

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Birkbeck, University of London		
Unit of Assessment: 32		
Title of case study: Curating <i>The Fallen Woman</i> at the Foundling Museum		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000-2015		
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-19		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Professor Lynda Nead was curator of <i>The Fallen Woman</i>, the most successful exhibition at The Foundling Museum to that date. It hugely increased admissions and revenue, was widely reviewed and highly acclaimed. It educated and empowered visitors and drew attention to present day inequalities in the treatment of women in terms of their class, race and sexuality.</p> <p>Insights developed through working on a specially-commissioned soundpiece for the exhibition have led to lasting changes in artistic practice for the artist.</p> <p>The success of the exhibition enabled more ambitious future programmes and led to innovations in funding models and curatorial practice that has impacted subsequent exhibitions at the Foundling Museum.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Lynda Nead's <i>Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London</i>¹ was a seminal work which challenged the dominant cultural histories of gender and modernity. Scholars of Victorian art tended to write about images of women in terms of a classic differentiation between the respectable, located in the domestic sphere, and the deviant (prostitutes and fallen women), who were part of the urban landscape. Nead's research drew on Victorian visual and literary culture to demonstrate how restrictive this analysis had been. It discovered unaccompanied women of the respectable middle classes, alongside women of the working classes and poor on the streets of the metropolis; tracing itineraries between home, friends, work and leisure. It identified women as agents of their own experiences rather than passive victims of a prevailing conservative moral ideology. Nead has continued to develop these themes in her subsequent research such as 'The Layering of Pleasure: Women, Fashionable Dress and Visual Culture in the Nineteenth Century'² and 'The Secret of England's Greatness'³.</p> <p>One of the areas that Nead investigated in this research was the fallen woman in Victorian art, and on the basis of this she was approached by the Foundling Museum and asked to develop an exhibition for them. As part of her preparatory research for the exhibition, Nead explored one of the key archives associated with the Foundling Hospital, now held in the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA). Previous studies had focused on the lives of the Foundling children, but little attention had been paid to the mothers who applied to have their children accepted into the Hospital. Combining her work on visual representation, particularly of so-called 'fallen women', with the material in this archive, Nead developed an exhibition that was innovative and interdisciplinary and shed new light not only on the experiences of the mothers who applied to the Foundling Hospital but also attitudes to</p>		

female sexuality and female desire in the Victorian period as well as their representation in nineteenth-century culture.

The Fallen Woman exhibition had as its starting point the stories of the unmarried mothers who applied to have their babies admitted to and brought up in the Foundling Hospital in London. The archive includes the 'petitions' they used to make their case, in which they told the stories of their 'fall', by seduction, rape or abandonment; as well as character references; the questions they were asked when interviewed; and notes by the investigator to check their accuracy. These materials offered a unique account of women's life experiences and narratives in the period and a deeply moving record of how Victorian women responded to personal crisis and trauma.

Nead identified aspects of the archive significant for other areas of historical scholarship and of much wider interest, in particular the circulation of tropes of sexual 'fall' and their everyday use; sexual behaviour and experience in the Victorian period; the language of desire and shame; financial dependency and illegitimacy. She showed these were frequently women of the working classes and both the exhibition and related research brought to light the complexities of their social and emotional lives at a moment of crisis. The material also bore fascinating relationships to other forms of Victorian culture that Nead had worked on; images and narratives from Victorian painting and graphic arts both reinforced and contradicted the stories told in the Foundling Hospital petitions. Nead represented the complexity of this through her choice of objects for the exhibition, and in the accompanying article 'Fallen Women and Foundlings: Rethinking Victorian Sexuality'⁴.

In 2016, at the time of the exhibition and based on her roles as a researcher and curator, Nead was appointed an academic Trustee of the Victoria & Albert Museum. Subsequently, in 2017, Professor Nead was elected a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, partly based on *The Fallen Woman* exhibition and was elected a Fellow of the British Academy (FBA) in 2018.

