

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Cambridge		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 22		
Title of case study: Building partnerships, prioritising care and decolonising museum practice through the exhibition <i>Another India</i> .		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: September 2008-March 2018		
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:
Dr Mark Elliott	Senior Assistant Curator	01.03.2006-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: March 2017-March 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The 2017 exhibition <i>Another India</i> at the University of Cambridge's Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology (MAA) showcased, for the first time, artefacts and histories from Indian marginalised communities who have long been excluded from Indian and UK museums. The exhibition attracted 65,724 visitors and its public engagement events ("India Unboxed") noticeably increased diversity of MAA audiences, with 25% identifying as Asian or Asian British; events have also fostered cordial relationships between MAA staff and Cambridge's Indian community. <i>Another India's</i> creative programme had positive outcomes for people experiencing mental health problems, decreasing anxiety and depression, and increasing social inclusion and wellbeing. Innovative methodologies for research and co-production developed at Cambridge provided recognition and new opportunities for artists and curators from six communities in India, informed their practice and, along with the project's focus on colonial legacies of museum collections, contributed to work on decolonising museum practice.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Transdisciplinary research, conducted in Cambridge and India, and led by Mark Elliott (Senior Assistant Curator in Anthropology, 2012-present) built on a body of work at the University of Cambridge's Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology (MAA). Elliott's work has consistently prioritised collaborative scholarly research on historic collections and engagement with local, indigenous and 'source' communities who identify with the collections and legacies. His research engaged with largely unstudied and unknown collections from South Asia at MAA and the nuanced histories of collecting, colonialism, racism, academic practice and indigenous self-expression that they make visible.</p> <p>Elliott has been researching alternative and marginalised histories within Asian collections at MAA since 2008. His publications on the portrait sculptures of Indian people of English artist Marguerite Milward [R1; R2] identified indigenous men and women, and their ancestors, whose biographies are entangled in material and textual archives of South Asian anthropology. The research reassesses the significance of an unknown and unwanted collection of artworks, privileges indigenous identity and agency, and materialises the complicity of diverse academic and curatorial practices in the business of empire. Elliott's research on Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhism [R3] reconstructed provenances of artefacts from South Asia, including official and unofficial military loot, prestige gifts and specimens from scientific expeditions.</p> <p>Elliott took up each of the above strands in research he undertook specifically for <i>Another India</i>. This project's primary aim was to uncover and give space to indigenous voices and indigenous histories concealed within historic museum collections, articulating and challenging the historical complicity of scholars and museum practitioners in colonial exploitation. Research drew on established methodologies within museum practice and from ethnographic, archaeological, historical and art-historical approaches. Physical and visual examination of approximately 2,000</p>		

artefacts and photographs was cross-referenced with historic museum documentation, primary archival and published sources, making new connections and revealing subjugated histories around objects. This complemented an innovative programme of collaborative research and co-production with practitioners, activists and knowledge-holders from six source communities in India, grounded in commissioning of new artworks for MAA [R4]. Collections research and exhibition development were thus integrated in an example of exhibition-as-research [R5].

Elliott's monograph *Another India* [R6], written for professional and popular audiences, presented new research on more than 150 historic artefacts, and revealed forgotten or unknown historical links, through people, institutions and events, between collections within MAA and in the Fitzwilliam Museum and Centre of South Asian Studies in Cambridge, and further afield including the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, British Museum, London, the Indian Museum, Kolkata, and the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. The monograph uncovered previously obscured provenances, highlighting the role of well-known figures in the histories of anthropology, archaeology and empire. It articulated and critiqued curatorial practices of collecting, documentation, preservation and interpretation, challenging the dominance of the gaze and voice of the white Europeans (mostly male) in the museumification of cultural heritage and the roots of apparently neutral forms of classification (identifying places or cultural groups) in colonial structures of systematic racism. As a case study of how museums and collections are colonised, it contributes to urgent work towards their decolonisation by making provenances and legacies transparent while experimenting with collaborative approaches to interrogating and challenging them.

