

Institution: University of Kent		
Unit of Assessment: 33 Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies		
Title of case study: The Power of Drawing: Transforming Public Perception of Raphael		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2003-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name: Dr Ben Thomas	Role: Reader	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 1999 to date
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2017-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
Summary of the impact		
<p><i>Raphael: The Drawings</i> exhibition (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 2017) enhanced public understanding of Raphael and transformed how audiences viewed his work. The visitor response and the overwhelmingly positive media attention impacted key beneficiaries in the cultural and creative sectors. It raised the profile of the Ashmolean as a national and international cultural destination; contributed to the sustainability of the museum and the local and regional economy; enriched critical and public understanding of Raphael; informed the development of new learning initiatives; informed the practice of contemporary British artists; and prompted successful collaborations with national and international museums and galleries.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>The research that underpinned this case study was undertaken by Ben Thomas (University of Kent), in collaboration with Catherine Whistler (Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford), between 2013 and 2019. The research project, <i>Transforming our understanding of Raphael with eloquence in drawing as a research theme</i>, was supported by a £135,265 two year Research Project Grant from the Leverhulme Trust.</p> <p>Thomas and Whistler co-curated the exhibition <i>Raphael: The Drawings</i> (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford: 1 June to 3 September 2017). The concept, visual narrative, graphic presentation, publications and public programme, embodied the results of Thomas and Whistler's research while also deriving strength from the Ashmolean's unrivalled collection of drawings by Raphael, and from the opportunity of staging an international loan exhibition in partnership with the Albertina, Vienna, in 2017.</p> <p>Thomas drew on his earlier research on Renaissance art theory, including questions of eloquence, the <i>paragone</i> debate, and constructions of <i>disegno</i> [R1, R2]. He also drew on his experience as Curator of the Studio 3 Gallery (2010-15) at the University of Kent (where he worked with a wide range of contemporary artists including Art & Language, John Blackburn, Paul Coldwell, Rose Hilton, Philip Hughes, Ana Maria Pacheco, Marcus Rees Roberts, Brian Rice, Richard Rome, Aithan Shapira, and Hani Zurob) and as curator of exhibitions at the Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery (Leeds, 2014) and the Stephen Lawrence Gallery, (Greenwich, 2013) [R3]. The combination of his earlier research on Raphael and his curatorial work with contemporary artists informed Thomas's impetus to challenge existing perceptions of Raphael's drawings. Instead of addressing them only as precursors to paintings, Thomas and Whistler developed an innovative methodology for the study and curation of drawings that centred on the concept of eloquence.</p> <p>The research methodology for <i>Raphael: The Drawings</i> involved the close visual scrutiny of Raphael drawings held in UK and European collections, the technical investigation of the drawings by the Ashmolean Conservation Department, and knowledge-sharing with curators and conservators internationally (e.g. Louvre, Paris; Albertina, Vienna; and Uffizi, Florence, 2016-17). Key insights were achieved through a series of interdisciplinary workshops held in front of the drawings in Oxford. Participants included cognitive scientists, social anthropologists, literary historians, and contemporary artists. Insights from these participants included, for example, a musician pointing out interval and rhythm in a drawing, a neuroscientist observing how Raphael directs our focus in it, and an artist showing where Raphael started to draw and tell us how long the drawing took. Findings from these</p>		

interdisciplinary dialogues guided the close study of the drawings by Thomas and Whistler in research trips to collections in London, Windsor, Chatsworth, Paris, Lille, Vienna, and Florence. Insights from this process were published in a jointly authored academic article, in which Thomas and Whistler also demonstrated how the concept of eloquence offers an innovative research tool in the study of Raphael drawings [R4].

Through the application of this original approach of detailed descriptive analysis, Thomas and Whistler gained new insights into Raphael's habits of invention and the layered nature of his drawings. These findings informed the selection and display of the drawings in the exhibition and helped shape the exhibition narratives and publications. Comparisons with paintings were avoided, together with questions of authorship. The focus was instead on the characteristic traits of eloquence in Raphael's draughtsmanship, as revealed through the recurrence of familiar motifs. The principal mode of dissemination of the research findings was the exhibition held at the Ashmolean Museum in Summer 2017. This brought together 120 drawings and presented them in three strands; invention, orchestration and expression. These strands highlighted Raphael's experimental approach, visual strategies and graphic language. Drawing on his curatorial experience, Thomas played a central role in bringing these strands together by establishing the thematic design that ran through the exhibition rooms. The research was further disseminated in two exhibition catalogues and a jointly-edited collection by Thomas and Whistler, as well as through a series of related public talks and events [R5, R6].

