

<b>Institution: University of Nottingham</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 34</b>
<b>Title of case study: Changing the terms of cultural debate around Art, Artists and Politics</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Professor Alex Danchev's research on the relationship between art, artists and politics has underpinned material changes to curatorial approach and practice at the Imperial War Museum, contributed to the planning of exhibitions at the National Gallery and the National Portrait Gallery, London, and has added depth to museums' and galleries' public programmes. It has stimulated new thought and practice amongst artists and writers, and has generated wider public debate about art, artists and politics. It has enriched the cultural debate by engaging thinkers, writers, broadcasters, practitioners, curators and educators, and the diverse publics with whom they engage.</p> <p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Professor Alex Danchev (Professor of International Relations, Nottingham 2004-) has an extensive history of research that examines the ways in which art – painting, photography, moving image – is able to produce provocative and innovative analyses of difficult political problems; it concerns the public understanding of art and artists, the many-layered connections between art and politics, and the ways in which art can illuminate moral, political and international life. Crucially, Danchev's analyses themselves emerge from a consideration of interactions that take place between artists, scholars, philosophers, writers and journalists.</p> <p>From the acclaimed biographies of Cézanne, Braque, and Picasso (3.6, 3.2, 3.1), that reconnected the political dimensions of their artworks to their historical moment to the initiation of an extensive collaborative network comprised of contemporary artists and practitioners, it is the specific engagement with the artwork and the idea of the artist as 'moral witness' that is fundamental to Danchev's research.</p> <p>Danchev has been instrumental in bringing to wider attention new research on three of art history's most important modern figures – Picasso (3.1), Cézanne (3.6) Braque (3.2) - through the publication of provocative and original books. These books have garnered critical praise and have influenced subsequent curatorial approaches to showing their work (see section 4). The originality of Danchev's approach has been to avoid 'psychoanalytical' methods in favour of reading these artists' lives and works through an expansive network of literature (philosophy; cultural and art criticism; social and art historical texts; artists' correspondence, etc.). Whilst writing the Cézanne biography, Danchev's research helped shape curatorial thinking for the National Gallery (NG) exhibition, <i>Cézanne in Britain</i> (2006) and this led to another sustained engagement between Danchev and the NG through <i>Picasso Furioso</i> (3.1); described by the curator of <i>Picasso: Challenging the Past</i> as 'an original and provocative assessment of Picasso's skill at positioning himself in artistic and political currents in fraught times'. Working on the Cézanne biography in Paris, Danchev unearthed unpublished letters by the artist; following this, Danchev has translated/retranslated the English edition of Cézanne's letters (3.7), scholarship that dates from the 1930s. The biography of Braque (3.2) re-examines long-held beliefs about the artist's politics, especially during the Second World War, traditionally seen as wavering between the apolitical and the far-right. Danchev offers a substantial challenge, arguing that Braque was acutely political; a man whose politics and art were resistant to sublimation to simple categories or political leanings.</p> <p>The significance of Braque's Second World War still life works appear in a new form in Danchev's collection of essays, <i>On Art and War and Terror</i> (2009) (3.3). This book was the subject of a BISA/PSA Group workshop [St Antony's College, Oxford, 9 November 2009] (3.4) and initiated several ongoing collaborations besides Braque, essays engage with Gerhard Richter's work on the Baader-Meinhof group, soldier imagery of Abu Ghraib in relation to Kafka, and war photography and the ethics of responsibility with reference to the work of Goya, Simon Norfolk and Don McCullin. What connects all these essays is the rearticulation of the artist as thinker and each is an answer to Barnett Newman's complaint about the view of the artist as a kind of <i>idiot savant</i> ('an instinctive, intuitive executant...largely unaware of what he [<i>sic</i>] is doing'). Since publication, these essays have reached and informed contemporary art and photographic practice, as well as curatorial practices and institutional approaches to images of war. Alongside this work, and in</p>

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keeping with his broader intellectual project, Danchev's edited collection, *100 Artists' Manifestos: From the Futurists to the Stuckists* (3.5), has focused attention on a much maligned form of artistic expression: the artist manifesto. Danchev's text includes many introductions to individual manifestos that examine cultural, social and artistic histories and contexts, highlighting the significance of these writings as not simple artist statements but as crucial cultural and social documents.

