

Institution: University for the Creative Arts		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 32		
Title of case study: Innovative Textiles Curation: Enabling Arts Organisations to Deliver Institutional Strategies [https://research.uca.ac.uk/5590/]		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012 - 2020		
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:
Prof. Lesley Millar	Dir. International Textile Research Centre	1999 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 - ongoing		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Prof. Lesley Millar has led five curatorial projects (thematically-related and all using a common methodology) with 10 public arts organisations, creating 6 exhibitions at 8 UK and European venues. These organisations are the beneficiaries of the impact. In each of the projects, Millar's research has led to change in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the development of new creative practice and approaches • the development of new collaborations and connections with greater global reach • the ability to reach bigger and wider audiences. <p>In turn, impact in these areas has allowed each of the participating museums, galleries and arts organisations to fulfil their institutional strategy, aims or mission more fully.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Millar's research in the curation of this case study is built on her long trajectory of pioneering work which commenced with <i>Revelation</i> (1996, Barbican). This exhibition toured to Japan, enabling Millar to forge cross-cultural connections further developed in <i>Textural Space</i> (2001, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts and Whitworth Gallery, Manchester), and leading to the establishment (AHRC-funded) of the Anglo-Japanese Textile Research Centre in 2004. Further large-scale projects included <i>Context and Collaboration</i> (2006-7), <i>Cloth and Culture Now</i> (2008) and <i>Lost in Lace</i> (2011). In 2014 the Anglo-Japanese Textile Research Centre expanded its reach to become the International Textile Research Centre (ITRC), with a mission in the 'national and international dissemination of contemporary textile practice'. The ITRC works across countries sharing a common heritage of strong contemporary textile practice built on traditional foundations. Millar's curatorial practice facilitates cross-cultural dialogues, placing textile practitioners from different geographical locations in close working relationships to respond to particular research themes.</p> <p>This case study encompasses 5 projects with multiple components.</p> <p>Transparent Boundaries (2012-14) (R1) took the structure of lace as a leitmotif, with Millar using its net-like form to create a network of 5 European organisations in 5 countries that collaborated in textile-related workshops, performances and exhibitions all responding to the changing position of older people in society. Unlike much discourse on the 'Elder', <i>Transparent Boundaries</i> saw older people as an overlooked but vital part of society, celebrating their contribution. This project was established and generating impacts before the start of the assessment period (Aug 2013), with subsequent impacts adding significantly to these foundations into the assessment period. The closing exhibition and performances, which fall within the scope of this case study, were a collaboration between Millar, Italian partner AMAT, Tcacka Gallery in Wroclaw, Poland and Adam Mickiewicz University in Kalisz, Poland.</p> <p>In Cloth & Memory 2 (August – November 2013) (R2), Millar asked an international group of artists to respond to the UNESCO World Heritage site of Salt's Mill, Yorkshire. Artists were prompted to consider the relationship between the making and use of cloth and its role in memory, resulting in this exhibition (which was linked to the <i>Transparent Boundaries</i> project,</p>		

above). *Cloth & Memory 2* showed work from 23 artists from the UK, Japan, Norway and Germany, in August - November 2013, and was located in the huge, unrestored nineteenth-century spinning room at Salt's Mill. Contemporary textile practice was brought into juxtaposition with a site where the traces of manufacture seep like memories from the floors and walls.

Kawaii (2015-16) (R3) focussed on the relationship between traditional and contemporary textile and craft practice. Millar invited 16 Japanese artists to interrogate the modern concept of 'kawaii' (transient, ephemeral, 'cute' fashions), through the enduring skills of traditional Japanese crafts. The resulting exhibition (a collaboration between UCA and Rugby Museum and Art Gallery) provided new insights into the subversive (rather than commercial) nature of kawaii, for both Japanese and UK artists and audiences.

Tapestry: A Narrative for our Times (2016-2018) (R4) consisted of the exhibitions *Tapestry: Here and Now* and *Weaving New Worlds*. The former brought Millar into collaboration with the National Centre for Crafts and Design (NCCD) in Lincolnshire, the Midlands Arts Centre (MAC) in Birmingham and the Holburne Museum in Bath. The latter extended the project to the William Morris Gallery in London. As in *Kawaii*, Millar invited participating artists (in this case from around the world) to respond to the relationship between traditional and contemporary practice, with the further goal of re-presenting contemporary tapestry to English audiences after a gap of more than 20 years since the last major exhibition on this subject. Tapestries have traditionally told stories about their time of making, and this project showed that contemporary tapestries can continue to tell the global and personal stories of our times, good and bad.