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

All outputs listed below underwent rigorous peer-review and emerged from eight research projects (listed below) based at MAA or involving MAA as a partner. Manuscripts of monographs and exhibitions [R3, R5, R6] were peer-reviewed by MAA curators and Department colleagues, with sections reviewed by external specialists in the area. Monographs were positively reviewed in peer-reviewed journals including the *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, where *Another India* was described as "an interesting and important model for future catalogues of museum ethnography." [E3]

R1: Elliott, M. (2012). Sculptural biographies in an anthropological collection: Mrs Milward's Indian 'types'. In K. Hill (Ed.). *Museums and biographies: Stories, objects, identities* (pp. 215-228). Boydell & Brewer. ISBN: 9781843837275

R2: Elliott, M. (2015). Sculpting the network: recognizing Marguerite Milward's sculptural legacy. In E. Hasinoff & J. Bell (Eds.). *The anthropology of expeditions: Travel, visualities, afterlives* (pp. 174-204). University of Chicago Press. ISBN: 9781941792001

R3: Diemberger, H., Elliott, M. & Clemente, M. (2014). *Buddha's word: The life of books in Tibet & beyond*. Museum of Archeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge. ISBN: 0947595201

R4: Elliott, M. (2019). Decolonial re-enactments? Facing and re-facing colonial histories in collecting 'Another India'. *Third Text*, 33(4-5), 631-650. [DOI](#)

R5: Herle, A., Elliott, M. & Empson, R. (2009). *Assembling bodies: Art, science & imagination*. Museum of Archeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge. ISBN: 9780947595180

R6: Elliott, M. (2017). *Another India: Explorations and expressions of indigenous South Asia*. Museum of Archeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge; Adivaani/One of Us. ISBN: 9780947595241

Funding:

F1. J. Robb - *Changing beliefs of the human body* - Leverhulme Trust - 2005-2010 - GBP1,181,061. Supported publications R1 and R5 above.

F2. A. Herle, M. Elliott & R. Empson - *Exploring the technologies that make bodies visible* - Wellcome Trust - 2007-2008 - GBP28,486. Supported publications R1 and R5 above.

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F3. A. Herle, M. Elliott & R. Empson - *Bodies of evidence* - Arts Council England (East). - 2007-2008 - GBP28,760. Supported publications R1 and R5 above.

F4. U. Bulag, S. Hugh-Jones, B. Quessel & H. Diemberger - *Transforming technologies and Buddhist book culture: The introduction of printing and digital text reproduction in Tibetan societies* - Arts & Humanities Research Council - 2010-2016 - GBP711,196. Supported publications R2 and R3 above.

F5. M. Elliott - *Unpacking India: Recalcitrant objects, contested histories in MAA's collections* - Cambridge Humanities Research Grant - 2016-2017 - GBP12,430. Supported publications R4 and R6 above.

F6. M. Elliott - *Conservation and documentation of South Asian collections at MAA* - The Pilgrim Trust - 2016-2017 - GBP10,000. Supported publications R4 and R6 above.

F7. M. Elliott - *Collecting Indigenous South Asia*. New Collecting Award. Commissioning new works by Indigenous artists in India - Art Fund - 2016-2017 - GBP50,000. Supported publications R4 and R6 above.

F8. M. Elliott - Additional funding for exhibition design, construction and graphics - The Crowther-Beynon Fund - 2016-2017 - GBP16,000.

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

The exhibition *Another India* (8 March 2017 to 22 April 2018), curated by Mark Elliott, was the first exhibition to focus on the Indian subcontinent at MAA and the first on historic artefacts from Adivasi (Indigenous or 'Tribal') communities across India. It was the centrepiece of – and inspiration for – “India Unboxed” (February-December 2017), a season of exhibitions, events and activities organised by the University of Cambridge Museums and Botanic Garden (UCM), coinciding and marking the British Council's UK-India Year of Culture (2017). The impacts below follow three strands that were essential to the vision of *Another India* and museological practice at MAA: developing and decolonising curatorial practice, increasing input and opportunities for artists and source communities, and building museums as spaces for care and wellbeing - for collections, communities and visitors.

