MAKING THINGS PERFECTLY QUEER:
ART’S USE OF CRAFT TO SIGNIFY LGBT IDENTITIES

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Abstract
This research explores how queer culture and theory can be communicated through crafted objects and curated exhibitions. It interrogates whether it is possible to identify queer characteristics, aesthetics and themes in crafted objects and develops the idea of visual polari – based on Polari, the slang language used by gay men in England predominantly in the mid twentieth century – as a methodology.

The research then examines how art related to queer lives has been curated in art organisations and how different curators have approached creating queer taxonomies. It also examines the use of craft techniques by artists addressing queer topics and argues that the marginalised positions of craft – the decorative and the domestic – have been adopted by queer practitioners.

Marginalised groups can often be excluded from representation in cultural organisations, and museums and galleries have traditionally shied away from the emerging discipline of queer theory. Although Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Month acts as a focus for queer recognition in museums and galleries, many organisations are unsure how to explore or tackle the subject. The core of this research examines practical case studies that explore how this can be achieved.

The research was informed by four exhibitions where I was both the artist and curator. The first – Queering the Museum at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery – drew on artist intervention methodologies that had been used to address race within museums, but had not been applied to marginalised sexualities.

The second was Other Stories: Queering the University Art Collection at the Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery at the University of Leeds and used oral histories from gay men and women to reposition objects in the art gallery collection.

The last two installations were at National Trust properties – Nymans House and Gardens and The Vyne – and examined the queer lives of their former occupants. The exhibitions used artist interventions to disrupt any single
interpretive narrative and move away from the centring of the houses' histories on heteronormative family trees.

Queer is a contested term and LGBT encompasses a wide variety of experiences. Although the research strives for inclusion, not all experiences that come under the banner term LGBT are explored equally. Rather, this research aims to move the ideas about how cultural organisations can represent queer lives and to generate debate in the fields of museums, galleries and historic houses.
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Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed:

Date: 10th August 2015
Introduction

This research interrogates the intersection between conceptual practice and queer theory. The terms ‘art’, ‘craft’ and ‘queer’ are all contested, their definitions have repeatedly changed over time and are geographically specific.

Chapter 1 outlines the use of the term queer in the research. Queer is used with a double definition: it is a noun to discuss individuals who identify as LGBT¹ and it can also be used as a way of describing a deviation from the norm. Queer can therefore be used as a verb (queering) to question normative views. Specifically, in this research, it is used to address heteronormativity² within cultural organisations. Queer is therefore used as an identity and also as a strategy and so explores the tension between essentialist ideas of identity and social constructionist ideas of identity in process.

Chapter 1 then explores the intersection between queer and craft practice, a relationship which is constantly in process. What were once seen as fixed binaries – craft/fine art, heterosexual/queer – are now much more nuanced and open to debate.

The artworks created and examined within this research sit within an overlap area. Produced using craft techniques and materials, they operate within a conceptual fine art framework. Conceptual craft has repeatedly been linked with artists’ movements that have used craft’s associations with the handmade, the personal and the domestic. Craft’s diverse nature and its secondary status to fine art within the art world has been used to explore marginalised identities to such an extent that craft’s status as old-fashioned and traditional is being replaced with ‘crafting as a strategy to examine and challenge contemporary issues’.³

Like queer, craft is an umbrella term. Craft groups together a number of material practices, two of which will be used in the research: clay and textiles.

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¹ Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans.
² Heteronormativity is defined as ‘the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality not only coherent – that is, organised as a sexuality – but also privileged’ in Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (1998), “Sex in Public,” Critical Inquiry, 24.2, 547–66.
Both have been linked with queer craft practice but for very different reasons. Clay, when fired, moves from a state of endless transformative possibility into a fixed form. It has been described as the ‘ultimate archival material, contributing primary archaeological information about past cultures’. This stabilising of form can be seen as a mirroring of queer, which has moved from an activity people engaged in into an identity.

In contrast to ceramics, textiles are more open to being worked and reworked. Their strongly gendered link with the feminine makes them ripe for queer work, especially by men. Chapter 1 concludes with an outline of the queer craft methodology that will be used in the rest of the research.

Chapter 2 – Queer Objects – begins with an examination of how queer lives and objects overlap. Sarah Ahmed has argued that ‘[t]o be orientated is also to be turned toward certain objects, those that help us to find our way.’ It considers the objects one might turn to for queer orientation. The chapter then considers two artistic strategies for queer craft practice that are used to create new work.

Firstly, it explores the idea of queer readings, which examine existing objects and artworks through a queer filter to interrogate them for queerness. Queer readings have suggested reversing the foreground and background as a strategy to interrogate marginalised spaces for queerness. Adopting this reversal, The Problems with History is a series of textile pieces that visually adopt this technique.

Secondly, queer appropriation and its links to postmodernism is explored with BlueBoy and Pillar of Masculinity. The works draw on Polari, the queer slang used in London in the mid-twentieth century, as a starting point to develop re-appropriation and adaption as a queer visual technique – a visual polari.

Queer art has largely relied on photography and figurative painting and the literal depiction of queer individuals. In Chapter 3 – Queer Curating – the manner in which different curators have approached curating queer art

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exhibitions, and particularly exhibitions that do not solely rely on figurative representations of queer individuals, draws out potential methodologies for identifying queer sensibilities in art objects.

It has been argued that there are few objects that uniquely link to individuals who identify as LGBT, so the representation of LGBT lives in museums – which rely on material culture to represent groups of people – can be problematic. Often, the ability of objects to signify queer lives relies on the association between queer individuals and a particular object rather than the notion of a queer group or type of object(s).

The reliance on the association between objects and lives lived in order for objects to have queer relevance creates a fragile interrelationship that is easily broken. Without explicit interpretation, heteronormativity erodes queer ties with objects. The main body of practice explores how heteronormativity operates in museums, art galleries and historic houses. Through a combination of artist intervention, curatorial practice and creation of new work, four organisations have been doubly queered: the organisations’ curatorial methods have been examined and deconstructed and LGBT histories have been placed at the core of their displays.

Three very different strategies were adopted for the different venues. Chapter 4 – Queering Museums and Art Galleries – describes two solo shows that intervene into museum and art gallery collections. The first, *Queering the Museum*, took place at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in 2010/2011, the second, *Other Stories: Queering the University Art Collection*, was at the Stanley and Audrey Burton Art Gallery at the University of Leeds in 2012.

*Queering the Museum* drew on artist intervention techniques that have traditionally been used to explore the representation of race in museums and, in particular, the work of the artist Fred Wilson. Through a reframing of the museum’s collections and exhibitions using a queer lens, the heteronormative exhibition practices that often erase queer lives are unpicked. Consisting of 19

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queer craft interventions throughout the museum, the exhibition critiqued the basis for museum displays and interrogated museum acquisition and collecting policies. To some extent this method of intervention relies on grand narratives of the past and attempts to create universalising truths which, like heteronormativity, privilege some individuals over others.

To move away from grand narratives, the intervention at the Stanley and Audrey Burton Art Gallery used an oral history archive as the basis for a repositioning of the gallery’s twentieth century art collection. Queer oral histories were embedded in contemporaneous objects and the resulting artworks were placed alongside objects in the collection in order that the collection be reviewed, queerly, through the association. The oral histories were used to alter the contemporaneous objects, which in turn changed the perception of the objects in the art gallery collection.

Historic houses operate very differently from museums and art galleries. Chapter 5 – Queering the Historic House – describes two historic house interventions, at Nymans House and Gardens in 2012 and The Vyne in 2013, both National Trust properties. Within historic houses, the lives of former residents are often at the heart of the curatorial interpretation and family trees usually form the starting point for understanding their histories. While marriage is not always an indicator of sexual intimacy, its centrality within the interpretations of historic houses puts relationships and intimacies centre stage in a way that seldom happens in museums.

Historic houses also present an accumulation of objects and allow us to view the associations between those objects and their use by historic house owners. Collecting theories have explored how the collection and display of material culture can reflect identity, often with respect to gender. Whitney Davis has explored how queer men have subverted Freud’s idea of family romance and used object collection and collation to create substitute queer family romances using objects.

The two historic house interventions discussed in this research were part of a larger project where, as one of the directors of Unravelled Arts, I commissioned

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33 new pieces of crafted artwork in response to three separate National Trust properties. This multi-voiced response to each house ensured that different narratives of the past came to life. This allowed the interpretation of the properties to move away from the ‘pale, stale and male’\(^9\) dominated view of history and allowed queer, female, postcolonial and working class histories to be heard. The interventions discussed in this research address queer lives and they in turn queer the interpretation of those properties.

Chapter 6 concludes with a reflection on the partial and temporary nature of queer associations and the issues that have arisen through the practice.

1. Queer, Queer Craft, Queer Craft Methodology

In order to set the terms for the practical work in this research, this chapter starts with a discussion of the term ‘queer’, which is a fluid, contested and historically specific term. For the purpose of this research, it is being used in two ways: as an inclusive term for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT), which will be discussed in this chapter; and to refer to ‘differing from the normal or usual in a way regarded as odd or strange’.10

This double definition opens the term out and enables queer to become a strategy (to queer), which can be used to explore queerness (LGBT identity).

Drawing on queer studies, the discussion explains how shared queer experiences led to the development of queer sensibilities, which allow us to link queer identities and lives lived with material culture.

Following on from the definition and discussion of queer, the chapter then explores queer craft. A relatively unexplored area, this section discusses key moments when craft has links with identity. It will also unpick some of the intersections between craft and queer theory and suggest reasons why the two overlap. Since both terms are contested, any discussion of either – let alone their intersection – will be by necessity both partial and subjective. However, to support the discussion, a number of key craft exhibitions that focus on queer identity are brought into the discussion.

Finally, the chapter outlines the methodology used in the remainder of the research, and in particular the practice-based interventions which form the core of the original research.

10 Collins Dictionary of the English Language (Collins: London, 1982).
1.1 Queer

Queer has been much discussed and debated in academia. The aim of this section is not to summarise that debate, but rather provide the essential underpinnings required to explore why the understanding of queer objects and queer sensibility is a contested and relatively new field.

Queer itself is a contested term. It refers and relates to many things in many ways and eludes simple definition. As Michael Warner says, ‘the appeal of “queer theory” has outstripped anyone’s sense of what exactly it means.’

Originating from an examination of the lives of gay men and lesbians (often called queer studies), it has taken on their marginalised position and developed into a tool with which to examine and deconstruct, often around the areas of gender and sexuality, and is referred to as queer theory. The practical work in this research links identity (queer studies) with the destabilising process of queer theory. For work exploring the binaries of art/craft and heterosexuality/queer, it seemed important to avoid ‘either/or’ and concentrate on the overlap area of ‘and’, linking both identity politics and deconstructive techniques. It can therefore be useful to think of queer in two ways: as a noun (related to a group) and as a verb (used in order to deconstruct and interrogate). Whereas gay and lesbian relied on binaries – gay/straight – queer explores transgressions of gender.

The adoption of the word queer works in two main ways: it re-appropriates a negative term of derision, and also uses its agency as a term of difference. Since its emergence in the English language in the sixteenth century (related to the German quer, meaning “across, at right angle, diagonally or transverse”), queer has generally meant “strange”, “unusual” or “out of alignment”.

The move in academia from identity (queer studies) to process (queer theory) is possibly best summarised by David Halperin, who argues:

Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. ‘Queer’ then, demarcates not a

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positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative – a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men.\textsuperscript{12}

This provides rich pickings for academic discourse and give queer the ‘potential to be annexed profitably to any number of discussions’.\textsuperscript{13} However, it runs the risk of making queer a subject without essence and therefore removed from LGBT lives lived.

Queer and LGBT are not necessarily synonymous and, according to Sedgwick,\textsuperscript{14} queer theory is not restricted to homosexual men and women, but to anyone who feels their position (sexual, intellectual or cultural) to be marginalised. Similarly, ‘[i]n 1992, San Francisco Queer Nation activist Karl Knapper opined that “queerness is about acknowledging and celebrating difference, embracing what sets you apart. A straight person can’t be gay, but a straight person can be queer.”’\textsuperscript{15} According to queer theory, the queer position then is no longer a marginal one considered deviant or pathological, but rather multiple positions, all equally valid. However, in practice, queer academic courses and books closely map what was formerly referred to as gay and lesbian studies and is now often called queer studies, so in reality queer in academia straddles both identity and process.

For the purposes of this research, these two aspects of queer – the study of LGBT identities and the deconstruction of identity privilege – are considered together. Queer lives are made visible through newly-created objects and those newly-created objects are used to destabilise heteronormativity in museums, art galleries and historic houses.

LGBT identities are not historically stable and the representation of historical queer lives is not straightforward. Terminology is both geographically and temporarily specific and the linking of sexual inclination with identity is a relatively recent social construct.

\textsuperscript{13} Jagose, \textit{Queer Theory}, 2.
It is argued that, historically, in Western Europe, queerness was an act that someone engaged in rather than an essential part of their character or make-up. Bray argues that modern homosexual identity originated 'at the close of the 17th century, with the emergence of an urban homosexual subculture that sprang up around [molly houses]… north of the Thames'.

Foucault, by contrast, argued that it was around 1870, when ‘in various medical discourses, the notion of the homosexual as an identifiable type of person begins to emerge’. ‘The nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history… Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality’, while the ‘sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species’.

This change from act to identity complicates the retrospective use of contemporary LGBT identity terms on historical figures. However, it is needed for the deconstructive strategy of queer theory which ‘aims to decentralise heteronormative understandings of sex, gender, sexuality, sociality, and the relations between them’ to take place, since it relies on identity politics and the ‘assumption that sexual inclinations, practices, and desires are the expression of a person’s core identity’.

Regardless of when this identity creation happened, the move from ‘temporary aberration’ into ‘species’ meant that:

Homosexuality came to be understood as the grounds for community; on this basis, a recognisable – though small and discreet – culture began to develop, which had its own “ways of dressing, of talking, distinctive gestures and distinctive acts with an understood meaning, its own jargon” [and created] a cultural context for homosexual identity and community… which “existed independently of the individuals who might

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17 Jagose, Queer Theory, 11.
18 Jagose, Queer Theory, 11–12.
20 Foucault, The History of Sexuality, 43.
22 Sullivan, A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory, 81.
compose it at any time”, and was distinguishable from the surrounding culture.²³

These shared ways of dressing, talking and jargon formed the basis of a queer sensibility and with it the possibility of a shared, queer subculture and material culture. This queer sensibility has mutated and will continue to change over time and often works by disrupting normative gender patterns. This sensibility is not shared by all LGBT individuals, and indeed may be discounted by some. I am not arguing here that LGBT should be seen as an ethnicity, but rather that there are shared collective experiences which can be expressed visually and, likewise, that there are visual sensibilities that are associated with queer identities.

According to Alexander Doty ‘queer readings and positions can (and do) become modified or change over time as people, cultures, and politics change.’²⁴ Therefore the visual communication between viewer and object may not necessarily need to rely on any intrinsic queerness in the object itself, but on the relationship between the viewer, the object and their context. Or as Nicky Sullivan puts it: ‘[r]ather than functioning as a noun, queer can be used as a verb, that is, to describe the process, a movement between viewer, text, and world, that re-inscribes (or queers) each and the relations between them.’²⁵ This idea of queer readings will be discussed further in Chapter 2, which looks at the queer object and also forms a core part of the methodology used in the Queering the Museum case study.

Queer is but one possible aspect of a person’s identity, an identity which is potentially made up of many characteristics. However, queer is a minority identity and this has implications for visibility. Whether queer is something that should be drawn out or discussed in relationship to artworks, objects and artists is debated.²⁶ However, owing to its status as a minority position in an overwhelmingly heterosexual world, unless queer is specifically mentioned when curating all but the most blatant depictions of queer lives and affections,

²³ Bray, Homosexuality in Renaissance England, qtd in Jagose, Queer Theory, 12.
²⁵ Sullivan, A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory, 192.
the effect of heteronormativity effectively erases queer difference and thereby silences it.

Queer theory is less a matter of explaining the repression or expression of a homosexual minority, than an analysis of the Hetero/Homosexual figure as a power/knowledge regime that shapes the ordering of desires, behaviors, social institutions, and social relations – in a word, the constitution of the self and society.27

It is therefore natural that a discussion of queer material culture should investigate how these power relations play out in the cultural organisations that collect and display objects. The research will investigate how artists can reposition the hetero/homo binary and reflect on the ubiquity of heteronormativity which ensures ‘heterosexuality as an institution is so embedded in our culture, that it has become almost invisible.’28

The practical case studies in this research explore the heteronormativity of cultural organisations. They comprised interventions in museums, galleries and historic houses and, not only did they seek to increase queer representation, but they also make evident the ideas of:

[p]oststructuralist theorists such as Foucault [who] argue that there are no objective universal truths, but that particular forms of knowledge, and the ways of being that they engender, become “naturalised”, in culturally and historically specific ways. For example, Judith Butler, and Monique Wittig argue (in slightly different ways) that heterosexuality is a complex matrix of discourses, institutions, and so on, that has become normalised in our culture, thus making particular relationships, lifestyles, and identities, seem natural, ahistorical, and universal. In short, heterosexuality, as it is currently understood and experienced, is a (historically and culturally specific) truth-effect of systems of power/knowledge.29

28 Sullivan, A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory, 121.
29 Sullivan, A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory, 39.
These queer interventions seek to question this ‘natural’ and ‘historical’ view of heterosexuality and examine and question the systems of knowledge that have normalised it. As Sarah Ahmed points out, ‘[t]o make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things.’

Queer can therefore be seen as a way ‘to make strange, to frustrate, to counteract, to delegitimise, to camp up – heteronormative knowledges and institutions, and the subjectivities and socialities that are (in)formed by them and that (in)form them’. This queering, according to Jonathan Weinberg, is more than pointing out potentially gay and lesbian identities, but rather ‘it involves revealing the signs of what Adrienne Rich called “compulsory heterosexuality”.’

1.2 **Queer Craft**

My mother made me a homosexual.

If I got her the wool would she make me one too?

Gay joke, traditional

Neither craft nor queer are essentialist terms. ‘Part of queer’s semantic clout, part of its political efficacy, depends on its resistance to definition, and the way in which it refuses to stake its claim.’[^33] Likewise, craft ‘has always had an unstable and complex identity and status’.[^34] Therefore what these two words mean is constantly under debate and contested and any overview of either, let alone their overlap, will be subjective, partial and open to debate.

Both queer and craft act as subjective groupings and both are terms which occupy a subordinate position in binaries where each dominant term relies in part on the subaltern for their meanings. As marginalised groups re-appropriate mainstream culture, so mainstream culture sublates[^35] marginalised cultural production so there will never be a clear boundary between queer and non-queer or craft and art. The aim of this writing is not to attempt to police those boundaries or to produce absolute categories.

Craft materials and techniques are increasingly being used in the art world, often linked to conceptual approaches to identity politics. In 2014, the curator John Chaich declared that '[c]raft has been long considered the queer stepchild of fine art.'[^36] The aim of this section is to consider why this may be.

A number of potential reasons will be addressed, namely: using craft’s marginalised status in the art world to address the identity politics of a marginalised group, can be seen as an double disruption of the craft/art hetero/homo binaries; the adoption of craft by queer has been a natural

[^35]: Sublation is defined as ‘the process by which disruptive cultural elements are absorbed by hegemonic culture’ in Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 91.
progression for craft, an art form which has been linked to the personal and political since the late nineteenth century; the field of conceptual craft allows the physical permanence of objects\textsuperscript{37} to stand in for a relatively new, and rapidly changing, (queer) identity group; and craft’s links to the personal and the heterogeneously handmade allow for individual difference to be made visible.

This section will begin by exploring how craft and identity have linked historically and how craft, like queer, has embraced and used its subordinate position within its binary. It will then explore how craft began to be adopted as a strategy within the art world to explore marginal identities – first by feminist artists and later, via postmodernism, by queer artists. It concludes by discussing how craftivism has sidestepped the hierarchies of the art world by using the internet and social media to provide unmediated platforms for identity through craft to be shared.

1.2.1 Craft and Identity

Art and craft split during the sixteenth century, with art ‘accorded the status of an intellectual activity while the craft trades were regarded as manual labour and consequently were ranked lower down the scale’\textsuperscript{38}. This set up a binary that would later be echoed in the writing of Kant whose influence, according to the curator and writer Marcia Tucker, is still being felt. Kant separated ‘the formal from the informal, the sublime from the decorative, thinking from feeling, the intellectual from the corporeal, high art from kitsch’\textsuperscript{39}. These binary divisions have been repeatedly assaulted, not least by conceptual makers. Working with craft, using haptic\textsuperscript{40} skills to address intellectual concerns, conceptual makers question these seemingly polarised binaries and undermine (or queer) these divisions.

\textsuperscript{38} Veitberg, \textit{Craft in Transition}. 38.
\textsuperscript{40} Haptic is defined as ‘relating to or based on the sense of touch’ in \textit{Collins Dictionary of the English Language}, 667.
The contemporary use of the word craft – relating it to makers and making of objects – only started gaining currency in the last quarter of the nineteenth century\textsuperscript{41} at the same time that Foucault argues that modern gay identity was being established.\textsuperscript{42} Direct links between craft and queer were yet to be developed, but this period saw the linking, through the aestheticism of Wilde, of interior decoration and the decorative with homosexual men.

At roughly the same time, the Arts and Crafts movement, which would form the basis for much craft thinking in the twentieth century,\textsuperscript{43} linked craft with personal identity and politics. Railing against industrialisation – which could be linked with uniformity of product and invisibility of maker – William Morris centrally placed the individual in the movement which sought to promote a 'glorious art, made by the people and for the people, as a happiness to the maker and the user'\textsuperscript{44} thereby linking the personal with the handmade. Craft was therefore assigned two distinctly different characteristics that are still linked to it today: the handmade and political opposition to mainstream culture, both of which resonate when discussing ideas of queer craft.