### 3. References to the research

- 3.1 Danchev, A. *Picasso Furioso*, Editions Dilecta, 2008 (available on request)
- 3.2 Danchev, A. *Braque: A Life* (Arcade and Hamish Hamilton, 2005; Penguin, 2007; Hazan, 2013): 'Book of the Year' in *The Times*, the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Financial Times* (available on request)
- 3.3 Danchev, A. *On Art and War and Terror* (Columbia UP and Edinburgh UP, 2009; paperback, 2011): 'Book of the Week' in the *Times Higher Education* ('A powerful, united, and beautifully strange book.' Robert Eaglestone) (available on request)
- 3.4 Danchev, A. BISA/PSA Art and Politics Group Workshop on 'Art and Terror' at St Antony's College, Oxford (9 November 2009), including a public lecture on Gerhard Richter and the Baader-Meinhof Group; the foundation of a special issue of the *Review of International Studies* 35 (2009). (peer reviewed) (available on request)
- 3.5 Danchev, A. *100 Artists' Manifestos* (Penguin Modern Classics, 2011): Now in its fifth printing. Discussed at length by Terry Eagleton in the *TLS* (25 March 2011) (5.8) and by John Gray in the *Literary Review* (March 2011) (submitted to REF2- reserve)
- 3.6 Danchev, A. *Cézanne: A Life* (Pantheon and Profile, 2012) (submitted to REF2)
- 3.7 Danchev, A. *The letters of Paul Cézanne* (Thames & Hudson, 2013) (submitted to REF2)

### 4. Details of the impact

Danchev's work has had a wide-ranging effect on the cultural landscape in two key domains: For museums and galleries his work has informed the content of their programming and in some cases led to innovatory changes in practice. For contemporary practitioners and writers it has stimulated debate and inspired new approaches in their work. The audiences who engage with the work of museums and galleries (through exhibitions and public programmes) and practitioners and writers (through their work and publications) have subsequently benefited from this enriched content. Significant media engagement with this work forms a third strand of the narrative below, and adds to the contribution the research makes to expanding the terms of cultural debate around art, artists and politics.

#### Influencing curatorial approaches and practice for large national galleries

A sustained relationship between Danchev and the Imperial War Museum (IWM), based on Danchev's work on *Art and War and Terror* (3.3, 3.4), has produced 'valuable outcomes' for the Museum through a change in its curatorial approach and practice. A workshop organised by the British International Studies Association and Political Studies Association (BISA/PSA) Art & Politics Group (co-founded by Danchev, Debbie Lisle and Bernadette Buckley in 2004) 'On Art and Terror', at St Antony's College, Oxford (9 November 2009), drew on ideas from his 2009 *On Art and War and Terror* (3.3). It included a public lecture by Danchev on Gerhard Richter and the Baader-Meinhof Group. The lecture was attended by the IWM's Head Curator of Photography, who leads on the Museum's interpretation of all matters pertaining to war photography (including research programmes, public exhibitions, publications, events or collections development programmes). The relationship initiated at this workshop between the curator and Danchev has **underpinned new developments at the IWM**. It has:

- contributed to a sequence of IWM exhibition projects in which the curator explores the artistic impact of supposedly documentary photographs of conflict in dialogue with the IWM's Head Curator of Art. This sequence includes displaying the work of artists which is 'entirely innovatory in the context of IWM';
- informed the curator's approach in planning a conference featuring Don McCullin, Michael Nicholson, Sir John Tusa, Philip Knightly and attended by the general public (with students and scholars);
- informed the IWM's approach to and interpretation of the depiction of atrocity;
- informed and supported the curator's work in initiating IWM Contemporary- a new, permanent IWM programme examining the diverse response of artists and photographers to

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contemporary conflict;

- inspired the setting up of IWM's war and media network (5.1).

