

Institution: King's College London		
Unit of Assessment: 33 Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies		
Title of case study: Intersections of Cinema and Art: Creating and Shaping Reception Contexts		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013–2019		
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:
Erika Balsom	Reader in Film Studies	From 2013
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015–2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact

Balsom's research has had a profound impact on the worlds of cinema and art, creating and shaping contexts for the reception of documentary and artists' film. It has informed, enriched and influenced curatorial practices, professional discourse and public understanding of this field in three distinct ways: 1) changing programming policies, performance and practice through curatorial work in documentary film and the moving image; 2) informing programming policy, performance and practice through consultative and advisory work; 3) enriching public and professional discourse on the intersections of cinema and art through speaking engagements at world-leading institutions and contributions to prestigious non-academic publications.

2. Underpinning research

Erika Balsom has developed an international reputation for interdisciplinary scholarship situated at the intersections of cinema and art, published by leading peer-reviewed journals and university presses. Balsom's research focuses on the history of how artists have engaged with the moving image, on the institutional and economic factors determining this practice, and on the aesthetics and politics of contemporary documentary practices. It has been integral in establishing the Department of Film Studies at King's as a leading centre for research in experimental cinema and moving image culture. In 2018, she was awarded a Philip Leverhulme Prize in recognition of the quality of this research.

Balsom's work is informed by both primary historical research and theoretical engagement. Publications such as "Around *The Clock: Museum and Market*" [6] and the co-edited collection *Artists' Moving Image in Britain Since 1989* [1] explore the changing place of the moving image in art, with special attention to how artistic practices relate to institutional practices and priorities. Balsom's research proceeds from the claim that a fundamental shift occurred circa 1989 regarding the status of cinema in contemporary art, whereby the moving image went from being a marginal medium of artistic practice with little relationship to cinema to occupying a central position in the landscape of contemporary art and asserting a strong link to the illusionism, scale, and iconography of cinema. This interdisciplinary scholarship brings together film studies and art history in order to historicise and theorise the place of the projected image in art from the 1990s onward.

By examining distribution models in the intersecting histories of experimental film and moving image art, Balsom's second monograph *After Uniqueness: A History of Film and Video Art in Circulation* [3] shows how circulation is an essential term for understanding the aesthetics, politics and economics of the moving image. Based on extensive archival research, this book demonstrates how the reproducibility of the moving image has figured within the artistic context as a dangerous inauthenticity, a utopian possibility, or both at once, exploring topics such as the sale of film and video as art objects, the bootlegging of experimental film and site-specific cinema. It is a deeply revisionist history in that it moves beyond established methodologies, leaving behind textual analysis and auteurist approaches, to understand cultural production as a network, and brings into the conversation the institutional contexts of moving image art and experimental film, which are often considered separate despite their many convergences.

Balsom's recent work has gravitated to questions of documentary, particularly as it intersects with artistic practice. The nexus of documentary and experimental film forms the central focus of

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An Oceanic Feeling: Cinema and the Sea [2], a short book that explores the motif of the ocean across the history of cinema, arguing that such representations offer a rich resource for considering the ocean as a vast and fluid archive traversing nature and culture. The article 'The reality-based community' [4] and the co-edited collection *Documentary Across Disciplines* [5] explore how shifting epistemological foundations and changing technologies have impacted the aesthetics and politics of vanguard documentary since the 1990s. During this period, amid political, humanitarian and ecological crises, documentary has undergone a period of tremendous experimentation, breaking away from orthodox notions of objectivity and neutrality to embrace impurity, reflexivity and artifice. Balsom's current research historicises and theorises these developments.

3. References to the research

1. Balsom, E., Perks, S. & Reynolds, L. (2019). *Artists' Moving Image in Britain Since 1989*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Edited collection (Balsom was individually responsible for Part 1, comprising nine scholarly essays and co-authored the introduction). QI: Longlisted for the 2020 Kraszna-Krausz Moving Image Book Award.
2. Balsom, E. (2018). *An Oceanic Feeling: Cinema and the Sea*. New Plymouth, NZ: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery/Len Lye Centre. Monograph.
3. Balsom, E. (2017). *After Uniqueness: A History of Film and Video in Circulation*. New York: Columbia University Press. Monograph. Peer-reviewed. QI: Review in *The Art Bulletin* states that Balsom "stakes out new intellectual terrain" and suggests that the book is "scrupulously researched and highly informative". Supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Insight Development Grant, CAD22,850; Carleton University Junior Faculty Research Grant, CAD6,700; and University of California, Berkeley, Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship, US59,929. Translations of two abridged chapters into German and Portuguese. [included as a double-weighted output in REF2021]
4. Balsom, E. (2017). The reality-based community. *e-flux journal*, 83 [online]. <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/83/142332/the-reality-based-community/>. Journal article. QI: Translated into German, Swedish, Spanish and Korean.
5. Balsom, E. & Peleg, H. (2016). *Documentary Across Disciplines* (Cambridge: MIT Press). Edited collection with curator Hila Peleg. QI: Review in *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* deems it "provocative" and "well-curated", while *Visual Resources* praises the "versatility, richness and compactness of the volume, as well as the elegance with which it is presented". *Image [& Narrative]* calls it a "key publication" and praises its "careful editing" and "in-depth and challenging analysis".
6. Balsom, E. (2013). Around *The Clock*: museum and market. *Framework*, 54(2), 177-191. Journal article. Peer-reviewed. DOI: 10.1353/frm.2013.0028

