Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Birmingham

Unit of Assessment: UoA32, Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory

Title of case study: Collaboration not cuts: Sustaining, enriching and transforming professional practice in regional galleries

Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: October 2008 to 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:
Dr Kate Nichols	Birmingham Fellow	2015– present
Dr Francesca Berry	Senior Lecturer	2005– present
Dr Gregory Salter	Lecturer	2016– present
Dr Nóra Veszprémi	Research Fellow	2015– 2019
Dr Sophie Hatchwell	Lecturer	2018– present
Prof. Richard Clay	Reader	2002– 2015

Period when the claimed impact occurred: January 2016–December 2020

Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No

1. Summary of the impact

Austerity precipitated a dramatic reduction in funding for public museums and galleries. Mitigating against this, the Midlands Art Papers (MAP) project has supported such institutions across the Midlands to **enhance and enrich their programming**, and **meet their strategic priorities**, at a time when significant cuts have threatened core activities.

MAP's impact derives from a specialist network that links up 13 galleries across the Midlands, facilitating new curatorial research and programming. Through this activity, MAP has **transformed professional practice** in our partner galleries by **changing how they manage their collaborative partnerships,** and in turn **changing who they collaborate with**. Through this network, we mobilise our art-historical research to **enhance heritage interpretation**, by **deepening curatorial knowledge**, and **inspiring new curatorial projects** that **enrich audience engagement.**

2. Underpinning research

The MAP project was formed in response to the challenges that austerity (2010–2019) posed to our regional public galleries. It centres on the creation of a network of 13 Midlands galleries, facilitates new research and programming, and is based on Departmental research into the role such institutions play as guardians or gatekeepers of culture. The structure of the network draws on the findings of (A) the AHRC-funded 'Creative Economy Knowledge Exchange' *Collaborative Arts Triple Helix* (*CATH*) project (2013–2014, PI Richard Clay, RO1), which investigated the opportunities afforded by cross-sector networking in the context of a steep drop in arts funding following the 2008 financial crash. Adapting and building on this, the MAP network mobilises our (B) art-historical research on the social and political histories of works within our regional collections, sharing this with our partner galleries in order to transform their curatorial knowledge and understanding.

A) Developed against the back-drop of the financial crisis, the *CATH* project (RO1) investigated key barriers and benefits to cross-sector networking (RF1), and evaluated the efficacy of a "brokerage" model to facilitate networking in which a representative from HE is appointed to mediate and facilitate partnerships with external stakeholders. CATH research showed that there was a need within the regional cultural sector for a new, pragmatic model for cross-sector networking, and that a "brokerage" model can be a successful way to work together with other institutions (RF2). The founders of MAP utilised this research to

inform the structure of the MAP network, as a means to help our regional galleries respond to the economic challenges posed by austerity.

B) Adapting the CATH model, MAP mobilises Departmental research that focuses on regional collections and addresses pressing contemporary issues including representations of gender and sexuality (RO2–RO3); and art, national identity and power (RO4–RO6). This research has resulted in new understandings of the shifting and frequently contested categories of home, memory and identity (RO2); gender and domesticity (RO3, RO6); the formation of national cultural identities and reputations (RO4); and the ways in which art institutions control interpretation (RO5). This body of research is utilised in the MAP project to transform curatorial knowledge and understanding, and shape new learning and engagement projects (RF3–RF6).

Cumulatively, this research produced the following findings, which informed the MAP project:

RF1. Benefits to cross-sector collaboration include access to each others' expertise; for cultural organisations, this includes access to academic research. Barriers to this include lack of a shared common language, constraints on time, financial concerns and building up trusting relationships in short time frames (RO1).

RF2. Brokerage helped introduce partners and collaborators to one another, and access to HE research through brokerage enables non-HE organisations to build capacity (RO1).

RF3. National schools of art are constructed in complex ways, inflected through ideas surrounding race, migration, religion, gender and sexual identity. These art 'schools' contribute significantly towards the formation of national identity (RO3, RO4, RO6).

RF4. These national narratives of art history tend to occlude artists who have minority identities; our work foregrounds and argues for the importance of studying artists often marginalised in the conventional art-historical record (RO2, RO3, RO4, RO6).

RF5. Art contributes significantly towards the social shaping of expectations of gendered behaviour (both masculinity and femininity; RO2, RO3, RO6).

RF6. Interpretation is inter-textual, and the choice of interpretive material deployed in a gallery setting determines audience experiences (RO5).

3. References to the research

RO1. Richard Clay, Johannah Latchem, Ross Parry and Lara Ratnaraja, *Collaborative Arts Triple Helix: Report* (University of Birmingham, 2014).