At the start of the twentieth century, the decorative arts enjoyed a substantial critical literature\textsuperscript{45} with writers including Christopher Dresser, John Ruskin, William Morris and Walter Crane arguing that they were 'arts worthy of consideration alongside all others'.\textsuperscript{46} However, craft began to be devalued with the advent of modernism. From around 1945, the visual avant-garde made work primarily for museum and gallery settings and turned their backs on the idea of art for domestic settings.\textsuperscript{47} Robert Morris recalls that ‘the great anxiety’ for artists of the 1960s and 1970s was for one’s work to ‘fall into the decorative, the feminine, the beautiful, in short, the minor’.\textsuperscript{48} According to Elissa Auther, the pejorative associations with the decorative also included ““craft”, a category of


\textsuperscript{42} Foucault, \textit{The History of Sexuality}, 43, qtd in Jagose, \textit{Queer Theory}, 11–12.


form often conflated with the decorative’.49 This left strategies in the art world related to domesticity and the decorative wide open for artists – and especially feminist artists – combining craft with identity politics.

One of the most notable examples feminist craft practice was Womanhouse, the installation and performance space organised by Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro in 1972. According to Chicago, its strategy was ‘to appropriate an amateur activity, and to intensify or multiply it until it transcended the normal boundaries of domesticity’,50 or in the words of Lucy Lippard, rather than ‘untying the apron strings’, the artists involved were ‘keeping the apron on, flaunting it, and turning it into art’.51 That Chicago felt the need to transcend the boundaries of the domestic gives an indication of the inability of the art world to address the domestic while Lippard’s transformation of the apron from a symbol of oppression to one of emancipation links with the idea of kitsch, taking a cliché, emptying it of meaning and then filling it with ever-more loaded meaning to provide ‘a productive confusion within the normal hierarchy of cultural prestige’.52

Craft was adopted as part of feminist art practice not only due to its rejection by the art world establishment, but also for its gendered associations. In The Subversive Stitch, Rosika Parker argues that the construction of femininity, which also began in the Renaissance, coincided with the separation of fine art and craft, a gendering of arts and crafts that continued into the eighteenth century academies, with ‘each consigned to the “appropriate” gender’.53 The gendered nature of craft education continued at least into the 1980s in English schools, with boys learning woodwork and metalwork while girls learned home economics and sewing, a gendering that was replicated in other countries.54

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51 Adamson, Thinking through Craft, 155.
The second-wave feminist movement exploited this linking of craft and gender, addressing both craft’s advantages and disadvantages. Exploring the long history of domestic arts including textile arts, paper works and decorative painting on furniture and ceramics, feminist artists argued ‘that these amateur activities should be recuperated as a lost art history’.\(^{55}\) While this opened up a ready-made alternative art history and a ‘vast realm of women’s experiences’\(^{56}\) it also confronted them with ‘the questionable notion that craft was inherently female, and [with] the negative aspects of that gendering’.\(^{57}\) The connection between craft and gender is most marked in textile work made by men, where ‘[t]he association of homosexuality with textiles is so deeply ingrained in Western culture that it is nearly archetypal.’\(^{58}\) These associations between queer male sexuality and textiles have been addressed in exhibitions such as *BoysCraft* (Haifa Museum of Art, 2008), *Boys with Needles* (Museum London in London, Ontario and Textile Museum of Canada in Toronto, 2003) and studiously ignored in other such as *Boys Who Sew* (Crafts Council London, 2004). More recently, *Queer Threads, Crafting Identity and Community* at the Leslie Lohman Museum in New York (2014) suggested that the association between fibre art and queer identity is due to the fact that ‘[i]t is only natural that artists seeking to explore a queer sensibility would look to something so ubiquitous to explore a perspective that may seem so foreign.’\(^{59}\)

Feminism did more than simply open up a parallel art history using craft, it also undermined the absolute status of modernism and enabled a space for multiple, conflicting and contradictory art practices. As Tami Katz-Freiberg puts it:

> Artists such as Harmony Hammond, Faith Wilding, Judy Chicago, Miriam Shapiro and others turned to manual crafts as a political act that

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\(^{55}\) Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*, 150.  
\(^{56}\) Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*, 151.  
\(^{57}\) Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*, 151.  
challenged the modernist hierarchy. This feminist contribution was essential to the launching of a wide-ranging postmodernist strategy. 60 Katz-Freiberg here links feminist craft with the postmodernist movement that was to come. Postmodernism, like feminism, opened out the art world and allowed voices which spoke in ways other than the ‘straight, male, Eurocentric artistic elite’61 promoted by critics including Clement Greenberg. Maria Elena Buszek concurs, stating that ‘early postmodern artists placed great faith in the value of folk and popular arts that had traditionally been viewed as the realm of women’s, queer, and non-Western cultures as a means of communicating beyond an elite community and letting the “real” world back into the art world.’62 However, postmodernism did not just take from queer culture. According to Nayland Blake, postmodernism was a product of queer culture since:

many of the theoreticians of the postmodern – the generation of critics and philosophers that came of age in the late ’60s – were gay and lesbian… the discourse of the postmodern is the queer experience rewritten to describe the experience of the whole world.63

The new focus on appropriation in the art world that came to the fore with postmodernism can be argued to be a queer visual strategy, since, according to Horne and Lewis ‘one could say that lesbians and gays have always had to be post-modern in the sense of having to form identities out of appropriations and adaptations of existing codes, not least in order to resist designation and co-option by medical and legal discourse.’64 While appropriation is now a widespread technique adopted by many in the art world, it is interesting to note how many queer artists working with craft techniques use it as a strategy, including the textiles of Nick Cave, Kent Henricksen and Nicolas Moufarrege as well as the ceramics of Léopold L. Foulem.

As postmodernism’s re-appropriation of object and codes allowed objects to be read from alternative viewpoints, feminist theory – which queer theory draws on – allowed for a ‘deconstruction of masculinity, [which has] permitted us to see that the viewpoint that has been accepted as objective is profoundly marked by interest of gender, race, and sexuality’. Therefore, re-appropriation, feminism and queer theory can all be seen as ways of questioning patriarchal privilege and (re)viewing ‘objective’ points of view.

The use of craft became an increasingly legitimate part of the artistic canon from the 1980s onwards. However, rather than working with craft for craft’s sake, for many contemporary artists the selection of craft media is ‘generally chosen with regard to the sociohistorical underpinning of a medium rather than any essential regard for or desire to plumb its unique material properties’. The work therefore becomes meta-craft: craft about craft. Craft’s link to feminism started to loosen and:

During the 1990s, male artists such as Mike Kelley, Lucas Samaras and Jim Hodges… began using craft techniques in order to destabilize the modernist canon.

This trend may also be related to the development of queer theories – which followed in the wake of the feminist discourse that undermined preexisting gender categories and offered alternative, flexible and liberating ways of thinking about gender.

This use of craft to interrogate identity within the art world is continuing with artists including Tracey Emin and Grayson Perry, with Perry in particular revelling in craft’s ‘domestic and feminist histories’ replacing ‘the obsessive prudery of the country potter with a provocative, explicit sexual, corporeal zest’.

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70 Jefferies, “Loving Attention,” 224.
Nayland Blake mapped these new associations between gender, sexuality and technique in his 1995 exhibition essay:

Much of this work looks back to the '70s. Many of the male artists are recreating working methods that originated in the women’s art movement. They are employing centralized imagery, using “craft” materials, sewing and employing a pre-modern rhetoric of sentiment. Many of the women are using '70s gay male culture as a template for expressions of sexual exploration and community. They are exploring drag, s/m technologies, and flanuerism as a way of moving lesbian identification beyond the feel-good homilies of essentialism. As such, there is an interesting crossover in this work.71

This deliberate blurring of ‘gay male’ and ‘lesbian’ art and interest is maybe unsurprising since ‘ideas of gender between the binaries of masculine and feminine are central to postmodern “queer” sensibilities.’72

Although craft had been allowed back into the art world, it was not a uniformly positive position and the power relationship between craft and fine art remained complicated. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Glenn Adamson argues that the most widespread strategy towards craft was by artists who saw it as ‘a site of cultural failure, a field of activity that is resigned to inferiority and debasement’,73 with ‘Robert Arneson, Judy Chicago, Gijs Bakker, Mike Kelley, Gord Peteran, Miriam Schapiro, Richard Slee, Emma Woffenden, and Yagi Kazuo, each in his or her way, tak[ing] their strength as artists from some aspect of craft’s intrinsic weakness.’74

The most obvious exception to the association between craft and weakness came as a result of the AIDS crisis which created the impetus for one of the most notable things to happen in craft in the 1980s, and particularly in the intersection between queer and craft. However, it took place outside of the art world completely. During the 1980s and 1990s, the art world saw queer lives come centre stage, when ‘the effects of AIDS became, arguably, the dominant

73 Adamson, Thinking through Craft, 159.
74 Adamson, Thinking through Craft, 168.
issue in avant-garde art.\textsuperscript{75} Politics and art were joined together. ‘Not only did the AIDS crisis challenge the supposed neutrality and objectivity of the art world in a similar, but more pervasive way than feminism did in the 1970s, but it also revitalized a public art tradition stretching back to the civil rights and anti-war movements.’\textsuperscript{76}

The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt, which was conceived by Cleve Jones in 1985 and formally organised in June 1987, enabled a lost generation to be made visible. Adopting a strategy used by war memorials, the names of the dead were used to signify and memorialise loss. The quilt acted as both personal memorial and public metaphor. Hawkins argued that quilts represented America itself: as America’s ‘quintessential folk art, the patchwork quilt is linked to nineteenth-century sewing bees and a nostalgia for a past sense of community’.\textsuperscript{77} Growing as the number of dead grew, the quilt was laid out on the Mall in Washington DC both as a protest to:

the country’s indifference to the AIDS epidemic and to rally for greater attention to research and support\textsuperscript{78} and also as ‘a way to suffer intimate losses in the most public space in America, to leave behind ghetto and closet, to bring mourning from the margin to the centre.’\textsuperscript{79}

Unlike most war memorials, the quilt did not seek uniformity. While each panel adopts the same 3 foot by 6 foot dimensions, craft and handmaking allowed individuals to create their own personal memorial. This resulted in juxtapositions of styles and emotional responses, refusing hierarchy or the ranking of the individual components. Christopher Reed has argued that the quilt fused ‘anger and power (conventionally masculine) with sentiment and sewing (conventionally feminine)’,\textsuperscript{80} drawing on both ‘camp culture and feminist activism’.\textsuperscript{81} Unlike memorials carved in stone, the fabric of the quilt is sewn in

\textsuperscript{75} Reed, \textit{Art and Homosexuality}, 208.  
\textsuperscript{78} Hawkins, “Naming Names,” 137.  
\textsuperscript{79} Hawkins, “Naming Names,” 137.  
\textsuperscript{80} Reed, \textit{Art and Homosexuality}, 216.  
\textsuperscript{81} Reed, \textit{Art and Homosexuality}, 216.
homes, by loved ones and will fade and fray, ‘its fragility, its constant need for mending, tell[ing] the real truth about “material” life.’

The AIDS crisis ‘led to a substantial change in social attitudes towards homosexuality, which paradoxically enhanced the visibility of this form of otherness’, changing not only societal attitudes, but also what was seen as acceptable in the art world. ‘The culture of drag and camp, and its relation to queer and alternative practices, gradually filtered into art. The transmutation of kitsch into high art, and the charging to mass imagery with subversive and critical meanings… allowed it to penetrate into an elitist discourse.’ This adoption of previously ‘alternative’ practices included the reintegration of the decorative into the art world by artists such as Robert Gober and Virgil Marti and a ‘more open use of media traditionally associated with craft… particularly by artists aggressively pursuing queer and feminist counterpoints to a contemporary art world in which heterosexual masculinity is still a privileged position’.

Although gender and sexuality prejudice is a concern for many artists, more recently, artists working with queer craft have begun to open up the politics they are interested in critiquing. The current craftivist movement ‘unifies the seemingly oppositional issues of identity politics and global politics, difference and connection.’ Neatly sidestepping the discussions about hierarchies in the artworld, craftivism and DIY craft uses the media and open access platforms such as Etsy to avoid ‘craft’s hierarchies, power structures, or institutional methods for confirming status.’ By avoiding ‘curated’ galleries and publications, Craftivist makers are using recent changes in media and communication to allow personal viewpoints to be heard. Rather than working on undermining the power structures in the art world, to a large extent, as some feminist artists chose to do in the 1960s and 1970s, craftivism simply avoids them. The internet:

82 Hawkins, “Naming Names,” 141.
has, in effect, created new communities of practice which are quite different from the more traditional form of craft practice… It seems that youthful artists working in craft media are focused on carrying out their own version of truth relative to their own epistemological perspectives and generational experiences.88

This democratisation of craft means that ‘craft is at a generational crossroads and is presently expanding to embrace aspects of cultural hybridization that have not previously been recognized or articulated with the status-quo craft community’.89 Julia Bryan-Wilson suggests that it is these areas of hybridisation which can most benefit from craft, since craft:

allows us to see those overlaps, to make connections between such different subject: globalized labor, war, digital culture, feminism, collaboration, queer identity. Maybe precisely because it is so slippery and unfixed, it can encompass a broad spectrum of issues.90

For queer artists, who belong to a social group which has traditionally been marginalised, it is possibly unsurprising that there has been a desire to adopt the similarly marginalised art form of craft. Queer identity has had a short and wildly changing history formation, and craft, with its ‘primary links to the physical object [which]…cannot be dematerialised’91 provides a relatively permanent counterpoint with which to mark queer lives. Craft therefore democratically centres the individual, or as Bruce Metcalf puts it, ‘[c]raft continues to be a social movement, often intuitive and without leadership. I see craft as a collective attempt to relocate personal meaning to a largely indifferent world.’92

Craft has been repeatedly linked to the personal, the political and the heterogeneously handmade, which makes it an ideal agent for queer, or as Katherine Brooks argues that ‘[j]ust as traditional quilts can help art historians understand the role of feminism in art-making, so can contemporary craft help

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89 Stevens, “Validity is in the Eye of the Beholder,” 43.
91 Livingstone, “Decentered Meaning,” 101
us to reflect on the ever-changing landscape of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer issues.  

As we have seen, the linking of the personal and craft has changed over time, and we can only expect it to further change in the future. Both craft and queer, when both used as nouns, operate as collective identities. The shared influence they can generate by uniting disparate groups can be powerful but also runs that risk of disguising differences and competing needs and priorities. Gloria Anzaldúa warns that queer is used as a false unifying umbrella which ‘queers of all races, ethnicities and classes are shored under... even when we seek shelter under it, we must not forget that it homogenises, erases our differences’.  

Similarly, Veitberg has argued that craft as a collective identity may have lost its meaning, and ‘may well fade in the coming decades’. Whether the unifying power of queer and craft will continue to outweigh their potential to erase difference will be key to whether these two collective terms will continue to be used and useful. Either way, the potential to derive power from marginalised status has huge productive potential. As Mazzanti succinctly puts it ‘craft has engaged with the leftovers of visual art and design. However, in this seemingly resigned position there is a potential that has not yet been fully realized.’

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95 Veitberg, Craft in Transition, 2005, 86.
1.3 **Queer Craft Methodology**

I was looking around, and I realized that Ruskay’s was a gay restaurant. The waiters were all gay, as were half of the customers. The mirror-topped tables were gay, and so was the ubiquitous smell of the Windex used to wipe them. The old-fashioned tile floors, the dramatic lighting, the whoops of laughter almost instantly suppressed into terribly amused hissing – it all seemed extremely gay, down to the men in formfitting T-shirts despite the cold outside, and I hoped none of my clients would see me.

Edmund White, *Jack Holmes and His Friend*, 2012

This project examines queer (theory and studies) and its relationship to contemporary art and craft practice in order to explore whether, and how, objects can be visually identified as queer or be used to queer spaces or collections of objects. As White’s protagonist asserts that mirror-topped tables could be identified as gay, this research considers both how objects can represent queer identities and also be seen to display queer signifiers. Both craft and queer are large and contested areas, and this thesis explores the areas of overlap between the two in order to identify ways in which they can inform each other theoretically and practically.

I consciously decided to use multiple research methods in the project and that the research should explore their intersection from a number of different theoretical viewpoints to generate a broad understanding of the area. This strategy of using a variety of methods is something identified by Carole Gray and Ian Pirie:

most researchers in Art & Design have displayed characteristic eclecticism, adopting a ‘multi-method’ approach to information gathering,
selection, structuring, analysis, evaluation, presentation and communication. 98


When considering queer, it is important to reiterate that queer can refer and relate to many things in many ways, but eludes simple definition. While this provides rich pickings for academic discourse and opens up potential ways of utilising queer as an artist, at the same time it runs the risk of divorcing queer from LGBT identity politics completely. However, as I hope to outline, queer does not refer to nothing, 99 but rather its investigation will necessarily involve doubt, a lack of clearly defined categories and some contradictions.

While theorists may argue that queer works only as a tool and relates to nothing in particular, in practice, academic courses and books include some topics and texts and exclude others. What is included tends to closely map what was formerly referred to as gay and lesbian studies and is now often called queer studies.

In practice, queer is used in two very different, but related ways: as a shorthand for gay and lesbian (and often referred to as queer studies) and as a tool to examine and deconstruct, usually around gender and sexuality (queer theory). There is an irony in that queer studies is a study of identity and queer theory a deconstruction of identity. This research project requires both of these: *identity* through the exploration of how LGBT identities can be incorporated into

museum and historic house exhibitions and made visible through objects; and *deconstruction of identity*, and in particular a deconstruction of heteronormativity though the contestation of power structures in museums, art galleries and historic houses. Heteronormativity, which can be defined as the way in which institutions and structures of understanding ensure that heterosexuality is privileged\(^\text{100}\) is ubiquitous in many museums and historic houses, as will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

The research develops this enquiry in five main ways, namely: by defining queer and a historic mapping of how craft and identity, and specifically, queer have intersected; addressing what might we mean by a queer object and how this might develop into a visual polari;\(^\text{101}\) exploring key curatorial strategies for addressing queer; discussing how craft objects can queer museums and galleries and their collections; and identifying how craft objects can queer domestic spaces and in particular historic houses open to the public.

Chapter 2, Queer Objects, explores which objects - to draw from Sarah Ahmed’s writing\(^\text{102}\) - might enable people who identify as LGBT, orientate themselves, or help them find their way. The discussion of historical associations between non-figurative objects and LGBT individuals moves onto discussion of three bodies of studio work: *From the Recesses of the Freer Collection*, *The Problems With History* and *BlueBoy and Pillar of Masculinity*. These collections were created as part of the research practice that interrogates LGBT associations with objects. They also examine the use of appropriation in queer craft practice to create objects that resonate with a visual polari, which can provide an object with a queer resonance, regardless of its context or setting. In the opening quote, Edmund White’s protagonist identifies mirror-topped tables and Windex as gay. In a similar vein, what is being attempted in the research is to identify what, if anything, would signify queerness in a crafted object, exploring what a queer visual language might look like, or what coded signifiers it might be based upon, and how it could be used by artists. The development of visual polari drew strongly on the work of a number of artists


\(^{101}\) Polari: a slang language used by British gay subculture particularly in the middle of the twentieth century

\(^{102}\) Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 1.
who identify with minority identity status – race, gender or sexuality – and included Kara Walker, Glenn Ligon, Virgil Marti and Robert Gober.

Exploring ideas through craft techniques moves craft and its discourse away from its traditional emphasis on skill towards using craft practice to answer core questions. Craft’s links with the handmade and the personal and its marginal position within the art world allow artists working with craft to intimately explore heterogeneous positions and power relations. Zandra Ahl has described the linking of ideas and making within her own practice as an ‘...investigation of taste, power, hierarchy, class and gender. I call it craft.’103 The linking of ideas and craft techniques has led to the adoption of the term conceptual craft, a term which Jo Dahn suggests should be used to describe objects ‘whose fullest interpretation depends on a conceptual context and a knowing audience, willing to “unpack” them.’104

Within the research, I have relied on two main craft media: ceramics and textiles. Ceramic brings with it resonance with archaeological digs and the role of found ceramic objects in building a picture of historical societies. By casting objects in the making process, clones are produced which can be modified and resituated to explore alternative narratives. The casting process involves a reduction in scale whereby the new cast will always be slightly less than the original object and brings with it an intrinsic sense of inferiority. During the research, I moved away from concepts of permanence and legacy and became interested in the idea of identity in process, in a continual stage of change. I therefore moved the making away from the permanence of fired clay and began working with textiles which could be unpicked and re-stitched multiple times. These tapestries were sourced already stitched by amateur sewers and parts of them were unpicked and re-stitched with alternative patterns, moving them away from amateur hobby activity into a more conceptual arena.


Chapter 3, Queer Curating, examines a number of these exhibition strategies to compare queer curatorial methods. These can be grouped into three main, non-exclusive areas. These are curating work by artists who self-identify as queer; curating work that queers exhibition spaces; and curating work that is deemed to have a queer sensibility.

Since queer is subjective, any sense of queerness is fluid. However, a number of queer visual strategies are identified by drawing on curatorial methods of grouping works and using intertextual readings of theoretical writers and visual readings of queer environments. This section of the project also examines how a space can be queered in addition to how objects destined for that space can been given a queer significance.

Chapters 4 and 5 of the research describe the making of new queer craft works that respond to existing spaces and collections. Gillian Rose argues that ‘[t]he seeing of an image [object] … always takes place in a particular social context that mediates its impact.’\(^\text{105}\) Therefore, I felt it was key that the context within which those objects were situated also needed to be considered in order to explore queer craft. Within the research in this dissertation into museums, art galleries and historic houses, queer is used predominantly as an identifier of sexual minorities and identity politics. However, as Del LaGrace Volcano puts it, ‘queer is a verb in drag, passing as an adjective’.\(^\text{106}\) Its use within these three cultural organisations not only indicates identity difference, but also the undermining and challenging of the power structures and norms that take place.

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within them. There is a double queering taking place: a queering (disruption) of the environment, which allows for queer identity (LGBT) representation to take place.

The exploration of queer craft in museums and galleries comprises two case studies: *Queering the Museum* at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and *Other Stories: Queering the University Art Collection* at the Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery at the University of Leeds. Representation of queer identity in museums is relatively unusual and the unpacking of the normative structures that privilege heterosexuality even more so. In the first case study, *Queering the Museum*, I drew on the conceptual framework developed by another minority group (African American), and in particular the work of Fred Wilson, to explore and critique the representation of difference by museum curators within museum collections.

