

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Oxford		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 28 – History		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Impact of the exhibition Raphael: The Drawings on public understanding and behaviour, and on professional practice		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2010-2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Catherine Whistler	Keeper of Western Art, Ashmolean Museum and Professor of the History of European Art	1988-present
Angelamaria Aceto	Research Assistant, Leverhulme-funded Raphael research project (2015-18), Italian Drawings research project (2018-20)	2007-present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> June 2017-December 2019		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>This prize-winning exhibition of wide international reach disseminated innovative art-historical research, based on the concept that drawings are journeys of discovery and eloquent artefacts. It overturned art-historical views on Raphael as a purely project-oriented artist, and on the functional nature of Renaissance drawing. Through an emphasis on the experimental and the persuasive aspects of drawing – foregrounding the materiality and agency of the object – the exhibition and programmes transformed visitors' perception of the art of Raphael. It deepened visitor appreciation of drawing, altered visitor behaviours by promoting creativity through drawing, and affected professional practice, creative practice and public understanding, nationally and internationally.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>The exhibition project (concept, visual narrative, graphic presentation, publications and public programme) embodied the results of a 2-year Leverhulme Trust-funded research project, 'Transforming our understanding of Raphael with eloquence in drawing as a research theme', a collaboration between Catherine Whistler (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford) and Ben Thomas (University of Kent). This new research grew organically from Whistler and Thomas's individual interests, deriving its strength from the Ashmolean's unrivalled collection of 80 drawings by Raphael, and from the opportunity of staging an international loan exhibition in a first-time partnership with the Albertina, Vienna (2017) (<b>R4</b>).</p> <p>Whistler's research since 2010 has displayed a particular concern with the cognitive and expressive nature of drawing and the historical evaluation of <i>disegno</i> (drawing and design) in studies of Venetian and Renaissance art. Her 2015 exhibition in partnership with the Uffizi, Florence (<b>R1</b>) and her major book (<b>R2</b>), challenged accepted views on the significance and understanding of drawing, providing a distinctive contribution to the underpinning research for the 2017 Ashmolean exhibition. Her 2015 exhibition additionally featured work by a leading British artist. Subsequently, Whistler invited Thomas to collaborate on a Raphael research project owing to the scholarly distinction of his work on Renaissance art theory (the <i>paragone</i> debate and constructions of <i>disegno</i>). A joint academic article signalled their use of concepts of eloquence as an innovative research tool in the study of Raphael drawings (<b>R3</b>). The cultural enrichment through the understanding, enjoyment and practice of drawing that individuals would experience as an outcome of the exhibition was intrinsic to their thinking from the outset. A point of departure was the recognition that Raphael's art is seen as bland and irrelevant by modern</p>		

audiences. In academic studies, concerns with taxonomy and function have marginalized Renaissance drawings: an emphasis on drawings as utilitarian steps in a linear progression towards a successful outcome has inflected current art-historical understanding of Raphael as a pragmatic, entrepreneurial figure. Through an emphasis on the nature of drawing as a mode of thinking, discovery and performance, Whistler and Thomas aimed to transform public and academic perceptions of Raphael.

The research methodology involved the close visual scrutiny of Raphael drawings in UK and European collections, the technical investigation of 40 drawings by the Ashmolean Conservation Department, and knowledge-sharing with curators and conservators internationally (e.g. Louvre, Paris; Albertina, Vienna; Uffizi, Florence). Angelamaria Aceto, the Research Assistant, contributed to the administration, research, public engagement and outputs of the project (**R5**, **R6**). The team aimed to transcend disciplinary boundaries through exploring the relationship of drawing with memory, cognition, embodied knowledge, rhetoric, emotion and performance. They held 3 interdisciplinary workshops in Oxford between 2016 and 2017 with participants (UK and international) from disciplines including Experimental Psychology, Social Anthropology, Cognitive Neuroscience, Classics, Medieval Studies, Italian Studies, English, History, Musicology, Fine Art, Theology and History of Art.

The research findings from analytical scrutiny, technical investigation, and multi-disciplinary events enabled the project team to develop a new language for analysing Renaissance drawing and yielded original interpretations of Raphael and drawing.

