

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Edinburgh		
Unit of Assessment: 32 (Art & Design: History, Practice and Theory)		
Title of case study: New Perspectives on the Renaissance Nude		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013 – 2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name: Jill Burke	Role: Professor of Renaissance Visual and Material Cultures	Period employed by submitting HEI: 2003–ongoing
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2018 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Burke's research expertise was crucial to the success of <i>The Renaissance Nude</i>, a major exhibition at The Getty, Los Angeles and The Royal Academy, London. Attracting combined audiences of 229,514 and reviewed in over 25 international publications, the exhibition brought the gender politics of the Renaissance nude to new audiences in the #MeToo era, generating impact by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inspiring new curatorial approaches towards Renaissance art that are responsive to topical debates. 2. Shaping public perceptions of the Renaissance nude and the understanding of its socio-political relevance today. 		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Burke's research focuses on the function, production and evaluation of the nude and the politics of the Renaissance body in the period 1400-1530. Her contributions to the field lie in three areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Integrating the category of gender into histories of the nude; 2. Presenting new global and regional contexts of the nude; 3. New interpretations of the relation between images of the nude and the theory and practice of depicting human figures from life. <p>These insights challenge prevailing scholarship that treat the nude as an ideal, ahistorical category (cf. Kenneth Clark's <i>The Nude: A Study in Ideal Art</i>) or primarily as a response to classical art. They prompt reassessment of the prevailing view of Renaissance art as a Western period construct detached from current concerns.</p> <p>1. Integrating the category of gender into histories of the nude</p> <p>Burke's research has prompted new ways of thinking about the nude in terms of period ideas of gender difference, sexuality and female appearance. She has investigated the function of the nude in Italian courtesan culture and linked the rise of the representation of the female nude in the early sixteenth century to new bodily ideals [3.1, 3.2, 3.3]. In this way, the research has exposed the differing receptions of male and female nudes.</p>		

2. New global and regional contexts of the nude

Burke's research has demonstrated how encounters with non-European cultures shaped perceptions of nakedness within Renaissance Italy and how the depiction of naked non-European figures reinforced ideas of European superiority following colonialization [3.1, 3.4]. Challenging the idea that the nude was essentially an Italian artistic development, Burke has presented the nude's emergence as a pan-European phenomenon shaped by regional artistic and religious ideas and patterns of censorship [3.5].

3. New interpretations of the relation between images of the nude and the theory and practice of depicting human figures from life

Burke's research has disproved the commonly held view that female nudes were based on classical statuary or studies of male nudes rather than on the direct study of real women [3.1, 3.5, 3.6].

3. References to the research

- 3.1. Burke, J. (2018) *The Italian Renaissance Nude*. London and New Haven: Yale University Press. ISBN: 9780300201567 (Submitted in REF2)
- 3.2. Burke, J. (2017) 'Emulating Venus: Beautifying the Body in Early Modern Europe'. In Hatzaki, M. (ed.), *The Venus Paradox*, Nicosia: A. G. Leventis Foundation, 45-50 ISBN: 9789963732265 (Can be supplied by HEI on request)
- 3.3. Burke, J. (2014) 'Il nudo femminile nella vita e nell'arte del Rinascimento'. In Laurati, P. (ed.), *Doni d'amore: Donne e rituali nel rinascimento*, Milan: Silvana, 22-31. ISBN: 9788836629862 (Can be supplied by HEI on request)
- 3.4. Burke, J. (2013) 'Nakedness and Other Peoples: Rethinking the Italian Renaissance Nude'. *Art History* 36:4, 714-739 <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8365.12029>
- 3.5. Burke, J. (2016) 'The European Nude, 1400-1650'. In Loughman, T., Morris, K. M., and Yeager-Crasselt, L. (eds), *Splendor, Myth and Vision: Nudes from the Prado*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 16-49. ISBN: 978-0-300-21874-9 (Submitted in REF2)
- 3.6. Burke, J. (2018) 'The Body in Artistic Theory and Practice'. In Burke, J., Kren, T. and Campwell, S.J., (eds.), *The Renaissance Nude* [exhibition catalogue], Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 183-245 (Can be supplied by HEI on request)