Theoretically, this project draws on the writings of Patrick Steorn, who argues for the development an “alternative archive” that consists of interpretations of artworks or other objects that have been queered and appropriated by a LGBT audience, and which holds narratives about affective knowledge and queer desires.107 Here, Steorn is addressing the lack of material culture related specifically to LGBT lives and shares the views of Halberstam who talks of the need to collect ‘ephemeral affects, memories and cultural values generated by other types of objects than the documents and objects that can be found in a conventional archive or museum’.108 This lack of objects meant that in addition to the juxtaposition of existing objects within the collections, I created the objects that previously could not be made, for example, queer counterparts to the heterosexual figurine groups that I inserted into the exhibition displays to fill historic gaps in the collection. To assess the impact of *Queering the Museum*, a programme of audience evaluation was undertaken to gather feedback.

*Queering the Museum* adopted museum norms of using individual objects to stand in for group identities. This left it potentially open to charges of

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generalisation and stereotyping, which brings difficulties when trying to represent such a diverse group. Therefore I decided with the subsequent project, \textit{Other Stories: Queering the University Art Collection}, to move away from ‘grand narratives’\textsuperscript{109} and examine individual oral histories drawn from the Brighton Ourstory oral history archive. Selected texts from individual oral histories were incorporated into objects chosen for their relationship to those narratives. These objects were then placed adjacent to existing artworks in the collection at the Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery at the University of Leeds in order to reposition the existing collection from their heteronormative framework into a queer (re)frameing of the past.

This use of the quotidian practically implements Halberstam’s suggestion that in order to represent LGBT lives, it is memories rather than objects that should be archived. Cvetkovich argues that lesbian and gay history relies an archive of emotion in ‘order to document intimacy, sexuality, love, and activism – all areas of experience that are difficult to chronicle through the materials of a traditional archive’,\textsuperscript{110} and for archive, we can also read museum collection. \textit{Queering the Museum} and \textit{Other Stories} required making and curating objects and working as a hybrid artist/curator/art historian, a queering of roles.

The work within domestic environments was undertaken in conjunction with the National Trust. The project, \textit{Unravelling the National Trust}, involved curating three large exhibitions of artist interventions in Nymans House and Gardens, The Vyne and Uppark. The exhibitions involved commissioning artworks specific to each house from between 10 and 12 artists working with craft techniques. This curatorial methodology allowed multiple, divergent views about the houses to be explored, moving away from any sense of master narrative, absolute truth or historical progression. In these terms, the curation of the projects could be seen as a \textit{queering} of the authorised history of the site and any reference to LGBT relationships a \textit{queer queering}.

\textsuperscript{109} Amy Tooth Murphy, \textit{Demystifying Public Engagement: Gender & Sexuality Studies Beyond the Academy Conference}, Newcastle University, 14–15 May 2011, np.
I chose to work with houses since they allow access to intimacy in a way that museums seldom do. These sites are built upon individual whimsy and allow their owners to shape the environment and its contents in a way that can reflect their identity. The family tree, which is central to the interpretation of most historic houses, places a documentation of relationships at the core of the narrative of the house and provides a useful starting point for exploring historic sexualities, both normative and non-normative. All three of the houses have long, well-documented histories of the houses and their occupants. They are open to the public and so have moved from being semi-private spaces to public spaces; what was a home is now a public spectacle.

Two of the houses and their exhibitions – *Unravelling Nymans* and *Unravelling The Vyne* – have particular relevance to this research project. Oliver Messel at Nymans and John Chute at The Vyne both present us with queer histories. The interventions that I made for these two houses will be explored in depth to examine what they can tell us about the historic presentation of non-normative sexualities in historic houses. In addition to the commissioning of works by artists for the exhibitions, a number of writers were also commissioned to write about subjects related to the exhibition. The results of these commissions are shown in the *Unravelled* catalogues in the appendices and helped guide my thinking in the writing of this chapter of the research as well as in the development of the work.
1.3.1 Approach to Practice

My artistic practice broadly uses materials that are associated with craft practice using conceptual thinking to inform the making and its presentation.

Paul Scott\footnote{Paul Scott, Ceramics and Landscape, Remediation and Confection: A Theory of Surface, doctoral Thesis (Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University, 2010) 32–33.} identified three main categories of ceramic PhD research:

1. Research of a purely historical or theoretical nature such as Julian Stair’s 2002 thesis Critical Writing on English Studio Pottery 1910–1940.
2. Research to explore and develop new materials, techniques or ways of working, such as Kevin Petrie’s 1999 thesis Water-based Ceramic Transfer Printing: The Development and Creative Use of a New On-glaze Printing System.
3. Research that analyses the creative process, proposing it as a research tool to create new understandings of issues of events, which Scott illustrates using Neil Brownsword’s 2006 thesis Action – A Creative Response to Transition and Change in British Ceramic Manufacture.

Scott describes this third category:

the creative process itself is posited as the primary research methodology, the artist researcher as reflective practitioner; the process of making art documented through notebooks, sketchbooks and video, and critical peer review used as a common methodological evaluation tool.\footnote{Scott, Ceramics and Landscape, 33.}

Of the three categories, this project most closely aligns with the third, but it is by no means a perfect fit. Historical and theoretical research directly informed the creation of new work, which in turned became the catalyst for new theoretical writing. This interrelated process continued throughout the research project, firmly linking the two research methods. Rather than using the creative process as an end in itself, the project aims to create social and curatorial change through the work, question curatorial practice and inform subsequent curatorial
projects. Therefore, in addition to the making of the work, writing and talking about the practice formed a large part of the research. Presentations about the work have taken place at numerous industry events including: The Museums Association Conference; *Civil Partnerships? Queer and Feminist Curating* at Tate Modern; *My Queer Museum* at the V&A; the University of Leicester’s AHRC Museum Ethics Research Network; and *Curating Craft* at the Bergen Academy of Art and Design. Throughout the project, peer review has comprised both a form of verification and also brought new and at times unexpected thoughts and possible working methods.

A key part of the methodology involved in the project, and one that is seldom discussed in PhD research, was the haptic aspect of the making. The physical process of making and the time taken to create the work allowed periods of reflection and thought around the subject, which formed a core part of the research process and fed into both the interpretation of the work and the direction of new work. Running against the idea of Cartesian dualism that suggests ‘mind and matter existed in separate spheres’113, I argue that the two were linked during the research and informed each other. In a research project that explores binaries and hierarchies, this is maybe unsurprising. As queer theory presents a more fluid approach to identity than the former fixed binaries of gay and straight, I would suggest that flattening, blurring and uniting of binaries enable a more insightful exploration of the subject. This uniting and blurring is also a core part of the practice-based nature of the research, where the thinking is ‘the result of ideas worked through matter’114 and ‘demonstrative of the intellectuality of making, which is not the same as the intellectuality of writing’,115 a physical knowledge which is in turn worked through words.

114 MacLeod, “The Functions of the Written Text in Practice-based PhD Submissions,” np.
115 MacLeod, “The Functions of the Written Text in Practice-based PhD Submissions,” np.
Chapter 1 discussed how queer is being used in two separate, but linked ways: as a signifier of LGBT identities and as a strategy to oppose the norm. This chapter discusses how objects and artworks might be read as queer without relying on the representation of same-sex couples or individuals who display non-normative gender roles. It also explores strategies that artists might employ to imbue objects with queer significance.

To start the discussion, a chair owned by Robert Mapplethorpe is used to illustrate the fragile nature of queer associations with objects within a larger discussion of historic associations between queer lives and objects. The chapter then explores how the identification of queer identities and the use of queer visual strategies can be brought together in visual art to create ‘meaning’ in three main ways and each will be illustrated by a body of new work made as part of the research project. Firstly, *From the Recesses of the Freer Collection* examines the overlap between queer lives and the objects associated with them and the need to consider partial and unsubstantiated histories when dealing with queer pasts as well as relying on emotional truths in queer archives, secondly, *The Problems with History* explores the visual representation of identity repression and the notion of queer readings and deconstructive reversal and how these may be used as an artistic strategy and finally, *BlueBoy* and *Pillar of Masculinity* adopt appropriation as a queer visual strategy to illustrate visual polari.

Any exploration of queer visual techniques will be geographically, culturally, temporarily, racially and gender partial. This discussion will therefore never succeed in universally answering the question of what makes an object queer. Reassuringly, according to Judith Halberstam, resignation to failure can be viewed as a queer aesthetic position, one that she claims as ‘possibly a lesbian style rather than a gay style (since very often gay style is style writ large)’.¹¹⁶

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However, Halberstam then goes on to suggest that failure is a strategy that has been used by male artists such as Andy Warhol as ‘an opportunity rather than a dead end; in true camp fashion, the queer artist works with rather than against failure and inhabits the darkness. Indeed the darkness becomes a crucial part of a queer aesthetic,’\textsuperscript{117} or, as Quentin Crisp succinctly put it, ‘[i]f at first you don’t succeed, failure may be your style.’\textsuperscript{118} Richard Dyer has similarly tried to define the difference between lesbian and gay male culture, this time, as ‘a polarisation of sensibilities: the emphasis on self-reflexivity and artifice in camp, the stress on authenticity (the hallmark of the confessional novel) and naturalness (the folk song ethos) in feminist culture’.\textsuperscript{119} If queer is in opposition to the norm, and we accept that societal norms are in constant flux, then any opposition will also be in a constant state of transition.

Having laid the groundwork that this chapter will never meet a universal view and is set to fail, we can move on. Any discussion on what constitutes a queer aesthetic will not be universally shared by all individuals who identify as queer, or indeed be restricted to queer individuals since the lines of demarcation are extremely blurred. As has previously been stated, Sara Ahmed suggests that ‘[t]o be orientated is also to be turned toward certain objects, those that help us to find our way,’\textsuperscript{120} and this chapter discusses objects which (may) help (some) individuals with queer sexual orientations or sensibilities find their way.

When discussing queer objects, we are not exploring the notional idea of same-sex desire between two objects, but rather how some objects resonate with queerness. Just as the study of gendered objects does not reflect the absolute sexing of material culture, but rather how those objects reflect societal expectations of gender norms and behaviours, so queer objects reflect contemporaneous associations with queer culture(s). Likewise, just as there are many ways of being queer, there are numerous ways of defining queer objects. Many of the methods for defining a queer object rely on contextual information about their use or ownership. These links between objects and their queer associations are tenuous and easily lost or missed. For some, queer objects are

\textsuperscript{117} Halberstam, \textit{The Queer Art of Failure}, 96.
\textsuperscript{118} Halberstam, \textit{The Queer Art of Failure}, 109–110.
\textsuperscript{120} Ahmed, \textit{Queer Phenomenology}, 1.
those objects which have been owned by queer people, which raises questions about the potentially fluid queerness of objects whose ownership has passed between individuals – some queer, some heterosexual. For other people, queer objects are those objects whose adoption is synonymous with queer subcultures.\textsuperscript{121} As will be discussed later, the assimilation or sublation of queer culture and the overlaps between queer lives and straight lives makes this a grey area and potentially limits the uniquely queer objects to a very small pool.

A more promising approach to defining queer objects may be looking at those objects which have been brought together to form queer collections by individuals\textsuperscript{122,123} where the queerness of these objects relies on their interrelationships to each other and the individuals who collected them. Similarly, the selection and grouping of objects by curators presenting queer exhibitions (see Chapter 3) enables an interrogation which starts to develop a taxonomy of queer objects.

Finally, there are some objects which read as queer. They may rely on queer strategies such as camp and appropriation or feature queer imagery. The queerness may be the intention of the maker, part of the intrinsic nature of the object or arise through a reading of the view of the object by an individual with a queer viewpoint or affinity. The goal is not to police whether something is queer, but rather open up the discussion to allow queerness to be acknowledged.

This chapter will start with a case study exploring the fragile nature of links between objects and queer lives before it concentrates on those sensibilities and strategies which can be used to create artworks which somehow embody queerness. Burston and Richardson suggest that ‘belonging to a sexual minority lends one an outsider’s viewpoint which, though not entirely predictable in its

\textsuperscript{121} Angela Vanegas, “Representing Lesbians and Gay Men in British Social History Museums,” 163–171.
This chapter seeks to understand how we might read this different way of seeing as the ‘preferred reading’ of objects and how some objects “encourage” queer viewing... the product of a queer cultural moment in which images [or objects] have been subject to so much renegotiation (including subcultural renegotiation) that the preferred heterosexual reading has been destabilised. In case this seems like a theoretical conceit, it is worth considering Michele Barrett’s argument that “[c]ultural politics are crucially important... because they involve struggles over meaning,” which will always be a loaded struggle since ‘[h]istorians have argued with force that we demand standards of proof of homosexuality that we would not require of heterosexuality. In effect we assume heterosexuality and therefore any assertion that a certain sensibility should be assigned anything other than a heterosexual status (as we will see later with the intersection of camp and postmodernism) will always be subject to debate.

The chapter will explore how the identification of queer identities and the use of queer visual strategies can be brought together in visual art of create meaning in three main ways. Firstly it will consider the overlap between queer lives and the objects associated with them, then it will consider the notion of queer readings and deconstructive reversal and how these may be used as an artistic strategy and finally, drawing on polari, it will debate the use of appropriation as queer visual strategy.

These three ideas come together in Nayland Blake’s *In a Different Light*:

> Queer people are the only minority whose culture in not transmitted within the family. Indeed the assertion of one’s queer identity is often made as a form of contradiction to familial identity. Thus, for queer

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126 Evans and Gamman, “The Gaze Revisited, or Reviewing Queer Viewing,” 46.
people, all of the words that serve as touchstones for cultural identification – family, home, people, neighbourhood, heritage – must be recognized as constructions for and by the individual members of that community. The extremely provisional nature of queer culture is the thing that makes its transmission so fragile. However, this very fragility has encouraged people to seek retroactively its contours to a degree not often found in other groups. Queer people must literally construct the houses they will be born into, and adopt their own parents. The idea that identity and culture are nonorganic constructs is also one of the most important characteristics of postmodernism.129

While I would dispute Blake’s argument that queer people are the only group who rely on horizontal rather the vertical transmission of group identity,130 he does manage to bring together the three main arguments of this chapter, namely the provisional nature of queer culture, the desire for queer revisionist readings and how the need to construct cultural identification outside of the grand narratives of history chimes with the postmodern technique of re-appropriation.

Finally, it is worth remembering that in a practice-based PhD concerned with craft practice, the potential for using both haptic and intellectual knowledge. Sally Munt has argued for joining of the head and body – uniting both theory and lived experience.131 The world of queer theory has the potential to erase real life experience in the desire to create an academic genre, privileging the intellectual over the bodily. The haptic nature of craft production brings the bodily back into this discussion. Rather than simply back up an academic debate, it is hoped that this fusing of haptic and conceptual has resulted in objects that communicate visually about the subject in a more nuanced, open and less didactic manner than text alone can allow.

129 Nayland Blake, “Curating in a Different Light,” In a Different Light, Visual Culture, Sexual Identity, Queer Practice, ed. Nayland Blake, Lawrence Rinder and Amy Scholder (San Francisco: City Lights, 1995) 12.
130 For more examples, see Andrew Solomon, Far From the Tree: A Dozen Kinds of Love (London: Chatto and Windus, 2013).
2.1 Queer Lives and Objects

One of the most literal ways of associating objects with queerness is to look at those objects which have strong association with queer lives. This leads to some arbitrary and time-specific connections. When considering queer aesthetics, it is hard to avoid discussing Oscar Wilde’s fusing of aestheticism with homosexuality. Wilde’s assertion: ‘[h]ow often I feel how hard it is to live up to my blue china,’ which, according to Aaron Betsky, ‘made it clear that the objects of everyday use could be aesthetic as well, so that a tea service could be the equal of a painting’ and played a double hand of developing both aestheticism and ‘what Susan Sontag has retroactively called camp, one of whose criteria is that it finds beauty in the elevation of the everyday to the extraordinary.’ The argument is not that Wilde has made blue and white china queer, but rather that blue and white china has queer associations owing to its link with Wilde.

While this study of blue and white and camp may be seen as a retrospective reading of historical queer aesthetics, there have been other attempts to identify a queer aesthetic. The sexuality researcher Magnus Hirschfeld suggested ‘that one way to determine a person’s sexual orientation is to study the objects that decorate her or his home’. This explicit linking of material culture with queer identity suggested statuettes of half-dressed working-class men by Belgian sculptor Constantin Meunier and works by Michelangelo and Rodin had queer resonance. Patrik Steorn describes how Hirschfeld created an alternative canon, ‘based mainly on homoerotic and aesthetic appreciation’, a canon which is ‘not necessarily about completely different objects, but about different emotional and political attachments to objects’. This is not to say that the work of Rodin is queer, or that Rodin was queer, but that the work chimed in a way that appealed to queer men.

134 Betsky, Queer Space, 81.
Some of these queer associations are still present today, others less so. The paintings of Thomas Gainsborough – not something previously read as queer by this author – were thought, by Hirschfeld, to appeal particularly to homosexual men. Whether it is this connection or a simple linguistic play that led to a gay pornographic magazine being called *Blue Boy*,¹³⁸ we may never know. What is possibly of more interest is, with the lack of vertical, familial, knowledge transfer between queers, how quickly cultural knowledge can be lost. While the possibility of linking queer identities and associations with objects will be discussed later in Chapter 4, the overwhelmingly heteronormative filter that exists in the world can possibly best be illustrated by the image in Figure 2.1. Taken from a Christie’s catalogue from 1989, lot 242 is listed as *An Oak Reclining Armchair, by the firm of L. & J.G. Stickley, circa 1920, Five slats beneath the straight arm, with drop-in black leather cushion seat, model no 498–33in. (84cm.) wide, 38 in. (97cm.) deep, estimate $2,500 – 3,500*.¹³⁹

Sold as part of the Robert Mapplethorpe Collection, the chair is one of a large number of objects that furnished Mapplethorpe’s home and was also used in his photography. According to Dimitri Levas, Mapplethorpe’s interest in his collection was ‘not scholarly but visual and aesthetic; arranging… the objects was the highest priority for him’,\(^{140}\) which Meyer goes on to describe as an interest in how the objects related to each other, as a collection, rather than the ‘art-historical value, provenance, or prestige of any one piece’.\(^{141}\)

In Mapplethorpe’s 1978 photograph *Helmut and Brooks, N.Y.C.*, if you look past the image of a man being fisted, you see this same Stickley chair (albeit with the original leather back pad). This object, once at the core of queer aesthetics, both as part of a queer collection and also the (part) subject of queer artwork, illustrates the heteronormatisation that can happen when queered objects are disassociated from their queer context and become just another oak armchair again. This is mentioned for two reasons: firstly to argue for the need for queer associations to be documented by archives as will be discussed in Chapter 4, but also to demonstrate the ephemeral and temporal nature of queer aesthetic associations.

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2.2  *From the Recesses of the Freer Collection*

The collection of another man – Charles Lang Freer – formed the basis for a series of ceramics panels, created as part of the research, *From the Recesses of the Freer Collection*. Charles Lang Freer (1854–1919) was a railroad car manufacturer from Detroit whose art collection (including Whistler’s *Peacock Room* with its blue and white porcelain) and funding formed the basis for the Freer Gallery of Art, part of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC.

As Mapplethorpe’s chair has shown, maintaining queer associations with objects is problematic when the sexuality of the owner/collector is known. It is even more difficult when their queerness is in question. Freer was a lifelong bachelor and his sexuality is debated.142 Keeping Oscar Wilde’s camp associations with blue and white in mind, *From the Recesses of the Freer Collection* considers Freer’s gender atypicality through a series of ceramic plaques that combine prints of drawings of Chinese ceramics from the Freer collection catalogue143 with images of naked men from gay pin-up and pornographic magazines.

The plaques create a discourse between a documented fact (Freer’s collection) and a disputed one (his possible queerness). This casual disregard of the usual reliance on documented and collaborated evidence adopts an appropriately gossipy approach to history – the poet John Giorno, as referenced by Gavin Butt, explored ‘gossip’s central importance for understanding art history, which resides, he suggests, in its capability for revealing the art community’s sexual secrets.’144 These plaques form a visual representation of the conflation of two aesthetic responses: Freer’s public collecting and (disputed) private queer desire.

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Figure 2.2  Matt Smith, *From the Recesses of the Freer Collection, no. 19, 2012*, white earthenware with screen-printed cobalt and underglaze, 24cm x 20cm.
Figure 2.3  Matt Smith, *From the Recesses of the Freer Collection, no. 25*, 2012, white earthenware with screen-printed cobalt and underglaze, 24cm x 20cm.
The plaques in Figures 2.2 and 2.3 incorporate a numbering technique, referencing museum and archive collections. This alternative Freer archive to some extent draws on what Halberstam describes as ‘gay and lesbian history as a repressed archive and the historian as an intrepid archaeologist digging through homophobic erasure to find the truth’.\(^{145}\) This sifting through material, according to Robert Mills, means that queer history exhibitions will necessarily adopt a:

style of presentation partly modelled on scrapbooks and collage; in place of the representative “object”, they will appropriate fragments, snippets of gossip, speculations, irreverent half-truths… with exhibits that self-consciously resist grand narratives and categorical assertions [and which recognise] that interpretations change and that our encounters with archives are saturated with desire.\(^{146}\)

This queer desire, which, drawing on Ann Cvetkovich’s *An Archive of Feelings*,\(^{147}\) Mathias Danbolt describes as so ‘hard to document, let alone archive in traditional ways’\(^{148}\) is made visible through appropriated fragments and irreverent half-truths in *From the Recesses of the Freer Collection*.


\(^{147}\) Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*.

