

Collaborative Doctoral Awards Studentship Competition (Project-led)



**Arts and
Humanities
Research Council**

Project Title:	Histories, Collections and Practice: Gender and the Regional Art Gallery	
Project Summary:	This topical project explores gender representation in the collecting, curatorial and educational practices of UK art galleries from the early twentieth century to today. Using Newcastle’s Laing Art Gallery (founded 1906) as a central case study, it adopts a new-museological approach to uncover the gendered power relations inscribed in the gallery’s archive, which continue to influence practice today. The project will propose new impactful models for the museum sector, and nuance our understanding of the role of regional galleries in promoting public knowledge of the relationship between art and gender.	
Institution:	Northumbria University	
Partner Organisation:	Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne	
Primary AHRC Subject Area:	Cultural and Museum Studies	
Creative Practice Component:	None	

For further information and to submit an expression of interest, please contact:			
Lead Supervisor:	Dr Claudine van Hensbergen	Email:	Claudine.vanhensbergen@northumbria.ac.uk
EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST MUST BE RECEIVED NO LATER THAN:			6th January 2020

Project Description:
<p>Much of the attention currently given to the marginalised position of female artists in the British Art world tends to focus on individual creatives and their representation in national institutions. This project adopts a broader research remit by exploring wider gallery practices in relation to art and gender, doing so within the relatively-overlooked context of the regional gallery. The project uses the Laing Art Gallery (founded 1906) as a central case study, drawing on comparative research into other regional and national galleries.</p> <p>The Laing offers a productive focus for exploring the project’s key research questions. Approximately 5% of its permanent collection are works by female artists. This seemingly low figure is almost five-fold that of the National Gallery, where the figure is just 1% of the collection. How, then, can we better understand and conceptualise gender representation within the Laing’s collection? In turn, what does this reveal about the history of regional galleries on this front – has it been more proactive than that of national institutions? As well as holding key works by artists including Laura Knight, Beryl Fowler and Ethel Walker, the Laing has a history of solo exhibitions of female artists yet to be researched. For example, in 1933 the Laing hosted one of Knight’s earliest solo exhibitions, but we know little about the show’s impact on the gallery’s practice. Was it the success we might imagine and did it, perhaps, pave the way for future solo shows by female artists? This project will mine the archive to explore the extent to which the Laing, and comparative galleries, engaged with the</p>

politics of gender, especially during key movements such as suffrage and second-wave feminism. Recent exhibitions (Exposed, 2018; Enchanted Interiors, 2019) demonstrate the Laing’s current investment on this front, but postgraduate research will help the Laing, and other galleries, to better understand their own past and build this awareness into ongoing policies around acquisitions, displays and learning.

On a broader front, the project’s research will inform histories of gender representation in UK galleries by querying the dominant view that women have held little importance within histories of collecting and display. Furthermore, it will explore the relative independence of regional galleries in pursuing gendered agendas, challenging the conception that they are less innovative or progressive than national institutions. The student will undertake placements at a national gallery and two further regional galleries to better contextualise the findings of this study, which aims to provide a model for the ways in which galleries can engage with, and understand, the history and content of their collections to develop new narratives and initiatives relating to gender.

The project will be informed by archival and collections-based research as well as secondary scholarship on twentieth- and twenty-first century cultural histories of gender politics in Britain. The project’s central methodology will be to build on the approach first advanced in *The New Museology* (Vergo, ed., 1989), placing the gallery itself under critical scrutiny to explore the wider social relations it embeds and enacts. This self-reflexive approach has chiefly been applied to History museums and US-based institutions (Kavanagh, ed., 1996) rather than art galleries or UK-based institutions, and has begun to be applied to gender only in the last decade (Levin, ed., 2010). Indeed, Ana Baeza’s 2018 article argued that new directions in museum studies “must attend to the materiality of museum archives regarding their construction of gendered narratives.” The PhD will combine this new museological approach with attention to the more developed field of gender studies and feminist theory in Art History, first given shape by Linda Nochlin’s 1971 pioneering work, and more recently by Pollock (1999; 2007), Sjöholm Skrubbe (2016) and Reilly (2018).

Indicative thesis content:

Introduction (7,000 words)

Section 1 (archive-based research): Gendering the Gallery (30,000 words)

Identifying relevant works, their acquisition and display

Overview of work by female artists held both in the Laing’s collections and comparative institutions; overview of works with key female subjects/themes

Exploring past uses of these works and impact on gallery practice

History of solo exhibitions of female artists; history of gender-themed exhibitions

Section 2 (practice-based research): New Directions (30,000 words)

Proposing new methodologies

Female artists in Britain today (new narratives and forms)

Curating Gender in 2020-24: state-of-the-field of UK exhibition-making and reflection on development of new Laing exhibition (c. 2023)

Learning Initiatives: empowering women and informing audiences through educational engagement

Section 3: The Regional and the National (10,000 words)

Implications of comparative findings

Situating the regional gallery in relation to national institutions

Conclusion (3,000 words)

SUPERVISION AND EXTERNAL ADVISORS

First Supervisor:	Dr Claudine van Hensbergen	School/Department:	Faculty of Arts Design and Social Sciences/Humanities (English)
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Second Supervisor:	Prof Ysanne Holt	School/Department:	Faculty of Arts Design and Social Sciences/Arts (History of Art)
Additional Advisor:	Julie Milne	Organisation/Institution:	Chief Curator, Laing Art Gallery
Additional Advisor:	Anne Fountain	Organisation/Institution:	Lead Learning Officer, Laing Art Gallery

