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| <b>Institution:</b> Bath Spa University   |                                  |  |
| <b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 32 - Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory  |                                  |  |
| <b>Title of case study:</b> Encounters with Objects: Changing perceptions of authorship and materials in contemporary art practice.   |                                  |  |
| <b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2014 - 2020  |                                  |  |
| <b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>  |                                  |  |
| <b>Name(s):</b>   | <b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> | <b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> |
| Jenny Dunseath  | Reader in Fine Art               | 1/9/2014 - present                           |
| Dr Natasha Kidd   | Subject Leader: Art              | 1/9/2007 - present                           |
| Prof Keith Harrison   | Research Professor: Ceramics     | 1/9/2002 - present                           |
| <b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2014 - 2020   |                                  |  |
| <b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N  |                                  |  |
| <p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Through the process of unpicking existing hierarchies surrounding art practice, research carried out between 2014 and 2020 by Dunseath, Harrison and Kidd at Bath Spa University has impacted positively on participants' and audiences' involvement and connection with art. At least 250 participants, including engineers, automotive workers, studio assistants and gallery assistants, who traditionally work behind the scenes have been placed at the centre of their research, impacting on their visibility and recognition, and breaking down the notion of the artist as a single author. One participant said that collaborating on a research project with Harrison was a "momentous" experience that "shone a light into my life", leading to a realisation that "I could go and share my skills with people". These researchers have brought a minimum of 200,000 people (between 2014 and 2020) into direct encounters with art objects and with the process of making art, resulting in new, expanded understandings of what constitutes art and creating new relationships between audiences and art practice.</p>  |                                  |  |
| <p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>How does the perception and practice of art change when the processes, materials and individuals involved in its making and maintenance are made visible? Dunseath, Harrison and Kidd have examined these questions together, through a process of extending and interrogating each other's research practices. Their interactions and connections have been strengthened by a network of relationships with curators and galleries as they work together through new understandings of creating and exhibiting objects. Their research is practice-led and is focused in three areas:</p> <p><b>Art as process</b></p> <p>Dunseath, Harrison and Kidd are concerned with art that invites viewers and participants into conversation with the moment of action. This contrasts with and challenges the traditional notion of an artwork as a finished item or a 'full stop'.</p> <p>Research by Kidd and Harrison has exposed hidden processes, bringing the act of making out of the studio or the factory and into public view. Kidd brings the process of covering the canvas with paint into the gallery setting (R6). Her automated paintings systems or machines (2014-2018) use arterial systems of pipes and pumps to fill paintings from the inside or to drip paint over their surfaces, deferring the application of the paint and the completion of the works. Harrison's <i>Heavy Rock</i> (2014-2015; R4) made public the casting and installation of a 100-tonne concrete wave breaker at the entrance to Plymouth Sound. Hydrophones cast inside the wave breaker animated the concrete block, relaying the sound of the waves back to the gallery setting. These works foreground the ongoing nature of the object and the process of making art, as well as challenging the boundaries between art and industrial processes.</p> <p>Both Kidd and Dunseath have interrogated the studio as the site of making and have challenged the notion of 'the exhibition' as a display of finished artworks. <i>Curious about Care</i> presented the act of making the 'paintings' within the exhibition space (R6), while <i>Elbow</i> (2015; R2) involved transforming a gallery space into a studio environment through which artists came and went,</p> |                                  |  |

leaving traces of their activities. Through their research, Dunseath, Harrison and Kidd are working to break down the division between making and exhibiting.

### Learning with materials

Through an emphasis on art as process Dunseath, Harrison and Kidd have created new relationships with their materials. Rather than seeking to impose forms or meanings onto materials, their research is centred on learning with materials and matter, as well as enabling audiences and participants to learn and engage with materials in new ways.

Harrison is concerned with the unpredictability of materials. Within his research he works with materials, skilled workers and participants/audience members, creating acts of enquiry and experimentation. In this way, he has explored the effect of sound on ceramics (*Material Soundsystems*, 2014-2020; R5), the live firing of clay objects and the behaviour of automotive clay models (*Joyride*, 2016-2017; R3). The transformation of the materials is witnessed in public, by artist and participants/audience, creating shared moments in which new knowledge about materials and their potential are revealed.

Kidd's painting machines also act as learning resources, as the audience and team tasked to care for them are drawn into the process of making, looking, and talking 'with'. Dunseath's research emphasises the ways in which materials play an active role in the creation of a work of art, demonstrating how a material can force a sculptor to bring together multiple studio assistants, with different skills, experiences and understandings (R1).

