

Institution: Queen Mary University of London (QMUL)
Unit of Assessment: UoA 30 History
Title of case study: Exhibiting the Past
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Two Queen Mary historians from distinct periods of study, and different stages in their careers, have employed their major research projects from over ten years' work in archives and other repositories to advise museum curators and influence museum exhibitions. Renaissance historian Kate Lowe's research has enabled her to assist curators in the selection of objects to highlight sub-Saharan Africa and Africans in Renaissance Europe, thereby emphasising the historic importance of the early African diaspora in Europe. She worked with the Renaissance Europe curator at the British Museum on the 2012 'Shakespeare: Staging the World' exhibition and with the curator of Renaissance and Baroque Art at the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, MD, on its 2012-13 'Revealing the African Presence in Renaissance Europe' exhibition which was noted as one of the top ten 2012 exhibitions in the US by the <i>New York Times</i>. War and culture historian Dan Todman's research on the cultural and social history of the First and Second World Wars has enabled him to advise and work with curators at the Imperial War Museum (IWM) as it prepares to commemorate the First World War's centenary. The impact of Lowe's and Todman's research expertise has been to advise curators, shape exhibitions and ensure that visitors experienced historically-informed exhibits to gain a more complex understanding of the past.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Kate Lowe (01 September 2004-) Lowe has been working on various aspects of 'Africa in Europe, 1440-1650' since 2000. When she started, this was a virtually ignored area, but partly as a consequence of her academic activity, it is now much more widely accepted. Her co-edited volume on <i>Black Africans in Renaissance Europe</i> was a Choice Outstanding Academic Title in 2006. In 2008-9 she held a British Academy Small Research Grant to carry out research on 'Visible lives: sub-Saharan Africans in Renaissance Florence and Venice', and from January 2010 to May 2011 she held a Leverhulme Trust Research Fellowship to carry out archival and museum work on 'Black slaves in Renaissance Italy, c. 1450 to c. 1550'.</p> <p>Lowe's research has been used to underpin collaboration on the two exhibitions described below, but it is very wide-ranging in nature, and cannot be easily summarized but can be exemplified. Her work explaining how stereotypes of black Africans influenced expectations about them, and representations of them, in Renaissance Europe, and her study on the significant numbers of African ambassadors to Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries has exploded myths that the only Africans in Renaissance Europe were slaves, and investigated how African rulers were portrayed in visual terms. More recently, she has analysed documentary and visual examples of fictive, notional and 'real' black Africans in German-speaking areas, and examined the vogue for acquiring young black slaves at Renaissance courts. All these discrete topics have directly influenced which objects were chosen for exhibition.</p> <p>Dan Todman (01 September 2003-) Between 2001 and 2013 Todman researched the history of Britain's role in the First and Second World Wars, with particular foci on military history and the history of post-war remembrance. The result was the prize-winning monograph, <i>The Great War Myth and Memory</i> (2005). This book, and the research that underpinned it, covered organisational and biographical studies of command and the representation of both wars in popular culture.</p> <p>Of particular relevance for this case study were the insights this gave Todman into the ways in which narratives of both wars were constructed over time and which subjects have been privileged and obscured. He has also been interested in the difficulties faced by those who have attempted to challenge well established versions of these conflicts over time. Todman's work on the</p>

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remembrance of the First World War emphasised the degree to which wartime experiences beyond the trenches had been written out of public commemoration: his research on the Second World War highlights the way in which civilian sacrifice was privileged over that of servicemen, particularly those from outside the UK.

3. References to the research

Lowe

'The black African presence in Renaissance Europe', pp. 1-14, and 'The stereotyping of black Africans in Renaissance Europe', pp. 17-47 in T. F. Earle and K. J. P. Lowe (eds), *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005).

"Representing" Africa: ambassadors and princes from Christian Africa to Renaissance Italy and Portugal, 1402-1608', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 17 (2007), pp. 101-28.

'Black diaspora in Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with special reference to German-speaking areas', in Mischa Honeck, Martin Klimke, Anne Kuhlmann (eds), *Black Diaspora and Germany across the Centuries* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013), pp.38-56.

Todman

The Great War: Myth and Memory (London: Hambledon and London, 2005).

'Changing Representations of the First World War in British Culture: The Ninetieth Anniversary of the Somme' in M. Keren and H. Herwig (eds), *War Memory and Popular Culture: Essays on Modes of Remembrance and Commemoration* (Jefferson N.C.: McFarland, 2009), pp. 23-40.

4. Details of the impact

The research carried out by Lowe and Todman has had three research impacts upon the museums and exhibitions with which they have worked: advising curators; shaping exhibitions and enhancing visitor experiences.