Nead's ongoing research continues to be influenced by her work on *The Fallen Woman*, taking up the issue of women, equality and the visual image into her recent work on post-war British art and culture such as *The Tiger in the Smoke: Art and Culture in Post-War Britain* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press for Paul Mellon Studies in British Art, 2017), for which the research was completed at the same time that the exhibition was in development.

3. References to the research

- (1) Nead, Lynda (2000 and paperback 2005). *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Mid-Nineteenth Century London*. London and New Haven: Yale University Press.
- (2) Nead, Lynda (2013). 'The Layering of Pleasure: Women, Fashionable Dress and Visual Culture in the Nineteenth Century.' *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 35:3, 489-509.
- (3) Nead, Lynda (2014). 'The Secret of England's Greatness.' *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 19:2, 161-82.
- (4) Nead, Lynda (2016). 'Fallen Women and Foundlings: Rethinking Victorian Sexuality.' *History Workshop Journal*, 81:2, 177-87.
- (5) Lynda Nead, 'The Fallen Woman.' Exhibition. The Foundling Museum, London, September 2015-January 2016

4. Details of the impact

Opened in 2004, the Foundling Museum tells the story and is based at the site of the former Foundling Hospital, the UK's first children's charity and first public art gallery, established in 1739. As a small, specialist institution and charity receiving no core public funding, its temporary exhibitions play a central role in ensuring its success and financial sustainability[1] & [2]. *The Fallen Woman* exhibition, between 25 September 2015 and 3 January 2016 and curated by Prof Lynda Nead, was the most successful exhibition hosted by the Foundling Museum to that date, and new approaches pioneered with the *Fallen Woman* have been successfully re-used by the museum in other later exhibitions.

The exhibition drew attention to an archive that was hitherto little known, and Professor Nead's expertise enabled the museum to increase public understanding of the lives of working-class women, in a way that was highly engaging, impactful and accessible and which significantly boosted the museum's profile. In 2015/16 the Museum achieved over 50,000 visitors for the first time in its history, which was a 16% increase on the previous year. With 15,542 visitors, *The Fallen Woman*, accounted for almost one-third of these in a little over three months, 'the highest number of any exhibition to date.' This had a major impact on the Museum with admissions revenue 44% ahead of target, the Shop 27% ahead of target, and venue hire up 40% on the previous year. [1] The exhibition also led to approximately 43 pieces of media coverage with a reach of 9,598,312 and an Advertising Value Equivalent of c£3,351,055 (or GBP3,351,055). It received widespread praise in outlets including *FT Weekend magazine*, the *Guardian*, the *Telegraph*, the *Independent*, the *Burlington Magazine*, the *Lady*, and *Art Quarterly*, BBC Radio 3's Free Thinking show, BBC Radio 2's Arts Show, and East London Radio. This was a huge boon to the Museum, being more than two-thousand times its typical spend of less than £1,500 (GBP1,500) on advertising. This unprecedented success enabled the museum to plan its 2016/17 curatorial programme with more confidence and ambition.

For visitors, the relevance of the exhibition impacted powerfully, drawing attention to the parallels between the inequalities and 'moral' representation of women in the past with those of today. World-renowned artist Grayson Perry tweeted: 'Nothing changes, poor excluded people drowned. Lovely, moving tightly conceived show, Fallen Women'. [3] The exhibition was reviewed in a wide variety of publications. For medical journal the *Lancet*, 'It shines a light on the way we continue to treat the poor, those who are not health literate, and women who do not live up to expected views of femininity and respectability.' [4] Jeanette Winterson suggested that 'It's worth revisiting the past to remind ourselves that we really don't want a return to Victorian values.' [5] The exhibition also recovered previously unheard voices of marginalised women. As the *Burlington Magazine* remarked, this was 'the first time that the fallen woman has been the chief focus of an exhibition, making this small but well-documented display a welcome endeavour. Overall, the challenge it presents to the received stereotype, by means of real tales from the Foundling's archives, makes for a moving exploration.' [6] For the *Tablet*, a Catholic weekly journal, the exhibition represented 'a message from the ghosts of a dark and sorrowful moment of motherhood past'. [7]

