

Institution: University of York		
Unit of Assessment: 32 - Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory		
Title of case study: Changing Curatorial Practices at the National Gallery, London		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2003-2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Professor Amanda Lillie	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor, History of Art	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 01/01/1988 - 31/12/2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This impact case study focusses on three interrelated shifts in curatorial thinking and practice at the National Gallery, London (NG): 1) changes to exhibition programming; 2) changes to display; 3) changes to audience profile and engagement.</p> <p>These changes were brought about through the planning and curation of two exhibitions, <i>Building the Picture: Architecture in Italian Renaissance Painting</i> (2014) and <i>Leonardo: Experience a Masterpiece</i> (2019-20), carried out by Professor Amanda Lillie of the History of Art Department at York in collaboration with Dr Caroline Campbell, Head of Collections and Research and Curator of Italian Painting Before 1500 at the NG. Both exhibitions explored the immersive qualities of architectural and landscape environments in Renaissance paintings, with the help of the digital technologies that create our current virtual environments. This bridge between images, environment, experience and technology has attracted different audiences and created new public understanding of the NG's collections.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Lillie's long-term research objective has been to carve out an environmental approach to art and architectural history. Within this broad area, Lillie defines two distinct research strands: extrinsic environments, how Italian Renaissance buildings and objects relate to their settings, and intrinsic environments, the depicted settings within paintings and sculpture. The first strand evolved from a book and articles on villas in their social, agricultural, spiritual and topographic landscapes (3.1), including a study of the concept of the healthy building in relation to climate and a major article exploring the sense of place and sacred presence on a hill overlooking Florence (3.2). Lillie's second research strand explores how artists assigned agency to air (3.3), water (3.4) and earth within their paintings and relief sculptures. Lillie set out her methodological approach to the non-figurative parts of images in a paper entitled 'The Rest of the Picture' delivered at the Warburg Institute colloquium 'Searching for Meaning in Renaissance Art' (2011). With this series of influential conference papers and peer-reviewed publications, a new field emerged, exploring both architectural and landscape environments and their representations in Renaissance Italy.</p> <p>Lillie's expertise in Italian Renaissance architecture, together with her pioneering study of artists' pictorial environments, led to her major research project 'Architecture in Italian Renaissance Painting' for which she was awarded an AHRC Leadership Fellowship in 2012 (3.5). By asking fundamental questions such as why artists incorporate buildings into their pictures, and what roles buildings play within images, this research project created new interpretations of depicted architecture, showing how fictive buildings structure images in an experiential way and how architecture has agency within paintings. This research underpinned the National Gallery (NG) exhibition <i>Building the Picture</i>, accompanied by the NG's first full-length online exhibition catalogue. The conceptual framework arising from the research provided the themes for the exhibition: 'Constructing the Picture', 'Entering the Picture', 'Place Making' and 'Architectural Time', which then became the essay titles for the online catalogue (3.5).</p> <p>From 2016 Lillie developed a new collaborative research project with the NG, leading to an exhibition on Leonardo da Vinci's <i>Virgin of the Rocks</i>. The two strands of Lillie's research led directly to her study of the painting's extrinsic and intrinsic environments: the sculpted altarpiece and chapel within which the <i>Virgin of the Rocks</i> was originally embedded, and the painting's depiction of a rocky grotto in an alpine landscape (3.6, 5.9).</p>		

The co-creation of both exhibition projects was enabled by a successful research partnership between the York History of Art Department and the NG, formally established in 2010 by Lillie and Luke Syson, then Head of Research and Curator of Italian Painting Before 1500 at the NG. Within this long-lasting collaborative framework, Lillie was invited to guest curate two research-driven exhibitions that led to new programming and display strategies at the NG, which in turn attracted new and different audiences to the Gallery and changed the public's engagement with and perception of the NG and its collections.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1 Amanda Lillie, *Florentine Villas in the Fifteenth Century. An Architectural and Social History*, Cambridge University Press, (Cambridge 2005), paperback 2011 [returned to RAE 2008]