In addition to these substantive changes in approach and practice implemented by the IWM, Danchev has been engaged by the National Gallery (NG) and the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) to offer his research perspectives on recent exhibitions, ultimately contributing to the way in which these institutions have interpreted visual culture for their audiences, and in so doing influenced the way in which they have enriched the lives and stimulated the imaginations of their audiences: In 2006, he was engaged by the NG as it prepared the exhibition *Cézanne in Britain*, providing, according to the Curator of Post-1800 Paintings, 'excellent advice as we shaped the exhibition' (5.2). Building on from the success of that engagement, the NG turned to Danchev for advice in 2008-9 as they were preparing an exhibition on Picasso, impressed by his 'original and provocative assessment of Picasso's skill at positioning himself in artistic and political currents in fraught times' [3.1]. Danchev's take on Picasso was 'enormously helpful to us in formulating our approach' (5.2). The NG regards the relationship as ongoing, hoping to further 'draw on his expertise, global perspective, and highly original interpretive skills to hone our presentation of Modern art to our vast public'. It is clear from the curator's statement that he also draws directly on the published outputs of Danchev, which he values as offering new interpretations and approaches (5.2). Danchev has also contributed 'memorable' public programme content for the Head of Adult Learning at NG on Cézanne, garnering 'excellent attendance' (193) and positive feedback from the audience and organisers such that it was identified by NG's senior management as 'one of the highlights of our programme this year' (2013) (5.3).

Danchev's research contributed to the decision taken by the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) to undertake a major exhibition of work by Cézanne (forthcoming). As the Director of the NPG explains, following the publication of his 'outstanding' *Life of Paul Cézanne* [3.6], 'Alex Danchev started a discussion about the possibility of a Cézanne Portraits exhibition, which coincided with some thinking of our own, and has now led to the research and planning of just such a major international exhibition project' in collaboration with the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC and the Musée d'Orsay in Paris (5.4). Finally, the Commissaire of the Braque exhibition at the Grand Palais (Sept 2013-Jan 2014), Paris) acknowledges the value of Danchev's 'subtle analysis' of the artist and 'nuanced conclusions' in his Braque biography [3.2]. The Commissaire says, 'I recommended this book to all the authors in the catalogue, who are as delighted as I am...' (5.5). An extract from Danchev's biography was used in the exhibition catalogue (5.5).

These examples show a demonstrable link between Danchev's research and the endeavours of major national galleries to develop, engage and stimulate the intellects and sensibilities of their audiences through provocative, research-informed exhibition content.

### Influencing thought and practice for contemporary practitioners & writers

Danchev's research on art and politics (specifically *On Art and War and Terror* [3.3] and *100 Artists' Manifestos* [3.5]) has inspired contemporary artists in their thought and practice and has stimulated new artistic expression and new critical responses:

- Award-winning **photographer Ed Clark** acknowledges the influence of Danchev's work on his practice. Clark (winner of the Royal Photographic Society Hood Medal for Outstanding Photography for Public Service, Best Book Awards at the International Photography Awards (The Lucies) and the New York Photo Awards and the British Journal of Photography International Photography Award) says of *On Art and War and Terror* (3.3): 'It is an important book. It influenced me in a variety of ways' and has 'contributed to helping me define themes in my on-going work exploring the use of control and incarceration in the War on Terror' (5.6);
- **Free Art Collective** has written a chapter for a new book entitled *Manifesto Now! Instructions for Performance, Philosophy, Politics* which it feels contributes to the debate that Danchev begins in the 100 manifestos book [3.5]: Free collective feels that the collection of manifestos in Danchev's book 'revitalises the notion of the manifesto for contemporary art [and] generates new discussions amongst artists about the power of the manifesto and enables a more informed debate about its potential in contemporary art. Alex Danchev's work 'brings manifestos to a new generation of contemporary artists and legitimises the manifesto as an art form; this contributes to the current debates around the spectator, the participant and the co-producer who are all important publics in relation to engaging with culture'. (5.6);