4. Details of the impact

On the basis of her research expertise, Burke was appointed to the advisory committee for *The Renaissance Nude*, a major exhibition tracing the rise and development of the nude in the period 1400-1530, held at two high profile museums: The Getty, Los Angeles and The Royal Academy (RA), London. Burke's research contributed to the exhibition's presentation of Renaissance culture as relevant to the way we think about gender and body image today. The exhibition attracted a combined attendance of 229,514 (150,728 to the Getty – judged 'highly successful' [5.1, 5.2]; 78,786 to the RA) and selling over 6,300 catalogues. It ranked within the Getty's top 20 most visited shows of all time [5.1].

The exhibition generated two key impacts:

1. Inspiring new curatorial approaches towards Renaissance art that are responsive to topical debates

Burke contributed to important changes in the curatorial representation of Renaissance art and the way major exhibitions can engage with topical debates and attract diverse public audiences. Incorporating Burke's insights into 'broader historical and cultural factors and methodologies' [5.2], *The Renaissance Nude* moved away from the customary language of idealism and triumph towards a multifaceted, historically-situated contextualisation that spoke to current concerns.

The Senior Curator Emeritus at the J. Paul Getty Museum and lead curator for *The Renaissance Nude* confirmed that Burke's 'grasp of gender theory and deep understanding of social issues around the body' were fundamental for the exhibition, offering 'fresh ways of understanding Italian Renaissance art' [5.2]. Her research also enabled the exhibition to speak to 'contemporary audiences and helped to assure its strong attendance at both venues.' Indeed, they highlighted Burke's 'ability to make her ideas accessible to a general audience' [5.2]. Burke's catalogue entries and catalogue essay were the basis for the wall texts and labels in the Getty presentation [5.2].

The RA Curator described Burke's contribution as 'crucial' to *The Renaissance Nude's* 'attempt to revisit Kenneth Clark's seminal *The Nude*' and its aim 'to develop a more nuanced understanding of the different perceptions of the nude in Italy and Northern Europe' [5.3]. They noted that Burke's essay in *The Guardian* about Renaissance nudes and gender 'helped to further clarify our curatorial approach.' [5.3]

Burke's research contributed to the associated public events at the RA and the Getty. Her work on life drawing generated new engagement opportunities for the RA – a four-week 'Drawing the Renaissance Nude' life drawing course and an online #LifeDrawingLife class. Public events at the Getty involved broad groups of public intellectuals and contemporary artists, discussing issues around the presentation of the body and gender in well attended events (1,358 total attendees) [5.1].

The Renaissance Nude, notably 'its reconsideration of gender and sexuality in early modern art', fed into the conceptions of other exhibitions on Renaissance art such as *Giulio Romano: Art and Desire*, Palazzo Te, Mantua, 2019 – 2020 [5.4].

2. Shaping public perceptions of images of Renaissance nudes

Burke's research contributed to new appreciation of the historical complexity and socio-political currency of Renaissance nudes. It brought focus to the gender politics of representations of the nudes, ensuring that *The Renaissance Nude* spoke to topical public debates around gender, identity and body politics intensified through the #MeToo movement.

The Renaissance Nude was also influential in placing nude within a global context, expanding audiences 'beyond the usual aficionados of Renaissance and pre-Modern art' [5.2]. Burke's research influenced the Getty's decision to focus a study day on images of

nudes outside Europe, which was 'effective in bringing in local audiences of diverse ethnic backgrounds' [5.2].