3.2 Amanda Lillie, 'Fiesole: *locus amoenus* or penitential landscape?' in *I Tatti Studies. Essays in the Renaissance*, Vol. 11, 2007, pp. 11-55 <https://doi.org/10.2307/20111821> [peer-reviewed]

3.3 Amanda Lillie, 'Sculpting the Air. Donatello's narratives of the environment' in *Depth of Field: Relief Sculpture in Renaissance Italy*, eds. Donal Cooper and Marika Leino, Peter Lang, (Oxford, 2007), pp. 97-124 [peer-reviewed]

3.4 Amanda Lillie, 'Artists interpreting Water in Fourteenth and Fifteenth-Century Tuscany' in *La civiltà delle acque dal Medioevo al Rinascimento*, eds. Arturo Calzona, Francesco Paolo Fiore and Daniela Lamberini (Centro Studi Leon Battista Alberti, Olschki, Florence, 2010) Vol. I, pp. 315-328. [peer-reviewed]

3.5 Amanda Lillie, *Building the Picture* (2014), peer-reviewed online exhibition catalogue, hosted permanently by the NG (<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/research/research-resources/exhibition-catalogues/building-the-picture>), c. 80,000 words. Written and edited by Lillie, contributions to the catalogue entries from co-curator Campbell and AHRC collaborative doctoral student Alasdair Flint. Other contributors: C. Elam (Warburg Institute), J. Gritti (Politecnico di Milano), C. Robertson (Oxford Brookes), A. Schmidt (National Gallery), and J. Sliwka (National Gallery). The research was supported by "Architecture in Italian Renaissance Painting", an AHRC Fellowship (Open Call) awarded to Lillie in December 2012 (GBP136,942). [Returned to REF 2021]

3.6. *Leonardo: Experience a Masterpiece*, exhibition at the National Gallery, London, co-curated by Amanda Lillie and Caroline Campbell, 9 November 2019 - 26 January 2020, <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/exhibitions/past/leonardo-experience-a-masterpiece>

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Three long-term changes in curatorial practice were generated by the two exhibitions co-curated by Lillie and Caroline Campbell at the National Gallery.

The first impact is the changed exhibition programming achieved by the way Lillie inspired the NG to explore new subject matter and interrogate paintings in different ways. As Campbell confirms (5.3), the innovative nature of Lillie's research (3.1-3.4) prompted the NG to invite her to co-curate *Building the Picture*, a free exhibition held during 5 months in 2014 (5.1, 5.2). Rather than focussing on one famous artist or school of painters, the purpose of this exhibition was to draw attention to a new theme and parts of paintings that had received little attention – depicted architecture. This enabled the Gallery to see their own collection differently, opening their eyes to the presence of architecture in hundreds of paintings, and inspiring its curators to programme an exhibition based primarily around their permanent collection. The exhibition had 180,892 visitors and 'received tremendous critical and popular acclaim' (5.2, 5.5), with the international press praising its originality and drawing attention to the exhibition as a curatorial model for re-interpreting a museum's own collection. Freudenheim in *The Wall Street Journal* noted, 'I was especially struck by this show as a matrix that might well have a life beyond its London display. Almost any museum with Italian Renaissance paintings could use this exhibition as a template to help viewers take a fresh look at its holdings. This exceptionally interesting and beautiful London exhibition merits attention as a model worthy of emulation', while Januszczak wrote in *The Sunday Times*, 'this is the way forward: the new way of collecting, the eco way – not by spending zillions on new pictures, but by getting to know what you already own much better' (5.4).