RO2. Gregory Salter, *Art and Masculinity in Post-War Britain: Reconstructing Home* (Bloomsbury, 2019). ISBN: 9781350052727

RO3. Francesca Berry, 'Maman is my Muse: The Maternal as Motif and Metaphor in Édouard Vuillard's Intimisme', *Oxford Art Journal*, 34.1 (2011), 55–77. DOI: 10.1093/oxartj/kcr015

RO4. Nóra Veszprémi, 'An Introspective Pantheon: The Picture Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 30.1 (2018), 453–69. DOI: 10.1093/jhc/fhx041

RO5. Sophie Hatchwell, *Performance and Spectatorship in Edwardian Art Writing* (Palgrave, 2019). DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-17024-0

RO6. Kate Nichols, 'Arthur Hacker's *Syrinx* (1892): Paint, classics and the culture of Rape', *Feminist Theory*, 17.1 (2016), 107–26. DOI: 10.1177/1464700115620863

4. Details of the impact

Austerity has precipitated a national crisis in our public galleries, instigating funding cuts that have threatened staff levels, reduced research capacity and endangered crucial public programming, a situation made more acute by the current Covid19 crisis. Our regional gallery partners across the Midlands have been uniquely supported to withstand such challenges by participation in the MAP network (RF1–RF2), **enabling them to both sustain and enrich their programming**. The MAP project has **transformed professional practice** in our partner galleries by **changing how they manage their collaborative partnerships** and, as a consequence, **changing who they collaborate with**. It has provided our partners with bespoke access to our art-historical research (RF3–RF6) that has enabled them to **enhance heritage**

interpretation by **deepening curatorial knowledge** and **inspiring new curatorial projects,** which in turn have **enriched audience engagement**.

Enabling partners to sustain and enrich programming in a challenging time

MAP's impact stems from the creation of a new space for the exchange of research, knowledge and best practice: a network of 13 partner galleries across the region that facilitates new curatorial research and programming (S9). It has been 'fundamental' in **enabling partners to sustain and enrich their programming and thereby meet their strategic priorities**, at a time when austerity-driven cuts have threatened their core activities (S2). As our partners testify, this resource 'simply did not exist before', but MAP stepped in to fill the void, providing a crucial new 'joined-up approach to collections research in the region', that is 'incredibly timely to the cultural sector at the present moment' because it creates 'opportunities that advance [partners'] strategic objectives' (S1).

Austerity-driven funding cuts (2010–2019) saw local authority budgets for the arts in the Midlands slashed disproportionately by 19%, compared to 15.5% in the south and 17% in the north (Arts Council England (ACE), 2016). Our partner galleries have borne the brunt of this: for example, in 2017 Birmingham Museums Trust (BMT) was faced with a cut of £750,000 (equivalent to 64.2% of their self-generated income) [TEXT REMOVED FOR PUBLICATION]. These cuts have meant that in-depth curatorial research 'became a luxury rather than a necessity' for our partners (S3). MAP's activities were devised to mitigate these austerity-driven challenges and have successfully met this aim: as our partners testify, the network has enabled them to 'address problems brought on by austerity', providing innovative approaches that 'inform and enrich' their work, facilitating 'major projects', at a time when their 'own capacity has been significantly reduced' (S1, S2).

Transforming Professional Practice in Midlands' galleries

MAP has led our regional galleries **to change the way they collaborate**. As our partners at BMT state, MAP has provided '**a model for future collaborations** in which [we are] empowered to direct and shape collections research to the benefit of all partners' (S2). Through participation in MAP, our partners are now pro-active in seeking and directing long-term, sustainable and 'more involved' collaboration with academics and each other (RF1), and have stopped being simply 'passive facilitators of access' (S2, S7). This is a key example of MAP helping our partners to meet their strategic priorities: for example, in the case of BMT, for staff to be 'active collaborators in research' (S2). Overall, [TEXT REMOVED FOR PUBLICATION], partners are now 'able to shape our collaborative activities around our own needs' (S1).

Examples of this change include BMT requesting that we act as the main consultants for the major rehang of their permanent collections, the centrepiece of their ambitious new 10-year strategy, and Wolverhampton approaching us to collaborate on their programming around the touring *British Art Show 9* (2021), which they will be the first gallery in the UK to host (S2, S7). Significantly, participation in the MAP network also instigated colleagues at BMT and NAGW to set up with MAP two new nationally reaching Research Groups under the auspices of Tate's British Art Network, drawing on our research into art, nationhood, identity and interpretation (RF3–RF4, RF6).

Thus, participation in MAP has led our partners to **change who they collaborate with**, as our collaborative projects have forged connections between regional museums and galleries who were not previously working together (RF1–RF2). This transformation is important because the development of new collaborative research partnerships are strategic priorities for all our galleries (S5, S6, S7). For BMT, 'MAP has provided a new means of connecting BMT curators with researchers with relevant subject specialisms, facilitating collaborative working and knowledge exchange', thus helping them to meet the 'Working Together' component of their 10-year strategy (2018; S2, S5). For NAGW, MAP's 'joined up' approach and the 'fantastic resource' it provides for sharing expertise aligns with the 'Partnership' goals newly set out in the

'Walsall for All' strategy (2020; S1). For Wolverhampton, MAP's focus on 'partnership working' enables the gallery to meet its objective to use collaboration 'to strengthen longer-term sustainability' (S7).