### Challenging the perception of the artist as single author.

An emphasis on process and materials is tied to a questioning of the perception of the artist as single author. What happens when the idea of a 'single author' is broken down and questioned?

Harrison's collaboration with materials and skilled workers with specialist knowledge (eg casting concrete blocks) challenges the distinction between studio and industrial processes, and questions perceptions of material as 'high' or 'low'. By basing participants' roles on their own 'normal' work, Harrison's research creates space for those people (and challenges the audience) to reappraise the value and status of their skills and abilities. Addressing the roles of studio assistants working for Sir Anthony Caro (1924-2013; an artist who played a pivotal role in the development of 20<sup>th</sup> century sculpture), Dunseath's *Artist Boss* (2014-2017) also asks whether identifying Studio Assistants changes the reading of works of art (R1). Kidd's research makes visible the importance of gallery staff to the exhibition of artworks and challenges hierarchies.

Questioning the perception of the artist as single author brings its own challenge for the researchers. Are they complicit with a system that prefers to focus on a single named artist? Is their work with undervalued and unseen individuals effective in breaking down hierarchies? What are the consequences of breaking down notions of authorship? The researchers are aware of the tensions involved in making use of other people in the creation of their work, and continue to debate these tensions and to develop research projects that address these complex issues.

### Outcomes

As a result of their research, Dunseath, Harrison and Kidd have developed new understandings of materials, processes and objects, and of the relationships people have with art objects, allowing them to create exhibitions and events in which participants and audiences engage directly with objects and processes. Their research into the making of objects has highlighted the range of individuals involved in the creation and presentation of art; making hierarchies within the discipline visible has resulted in them being challenged and changed.

### 3. References to the research

**R1** Dunseath, J (2017) [Artist Boss \(2014-2017\) \[research portfolio\]](#).

**R2** Dunseath, J (2015) [Elbow \(2015\) \[research portfolio\]](#).

**R3** Harrison, K (2017) [Jerwood Open Forest Commission: Joyride \(2017\) \[research portfolio\]](#).

**R4** Harrison, K (2015) [New expressions 3: heavy rock | Plymouth Sound \(2015\) \[research portfolio\]](#).

**R5** Harrison, K (2020) [Material soundsystems \(2014-2020\) \[research portfolio\]](#).

**R6** Kidd, N (2018) [Curious about care \(2014-2018\) \[research portfolio\]](#).

**Funding**

- Dunseath (Artist), project funding from Arts Council England, Pangaea Sculptors foundation and others (see E8), total GBP54,500 (independent)
- Harrison (Artist), project funding from Arts Council England, Jerwood Foundation and others (see E8), total GBP85,500 (independent)
- Kidd (Artist), project funding from Greater Taiwan Biennale and others (see E8), total GBP24,000 (independent)
- Kidd (Fellow), *South West Creative Technology Network* (2018-2019), Research England, GBP15,000

**4. Details of the impact**

Dunseath, Harrison and Kidd's research has unpicked the hierarchies that surround the making and exhibition of art and has impacted on the awareness of the range and value of the work done by skilled individuals, including studio assistants and gallery assistants, within the discipline. Their research has also made a difference to the ways in which audiences relate to and engage with art, allowing them to be involved in the production of art objects, rather than having them mediated through explanatory texts or educational resources. The impact of the research by this group of artists is focused in two areas: increasing visibility and recognition for a range of individuals involved in making and caring for art; and bringing audiences into contact with the process of making art objects.

**Increasing visibility and recognition for a range of individuals involved in making and caring for art**

Dunseath, Harrison and Kidd have made a significant impact on understandings of who makes and maintains works of art, and how specific roles (eg artist, studio assistant, gallery assistant) are perceived in relation to one another. Greater understanding of these roles and of specialist skills and knowledge, on which artists and their works of art depend, has raised the profile of studio assistants, engineers, gallery assistants and skilled industry workers, as well as aiding the process of picking apart hierarchies within art practice.

*Artist Boss* (2014-17) made visible the role of Sir Anthony Caro's assistants in the making of sculptures, questioning traditional ideas of ownership and authorship. This piece of research (interviews with 20 studio assistants; 3 exhibitions with over 1400 visitors; E5, E8) brought to light the collaborations and activities behind the finished works of art. Artistic Director at the Royal Academy of Arts said the research "illustrates how ideas can take shape collaboratively whilst raising important questions on issues such as individuality and authenticity of the pieces" (E5). A testimonial from an Arts Advisor/Art Trustee acknowledges the rise in demand for skilled assistants and technicians in recent years, and states that by "looking specifically at the role of the artist's assistant [*Artist Boss*] opens up an important discussion about a particular aspect of art production that continues to be largely overlooked" (E5).