Whistler and Thomas were jointly awarded the University of Oxford's Vice Chancellor's Public Engagement Prize in 2019, for 'opening new pathways to understanding and enjoying the art of Raphael'. The exhibition was awarded the 2017 Exhibition of the Year by Apollo Magazine (in a shortlist of exhibitions at the National Gallery, Tate Modern, the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, the Frick Collection New York, and the Hammer Museum, LA) and in March 2018 the exhibition won a Global Fine Art Award for Best Exhibition 1200-1830, solo artist (in competition with the Metropolitan Museum and Rijksmuseum). Both this critical acclaim and the public response demonstrated that the new approach successfully opened up Raphael's drawings for appreciation and enjoyment by a wide audience.

3. References to the research

[R1] "The art consists of hiding the art": Castiglione and Raphael' in Antonella Braida and Giuliana Pieri (eds), *Image and Word. Reflections of Art and Literature from the Middle Ages to the Present*, Oxford: Legenda - Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 134-50. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351197755>

[R2] Ben Thomas, 'Disegno: Superficial Line or Universal Design?' in Ita MacCarthy (ed.), *Renaissance Keywords* (Oxford, Legenda/Oxford University Press, 2013) pp. 27-38. <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/31502/>

[R3] Ben Thomas, 'Passing through...', in *Paul Coldwell: A Layered Practice – Graphic Works 1993-2012*, exhibition catalogue, Canterbury, University of Kent, 2012. <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/65286/>

[R4] Ben Thomas and Catherine Whistler, 'Eloquence in Raphael Drawings', *Artibus et Historiae* 74 (2016). <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/31503/>

[R5] 'Raphael and the Idea of Drawing' in Catherine Whistler and Ben Thomas with Achim Gnann and Angelamaria Aceto, *Raphael: The Drawings*, exhibition catalogue, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2017, pp. 43-55. Reprinted in Achim Gnann (ed.), *Raffaello*, exhibition catalogue, Vienna: Albertina, 2017, pp. 27-39. <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/61918/>

[R6] Ben Thomas and Catherine Whistler (eds), *Raphael and the Eloquence of Drawing*, Urbino: Accademia Raffaello, 2020. <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/86675/>

[G1] *Transforming our understanding of Raphael with eloquence in drawing as a research theme*, £135,265, Research Project Grant, 2015, Leverhulme Trust. (Whistler PI, Thomas Co-I)

4. Details of the Impact

Raising the profile of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford as a national and international cultural destination

The success of the *Raphael: The Drawings* exhibition raised the profile of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and contributed directly both to the museum's sustainability and to its ability to programme ambitious exhibitions in the medium and longer-term. Writing in 2020, the museum's Commercial and Public Engagement Directors noted: 'Raphael: The Drawings remains one of the most successful exhibitions the Ashmolean has ever staged, and the most impactful when taking into account all measures such as social and cultural impact, in addition to economic and critical success' [h].

The exhibition exceeded the Ashmolean's initial attendance projections by more than 50% (c.68,000 compared to initial projections of 45,000), making it necessary to extend the evening and weekend opening hours [a]. Illustrating the broad reach of the exhibition, over 30% of the attendees were first-time visitors, which is the highest proportion of new visitors for any of the Ashmolean's major exhibitions. In terms of international reach, attendance by overseas visitors was 5% higher than for other similar exhibitions [b].

Extensive coverage of the exhibition in both national and international press further extended the reach of the research to a worldwide audience. There were 148 pieces of offline media coverage (newspapers, magazines, radio and TV) reaching an audience of 66 million. Coverage included reviews, articles and interviews in the *Financial Times*, *Guardian*, *Telegraph*, *Sunday Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *La Repubblica* and *La Stampa*, as well as discussions on BBC Radio 2's *Breakfast Show*, *BBC News at 10*, BBC Radio 4's *Front Row* and *Saturday Review* and BBC Radio 3's *In Tune*. In addition, there were 68 online articles and reviews with an estimated coverage of almost 1.5 million readers. These articles and reviews were shared more than 8,600 times across social media, and the Ashmolean's Raphael website had more than 130,000 views [a]. According to the Ashmolean's marketing data, this coverage was a key factor in the high attendance figures [b].

