the provision of cultural capital to a wide array of audiences.