

Institution: University of Aberdeen		
Unit of Assessment: 28 (History)		
Title of case study: Caravaggio: Generating Cultural Value Through Art Historical Research		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2003-2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
John Gash	Senior Lecturer, History of Art	09/1972-12/2019
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>John Gash's research on Caravaggism has generated significant cultural value through international exhibitions, raised the profile of Perth Art Gallery, and brought economic benefits to the commercial art market. First, his ground-breaking discovery of a Caravaggesque work in Perth sparked significant scholarly and public interest. Now usually attributed to Spadarino, one of Caravaggio's principal followers, the painting has been requested by major national and international galleries for touring exhibitions. This has boosted ticket sales, visitor numbers and revenues. Second, Gash's connoisseurship has contributed to the commercial art market, most notably in the attribution of the newly rediscovered <i>Judith Beheading Holofernes</i> to Caravaggio himself, which was sold in 2019 for EUR100-150,000,000.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>John Gash is one of the world's leading authorities on Caravaggio and his followers. His connoisseurship is internationally recognised, and he has published extensively on Caravaggism throughout his career. Gash's expert understanding of the origin and context of these works, and forensic analysis of form, brushwork and canvas, allows him to deduce painterly idiosyncrasies and reveal authorship. Coupled with his understanding of scientific techniques, this work has been central to the attribution of several important paintings, by Caravaggio himself and by his followers. These attributions have created both cultural and economic benefits.</p> <p>In 2009, Gash was the first to publish a highly accomplished, anonymous Caravaggesque work entitled <i>Christ Displaying His Wounds</i>, held within the collections of Perth Art Gallery and Museum (PAGM). Nothing was known about the painting when it entered the collection in 1861, and it had subsequently been recognised as a seventeenth-century Italian work, but with no clear artist. Struck by the similarities to Caravaggio, which the work presented, and through appreciation of subtle details and comparison with firmly-attributed works, Gash considered several artists of the Caravaggist school as potential authors, noting that firmer attribution would be possible if the painting was cleaned [1]. In 2012, PAGM was awarded a Woodmansterne Art Conservation Award to clean the painting, which allowed it to be removed from storage and permanently displayed prominently in PAGM from August 2013.</p> <p>Gash's groundbreaking discovery highlighted the work's international importance and sparked significant scholarly debate, to which Gash has further contributed [2]. The difficulties attendant on pinning down the artist intrigued both curators and the general public and, following its cleaning, many commentators now agree that the <i>Perth Christ</i> can be attributed to Giovanni Antonio Galli, one of Caravaggio's principal followers otherwise known as Spadarino, and that it is a significant and high quality example of his art. It has been included in several major exhibitions, including</p>		

Impact case study (REF3)

Beyond Caravaggio (London, Edinburgh, Dublin), *Utrecht, Caravaggio and Europe* (Utrecht, Munich) and *Caravaggio and Bernini* (Vienna).

Gash's monograph on Caravaggio himself [3], and further work on Caravaggio and his followers, have cemented Gash's global reputation for an unsurpassed 'connoisseurial eye', exemplified by his 2015 article reattributing the *Incredulity of St Thomas*, previously associated with Caravaggio or Ribera, to Spadarino [4].

In 2014 Gash was central to the scholarly debate around the rediscovery in Toulouse of Caravaggio's *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, the whereabouts of which were last recorded in the seventeenth century. Having been invited to authenticate the painting on the basis of his considerable expertise Gash was the first to publish research confirming the attribution [5]. His findings were integral to the sale of the picture as described below.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- [1] "A Caravagguesque 'Christ' in Scotland", *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. CLI, no. 1279, October 2009, pp.682-690.
- [2] "Caravaggism: Madrid, London, Dublin and Edinburgh", *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. CLIX, no. 1367, 2017, pp. 162-165.
- [3] *Caravaggio*, 2003, London: Chaucer Press. 128p.
- [4] Spadarino's "Doubting Thomas" rediscovered, *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. CLVII, no. 1351, October 2015, pp.678-81.
- [5] Caravaggio's other "Judith and Holofernes", *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. CLXI, no. 1398, September 2019, pp.716-31.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

John Gash's research on Caravaggism has raised the profile of Perth Museum and Art Gallery through enhanced interpretation and increased recognition, generated significant cultural value through international exhibitions, and brought economic benefits to the commercial art market.

Raising the Profile of Perth Museum and Art Gallery through Enhanced Interpretation and Increased Recognition

Gash's ground-breaking research on the *Perth Christ* has raised the profile of Perth Museum and Art Gallery. In 2014 Gash contributed to a film about the picture, *The Perth Christ. Discovery of a Masterpiece*, offering an enhanced interpretation of the painting and its significance. It was given a special screening in the Gallery and subsequently shown there on a loop throughout the REF census period, as well as being made available online [S1]. The film tells the story of the artwork's rediscovery, and Gash guides the general viewer to appreciate the expert connoisseurly methods that enabled the scholarly discussion and eventual attribution to Spadarino, one of Caravaggio's principal followers. As Maria Devaney, Principal Art Officer, explains in the film 'I think this has been a fantastic opportunity for Perth Museum and Art Gallery, to be able to focus on one of the many treasures that we have here and I think the fact it has been such a focus of debate between so many different academics, it's really put Perth Museum on the map and really highlighted the fact we do have really important treasures here in Perth'. More recently Rhona Rodger, PAGM's Senior Collections Officer, highlighted the lasting impact on the Gallery which increased recognition of the *Perth Christ* has had: 'the painting has been in demand from major museums around Europe and the reputation and interest in the work is steadily growing. I believe that this is mostly down to the research you [Gash] undertook on the painting and its subsequent inclusion in the tour of the National Galleries in London, Dublin and Edinburgh' [S2]. The exhibition was reviewed in *The Guardian*, with the *Perth Christ* prominently featured and credited, while one visitor to the National Gallery, London's Facebook page commented of the *Perth Christ*: 'Never knew this was in Perth. Will have to visit once it returns!' [S3, S4].