Impact on museum audiences and their diversity

Another India attracted 65,724 visitors. Its 47 public engagement events around Cambridgeshire included music projects for young women's groups, art activities for people at risk of depression and social exclusion, family activity days, lectures and tours, reaching 1,087 children and 1,318 adults, with 25% of participants identifying as Asian or Asian British [E1, p. 20]. This was a noticeable transformation of MAA's traditional audiences: in 2015, 13% of visitors had identified as BAME. The increase in diversity of MAA audiences continued beyond *Another India*: in 2019, 15% identified as BAME, 2% above the UCM average [E2]. Across UCM, a similar increase in audience diversity was noted, with significantly more BAME visitors, including but not limited to people with South Asian heritage, and increased visits to under-accessed museum collections. To quote UCM colleagues and community groups [E1, pp. 6-7]:

“The events... have certainly reached new audiences both within the University and within Cambridge resident community, both old and young”; “It ‘Highlighted parts of our collection that were regularly not noticed. We saw an influx of more diverse families.”; “during the period of our exhibition over the summer we had visitors from more diverse ethnic backgrounds, including people with South Asian heritage.”

Impact on local community participation

Another India prompted the Cambridge Indian Cultural Society [E3] to donate their *pratima*, or idol of Goddess Durga, to MAA. The *pratima* has been worshipped by Cambridge's Hindu community for a decade, but was now being replaced with a new one from Kolkata (traditionally fresh idols are made annually, though re-use from year to year is common diaspora communities). Since the donation, MAA staff participated in the Society's Durga Puja celebrations, breaking down barriers between the museum and the community. As a volunteer University Liaison of the Indian Cultural Society notes, the displaying of the Goddess has been

key to fostering cordial relationships with a section of the local community, adding that *“Had it not been for Another India..., [we] would not have considered MAA as a home for our Pratima... it has been most gratifying to note that a piece of our cultural heritage has been valued and treated with respect as part of the University’s effort to acknowledge and showcase diversity in the UK.”* [E3]

Impact on health and wellbeing

The exhibition also had impacts on health and wellbeing through the Arts on Prescription scheme. This programme, delivered in Cambridgeshire by Arts and Minds (a charity recognised by the UK Government, National Health Service and the World Health Organisation), offers sessions on museum collections to people experiencing mild to moderate anxiety and depression. Sessions are accessed via self-referral or via health or social care workers, and are facilitated by a professional artist and qualified mental health counsellor. In 2017-18, 60 people on the scheme participated in five workshops focused on *Another India* (12 participants at each workshop), leading to an exhibition of participants’ work in MAA. Improved health outcomes from the sessions include 71% of participants reporting decreased anxiety, 73% decreased depression, 69% increased social inclusion and 76% increased wellbeing [E4]. As an Arts Facilitator at Arts and Minds explains:

Working with objects is hugely important to our participants’ wellbeing offering them a chance to connect with the hand and the power of the objects. ... [participants] spent a long time drawing from the objects and then often spent two or three sessions making their own objects influenced by the exhibition. This is very unusual for the groups, concentration can be a real issue for my students that are often heavily medicated. ... The exhibition had a real “wow” effect on the participants’ morale... the participants were also talking more during the sessions and ... some of their own stories of traveling around India were shared. The effect on my students was so positive that I kept taking all my new groups to see it and created several workshops inspired by the exhibition. We also had the immense pleasure in meeting the curator Mark Elliott who came and looked at the work; some was shared back with the Indian artists and makers. This helped build the group’s confidence. [E4]

Impact on creativity, culture and society: recognition and new opportunities for artists and practitioners

Art Fund support enabled five one-day community workshops with 20 artists and cultural practitioners from six indigenous and Adivasi communities in India in March-April 2016. These workshops involved artists from Santal and Gond (Koitur) communities in Dumka (Jharkhand), Konyak and Ao woodworkers in Mon and Dimapur (Nagaland), Gassiya metalworkers in Kondagaon (Chhattisgarh) and Rathwa woodworkers in Tejgadh (Gujarat). Workshops introduced MAA and the collections it cares for, highlighting issues of colonial collecting, ownership and representation that MAA foregrounds. Elliott presented images and descriptions of artefacts from the artists’ own communities in MAA collections, and participants discussed their significance and legacy. Finally, participants were invited to propose concepts for new artworks that responded to the collections, histories or contemporary salience, developing them collaboratively with each other and with curators from Cambridge and India. The 11 resulting commissions were highlights of the *Another India* exhibition and are now in the MAA collections.