Finally, **The Erotic Cloth** (2018-20) (R5) is an ambitious and innovative project which explores cloth as an erotic substrate and surface, mediating the absent/present body and wrapping, disguising or amplifying the sensuality of form. Millar and co-researcher Alice Kettle (Manchester Metropolitan University) edited a volume that brought together essays on the subject from contemporary textile artists, and curated an exhibition at Compton Verney, Warwickshire. This was a companion show to a major new exhibition centered on Compton Verney's holdings of works by Lucas Cranach the Elder. It assembled important historical paintings with newly-commissioned textile works by artists from several cultures, provoked by cross-historical and cross-cultural juxtapositions.

This case study is thus underpinned by a number of high quality research outputs which share a common methodology and insights—that the process of exchange involved in curating and being curated can lead to creative and cultural innovation, and that textiles can carry multiple, complex and changing meanings. R6 is a journal special issue that places this curatorial endeavour in its disciplinary context.

3. References to the research (submitted to REF2 or available via links or on request)

Quality is evidenced by peer review of publications, commission and support of exhibitions by important galleries, and multiple peer-reviewed funding awards. Millar's projects have also received extensive positive review in the press and media (see S2).

R1 Millar, L. (2012-14) *Transparent Boundaries*, **Multi-component Output**: conferences, performances, events, exhibitions in the UK, Greece, Italy and Denmark, culminating in *The Perfect Form*, exhibition, Tkacka Gallery, Wroclaw, Poland, Jan - Feb 2014, nominated for *Times Higher Education* Leadership and Management Award, 2015.

[https://research.uca.ac.uk/view/projects/Transparent_Boundaries.html]

R2 Millar, L. (2013) *Cloth & Memory 2*, **Exhibition**: Salt's Mill, August - November 2013.

[<https://research.uca.ac.uk/1623/>]

R3 Millar, L. (2015-16) *Kawaii*, **Exhibition** and catalogue, **REF2**, James Hockey Gallery, UCA Farnham, 2015; Rugby Art Gallery and Museum, 2016). [<https://research.uca.ac.uk/2897/>]

R4 Millar, L. (2016-18) *Tapestry: A Narrative for our Times*, **Multi-component Output, REF2**: *Tapestry: Here & Now*, exhibition, National Centre for Craft & Design, Sleaford, 2016- 2017; Holburne Museum, Bath, 2017; Midlands Art Centre (MAC) Birmingham, 2017, with book of

the same title, ISBN 9781526204547; *Weaving New Worlds*, exhibition, William Morris Gallery, London, 2018. [<https://research.uca.ac.uk/4259/>]

R5 Millar, L. and Kettle, A. (2018-20) *The Erotic Cloth*, **Multi-component Output, REF 2: The erotic cloth: seduction and fetishism in textiles**, book, Kettle and Millar (eds), Bloomsbury, London, 2018, ISBN 9781474286800; *Fabric: Touch and identity*, exhibition, Compton Verney, Warwickshire, 2020. [https://research.uca.ac.uk/view/projects/Erotic_Cloth.html]

R6 Matter of Material, special issue of *Textile, Cloth & Culture* (2018) vol. 16 issue 3, **Journal articles**: Millar, L., 'Introduction' (doi:10.1080/14759756.2018.1432127) & Harper, C. 'The Canon and the Gift' (doi:10.1080/14759756.2018.1432129)

Funding (total £329,223):

- *Transparent Boundaries*: European Culture Programme, July 2012-July 2014: £174,441
- *Cloth & Memory 2*: Arts Council England Grants for the Arts 2013-14, £60,000. Further funding (£25,482) from: City of Bradford; Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation; Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation; Japan Foundation; Pola Art Foundation; Royal Norwegian Embassy in London; Salt's Mill, sponsored by Hainsworth Mill.
- *Kawaii*: Arts Council England £14,000. Further funding (£12,000) from: Japan Foundation; Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation; Japan Society.
- *Tapestry: A Narrative for our Times*: in-kind funding from hosting galleries. Further funding (£8,300) from: Norwegian Arts Council; Japan Foundation; Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation; Arts Council of Canada; Norwegian Embassy in London.
- *The Erotic Cloth (Fabric: Touch and Identity)*: Compton Verney, £35,000

4. Details of the impact

In this curatorial research, the exhibition is at the same time the research, the output and its dissemination, which leads to impact. Pathways to impact are therefore straightforward and direct. Millar's innovative curatorial research described in **2**. has resulted in 6 exhibitions at 8 venues in collaboration with 10 public arts organisations; a total of 103 artists have participated and 53 new works have been commissioned; in excess of 339,000 people have visited the exhibitions and more have participated in or attended associated events, performances, and workshops (**S1**). The work has received widespread positive critical review (**S2**).