Contributing to the economic sustainability of the museum and the local and regional economy

In his Foreword to the 2016/17 Annual Report, the Director of the Ashmolean, wrote: 'The year ended in suitably spectacular fashion with Raphael: The Drawings [...]. Ambitious exhibitions not only attract visitors, showcase new research and shed new light on our collections. They yield many other benefits [...] a healthy increase in visitor's numbers, a marked rise in Friends' membership and our most successful year in terms of income generation and commercial profit' [d].

Approximately £684,000 was generated through the sale of tickets. 547 new members joined the museum (an increase of 26%) and a further £206,000 was generated through the exhibition shop [e, h]. Overall, average spend per visitor in the exhibition shop was 34% higher than the previous record for exhibition shop spend (Degas). This increase was underpinned by strong catalogue sales. Reprinted twice, and with more than 8,200 copies sold, the exhibition catalogue generated revenue of £130,000, which is almost three times higher than the next best previous exhibition (Cézanne) [a, h].

The Ashmolean Commercial Director wrote that 'the Raphael exhibition was, commercially, one of the Ashmolean's most successful exhibitions, contributing to the financial sustainability strategic objective of the Museum to increase its organisational resilience' [h]. In total, the direct revenue generated by the exhibition was almost £850,000 (excluding any wider expenditure associated with visitor travel, accommodation and subsistence). This represents approximately 22.4% of the museum's total self-generated income in 2017-18 [d, e]. Accounting for the ripple effect throughout the wider economy, the initial income generated as a result of the exhibition would be expected to result in a total direct, indirect and induced effect of £1.9 million [e]. Demonstrating local and regional impact, the Commercial Director also notes that the exhibition's success benefitted not only the museum but also 'the city of Oxford and the region of Oxfordshire, where the Ashmolean plays a major civic role' [h].

Enriching critical and public understanding of Raphael and drawing

The exhibition enriched the cultural awareness and understanding of the viewing public and other audiences. According to the Ashmolean's Director of Public Engagement, 'the radically different research approach to *Raphael's Drawings* with an emphasis on the universality of drawing, experimentation, brainstorming and expressing emotions, helped the audience connect more directly with the art and artist. It gave his work a contemporary relevance [that] encouraged creative thinking and practice for visitors' [h]. 92% of respondents to the Ashmolean Exit Survey rated the exhibition as either 'excellent' or 'very good' and written feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with many commenting that seeing the drawings enriched their understanding of the artistic process [b]. 82% of visitors surveyed felt that their understanding of drawing had been changed as a result of their experience and over 58% of surveyed visitors were inspired to try drawing as a result of the exhibition [b].

The strong press response (5* ratings from *The Times*, *Telegraph*, *Guardian* and *Financial Times*) demonstrated how powerfully the research impacted upon audiences. Jonathan Jones, in the *Guardian*, described the exhibition as 'a magnificent, mind-changing exhibition' and noted that it is 'rare for an exhibition to transform how we see an artist' [c]. Jackie Wullschlager, in the *Financial Times*, called it 'game-changing' and an exhibition 'which alters our conception of its creator' [c]. Leading art critic and TV presenter, Andrew Graham Dixon, described it as 'one of the greatest exhibitions for 20 years' [c].

Building on Whistler and Thomas's approach to the curation of Raphael's drawings, the museum's education department developed initiatives that encouraged visitors to respond creatively to the themes of the exhibition, including setting up drawing and sketchbook stations throughout the main galleries. This was hugely popular with visitors and as a result the museum has retained this initiative in its permanent galleries where, to date, over 22,000 sketchbooks have been used [j]. Public understanding was further increased through a number of engagement events, including 'Bitesize Raphael' talks by early career researchers, and four events in the Lecture Room (capacity 90 people, each sold out). Those events included an 'in conversation' between Thomas and a cognitive neuroscientist, as well as presentations by an artist, a paper conservator and the research team. Post-event feedback identified that 97.5% of attendees agreed that their understanding of Raphael had been changed by the event and 100% thought differently about drawing [j].

Extending creative collaborations: Reaching new audiences and informing professional and artistic practice

Reach was extended through co-operation with the Albertina museum in Vienna which led to a partner exhibition (*Raphael*, 29 September 2017 – 7 January 2018) seen by over 330,000 visitors [k]. The curator of the Vienna exhibition affirmed that while their presentation and focus differed, the Albertina exhibition drew extensively on the research of Thomas and Whistler [f]. Reflecting this, essays by both Thomas and Whistler were included in the Albertina museum's exhibition catalogue which sold almost 7,000 copies in both German and English-language formats. Via the exhibition and accompanying catalogue, Thomas and Whistler's research was therefore disseminated to a wider German-speaking audience [k].