### 3. References to the research

- R1.** [Exhibition, catalogue available on request] Catherine Whistler, *Drawing in Venice: Titian to Canaletto*, with essays by Marzia Faietti, Giorgio Marini and Jacqueline Thalmann (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, 2015)
- R2.** [Authored Book, available on request] Catherine Whistler, *Venice and Drawing: Theory, Practice and Collecting 1500-1800* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2016). ISBN 9780300187731.
- R3.** [Journal Article, listed in REF2] Ben Thomas and Catherine Whistler, 'Eloquence in Raphael Drawings', *Artibus et Historiae* 74 (2016), pp. 25-36. Available at: <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:1ac6d55d-0926-4e61-8a5d-eea8c1d6fdbd>
- R4.** [Exhibition, details available on request] *Raphael: The Drawings* (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, 1 June-3 September 2017), curated by Catherine Whistler and Ben Thomas
- R5.** [Authored Book, available on request] Catherine Whistler and Ben Thomas, *Raphael: The Drawings*, with contributions by Achim Gnann and Angelamaria Aceto (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, 2017)
- R6.** [Chapter, available on request] Angelamaria Aceto, 'On Raphael's use of blind stylus and some new sketches for the Disputa', in Ben Thomas and Catherine Whistler, eds, *Raphael and the Eloquence of Drawing* (Urbino, Accademia Raffaello, 2020), pp. 87-101

#### Grants/prizes awarded:

**Leverhulme Trust 2015:** a 2-year Leverhulme Research Grant (RPG-2015-409) of GBP135,265, awarded to Whistler (PI) and Thomas (Co-I) to research the project *Transforming our understanding of Raphael with eloquence in drawing as a research theme*, with academic and public engagement outputs.

**Getty Foundation (The Paper Project) 2018:** a grant of GBP230,000, awarded to the Ashmolean Museum (Whistler, PI) for curatorial training in the preparation of a scholarly collection catalogue of Italian drawings from the collection of the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology (funding period has been extended up to September 2022).

**British Academy Medal 2018:** awarded to Whistler for her book *Venice and Drawing* (**R2**).

### 4. Details of the impact

As PI, Whistler negotiated with senior figures in the relevant lending institutions (the Louvre, the Uffizi, and others) to demonstrate the originality and significance of the research. This led national and international collections to agree to lend major artworks to the Ashmolean and to their first-time partner, the Albertina, Vienna. The 120 Raphael drawings selected by the research team for display became active agents for exhibition viewers, sparking visual comparisons and juxtapositions of approach, affect and process. The innovative language used in the exhibition texts and publications was a key contributor to the impact. Another was the unusual exhibition narrative, which used the oratorical strands of invention, orchestration and expression as structuring elements over 3 galleries. The exhibition texts emphasised Raphael's experimental approach, visual strategies and charged graphic language. This innovative presentation enabled a clear communication of the project's findings on the material and visual rhetoric of drawings. Exhibition audiences were encouraged to engage with the drawings as intimate gestural works with the artist's mind and hand in tune, which could activate thoughts and emotions in the viewer.

Research insights were disseminated in advance of and during the exhibition (01/06/2017-03/09/2017) via the website, social media, YouTube films and press articles (E1). The exhibition webpage had 10,241 unique page views before the exhibition opened, and 93,797 during the run, the highest ever for the Ashmolean. The exhibition trailer was viewed 20,045 times across YouTube and Facebook, with a video featuring Whistler viewed 33,018 times across the 2 platforms (E2). A film shown first in the exhibition presented technical information and discoveries resulting from the research; it remains live on the Ashmolean website (E3).

#### Impact on public understanding and behaviour

The exhibition's reach and significance are attested by record-breaking visitor numbers (67,628; target 45,000), by the need to reprint the accompanying book 4 times (target of 2,000 sales; over 8,500 sold), by the overwhelmingly positive press and media response (e.g. Jonathan Jones, *Guardian*: 'Today, Raphael seems to many eyes ... boringly strait-laced. But that image is blown away by this exhibition. ... This mind-opening show will transform how Raphael is seen'; Richard Cork, BBC Radio 4 *Front Row*: 'incredible ... a revelation'; Jackie Wullschlager, *Financial Times*: 'a game-changing presentation'; Alastair Sooke, *Telegraph*: 'first-rate ... should not be missed') (E1.4-1.7), and by 2 prestigious international awards (Apollo Exhibition of the Year; Global Fine Art awards) (E4).

Cultural enrichment and changed public perceptions or behaviour were attested by the Exit Survey (1,882 respondents): 82% of exhibition visitors felt their understanding of drawing had changed, and 99.87% felt their views on Raphael had changed after visiting the exhibition (E5, E6). Particularly rewarding was the feedback from highly-trained Visitor Experience Assistants who reported the attentiveness of visitors in looking at the drawings, with more than one person moved to tears. One visitor wrote: 'We moved to Oxford in August 2017 when I was 5 months pregnant ... When our son was born in late January 2018 we named him Raphael ... The Ashmolean's work on this exhibition had a deep impact on me and will have a life-long effect on the small chap! Thank you for curating such a powerful show. I am sure it touched many people and prompted them to reflect on childhood, love, ageing and living too' (E7).

