

Institution: University of Essex		
Unit of Assessment: 32		
Title of case study: British Tattoo Art Revealed: Impacts on Communities, Collectors and Museums		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013-2020		
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:
Dr Matt Lodder	Senior Lecturer, Art History	September 2013 – to present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: January 2016 – December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No.		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Lodder's research on tattoo history, primarily the exhibition output <i>British Tattoo Art Revealed</i>, has produced economic, practical and cultural benefits locally, nationally and internationally. Significant impact can be demonstrated in five areas: (A) on the host museums of the exhibition, with wide-ranging, sustainable and award-winning community engagement, particularly in seaside towns identified as areas of deprivation; (B) on curatorial practice, influencing collecting and display practices nationally and internationally; (C) on UK/Welsh national heritage, with a landmark acquisition of a major collection by the National Museum of Wales; (D) on the cultural and economic valuation of tattooing in its community, and (E) on the public perception and understanding of tattooing in the UK and abroad, with impacts of Lodder's work in critical court cases in England and at the Supreme Court of Japan. The "powerful impact" of the exhibition was "acknowledged in the museum community when it was shortlisted for the 2020 Museums Association 'Museums Change Lives' award. The legacy will not end there." [S1, p. 3].</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>The body of research underpinning this case study is anchored by the practice-as-research exhibition output <i>British Tattoo Art Revealed</i> (hereafter <i>BTAR</i>), the first major historical survey of art and artefacts documenting the history of tattooing in Britain [R1]. Commissioned in 2016 by the National Maritime Museum in Falmouth, Lodder's exhibition toured to eight UK venues between its opening in 2017 and its final closure in January 2021.</p> <p>The exhibition of over 400 objects spanning 400 years of history is the result of an extensive and ongoing period of research. The exhibition interweaves seminal theoretical thinking on how this ephemeral, living art form might be brought into a museum exhibition, with extensive primary source research in public and private collections and new discoveries in major archives around the world, as well as oral-history work with artists and collectors. In the case of the private donors in particular, the exhibition put on display objects which had never before been seen in public or published.</p> <p><i>BTAR</i> and the wider body of underpinning research [R2-6] asks the following distinct but interrelated research questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Why has the history of Western tattooing been so riven by myth and misconception?</i> <p>I propose that insufficient attention has been paid to primary sources [R1, R2, R5]; that tattoo artists have not been sufficiently involved in accounts of their work [R1, R3, R4]; and</p>		

that conventional approaches to tattooing from disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and psychology fail to adequately account for the material and artistic cultures of tattooing in ways that art-historical approaches can [R1, R2, R3, R5].

- *What can a more rigorous, primary sourced presentation of the historical evidence reveal about the practice of tattooing and, by extension, about the otherwise insensible social stories it reveals?*

Tattooing has a longer and more continuous history in the West than is commonly asserted in the scholarly and popular literature [R1, R4, R5, R6]. It can be understood as a visual art practice [R5]. It is often continuous with, rather than oppositional to, mainstream visual culture [R1, R4, R5, R6]. The practice is more diverse, particularly in terms of gender and sexuality, than scholars claim [R1, R2, R3].

- *What are the challenges, both conceptual and practical, of staging an exhibition of tattooing, and what does bringing this art form into the museum tell us about the limits of institutional collecting in the past, and about the possibilities for such collecting in the future?*

Tattooing, by its ephemeral and embodied nature, is not an art form which is simple to curate. Moreover, institutional holdings cannot tell the stories of tattooing, whose histories are held by communities of private collectors. This can be overcome by a) working closely with private collectors to display and contextualise their objects [R1-3, R6]; b) developing new methods of display, such as replica bodies [R1], work in other media [R1, R3, R6] and participant-curated cases [R1, R3]; c) using visual analogy to place tattooing into conventional visual culture histories [R1, R5, R6]; d) commissioning work by tattooers on replica bodies and in other media, and accessioning these into permanent collections of national museums. [R1, R3]. These insights are generalisable to other forms of marginalised cultural practices [R1].

3. References to the research [can be supplied by the HEI on request]

R1. Lodder, M. (2017 - 2021) 'British Tattoo Art Revealed' [exhibition]. National Maritime Museum, Falmouth and touring nationally. Supported by host co-curators Stuart Slade & Derryth Ridge.

Venues:

- National Maritime Museum, Falmouth (March 2017 – January 2018)
- Torre Abbey, Devon (January - June 2018)
- National Museum of the Royal Navy in Portsmouth (July 2018 – December 2018)
- South Ayrshire Museum (January 2019 – March 2019)
- Bristol M Shed (March – June 2019)
- Time and Tide, Yarmouth (Oct 19 – March 2020)
- Chatham Historic Dockyard (Mar 2020 – Oct 2020)
- Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery (Oct – 2020 – Jan 2021)

Supplementary Research:

R2. Lodder, M. (2018), 'Skin Diggin' [exhibition], ArtExchange, University of Essex.