2.3 The Problems with History: Queer Readings

‘...there is no one “right” way of looking at the world.’
Claire Bishop\textsuperscript{149}

This interrogation of material culture for queerness can be seen as a queer method. Mair Rigby suggests that in literature, to ‘discover queer experiences and lives, it is often fruitful to look at the marginal characters and places’.\textsuperscript{150} Taking this idea forwards, Hilde Hein argues that reversing the ‘foreground and background... draws attention to the overlooked and suppressed, and, having exposed it, asks why it has been neglected’,\textsuperscript{151} thereby resituating the dominant position into a subordinate one: '[r]eclaiming the background can... be a cognitive breakthrough: it can also be a warranted act of rebellion.'\textsuperscript{152} This method of reversing the foreground and background, and reading against the grain, has been adopted in the second body of work to be discussed in this chapter, a series of textile pieces called The Problems with History.

The Problems with History series started with the reworking of mass-produced tapestries in which the central figures were stitched over with the aim of prioritising the marginal characters and scenery (Figure 2.4). This attempted silencing of the central characters did not remove them from the work, but rather changed their status. This inability to remove the figures completely echoes Michel Foucault’s assertion that silence is ‘an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies.’\textsuperscript{153} Meanwhile, Jonathan Katz\textsuperscript{154} has linked queerness and silence, suggesting that silence was used as a resistance strategy in the work of Warhol, Johns and Rauschenberg – one that I would suggest mirrored the effects of the closet and what Anna-Marie Larsen describes as the ‘repression and the institutionalization of silence and discrimination’\textsuperscript{155} that they

\textsuperscript{152} Hein, “Looking at Museums from a Feminist Perspective,” 57.
\textsuperscript{153} Rigby, \textit{A Strange Perversity}, 477.
\textsuperscript{155} Larsen, “Boys with Needles,” 5.
experienced. Backing up Foucault’s assertion, John Cage demonstrated with 4’33” that even when silencing was attempted, absence (of sound in this case) was never achieved.

Figure 2.4  Matt Smith, *Hide and Seek*, from *The Problems with History*, 2012, found textile and silk, 45cm x 45cm.

According to Martha Gever, coming out – or leaving the closet – is not only an individual declaration, but also a social process that ‘defies social disapprobation and infuses conventional representations of sexual deviance… embodied by lesbians and gay men with new meanings – what Michel Foucault
called “reverse discourse”, a reversion echoed in the methodology used to produce these textiles.

As The Problems with History developed, I began working increasingly with amateur tapestries. Mass-produced canvases, originally stitched by hobby sewers at home, were unpicked and reworked. These textiles, sewn by unknown crafters, of artworks by named artists which often depicted known sitters were reworked into objects by a named artist depicting an anonymised sitter. In doing so they move from the world of handicraft to fine art, while adopting and using amateur craft skills. This use of tapestry canvases has to acknowledge their kitsch associations, which Thomas Crow suggests provides another ‘productive confusion within the normal hierarchy of cultural prestige’ while at the same times harnessing, what Philip Derbyshire terms, queer’s ‘violent rejection and despoliation of the norm’.

Stuart Hall suggests that we think of identity not as an unproblematic fact, but ‘as a “production”, which is never complete, always in process.’ While this disturbs the authority of ideas of cultural identity, Hall uses this idea to study the implications of identity as displacement. His argument suggests that one is only aware of identity when inhabiting a position where your identity is unaligned with those of the people around you. The Problems with History mirrors this idea of flux. The intervention onto the original sewing can be reversed at any time, or indeed replaced with another intervention. The works mirror Judith Butler’s argument that queer must be seen as a category in constant formation, ‘that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and

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157 Adamson, Thinking Through Craft, 2.


expanding political purposes, and perhaps also yielded in favour of terms that do that political work more effectively.\textsuperscript{160}

Figure 2.5  Matt Smith, 1870/1970, from *The Problems with History*, 2014, found textile and wool, 55cm x 38cm.
I will now focus on one particular piece (Figure 2.5) from *The Problems with History* series, *1870/1970* which works on a number of levels. It subverts a tapestry which is believed to date from the late 1970s or early 1980s of a clown and reworks the space formerly taken by the face and hands with a late-Victorian, decorative, Berlin wool work upholstery pattern. It fuses these two different times (1870 and 1970) with the changing status of homosexuality in England. Foucault, slightly provocatively, named 1870 as the year that homosexuality was invented\(^\text{161}\) within medical discourse. He argued that before this medicalisation, homosexuality was an act rather than an identity. The use of the Berlin wool work pattern references both this date and the years preceding it, when, according to Foucault, homosexuals were as yet to be foregrounded. By 1970, homosexuality had been medicalised and criminalised, and then decriminalised in 1967 (in England and Wales). Associations between homosexuality and dandyism that gained currency with Oscar Wilde were still prevalent. Whether it was innate mannerism, defence mechanism or coping strategy, gay men in popular entertainment of the 1970s were usually figures of fun and amusement to be laughed at or pitied.

The use of ornament as the masking technique in this work is deliberate. Describing the work of textile artist Neil MacInnis, Anna-Marie Larsen argues that through a pastiche of images, MacInnis claims ‘a history of repression, violence and silence. He then re-inserts contemporary queer consciousness back into the very fabric of textile history.’\(^\text{162}\) MacInnis thereby claims the aesthetic of ornament as a queer visual language. The associations between textiles and the domestic, the feminine, the decorative and a queer aesthetic is also explored by Tom Folland, who argues that their use in Robert Rauschenberg’s *Combines* blurred the ‘boundaries between public/private, male/female and high/low’\(^\text{163}\) at a time when modernism was ‘underwritten by a fear of the ornamental [which could contaminate it with a] domestic aesthetic of craft and frivolity.’\(^\text{164}\) Folland continues, ‘the decorative fabrics Rauschenberg

\(^{161}\) Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 10–11.


employed brought to light the flip side of modernism, its debased other: the feminine, the commodity, the decorative, the queer."165

This undermining of modernism is unsurprising since, according to Emmanuel Cooper, many gay and lesbian artists were in turn alienated ‘from late modernism because the forms and conventions of mainstream art did not offer the range and meanings required’.166 Textile’s challenge to ‘dominant cultural sensibility though a strategic use of the decorative, decadent, feminine’167 helped anchor it as a medium in the fine art world to be mined by feminist and queer artists, a medium that when adopted by men, immediately puts the work ‘outside social convention’.168

By not simply reversing the marginal and the core in the textile, but introducing a new visual vocabulary of decoration, it could be argued that 1870/1970 employs ‘a radical exteriority’169, moving outside of structures of power and authority. It has been suggested that the poststructuralist logic of Foucault and Deleuze run the risk, through assaulting the binary hierarchies, of ‘reaffirm[ing] the very structures of authority they seek of overthrow’.170 In contrast to this, Saul Newman argues that Derrida’s idea of deconstruction provides ‘a series of moves which include the dismantling of conceptual oppositions and hierarchical systems of thought.’171 Newman goes on to suggest that Derrida does not want to simply ‘invert the terms of these binaries so that the subordinate term becomes the privileged term [inversion]’172 but transform the hierarchical structure itself.173 Therefore, rather than reversing the binary opposition, ‘one should perhaps question, and try to make problematic, its very structure’.174

This movement away from binaries and hierarchies chimes with queer theory. The questioning of the structure is seen in 1870/1970 where rather than simply inverting the foreground and background, the foreground is removed and replaced with another background, thereby deconstructing the original binary hierarchy between foreground and background. In his dismantling of hierarchies in which one term is subordinate to another, Derrida’s critique ‘throws into doubt the question of essential identity’.175 This would concur with the socially constructed ideas of queer theory and may be what led John Caputo to argue that ‘deconstruction is a strategy of responsibility to the excluded other.’176

Once this deconstruction has taken place, we are left with the structure of a portrait with no way of identifying or orientating towards the sitter. Ahmed has argued that queer refers to both sexual and also political orientation and disorientation,177 orientations that are oblique to the majority position. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes the face as orientated.178 He states: ‘[m]y gaze which moves over the face, and in doing so faces certain directions, does not recognise the face unless it comes up against its details in a certain irreversible order…[t]o invert an object is to deprive it of its significance.’179

Whilst Merleau-Ponty seems to be suggesting there is only one significance and orientation to be found, Ahmed suggests, that to move from a position of disorientation to orientation, we need to get our bearings and “what” we are orientated toward180 will differ for different people and an altered portrait with queer affect may well provide queer orientation. As Rictor Norton explains, while:

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the term “orientation” is now common in legal and psychiatric discourses, we think of it as a scientific word. But of course it is merely a directional metaphor drawn from magnetism and navigation, which has gradually superseded the directional metaphors used prior to the 1970s: inclination, deviant, pervert, invert, taste, tendency, bent, drive. Sexual love is often expressed in terms of directional metaphors.  

The final point to make about 1870/1970 returns to the fusing of two years, 100 years apart. Elizabeth Freeman proposes that time and class are the ‘hidden referents of the postmodern, ironic re-enactment that we call camp’ and has coined the term ‘temporal drag’ to describe their effects. Rather than limiting drag to gender parody, temporal drag in 1870/1970 operates with a ‘queer historical impulse… making connections across time’ and uses what Blake calls drag as ‘an artistic method’. This impulse to make historical connections, according to Mathias Danbolt, predates the gay and lesbian liberation movements of the 1970s, using history as an ‘orientating device in the negotiation of sexual identity’. This ‘co-existence of multiple temporalities’ was a core feature of Wunderkammer, but was discarded in favour of ‘straight time’ with ‘the establishment of public art museums in Europe in the late eighteenth century… which were structured around chronological order and periodical sequences, in line with a scientific understanding of historical progression’. It may be a leap too far to suggest that the opposition of straight time is queer time, but it is something to be considered as we move onto another form of queer multiplicity: assemblage and re-appropriation.
2.4 **BlueBoy and Pillar of Masculinity: Queer Appropriation**

Polari, a combination of ‘pig’ Latin, word inversions and Romany, had developed as a distinctive queer patois in the nineteenth century, and by the 1920s, it was common in theatrical circles and around the docks, fostering a sense of connection between queens, prostitutes, immigrants and other ‘outcasts’.  

This section of the research will adopt the idea of polari and mutate it into a visual method to infer queerness. Using polari’s techniques of re-appropriation, amalgamation, subversion and coding, the methodology has been used to create the works *BlueBoy* and *Pillar of Masculinity*. The reasons for adopting visual polari as a means of considering queer are many. Like queer, it is slippery and constantly mutating, travelling and adapting over time and in different physical locations. It was used predominantly by LGBT individuals, but also adopted and adapted by other groups. Polari takes from many sources, adapting source material and repurposing it for its own ends. It takes from other languages and by mutating them, encodes messages, allowing them to occupy a place ‘under the radar’. Visual polari covers subject matter, visual styles, ways of making, ways of displaying and arenas for display. This identification will by its very nature be partial, selective and open to debate. Since queer is a contested term, any attempt to define it visually will also, necessarily, be a subjective one. Relating to the idea of ‘reading against the grain’ in order to find queer interpretations, visual polari shares ground with collage and appropriation, taking fragments and reinterpreting dominant cultural norms and repurposing them into queer associations. As Noreen Giffney describes it, ‘appropriation and pastiche, irony as well as a reworking of history with social constructionism very much in mind... these works are irreverent, energetic, alternately minimalist and excessive. Above all, they’re full of pleasure. They’re here, they’re queer, get hip with it.’

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It would be easy to equate this visual polari with postmodernism, and the two overlap to a degree. However, visual polari’s use of camp means that rather than simply assimilate from heterosexual (mainstream) society, truly queer work doesn’t merely collect and reflect, but provides an ‘aggressive, queer critique of heteronormativity’. As Andy Medhurst, rather defiantly and slightly defensively, puts it, ‘[i]t’s ours, all ours, just ours, and the time has come to bring it back home.’

Suzanne Moore has said that she has begun ‘to see postmodernism as camp for straight, middle-class people’ and that camp ‘which is meant to be a way to survive, [has been] commodified, becom[ing] just another signifier of knowingness, no longer a radical aesthetic at all’. This interplay between camp’s queer adaptation of heterosexuality into camp and heterosexuality’s re-adoption of camp into straight postmodernism shows the difficulty of isolating and identifying a uniquely queer aesthetic. Moe Meyer, in The Politics and Poetics of Camp, argues that this sublation, or “appropriation” by the hegemonic, heteronormative culture… removes the critical and subversive sting of Camp as a Queer practice.

Moore’s conflation of camp with postmodernism fails to take into account ‘the degree to which [for LGBT individuals] the erasure of the gap between construction and experience is less naturalised than with many other human categories (notably race, gender and, supremely, heterosexuality) and thus [their] high degree of awareness of that gap’. It could be argued as drag parodies gender (appropriation as mask), camp parodies the performance of difference traditionally expected of queers by heterosexuality, making it a differentiating device that could never be quite integrated into a majority position. As David Macy observes, ‘Gays had to do more than assert an

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195 Moore, “No Better Than They Ought To Be,” 22.
identity; they had to create it,’ (Rogers’ emphasis). The aspect of camp which is lost on Moore, is that while ‘postmodern aesthetics can easily be confused with camp… camp grows from a specific cultural identity, [whereas] postmodern discourses peddle the arrogant fiction that specific cultural identities have ceased to exist.’ Camp is at heart both a political and aesthetic strategy.

The dividing line between postmodernism and camp is indeed a fine one. Instead of pretending to an authoritative originality, both camp and postmodernism ‘concentrated on the way images and symbols (‘signifiers’) shift or lose their meaning when put in different contexts (‘appropriated’), revealing (‘deconstructing’) the processes by which meaning is constructed’. Two ceramic works that use camp and visual polari in order to signify queer cultural identity will now be considered.

The intersection between queer and contemporary ceramics is less discussed that that between queer and textiles. This may be partly because using ceramics is currently seen as less gendered than working with textiles. Paul Mathieu, discussing artists’ adoption of clay, has written:

social exclusion due to sexual orientation might have played a role in their choice of the medium of ceramics too. The position of ceramics as a marginalised practice certainly influenced my choice as an artist. This marginalisation created a parallel with my own burgeoning sexuality and how it was perceived socially. I identified with the marginalisation of ceramics because I felt socially excluded in other ways. This might have been the case for many others as well, and might partly explain the large number of gay and lesbian artists working with clay…

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What interests me more than clay’s marginal position is its ubiquity in archaeological digs, which are then, in turn, used as ways of understanding historical societies. Unlike the textiles in *The Problems with History*, which can be endlessly altered, clay, once fired, becomes ceramic and is permanently changed, producing an identity that cannot alter. For this reason, Mathieu has called it ‘an archival material, [a] witness to and evidence of our time’.\(^{203}\)

*BlueBoy* can be seen as precious, both intrinsically as a breakable ceramic object and also in the main figure’s ‘performative gestures’.\(^{204}\) It thereby activates both the negative and positive associations of the word. The work adopts what Jim Mooney, drawing on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, describes as a rhizomatic model involving connections between semiotic chains of signification in which ‘the work of art is a gathering and ordering, (a re-articulation) of the gatherings, producing new matrices, new bodies, new conjunctions of semiotic chains’.\(^{205}\) This appropriation technique provides queer artists with ‘challenging, even confrontational, ways of subverting mainstream culture and inserting their own odd, even perverse perspectives on a largely unsuspecting and often unsuspicious public’.\(^{206}\) According to Mathieu, this appropriation technique also has the ability to queer the object:

this “queerness” is not only based on content (gay iconography, sexual innuendoes, phallic forms, etc.) although at times it is one of the strategies employed. But it also, and more importantly, makes use of queer concepts, such as humour and camp, inversion, and reversal, excess and extremes, in an irreverent attitude to conventions and social prescriptions, a subversive approach to systems. Furthermore, the use of juxtaposition queerly challenges and contests both accepted codes and a

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\(^{204}\) Metcalf, *Camp Fires*, 7.


\(^{206}\) Cooper, *Queer Spectacles*, 14.
system of clues that implies oppression and silencing, not only within sexuality but also within cultural institutions.207

Figure 2.6 Matt Smith, *BlueBoy*, 2013, cast white earthenware with cobalt carbonate and glaze, 35cm high.

207 Mathieu, *Sexpots*, 132.
This juxtaposition of casts of ready-mades, ‘of appropriation and collage as means of generating startling new meanings’ cannot quite live up to its source material. Jorunn Veitberg has suggested that making a mould instead of using objects directly, produces ‘a distancing, stylistic effect. It can also be seen as a way of venerating the objects.’ On drying, clay shrinks and therefore each part of this camp composite is marginally reduced from its original, a pathos that would not be lost on camp. Camp, says Sontag (in Note 45), is ‘Dandyism in the age of mass culture.’ In BlueBoy, the replica of a mass-manufactured figurine of a dandy demonstrates:

the cruising style that has come to be known as “stand-and-pose” – a decidedly self-contained form of cruising that telegraphs something like: “I am indicating that I want you only to the extent that I am showing how desirable I am by demonstrating that I am capable of complete indifference to you”.

This swishy pose ensures that the work demonstrates what Dyer calls, the ‘two different interpretations’ of camp ‘which connect at certain points: camping about, mincing and screaming; and a certain taste in art and entertainment, a certain sensibility’.

The associations between queer and both Gainsborough and blue and white ceramics have been discussed earlier. In BlueBoy, a ceramic, slipcast replica of Gainsborough’s subject is joined when wet with two other heads to form a phallic trio which is decorated with casts of ormolu decoration and mounted onto a horn of plenty. The fusing of high and low cultural references mirrors what Sontag described as camp’s ‘unsettling of hierarchies [which] enabled new appreciations of underrated popular forms and advocated an arch scepticism towards established cultural canons’. In addition to the hierarchies of

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208 Metcalf, Camp Fires, 7.
209 Veitberg, Craft in Transition, 68.
210 Metcalf, Camp Fires, 12.
212 Dyer, The Culture of Queers, 49.
213 Dyer, The Culture of Queers, 49.
sculpture and decorative art, the work also addresses the hierarchy between fine art (the subject matter) and craft (the material). BlueBoy uses visual polari’s amalgamation of queer-coded references, re-appropriation from other sources and subversion of hierarchies, bringing them together in a phallic visual form.

Pillar of Masculinity adopts a similar strategy to BlueBoy. Overfired, the base has collapsed in on itself and the central column bends forwards. Creating a slightly pathetic parody of a sporting trophy, it addresses ‘camp’s adoption of the feminine as a way of being free of the masculine’. The small dandy on the top of the work stands in contrast to the usual figures of sporting winners, and brings us back to the notion of failure as a queer methodology. Both these pieces adopt and subvert existing material, and by creating new associations, start to erase their original ‘legitimating metanarratives’ and for legitimating, read “heteronormative”.

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Figure 2.7  Matt Smith, *Pillar of Masculinity*, 2013, cast white earthenware with cobalt carbonate and glaze, 51cm high.
2.5 Conclusion

While there can be no unifying definition of either queer sexuality or queer aesthetic sensibility and content, since these discourses are ‘active, multi-faceted and evolving’,\(^\text{217}\) this does not mean that queer objects do not exist. Although any investigations of queer objects, as already mentioned, can only be partial, temporal and specific to the investigator, ‘culture plays an active role in constructing identities’\(^\text{218}\) and material culture has a part to play. For Foucault, ‘power lies at the root of the gaze’\(^\text{219}\) and so to question hierarchies and normalise power structures, we need to be clear whose gaze is privileged and exactly what they are seeing. The fleeting and tenuous links between objects and their queer owners has been demonstrated by the oak chair, formerly owned by Robert Mapplethorpe. In Chapter 5, on historic houses, we will explore how collections can be brought together to form queer environments. However, to address the overwhelming force of heteronormativity, queer associations with individual objects need to be identified and recorded.

Notions of camp can feel dated, possibly since the need for coding, hiding and connotation has decreased in some Western societies as tolerance towards queer individuals has increased. It will be interesting to see whether this will, in time, negate the need for ‘euphemisms… mimicry: innuendo and inversion [as] …a distinctive [queer] aesthetic’\(^\text{220}\) and whether alternative visual strategies will take their place. That queer aesthetics should be subject to change is unsurprising, since, according to Stuart Hall, identity is a “production” which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.\(^\text{221}\)

While it is beyond the scope of this research, “[s]exuality is just one of the marginalising aspects of someone’s life – so is gender, class ethnicity, and

\(^{217}\) Larsen, “Boys with Needles,” 8.
\(^{219}\) Evans and Gamman, The Gaze Revisited, or Reviewing Queer Viewing, 21.
race. So to solely look under the prism of queerness negates other
difference. It may be argued that techniques identified here as queer (verb)
to consider queer (noun) could potentially be adopted to consider other
marginalising differences. In doing so, queer problematises memory, or what
Foucault called the “ritual of power” [which] selects what is important (the
histories of triumph) [and] reads a continuous narrative into one full of ruptures
and contradictions. Queering, in contrast, celebrates these very ruptures and
contradictions: ‘Almost intrinsic to queer culture is that it is fleeting and
unpredictable, it… must exist in the cracks and the rips. This concept is
explored by Butler in “Agencies of Style for a Liminal Subject” where she
discusses the use of style by those liminal groups sacrificed to maintain
coherence within ‘the category of the human’ as both a sign of their exclusion
and a mode of survival.

‘The political significance of an artist’s work is never given once and for all; it
does not have a fixed ontological status but is reaffirmed, fought over, ascribed
new meaning in new contexts, encounters and exhibitions. It is therefore
relevant that in the next chapter we explore how different curators have used
the idea of queer in exhibition development. While this is unlikely to drill down
into the specifics of any one object and its queer associations, it holds the
potential to start exploring queer visual methodologies and groupings which
operate in a manner other than through written or spoken language.

222 Evans and Gamman, The Gaze Revisited, or Reviewing Queer Viewing, 39.
223 Halberstam, The Queer Art of Failure, 15
225 Judith Butler, “Agencies of Style for a Liminal Subject,” Without Guarantees: In Honour of
Stuart Hall, ed. Paul Gilroy, Lawrence Grossberg and Angela McRobbie (London and New
13.
3 Queer Curating

The linking of two words – queer and curating – opens up many possibilities and so it is unsurprising that different curators have explored their intersection in various ways. In 2012, I helped Lara Perry programme and deliver a conference at Tate Modern called *Civil Partnerships? Queer and Feminist Curating*. The different approaches to curating taken by the speakers started to explore the breadth of possibilities that queer curatorial strategies could engage.