Building the Picture's impact on NG curators and the public led to further changes in programming at the NG. In stepping away from traditional curatorial interpretations focussed on artists' biographies, chronology, attribution or iconography, Lillie's work encouraged the Gallery to develop other projects relating architecture to painting, including their major exhibitions *Monet and Architecture* (2018) and *Impressionist Decoration* (2021-22). This link is confirmed by co-curator Campbell: 'We now think differently about our collections and the way we display them, particularly relating to architecture, context, and environments, and better understand the possibilities available in programming these areas' (5.3); and by Susan Foister, Deputy Director, who writes, '*Building the Picture*... became a model for future exhibition programming in its thematic exploration of the environments of artworks, and Amanda's research has helped the Gallery conceive of new ways of interpreting and exhibiting some of our key paintings' (5.5).

The most far-reaching example of this shift in programming was Lillie's second co-curated exhibition at the NG, *Leonardo: Experience a Masterpiece*, which was focussed entirely around one of the Gallery's most famous paintings, Leonardo da Vinci's *Virgin of the Rocks*, and timed to coincide with the 500th anniversary of Leonardo's death in 2019, with 64,171 visitors (5.7, 5.8, 5.10). Impact was achieved through the originality of Lillie's approach to the painting via the intrinsic environment of its rocky landscape and the extrinsic environment of the sculpted altarpiece and chapel in which it was originally embedded. Campbell notes that 'Amanda's pioneering work and the success of *Building the Picture* (and later *Leonardo*) has contributed to a culture of greater risk taking at the National Gallery. We took a more experimental approach to exhibition programming and outputs... The success of these models... influenced the NG's programming strategy' (5.3).

The second impact is the development of new, more immersive forms of display, enabling the public to experience art (rather than being detached spectators) and to imagine paintings in the environments for which they were commissioned. These display innovations commenced with Lillie's curation of *Building the Picture*, where the immersive effects of environment were explored through the exhibition design, interpretative wall texts, related images and short films. Encouraged by the success of this concept, Campbell notes that several of the NG's subsequent exhibitions 'incorporated these research themes and virtual/digital elements into their content and display, including *Visions of Paradise: Botticini's Palmieri Altarpiece* (2015-2016), *Delacroix and the Rise of Modern Art* (2016), and *Monet and Architecture* (2018)... Without our experience with *Building the Picture* and our long-running collaboration with Amanda, the Gallery would not have developed these exhibitions in the way that we did' (5.3).

The critical success of *Building the Picture* and of the display strategies it inspired gave the NG the confidence to build their first exhibition wholly centred on immersive digital experience, *Leonardo: Experience a Masterpiece*, co-produced and executed by 59 Productions. Campbell states that 'The innovative elements of *Building the Picture* – the imagination of spaces, visualisations of that beyond the picture plane... provided the foundations for *Leonardo: Experience a Masterpiece* and its immersive virtual recreation of *The Virgin of the Rocks* in its original physical surroundings.' (5.3) Based on Lillie's reappraisal of the documents and comparable altarpieces remaining in situ in the Valtellina, the Gallery took a controversial decision to surround Leonardo's painting by projected computer-generated images, creating the first animated digital evocation of the extraordinary sculpted altarpiece completed in 1508. Since scholars, critics and the public are used to seeing *The Virgin of the Rocks* as a stand-alone masterpiece, there was resistance to the idea of re-imagining it juxtaposed with Lombard relief sculptures, and to projecting digital images around Leonardo's original. Campbell noted that 'We developed and employed models of digital/virtual engagement that were immensely challenging for our organisation' (5.3).

As a display, the *Leonardo Experience* elicited varied responses: critique and dissent from those opposed to digital experiences focussed on old master paintings; praise for embracing the new medium; enthusiasm from younger members of the audience expressed through social media sites (5.7, 5.8). It also 'received visits by gallery staff from around the world keen to draw lessons

from the programming' (5.3). Despite the risks involved in forging what was a radically new form of museological expression for the NG, the decision to recreate digitally the surrounding altarpiece had a positive impact on the NG's display strategies. As Foister observes, 'This digital experience – the visual components of which depended entirely on Amanda's research – was the most popular aspect of the *Leonardo* exhibition among our visitors and has encouraged the Gallery to continue experimenting with new digital formats' (5.5). The NG's second immersive experience, *Sensing the Unseen: Step into Gossaert's 'Adoration'*, curated by Foister, has just been inaugurated (2020-21) (5.1, 5.3, 5.5).