R3. Lodder, M & Kavanagh, J. (2016), 'Tattoo London' [exhibition], Museum of London

R4. Lodder, M. (2015) 'The New Old Style: Tradition, Archetype and Rhetoric in Contemporary Western Tattooing' In *Revival: Memories, Identities, Utopias*. Editors: Lepine, A., Lodder, M., McKeever R. The Courtauld Institute of Art. ISBN 978-1-907485-04-6

<http://repository.essex.ac.uk/id/eprint/17169>

R5. Lodder, M. (2015) 'Things of the sea': Iconographic continuities between tattooing and handicrafts in Georgian-Era Maritime Culture', *Sculpture Journal* 24(2): 195-210.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3828/sj.2015.24.2.5>

R6. Lodder, M., (2013). 'Neo-Victorian Tattooing'. In: *Victoriana A Miscellany*. Editor: Solicari,

Sonia, [ex. cat.]. Guildhall Art Gallery. ISBN-13 9781902795157

4. Details of the impact

The benefits and ongoing legacy achieved by this project are in five distinct but interrelated areas: A) on the host museums and the communities they serve; B) on curatorial practice worldwide; C) on national heritage; D) on the tattoo community, including artists and collectors; and E) on the perception of tattooing in the general public.

These have resulted from the research findings posed in Section 2, namely that i) tattooing is best understood through a primary-sourced, historical approach; ii) tattooing exists in continuity with broader visual culture; iii) tattooing has a longer and more diverse history than previously suggested, iv) these histories provide insights into the lives of demographics who have been historically under-represented by museums; and v) museums' failures to properly collect these histories can be overcome with creative collecting and engagement.

A: Host Museums

Participating museums had the same profile: they were ranked in the top percentile of the most deprived areas in the country and all (bar one) based in coastal towns. This is significant in terms of recent Parliamentary recognition of the particular patterns of deprivation faced by seaside communities [S1, p.6, pp. 35-6, p. 41]. At all eight institutions, the exhibition generated income, forged new partnerships, encouraged new audiences, undertook prize-winning community engagement, and developed new curatorial practices [S1, S2].

This work was recognised through, amongst others, shortlisting for the 2020 Museums Association 'Museums Change Lives' award [S1, p. 3] and by winning the 'Best Local Authority Initiative' by the National Campaign for the Arts, 2019 [S1, p. 18]. Full details of the wide-ranging impacts are spelled out in the report by a Heritage and Museums consultant [S1]. Examples include:

- In Falmouth (2017), visitor numbers increased 9.3% to approx. 109,000 people in the first year. Admissions spend-per-head increased by 6%, largely due to the demographics of the visitors (more new adult tickets have been sold rather than child tickets). Visitor research showed that the temporary exhibition programme led to more adult visitors, leading to a significant increase in 'new' adult sales, as did the award-winning public engagement delivered around the original show, which continued with national touring partners [S2]. These new outreach strategies also generated over GBP750,000 of advertising and raised the profile of the museum nationally and internationally [S3]. The Director of the NMMC attests to "*seminal and profound impact*" ... "*at the level of ethos and organisational change*" [S2].
- In Bristol, the exhibition was particularly successful in attracting visits from priority postcodes (10% higher than average), 16–25 year olds (+6%) and BME audiences (+1%) [S4].
- In Portsmouth, outreach work was undertaken with new audiences that had additional complex needs with drugs, alcohol and homelessness; Alzheimer's and dementia patients; and local communities including veterans and the football club. Reminiscence work with people with Alzheimer's and dementia used tattoos to unlock memories. Other innovations included linking up with Naval Recruiters to update sessions, thereby developing a policy that has now been integrated into the programme of the Collections Team [S1, p.20].
- In Yarmouth, the exhibition was recognised as a means to attract first-time visitors—"*especially the missing demographic of 16 – 25 year olds,*" as the Exhibition Officer of Time and Tide Museum acknowledged. A local youth organisation produced a companion exhibition *TatTwo*, media students at East Coast College contributed a film celebrating local tattoo artists and Other Dance Art, and a Young Person's group created a responsive dance commission [S1, p. 28].

- Host museums have collected new material for their permanent collection, including oral history, photography and testimonials [S1, S2].

B: Curatorial Practice

BTAR loaned a painting by William Hodges, ‘*Tahiti Revisited*’ (1776), as part of Royal Museum Greenwich’s *Collection Stories* project to extend the reach of national collections and increase and diversify audiences through national-regional partnerships. As one of four participating exhibitions, *BTAR* “*impacted significantly on RMG, the regional partners and audiences nationally, both in terms of the core aims and beyond. ... The benefits of this holistic, national-regional, partnership-based approach are clear, both in term of direct impact ...and in the more nuanced benefits such as strengthening community cohesion and developing workforce skills and confidence*” [S5, p. 14]

Curators of exhibitions in the UK [S6, b, f, g] and in Japan [S6, a], Germany [S6, c], USA (National-Norwegian museum) [S6, d] and Malta [S6, e] attest to drawing upon historical, practical and methodological insights from Lodder’s work. In particular, curators drew direct inspiration from the use of silicone sculptures to present tattooing in the gallery space. Curators at the Tate Modern in London and the Getty in LA re-attributed a work hanging in their major 2020 Dora Maar Retrospective to tattoo artist George Burchett [S6, g]. At the National Museum of the Royal Navy, Lodder identified an uncatalogued piece of tattoo flash (or design) in their collections, and as a result of *BTAR*, they have adapted the permanent gallery for the HMS Victory to include tattoo history [S6, f].