In all the projects, Millar's research has created impact for the museum and gallery partners in:

- **The development of new creative practice and approaches**: new textiles work; new interpretations of objects in permanent collections; new curatorial expertise.
- **The development of new collaborations and connections with greater global reach**: new links with UK and international organisations; increased access to artists and works with an international perspective; access to new sources of funding.
- **The ability to reach bigger and wider audiences**.

In turn, impact in these areas has allowed each of the participating museums, galleries and arts organisations with which Millar has collaborated to fulfil their **institutional strategy, aims or mission** more fully. These organisations are the beneficiaries, and through them their audiences and artists have also benefitted. Impacts are evidenced below by sources including impact reports and testimonials from the curators and organisations involved.

In the multi-partner project *Transparent Boundaries* the independent evaluation report found that it delivered its aims with benefits to the participating institutions which included 'high-quality and transformative artistic interventions', 'new ways of working, collaborating and co-creating work' with 'new organisations, groups and networks', enhanced reputation and increased expertise (**S3**). The report found that participating elders experienced increased confidence through 'greater understanding of the transformative potential of the arts', and greater awareness of 'their own physical and mental capabilities' (**S3**).

Cloth & Memory 2 was a creative response to the UNESCO world-heritage site of Salt's Mill, Titus Salt's huge 'model' textiles mill built in 1853. Several of the organisations involved in this case study have been enabled by the research to develop interpretation of their own

collections; at Salt's Mill, this interpretation was of the building itself, and its unrestored, quarter-mile long roof space (<https://transitionandinfluence.com/cloth-and-memory>), into which Millar inserted the exhibition. *Cloth & Memory 2* was successful in bringing new audiences to Salt's Mill. Over 15,000 people visited the exhibition, and comment cards show that for 27 per cent this was their first visit. 67 per cent of these visitors stated that the exhibition was the main reason for their visit, indicating that c.2,700 new visitors resulted from the exhibition. As a result of the exhibition, Salt's Mill went on to create an interpretive gallery on its history which also includes contemporary textile works by artists who participated in *Cloth & Memory 2* (S4).

The *Kawaii* exhibition at Rugby Art Gallery and Museum (RAGM) had particular benefits in developing global reach and new audiences. The curator describes how *Kawaii* allowed RAGM to deliver on its commitment to bring 'international work' to Rugby, 'providing an opportunity for local residents to engage with arts that they would not usually have access to'. *Kawaii* therefore 'offered RAGM a chance to have a greater ambition than usual. . . [it] enabled us to work with 16 Japanese artists and to contribute to the development of the research, as we were supported by Professor Millar and the university's resources' (C1). *Kawaii* was the focus for educational activities in support of RAGM's 'key commitment to its education programme' in which the exhibition 'was perfect for developing family friendly activities'. These were 'very successful' for RAGM with 'the education programme widening engagement for the exhibitions programme' (C1). For the curator, the experience of working on *Kawaii* was 'beyond beneficial' in developing skills and curatorial opportunities (C1).

In *Tapestry: A Narrative for our Times* Millar worked with the National Centre for Craft & Design (NCCD) to curate an exhibition that also toured to MAC in Birmingham and the Holburne Museum in Bath. [SECTION REDACTED] At MAC, 'craft had been sidelined out of the contemporary arts programme' but the curator (who had previously worked at RAGM on the *Kawaii* exhibition) notes how working with Millar allowed the gallery to re-engage with 'craft work from international artists' (C1).

