

Institution: University of Cambridge		
Unit of Assessment: 28 History		
Title of case study: Material Worlds: Curating Early Modern Object Cultures		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2005-2020		
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:
Melissa Calaresu	Affiliated Lecturer	1997-present
Mary Laven	Professor of Early Modern History	1997-present
Ulinka Rublack	Professor of Early Modern European History	1996-present
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 (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>The Material Worlds case-study combines three major research-led exhibitions held at the University of Cambridge's Fitzwilliam Museum: 'Treasured Possessions from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment' (TP), 2015; 'Madonnas & Miracles: The Holy Home in Renaissance Italy' (M&M), 2017 and 'Feast & Fast: The Art of Food in Europe, 1500-1800' (F&F), 2019-20. The exhibitions attest to an exceptional and ongoing collaboration between curatorial staff at the Fitzwilliam Museum and early modern historians at Cambridge University. The cumulative impact of these initiatives may be seen in unprecedented public engagement; lasting changes to museum and display practice; and a long-term commitment to cross-pollination of expertise and knowledge across the academic and museum communities.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>The research underpinning 'Material Worlds' was conducted by three long-standing members of the History Faculty: Melissa Calaresu (Neil McKendrick Lecturer in History at Gonville and Caius College); Mary Laven (Professor of Early Modern History) and Ulinka Rublack (FBA, Professor of Early Modern European History). Embracing the material turn at the start of the twenty-first century, the expertise of these scholars has since developed in three main areas: clothing and textiles (Rublack); food and urban consumption (Calaresu); religion and global encounters (Laven).</p> <p>As evident in her prize-winning book of 2010, <i>Dressing-Up</i> [R1], Rublack has placed clothing at the heart of our conception of the Renaissance. Her more recent work, which is increasingly engaged with raw materials and processes of craft production, contributes to current thinking on material agency and resistance [R2]. By combining archival research with innovative approaches to material evidence, Rublack has shown how textiles, leather and other materials were vital to self-fashioning yet often intractable.</p> <p>Calaresu's work has foregrounded the role of food in the Enlightenment. Often perceived in grandiose terms as an era of 'reason' and elevated thinking, the Enlightenment is instead studied by Calaresu from the ground up [R3&R4]. Her work on material culture is vital here as she explores the role of street-sellers, their customers, and their wares (such as ice-cream and hot chocolate) in creating the sociable spaces in which new ideas took root; the outstanding collection of eighteenth-century ceramics held by the Fitzwilliam Museum is fundamental to her work.</p> <p>The research carried out by Laven on the material culture of devotion [R5&R6] challenges the assumption that the rise of commodification in the early modern period was inexorably linked to a process of secularization. Instead, through detailed study of extant devotional objects in conjunction with wills and inventories, she has charted the proliferation of rosaries, coral, crucifixes, figurines of saints and other religious objects from the fifteenth to the seventeenth</p>		

centuries. By pushing her research beyond Europe into the mission fields of East Asia, she has further demonstrated the fundamental role of objects in advancing global Catholicism.

The close relationship with the Department of Applied Arts at the Fitzwilliam Museum has allowed the three historians unparalleled access to early modern objects, giving rise to new research questions, methods and arguments. Assisted by the Keeper of Applied Arts, Victoria Avery, herself an expert on early modern bronze production, they have acquired the knowledge of the making and make-up of the objects that is now central to their research. The synergy between the Fitzwilliam Museum and the Faculty of History has deepened through collaboration on the three exhibitions and production of the three associated scholarly yet accessible catalogues and has blossomed in externally funded collaborations. As a result of projects like 'Domestic Devotions' (ERC Synergy Grant – Laven), 'Materialized Identities' (Swiss National Foundation Grant – Rublack) and 'Sweetest Gender' (Marie Skłodowska-Curie – Calaresu), material evidence, curatorial skills and a rigorous understanding of production methods are now considered central to the practice of early modern history.