MAA and Art Fund were committed to paying a fair price for the artworks that reflect the labour and skill involved. The value of the commissions between eight artists was INR 822,000, or approximately GBP8,500. Resulting from *Another India*, two artists have received further high-profile public commissions [E5, E6] and one of them stated that working on it *“helped me know myself, know our strengths, possibilities and tradition which are so amazing and beautiful”* [E5]. The unprecedented exposure and recognition received by the artists is recognised in a review of the *Journal of Museum Ethnography*: *“These extremely insightful commissions address issues of colonial control and power, fractured indigenous identities, and ... allow for new interpretations of colonial-era objects, but importantly they also provide a platform for voices from India that rarely get to speak for contemporary Indian art and culture”* [E7].

Adivaani, an Indigenous Peoples' publishing house that focuses on Adivasi writers, designed and published Elliott's monograph *Another India* [R6] in collaboration with MAA. For Adivaani, it was the first time they had worked in museum and exhibition publishing. Following this exposure, they were contracted to produce a catalogue for the exhibition *Behind the Indian Boom* (Brunei Gallery, SOAS, London, 2017). As Adivaani's Director states, "Another India has been a big part of our lives – work and otherwise... what came after has been a lot" [E5]. Beyond immediate financial or capacity-building benefits for project collaborators, she points to intellectual and creative outcomes that are inseparable from and constitutive of collaborators' self-identification as Adivasi or Indigenous peoples:

"Another India allowed us Adivasi creative collaborators the opportunity to debut our works internationally, adding a much-valued boost to our careers, but also enabled us to imbibe an effective ethic and approach to art curation and exhibiting to supplement our traditional ways of living, thinking and practicing art." [E5]

The Coordinator of the research, commissioning and consignment of the artefacts for the *Another India* exhibition states that the project has 'definitely had an impact on my curatorial practice as well as the practice of the artists' [E8]. She subsequently established a foundation in New Delhi, Art@Anangpur, to promote marginalised artists and cultural producers, which includes a gallery, workshop and meeting space as well as an online sales platform where the emphasis is obtaining a fair price for the work of artists from marginalised communities.

The Curator of the Sanskriti Museum & Art Gallery in Jharkhand held a placement at MAA during the production of the exhibition. He found that "the experience of working on Another India... but most of all the curatorial approach that it fostered – have enriched my professional progress as a curator" [E6]. Sanskriti have since adopted the consultative and participatory approaches promoted by MAA on *Another India* in extensive participatory consultation with local Oraon, Munda, and Santal communities, contributing to Sanskriti's new galleries. For these communities, *Another India* created "a sense of pride and enthusiasm to further explore and keep their heritage intact, even when they face the impacts of modernization and displacement from mining, effects of deforestation and migration" [E6].

In Cambridge, the UCM's "India Unboxed" season grew out of *Another India* and was developed in parallel, supported by an Arts Council England ChangeMaker Fellowship for the project curator of the season. A legacy of this work has been the establishment of the Change Makers Action Group (CMAG) as a platform to advocate for more inclusive museum practice and for structural change in museums in Cambridge and beyond. As the Chair of CMAG states, "Without India Unboxed, it's unlikely that CMAG would have developed so rapidly across the consortium and with so much ground-up support. It's a testament to the dialogue and self-critique that the season enabled at all levels of our organisations" [E9].

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

- E1: India Unboxed Evaluation Report, University of Cambridge Museums
- E2: UCM visitor profiles 2013/2019 (Audience Agency)
- E3: Testimonial from Volunteer University Liaison, Indian Cultural Society, Cambridge
- E4: Testimonial from Arts Facilitator, Arts and Minds
- E5: Testimonial from Director, Adivaani, Kolkata
- E6: Testimonial from Curator, Sanskriti Museum & Art Gallery (Jharkh)
- E7: Book review: *Another India*. *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 31 (2018), 262-247
- E8: Testimonial from Curator, Art@Anangpur (New Delhi)
- E9: Testimonial from Chair, Change Makers Action Group