Moreover, 58% of exhibition visitors were inspired to have a go at drawing. Opportunities were provided in the exhibition and shop space, e.g. encouraging people to take emotion as a subject for drawing; free Raphael sketchbooks and pencils in the main galleries took these to wider audiences. This initiative became permanent, with over 23,000 sketchbooks used by the end of 2019.

Public understanding was further altered and enriched by public engagement with research (PER) events involving dialogue with research findings. Each session, with 90 places, was booked out: Stephen Farthing RA, *Raphael and the Nine Secrets of Drawing*, 7 June 2017; Catherine Whistler, *Raphael's Eloquence*, 24 June 2017; Conversation with Ben Thomas and a Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience, University of Kent, *Drawing Attention to Raphael's drawings*, 11 July 2017; Angelamaria Aceto and Ashmolean Senior Paper Conservator, *Beneath*

*the surface: unveiling Raphael's drawing techniques*, 18 July 2017. Participants were asked:

- Has your understanding of Raphael been changed by this talk?
- Has this talk made you think differently about drawing?

The responses were positive (42 forms were returned with 99.5% agreeing with the first question, 100% with the second). Further cultural enrichment came through 4 'Bitesize Raphael' public talks by early career researchers with their personal responses to the research findings.

### **Benefits to the Ashmolean and impact on professional practice**

The extraordinarily positive international and national press coverage (**E1**) saw the Ashmolean increase its profile as a major cultural destination with 5-star ratings from the *Financial Times*, *The Times*, *Guardian* and *Telegraph* (**E1.4, E1.6-1.8**). The exhibition exit survey showed approximately 31% first-time visitors (up 7% from previous exhibitions), and 14% overseas visitors (compared to 9% at *Degas to Picasso*, the previous highly successful show) (**E5**). Economic benefits to the Ashmolean were seen in retail sales: revenue of GBP208,656, with an average spend per visitor of GBP3.09 (compared with GBP2.31 for the previous show); and in the highest increase per exhibition of membership of Friends of the Ashmolean (547 new members and 350 renewals) (**E6**). New types of promotion and marketing trialled during the exhibition run (e.g. adding quotations from 5-star reviews to the poster; advertising at Marylebone Station and London underground sites) have become embedded in exhibition planning. Further economic benefits derive from a Raphael facsimile initiative, a new commercial partnership (2019) with leading Italian publisher Treccani. The award of GBP230,000 in 2018 to the Ashmolean (Whistler as PI) by the Getty Foundation (international 'Paper Project' initiative), for curatorial training and research on Italian drawings, was made on the basis of the Museum's quality of drawings research. The dynamic interdisciplinary workshops enhanced the Ashmolean's institutional research profile and affected participants' professional practice.

Impact on the Ashmolean's Learning Strategies is seen in the increased use of drawing in education and well-being activities as a direct result of the exhibition's success in changing perceptions of the nature and value of drawing, e.g. new Royal Drawing School/ Ashmolean courses for 15-18 year olds; a digital initiative ('Your Sketchbooks') (**E8**); 2 sessions on drawings as part of a 2019 mental health initiative with Oxfordshire Mind culminating in a display of participants' work, described by an Oxfordshire Mind representative as 'a wonderful opportunity to present a positive image of those with mental health problems in the heart of Oxford's cultural landscape' (**E9**).

### **Benefits for artistic, museum, and curatorial practice nationally and internationally**

A leading British contemporary artist described how her new understanding of Raphael's drawings has affected her creativity: 'The Raphael exhibition ... and discussions I have had with Catherine Whistler in front of Raphael's drawings have 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' (**E10**).

Institutional impact is attested by the Courtauld Gallery's development of an exhibition with a publication by Ben Thomas, *Drawing Together*, based on the project team's concept of drawing as a journey of discovery, with an associated interdisciplinary workshop at the Courtauld Research Forum (11 November 2017). The partner exhibition in Vienna (28/09/2017-07/01/2018) (**E11**) evolved from our project, bringing increased revenue and profile for the Albertina, with 350,000 exhibition visits. Essays by Whistler and Thomas in the accompanying book (German edition: 5,455 sold; English edition: 1,376 sold) shared their research findings with a new audience.