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

Selected outputs:

- [R1] Ulinka Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2010). (Book: ISBN 9780199645183)
- [R2] Ulinka Rublack, 'Matter in the Material Renaissance,' *Past & Present* (2013) 219 (1), 41-84. (Journal article)
- [R3] Melissa Calaresu, 'Making and eating ice cream in Naples: Rethinking Consumption and Sociability in the Eighteenth Century,' *Past & Present* (2013) 220 (1), 35-78. (Journal article)
- [R4] Melissa Calaresu, 'Food selling and urban space in early modern Naples', in Melissa Calaresu and Danielle van den Heuvel (eds), *Food Hawkers: Selling food in the streets from antiquity to the present day* (Routledge, 2016) (Chapter in book: ISBN 9781409450429)
- [R5] Mary Laven, *Mission to China: Matteo Ricci and the Jesuit Encounter with the East* (London: Faber, 2011). (Book: ISBN 9780571225187)
- [R6] Mary Laven, with Abigail Brundin and Deborah Howard, *The Sacred Home in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). (REF output. Book: ISBN 9780198816553)

Evidence of quality of research:

The above outputs have all been peer reviewed and published by international journals and major university presses. They therefore meet the 2* minimum requirement.

Major grants awarded:

Laven: Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship, GBP103,560 (2 years, October 2011 – September 2013): 'Objects of Devotion: the material culture of Italian Renaissance piety, 1400-1600'.

Rublack (Burghartz, Burkart and Göttler): Swiss National Foundation Grant, CHF716,462 (2 years, January 2016 – December 2018): 'Materialized Identities, 1450-1750'.

<https://www.materializedidentities.com>

Laven (Brundin and Howard): ERC Synergy Grant, EUR2.3 million (4 years, September 2013 – August 2017): 'Domestic Devotions: The Place of Piety in the Renaissance Italian Home'

Calaresu (Manzanares) Post-doctoral Marie Skłodowska-Curie-funded research project, GBP183,564 (MSCA-IF 2019) on 'The sweetest gender: Feminine subjectivities and the gendering of sweets in Barcelona (1650-1800)', September 2020-August 2022.

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

Collaboration, Innovation and Accessibility

Some exhibitions are 'helicoptered' into museums; others are rooted in the academic and local community. The three exhibitions detailed here belong to the second category; each has grown organically from a close relationship between academic and curatorial staff, all of whom are committed to understanding objects in the early modern world and to sharing their meanings and

materiality with a broader public. This symbiosis has led to new investigation, display and interpretation of museum objects, often stored within reserve collections and hidden from view. The challenge of telling new stories about early modern objects to broad contemporary audiences unfamiliar with this material and its context, in a succinct and engaging way, has challenged museum staff to develop more publicly-accessible modes of dissemination, incorporating multi-sensory display techniques (for example, using music or video footage alongside conventional labels to bring unfamiliar objects to life) and alternative kinds of public participation, from 'making workshops' (TP) to 'sensory' late nights at the Museum (M&M) to films about food memories involving local community partners (F&F). As a result, practices that emerged from a shared process of trial and error have become established in the life of the Fitzwilliam and beyond. Curators have come to interpret the museum collections in new ways, and the researchers have come to think more didactically about their objects, which has in turn ensured an enhanced public engagement with early modern research.

New Didactic and Curatorial Practices

The research of Calaresu, Laven and Rublack led directly to the invitation from the Fitzwilliam Museum to curate an exhibition with Avery on the material culture of the early modern world. Supported by an external grant from the Monument Fund (GBP77K) and private sponsorship (GBP65K), TP was held in the Adeane Gallery from 24 March to 6 September 2015; attracting 94,419 visitors, it succeeded in bringing a new awareness of the significance of material desire, production, acquisition and ownership to a broad public audience. [E1] Reviews of the exhibition were consistently positive and emphasised the value of the collaboration. In *The Daily Telegraph* (14 April, 2015), Richard Dormont observed: 'Working together, historians and curators have come up with a genuinely original exhibition examining our relationship to the material world.' Rachel Campbell Johnston reported in *The Times* that 'Treasured Possessions is about learning to let objects speak.' Several reviewers commented on the success of TP despite the constraints of budget and the sparing use of loans; *The Economist's* reviewer observed, it 'was a smart decision' of the Museum to collaborate with experts from the History Faculty. Positive press reports were echoed by testimonials from visitors, who enjoyed being confronted with unfamiliar objects (e.g. mourning rings) and being encouraged to 'think differently' about things they 'wouldn't normally take an interest in'. [E3]