The third impact is the changed audience profile and engagement following technological advances on the NG website and digital engagement with a global public. *Building the Picture* was accompanied by the NG's first full-length online exhibition catalogue, mainly written and edited by Lillie, at a time when this was a bold innovation in museums (3.5, 5.2). Foister points out that the online catalogue 'would not have taken place without Amanda's AHRC-funded research project' and that it 'constituted the important first step in the Gallery's long-term goals to develop its digital programming' (5.5). The catalogue was shortlisted in the Apollo Awards for 'Digital Innovation of the Year' (5.6) and has been massively popular, receiving over 500,000 visits (during the exhibition and the following year it received 462,607 page views with users visiting 2.1 more pages and spending 2.3 times longer on the site than typical; to Nov 2020 it received an additional 93,906 views (5.2)). Freudenheim in *The Wall St Journal* commented that Lillie's online catalogue 'is a bold model for a museum to follow', a view echoed by Januszczak in *The Sunday Times*: 'I went home, got online and began reading about Building the Picture on the National Gallery's website. Four hours later I was still there... the Building the Picture web experience ought to carry a warning on its opening page: "Beware. You could spend the rest of your life on here"' (5.4). The five short films commissioned for the exhibition and produced by Lillie were also pioneering. Contributed by practitioners and theorists - an architect, a filmmaker, an art historian, a film theorist, and a digital games designer - these thought pieces opened up different ways of thinking about depicted architecture and, seven years later, are a continuing presence on YouTube, where they have received 91,046 views (5.2). As Nevola remarked in *The Burlington Magazine*, 'the online catalogue will make a lasting contribution; with five short films – also available online... these resources will help to open up the research to a wider and younger public (5.4).'

Extending the NG's audience of younger visitors and reaching a global public were two key impacts of *Leonardo* (5.7, 5.8). The Summative Evaluation reports that almost a third of first-time exhibition goers were young British adults (16-35), and that visitors who were attracted by the immersive elements 'had high levels of satisfaction and their expectations were exceeded... This experience led to many visitors thinking of the Gallery as a "modern gallery for the 21st century"' (5.7). Campbell confirms that 'The immersive and experiential approach of the *Leonardo* exhibition attracted a younger audience to the Gallery, and, as a result, influenced how the NG thinks about engaging younger visitor demographics. *Leonardo* demonstrated to us the ways in which innovative engagement tools can be deployed to draw in different audience groups. For example, we have focused on digital engagement for our December 2020 *Gossaert* exhibition, taking what we did with *Leonardo* and working that into a new form of engagement specifically aimed at the 18-34 age group.' (5.3) The digital nature of the exhibition also enabled the Gallery to plan engagement with much wider audiences globally: 'we are currently in discussions with partners in China for *Leonardo* to tour several sites in that country in 2021, including Shanghai. This would not have been possible without Amanda's research on intrinsic and extrinsic environments and the connected digital element of the exhibition, both of which allow us to take the physical and recreate it for new audiences many thousands of miles away' (5.3).