As the representative of *The Renaissance Nude's* curatorial team responsible for media engagement, Burke played a key role in bringing the research informing the exhibition to the public. Her contributions included a post on *Iris* (the Getty blog) and an article on the RA website [5.5], widely discussed interviews for the BBC Culture blog and the Radio 4 programme *Start the Week*, a public lecture at London's National Gallery, and guest appearances on the arts podcast *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* [5.6]. A *Guardian* opinion piece authored by Burke drew 200 responses in a single day. This included support for exhibitions that challenge the 'new puritanism of art in our own age' and make 'a genuine attempt at generating sober debate' [5.5]. Burke's appearance on the BBC2 documentary *Titian – Behind Closed Doors* (aired 4 April 2020) brought a 'fresh take on the subject of Titian's *poesie* and [...] the role of female models' that revealed 'the problematic nature of the subject matter, in contrast to more traditional views that focus largely on the skill of the artist' [5.7].

The Renaissance Nude received significant positive media coverage. As the Senior Curator Emeritus at the Getty noted, 'all the key reviews that have appeared thus far [...] singled out Jill Burke's contributions with praise' [5.2]. Consistent across the coverage was the acknowledgement that *The Renaissance Nude* led to new appreciation of the nude's complexity and diversity with respect to media, subject, geographical origin and function. The magazine *Apollo*, discussing the Royal Academy iteration, stated that the broad chronology and cross-national focus showed the nude 'to be far more multifaceted than one might have previously imagined' [5.8]. *The Guardian* ranked *The Renaissance Nude* 13th in its top 20 exhibitions of 2019, calling it 'thought-provoking' and 'a jolt to the system'. It commented that 'the exhibition shows us that the variety of approaches to the naked body is almost as diverse as the artists who depicted them' [5.8]. *Frieze* praised *The Renaissance Nude* for challenging 'easy narratives about prurience and prudishness in Renaissance art' [5.8], while *The Telegraph* stated that it gives 'a sense of the renaissance as way weirder and more complex than you imagined' [5.8].

London Review of Books commented that *The Renaissance Nude* 'forcefully' made the point 'that the male and female nude have very different histories and significance.' Critic Waldemar Januszczak's YouTube video, which drew 2,573 views, highlighted the inclusion of male nudes: 'by avoiding the obvious Venuses and nymphs, it's a very fresh-feeling show' [5.8]. *H-France* called it 'one of the best full-scale shows of Renaissance art in the last two decades' [5.8]. Singling out Burke's research insights into the use of female models, it stated that the show 'is above all a welcome and important challenge to revisit the iconography of the gendered body today, in light of the importance of resisting forced gender conformity six hundred years later'.

Indeed, at least five commentators writing for international newspapers (*The Art Newspaper*, *The Financial Times*, *The Times*, *The Spectator*, *The Independent* and *The Guardian* [5.8]) explicitly linked the exhibition to #MeToo, with many more noting that it drew attention to the role of images in shaping negative attitudes towards women, LGBT+ people and other marginalised groups such as older people [5.8]. *The Times* described the Royal Academy iteration as a 'definition-busting, picture-widening, sex-upsetting, #MeToo-welcoming, ratio-

righting, image-correcting masterclass of a display' which 'overturns pretty much every preconception about its subject' [5.8]. Other reviews commended the exhibition for shedding unexpected light on broader intellectual contexts, such as anatomy and artists' use of life models [5.8].

The exhibition catalogue was also singled out for praise. *H-France* noted that the catalogue 'extends the impact' of the show through its 'transnational approach' and praised the 'genuine engagement with figures from outside Europe' [5.8]. *The Historians of Netherlandish Art* reviewers called the catalogue 'exemplary' and that 'most impressive is the attention to nudes both North and South, and assertions that not all major developments arose in Italy' [5.8].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 Attendance and sales figures at the Getty and the RA

5.2 Testimonial from Senior Curator Emeritus, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

5.3 Testimonial from Curator, Royal Academy, London

5.4 Caslini, E. (2019) 'Giulio Romano: Art and Desire. Interview with Exhibition Curators Barbara Furlotti and Guido Rebecchini'

5.5 Collated articles on *The Renaissance Nude* authored by Burke

5.6 Collated media appearances by Burke on *The Renaissance Nude*

5.7 Testimonial from the Founder of Red Duet Pictures, producers of *Titian – Behind Closed Doors*, BBC 2

5.8 Collated press on *The Renaissance Nude*