These themes resonated in the hundreds of visitor comments. For *The Museological Review*, the exhibition's success in this regard 'sends a potent message: if museological agency can encourage gender equality, the urgent question is of how museums might now generate and advance unprecedented gender political change.' [9]

Artist development

A notable aspect to the exhibition was a soundscape based on the voices presented in the archival documents. The artist worked closely with Nead to develop it'. The artist realised he

had been unconsciously affected by the standard discourse regarding the Victorian idea of the fallen woman, with a simplistic view of them as passive victims. Working with Nead alerted the artist to the origin of the myth in its social context and to the complexity of the reality. To accurately tell a story, the artist needed to embrace all the nuances, and not just those that satisfy a desire for a clean and tidy narrative, or a happy ending. This changed his artistic approach, directly influencing his next project. [10]

Innovation and legacy

As well as the enhanced profile of the Museum, *The Fallen Woman* led to several innovations for the Museum that had a lasting impact on its curatorial policy and practice, further successful exhibitions, and finance.

One of these innovations was a successful attempt to broaden public involvement through the creation of the Exhibition Supporters' Circle for individuals interested in the exhibition and willing to help fund its realisation, particularly in relation to loans and conservation. This led to the Museum borrowing items from abroad for the first time, which would not have been possible without the Supporters' Circle. Supporters' Circles are now a regular feature of the museum's exhibition fundraising. [2]

Another innovation was the use of crowdfunding, hosted via the Art Fund's Art Happens platform. This alone raised £25,417 from 180 individual contributors, or 110% of its target funding of £23,000. This successful first venture in crowdfunding inspired a similar campaign in 2018 for *Ladies of Quality and Distinction*, an exhibition described by the Museum as the 'spiritual sequel' to *The Fallen Woman*. This raised £37,320 from 342 donors, 186% of its target funding. It was nominated for the Museums + Heritage Temporary or Touring Exhibition of the Year Award in 2019. [2]

The Fallen Woman continues to reach new audiences. Its success prompted the expansion of the "Past Exhibitions" section on the website, enabling the show's research and interpretation to remain accessible once the exhibition came to an end. The exhibition page has received over 25,000 unique views to date. [2; 2.i]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

PDFs of all these sources are available if requested.

[1] The Foundling Museum Annual Report & Financial Statements, 31 March 2016; these can be accessed via <https://foundlingmuseum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Foundling-Museum-Annual-Report-2016.pdf> - information about The Fallen Woman exhibition is on page 7.

[2] A Written statement

Please note there are some minor discrepancies between the numbers provided in the written statement from the Director and the numbers in the (audited) annual reports and financial statements. Where possible the numbers cited in the impact narrative are taken from the annual reports and financial statements as the authoritative source; however, where it is not possible to clearly identify the correct number in the annual reports and financial statements the numbers from this written statement have been used.

[2.i] Exhibition website: <http://foundlingmuseum.org.uk/events/fallen-woman/>

[3] Grayson Perry tweet @Alan_Measles 25 September 2015.

Impact case study (REF3)

[4] Review in The *Lancet*, 5 December 2015; this can be seen here: [The Lancet, 05 December 2015, Volume 386, Issue 10010, Pages 2227-2364, e46-e55](#). The quotation used is on page 2246.

[5] Review in The *Telegraph*, 11 October 2015; this can be seen here: [Jeanette Winterson: 'unmarried mothers were blamed for everything' \(telegraph.co.uk\)](#)

[6] Review in The *Burlington Magazine*, December 2015, CLVII, pp. 870-71; this can be seen here: [December 2015, #1353 – Vol 157 | – The Burlington Magazine](#)

[7] Review in The *Tablet*, 10 October 2015, page 25; this can be seen here: [The Tablet - 10 October 2015 \(exacteditions.com\)](#)

[8] Visitor comments.

[9] Linda Aloysius, 'EXHIBITION REVIEW: Not Fallen but Felled', *Museological Review: The Global Microphone*, Issue 20, 2016, pp. 63-70; this can be seen here [Museological Review Issue 20 2016.pdf](#)

[10] Written statement.