Generating Significant Cultural Value through National and International Exhibitions

Gash's work on the *Perth Christ* generated significant cultural value as the painting was exhibited in major touring exhibitions. It was included in the international exhibition *Beyond Caravaggio* at the National Gallery, London in 2016-17, subsequently shown in Edinburgh and Dublin. The former's press release described the *Perth Christ* as 'one of the most striking and memorable paintings in the show', and it was used heavily in publicity [S5]. Visitor numbers reached 191,661, exceeding targets by a 'significant margin' and making a 'positive net contribution to the National Gallery, London's financial position' [S5]. Similarly, the National Gallery of Scotland's exhibition was reported as the 'highlight of the summer season' for 2017, and in that year annual visits were 1,601,433, exceeding target by 41,433 [S6]. It was exhibited in major Caravaggio exhibitions in the Centraal Museum, Utrecht, and the Alte Pinakothek, Munich, in 2018-19. The former was attended by 110,000 visitors, making it the most popular exhibition at the Centraal Museum since its foundation in 1838 [S7]. It also formed part of the *Caravaggio & Bernini* exhibition at the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (October 2019-January 2020) and at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (February-June 2020).

Generating Economic Benefits to the Commercial Art Market

Gash's research has made him a consultant to international auction houses, including Sotheby's and the Dorotheum, Vienna. Jacques Leegenhoek, Paris-based art dealer and former Old Master Specialist at Sotheby's, explains that 'the impact of his research is clearly important for the market: several international auction houses regularly send him photos of difficult cases to get his opinion' [S8]. Gash was one of the first experts to be called to examine the newly rediscovered *Judith Beheading Holofernes* in Toulouse in 2014 and was the first to publish a research article endorsing it as a work by Caravaggio [S9, 5]. Old Master expert and Paris-based gallery owner Eric Turquin, through whom the sale was organised, explained the contribution of Gash's research: 'John Gash has been essential in attributing and asserting the Toulouse picture to Caravaggio... his monumental article in the *Burlington Magazine* in September has been instrumental in establishing the status of the picture as a new and major original by the artist' [S8]. The painting was scheduled to be auctioned on 27 June 2019 at the Halle aux Grains in Toulouse but was instead sold by private treaty two days before this, for an estimated EUR100-150,000,000 [S10]. Gash appeared in the documentary *L'Affaire Caravage*, screened to European audiences on the cultural programming channel ARTE on 23 February 2020, explaining his attribution. Frederic Biamonte, the director, stated that 'John Gash appears in my film as the main supporter of the attribution to Caravaggio... his arguments were the most convincing... and [his] sequence is now one of the best pieces in the documentary [S11]. Purchased by the American billionaire J. Tomilson Hill, a board member of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, it is expected that the picture will be placed on long term loan to this or another major gallery, although future timelines are unclear given the ongoing COVID-19 situation.

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

- [S1] "The Perth Christ. Discovery of a Masterpiece". Film directed by Alan McMaster (Woodmansterne Publications Ltd.), 2014. <https://vimeo.com/64288673>
- [S2] Rhona Rodger, Senior Collections Officer, E-mail testimony, 15 October 2019.
- [S3] The Guardian, 'Villains and visionaries: how Caravaggio's followers saw the light', 7 October 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/oct/07/a-villain-among-visionaries-how-caravaggios-followers-saw-the-light>
- [S4] National Gallery Facebook, 14 Oct. 2016.
- [S5] The National Gallery, Beyond Caravaggio, Press Release: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/about-us/press-and-media/press-releases/beyond-caravaggio>; The National Gallery Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2017. https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/media/24777/annual-report-accounts_2016-17.pdf
- [S6] National Galleries of Scotland, Trustees' Annual Report and Financial Statement for the year ended 31 March 2018. https://www.nationalgalleries.org/sites/default/files/features/pdfs/Annual_Accounts_31_March_%202018.pdf

- [S7] Email correspondence with Liesbeth M. Helmus, Senior Conservator Oude Kunst, Senior Curator of Old Masters, Centraal Museum, Utrecht.
- [S8] Email correspondence with Jacques Leeghoeck, Art Dealer and former Old Master Specialist at Sotheby's, 20 October 2019.
- [S9] Eric Turquin, "The Expert Eye", The Toulouse Caravaggio website. <https://thetoulousecaravaggio.com/en/the-expert-eye;> and e-mail correspondence, 10 October 2019.
- [S10] Marc Lebarbe and Cabinet Turquin, Press Release, June 2019, <https://thetoulousecaravaggio.com/en/the-auction>
- [S11] *L’Affaire Caravage* (2019), film by Frederic Biamonte for ARTE; correspondence with Frederic Biamonti, Director.