Advising curators: The Renaissance Europe and Curator of the Waddesdon Bequest at the British Museum, and the Curator of Renaissance and Baroque Art at the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore MD, called on Lowe to join advisory boards to guide their curation. The British Museum curator, who had known of Lowe's research expertise for many years, thought immediately of inviting her to join the British Museum's three-person Academic Advisory Board for the BP-sponsored 190-object 'Shakespeare: Staging the World' exhibition (July to November 2012). They have commented that 'Kate Lowe's expertise in the history of black Africans in Renaissance Europe was of particular interest to me, as was her scholarship in general'. Consequently, they asked Lowe to advise on representations of black Africans in Shakespeare's work and world and to read and comment on parts of the draft book that she researched and wrote (with Shakespeare scholar Jonathan Bate) ahead of the exhibition. Similarly, the Walters Museum curator had identified Lowe as 'one of the two most important [scholars]' who could assist her in the 2012-13 \$1m exhibition entitled 'Revealing the African Presence in Renaissance Europe' (Walters Art Museum, October 2012-January 2013; Princeton University Art Museum, February-June 2013). They consulted Lowe because her 'expertise extended into some areas with which I was only superficially familiar'. Todman was consulted by curators at the IWM for the same reason. He became one of the five members of the museum's advisory panel (the others were Professors Deborah Thom, David Reynolds, David Stevenson and Hew Strachan). The IWM Principal Historian wrote that he and his colleagues were 'very conscious that the wide sweep of the [First World War] galleries extends well beyond the areas of knowledge that any of us possess in detail, and it has been both invaluable and reassuring to draw upon Dan's far-reaching wisdom and expertise on a regular basis'. His IWM colleague, the Director of Learning and Interpretation, explained the link between Todman's research and his recruitment at the museum: 'We had been really impressed with his Great War book, for its fresh approach to the subject in tackling social and media perceptions of the war and its meaning/significance, as this chimes very much with what we as a museum do.' They added: 'Dan was writing so perceptively about the impact of TV

history for example on people's perceptions of the war – and doing so as an academic – [and this] was what convinced me we needed him.' The Head of the IWM London First World War Galleries Content Team, wrote that Todman 'is noted for his work in challenging common understanding about the conflict ... and also understands how to deliver complex, often sensitive narratives and ideas in fresh, clear ways to non-academic audiences – hugely important when we are dealing with visitors who know little, even nothing'.

Shaping exhibition: The form of museum exhibitions is directed by specialist curators at all times, however, they often seek opinion from historians and other academics in the process of selecting and positioning exhibits. Lowe's specialist knowledge on representations of Black Africans enabled her to advise curators at the British Museum in London and the Walters Museum in Baltimore. The British Museum curator took Lowe's opinion on the selection of relevant objects and also on the drafts of the exhibition catalogue, writing that 'Choices of objects for the exhibition and decisions about the content and shape of the catalogue remained mine as curator but the expertise offered by Kate was of great use and assisted me in making "Shakespeare: Staging the World" unique in its representation of black Africans'. Lowe's contribution to the exhibition in Baltimore was not limited to advice on object selection and comments on the exhibition catalogue but also to the writing of the exhibition catalogue (Lowe wrote two of the five essays). As the curator explained, Lowe's role was critical to the catalogue's publication: 'Her most valuable contribution to the catalogue [beyond her essays] was not caving in when my director tried to eviscerate the publication', a defence of the exhibition which proved valuable as it became highly praised locally and nationally in the United States. The *New York Times* wrote on 8 November 2012 that 'The show is so interesting to look at and so fresh with historical news as to override reservations. It does what few museum shows ever do: It takes a prized piece of art history, one polished to a glow by generations of attention, and turns it in an unexpected direction, so it catches the searching, scouring rays of new investigative light.' At the IWM, Todman's research has helped form the way curators have chosen exhibits and designed their presentation for what will become from 1914 one of the museum's most important representations of the past. Examples included for the First World War galleries, detailed written responses to outline narratives during early stages of design, discussion of ongoing content and layout and auditing of displayed text; and for the post-1918 galleries, discussion of and input into major content areas and themes, notably the 'meaning' of the Second World War and the conflict's place in contemporary British history. The Director of Learning and Interpretation at IWM London explained the process of curation and Todman's role in it: 'What we have to do here is to really clearly and confidently decide what the key turning points, ideas and concepts are for every subject we choose to translate into an exhibition. I think that Dan's contributions have been the most helpful to us in clarifying these.' The Principal Historian at IWM London referred to Todman's contribution to 'the underlying platform of historical interpretation in these new displays', adding that at 'each level, from initial concept through the first draft texts to the more developed version on which the interpretation now rests, Dan has critiqued and strengthened our vision. He has challenged our thinking, questioned our statements and, where necessary, offered clear adjustments and alternatives. As a result of his input, the scope and depth of the displays has been hugely improved'.