Dr. van Hensbergen (first supervisor) is an interdisciplinary researcher whose work explores intersections between art and literature, most often with a focus on gender. She has published widely on female creatives and female representation in the textual, performative and visual arts. Based in Humanities, van Hensbergen has considerable experience of working on art historical projects and is currently an AHRC Leadership Fellow (Innovation Fund, 2019-2021) with a project delivered in partnership with the Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle, and Shipley Art Gallery, Gateshead. The project supports van Hensbergen's research for a monograph, and funds an RA based at the Laing's Learning Team. The AHRC project also underwrites a suite of funded activities including academic conferences, workshops and knowledge-exchange visits. The PhD student will benefit from involvement in these events, which provide academic networking and dissemination opportunities, as well as insight into external partnership work. Van Hensbergen was previously a PDRA based in Tate Britain's Pre-1800 Curatorial Team on the AHRC-funded 'Court, Country, City: British Art, 1660-1735' project run between Tate Britain and York University, and she has publications in the fields of Art History and Literature. She has successfully co-supervised a number of PhDs to completion, including an AHRC Heritage Consortium DTP student working on gallery collections and display.

Prof. Ysanne Holt (second supervisor) has expertise in early twentieth-century British Art History, with a particular focus on the Edwardian and inter-war periods. She was commissioning editor of Tate Britain's 2012 online cataloguing project, 'The Camden Town Group in Context', funded by the Getty Foundation's Online Scholarly Catalogue Initiative. She has a strong interest in the social and historical relations between forms of cultural production, and was founding editor of the Routledge journal Visual Culture in Britain. She currently supervises a PhD working on the history of the Laing's collections (1904-1950s).

The applicant's supervision will be strengthened through the addition of two external advisors at the Laing: Julie Milne, Chief Curator, and Anne Fountain, Lead Learning Officer. Milne brings years of programming, curatorial and managerial experience, whilst Fountain brings years of educational-facing experience. Both advisors are closely familiar with the collections, will facilitate access to them, and will advise the applicant on the development of a project exhibition for the Laing and on wider public engagement. Their advisory involvement is essential, enabling these senior staff to perceive benefits to the gallery deriving from the applicant's research as they arise.

The supervisory team have a combined total of 9 PhD completions as first supervisor (Holt 8, van Hensbergen 1). Van Hensbergen has two PhD completions as second supervisor (including an AHRC Heritage Consortium DTP student working on gallery collections and display) and has supervised an MRes student (2018-19) on a fully-funded AHRC Heritage Consortium DTP award working on a dissertation project on the Laing's collections. The MRes student was collaboratively supported through a twelve-month placement at the gallery, mentored by Anne Fountain. The supervisory team have completed all mandatory institutional training in PhD supervision and ethics.

For full supervisory profiles see:

<https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/our-staff/v/clauidine-van-hensbergen/>

<https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/our-staff/h/ysanne-holt/>

RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

The student will be joining a rich research environment at Northumbria, facilitating the interdisciplinary and outward-facing nature of the PhD project, and offering a host of postgraduate opportunities for training and professional development. In recent years Northumbria has recruited a new generation of research-active staff and significantly grown its PhD population, securing large research grants (AHRC, Leverhulme Trust) and receiving AHRC funding for PhD

studentships through the Art & Design CDT. These awards have been strengthened by external partnerships, with the vibrant interplay between organisations central to the department's culture.

The student's departmental home will be in Humanities, where they will access the wide-ranging opportunities offered through Northumbria's Institute of Humanities. The Institute hosts seminars, conferences and book launches, and offers professional training for postgraduates, access to funds and the free use of premises for postgraduate-led events. Northumbria encourages interdisciplinary exchange between its departments, and the student will have access to the suite of research opportunities offered through the Department of Arts, including membership of the Visual & Material Culture Research Group. Through Arts postgraduates are provided with access to unique facilities including the BxNU Institute of Contemporary Art at Baltic39. Northumbria invests significant research capacity into professional contemporary art, performance and curatorial practices. The university has its own exhibition space, Gallery North, and an impressive art collection used to support teaching, learning and research; all these facilities are available for use by postgraduate students. The student will be given desk space, training and support at the Laing, but they will also access desk space in Northumbria's Glenamara postgraduate study centre and draw on collections held by Northumbria University Library. The student will complete all the mandatory postgraduate training programmes run through the Faculty of Arts, Design and Social Sciences. Furthermore, they will be able to extend their engagement with the museum and heritage sector through involvement in broader existing partnerships, including a current Heritage-Lottery funded project (2019-2022) overseeing fifteen cross-disciplinary projects between the Faculty and the National Trust.

Northumbria has a unique relationship with the Laing, and the institutions collaborate on multiple fronts. Dr. van Hensbergen's AHRC project represents a major investment (£191,207) in this relationship, with a project staff member based at the Laing but employed by Northumbria and line-managed by van Hensbergen. The AHRC project supports a suite of funded activities (academic conferences, workshops and knowledge-exchange visits) at the Laing and her sister gallery, The Shipley (Gateshead), and the student will benefit from involvement in these networking and knowledge-sharing events which explore productive partnerships between academics and the museum and gallery sector. Further evidence of a rich research relationship between the Laing and Northumbria abounds. Prof. Holt currently supervises a collaborative PhD student working on the Laing's collections (1904-1950s). This builds on a previous PhD completion for a project working on the Rothschild collections at the Shipley, which led to an extended AHRC Cultural Engagement project making the archive accessible. A 2001 Northumbria doctoral thesis was developed into the Laing's 'hugely' popular Cullercoats colony exhibition (2003).