The new Research Groups co-led with BMT and NAGW have led our partners to **form new curatorial research partnerships** with colleagues in Liverpool and Exeter, expanding their professional networks nationally (S10). The Research Groups provide members with new access to knowledge and expertise, through a unique professional network of 30 curators working across 24 galleries across the UK (S4): unique because these national links did not exist previously, and now that they do, they have afforded MAP partners unparalleled access to a 'rare' and 'fantastic resource for the sharing of Collections expertise, and new opportunities to develop and collaborate on joint projects' (S7, S1). MAP partners from Wolverhampton, Derby and Stoke have joined these new national Research Groups too and are likewise benefitting from opportunities for knowledge exchange and transfer on curatorial practice and promotional methods (S7). For example, participation in these Research Groups has encouraged partners to 'think more deeply about community, diversity, diversity of voices in interpreting collections and co-curating which are central to upcoming projects' and have in turn 'shape[ed] ideas for working with community partners' (S4).

Enhancing Heritage Interpretation in the Midlands

Through participation in MAP, partners have **used our research as inspiration for new curatorial projects**. For example, the exhibitions 'Wanting to Say' (2017, Walsall) and 'Maman' (2018, Barber), were inspired by our research on gender and identity (RF4–RF5), while 'Reframing the Wild' (2019, Wolverhampton) arose from our research on national identity and colonialism (RF3–RF4). As our partners testify, access to MAP research provided 'new insights' into these important themes 'previously un-explored' in their collections, resulting in new ways of presenting collections in a 'more focused' and 'challenging' manner (S1, S7).

Cumulatively, by providing partners with access to our research, MAP has afforded them the means to **deepen their curatorial knowledge** (e.g. MAP 'enriched' and 'changed our understanding of key works in our collections' and in turn has 'provided focus' for public programming; S2, S1). Partners now feel their interpretive practices are 'connected, relevant, and invigorated by academic inquiry' (S7), and they are newly able to develop programming that addresses pressing 'timely' issues relating to gender, national identity and colonialism, and address often-neglected aspects of their historic collections (S1, S7).

The result has been a **change in how they display their permanent collections**. For example, inspired by Department research on national identity (RF3–RF4), BMT exhibited a painting by disabled Hungarian artist Károly Kotász for the first time in the 80 years that it's been owned by the gallery, and we are now acting as advisors for their major re-hang post-2022 (S2). Overall, as our partners state, this has left them 'empowered to direct and shape collections research' moving forward (S2).

Enriching Audience Engagement in the Midlands

MAP has **'undoubtedly' enriched audience engagement** by facilitating the creation of new programming (RF6) and improving 'the effectiveness of [our partners] delivery to audiences' (S3). This has '**provided visitors with new insights**' into Midlands' collections (S7), allowing them to '**get more value**' from their visit and leave feeling '**inspired**' (S3). For example, partners report that audiences are increasingly able to engage with 'works that are aesthetically or conceptually challenging' (S3) and that 'the voices and histories of those who have been marginalised by traditional museum narratives' are now better represented (S2). Specifically, partners testify that they are better able to engage 'superdiverse Birmingham audiences', and audience groups with protected characteristics 'in a meaningful way, avoiding tokenism or box-ticking' (S2, S7).

Increases in visitor numbers and positive audience feedback testify to this:

- 'Maman' produced a 28.1% increase in visitor numbers compared to the 2017 Barber Autumn exhibition and a 30.3% increase on Autumn 2016 (S8). Walsall saw an average of 13,067 visitors per month throughout 'Wanting to Say' (2017), a clear increase on their average attendance of *c*.12,500 per month (S8).
- At ARTiculation events at Wolverhampton and The Herbert Coventry, visiting students 'have been able to examine and discuss artworks in a more in-depth and thorough way' as a result of our collaboration (S3, S7).
- 96.9% of visitors to MAP-inspired events who were surveyed state that are more likely to visit the galleries in future, and many asserted that they gained new appreciation of the contemporary relevance of the galleries' collections (S8). For example, audiences at BMT gained new knowledge about transnational art practice and disability in the arts, as they 'learnt about […] the development of art and artists in the past, and how and why some succeed' (S8). Visitors at Wolverhampton gained a new understanding of the impact of colonialism on art, that 'British imperialism was a major influence of trends in the art world' (S8).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1. Testimonial from [TEXT REMOVED FOR PUBLICATION] (October 2020)
S2. Testimonial from the Fine Art Curator, Birmingham Museums Trust (September 2020)
S3. Testimonial from the Learning Officer, Herbert Museum and Art Gallery (September 2020)
S4. Reports from British Art Network events in Liverpool, Birmingham and online (2019-2020)
S5. *Birmingham Museums Trust Ten-Year Strategy 2018–2027* (2018)
S6. Report on strategic aims of public museums and galleries in the West and East Midlands (2015–2020)
S7. Testimonial from the Senior Curator, Wolverhampton Art Gallery (November 2020)
S8. Visitor statistics and feedback from partner collections for exhibitions 'Maman', 'Reframing the Wild' and the Kotasz re-hang (2018-2019)
S9. MAP Manifesto and online journal
S10. Tate British Art Network Research Group webpages