Enhanced visitor experiences: The translation of historical scholarship, through collaboration between historians and curators and the medium of museum exhibitions, has enhanced visitor experiences. 'Shakespeare: Staging the World' was both a critical and popular success drawing sizeable public audiences from the UK and overseas during the Olympic summer of 2012 (see reviews under 5 below). 'Revealing the African Presence in Renaissance Europe' was noted by the *New York Times* as one of the top ten exhibitions of 2012 in the United States. Prominent public figures attended (including congressmen, the mayor, and representatives from the Congress of Black Catholics, the NAACP, the National Museum of African Art and the National Museum for African American Culture); over 40,000 people visited the exhibition (2000 in its last two days); and the exhibition catalogue print run of 2100 copies sold out (it will become freely available as an ebook). The curator at the Walters Museum stated that she 'could only have made this rather audacious project work with a colleague like Kate. I was ready to take responsibility for the larger sweep of the historical hypothesis, interpretations of blackness, and for the challenges of racial politics, but I had to have someone of the highest intellectual rigor, knowledge, probity and profile

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to supply depth'. The projected figures from the IWM for centenary galleries are 1.3 million visitors in the first year, 80% of whom are expected to view the First World War galleries. The Director of Learning and Interpretation at IWM London has described the museum's expectations: 'The significance of this project as a whole (we're calling it Transforming IWM London) is huge as it is the first phase of a masterplan that will reinvent and renew this branch of IWM for the next generation (that's c.25 years or so, in our planning terms). It's also IWM's own centenary from 2017 onwards, and whilst we have remained true to the vision of the founders to display the items donated to us by so many veterans and eyewitnesses to war since then, we are translating that into this century's world. We are trying even harder to identify the things that will make the past make sense to visitors today, that will be familiar to them, or surprising or challenging - but above all will grab their attention and make them think a little.' Central to the success of the IWM's plans from the perspective of visitor experiences and understanding of the past is the content and form of the exhibitions which, according to the IWM's Principal Historian, have 'been significantly boosted by Dan's support and interest'. Todman has extended his contribution to the future experiences of visitors to the IWM's exhibition by leading the development at Queen Mary, with final year undergraduates on his modules, of a smartphone app which will prepare visitors for their trip by delivering information about the wartime experiences of servicemen and their families from the streets they pass as they walk from local underground stations to the Museum. Consequently, his research has contributed, and will contribute, to public appreciations of the historical significance of the First and Second World Wars, thus responding to the current government's policy, stated on 11 October 2012, of prioritising the commemoration of the First World War for the nation.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

For the British Museum [Exhibition](#)

- Jonathan Bate and Dora Thornton, *Shakespeare: Staging the World* (London: The British Museum Press, 2012), especially chapter 6, 'The Noble Moor', pp. 170-85, but also 34-6, 120-1, 220, 222, 234, 251-3. Also, see interview for BBC Radio 4 for '[Shakespeare's Restless World](#)' (in connection with the Shakespeare exhibition) broadcast in 1 May 2012
- Reviews: [The Daily Telegraph](#); [The Guardian](#)

For the Walters Art Museum Exhibition (thewalters.org/exhibitions/african-presence/)

- Kate Lowe, 'The lives of African slaves and people of African descent in Europe during the Renaissance', and Kate Lowe, 'Visual representations of an elite: African ambassadors and rulers in Renaissance Europe', in Joaneth Spicer ed., *Revealing the African Presence in Renaissance Europe* [the catalogue of the exhibition] (Baltimore: The Walters Art Museum, 2012), pp. 10-31, and 98-115
- Reviews and comment: [summary of media coverage](#); [Baltimore Sun](#); [New York Times](#)

For the Imperial War Museum Exhibitions (www.iwm.org.uk/centenary)

- IWM London First World War Galleries [information](#)

Individuals who can be contacted to corroborate impact:

1. Director of Learning and Interpretation at IWM London on: Todman's research as reason for his recruitment as advisor to IWM and of his role in the curation of WW1 galleries
2. The James A. Murnaghan Curator of Renaissance and Baroque Art, The Walters Museum on: how Lowe's scholarship informed the curation of the exhibition and the exhibition catalogue.
3. Principal Historian, IWM London on: Todman's influence on the historical interpretations underpinning the exhibition and on visitor experiences.
4. Head of IWM London First World War Galleries Content Team on: how Todman assisted the IWM in thinking about how to portray the First World War to the public.
5. Renaissance Europe and Curator of the Waddesdon Bequest, British Museum on: Lowe's influence on the shape and content of the exhibition.