

<p>Institution: University of Cumbria</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 34 Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory</p>
<p>a. Context</p> <p>Fine Art and photography research within the Art and Design unit is primarily practice based. As research based practice, the nature of the outputs produced is rooted in the assessment, critique and interrogation of the purpose and value of both the finished work, and the process of its development and production. This means that the research produced by the unit has a power to interrogate and interpret the subjects, themes and assumptions of the matters on which it is based. In effect, this allows the work to provide a window through which those exposed to it can consider and reconsider the topics explored, stimulating new insights and perspectives. As a large proportion of the work relates to themes of environment, sustainability and health, the research of the unit is an influential tool for consideration of issues which are important for society.</p> <p>More widely than this, as research resulting in artistic outputs, the unit has the ability to make a direct cultural contribution through work exhibited nationally and internationally.</p> <p>The characteristics of the unit mean that the main beneficiaries of the work are non-academic practicing artists whose work may be influenced by the research; members of the general public who are exposed to the artistic works produced, including through attending exhibitions; Cumbrian rural and post-industrial communities, which are engaged in important dialogues through dissemination and specific outreach activities; and museums and cultural organisations whose offering is enriched by the input of academic staff to their activities, including through input into exhibitions, public open days, seminars and other activities.</p> <p>The main types of impact generated by the unit's research are the stimulation of public debate and discourse through the use of art to explore important societal issues, and particularly through challenging cultural values and social assumptions on environmental issues; and cultural benefits through the creation of interpretative and stimulating works of art which are publically displayed.</p> <p>b. Approach to impact</p> <p>One of the primary tools for stakeholder and public engagement used by the unit, given the practice-based nature of the research, is through public exhibitions. One key element of this is the development of networks and collaborations with stakeholders (such as exhibition venues and non-academic artists), which supports the wider impact of the unit. However, exhibitions also expose members of the general public to installations and exhibits of work which explore important societal themes, stimulating thought and discourse. By creating a novel viewpoint on important and sometimes contentious issues, such as society's interaction and relationship with the environment, the outputs of the unit's research allows individuals to reach the tacit underpinnings of entrenched and often unchallenged perceptions and misconceptions about important global issues that would not otherwise necessarily have been accessible to them. One key example of this is the widely toured exhibition cited in case study one, <i>nanoq flat out and bluesome: A Cultural Life Of Polar Bears</i>, used as the basis for case study 1. The importance of this work, and the relevance of its incisive approach, to communities across the world has been shown in its extensive touring during the assessment period (having previously been exhibited at several UK venues, Sweden, Denmark and the Faroe Islands prior to 2008) at Fram Museum, Oslo, Norway; Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge; HEAT: art and climate change, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, Australia; New Walk Museum, Leicester; Grenna Museum, Sweden; Worcester Art Galleries and Museum; Manchester Metropolitan Museum; Svalbard Museum, Norway; and the Polar Museum, Tromsø, Norway.</p> <p>Through managing the installation of the bears in different ways within each exhibition context, the work deepened and varied in resonance, creating a different experience for audiences at each venue. However, despite such variances in the form of display, the work consistently raises questions of how to manage the legacy of the destructive act of shooting the animals and its reverberations for environmentally unsound societal norms today, provoking audiences to reconsider their tacit compliance with unsustainable modes of living and their engagement with environmental issues. Whilst these impacts are diffuse and hard to track, they mirror the purpose</p>

Impact template (REF3a)

of the work, and examples of widespread exhibiting such as *nanoq* highlight the relevance and success of the artwork produced. The impact and on-going significance of the work is also shown by the success of the accompanying publication (Black Dog Publishing, 2006, ISBN 1-904772-39-0). In addition to current discussions, initiated by the publisher, about an additional print run for the book, second hand copies of the book (which originally retailed at £19.95) sell for considerable sums, sometimes up to 3 figures: a mark of the on-going resonance of the work. The publication of accompanying books for purchase by artists and the general public is a technique used throughout the unit to increase the reach of the research to individuals who were either unable to attend location-specific and time-limited exhibitions, or wish to have permanent access to the work. Another example is Dr John Darwell's *DDSBs (Discarded Dog Sh*t Bags)* imprint, produced specifically for *The Photography Festival Les Rencontres d'Arles*, 2013.