This chapter can only be a partial exploration of the area that can be broadly split into three main, non-exclusive areas, namely curating work by artists who self-identify as queer; curating work that queers exhibition spaces; and curating work that is deemed to have a queer sensibility.

This chapter surveys how each of these strategies have been manifested using key case studies. Owing to the paucity of queer exhibitions in general, and queer craft exhibitions in particular, the research in this chapter has been opened out to look at queer art exhibitions. Since the exhibitions have happened over the last 30 years, the ways in which they talk about identity varies and, wherever possible, their choice of terminology will be used.

All of the exhibitions are described based on extant documentation, usually the exhibition catalogues produced by the venues. While these provide a very different experience from seeing the exhibitions in person, time and geography mean that there is no other way of tackling the subject.
3.1 Curating work by artists who self-identify or are identified as queer

Possibly the most obvious starting point when discussing queer curating would be to use the identity of the artist as the starting point, to curate an exhibition of works by makers who identify as queer or more usually referred to as gay artists and lesbian artists. Since queer is a contested term, deciding who to include or exclude will be open to debate and it is interesting to see how different curators have negotiated this terrain. The three exhibitions selected to discuss these issues are *Hidden Histories* (New Art Gallery, Walsall, 2004), *Das achte Feld/The Eight Square: Gender, Life, and Desire in the Arts since 1960* (Museum Ludwig, Cologne, 2006) and *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* (National Portrait Gallery Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, 2010).

In 2004, Michael Petry curated *Hidden Histories* at the New Art Gallery in Walsall. The catalogue that accompanied this survey exhibition of work by men who had male lovers starts with the pertinent questions:

> Do artists who are same sex lovers have anything in common besides their sexual desire? How does gender preference impact the way work is made? Is art by same sex lovers as diverse as that of the heterosexual majority? What is the importance of documenting same sex history?  

Petry does not try and link the works through any other overarching themes, arguing that the works are as ‘diverse as the men who made them’. He also argues that in no way is he trying to ‘out’ any of the artists, since the information about their sex lives is already in the public domain. However, he adds that ‘[r]eaders may be surprised at the inclusion of so many prominent and pivotal artists.’ So while he is not breaking new news, he does acknowledge that this will be news for many readers. Here he shares similar territory with Jonathan D. Katz – whose exhibition *Hide/Seek* is discussed later. Petry has provided revisionist histories of key artists including Jasper Johns and Robert

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Rauschenburg, highlighting their relationship which is often discounted by exhibition venues that privilege information about Rauschenburg’s marriage.\textsuperscript{231}

Petry suggests that, unlike sex or race, other traits that have/are on occasions treated prejudicially by the dominant, same-sex desire can often be hidden. While the idea that sex and race can never be hidden is arguable in some situations, there is a core truth here. An artist’s name, will often give information about their sex and sometimes their race, but not their sexuality. So unless curators actively include that information or the artists specifically address same-sex desire visually in their work, a heteronormative filter is placed over the art. Therefore avoiding the mention of minority sexuality effectively erases it. Flipping this from a negative to a positive, the reading of many works of art becomes much richer when the (in this case queer) context is known. For example, Petry reinterprets Jasper John’s \textit{Target} works in light of the entrapment stings at the time by police in America on men seeking sex with other men in public toilets.\textsuperscript{232}

Petry unpicks the many ways in which ‘institutional homophobia\textsuperscript{233} and academic and curatorial bias\textsuperscript{234} often privilege information about heterosexuality and hide details of same-sex activity, especially when dealing with nationally important artists. He also explores the different levels of historical evidence required to assume heterosexuality or homosexuality.\textsuperscript{235}

Petry argues, ‘It is not this text’s contention that there is a gay aesthetic.’\textsuperscript{236} He talks about his desire to write a historical narrative and so move ‘homosexual history’ from an oral, horizontal history to a written, vertical one and ‘in doing so, previously hidden codes and meanings in social and artistic practice can be made decipherable to the general viewer.’\textsuperscript{237} I would argue that these codes and meanings could be seen as the basis for a queer sensibility. However, Petry takes his argument against any overarching queer aesthetic further, stating that:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{231} Petry, \textit{Hidden Histories}, 23.
\item \textsuperscript{232} Petry, \textit{Hidden Histories}, 17.
\item \textsuperscript{233} Petry, \textit{Hidden Histories}, 35.
\item \textsuperscript{234} Petry, \textit{Hidden Histories}, 36.
\item \textsuperscript{235} Petry, \textit{Hidden Histories}, 41.
\item \textsuperscript{236} Petry, \textit{Hidden Histories}, 7.
\item \textsuperscript{237} Petry, \textit{Hidden Histories}, 49.
\end{itemize}
The twentieth century will not be seen to have engendered a queer aesthetic or a gay style. Everything from figurative to performance art exists within the work of same sex lovers. No school ties them together… Just as there is no overriding theme to/of heterosexuality, so there is no homosexual one. What has been missing is their hidden history.²³⁸

If we were searching for a queer aesthetic methodology from this exhibition, it might focus around the themes of visibility, invisibility and coding. It is interesting to compare this statement with the way in which Museum Ludwig in Cologne structured its beautifully titled 2006 exhibition, The Eight Square: Gender, Life and Desire in the Arts since 1960. Under the rules of chess, when a pawn reaches the eight square it can transform into a queen:

This not only means a change of gender, but also grants him greater freedom of movement, more influence, and more power. The normal situation is turned on its head, so that the weak male becomes a powerful female, the loser becomes the winner. But it is no secret that when seasoned chess players face one another, the pawn almost never reaches the other side of the board. Sadly, reality rarely permits such miraculous changes.²³⁹

The exhibition is introduced in the catalogue as:

a comprehensive exhibition of artistic approaches since 1960 to highlight the various aspects of sexual desire and sexual liberation. The initial catalyst for this was an issue of the art journal Kunstforum International edited by Heinz-Norbert Jocks, and dedicated to the ‘homo-erotic eye’ in contemporary art. The issue inspired the curators to take a closer look at artistic inquiries into the complications of gender and the varieties of sexual transformation and divergence, and to bring together a broad range of approaches.²⁴⁰

While the curators are not arguing for a singular queer aesthetic, they are implying that works can be grouped into queer aesthetic approaches. The

²³⁸ Petry, Hidden Histories, 66.
poetic sensibility of the exhibition title is taken through into the exhibition structure. From the entrance hall ‘two different routes take the visitor in two opposite directions: to either the world of gender relations, or to the manifold forms of desire’. These two routes split the works up into nine separate sections.

Establishing identity through signs, ‘with works that operate with sigils, typographies, pictograms, diagrams, repeating patterns, schemata and scribble that focus on sexual desire by emblematic means’. Female to Male to Female features art in which the artists have explored ‘the pleasures of masquerade and slipped under the skin of the other sex’. Sexy Machismo explores work by artists who take a critical stance towards patriarchal conventions. Accursed Worlds features hybrid creatures, mutations between human and beast. Transsexuality features mainly photographic portraits of individuals who confuse the sex binaries with work by Del LaGrace Volcano, Catherine Opie and Annette Frick, with writing by Judith Butler. Identity and Portrait, which, in addition to work by Nan Golding, David Hockney and Robert Mapplethorpe, features The Fae Richards Photo Archive (1996) by Zoe Leonard and Cheryl Dunye. This presents a fictional photo archive of a black, lesbian movie actress and nightclub singer. I will compare this with Fred Wilson’s An Invisible Life, a collection that looks at another queer person of colour, later in this chapter. Outsiders, Discrimination, AIDS contrasts the role of the artist as an outsider with their assertion that when ‘gay artists produced gay art… that reduced them in the eyes of many to mere artisans producing for shunned minorities’.

The exhibition has two potential end points, described in the catalogue as No finale, but instead two ends. They are Places of Desire – Cruising, which explores spaces where people pick each other up and Friendship Gallery, which explores artist collaborations and is also where “[t]he eighth square is

244 Wagner, “The Eight Square,” 33.
visualised”\textsuperscript{245} using Wolfgang Tillmans’ photographs to produce a ‘Garden of Earthly Delights’.\textsuperscript{246}

While on one level, the exhibition performs as a survey show (albeit for a wider group of identities and a shorter timespan than \textit{Hidden Histories}), the non-linear progression of the exhibition and the overlapping, non-exclusive exhibition area titles allow for the multiplicities and contradictions inherent in such a wide-ranging subject area to come to the fore. Taking a broader, less essential approach to sexual identity, the exhibition places work by mainly queer makers, with ‘queer work’ by makers who would not necessarily self-identify as queer (including Matthew Barney and Louise Bourgeois). The exhibition catalogue also features essays by writers including Judith Butler (“Transgender and the Spirit of Revolt”) that places queer visual art in its broader cultural context (queer cinema, queer performance and queer appropriation in music) as well as exploring more methodological ideas in essays such as Julia Friedrich’s “Everything Doubled: Self-styling and Gender in Modern Art” and Eva Meyer’s “Orlando or the Idiosyncrasy of Sex.”

If we attempt to draw out non-figurative queer aesthetic strategies from \textit{The Eight Square}, we would again find the use of coded signs, but also masquerade and drag, the undermining of patriarchy, hybridity and boundary transgression and the creation and re-appropriation of archive material to create missing queer histories.

The final exhibition that will be considered in this section is \textit{Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture}. Curated by Jonathan D. Katz and David C. Ward, the exhibition opened at the National Portrait Gallery at the Smithsonian Institution in 2010 before touring to the Brooklyn Museum and the Tacoma Art Museum in 2012.

The catalogue features works dating from 1891 until 2005 incorporating a wide definition of portraiture including Warhol’s image \textit{Truman Capote’s Shoe} and Robert Rauschenberg’s \textit{Canto XIV (from XXXIV Drawings from Dante’s Inferno, including KAR)} and featuring ‘straight artists representing gay figures, gay artists representing straight figures, gay artists representing gay figures, and

\textsuperscript{245} Wagner, “The Eight Square,” 39.
\textsuperscript{246} Wagner, “The Eight Square,” 39.
even straight artists representing straight figures (when of interest of gay people/culture)." In his foreword in the catalogue, Martin E. Sullivan, the director of the gallery, bills the exhibition as ‘the first major museum exhibition to chart the influence of gay and lesbian artists on modern American portraiture. Not just a chronicle of a prominent subculture, *Hide/Seek* reconsiders neglected dimensions of American art."

Katz, in his catalogue essay, uses the images to map a social and political narrative of same-sex desire from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. The exhibition title plays with the visibility and invisibility of queer lives, and Katz has developed a back catalogue of interrogating key artworks from the canon for queer signifiers which he backs up with biographical information about the artists, particularly relating to the word of Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. Katz writes:

> While we have tried to represent a diverse group of artists, our emphasis on canonical figures has worked against our desire for inclusivity. Even today, the art world is too often closed to women and ethnic and racial minorities; in the past, that tendency was amplified. While we could have chosen to focus on a more diverse group of artists, our goal has been to address the role of sexual difference within the American mainstream, both as a means of underscoring the hypocrisy of the current post-Mapplethorpe anxiety about referencing same-sex desire in the museum world and toward scrutinizing the widely held but utterly unsupportable assumption that same-sex desire is at best tangential to the history of American art."

This raises a difficult issue that Maura Reilly brought up at the *Civil Partnerships? Queer and Feminist Curating* conference at Tate Modern in 2012. While Katz provides a ‘revisionist approach to queer representation… only 25%

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of the artists are women’. In fact Maura was being generous, a survey of the plates in the catalogue shows that 22% of works by a single artist are by women (78% by male artists) and of the works showing solely male or female subjects, only 21.6% are of female subjects (with 78.4% depicting men). While no exhibition can be everything to everyone, and it is certainly not my intention to undermine the curators of these shows or to argue that all exhibitions should exactly represent the demographics of society. However, basing the exhibition so strongly on the canon that a patriarchal art world has decided should represent America could be seen to reinforce gender, race and class disparities.

Gender imparity aside, both the exhibition title and Katz’s catalogue essay underscore the play of the visible and invisible by gay men and lesbians, presenting:

> a dynamic familiar to a subculture long used to employing protective camouflage, while at the same time searching for tiny signs, clues, or signals that might reveal the presence of other queer people. From a glance held a little too long, to the cut of hair or dress, to manners and tastes undetectable to the uninitiated, queer people have long used a superficial conformity to camouflage instrumental differences legible only to those who know where and how to look. And there is often no better form of social camouflage than the refusal of camouflage… This book seeks to turn such seeing into noticing.

This public/private dichotomy threads through both Katz’s essay and also the chronological chapters written by David C. Ward (“Before Difference, 1870–1918”, “New Geographies/New Identities”, “Abstraction”, “Postwar America: Accommodation and Resistance”, “Stonewall and More Modern Identities” and “Postmodernism”).

Tracing the theme of coding starts with Marsden Hartley’s *Painting No. 47, Berlin* (1914–15), which uses abstracted and symbolic visual references to produce a portrait of Hartley’s dead lover. Katz argues that this painting provides ‘a landmark instance of what would become a leitmotif in the

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development of queer American portraiture: the self-conscious creation of a bifurcated pictorial language, at once public and private. The catalogue follows onto the post-abstract artists Rauschenberg and Johns who ‘cultivated a self-portraiture that was all mediation, its imagery appropriated from mass culture and during:

the extraordinary persecutions of the Lavender Scare era, wherein queers were psychoanalyzed, ostracized, incarcerated, and repeatedly blamed for a host of social ills that were very far from anything to do with same-sex desire, it was patently clear that gay people did not have the privilege of defining themselves. In short order, the inauthentic trumped the authentic as the defining mode of portraiture, and the postmodernist portrait was born.

This use of the inauthentic led to appropriation, whether it be Mapplethorpe’s ‘aggressive appropriation of traditional photography, the domestic interior, the patriarchal posing – for other purposes… [which enabled his work] to look both conservative and defiant at the same time, making it, at the very least, harder to dismiss as “merely” political or for ‘lesbian artists whose chief constraint was often not the political ramifications of making a statement, but an art world that proved uninterested in a female, and especially lesbian, presence itself, the appropriation and subversion of dominant masculine narratives offered a tempting target.’

Postmodernism is therefore linked to work by gay men and lesbians seeking the inauthentic and to subvert masculinity respectively. David Ward defines postmodernism as ‘a peculiarly elusive category whose very slipperiness reflects our groping attempts at defining the society in which we live now’. He goes on to describe postmodernism as ‘an exasperating term [which] does not define the thing itself but is indeterminate… But the fact that it cannot be defined precisely captures its essence: it means and has meant different things

to different people at different conceptual levels.\textsuperscript{258} This slippery elusive nature has much in common with queer theory. Coming after, and rejecting modernism, "[p]ostmodernism entails a self-conscious rejection of modernism itself; a severing of the presumed equivalency between artist and artwork, so that the artwork became, in Barthes' words, a "tissue of quotations".\textsuperscript{259} Ward argues that this severing between the maker and the artwork is a strategy that has appeal particularly to:

artists on the margin – women artists; artists of color; gay artists – in short, artists who have something to lose rather than gain by presenting their art and the heroic extension of their identity. This is particularly true for queer artists, who literally had something to lose by disclosing too much. Queer artists had a vested interest in creating cryptic and detached artworks that were able to address multiple audiences at the same time.\textsuperscript{260}

This neatly conflates marginal status, appropriation, postmodernism and subversion of patriarchal norms. I will now look at this subversion of norms.

\textsuperscript{258} Ward, “Postmodernism,” 231.  
\textsuperscript{259} Ward, “Postmodernism,” 232.  
\textsuperscript{260} Ward, “Postmodernism,” 232.
3.2 Curating work that ‘queers’ an exhibition space

In her article, *The Curatorial Paradigm*, Dorothea von Hantelmann asserts that:

the exhibition’s most important cultural accomplishment was the constitution of a site in which basic categories of modern societies are enacted and exercised. Museums and exhibitions introduced a ritual that fulfils precise functions in modern Western societies: it addresses the individual citizen (where theatre, as another cultural format, addressed a collective); it placed the individual in relation to a material object (in an increasingly industrialized society that derives its wealth and identity from a manufactured object-world); and it immerses both the individual and the object into a narration of linear time, progress and development.261

The work of Fred Wilson, Glenn Ligon and Jo Darbyshire explore what happens when that narrative of linear time, progress and development excludes an artist’s history and how by adopting different methodologies on the intersection between artistic and curatorial practice, artists can help the museum or gallery begin to redress those omissions.

The role of the curator as an auteur has increased in significance in Western society in recent years and over the last few decades has come to be seen as a creative activity. Von Hantelmann262 argues that this change has come about as the art historical canon’s authority and objectivity has become increasingly questioned. Until this happened, ‘the exhibition did not play itself into the foreground’263 and it was only when the curator emerged as a figure who ‘selects exemplarily, who is constituted in choosing (particular works of art, discursive positions, aesthetic acts, et cetera), and above all in whom consumption is manifested not only as a receptive capacity, but as a productive and generative force’264 that curating as an art practice began to be recognised.

In 2003, Jo Darbyshire conflated lesbian and gay lives with a queering of the Western Australian Museum in Perth in the exhibition called *The Gay Museum*. In the e-catalogue to the exhibition, Darbyshire writes that the exhibition aimed

not only to redress the lack of representation but to also overcome the lack of
objects in the collection that represented lesbian and gay lives, as she
succinctly puts it: ‘On the face of it lesbian and gay people had no history.’

Darbyshire linked oral histories that she had gathered with quotes from the
media and objects from the collections to set up resonances between them. For
example, an interview about the destruction of records from an LGBT
organisation is juxtaposed with a shame-faced crab, while a statement about
lesbianism at the start of the 20th century is shown with a contemporaneous
silver locket containing two female portraits.

Darbyshire advocated the need for this breaking of the museum conventions to
open up ‘new meanings and ideas… exploring other ways objects can be
interpreted when displayed’ and suggested that artists with their ‘training in
lateral thinking and the skill of “looking”’ have the potential to see alternative
content and meaning in objects, which is required if gaps in collections are to be
(temporarily) filled. Rather than focusing responsibility on the institution or
curator to explain this lack of objects, Darbyshire looks at the reasons lesbian
and gay men did not keep a record of their lives:

the gaps in the knowledge, the collusion to keep quiet, the eradication of
knowledge or memory, self-censorship and the fear of exposure in the
lesbian and gay community were heartbreakingly apparent. For many
people, safety lay in the eradication of all evidence of difference. Many
things… that signal significant moments in our history were just too
dangerous to keep. Researcher Reece Plunkett suggests that these
actions are evidence that gay and lesbian people have had a
fundamentally different experience of history.

A fundamentally different experience of history is not something that is only
experienced by lesbians and gay men. Much work has been done by artists of
colour to bring these revisionist histories to light. In the UK, notable work has

268 Reece Plunkett, “History, Sexuality, Western Australia,” conference paper, *Homosexual
been done with collections by Keith Piper; while in the States, Fred Wilson has continually reinterpreted collections, most notably those at the Maryland Historical Society in the *Mining the Museum* exhibition in 1992. In 1993, a year after *Mining the Museum*, Wilson worked with Capp Street Project in San Francisco on an exhibition *An Invisible Life: A View into the World of a 120 Year Old Man*. Unlike *Mining the Museum*, which had seen Wilson take existing objects from a collection and reframe, juxtapose and edit them to tell a previously neglected history (of African and Native Americans), the Capp Street Project explored the eradication of knowledge in another way. It juxtaposed found objects to materially represent a fictional life. The intervention took place in Haas-Lilienthal House, a historic house that had been restored to its Victorian style. The intervention recreated the life of its fictional former inhabitant, Baldwin Antinous Stein. Baldwin was born in the Caribbean before travelling the world, becoming friends with Eadweard Muybridge and acquainted with Marcel Proust in Paris. In addition to sound recordings, and a silent video piece placed inside the bedroom closet, objects belonging to Stein were placed around the house:

On the second floor of the house, in the library and bedrooms, hundreds of photographs – portraits of men of different ethnicities – cluttered the shelves and table tops. There were pictures from the turn of the century of sailors, athletes, gentlemen in business suits, and other men lounging outdoors. The house was also filled with memorabilia, statuettes of men wrestling, and other art objects from around the world. Books sitting on table tops, such as *Love in Ancient Greece* (1962), *Of Human Bondage* (1915), *Nijinsky* (1993) and *Proust and the Art of Love* (1980).269

The intervention worked on a number of levels. At the end of a tour of the house, most visitors were surprised to find out that Stein was not a real person270 even though Wilson had encouraged the docents to alert visitors to ‘faux finishes’ and ‘hidden’ architectural details in the house. This shows how visitors ‘invest museums and their docents with an unquestioned authority’.271 The intervention also showed how collections of objects allow observant visitors

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271 González, “Against the Grain,” 147.
to piece together the ‘evidence of Stein’s gay desire’. While Stein’s sexuality was never explicitly referred to, the process of sifting through material culture and amassing evidence of shared minority cultural references is called into play as these objects allow a silenced, queer identity to become evident. In this way, An Invisible Life allowed Wilson to illustrate ‘the degree to which life histories of men like Stein – educated, cosmopolitan, gay men of the last century – have generally been rendered invisible’. Material culture here makes visible a difference that is bodily invisible.

A similar process happens at the Geffrye Museum of the Home in London, where the Loft-style Apartment, 1998 features a Balzac chair from Heal’s and a copy of Wallpaper*. The Judy Garland biography on the bookshelf tips the balance of probability for the observant visitor that this is probably the apartment of a gay man.

This strategy of creating fictional lives, standing in for actual lives that were not permitted entry to the archives, was also used by Zoe Leonard and Cheryl Dunye in The Fae Richards Photo Archive (1996), which documents the life of a (fictional) black movie actress and nightclub singer using 82 photographs showing her in film roles and in private shots with female friends and with her partner. The work, which Dunye developed into a film of Richards’ life – The Watermelon Woman – provides a record of a life that would exclude the archive on two counts, as a lesbian and also as a black actress living at a time when ‘[b]lack actors were not even mentioned in the credits of American films… because their white colleagues would never have tolerated it.’