4. Details of the impact

In 2018, Balsom was selected by leading London-based art magazine *Apollo* as one of '40 Under 40 Europe', a group of art-world professionals recognised for excellence by a panel of expert judges. Balsom was the only academic included in the subcategory 'The Thinkers', with the nine others selected being curators – a recognition of how thoroughly her research has had a decisive influence within the professional context of the art world. Balsom's research has generated a body of knowledge that has led to impact in three key areas.

1. Changing programming policies, performance and practice through curatorial work in documentary film and moving image

Balsom has extended her research on documentary film into curatorial work, which has led directly to changes in policy, practice and performance for both art and film organisations, and individuals – artists and filmmakers and audiences.

In 2017, Balsom was international film curator in residence at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery/Len Lye Centre in New Zealand. Her research for *An Oceanic Feeling* [2], on the motif of the sea in the history of cinema, informed an exhibition and screening programme of the same name. *An Oceanic Feeling* critiques the Romantic image of the sea, foregrounding it as a historical space of passage – an attitude exemplified in works Balsom selected for the programme. The

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Senior Curator of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery/Len Lye Centre identifies Balsom's residency as "*the most successful yet*" of the three the institution has hosted, noting that it was "*highly regarded by our audience and sector peers in New Zealand*" and highlighting her role in "*embolden[ing] the film curator residency*" programme at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery "*as a productive project with a wide reach*" [A.1]. The exhibition and programme increased audience numbers and raised the profile and reach of the gallery; the exhibition had an audience of more than 14,000 visitors. Screenings from this programme travelled to Auckland, Whakatāne and London. In 2020, Balsom curated an additional programme of 13 films for *An Oceanic Feeling* at the Punto de Vista International Documentary Film Festival in Pamplona, Spain, as the festival's historical retrospective, and the programme was the subject of a feature article in the local newspaper. Most recently, Balsom has expanded on the research from *An Oceanic Feeling* to develop the programme *Shoreline Movements*, co-curated with Grégory Castéra of Council, a Paris-based arts organisation devoted to fostering an enhanced understanding of social issues. *Shoreline Movements* is a programme of 18 films exploring the threshold between land and water as a material environment and as a provocative metaphor for the uncertainties and conflicts of worldly existence. Taking place from November 2020 to March 2021, the programme was shown in a specially designed environment by artist Daniel Steegmann Mangrané as part of the 2020 Taipei Biennial, curated by Bruno Latour and Martin Guinard. The previous edition of the Taipei Biennial, in 2018, attracted 170,000 visitors.

Based on her research on image circulation in *After Uniqueness* [3], Balsom was enlisted as consultant for the major 2016 exhibition *Electronic Superhighway* at the Whitechapel Gallery, suggesting artists to include and giving feedback on curatorial decisions.

'The reality-based community' [4], engaging with the history and theory of documentary film and its future directions in the era of digitisation and post-truth, was delivered as a keynote lecture for a symposium, *The Thickness of Cinema*, by the New Zealand moving image organisation CIRCUIT in August 2017. Because of this lecture and essay, Balsom was selected to curate CIRCUIT's 2018 programme, titled *Truth or Consequences*, and to commission artists to produce new documentary work specifically informed by the questions concerning truth and referentiality that are central to the essay [A]. Five films were produced by artists including Bridget Reweti and Jeremy Leatinu'u; Andrew de Freitas's film *Weight* won the Lichter Art Award at the Lichter Filmfest in Frankfurt, while others played at the Berlin, Rotterdam and Oberhausen film festivals.

Research on artists' documentary film resulting in *Documentary Across Disciplines* [5] led to and informed Balsom's curation of an online exhibition called *Prophecies for the Second Machine Age* (March – April 2019) for the art foundation Kadist [A]. Including work by five artists and a short introductory essay, the exhibition explored how artists working in a documentary mode have reflected on technologisation and embodiment.