- The **co-founder of the Stuckists** art movement (237 groups in 52 countries) considers *100 Artists' Manifestos* [3.5] to have made a significant intervention in contemporary debates about art, artists and the political. He comments that the publication of the book, and its inclusion of previously marginalised or 'blanked' material (or material which might have brought it into opposition with an 'art establishment') is in and of itself 'a polemical action that impacts on the contemporary art scene'. He continues that the book 'removes power from the exclusive hold of commercial interests and contributes towards the reinstatement of intellectual honesty' (5.6)

### Contributing new knowledge and insight to public debate through media engagement

Danchev's publications straddle the scholarly and popular and have been read extensively by extra-academic audiences, and reviewed and discussed by broadcast and broadsheet journalists. The critical response to his work (5.8, 5.9) confirms that his key ideas can be said to have changed the terms of cultural debate around the figure of the artist, the nature of artists' biographies, and the value of their writings:

- **100 Artists' Manifestos** (3.5) is in its fifth reprint since 2011, a 6th is planned, and it has already sold over 13,000 copies (5.7). It has reached audiences nationally and (in translation) internationally. It has enlarged the terms of cultural debate, not only through the inclusion of manifestos by women and by movements that had previously been 'blanked', but also through its scholarly consideration of a form of writing that had previously been side-lined, and its positioning of the manifestos as cultural and social documents in their own right. Its widespread critical acclaim has served to reinvigorate public debate more broadly about the relationship between art, artists and politics, evidenced by the way in which it has featured in a range of high profile broadcast and print media (5.8): On 'Start the Week' (31 January 2011), distinguished artist Susan Hiller testified to the significance of *100 Artists' Manifestos*, and in particular its role in presenting for the first time some manifestos that were previously unpublished and unknown: 'One of the values of your book is that you've brought these out for public contemplation. For example you've included some manifestos by women artists which were totally unknown to me ... It's much more than a collection of artists' manifestos; it's almost like taking the temperature of art as time passes.'; Terry Eagleton engaged with the book through an extensive review article in the *Times Literary Supplement* (25 March 2011) where he commented that the manifestos had been 'deftly selected and stylishly introduced' (5.8);
- Critical responses to Danchev's **biographical work**, in particular that on Cézanne (3.6) (over 15,000 sold since 2012 [5.7], and identified as one of the most 'reviewed books of the year' in 2012), indicate the degree to which his approach has been transformative in the field of artists' biography: Frances Spalding writing in the *Independent*, for which Danchev's *Cezanne: A Life* was book of the week (27 October 2012) suggests that 'the reach of this book is unlikely ever to be surpassed in the search for Cézanne' (5.9). Hilary Spurling from the *Telegraph* says 'this is a biography for an age that takes Cézanne's supreme clarity, balance and pictorial logic for granted. Far from putting him back in the context he came from, it explores his relations with the world he shaped.' (19 November 2012) (5.9). Julian Bell writing for the *Guardian* calls the biography 'original, engaging and highly persuasive' (19 October 2012) and declared it to be one of the books of the year 2012 (5.9).

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Head Curator of Photography, Imperial War Museum (factual statement available on file)
- 5.2 Curator of Post-1800 Paintings, National Gallery, London (factual statement available on file)
- 5.3 Head of Adult Learning, National Gallery, London (factual statement available on file)
- 5.4 Director, National Portrait Gallery (factual statement available on file)
- 5.5 Commissaire of *Georges Braque* at the Grand Palais, Paris (e-mail correspondence available on file)
- 5.6 Dossier of feedback from writers, artists and thinkers (available on file)
- 5.7 E-mail from author confirming sales figures (available on file)
- 5.8 Dossier of critical and media responses to *100 Artists' Manifestos* (available on file)
- 5.9 Dossier of critical responses to Danchev's *Cezanne: A Life* (available on file)