Conscious of the success and multiple benefits of the TP collaboration, the Fitzwilliam welcomed approaches from Laven and Calaresu for two further research-led exhibitions, both of which have continued to explore the museum's own collections and to highlight their significance by means of targeted loans and tactical juxtapositions. M&M was held in the Mellon and Adeane Galleries from 7 March to 4 June 2017. Despite its shorter duration, it attracted over 50,000 visitors [E4] and extensive press coverage, including major feature-length previews and reviews in *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, *The Spectator* and *The Mail on Sunday* (which proclaimed M&M to be 'surely the exhibition of the year'). [E7] Analysis of visitor responses and feedback, including 'thermal mapping' and 'before and after' interviews, demonstrated the impact of the exhibition in changing assumptions about the role of religion in everyday life. [E2, E5, E9] Mind maps drawn by visitors before and after viewing the exhibition showed 'a shift in language towards more domestic, familial and everyday terms' in their conception of religion. [E5] Use of 'tracking' analysis revealed an exceptionally attentive audience with more than 25% of tracked visitors stopping at 50% or more 'elements' within the exhibition; this was the highest proportion of 'Diligent Visitors' thus far recorded in the tracking project undertaken by University of Cambridge Museums (UCM). [E6] The high engagement with the case of rosaries (at which 72% of visitors stopped) was generated by the adjacent video, which brought these static objects to life and linked them to the nearby painting by Jacopo Bassano. The video, which was captioned, featured a Catholic woman explaining the significance of rosary beads in her own home life and emphasised their multi-sensory qualities and tactility. Tracking also showed unusually high engagement with the text panels, which succinctly conveyed the research underpinning M&M: 88% of visitors stopped at one or more text panels during their visit; this compares favourably with averages from other University of Cambridge Museums (47% at the MAA and 46% at the Whipple).

F&F, the largest of the three exhibitions, was held in the Mellon, Adeane, and 20th century Galleries. Originally scheduled to run from 26 November 2019 to 26 April 2020, doors closed on 17 March 2020 due to COVID-19 (over 60,000 people had visited by this point) but reopened from 4 to 31 August 2020. [E8] Building on a commitment to accessibility and public engagement, F&F innovated with the incorporation of a Creative Zone, a dedicated visitor-feedback space within the exhibition. A feedback form asked visitors 'Which three words come to mind when you think about food?', and the most frequently cited words were displayed each week on the response wall. [E9] Art supplies, colouring sheets and props were also provided, and drawings by visitors were displayed and collected. At the same time, F&F developed the use of film not only as a didactic resource but also as a means of bringing more diverse and contemporary voices to the exhibition narrative.

The Public Benefit of University-Museum Collaboration

New approaches developed collaboratively by researchers and museum professionals have engaged audiences with research that is not typically accessible. For example, TP innovated in its use of video footage of a young man being dressed in an elaborate sixteenth-century costume [E1]; M&M commissioned the didactic rosary video [E4]; F&F collaborated with Cambridge community partners in two films featuring different cultural practices, to enrich the exhibition narrative [E8]. A multi-sensory approach (commissioning new recordings of the music on a set of 'singing knives', playing street songs in gallery spaces, distributing Renaissance scents at Museum 'lates', running touching sessions with real objects and 3D-printed versions, cooking meals with community partners) has been a feature of all three exhibitions, at once reflecting the research agenda of the historians and rendering the museum accessible to broader audiences, including the blind and partially-sighted. Indeed, the multi-sensory aspect of F&F has been a primary driver in the Museum's decision to adopt 'Virtual / Sensual' as its first annual research theme. This has also encouraged the creation of a special F&F-themed 'Museum in a Box' digital interactive resource, which can be taken off site to hard-to-reach audiences. [E8] The evidence garnered from all three exhibitions is leading to innovations that will enhance public engagement with objects in the permanent galleries.

Opportunities for creative participation have also been developed, via 'making' events (for example, stitching, enamelling and cooking) and writing workshops, which reflected on the meaning of objects. TP culminated in the 'Writing Lives' project, in which the then Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy and novelists Sarah Dunant and Ali Smith were commissioned to write new pieces relating to exhibits. [E9] New food-themed literary works arising from creative writing workshops are featured on the F&F website. [E10] Community engagement has been integral to Material Worlds. For the first time, the artworks of children and adults inspired by paintings in M&M were displayed on the exhibition landing. This practice was extended in F&F, thanks to the possibilities of the dedicated Creative Zone. For example, a *trompe l'oeil* ceramic artwork, made collaboratively by one community group and inspired by museum objects from the initial handling sessions, was displayed alongside other works relating to food memories made by the same community group; the piece has recently been accessioned by the Museum. [E8]