Thomas's curation of *Raphael: The Drawings* led to a further collaboration when he was invited to curate an exhibition, *Drawing Together*, at the Courtauld Gallery, Somerset House, in London between 30 September 2017 and 2 January 2018. According to the Courtauld's Curator of Drawing the invitation was made because of Thomas's 'engaging, solid and innovative knowledge, method of working and understanding of old Master and modern drawings [...and his] approach in developing the exhibition *Raphael: The Drawings* at the Ashmolean Museum' [g]. Thomas' curation of *Drawing Together* explored the nature of drawing and stimulated new insights by presenting unexpected pairings of drawings from the Courtauld Gallery's collection with those by living artists. This encouraged a dialogue between the past and the present that invited the viewer to engage with the exploratory nature of drawing. The exhibition was attended by approximately 56,000 visitors. The artist Stephen Farthing RA donated the drawing he had created for the exhibition to the Courtauld Gallery's permanent collection [g].

The *Raphael* and *Drawing Together* exhibitions had a significant influence on the practice of three internationally renowned British contemporary artists. Humphrey Ocean, RA, noted that ‘When I saw Ben Thomas’s exhibition of Raphael drawings, I was struck (and, to be honest, surprised) by the urgency, the sheer modernness’. He went on to say that ‘Ben’s perceptive writing in the catalogue, followed by what he then wrote about my own work in his show *Drawing Together* at the Courtauld, gave me the idea of asking him to write the essay for my book’ [i]. This prompted a further collaboration between Ocean and Thomas that resulted in a Royal Academy of Arts monograph (2020) on Ocean’s work. Stephen Farthing, RA, noted that ‘The Raphael drawings project offered me, as an artist actively engaged in research, the opportunity to engage in dialogue with a cross disciplinary group of scholars [...] and finally to participate in a drawing exhibition curated by Benjamin Thomas at the Courtauld Gallery’ [i]. Jenny Saville, RA, corroborated that both the research and the exhibition impacted on her professional practice, noting that the ‘Raphael exhibition of drawings at the Ashmolean museum had a profound and long-lasting impact on my work. Through this possibility for intensive study of Raphael’s drawings I found new directions in my work, as well as being able to discover artistic similarities in our endeavour as artists depicting the human form. For me Raphael is a contemporary artist and I use the catalogue from the exhibition on daily basis for reference when I’m working. I hope there are future exhibitions such as this, as they are fundamentally useful and inspiring for an artist such as myself, working in 21st century’ [i].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[a] Marketing Report 2017 for the exhibition *Raphael: The Drawings*. This report, produced by the Ashmolean, includes data on visitor numbers, characteristics and expenditure.

[b] Exit Survey 2017 for *Raphael: The Drawings*. This report, produced by the Marketing Department at the Ashmolean, corroborates the change in understanding of the exhibition on visitors and how this impacted on their informal learning.

[c] Coveragebook for the exhibition and other press articles. This media reporting tool collated press articles on the exhibition and provided data on offline and online audience reach.

[d] Ashmolean Annual Reviews: 2016/17 and 2017/18. The Chairman and Director’s Foreword corroborates the extent to which the *Raphael: The Drawings* exhibition brought economic and cultural benefits to the museum (2016/17) and provides a detailed breakdown of the museum’s income and expenditure (2017/18).

[e] Economic impact of *Raphael: The Drawings*. Economic benefits summary sheet and Arts Council England (2019), Contribution of the Arts and Culture industry to the UK economy. This report provides guidance on the identification of the direct, indirect, and induced impact when measuring the economic benefits of arts and culture.

[f] *Raphael* Exhibition, Albertina, Vienna (2017). This press announcement corroborates that Catherine Whistler and Ben Thomas conceived the Albertina exhibition in collaboration with the curators at the Albertina.

[g] Testimony from the Curator of Drawings, Courtauld Institute of Art, London, corroborating the influence of Thomas’s research on the exhibition *Drawing Together*, visitor numbers and acquisition of Stephen Farthing drawing.

[h] Supporting statement from the Ashmolean Commercial Director and the Director of Public Engagement, corroborating the economic, social and cultural impacts of the exhibition.

[i] Testimony from three contemporary British artists, corroborating the influence of Thomas’s work on their practice.

[j] Entry to University of Oxford Vice-Chancellor’s Research competition detailing the exhibition’s public engagement and learning initiatives and their impact.

[k] Testimony from the Curator of Italian Art from the 15th to the 19th Century at the Albertina Museum, Vienna, corroborating visitor numbers and catalogue sales.