Even when marginalised identities become part of the art canon, there are still questions to be answered about whose voice is being heard, a question tackled head-on by Glenn Ligon in Notes on the Margin of the Black Book (1991–1993). Robert Mapplethorpe’s Black Book (1986) features 91 photographs of mainly nude black men in fetishistic poses. The work had been controversial: both black and white writers had been critical of the photographs as objectifying

272 González, “Against the Grain,” 147.
273 González, “Against the Grain,” 147.
black male bodies, and more generally, when right-wing attacks on Mapplethorpe’s 1988 survey exhibition, The Perfect Moment and its public funding by the National Endowment for the Arts, led to the show being cancelled at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington DC.

Ligon, who is black and gay, describes his first encounter with the images in the Black Book as ‘very disturbing’ and started asking himself ‘if those photographs were racist’. Realising that the question was too limiting and that the subject was more complicated, and also wanting to remove the personal from the enquiry, Ligon sourced newspaper articles about the scandal and books both praising and critiquing the work. The final piece comprises a row of the 91 Mapplethorpe images, double hung, with 78 texts (also double hung) between them. These texts, adopting the visual language of museum object labels, contain comments about the work ranging from art historians, Mapplethorpe himself, pro- and anti-gay campaigners to a personal ad reading ‘Me: black, 5’8”, 32 years old, huge, huge dick, long and thick, seeks bottoms who can’t get enough of my funky stuff’. In addition to using secondary information, Ligon took the book to a bar, Sound Factory, and collected responses to the work between dancing.

The small physical size of the texts ensures that viewers have to come up close to the texts to read them and thereby become intimately involved with the work. The plurality of the responses and their sheer diversity opens out the questions raised by the Black Book and moves its interpretation away the usual didactic, anonymous institutional labelling into a world of contradiction, conflicting contexts and plurality. With issues this personal about identity and representation, Ligon provides a methodology and a space to allow a rounded discourse to take place, and queers the traditional curatorial interpretation techniques.

278 Rothkopf, “Glenn Ligon,” 34.
3.3 Curating work deemed to have a queer sensibility

As was previously mentioned, unlike race or sex which may be indicated via the artist’s name, or visually in images of the artist, sexuality seldom is. This would indicate that we are reliant on three things if we wanted to know whether a work might contribute to a ‘queer canon’: existing knowledge about the artist; curator-provided information about the artist or the work explaining its relevance to queer; or portrayal of queer lives in the work.

Photography by artists including Del LaGrace Volcano, Nan Goldin and Wolfgang Tillmans have ensured the visibility of queer lives in contemporary art. However, this section explores works that identify queer art in a fourth way: through a queer sensibility. This is a slippery area that is open to disagreement and contest. Reading a queer sensibility requires cultural knowledge and intertextual readings. In this way, it could be argued that queer sensibility works as a visual polari, a coded message of kinship, allowing others to read a queer resonance in a work. Any reading of sensibility will be culturally, geographically and temporally specific. The boundaries between any given subject or visual methodology being queer or not queer will be permeable and open to debate.

Over the last 30 years there have been a number of attempts to curate shows around queer sensibility. This section will explore how the curators have tried to categorise these shows and illustrate how, as identity politics have altered, so too have the curatorial strategies.

The first case study is Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art, which was guest curated by Daniel J. Cameron at the New Museum in New York in 1982 and featured work by 19 artists. Table 3.1 lists the artists, their genders and the type of work displayed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artists</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Type of Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charley Brown</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Collage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott Burton</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Performance with furniture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig Carver</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Acrylic on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arch Connelly</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Paste jewels and mixed media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet Cooling</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Acrylic on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betsy Damon</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Drawing on paper, documentation of performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy Fried</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Clay and acrylic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jedd Garet</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Acrylic on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilbert and George</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Photosculpture and documentation of performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee Gordon</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Oil on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmony Hammond</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Textile sculpture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Henninger</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Soft sculpture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry Janosco</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Ceramic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lili Lakich</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Neon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Les Petites Bonbons</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Documentation of performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ross Paxton</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Acrylic on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jody Pinto</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mixed media 2D and 3D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carla Tardi</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Oil on wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fran Winant</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Acrylic on canvas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 Artists, gender and material, in *Extended Sensibilities*

Cameron splits ‘Homosexual Content’ into three main categories: ‘Homosexual Subject Matter’ comprised cultural material about homosexuals aimed mainly at a straight audience; ‘Ghetto Content …as the name suggests, the artist and audience are both gay’; and ‘Sensibility Content [which] has occurred as a cultural synthesis of the first two. Neither intended for a limited audience of gays, nor an attempt to market a destigmatized version of homosexuality to a larger group, Sensibility Content is work which is created from personal experience of homosexuality which need not have anything to do with sexuality or even lifestyle.’

*Extended Sensibilities* moved away from fixed essential ideas of identity towards visual languages and interests. Unsurprisingly, the exhibition was very

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280 Cameron, “Sensibility as Content,” 7.
281 Cameron, “Sensibility as Content,” 7.
282 Cameron, “Sensibility as Content,” 7–8.
mixed and trying to put an overarching summary on it is near impossible. However, a number of things are worth noting. In addition to a large amount of figurative imagery, works which could be associated with craft formed a relatively large amount of the show. These ranged from Harmony Hammond’s soft sculptures, Jerry Janosco’s composite and re-appropriated ceramics, John Henninger’s satin cruising figures, Nancy Fried’s elaborate acrylic and clay sculptures and Arch Connelly’s papier mâché and paste jewel sculptures, with the latter four sharing an unabashed camp aesthetic.

The curator, Cameron, recalled that ‘nearly every out or closeted gay art world professional… assured me that it would be difficult, verging on impossible, to get a serious art world gig after doing this project’. However these views were unfounded, since Cameron went on to become Senior Curator at the New Museum and then Chief Curator at the Orange County Museum of Art.

The exhibition’s premise was criticised by the self-identified gay artist Nicholas Moufarrege in Arts magazine who wrote, ‘[w]e are faced with artists who happen to be homosexual rather than a particular homosexual aesthetic… it would be frightening to see the work of these artists, and others, stereotyped as homosexual, for they are artists “before” they are homosexual’. In hindsight, what was a ground-breaking exhibition premise does to some extend fall down in the face of Moufarrege’s attack. While there was a tradition of lesbian art shows, there was a reluctance by gay male artists to show in the exhibition (Gilbert and George pulled out after the catalogue went to print, but a private collector lent work). Cameron’s arguments in the catalogue are not particularly backed up by the works in the exhibition and a lack of clear curatorial structure leaves the show looking like a group of works by ‘artists who happen to be homosexual’ rather than a visual representation of personal experience of homosexuality.

Gay sensibility would not be addressed in an exhibition again until 1995 when Lawrence Rinder and Nayland Blake curated In a Different Light at the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Rinder

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was interested in works that conveyed ‘gay and lesbian views of the world… [views that were] outward-looking, gregarious and socially concerned’.286 Blake shared ground with Petry and Katz, and was interested in ‘a cross-generational exhibition’,287 arguing that the art world is prone to cultural amnesia and that gay men and lesbians ‘have been especially susceptible to such forgetfulness because art with homosexual content – literal, metaphorical, or symbolic – has typically remained unidentified as such or has simply been excised from the histories’.288 Featuring a much wider pool of artists than Extended Sensibilities, and coming after the Whitney Biennale of 1993 which saw a strong focus on identity and multiculturalism, In a Different Light, created nine groups within the exhibition: Void, Self, Drag, Other, Couple, Family, Orgy, World and Utopia.

The use of the word ‘sensibility’ is very specific within the exhibition as Rinder explains:

The notion of “sensibility” that we have employed…is somewhat idiosyncratic. The groups are not based on aesthetic sensibility, but rather came together and are identified by social sensibility… The exhibition is thus structured in a fundamentally sociological rather than art historical manner. While aesthetic sensibilities as such are not a point of departure or structuring principle, such sensibilities certainly emerge in interesting ways throughout the exhibition.289

Rinder quotes Harmony Hammond’s experience of curating the 1978 A Lesbian Show when she found ‘not a distinctly lesbian aesthetic sensibility, but rather the revelation of a broad variety of shared thematic concerns including ‘issues of anger, guilt, hiding, secrecy, coming out, personal violence and political trust, self-empowerment, and the struggle to make oneself whole’.290

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286 Lawrence Rinder, “An Introduction to In a Different Light,” In a Different Light: Visual Culture, Sexual Identity, Queer Practice, ed. Nayland Blake, Lawrence Rinder and Amy Scholder (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1995) 2.
287 Rinder, “An Introduction to In a Different Light,” 2.
288 Rinder, “An Introduction to In a Different Light,” 2.
289 Rinder, “An Introduction to In a Different Light,” 4.
290 Rinder, “An Introduction to In a Different Light,” 4–5.
Rinder argues that if ‘identifiable gay or lesbian aesthetic styles or sensibility exist, they exist in multiplicity, and in complex intersection with mainstream art practice. They are emanations of complex, fluid sociological constructs, never simply gay or lesbian’\textsuperscript{291} and goes on to state that ‘gay or lesbian sensibilities – aesthetic or otherwise… are highly amorphous phenomena… and are not attached exclusively to people who have sex with people of the same sex’.\textsuperscript{292} Rinder therefore gets around some of the issues Cameron faced in attracting artists to take part in a homosexual exhibition: by removing the terms gay and lesbian from identity politics and sexual acts, the show had the potential to include work by non-gay artists whose practices met with the curator’s definitions of gay and lesbian sensibility.

Atkins, in his 1996 review of queer curating, states that ‘In \textit{In a Different Light}, homosexuality was out of favour; indirectness and irony, metaphor and perverse gesture, the dandyish and the coquettish, were in. (Blake dubbed overtly gay or lesbian imagery “essentialist” and “retrograde.”)\textsuperscript{293} Queer art and craft had relied on same sex imagery (and still does to a large extent) to mark its identity, and it is understandable why Blake wanted to get away from the act of sex and onto the cultural norms and shared experiences of queer individuals in the West.

There is a language change in the catalogue, from Rinder’s gay and lesbian to Blake’s queer. Blake (who like Ligon and Wilson identifies as both gay and black) defines the show as ‘a map of queer practice in the visual arts over the past thirty years. It is… incomplete and personal’.\textsuperscript{294} What is interesting about Blake’s catalogue essay is that in addition to the main categories in the exhibition, he identifies visual and narrative themes that run through the entire show, which form an underpinning of what queer visual sensibility might comprise (at least on the west coast of America in the mid-1990s). These themes included: postmodernism and the re-appropriation and manipulation of material by queer artists, the use of semiotic means to express queer tribal affiliations, the twin heritage of the fluxus and the punk movements, the

\textsuperscript{291} Rinder, “An Introduction to In a Different Light,” 5–6.
\textsuperscript{292} Rinder, “An Introduction to In a Different Light,” 6.
\textsuperscript{294} Blake, “Curating in a Different Light,” 11.
adoption, by queer artists, of the roles of curator, critic and historian, the use of craft materials and pre-modern rhetoric of sentiment, drag and the ability to 'pass', the flipping of serious issues into parody, self-mockery, black humour and failure.

Amy Scholder, in her catalogue essay for the exhibition, Writing in a Different Light, adds to Blake's list, including irony and camp, reading cultural works with a subversive gaze and the adoption of revisionary history. This provides queer with a two-pronged strategy: coupling artistic strategies with revisionist methods where 'gay plundering of the past is not just nostalgia, but marks an active reincorporation that is self-knowing'295:

[queer] is driven by the dynamic of a double movement: it addresses lesbian and gay visual cultures in a way which foregrounds art produced by lesbian and gay, or queer, artists but also goes beyond that to attend to the potentially queer reception of visual material from the past and the present, regardless of its sexual point of origin...[creating] a space to consider the production of queer meanings, since in a heterosexist society the queer reader has often to be ever resourceful and imaginative in the production of alternative sexual pleasures.296

These two themes – the production of art by and about queer people and the queer reading of historic visual materials will form the basis of the two next chapters. They will respectively examine how craft and queer sensibility can be used to destabilise (queer) museums, art galleries and historic houses and allow a space for queer (LGBT) lives to be represented.

3.4 Conclusion

The breadth and divergence of curatorial methods for examining queer make clear that this is a subject area very much open to debate. Rather than aim to find an essentialist method for queer curating, this plurality of approaches allows for flexibility and tailored approaches to take place. However, certain themes recur: visibility, invisibility and coding recur, and link in with artworks that are open to both public and private readings. These private queer readings, as discussed previously, need not be restricted to queer art, but can be adopted as filters to view any material. The themes of masquerade, drag and re-appropriation which can all be linked with notions of camp and kitsch also recur.

Nayland Blake suggests that overtly gay or lesbian imagery is retrograde. However, this leaves us with the difficulty of trying to unpick a queer sensibility. Lawrence Rinder argued that if an identifiable gay or lesbian sensibility exists, it exists ‘in multiplicity, and in complex intersection with mainstream art practice.’²⁹⁷ Therefore it would stand to reason that as art practices continually mutate, so will queer sensibilities.

Whether these sensibilities speak of any essentialist notion of lesbian or gay identity is questionable. It is more likely that they have developed in response to a variety of shared concerns which Rinder lists as ‘issues of anger, guilt, hiding, secrecy, coming out, personal violence and political trust, self-empowerment, and the struggle to make oneself whole’.²⁹⁸

Two queer methodologies that are of particular relevance to the next two chapters are hybridity and the re-appropriation of archive material to create missing queer histories. The hybrid role of artist/curator/historian will be adopted in both a museum and an art gallery and in two historic houses to unpick how these organisations can be queered through craft interventions.

²⁹⁷ Rinder, “An Introduction to In a Different Light,” 5–6.
²⁹⁸ Rinder, “An Introduction to In a Different Light,” 4–5.
4 Queering Museums and Galleries

This chapter describes two intervention projects and explores what they can tell us about queer representation in museums and galleries. The first project is *Queering the Museum* at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in 2010–11 and the second is *Other Stories: Queering the University Art Collection* at the Stanley and Audrey Burton Art Gallery at the University of Leeds in 2012.

In October 2007 Jack Gilbert argued in the *Museums Journal* that most museums and galleries were failing to ‘collect, frame and interpret the lives and experience of LGBT people… not necessarily because individual staff are homophobic but because of institutional failure’.299

Using two different exhibitions – *Queering the Museum* and *Other Stories* – I sought to unpick the interrelationships between queer theory (and LGBT experiences) and museum and gallery exhibitions, exploring how queer could be brought into and interpreted within museums and art galleries that hold collections of material culture. I also sought to investigate why LGBT experiences are so seldom included in museum and gallery displays.

This chapter considers the two exhibitions in turn, since the curatorial and artistic strategy used in *Other Stories* was informed by lessons learnt from *Queering the Museum*. In both exhibitions, I worked as both artist and curator, placing new works alongside the existing collections and also rearranging objects from the permanent collection in order to recontextualise them. This hybrid role of artist/curator/historian and its coupling with craft materials and re-appropriation has a large overlap with Nayland Blake’s suggestions of what might comprise a queer sensibility, as was outlined in the previous chapter.

As has previously been discussed, there is a distinction between queer and LGBT. This is a key point for both the exhibitions and the thesis, for the two are distinct, yet related. Within *Queering the Museum*, the main emphasis was on issues and histories related to people who identify as LGBT, with one object – *Donkey Boy* – exploring queer in a broader sense. Queer can be defined as

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‘differing from the normal or usual in a way regarded as odd or strange’\textsuperscript{300} and ‘to put in a difficult or dangerous position’.\textsuperscript{301} This opens it out and provides numerous potential strategies to be adopted by the artist.

If queer means ‘differing from the normal’, then museums are intrinsically queer: they act as a counterpoint to everyday life, they provide an arena for stopping, staring, thinking and – on occasion – accessing the liminal. Why then, according to Gilbert, do they so seldom explore LGBT lives? Through working with Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and the Stanley and Audrey Burton Art Gallery, and looking at their collections through a queer lens, I aimed to explore what heteronormative assumptions underpinned the working of the organisations, the development of their collections and the interpretation of those collections.

Both \textit{Queering the Museum} and \textit{Other Stories} could fit under the umbrella of what is often termed institutional critique:

\begin{quote}
As I see it, artists doing institutional critiques of museums tend to fall into two different camps. There are those who see the museum as an irredeemable reservoir of class ideology – the very notion of the museum is corrupt to them. Then there are those who are critical of the museum not because they want to blow it up but because they want to make it a more interesting and effective cultural institution.\textsuperscript{302}
\end{quote}

With both these projects, the aim was to work with the organisations and their collections to explore how queer could be more effectively represented. The projects owed much to the work of Fred Wilson, whose works ‘challenge assumptions about the dynamics of race, ethnicity, class and gender in

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{300} Collins English Dictionary (London: Collins, 1982).
\bibitem{301} Collins English Dictionary.
\bibitem{302} Corrin, Lisa G., Kwon, Miwon and Bryson, Norman. \textit{Mark Dion} (London: Phaidon, 1997) 16.
\end{thebibliography}
museums and in hegemonic culture\textsuperscript{303} and his ideas concerning socially just organisations and the ability that museums have to change society.\textsuperscript{304,305}


\textsuperscript{305} David Fleming defined social justice as an idea ‘based upon the premise that all people should be able to derive benefit from museums, that they have an \textit{entitlement} to access to museums, and to see themselves \textit{represented} in museums. Furthermore, museums have a responsibility to \textit{fight} for social justice, not simply through ensuring access for all, but even in some instances through acting as forums for debate about basic human rights.’ Museums Campaigning for Social Justice, 5\textsuperscript{th} Stephen Weil Memorial Lecture, Shanghai, 8 November, 2010. 5 Feb. 2013.

4.1 Queering Museums

Since Gilbert's 2007 article, there have been a number of exhibitions that explored LGBT identity in British museums, the most prominent being *Gay Icons* at the National Portrait Gallery (July–October 2009). However, even in 2011 Stuart Frost, Head of Interpretation at the British Museum, argued that the 'question of whether museums are doing enough [to reflect LGBT history and experience] remains pertinent'.


There are numerous reasons why museums have struggled with LGBT visibility and to argue that it is solely down to institutional homophobia or apathy misses some key points. One of the first issues to address when talking about queer and museums is material culture. Since museums and galleries and their exhibitions are usually centred around object collections, those groups in society that own, use and consume objects tend to be privileged in museum displays. In addition, since museums and art galleries predominantly use material culture to form exhibitions and tell stories, they rely on objects standing in for identity groups.

It can be assumed that the only difference between gay and straight men and women is that they have sex with people of the same gender. This logic would therefore focus any queer material culture search around objects related to queer sex:

The underlying message seemed to be that, because lesbians and gay men are defined by their sexuality, they can only be represented by objects relating to sex, an approach that denies other aspects of gay and lesbian culture. Whilst lesbians and gay men have much in common with everyone else – most gay men are more likely to use a steam iron than a cock ring – there are, nevertheless, often distinct dress codes and meeting places, tastes in music and so on. In summary, many museum staff appear

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confused about who should collect gay and lesbian material, how to record it and, indeed, what it might be.\textsuperscript{307}

In reality, associations between LGBT identities and material culture are much wider and more nuanced than might initially be assumed. As with any minority group, the experience of being in that group is made of many more experiences than those linked directly to the differencing characteristic. However, to draw out LGBT links to objects in collections, there either needs to be a high degree of knowledge on the part of the curator, or else those links need to be identified within cataloguing systems and in the exhibition labels, something that is seldom done, as we will see later.

Museums generally label objects with information about their date, material and maker. It is less common for objects to be associated with their owners and coupled with a lack of visibility among LGBT people – whether that be via their appearance or name – it makes the process of identifying LGBT-related objects next to impossible for museum visitors, unless those links are specifically drawn out in object labelling. While tagging objects with key words related to their LGBT associations would help, Patrik Steorn suggests that to:

\begin{quote}
attribute tags like ‘homosexual’ or ‘queer’ or ‘heterosexual’ to objects in museum and archival collections...[will] not be able to account for the juicy stuff – the kinds of emotional attachment, desire, knowledge and narratives that may queer any certain object.\textsuperscript{308}
\end{quote}

The association of objects with queer identities is still in its infancy for most organisations. An online catalogue search of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery’s collection using the keywords “lesbian”, “gay”, “bisexual”, “transgender”, “LGBT” and “queer” brought up only one search result. Using the keyword “queer” finds object number 1900P102, a photogravure of Dorothy Drew from a work by Edward Burne-Jones. Its connection to queer is found in a

\textsuperscript{307} Vanegas, “Representing Lesbians and Gay Men in British Social History Museums,” 164.

contemporaneous commentary about the object highlighting that it ‘has a queer kind of elfin charm’.309

The reality of the collection, which includes many images by the openly homosexual Simeon Solomon, for example, is vastly different to what this search would suggest. This raises some disturbing questions. Aside from researchers needing to bring with them a large amount of pre-existing knowledge to identify any queer relevance in the collection, there is an argument that what is not identified or collected is deemed of no importance, and this lack of documentation could be read as an – albeit potentially unwitting – aggressive act of cultural silencing:

Omission from the museum does not simple mean marginalization; it formally classifies certain lives, histories, and practices as insignificant, renders them invisible, marks them as unintelligible, and, thereby casts them in the realm of the unreal.310

Exhibition labels are usually written with an institutional voice and backed up with documented evidence. Normative thinking assumes people are part of the majority unless there is clear evidence to the contrary. Names and portraits will often indicate gender and race, but less often sexuality. With some notable exceptions, written information about historical queer lives is unusual and, before the decriminalisation homosexuality in 1967, was often confined to criminal or medical records. This reliance by museums on documented ‘fact’ means that LGBT histories are often silenced or negative and that heterosexuality is assumed and privileged, encouraging heteronormativity. Joe Heimlich and Judy Koke concur, arguing that within museums there is still tremendous homophobic prejudice often enacted through the silence, omission and assumptions that are socially dominant.311

It was out of a desire to interrogate some of these issues that the rationale for *Queering the Museum* developed. Drawing on previous identity-based museum

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309 http://www.bmagic.org.uk/objects/1900P102, accessed 22 January 2013
work, notably Fred Wilson’s *Mining the Museum* (The Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore 1992–1993) and Jo Derbyshire’s *The Gay Museum* (Western Australia Museum, Perth, January–May 2003), the exhibition utilised numerous intervention techniques rather than rely on the “discovered” identities and “hidden” histories312 of makers or owners of objects in the collection.

