

Fine Art Curatorship in the Regions

Date(s) Thursday 1st November 2012 (09:00-16:30)

Contact Workshop Leader: **Professor Matthew Rampley** (<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/staff/profiles/historyofart/rampley-matthew.aspx>)

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Are University Fine and Applied Art Research Partnerships a substitute for Collections-based Curators in Regional Museums?

Over the past 20 years there has been a dramatic decline in fine and applied art curatorship in the regional galleries, despite considerable investment from the Renaissance programme which initially focused on access and learning. <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/apply-for-funding/renaissance/renaissance-major-grants-programme/> (<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/apply-for-funding/renaissance/renaissance-major-grants-programme/>)

Major regional collections of national standing such as Birmingham, Bristol, Glasgow and Manchester have much diminished specialist fine art curatorial departments. Collection care managers very often now take on the curatorial role and little collection research is carried out by in-house curators, beyond the major national museums in London, Edinburgh and Cardiff and the large University Museums, the Ashmolean and Fitzwilliam.

Leading figures in the museum and gallery world such as Dr Nicholas Penny, Director of the National Gallery, London have long expressed concern about this situation. Specific projects, such as the National Inventory of European Paintings (NIRP) and the Neil MacGregor Scholarship programme, have involved bringing outside expertise in to assist regional galleries rather than training young regional curators. In the last year the National Gallery and British Museum have supported regional internship programmes.

Given the large number of posts which have been lost regionally, such programmes have not filled the gap, there has been an enormous loss of knowledge with retirements and instead regional collections have looked to University research partnerships to fill the gap, leaving remaining curators feeling frustrated as mere facilitators. Academic research often needs editing and developing for public exhibition or display - a role scholarly curators previously carried out. Acquisitions of historic art have also been adversely impacted by the lack of expertise in regional museums which has been noted by the Art Fund and the V&A Acquisitions Fund. The contribution of the Public Catalogue Foundation (PCF) and the recent OPEN conference will also be assessed.

The workshop will reflect this current debate in regional museums with key organisations in the sector expressing interest in presenting short 10-15 minute papers for discussion from various perspectives from the Art Fund, the Association of Art Historians, the Arts Council, the Museum Association, University Museums Conference, the Art Museums Director's Conference, the Steering Group for the Special Subject Network for European Paintings pre 1900 and the V&A Purchase Grant. The success of collaborative PhDs will also be covered. Leaders of the major regional museums would also contribute as well as the National Gallery, London and national institutions in Wales, Scotland and Ireland as well as the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford. There will be specific sessions benchmarking with European examples in Germany, Austria, France and Italy as well as a short presentation about recent developments in America where curators continue to be promoted to Director level. Proposals for solutions to this wide ranging problem will complete a day of debate and discussion, which we hope will feed into the 2013 Museums Conference and future shaping of Renaissance funding. With such enthusiasm from the sector, it is hoped that this will be a high profile opportunity for the University of Birmingham to place itself at the heart of this controversy and give us the chance to publish the debate and outcomes in the Association of Art Historians Journal. Sessions will be chaired by Professor Matthew Rampley, Professor Ann Sumner and Robert Wenley.