Harrison's research has made audiences and reviewers appreciative of participants' (including bus drivers, engineers and automotive industry workers) deep experience and knowledge; an artist-writer who attended *Conductor* highlighted the actions of the "skilled drivers" who manoeuvred 32 buses to "perform slowly choreographed movements from the bus bays and across the forecourt" (2019, Preston Bus Station and *The Harris Museum & Art Gallery*, Preston; 32 drivers, 8 volunteer performers, bus station manager, 8 event marshalls; audience of 200 at performance; 8000 views online; 15,000 visitors to the exhibition; E7, p1; E8).

The act of taking part in Dunseath, Harrison and Kidd's research has also impacted positively on individuals' understandings of their own practice, skills and employment. The skilled individuals involved in *Heavy Rock* (including 2 block casters, 20 Dockyard Diving Team, 24-piece Royal Marine Band, 2 Babcock Marine engineers, Queen's Harbour Master, Marine Sound Engineer, Sound engineer, Metal-Wood fabricator; E3; E8) and *Joyride* (including 1 car model maker, 6 ramp builders, 20 volunteer event marshalls; E4; E8) saw their skills and knowledge being celebrated and placed at the centre of the research. One former model maker at Longbridge Car Factory and co-maker of the clay Rover 75 central to *Joyride*, said that taking part in the project had "made me look at the arts in a different way", and had allowed him to think of car models, once carved from mahogany, as works of art (E4). Participating in *Joyride* opened up new

possibilities and activities, including a serious (and continued) interest in making pottery, and presenting as a keynote speaker in an academic conference (2017). He described the keynote as “a tremendous experience” and said that, while sitting around the table with a group of professors, “I felt as an equal...I was part of the discussion” (E4).

A former studio assistant and artist who participated in Artist Boss, talked about the impact of the research on peoples’ perceptions of studio assistants, noting that the Artist Boss Roche Court exhibition had presented studio assistants as “artists in our own right” and had “re-examined us, and presented us as equals” (E5). The research had a direct impact on his own career, as the Roche Court exhibition had “spurred me into doing something quite experimental... a departure from how I was normally working”, leading to the creation of a sculpture that was subsequently selected for the Frieze Sculpture Park (2017): “which is probably the most high profile thing I’ve done and put me in the international art scene” (E5). The *Artist Boss* publication (2016; more than 400 copies sold) has helped to increase visibility of studio assistants and has impacted on assistants’ own perceptions of the work that they do (E5).

Meanwhile, gallery assistants caring for Kidd’s painting machines noticed a shift in visitors’ attitudes towards them, as well as changing the nature of their role in the gallery (E1). An assistant at *Test Run* (2014, Modern Art Oxford, 11,814 visitors; E8) said that “seeing that the invigilator is actively involved in the process of the work” caused “a greater intrigue and social involvement from the viewers”, while their task of maintaining the paintings “shifted me away from the usual invigilator role” (E1, p1). This was echoed at Sullivan Galleries, Chicago, where a minimum of 40 gallery assistants who were involved in caring for the works “were often asked about the work” and found this to be a “profoundly positive consequence” of the works’ “unusual nature” (2016, *Painting in Time II*, 20,608 visitors; E1; E8).

As well as impacting on artists, makers and assistants, visitors to the exhibitions and participants in outreach and education programmes gained a greater understanding of collaboration within art practice and acquired knowledge of formerly unknown career opportunities and ways of working. A former art student who took part in the Artist Boss engagement programme said that the research “gave me new insight into how artists navigated their careers, how important other people were to their practice”, while another said: “Artist Boss opened my eyes to the idea of making work that wasn’t just my own or for myself” (E5). These insights opened up new avenues of professional practice and potential careers for students, including art school technician, furniture maker and studio assistant (E5). Testimonials from these alumni demonstrate the lasting impact of the research on their careers, with one saying that: “Artist Boss recognised that this IS a way of living for an artist, and I concur. The influence and physicality of being around working artists and making work for others feeds your own creativity”, while another said that Artist Boss “has continued to influence my studio practice as a multidisciplinary artist” (E5).

### **Bringing audiences into contact with the process of making art objects**

- **creating new understandings of exhibiting and making art**
- **creating new understandings of materials and new relationships between objects, materials, makers, carers and audiences**

Research carried out by Dunseath, Harrison and Kidd has brought audiences closer to the processes and materials involved in the making of art, and in doing so has succeeded in breaking down the distance between art object and audience, as well as expanding and enriching audiences’ understanding of what constitutes a work of art or an exhibition.