Social media played a larger role in engaging the younger audience with *Leonardo* and in charting its impact. Comments on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter reveal the positive response of this younger audience, in many cases because this new demographic were engaging with the immersive virtual experience via another virtual medium: 'it's great, offering a totally modern way of looking at something that's bloody old'; 'such brilliant curation and clever use of digital tech'; 'it's wonderfully immersive, educative without being preachy... and shows that there are ways in

which technology can be used to make pre-modern art relatable for younger audiences'; 'seeing the Virgin of the Rocks in an imagined altarpiece setting... was sublime and exalted' (5.8). The NG received 78,000 new followers on social media platforms due to activities around *Leonardo* (5.7), with hundreds of thousands of *Leonardo* posts on Twitter (1,114,822), Facebook (465,960), and Instagram story views (122,000). On the new *Virgin of the Rocks* section of the NG website, visitors to Lillie's feature on 'The Lost Altarpiece' (5.9) spent nearly twice as long there (4 minutes) as on other parts of the *Leonardo* web pages (5.8).

The NG summarises that 'Amanda's research and her collaborations with us have had a hugely positive impact on the National Gallery's exhibition programming, curatorial strategies, and audience engagement.' (5.3). The underpinning research impacted on the programming (Impact 1) which impacted on the nature of the display (Impact 2) which impacted on the changed audience profile and engagement (Impact 3). This momentum of three impacts retained the initial force of Lillie's research because the intellectual trajectory remained consistent from start to finish: environments as a research field leading to environments both as an exhibition theme and as a mode of display that communicates immersively with audiences in museums and on their digital platforms. At the same time, the research trajectory explored through *Building the Picture* and *Leonardo* has fundamentally changed perceptions of the works of art themselves within the NG and in the world at large. In both exhibitions, the curation of environments within Renaissance paintings achieved a more immersive engagement, so that visitors could understand how artists use pictorial architecture and landscape as rhetorical devices, addressing them and inviting them into the picture, designing an internal narrative and mood, and channelling the viewers' journey through the painting and their response. This visual immersion is participatory and experiential. As Wainwright in *The Guardian* commented, 'The exhibition has a transformative effect... Building the Picture helps to open our eyes to why these stage sets matter, and it might just change the way you look.' Cumming in *The Observer* remarked, 'All great exhibitions have the power to change the way we think about one or more artists. Not many change the way we think about art itself. But that is the rare and surprising achievement of Building the Picture' (5.4).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1** Exhibition programme at NG since 2013 <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/whats-on/past>
- 5.2** Exhibition visitor numbers for *Building the Picture* free exhibition, reported in *The National Gallery, Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2015*, p. 4; *Building the Picture* online catalogue visitor numbers; YouTube videos for *Building the Picture*, with viewing stats.
- 5.3** Testimonial letter from Dr Caroline Campbell, co-curator of *Building the Picture* and *Leonardo: Experience a Masterpiece* and Head of Collections and Research at the NG.
- 5.4** *Coverage Book* media report of press reviews for *Building the Picture* exhibition and online catalogue, inc. [The Wall Street Journal](#), [The Sunday Times](#), [The Guardian](#), [The Observer](#), [The Telegraph](#), [The Architectural Review](#), [Artlyst](#) ('the UK's leading art information website'), *History Today*, [Time Out](#), Caroline Campbell (National Gallery) in an [interview with Apollo magazine](#), [Burlington Magazine](#).
- 5.5** Testimonial letter from Dr Susan Foister, Deputy Director and Curator of Early Netherlandish and German Painting at the National Gallery, London.
- 5.6** *Apollo: International Art Magazine*, 'Apollo Awards 2014. Digital Innovation of the Year', 3 December 2014, <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/apollo-awards-digital-innovation-year/>.
- 5.7** *Leonardo: Experience a Masterpiece*: Summative Evaluation. Data & Insight February 2020, NG Exhibition Department, includes visitor numbers, outcomes and analysis.
- 5.8** *Leonardo: Experience a Masterpiece*: End of Exhibition Report, NG Digital Department, includes social media debrief, website debrief, social media feedback.
- 5.9** *Leonardo: Experience a Masterpiece* NG website feature: ['The Lost Altarpiece'](#).
- 5.10** Leah Kharibian, *Leonardo: Experience a Masterpiece*: Exhibition Book (National Gallery 2019), pp. 9, 71.