C: National Heritage

The private collection of material once owned by seminal female tattoo artist Jessie Knight, which was core to the exhibition, has been acquired for the nation [S1, p. 12], and will be housed at the National Museum of Wales [S7]. The works were acquired in a private treaty sale, reserved for items of particular national importance. On the basis of having been discovered, catalogued, valued and displayed by Lodder for *British Tattoo Art Revealed*, the collection was deemed by the Arts Council and by HMRC of pre-eminent importance to our national history and of especial art-historical interest [S8].

D: Tattoo Community

Tattoo artists and collectors involved with the show and more widely have benefited from the research [S1, pp 13 – 15]. The exhibition has generated new customers, new intellectual engagements with tattoo history, cataloguing of previously invisible collections, and increased the value of many objects exhibited [S1, pp. 5, 13 – 15]. An American collector, [S9], purchased one of the newly displayed objects from the exhibition, a historic hand-painted banner, for an undisclosed sum which exceeded its insurance value of £20,000 [S10, para 20]. In 2020, two of the core collectors in the exhibition were in court over a dispute about the value of an object one had damaged whilst borrowing it from another. Though suing for £200,000, the judge awarded the claimant only £750 + costs, stating that “*the most reliable, admissible evidence before the court is that of Dr Lodder. I have based my finding as to the claimant’s loss upon Dr Lodder’s report*” [S10, paras. 18 & 19, S11].

E: General Public

A formal review of the exhibition by a report from the Arts Council at its opening stated “*The sheer amount of research, involvement of practitioners, community programmes and curation, from the museum and the guest curators, have the potential to really change our understanding of the history of tattoo art in Britain*” [S12]. This potential was realised. For example, comment cards from the duration of the run were overwhelmingly positive, and included such statements as “*Our 4th visit, so sad when I came to the end. This is pure art. Inspired me to have 6 tattoos.*”; “*I learned so much and shattered preconceived ideas about tattoos.*”; “*Fascinating. Never realised it had such a history*” [S13, p. 2].

Four of the venues hosted live tattooing during the run. Rozelle House had a tattoo artist in

residence throughout the exhibition. Many visitor comments attest that they went to be or would go and get tattooed. This has resulted in countless permanent impacts on the bodies of visitors, including on the Mayor of Bristol [S1, p. 25].

In Japan, Lodder's research was drawn upon by lawyers who successfully fought to keep tattooing legal there. The legal team attended a presentation by Lodder in Tokyo in March 2019, where he presented research from the exhibition as to the relationship between tattooing and Japan's artistic legacy. The attorney at law attests that "*The lecture... demonstrated and strongly supported our argument that tattoo has significant cultural and artistic value*" [S14].

During the summer of 2020, the Chatham opening was postponed due to COVID-19. In response Lodder worked with the curators at the Historic Dockyard and production company Sparkly Light to produce an innovative film for the BBC's *Culture in Quarantine* series. This attracted over 17,000 viewers, ensuring that the exhibition had an audience and an impact even whilst closed to physical visitors [S15, S1, p. 31].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Host Museums

- S1. Report on exhibition impact & tour by Heritage & Museums Consultant.
- S2. Letter from Director, National Maritime Museum, Cornwall.
- S3. Report on NMMC PR Reach and Impact by PR firm, *Margaret London*
- S4. *BTAR* Impact Report, M-Shed Bristol.

Curatorial Practice

- S5. Report on *Collections Stories* (Royal Museums Greenwich) by Heritage Consultant.
- S6. Letters from: **a)** Tsuru University and curator, *Taiwan Indigenous Traditional Tattoo History* Okinawan Prefectural Museum, Okinawa, Japan; **b)** Curator, *Tribute Ink*, Royal British Legion, UK; **c)** Curator, *Tattoo Legends: Christian Wahrlich in St Pauli*, Hamburg State Museum, Germany; **d)** Curator, *Tattoo: Identity through Ink*, Vesterheim National-Norwegian Museum, USA; **e)** Curator, *REL *INK*, National Maritime Museum, Malta; **f)** Curator, National Museum of the Royal Navy, Portsmouth; **g)** Curator, Tate Modern

National Heritage

- S7. Letter from Head of Public History, National Museum of Wales.
- S8. Arts Council. Private Treaty Sales Criteria.

Tattoo Community

- S9. Letter from Antiques Dealer and Collector.
- S10. Judgment in the matter of Robinson and Ramsbottom.
- S11. Letter from Barrister at Law.

General Public

- S12. Report on NMMC Exhibition by Arts Council Artistic & Quality Assessor.
- S13. *BTAR* visitors' feedback (Cornwall).
- S14. Letter from Attorney at Law, Nakashima, Miyamoto & Mizoguchi Law Firm.
- S15. Email from Commissioning Executive, Digital and Festivals. BBC Arts.