Since May 2018, Balsom has been a member of a film programming collective, *The Machine that Kills Bad People*, which programmes a bimonthly double bill at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA London) of films by women, and commissions a critical essay to accompany them (edited by Balsom) that is circulated online and at the screening. The collective has screened the work of filmmakers Balsom has written about, including Claire Denis and Babette Mangolte. Out of the 239 repertory screenings critic Philip Concannon saw in 2018, he named the collective's screening of Larisa Shepitko's *The Ascent* (1977) his number one cinema discovery of the year [A.6].

2. Informing programming policy, performance and practice through consultative and advisory work

Balsom's consultative and advisory work in professional contexts has had significant influence and is widely acknowledged. Balsom's research on the distribution of artists' film and video, published in *After Uniqueness* [3], has been a crucial influence for professionals in the field, who have looked to it to provide historical context for and analysis of their work. In December 2017, *Art Monthly* called it a "*fascinating study*"; *Film Comment* deemed it a "*a crucial, accessible skeleton key for understanding the weird world of moving image art circulation*" [B.5]. On the strength of the research which resulted in *After Uniqueness*, Balsom has been invited to present her research in industry contexts, such as the SUPERLUX seminar in Scotland, Loop art fair in Barcelona, and the International Film Festival Rotterdam, engaging in knowledge exchange with artists, distributors and gallerists to inform their professional practice. From 2015 to 2019, she was a trustee at LUX, consulting on the operation of the preeminent organisation for the distribution and support of artists' moving image in the UK. The Director of LUX stresses Balsom's critical

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contributions as trustee, calling her “one of the most influential voices in contemporary moving image discourse both in the UK and internationally” [B.1]. She is a founding member of the ICA’s Independent Film Council, a board convened in 2018 to advise on the organisation’s film-related activities, comprised primarily of industry professionals.

In 2018, Balsom’s combined expertise on documentary and the distribution of artists’ film [1,3,5], led JustFilms, a wing of the Ford Foundation devoted to social justice media practice, to commission her to draft a report on the funding, production and exhibition of artists’ documentary practices. The report drew on research from *After Uniqueness* [3] and *Documentary Across Disciplines* [5] to conceptualise the challenges and opportunities for funding and distributing work at the intersection of artists’ film and documentary. JustFilms is using the report to inform their granting activities in this area, one relatively new to them but identified as a possible target area for increased support. A Senior Programs Officer at JustFilms calls Balsom “the foremost academic and public thinker writing about documentary film today” and writes, “The report is a vital resource for a philanthropic organization like Ford Foundation and will be a useful reference point for its grant making in documentary film ... The terrain which Balsom mapped out has not been written on widely and this report will be shared with others in the funding world to help inform their work” [B.4]. One of the recommendations of this report was to fund documentary criticism; JustFilms actualised this recommendation with the launch of the UNDO Fellowship in 2019, in partnership with UnionDocs, New York.

Additionally, Balsom has served on eight international film festival juries and is a nominator for major artists’ prizes, including the Film London Jarman Award, the Prince Claus Awards and the Hasselblad Foundation International Award in Photography. She has been on the awards panel for the Michael O’Pray Prize for new writing and Andy Warhol Foundation/Creative Capital Arts Writers Grants, and is a member of the editorial board of the Documents of Contemporary Art book series, published by Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, which is devoted to making the concepts and discourses of contemporary art accessible to broad publics. Balsom has led seminar series on topics related to her publications at Camden Arts Centre (2015), the British Film Institute (2016), and the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen (2016), attended primarily by artists, curators and critics. She has served as a mentor to emerging film critics at the CPH:DOX and Rotterdam festivals. A film curator and critic who participated in the Oberhausen seminar notes of Balsom wrote, “I’m hard-pressed to name working academics whose research and contributions offer a comparable level of impact on the conversations taking place in the professional worlds of art and film” [B.6].

Balsom’s scholarship has furthermore inspired and shaped artistic and curatorial practice. The Yale Center for British Art’s 2019 exhibition *Migrating Worlds: The Art of the Moving Image in Britain* grew out of research published in *Artists’ Moving Image in Britain Since 1989* [1]. The Head of Cinema at ICA London notes the “considerable influence” of Balsom’s research on documentary on the organisation’s “curatorial decision-making but also on spreading and legitimising a singular approach and sensibility to film” [B.3]. In 2019, both the Videonale in Bonn and the HUMAN International Documentary Film Festival in Oslo referred to the essay ‘The reality-based community’ in the framing of their programmes, while in 2018, the essay was included in a reading list accompanying the exhibition *Freedom of Movement: Municipal Art Acquisitions 2018* at the Stedelijk Museum. A curator and former deputy director of LUX calls it “one of the most influential texts in our field in recent years” [B.2].