For the Holburne Museum, working with Millar and NCCD enabled the museum to activate a rare, important and previously undisplayed object in its collection, the Arts Tapestry by Edward McKnight Kauffer. The Holburne curator describes how conserving and displaying this object was 'an opportunity to pursue our own research and explore the relevance of a contemporary exhibition on making for the museum. The project highlighted the impact that unusual items in the Holburne's collection could have on the wider public programme as a conduit for storytelling which had an impact on future curatorial practice'. This led the museum to pursue a similar strategy with other less-known parts of the collection, securing 'significant funding' (C3). Working with Millar and NCCD and the Arts Council funding they brought enabled the museum to have 'a show with an international cohort of artists . . . Ordinarily international loans are prohibitively expensive for regional museums to undertake.' The curator describes how the museum had held exhibitions on contemporary craft before, 'but they rarely had the international reach of this project' (C3). [SECTION REDACTED]

The Holburne stated that *Tapestry* allowed them to reach new or bigger audiences; the exhibition was 'the best performing applied arts exhibition the Holburne had ever hosted' and accompanying events 'brought new audiences as well as income' (C3). [SECTION REDACTED]

The launch of the *The Erotic Cloth* book was accompanied by a performance by Japanese/Italian artist Masako Matsushita of her work UN/DRESS, bringing this work to the UK, and supporting Matsushita in her artistic development. She has since been supported by the New Italia Dance platform, and selected for the Aerowaves dance discovery hub. She is one example of an artist whose career has benefitted from Millar's curation and commissioning.

The Erotic Cloth concluded with the *Fabric: Touch and Identity* exhibition at Compton Verney. Here the curator attests that the gallery was eager to work with Millar on the exhibition because it 'presented an interesting perspective on the work of a number of international contemporary

artists, many of whom were women', because 'these artists and the medium of textiles in general had been underrepresented in exhibitions to date' and because 'exhibiting these works at Compton Verney would bring a fresh narrative to the historic works in our collection' (C5). *Fabric, Touch and Identity* was programmed alongside a show on works from the permanent collection by Lucas Cranach the Elder. The curator describes how 'After viewing the *Fabric* exhibition, a visit to the Cranach exhibition is embedded with a heightened awareness of the sensual and erotic qualities of the wisps of drapery covering the figures, while the darkly moral aspects of Cranach's art compliment the stories of desire, agency and self-discovery that are central to the *Fabric* exhibition' (C5). The exhibition 'helped us to consider our collections in new ways, and reach out and engage with new audiences' (C5). This was despite the fact that it opened just a few days before the first national lockdown in March 2020. Short films on a selection of the exhibits were prepared by Millar, co-curator Alice Kettle and several of the artists, and these were viewed nearly 19,000 times on the website and via social media. In the summer of 2020, 2,641 visitors were able to enjoy socially-distanced viewings of the exhibition. (S1; C5)

As a result of all the impacts described, participating organisations were able to meet their aims for each project and to fulfil their institutional strategies more fully. In *Transparent Boundaries* the research delivered its aims, making 'a critical intervention' in cultural awareness of the Elder and delivering 'key learning points' for its participating organisations (S3). At Salt's Mill, *Cloth & Memory 2* was 'a perfect fit with our desire to create cutting edge temporary exhibitions in our vast Victorian factory spaces', and aligned with the City of Bradford's World Heritage Site Management Plan's aim to 'improve the interpretation and understanding of the World Heritage Site to increase enjoyment and learning by all visitors and residents' (S5). Kawaii offered Rugby Art Gallery and Museum 'a chance to tick all the important strategic boxes' (C1). [SECTION REDACTED] At the Holburne Museum, the 'scope and ambition' of *Tapestry* 'meant that it fit well with the Holburne's wider strategy and ambitions' (C3). At Compton Verney *Fabric: Touch and Identity* served the 'wider exhibitions strategy to programme contemporary counterparts to historical shows to investigate or illuminate a particular narrative or theme'. Its 'international character . . . developed the breadth of our offer' (C5).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

(available from UCA on request; S = documentary/online source; C = corroborator/testimonial)

S1 *Textiles Across Cultures* quantitative report

S2 *Textiles Across Cultures* media report

S3 *Transparent Boundaries* evaluation report

S4 *Cloth and Memory* visitor feedback

S5 City of Bradford Saltaire World Heritage Site Management Plan

C1 Testimonial letter from former Curator Rugby Museum and Art Gallery, and former Visual Arts Curator, Midlands Arts Centre (MAC) (Corroborator 1, REF submission system)

C2 [REDACTED]

C3 Testimonial letter from former Curator, Holburne Museum, Bath (Corroborator 3)

C4 [REDACTED]

C5 Testimonial letter from Senior Curator, Compton Verney, Warwickshire (Corroborator 5)