*Queering the Museum* aimed to negate the ‘heterosexual filter’313 that is placed over museum displays, a filter that prioritises the position of the mainstream and negates LGBT experiences unless they are specifically mentioned. The exhibition comprised 19 interventions placed throughout Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, exploring LGBT themes by drawing on and interrogating the museum’s collections. The museum is one of Britain’s largest local authority museums and houses a broad range of objects, from fine and applied art to natural and social history and archaeology.

### 4.2 *Queering the Museum* at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

Museums present themselves as neutral, democratic spaces that deal in facts and the truth. However, they are nothing of the sort. Curators make active decisions about what to collect, thereby shaping what society deems valuable and worth preserving. They also make active decisions about what to keep in store and what to display, and which narratives to tell with those objects that are displayed. *Queering the Museum* repeatedly questioned and critiqued these decisions by re-appropriating objects to tell revised stories, removing objects from the stores and placing them centre stage and placing newly created ‘historic’ objects within the collection to fill LGBT gaps. *Queering the Museum* therefore worked within – and outside of – the museological norms and there are many of these, since:

> Above all, a museum is not the neutral and transparent sheltering space that it is often claimed to be. More like the traditional ceremonial monuments that museum buildings frequently emulate – classical temples, medieval cathedrals, Renaissance palaces – the museum is a complex experience involving architecture, programmed displays of art...

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objects, and highly rationalized installation practices… it also carries out broad, sometimes less obvious political and ideological tasks. With this in mind, Queering the Museum aimed to unpick the workings of the museum and explore why LGBT identities are so seldom seen in museums.

The interventions in the exhibition were placed within four main settings and respond to the norms of those particular environments, namely: cathedral-like atriums, dense traditional museum displays, classical fine art galleries and social history exhibitions. Figure 4.1 shows the exhibition layout.

![Queering the Museum gallery plan, 2010, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.](image)

4.2.1 The Atrium: Lucifer and the Round Room

The first main gallery space in the museum is the Round Room, which was designed in order to impress the visitor. It is a large, circular, top-lit space, tiled with encaustic tiles and hung – academy style – with a range of oil paintings from the fine art collection. The Round Room employs the ‘very architecture of museums [that] suggests their character as secular rituals… [with] monumental classical forms… corridors scaled for processions and interior sanctuaries

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designed for awesome and potent effigies’. In the centre of the space, raised on a plinth, is Epstein’s bronze, *Lucifer* (1944–45), inspired by Milton’s poem *Paradise Lost*. The first intervention in the exhibition involved draping the sculpture with a cape of artificial green carnations (Figure 4.1).

The use of Lucifer can be read in a numerous ways, particularly through a queer filter. In *Paradise Lost*, Lucifer is banished to hell after a failed rebellion to wrestle control of heaven from God, an attempt borne out of his belief that the angels were equal to God. This struggle for equality is mirrored in feminism and gay rights activism, placing Lucifer in a queer role, challenging the received orthodoxy. The desire to challenge an overarching power structure that controls society can be read either as a fight between good and evil or the democratisation of society, depending on one’s position. It raises interesting arguments for a largely secular society within which equality is being shared between increasingly diverse groups. Does the inclusion of an LGBT exhibition within the authoritative and faux sacred setting of a museum signal the end of a

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period of demonisation of these minorities or a temporary ‘satanic’ undermining of that which society deems good and holy?

The journey of Lucifer from a heavenly creation of God to an exiled ‘other’ could be read as the ‘coming out’ transition through which LGBT individuals can become distanced from heterosexual family units, thereby becoming ‘other’ and challenging the status quo. Furthermore, it could be argued that the demonisation of Lucifer for a single act of defiance has parallels in homophobia.

Lucifer’s assigned role as the negative counterpoint to good also chimes within queer theory, as Thomas Dawson explains:

the binary distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality… resulted from a homophobic desire to devalue one of those oppositions. Consequently, homosexuality is not symmetrically related to heterosexuality – it is subordinate and marginal, but necessary to construct meaning and value in heterosexuality.\textsuperscript{316}

This has links to the use of ethnographic materials in museums, as will be discussed later.

The transgressive nature of the sculpture is also seen in its form: the head was modelled from a female model and placed on a male body. Epstein was obviously comfortable being linked to identifiably gay men – by 1905 he had produced ‘emotionally charged drawings of male nudes intended to illustrate [the homosexual] Walt Whitman’s poem \textit{Calamus}\textsuperscript{317} and in 1908 was commissioned to design the tomb of Oscar Wilde. Therefore, it is maybe unsurprising that \textit{Lucifer} resonates with queer in so many ways.

There are many reasons why the figure of Lucifer, which has been awarded the most dominant, monumental position in this temple to culture, makes a great starting point for an exhibition exploring the ‘other’. It is interesting that such a twisted and deviant object can be read as normative by virtue of its status in an


authoritative establishment, and this is where the intervention came into play. Layered on top of the figure was a cape made of 2,000 artificial green carnations, sewn together on organza fabric. The cape acts as a signifier, letting the visitor know that something is changed, all is not as it has been, making them relook at the familiar and see it in a new light, reading the stories that were already there but forgotten or overlooked. The contrast between the sculpture and the intervention jars the viewer: cheap, fake flowers juxtaposed with a fine art bronze; garish lime green contrasting with the mellow patina of the metal and the hundreds of tiny flowers, joined together to subsume the mighty figure. Issues relating to artificiality and camp and men taking part in the “female” art of sewing are not far away.

I would argue that, counter to the “male” approach of installing iconic objects on plinths in white cube spaces – objects made to impress, inspire awe and dominate a space – interventions embody a more “female” way of working. They take a situation and modify it, they adapt, they subvert. Interventions show us the foolishness of what we take for granted, they challenge authority and, when done well, they remind us that there are many ways of seeing the world: they are perfect agents for queer. They also bring questions of hierarchies to the fore: do the carnations adorn the sculpture or does the sculpture simply become a display plinth for the new object?

The green carnation, with its unnatural status, was popularised by Oscar Wilde as a means of self-identifying as homosexual in Victorian England. ‘The playwright notoriously attended the premiere of Lady Windermere’s Fan at the St James’ with a group of young men, all wearing green carnations, supposedly the symbol of homosexual desire in Paris.’

Visual signifiers have long been important to gay men as a means to recognise each other. As Matt Cook explains, ‘the play of visibility and invisibility, and recognition and misrecognition, were important to the homosexual dynamic in London during the [Victorian] period.’ It is therefore apt that the carnation was taken as a visual key to link the interventions within Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (Figure 4.4). The carnation was used within the exhibition to visually

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319 Cook, London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 132.
signify queerness in a mirroring of the ways that museums use words – “husband”, “wife”, “child” – to reinforce heteronormative values and family ties. Within the exhibition, the role of the carnation mirrors the performance of cruising: the visitor walks through an ostensibly heterosexual environment looking for queer signifiers that they can then choose to either engage or ignore with.

Matt Smith (1971 - )

**Carnation Cape, 2010**

Green silk carnations, organza

Sexual acts between men were illegal in the United Kingdom until 1967. Therefore gay men had to communicate with each other in covert ways to avoid persecution and prosecution.

Green carnations were worn on the lapels of gay men in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to signify their homosexuality. They were often worn by Oscar Wilde.

In 1894, Robert Hichens anonymously published the novel ‘The Green Carnation’. Based closely on the lives of Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas, it was used in the prosecution of Wilde during his trial for Gross Indecency.

The cape is placed on Epstein’s sculpture, ‘Lucifer’. ‘Lucifer’ was sculpted with the body of a man and the face of a woman. This merging of genders provides a starting point for ‘Queering the Museum’.

**Queering the Museum** is a series of displays which explore Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender themes using the museum’s collections. It is funded by Arts Council England and is part of the ShOUT! Festival, Birmingham’s celebration of Queer Culture. To comment on the exhibition, tweet using the hashtag #queering.

Figure 4.3 Matt Smith, Label for *Carnation Cape* showing green carnation, 2010, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery
This play between invisibility and visibility, recognition and misrecognition, is key to the strategy for the second set of works in *Queering the Museum*, the ones placed within the museum collection. By adding new works within the existing collection, a playful air of hide and seek is engaged. It could be argued that this could lead to interventions being missed. However, this was the approach of the exhibition: armed with basic signifiers and coded signals, the visitor had the opportunity to see – or ignore – LGBT histories within the collections.

### 4.2.2 Traditional Museum Display: Upstairs in the Industrial Gallery

The upstairs floor of the Industrial Gallery was last redisplayed in the 1970s. It employs the traditional museum norms of collecting, cataloguing and displaying to provide curated, ‘representative’ histories of a subject – in this case, ceramics. Collecting theory would label this type of collection – and display – as male. It argues that ‘women’s collections tend to be personal and ahistorical, men’s impersonal and historical, just as, traditionally, women have tended to have a relatively greater emotional investment in people than in ideas and men to some extent the reverse’.

By inserting personal, people-centred objects into the cases, the display has been queered, not only through a disruption to the cataloguing systems used by the museum, but also through a gendered assault on the impersonal, male display. Disorder is created within the systematic display, and ‘the collector’s need for order... satisfied by the task of arranging and cataloguing the objects he owns’, is disrupted and contaminated.

The interventions in this gallery are direct responses to the extant collections. The new, queer objects play with the existing cataloguing rules and reappropriate them with queer narratives to produce new groupings that both sit within the categories, but also outside of them. In this way, they echo the LGBT community’s ability to visually ‘pass’ – to go under the radar when necessary and fit in – albeit sometimes only when subjected to a cursory glance. These new works undermine the museum’s position of authority and place the shared

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experiences of LGBT-identified individuals in the centre of cultural power. The interventions play with the rules of insider and outsider, adopting queer theory’s positions of ‘emic and etic’\textsuperscript{322} – who is in, who is out. There is a permeability to the distinction as objects alternate between being inside and outside the museum’s collections, just as individuals can potentially adopt and discard queer positions. In this act of securing space within the cases, the objects both illustrate that these marginalised stories can be found within the existing ‘truths’ of the collection and also deserve an (albeit, in this case, temporary) telling.

Naturally, this challenging of authority is nothing new – various artists upset the applecart and question perceived hierarchies within the art and cultural world. Jeff Koons’ use of kitsch and Rebecca Warren’s use of the amateur are obvious examples. However, the linking of a marginalised group to the museum narrative raises social and ethical issues of inclusion, stereotyping and equal voice.

One of the interventions in the Industrial Gallery is \textit{Double-spouted Teapot} (Figures 4.4 and 4.5). Sited within a collection of earthenware tea and chocolate pots, the piece is a wordplay on the American slang “tea-rooming”, describing anonymous male–male sexual encounters in public toilets.

![Image](image_url)

\textbf{Figure 4.4} Matt Smith, \textit{Tea-rooming} (left) intervention in the cases in the Industrial Gallery, 2010, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. Image © Birmingham Museums Trust

\textsuperscript{322} Tom Boellstorff, “Queer Techne: Two Theses on Methodology and Queer Studies,” \textit{Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research} ed Kath Browne & Catherine J.Nash (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011) 218.
The piece is cast from a Wedgwood teapot, with a secondary spout added to the front. On the lid, the finial has been replaced by two bearded heads, cast from an Action Man figure – the idealised ‘boy toy’. Referring to both ‘cottaging’ and the social niceties of afternoon tea, the piece mashes two very discordant subjects and alludes to the British habit of boiling the kettle when shocking events occur. By taking a norm and subverting it, the piece acts to both tell a LGBT narrative and also act as an agent to queer the exhibition case.

Having two male heads facing forwards with two erect spouts, plays with the viewer’s eyes. It is not too large a jump to replace the teapot body with the writhing figures of men. A functional object has been remade unable to fulfil its traditional function, but achieving a new and different role.

### 4.2.3 Civil Partnership Figure Group

Another intervention in the ceramics gallery was the *Civil Partnership Figure Group* (Figures 4.6 and 4.7). In direct response to the eighteenth century ceramic *Figure Group* in the collection, the new piece repurposed the pose and figuration in a same-sex parody of the original piece.

Instead of trying to find or “out” queer objects in the collection, in this intervention I chose to make the pieces that did not exist historically, but could exist now, representing the lives that were lived but not recorded through...
material culture. In this intervention, I moved away from the *Mining the Museum* work of Fred Wilson that used existing objects in the collection and reframed them with an African American focus, and drew more on the practice of artists such as Kara Walker and Glenn Ligon who adopt and subvert historical techniques and styles and insert minority identities.

Figure 4.7 Matt Smith, *Civil Partnership Figure Group*, 2010, white earthenware, enamels and lustres, 18cm tall. Image © Birmingham Museums Trust
4.2.4 Social History and Gallery 33

Gallery 33 at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery came out of a desire for a more inclusive approach to displaying the museum’s ethnographic collections. The gallery caused quite a stir when it first opened in the early 1990s for the then-innovative ways in which it approached multiculturalism, gender and social difference. Writing about Gallery 33 in 1995, Jane Peirson Jones said:

Cultural identity is a very personal and emotive issue for everyone because it involves the consideration of gender, sexuality, religion, nationality and economic group as well as race and ethnicity. There is evidence to suggest that, in Gallery 33... it is “the shock of non-recognition” which provokes an emotive response which is sometimes expressed in terms of cultural self-assertion.323

The gallery contains no reference to LGBT lives. Attraction to people of the same gender is the sole overarching unifier of gay men and women, and sex is something that museums have traditionally had an uneasy relationship with (using fig leaves to cover genitals and forming secret collections). Prior to civil partnerships, we were left with a relative void in material culture, a troubling vacuum, from which museums could draw. The troubled relationship between museums and sex is perplexing. Spaces with so much naked flesh on show, where one is prohibited from touching, lends them a voyeuristic atmosphere.

We take the dichotomy for granted: the ‘improvement’ gained while looking at classical nudes in harsh contradiction to puritanical attitudes towards real life nudity. Museums may be quiet, but they are not solitary. Visitors interact with each other. The behaviour appropriate when viewing an object can be redirected towards other visitors, and in one sleight of hand, the site of societal improvement becomes a base and charged cruising ground, the loitering of visitors slipping into cruising ground behaviour. It is little surprise that EM Forster includes the museum – along with commuter trains and bachelor flats – as an arena for homoerotic encounters in his 1914 novel Maurice and Isaac Julien explores S/M activities within the museum in his 1993 film The Attendant.

While lack of material culture can be used as an excuse for not representing LGBT lives in museums, I think it avoids the insidious reality that most museums did not want to, or were afraid to, represent them.


They were all temporary, and with the exception of *Hidden Histories* and *Gay Icons*, relatively small scale. Due to their relative scarcity, when LGBT-related exhibitions are put on, they receive a disproportionate amount of attention. This is unsurprising, since museums deem what is important enough for society to care for and society relies on museum collections to provide communal memories. Museums are about objects: they collect them, preserve them, display them and occasionally, de-accession them.

By simply placing a civil partnership card within the displays of Gallery 33 (Figure 4.8), a number of issues are raised. In a gallery devoted to cross-cultural difference, why was there no mention of LGBT individuals? Was it due to a paucity of LGBT material, curatorial apathy, or the political climate in the early 1990s and Clause 28?\(^\text{325}\)


\(^{325}\) Clause 28/Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 stated that a local authority ‘shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality’ or ‘promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship’. It was repealed in Scotland in 2000 and in the rest of the United Kingdom in 2003.
It may be that LGBT individuals have not argued strongly enough for representation or helped museums to reflect their lives. The Equality Act, 2010, provides the stick (to accompany the carrot) that had been missing to date. However, the practical application of the Equality Act on museums is as yet untested. The LGBT community should be campaigning for better inclusion in museums, since:

To control a museum means precisely to control the representation of a community and some of its highest most authoritative truths… What we see and do not see in our most prestigious art museums – and on what terms and whose authority we do or don’t see it – involves the much larger questions of who constitutes the community and who shall exercise the power to define its authority.  

While Peirson Jones includes sexuality as one of the many cultural identities to take into consideration, museums have a tradition of biased representation of difference and the role of ethnographic ‘other’ is not necessarily something that  

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327 Peirson Jones, “Multiculturalism Incarnate,” 158.
the LGBT community would want to embrace. However, it can learn from postcolonial studies and theorists of cultural representation. Art galleries and museums unwilling to discuss LGBT lives are often happy to show works by artists such as Francis Bacon, Caravaggio, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo or Georgia O’Keefe. While an artist’s sexuality may or may not have an impact on how their works are read, if the stories of the LGBT community are consistently silenced, there are worrying parallels between these artworks and colonial ethnographic displays: objects removed from the context in which they were made, depersonalised and re-appropriated for the dominant culture’s pleasure.

Joshua Adair draws further parallels between race and LGBT representation in museums. ‘In a number of museums, both (African American and gay) experiences are summarily dismissed in favour of a narrative addressing whites and heterosexuals respectively’.328 Advocates of LGBT representation in museums could well adopt the argument that Eichstedt makes about race representation: ‘[l]ack of accurate information is a form of abuse… Continuing the telling of untruths, distorting experiences, and so on constitutes victimization’.329

If the paucity of LGBT exhibitions is in part due to a lack of material culture, then civil partnerships and same-sex marriages provide a fascinating opportunity for museums. Although far from adopted by all gay men and women, these are the first positive state recording of same-sex relationships. As increasing numbers of civil partnerships and same-sex marriages take place, customs and norms are being created. Clothing, wedding albums, invitations and wedding cards are all celebratory material, which can be collected and displayed by museums to tell positive, queer stories.

However, even without uniquely LGBT-related material culture, the interventionist strategies used in Queering the Museum enable museums to represent LGBT experiences. As Stuart Frost points out, by taking a tangential approach to museum display, Queering the Museum ‘underlines the potential that exists for museums to reinterpret their existing collections in thought-

provoking ways, and how to integrate LGBT experience and history into permanent galleries’.330

4.2.5 Classical Art Gallery: Simeon Solomon

For Queering the Museum, a number of exhibition cases were taken out of store and placed within the main art gallery spaces. In each of these, objects from the museum stores were selected for their ability to act as vehicles to tell LGBT narratives. This method of working provides a useful methodology for exploring subjects where little material culture exists and draws on Jo Darbyshire’s creative use of objects in the exhibition The Gay Museum in Perth (2003), discussed in the Chapter 3.

Unusually, access was given to all the collections, which allowed for some surprising unions – not least a taxidermy otter and three salt-glazed ceramic bears; in gay male culture, a bear is a large hairy man and an otter his slimmer counterpart – by placing these four objects together, a visual connection was created that moved the objects from their normal taxonomies. For the most part, these queer narratives were overlaid on objects which had no intrinsic connection to LGBT lives. However, the drawing of Night and Sleep by Simeon Solomon was an exception. In the early 1990s, when Clause 28 was still in place, museums shied away from mentioning homosexuality even more than they currently do. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery had one label that dealt with the subject (Figure 4.9).

330 Frost, “Are museums doing enough to address LGBT history?” 19.
I wanted to re-examine this label and try to reposition the narrative about Simeon Solomon in a less depressing way. I spent a lot of time researching Solomon, trying to piece together information about his relationships – who he had met, where he had met them and what their histories were. It became clear that the only documentation about Solomon’s sex life was in police records and newspaper reports. The working class men he was caught with were named, but very little else was known about them. I began to sympathise with museum curators – how to tell stories without hard facts? I decided to work with the lack of evidence, rather than against it.
Lord Frederic Leighton (1830–96) was working at the same time as Solomon (1840–1905). They were both painters with links to the Pre-Raphaelites and both were seen as great talents at the start of their careers. Solomon’s arrests and the subsequent scandals limited his career, while Leighton became a pillar of the Victorian art establishment: knighted in 1878, made a baronet in 1886 and raised to the peerage in 1896. There are numerous indications that, were they alive today, both men would identify themselves as gay. Solomon had numerous same-sex encounters, two of which led to his arrest, in London and then Paris. Leighton was much more discreet about any sexual relations he may have had, whether in England or North Africa. He left no diaries and his correspondence was ‘telling’ in its ‘lack of reference to his personal circumstances’. This has led to his possible homosexuality being an ongoing matter of debate.

Within the case (Figure 4.10), two objects from the collection – a bronze by Leighton and a drawing by Solomon – were placed facing away from each other. Each was accompanied by contemporaneous quotes about the men, charting their lives. A small trophy of a bear, pierced with arrows was placed by the Solomon drawing, in some small way rewarding his openness and honesty.

As previously mentioned, civil partnership documentation provides one of the first positive state-approved recordings of same sex activity, making it easier for curators and archivists in the future to tell definitively when people were in same-sex relationships, reducing the need for speculation, side-stepping and reliance on criminal charges.

331 For more about the perceived links between North Africa and homosexuality in nineteenth-century London, see Cook, London and the Culture of Homosexuality pp. 14, 92–3.
Figure 4.10 Matt Smith, *Simeon Solomon* intervention, 2010, consisting of (left to right): Lord Frederic Leighton *Athlete Strangling a Python*, 1877, bronze, 550mm high, Simeon Solomon, *Night and Sleep*, 1888, chalk drawing, 359mm x 296 mm, Matt Smith, *A Tribute to Simeon*, 2010, white earthenware bear with underglaze, lustre and copper nails, 240mm high, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. Image © Birmingham Museums Trust

Leighton and Solomon raise issues about how museums can incorporate historic LGBT narratives into exhibitions without resorting to the ‘married to his art’ and ‘bachelor uncle’ euphemisms. Joshua Adair argues that we need to rethink the use of the word gay. He advocates Fellows’ logic:

> One of the most harmful aspects of homophobia is its equating of gay with sex alone: that is *gay* tends to be understood quite narrowly as a synonym for *homosexual*. For this reason, it’s not an ideal term to use when looking at a person’s nature beyond the scope of his sexual orientation per se. But what’s the alternative? Resisting the urge to coin a new term for my kind across time and cultures I’ve decided to make do with the familiar word *gay* and explain what it means to me: a male who

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335 Adair, “House Museums or Walk-in Closets?” 264–278.
is gender atypical (psychologically and perhaps physically androgynous or effeminate) and decidedly homosexual in orientation if not in practice. Thus, my use of the term gay encompasses both gender identity and sexual orientation. It is not synonymous with homosexual.336 [Italics in original]

This shift of focus from physical act to gender and sexual difference, may be a means of moving the exploration of historic LGBT narratives in museums forwards. Similarly, queer becomes a useful tool to start discussing difference that cannot be solely categorised around sexual orientation.