3. Enriching public and professional discourse on the intersections of cinema and art

Balsom’s research informs her critical writing practice, reaching wide audiences to shape opinion and create a context for the reception of vanguard cinema, through outputs which reach beyond an academic readership. *An Oceanic Feeling* [2] is the bestselling publication in the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery’s history and was included in the LUX round-up of the best artists’ moving image publications of 2018. The *Times Literary Supplement* states that Balsom “crafts her sophisticated argument with remarkable efficiency”, while a review in *The Pantograph Punch* remarks that Balsom’s “breadth of knowledge ... permits a dizzying and thrilling chain of association”. In his year-end round-up in 2017, film blogger and *Film Quarterly* editor Girish Shambu wrote of ‘The reality-based community’, “If You Read Only One Film Studies Essay This Year, Make it This One”.

Balsom is a member of the London Film Critics’ Circle and a frequent contributor to leading magazines, including *Sight & Sound* (22 contributions during the REF cycle), *Cinema Scope* (6

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contributions), *Frieze* (7 contributions) and *Artforum* (20 contributions). All are publications with extensive circulation; *Frieze* has a monthly print readership of over 25,000 and digital readership of over 33,500; *Sight & Sound*'s estimated monthly subscriber base is 19,000, while *Artforum*'s is 38,500. Balsom's criticism is frequently showcased on highlights sites, such as Criterion's The Daily and Mubi Notebook Rushes, and her reviews have been distributed as programme notes at BFI Southbank. The Deputy Editor of *Sight & Sound* describes Balsom's contributions as "profoundly insightful, well-informed and thought-provoking", and calls her "without doubt one of the most illuminating writers on cinema in all its various manifestations working in the English language today" [C.1]. Balsom has written 22 catalogue essays during the REF cycle for leading international artists, including Cindy Sherman and Sarah Sze, for major institutions such as the National Portrait Gallery (London) and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Balsom has given over 45 invited public lectures at art institutions and film festivals, contributing to and enriching awareness and understanding of art and cinema for non-academic audiences. She has spoken at major international institutions, such as the Carnegie Museum of Art (Pittsburgh), Centre Pompidou (Paris), Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam), Bergen Kunsthall, National Gallery (Prague), Photographers' Gallery (London), the International Film Festival Rotterdam, Punto de Vista International Documentary Film Festival (Pamplona), and HUMAN International Documentary Film Festival (Oslo). Over 200 people attended her 2019 lecture at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, held in conjunction with its Harun Farocki exhibition, for which she also contributed to the exhibition catalogue.

Balsom has participated in over 50 panel discussions, film introductions and public conversations with leading artists at major institutions and festivals, including Christian Marclay (Tate Modern, 2018), Wang Bing (ICA London, 2019) and Ulrike Ottinger (Documenta 13, Athens, 2017). The sold-out talk with Marclay coincided with the Tate Modern's first major showing of Marclay's important work *The Clock* (2010), which Balsom had previously written about [6]. Marclay himself noted her important contribution to understanding his work in an interview with *Frieze* in September 2018 [C]. The Tate conversation led to an invitation to contribute to the catalogue for Marclay's 2019 MACBA exhibition (Barcelona).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

A. Sources illustrating how Balsom's research has led to changes in programming policies, performance and practice through curatorial work in documentary film and moving image: A.1 Testimonial letter from: Senior Curator, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery/Len Lye Centre; A.2 Exhibition catalogue for: Projection Series #11 An Oceanic Feeling at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery/Len Lye Centre; A.3 Testimonial letter from: Director, CIRCUIT; A.4 Programme announcement for: Truth or Consequences, <https://www.circuit.org.nz/project/truth-or-consequences>; A.5 Programme announcement for: The Kadist Video Library – VIDEOLOOP Initiative, <https://www.art-agenda.com/announcements/255678/the-kadist-video-library-videocloop-initiative>; A.6 'My Cinema Discoveries of 2018', *Phil on Film*, http://www.philonfilm.net/2018/12/my-cinema-discoveries-of-2018_30.html

B. Testimonials and review articles corroborating that Balsom's research has informed programming policy, performance and practice through consultative and advisory work: B.1 Testimonial letter from: Director, LUX; B.2 Testimonial letter from: former Deputy Director, LUX; B.3 Testimonial letter from: Head of Cinema, ICA London; B.4 Testimonial letter from: Senior Program Officer [formerly Program Officer], JustFilms/Ford Foundation; B.5 Review article in: *Film Comment*, 15 November 2017, <https://www.filmcomment.com/blog/readings-uniqueness-smutty-little-movies>; B.6 Testimonial letter from film curator and critic

C. Sources demonstrating how Balsom's research has enriched public and professional discourse on the intersections of cinema and art: C.1 Testimonial letter from: Deputy Editor, *Sight & Sound*; C.2 Article in *Frieze*, 11 September 2018, <https://www.frieze.com/article/about-time-christian-marclays-clock-receives-its-tate-modern-premiere>; C.3 Record of published criticism, Erika Balsom website, <http://www.erikabalsom.com/criticism>