A visitor to *Elbow* (2015, C&C gallery, London; 1 blind consultant and 1 assistant, 1 gallery assistant, 2 gallery directors, 2 marketing staff; 400 participants by active involvement, 4230 live audience, 10,000 online, E8) commented: “Nice to see a gallery looking at disability as an issue rather than just showing paintings, I didn’t know art could do that”, while another stated “I really enjoyed learning how the process came about and that the focus is on the process itself rather than what they are making” (E2, p1). These comments demonstrate that the research altered visitors’ understanding of art and challenged their notions of exhibiting and making art (E2).

Dunseath’s outreach and participation work as part of *Artist Boss* has impacted on students’ and teachers’ understandings of materials, technologies, and collaborations (workshops, crits and



talks, over 690 students, teachers and pupils; E2, E5). Art students responded to technical discussions of joining and making, with one commenting: “Before this project I had not seen how new technologies were being used in art”, while another said: “It supported my interest in sculpture, and supported it as a viable approach. How artists are using, interpreting or trying to push the parameters of a new technology, process or material” (E5). Encounters with new materials, technologies and artists impacted on these art students’ perception of the discipline and their own professional practice.

By bringing gallery visitors and participants into direct contact with materials and their transformations, Dunseath, Harrison and Kidd’s research allows them to play a part in witnessing and creating new knowledge and new understandings. An artist-writer’s account of Kidd’s *Overfill (Painting in Time, The Tetley, 2015; 6149 visitors, E8)* discussed the relationship between art object, materials, studio assistant and audience: “the gallery attendants become implicated in the work, the paintings ‘marked’ by their ‘care’ and in a sense becoming ‘documents’ of this ‘care’ – the visitor taking on the role of witness within this process” (E1). Director of Exhibition Operations at the Chicago exhibition said that Kidd’s work succeeded in engaging with its audience “in its making” and continues to do so “in the memory of that making”, while a studio assistant at The Tetley said the work had a “live-ness” and “sparked a real material interest from audiences, an inquisitiveness, curiosity, playful” (E1).

Visitors to *Mute (2015, National Museum Wales; 45,775 visitors, E8)* were actively involved in the exhibition, being invited to play brass music from 2 turntables into slip-filled speakers, with the aim of breaking down the clay and exposing the internal sound. Over the course of the exhibition, visitors added to the record collection on display. Artists, writers, students and photographers who visited the exhibition were moved to write about and share images and videos of *Mute*; one wrote about how the installation “invites the public” to take part, saying: “being invited to make a load of noise on turntables is always a fun proposition, and I can now (technically) claim to have DJd the National Museum of Wales!” (E6, p1). Another visitor, who took along some of his noisiest records to play, witnessed the “deterioration of these ceramics plates through sound” and said “I think it’s the most fun I had all year” (E6, p1). These comments demonstrate the interactive and joyful experience of engaging with this artwork, which turned the gallery from a place of quiet, distant contemplation to one of welcoming interaction.

As well as creating new ways of engaging with art practice and shifting perceptions of authorship and hierarchy in art, Dunseath, Harrison and Kidd have effected changes in the programming and curating of cultural events. Plymouth City’s Plan for Public Art (2016) cites Harrison’s work as a case study that demonstrates “the capacity of the city and the city’s artists to produce ambitious work” (E3). A city council commissioned report (2016) found that Heavy Rock’s collaborative approach had resulted in Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery creating “valuable new partnerships with a range of organisations in the city, including the Royal Navy and the marine engineers, Babcock International”, while the project had also “forged new working relations between the museum and the visual arts community in the city” (E3).

#### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

**E1** *Curious about Care (2014-16)* Testimonials from gallery assistants and staff involved in caring for the painting machines. Reviews of exhibitions.

**E2** *Elbow (2015)* Visitor feedback and interviews with gallery café staff.

**E3** *Heavy Rock (2015)* Council commissioned report with case study on the impact of *Heavy Rock* on public art in Plymouth (2016); A Public Art Plan for the City of Plymouth (2016).

**E4** *Joyride (2017)* Participant testimonial.

**E5** *Artist Boss (2016-17)* Testimonials by former studio assistants; testimonials from participants in *Artist Boss* education program; testimonials from Artistic Director and Arts Advisor/Art Trustee.

**E6** *Mute (2015)* Visitor feedback and reviews.

**E7** *Conductor (2019)* Reviews of performance and exhibition.

**E8** Overview document: audience numbers, grants, links for all events discussed in Section 4.