Material Worlds has resulted in lasting partnerships with businesses (e.g. Cambridge's Ted Baker store, Fitzbillies Restaurant and John Lewis which launched an adult colouring contest based on 18th-C pastry pie top designs for F&F), charities (e.g. Fine Cell Work, which promotes sewing among prisoners and Rowan, a Cambridge-based art centre for people with learning disabilities [E4, p.10]) and faith groups (e.g. Chabad Cambridge and Cambridge Muslim College). M&M included an interfaith panel discussion on 'Faith in the Home' as part of its programme of public events [E4, p.11], while a student discussion of the experience of fasting at university was central to the F&F late-night event on 'Food, faith, & well-being.' One student participant reported that 'this was my first opportunity to take part in an academic panel discussion at Cambridge ... Sharing personal memories and experiences with the audience and the other panellists ... gave me the opportunity to reconnect with my culture and reminisce about homecooked family meals, one thing which I realised I sorely lacked at university.' [E11] Fundamental to the approach of Material Worlds has been the acknowledgement of an interplay between familiarity and unfamiliarity in negotiating between early modern and modern object

cultures. This has proved crucial in capturing the imagination of new audiences. The leader of a group from a care home emphasised the importance of the stimulus provided by TP: 'I can tell it was a successful visit because everyone is still talking about it, which is always a sign of how much they enjoyed themselves.' [E8] Three community groups participated in developing F&F: student Ambassadors from North Cambridge Academy, students from Rowan Art Centre, and participants in the 'Dancing in the Museum' programme for senior citizens living on their own. The transformative effect of their involvement is recorded in the two community partner films for F&F. In the second film on reflections, one participant in the dance group (7:44) described the collaboration with the museum as 'just making me want to discover more and see more...it just altered my way of thinking.' A student ambassador (5:07) who enjoyed handling the objects and felt that she 'had a connection with them' described the exhibition as 'quite shocking': 'You walk through and there are things that you might have not thought about when you think of food, at least through the centuries, what it would have been like, and also some of the kind of sad history behind some of the food like slavery'. Another student (5:59) said that 'It's always hard to think of what sugar used to be like because we see it as this pearly white [substance] that we use in everything, and it's sweet, and it brings pleasure and joy, and then you see what they [slaves in Caribbean sugar plantations] had to deal with and where it's come from. It's a very big jump.' [E9] By working with themes that have contemporary resonance (shopping, religion, home life, food), Material Worlds has allowed the public to engage with the unfamiliar history of early modern materiality.

A Paradigm for University-Museum Collaboration

In a 2018 report to Research England, the Fitzwilliam Museum referred to the innovations trialled during M&M, as a result of which 'we have made substantial change to the way that we display and interpret our collections, especially in temporary exhibitions'. [E12] Material Worlds has been consistently innovative in its informed approach to juxtaposing different media and offering a multisensory experience. The reopening of Gallery III, the largest and most prestigious room in the Fitzwilliam, has been planned around the Sensual / Virtual theme with the didactic approach of 'Beyond the Label' – evidence that the Museum has adopted practices from Material Worlds in its permanent galleries. Broader influence could be detected in the 2018-19 Lotto exhibition at the National Gallery: Lotto's masterpieces were displayed alongside strings of rosary beads, rings, classical statues, lavish clothes and a Turkish carpet, thereby re-situating two-dimensional canvases in their richly textured material worlds. The Head of Learning at the Fitzwilliam Museum believes that the distinctive legacy of Material Worlds has been to encourage exhibitions that are research-led and 'informed from source'. According to the Exhibitions Manager, Material Worlds is acknowledged by the Museum as a 'benchmark' for innovation and collaboration.

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

- [E1] Treasured Possessions, Fitzwilliam Report
- [E2] Treasured Possessions, Visitor Comments
- [E3] Treasured Possessions, Media Coverage
- [E4] Madonnas and Miracles, Fitzwilliam Report
- [E5] Madonnas and Miracles, Visitor Comments
- [E6] Madonnas and Miracles, Visitor Tracking Survey
- [E7] Madonnas and Miracles, Media Coverage
- [E8] Feast and Fast, Fitzwilliam Report
- [E9] Feast and Fast, Visitor Comments
- [E10] <https://feast-and-fast.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/discover/> (pdf) <https://feast-and-fast.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/creative/> (pdf)
- [E11] Email from student representative
- [E12] Report to Research England