The exhibition and book have had an enduring effect on the practice of a leading US curator: 'The Raphael exhibition's public-facing components had something genuinely *exciting* about them.... The show had a kind of centrifugal force, powering the viewer from drawing to drawing like a page-turner of a novel. I assure you, this is *not* easy to accomplish. It requires deep research, enormous knowledge, and a genuine desire to understand one's diverse audiences

and share one's enthusiasms. I can honestly say I have rarely, if ever, seen such a satisfying and successful exhibition of drawings. Its effect on me and my own curatorial practice was profound' (E12). A leading US curator, now a UK museum director, also testifies to the impact of the radically innovative nature of the exhibition and book in presenting research findings: 'The result[s] of these two forms of interrogation - the intellectual bird's-eye question of eloquence and the parsing of each individual sheet - were truly revelatory. They were also controversial in a way I think is entirely healthy ... This is a radical shift ... [T]his exhibition made me think hard and for the first time about how the well-defined processes of Renaissance speech- or sermon-making might appear in visual form in Raphael's drawings – the uses of memory (including mnemonic techniques), invention, imitation, fantasy – with observation from life, only one ingredient' (E13).

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- E1.** Selection of press and media coverage of *Raphael* exhibition demonstrating changed views of Raphael: **E1.1.** The Daily Telegraph, 27 May 2017; **E1.2.** The Times, 27 May 2017; **E1.3.** The Guardian, 30 May 2017; **E1.4.** The Guardian, 30 May 2017; **E1.5.** BBC Radio 4 Front Row, 30 May 2017; **E1.6.** The Daily Telegraph, 31 May 2017; **E1.7.** Financial Times, 1 June 2017; **E1.8.** The Times, 1 June 2017; **E1.9.** BBC 1 News/BBC News 24/BBC World, 2 June 2017; **E1.10.** The Sunday Times (Culture), 4 June 2017; **E1.11.** BBC Radio 4 Saturday Review, 10 June 2017; **E1.12.** La Repubblica, 11 June 2017 (in Italian); **E1.13.** The Mail on Sunday, 11 June 2017; **E1.14.** i, 14 June 2017; **E1.15.** The Spectator, 17 June 2017; **E1.16.** Oxford Times, 27 July 2017; **E1.17.** The Guardian, 4 August 2017; **E1.18.** BBC Radio 2 Breakfast Show, 21 August 2017; **E1.19.** Apollo, December 2017.
- E2.** Webpage analytics, film views and ticket sale information, via email from Ashmolean Museum Marketing Team, 25/08/2020.
- E3.** Film presenting the research shown in the *Raphael* exhibition from 01/06/2017, continuing on the Ashmolean website (screengrab), <https://www.ashmolean.org/raphael-exhibition-video>. Accessed 23/10/2020.
- E4.** Webpages showing international awards for *Raphael*: **E4.1.** Apollo Award 2017: Exhibition of the Year (shortlist: National Gallery, Tate Modern, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, Frick Collection New York, and Hammer Museum, LA); **E4.2.** Global Fine Art Award 2017: Best Exhibition 1200-1830, solo artist (shortlist: Metropolitan Museum, New York, and Rijksmuseum Amsterdam). Accessed 23/10/2020.
- E5.** Report of *Raphael* exhibition Exit Survey, 09/10/2017, Ashmolean Museum Public Engagement Department, containing visitor data and feedback.
- E6.** *Raphael* Marketing Evaluation, 09/10/2017, Ashmolean Museum Public Engagement Department, containing visitor data.
- E7.** Email from Oxford resident, 27/02/2018.
- E8.** *Your Sketchbooks* webpage, which displays drawings, collages and creations inspired by visits to the Ashmolean, including works inspired by *Raphael: The Drawings*, <https://www.ashmolean.org/your-sketchbooks>. Accessed 21/10/2020.
- E9.** Email from Oxfordshire Mind, 04/08/2020, conveying response of manager of the Oxfordshire Mind facility where the Art Group meet.
- E10.** Email from leading British artist, 27/02/2019.
- E11.** Webpage for Albertina, Vienna exhibition, <https://www.albertina.at/en/press/exhibitions/raphael/>. Accessed 19/10/2020.
- E12.** Email from the Anne Vogt Fuller and Marion Titus Searle Chair and Curator of Prints and Drawings at The Art Institute of Chicago, 31/07/2019, on the impact of the exhibition on their curatorial practice.
- E13.** Email from the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Curator and Chair of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts at the Metropolitan Museum, New York (now Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge), 18/04/2018, highlighting the impact of the exhibition on their curatorial approach to Raphael and Renaissance drawings.