A key method for engagement is through interactions directly with practicing artists who are not within academia. Through direct engagement and collaborative work between academics within the unit and both emerging and established local, national and international practicing artists, the purpose and methods of artistic practice is influenced, which has the potential to increase the cultural value of the work that these artists are producing. Primarily, this is through exposure to the research approach to creative endeavours, questioning the methodology, form and purpose of the creation. This type of route to impact reflects an intrinsic part of the way in which the unit operates, and is also exemplified through direct academic engagement with small and local practitioner groups through talks and workshops, such as with the following groups since 2008: Langholm Art Club, Dumfries and Galloway Arts society, Stewartry Arts Society, Gracefield Arts Centre, Tramway Visual Arts program and North Berwick Art Club. However, influence on artistic practice is also effected through direct research collaborations, such as engagement with the *Mildred's Lane* project, Pennsylvania, USA. This is an on-going collaborative project of which Professor Robert Williams is a long term member, which has a continuous flow of practicing artists joining together for transient projects and activities. *Mildred's Lane* involves a pedagogic element, including periodical short term immersive fellowships, which use a dialogic and practical process to engage new artists with artistic research practice. By contributing to this process, Professor Williams has helped to develop the resonance which the work of these aspiring artists will have, and so influence the cultural capital produced. The *Mildred's Lane* model also includes 'social Saturdays' as a means of engaging the wider community, allowing members of the general public and local businesses to engage with the research practice through talks, lectures and social activities. This type of activity is mirrored to some degree in the associations that the unit has with local museums and other organisations in the UK, including contribution to public events of different types. One example of direct engagement with communities was the *Radio Animal* project, one element of Wilson's *Uncertainty in the City* project, which involved a mobile radio unit and website to generate direct engagement with the public to provide data. Through interviews with members of the public and public meetings and seminars, rich information about individual experiences and perceptions of uninvited animal 'others' was gathered, which was fed into the research outputs. However, engaging in these discussions also had an impact on members of the public who became involved with *Radio Animal* (directly, or through visiting the website); challenging perceptions about their characterisation of animals existing in the personal and shared spaces of humans as 'pests'.

The unit uses engagement with local and national stakeholder organisations in order to maximise the reach and impact of the research. These include the Brantwood and Tullie House museums; Grizedale Arts; LUX; Arts Catalyst (London) and Art Gene. Interactions such as participating in stakeholder exhibitions and open days increase the value of the offer that such organisations can provide for the public, improving visitor numbers and revenues. However, such engagement also provides additional reach directly to the general public. Such relationships also lead to other tangible joint activities, such as co-publication of outputs aimed at practitioners and the general public, such as the 2008 publication *BIPOLAR, essay on nanoq: flat out and bluesome* by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson, in an Arts Catalyst publication edited by Kathryn Yusoff.

The group also engages in other publications specifically aimed at a practitioner or art enthusiast audience, in order to widen the reach of the work. An example is the inclusion of Topping's work in

Impact template (REF3a)

the Danish visual art periodical as artist's pages in *Pist Protta*, Volume 71 (2012). However, rather than simply disseminating work, such publications frequently comprise interviews or explanatory pieces which disseminate the purpose and critical research processes behind the finished works. Examples include Wilson's work in an article in *ANTENNAE, the Journal of Nature in Visual Culture* and an interview in the online journal *Art and Research*.

c. Strategy and plans

The unit plans to increase and extend its impact on practitioners and members of the public by continuing with the forms of engagement outlined in section b. However, the unit also plans to develop its work directly with communities by engaging with local stakeholders such as councils and community groups, and so have a more direct and traceable local benefit.

Specifically, the strategic goals are to:

- Refine and further develop a tangible impact and engagement strategy, in order to support and sustain on-going engagement activity.
- Increase impact in key areas, including direct engagement with defined localised community groups, particularly in West Cumbria.
- To plan and implement a strategy to increase identifiable impacts from the research strategy for the Centre of Landscape Environment and Research (CLEAR), which has a specific focus on the role of art in the relationship between people and the environment.
- To leverage the Consortium for Research Excellence Support and Training (CREST) network to enhance impact across all existing areas. This is a Higher Education research group with which the University is engaged, and which already has a specific collaborative niche in Art and Design. The forward strategy for the unit with CREST will be to strengthen the existing linkages, particularly with the specialist art institutions which are members of CREST, to gain additional reach for the research of the unit. This is likely to include research collaborations and engagement activities to extend the influence of the impact to more communities across the country.
- To generate further impact on the quality of work produced by practicing artists, in part through the specific research engagement of individuals undertaking PhD at the University, via strengthening and expansion of the research degree programme.

The unit will also be working to develop further understanding of the impact that arts research can have, as a way to ensure that potential impacts of future work are identified, and maximising the impacts that can be realised from research practice produced in the current assessment period. This will primarily be through training, workshops and dialogue between academic staff, central services (particularly Research Office) and stakeholders. Work with stakeholders on impact, particularly partner organisations listed in section b, will be an important and intrinsic factor in developing the unit's future impact strategy. By co-developing impact with partners, including strengthening how the benefits of the research are captured, the unit will also directly support partners, by helping them to demonstrate the value of their cultural contribution to society in a context of increasing requirements to prove return on investment from public funds.

d. Relationship to case studies

Case study one, based on the research project *nanoq flat out and bluesome*, is a key example of how the unit can stimulate consideration on important issues, in this case environmental concerns, and the consequences of tacitly accepted yet damaging cultural and social norms. It is a clear illustration of how the research undertaken can create impact for those exposed to it by providing novel approaches to important issues, allowing a route of access into engrained and socially normalised ways of thinking that would otherwise be hard to access and re-evaluate.

Case study two, based on the research practice artwork, *Theatrum Mundi: Armarium*, provides an example of how the research influences the practice of artists.