4.2.6 Untold Stories – Cardinal Newman

Not all the proposals for interventions were accepted by the museum. One that wasn’t was a kneeler exploring the beatification of Cardinal Newman, intended to be placed with a display of ecclesiastical silver.

**Intervention Proposal: Bring me the Body of Cardinal Newman**

An oversized needlepoint kneeler embroidered with mid c. 19th Berlin Woolwork designs and Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem (‘Out of shadows and phantasms into the truth’), the inscription on the memorial stone of Cardinal Newman (1801–90) at Birmingham Oratory.

Newman specifically requested to be buried next to Ambrose St John with whom he shared a house for over 30 years. Regardless of the specifics of their relationship, the strong bond between the two men – which Newman likened to a marriage – places them outside the norm, as ‘other’.

In the run-up to his beatification, the Vatican chose to exhume this body and move it from beside Father Ambrose. When digging up the corpse, it was found that the body had already disintegrated to such an extent that it was unable to be disinterred.

The exhibition dates for Queering the Museum overlapped with an exhibition in the museum about Cardinal Newman that was scheduled to coincide with the Pope’s visit to Birmingham and in large part this was the reason for the proposal

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336 Fellows, A Passion to Preserve, 13.
being rejected. The conflict between church, museums and LGBT representation is not unique to this project and the links between museums and site of devotion are many, as previously discussed.

This association of museums as semi-religious spaces may account for the fury that queer representation in them can cause. At the same time as Queering the Museum opened, the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery decided, controversially, to remove David Wojnarowicz’s work A Fire In My Belly from its Hide and Seek exhibition of LGBT portraits following complaints from the Catholic League.

The role of censorship in museums was tackled eloquently and successfully in ‘The Play of the Unmentionable’ – an installation by Joseph Kosuth at the Brooklyn Museum (1992). In response to attacks on the National Endowment for the arts from the ‘radical Right’, Kosuth displayed objects, drawn from the museum’s collections that were at one point or another deemed controversial – including a Rodin bronze and a Bauhaus armchair – illustrating the temporal nature of taste, ‘comprehension and judgment of artworks and cultural artifacts’.

While the kneeler was not included in the Queering the Museum exhibition, I produced the work after the exhibition had finished (Figure 4.11).

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It could be assumed that exhibitions exploring LGBT lives are mainly of interest to the LGBT community and this may, in part, account for their infrequency. However, the same arguments are not made about, say ethnographic galleries or galleries of Egyptology. In the evaluation of the exhibition, of the people interviewed who had come specifically for the exhibition, some 43% identified as heterosexual. Ivan Karp suggests that:

Cross-cultural exhibitions present such stark contrasts between what we know and what we need to know that the challenge of reorganising our knowledge becomes an aspect of the exhibition experience… Almost by definition, audiences do not bring to exhibitions the full range of cultural resources necessary for comprehending them; otherwise there would be no point in exhibiting. Audience are left with two choices: either they define their experience of the exhibition to fit with their existing categories of knowledge, or they reorganise their categories to fit better with their experience. Ideally, it is the shock of non-recognition that enables the audience to choose the latter alternatives. The challenge to exhibition
makers is to provide within exhibitions the contexts and resources that enable audiences to choose to reorganise their knowledge.\textsuperscript{339}

In reality, there is no one ‘LGBT community’, but rather many different individuals who may, or may not, choose to associate under a uniting group. Therefore any attempts to unite individuals who identify as LGB or T into an overarching group will be fragmented, contradictory and multivoiced. There are few, if any, unifying activities, events or traditions. It is a group where the shared characteristic is seldom passed down through family lines, so in effect, members of the group are devoid of ‘elders’ to pass on the shared histories. I would argue that because of this, the representation of LGBT histories in museums is even more important for this group than those groups where traditions are passed from parent to children and allows all of us to ‘reorganise our knowledge’.

4.3 Other Stories

Following on from *Queering the Museum*, the next project, *Other Stories: Queering the University Art Collection*, was initiated by Layla Bloom, Curator of the Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery at the University of Leeds. It was part of the university’s marking of the centennial of the vice-chancellor Sir Michael Sadler’s administration (1911–23). Sadler had donated many of the works in the gallery’s collection and, following inquiries from the university’s LGBT group, the gallery had decided to work with the Edward Carpenter papers held in the University Library archive.

Bloom was having difficulty relating the Edward Carpenter material to the permanent collection of paintings and sculpture and contacted me to see if I could help.

Edward Carpenter was born in 1844 in Hove. A true renaissance man, Carpenter was known for advancing adult education, vegetarianism, naturism, pacifism and gay rights. In 1891 he met George Merrill and the two men lived together and had an openly homosexual relationship until Merrill’s death in 1928. I was interested in how the visibility of their relationship ran in contradiction to the perceived historical ‘truth’ that late Victorian homosexuality involved covert and persecuted lifestyles, with Oscar Wilde being the notable example.

At about the same time as Bloom contacted me about the project, I heard Amy Tooth Murphy, from LGBT History Month Scotland, talk about her work with LGBT oral histories and how many of the interviewees painted a picture that differed from the ‘grand narratives’ of the past. I had been concerned that with *Queering the Museum*, some of the interventions had relied on stereotyping, attempting to develop overarching narratives to describe a diverse, complex and contradictory group. Tooth Murphy’s use of oral histories as a counterpoint to this rhymed with my thinking and tied in with Carpenter’s biography that ran counter to prevailing queer histories.

As mentioned before, unlike most other minority groups – those linked by religion, ethnicity and race – the LGBT community produces a paucity of unique
material culture. There are few ‘gay objects’. It is also a group that seldom passes knowledge down through familial, intergenerational lines.

In light of this, the role of the oral history archive becomes a key mechanism by which members of the fragmented, diverse ‘LGBT community’ can place themselves within a wider historical setting. Traditional museum and gallery classification – which records object date, medium and maker – provides a basis for categorisation and order, but often ignores the role those objects played in daily life – the reasons they were made bought, used and retained. The emotive memories that become embedded in loved objects are too often lost since these emotional attachments fall outside the normal means of classification. For all these reasons, I was interested in working with the material in an oral history archive to find out what people thought and felt in the past and to discover what discrepancies it might contain and what links and connections it might make with the fine art collection at the university. Therefore, I contacted the Ourstory oral history archive in Brighton.

The Ourstory archive’s remit is to document lives of people who have same-sex desire.340 Like any collection, the archive is obviously further selected – by whose stories are told and collected, who is asked to speak and, who is willing to be recorded. Layered on top of that, was my further sifting and selecting. Going through the archive, I was looking for those voices that interested me – that made me stop and want to consider what was being said. I was interested in voices that either ran counter to my assumptions, shed light on those assumptions or with whom I felt an emotional attachment.

Working with these first-person narratives, I embedded them permanently, into contemporaneous objects. As a counterpoint to the argument that LGBT stories become hidden histories, I wanted to make these memories visible, tangible and permanent by indelibly etching them into objects that these interviewees could have owned, held or viewed. Throughout this process, I kept coming back to the third equal player in this exhibition – the university art collection – since this series of interventions formed a three-way connection between the oral

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340 While this doesn’t necessarily exclude trans people, I couldn’t find appropriate reminiscences and trans voices were not heard in the exhibition, unfortunately.
histories, the contemporaneous everyday objects and the art collection at Leeds.

Figure 4.12  Other Stories exhibition methodology
I had a great sense of relief when the law changed. I was terrified of the law. When you grow up and you find that you’re against the law – it worries you. Just the very fact that your existence is threatened all the time and you have to behave in certain ways. And you’re vulnerable. In bars, for example, you never discussed where you worked, you never gave you name, never gave your real name anyway. You’d be Bill or Harry. I have friends who didn’t even know my real name… I lived in terror, I’ll never get over that as long as I live. It’s born into us, it’s bred to feel ashamed of...
By taking a moment of absolute truth from the interviewees within the oral history archive and pairing it with objects in the museum collection, I aimed to open up the interpretation of the museum objects in a more democratic way: removing the pictures in the collection from their place in the development of art history and relating them to lives lived and contemporaneous queer social histories, histories:

… of the many people whose lives are not arranged through straightforward heterosexuality. This is a history that is almost always omitted from museums and galleries, even when it is integral to the lives of the artists and artworks that are exhibited there.341

The use of domestic objects was a conscious one. It attempted to break the divide between museum objects and lived experience, bringing the domestic into a public setting and using it as a vehicle to talk about intimacy. As Lara Perry describes the domestic objects: ‘[t]hey belong to the realm of the familiar because our own homes are populated with similar kinds of things, and give us a direct mode of access to the “foreign country” that is the past’.342 Their use was also a counterpoint to queer as ‘other’, the domestic objects describing the ‘ordinary qualities of queer history and desires, and of their seamless integration’.343 This overwriting of the artistic canon with personal messages is not a new strategy. As part of the V&A exhibition Give and Take (2000), Ken Aptekar held a number of focus groups with different audience groups where they were encouraged to discuss paintings in the collections. Aptekar painted selected parts from those pictures, over which he placed glass panels which were sandblasted with quotes about the paintings taken from the focus groups.

The artist attempts to understand the place of painting in the museum today. He questions Alice Mungrave, a Londoner from Barbados.

Q: You’re ten years old and you’re living with your family. You can have anything you desire. What do you want it to be?

A: A toy, one I shouldn’t be playing with. Maybe a very expensive piano. You want to play it, just mess around with it.

Q: Did you ever play the piano?

A: Once.

Q: When you were little? This would be fifty years ago or so, no?

A: Yeah (with a big smile). But I didn’t get very far.

Q: How long did you play?

A: A few minutes.

Q: How come?

A: It wasn’t my parents’. It was in a friend’s house, just decoration. Nobody touched it. I was forbidden.
Aptekar’s work continually pulls the interpretation of objects away from the authority of the museum and opens it out to more personal musings, whether from focus group members or his own words and text. Dana Self, the curator of Aptekar’s exhibition *Writing Voices* sees these paintings as:

anecdotal analyst to the contested interpretations of identity, masculinity, personal authority, Jewishness, and the slippery history of art. By appropriating paintings from Western art history and combining them with witty and poignant autobiography, Aptekar knits together art history and biography’s parallel dialogue.344

The triple connection that occurred in *Other Stories* led to some interesting results and connections being made. The intervention that most closely tied in with the history of the objects in the collection was the pairing of a coffee set with two pictures – Duncan Grant’s *Still Life, Asheham House* and Vanessa Bell’s *Still Life (Triple Alliance)*. The intervention (Figure 4.15) was a coffee set that was fired with lettering transfers describing Val’s experience of leaving her husband for another woman (who also left her husband) and the different ways their partners saw and reacted to this change.

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Bell’s *Still Life (Triple Alliance)* was identified near the start of the project as a good partner for this text, both for its title and the biography of the artist. During the development of the project, Leeds acquired the Grant painting at auction and we were able to display the two paintings together, showing the different visual perceptions of the same still life by the two married artists whose non-monogamous relationship in some ways mirrored Val’s oral history. The use of the coffee set also brought the domesticity of the situation to life and the paintings out of the gallery setting and back into the domestic.

The material in the Ourstory archive questioned some of the myths about gay men and women. Dennis (interview c. 1960) talked about his choice to have anonymous one-night stands rather than a relationship out of fear of being reported to the police and arrested as a homosexual. Dennis believed it was safer not to let people know his real name or his address. He explained how the police would go through the address books of homosexuals and arrest people in them for homosexuality.
The intervention (Figure 4.16) involved printing Dennis’s quote onto a Stratton Fonopad address book. In 2012, I was able to undertake an activity that Dennis felt incapable of in the 1960s. The piece was paired with Frank Lisle’s *Birdcage*, referring to both police entrapment and the 1973 play *La Cage aux Folles*.

Figure 4.16 Matt Smith, *Untitled III*, 2012, Stratton Fonopad address book, ink, 24cm high, shown with Frank Lisle, *Bird Cage*, 1955, oil on canvas, Stanley and Audrey Burton Art Gallery.

The connection between Trevor Bell’s *Image of Blues* and the oral history of Graham who would die of an AIDS-related disease less than a year after his interview was based on the visual appeal of Bell’s image and its potential for
intertextual readings (Figure 4.17). *Blue* was also the title of Derek Jarman’s last film, which explored the artist’s experience with HIV and AIDS using a soundscape and a solid blue screen. At a similar time, Robert Gober started making his sink pieces and k.d. lang shot her 1990 video *So in Love* for the *Red Hot and Blue* AIDS fundraiser, which featured her repetitively washing bedsheets. For these reasons, I decided to work with soap for the intervention.

![Image of a soap sculpture with text etched into it.](image)

**Figure 4.17** Matt Smith, *Untitled VI*, 2012, soap, titanium dioxide, 32cm x 32cm x 6cm, Stanley and Audrey Burton Art Gallery.

When the soap piece was completed, its visual connection with marble and the tombstones of the *Don’t Die of Ignorance* public health adverts of 1987 featuring cleaving icebergs became obvious. The intervention acted both as memorial to Graham and also placed his quotes within a contemporaneous cultural context.

There were objects in the collection by gay artists, including work by John Singer Sargent, which were not included in the exhibition. What I was interested in was trying to allow visual connections rather than curatorial connections to happen wherever possible – to let visual juxtapositions do the communication. Moving on from the stereotypes and generalities of *Queering the Museum*, the use of oral histories in *Other Stories* lent the exhibition a much more intimate and personal quality. The oral history archive – while certainly not unedited or
unselected – provided a more rounded, representative portrayal of lives and loves than can often be found through objects alone. By using these contradictory histories, and using them to reinterpret the pictures from the collection, I hoped to reposition the pictures away from their curatorial norms and certainties and into the worlds of emotion, subjectivity and identity. This is a strategy endorsed by Barbara Clark Smith who ‘contest[s] the claim that the material of which an object is made – metal, plastic, wood, fabric, paper – is more basic to its nature than the social and cultural meaning that men and women have given that object’.345

When trying to represent the LGBT community in museums and galleries, due to the lack of visual identifiers and the paucity of queer objects, the emotive links between objects and individuals become important. Other Stories tried to allow the pictures to be curated and considered in a new way:

Each of the quotations and objects that Matt has used in his own works articulates moment of crystalline clarity about the speaker's situation, and the way that an individual's life is shaped by its encounters with the sexual habits of a society.346

Robert Mills has identified that this fragmented narrative may well be a new, queer, curatorial paradigm:

Queer history exhibitions will adopt a style of presentation partly modelled on scrap books and collage; in place of the representative ‘object', they will appropriate fragments, snippets of gossip, speculations, irreverent half-truths. Museum goers will be invited to consume their histories queerly – interacting with exhibits that self-consciously resist grand narratives and categorical assertions.347

There are often many histories to an object and to try and reduce history to a single, unified narrative will often erase the lives of those who lived outside of that mainstream and ignores that the past has always been a collection of complex, fragmented and contradictory stories.

347 Mills, “Queer is Here?” 86.
4.4 Conclusions from Queering the Museum and Other Stories

Queering the Museum interrogated and drew out LGBT narratives from within the collections at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. By developing subjective and tangential links and developing new artworks to explore queer narratives, the exhibition highlights that LGBT stories are all around, but often only appear when you look for them. But was it queer?

As has been previously discussed, queer can be used in many ways. As a noun, it encompasses the LGBT ‘community’, and in this reading the subject matter explored by the interventions are queer. However, this limited reading of queer doesn’t address queer’s use to describe ‘differing from the normal or usual in a way regarded as odd or strange’.348 The Donkey Man intervention at Birmingham touches on this use of the word. The piece explores the sense of being not in the mainstream that most people experience at some time. This broadening, more encompassing use of the word may be a challenge to some theorists, but it’s a potentially powerful tool with which to promote empathy.

Figure 4.18 Matt Smith, Donkey Man, 2010, white earthenware ceramic, underglaze colour and decals, 24cm high, shown in situ, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. Image © Birmingham Museums Trust

348 Collins Dictionary of the English Language (Collins: London, 1982)
Queer as a verb brings exciting opportunities for artists, allowing them to alter spaces, work in non-normative ways and challenge hierarchies. Unsettling categorisations, disrupting sculptures and displays in the museum and questioning the messages curators tell us have all in some way resulted in the museum being ‘put in a difficult or dangerous position’. Queer – the verb – provides limitless scope for working with museums. Chiming with institutional critique and museum interventions, it can work with or without reference to LGBT narratives. It is concerned with change: re-examining the norm, repositioning the marginalised, subverting the status quo and thereby resonating with outsider status.

One of the outcomes of the exhibition has been the acquisition of two pieces from the exhibition by the museum. This takes the work from the everyday and places it within the museum collection, a place where there is a duty to preserve and care for the object. The objects have left their outsider status and been deemed important enough to represent society. In doing so, the museum curators have moved the objects ‘from the secular, profane, undifferentiated realm of the commodity, and ritually transform[ed] it into a personally and socially significant object’. It could be argued that through being acquired into the collection, the objects have lost their queer status and become mainstream.

However, this acceptance is provisional as the label that now accompanies Donkey Man makes clear: ‘Matt Smith is an activist and campaigner over the issues of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender identity. His work is highly political and can be challenging, explicit, thought-provoking and funny’. I question whether terms such as activist and campaigner would be used if I had been working with mainstream identities in the project. I worked on the project as an artist, attempting to explore the museum’s systems and taxonomies to understand why queer lives were so scarce in the displays. The labelling goes on to say: ‘Smith also engages with society’s inability to accept difference’. What I was engaging with was an organisation’s inability to portray difference.

351 Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Object Label.
Society's (in)ability to accept difference was engaged with through the evaluation of the exhibition. Part of the project included an evaluation study of the exhibition conducted by Maria-Anna Tseliou, a PhD student from the Museum Studies Department at the University of Leicester. While the sample size was relatively small (31) it raised some interesting results. 45.2% of the interviewees came specifically to the museum for the exhibition and 57% self-identified as LGBT and 43% as heterosexual; when asked by the interviewer whether they had found the exhibition provocative, interviewees replied that they had found it 'thought-provoking, but not at all provocative'; and 74.2% of the interviewees said they thought it appropriate to have gay and lesbian culture represented in museums and the other 25.8% agreeing, but with some specifications. This data challenges the museum sector’s reluctance to address LGBT lives.

The evaluation also brought the use of the term queer outside the academy into sharp relief. Only 22% of interviewees were aware of the reclamation and re-appropriation of the word, with over half of interviewees having negative associations with the word. This raises concerns for its use in projects that are trying to increase and widen social engagement.

Queering the Museum provoked much positive comment and generated comparatively little protest and that could be attributed to a number of reasons. Craft, with its association with the homely, the comforting and the feminine is an ideal Trojan horse for the politically-minded. Working with museum rules and bending and distorting them, rather than attempting to overtake or dominate them in an agit prop manner has allowed for much greater pushing of boundaries.

Placing a ‘homonormative’ filter on the work of one museum highlighted a number of issues. Firstly, any object contains many stories and histories, and curatorial decision-making decides not only which objects are collected and displayed, but also which stories relating to an object are told. Secondly, the freedom that museums allow to artists undertaking institutional critique and artist interventions could be exploited more by curators, and if museums and galleries are serious about LGBT inclusion, the collecting patterns and

especially the cataloguing terms used, need to change. Finally, and possibly most controversially for museums, if the objects needed to tell a history and represent society do not exist, then get an artist to make them.

Michael Petry talks about the idea of horizontal history. Rather than the dominant culture’s vertical transmission of history (through family ties and education) ‘queer people have had to devise alternative means of keeping their excluded history viable’,\textsuperscript{353} often passing information between friends or from one same-sex lover to another. Or as Nayland Blake explains, ‘[q]ueer people are the only minority whose culture is not transmitted within the family… The extremely provisional nature of queer culture is the thing that makes its transmission so fragile’.\textsuperscript{354} Whether mainstream museums will ever seriously preserve these histories, or continue to address them sporadically and temporarily remains to be seen.

Museums are one of the few organisations placed to preserve and communicate these histories vertically, and if they can’t, maybe they should be more explicit about their selected approach to history. As Hans Haacke puts it:

> What museums should perhaps do is make visitors aware that this is not the only way of seeing things. That the museum – the installation, the arrangement, the collection – has a history, and that it also has an ideological baggage.\textsuperscript{355}

*Other Stories* provided a good counterpoint to *Queering the Museum* through its use of the quotidian. Museums have traditionally shied away from the personal, the questioning and the intimate in favour of the authoritative and overarching. Gail Levin argues that museums ‘remain burdened by a centuries-old commitment to maintain a master narrative that privileges white men’,\textsuperscript{356} and I would add that this master narrative particularly privileges straight white men.


The success of exhibitions such as Grayson Perry’s *Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* at the British Museum,\(^{357}\) which saw Perry reinterpret the collections through his own ‘personal themes and obsessions’\(^{358}\) indicates a strong desire among museum visitors for a more personal and intimate approach to museum display. The role of the museum as a didactic place to learn is changing, slowly and slightly, into a place to feel. This change in museum focus, ‘the reversal of foreground and background, which draws attention to the overlooked and suppressed, and having exposed it, asks why it has been neglected’\(^{359}\) chimes with feminist thinking, which has also tried to erode the opposition between intellect and emotion.\(^{360}\)

Chapter 5 will further explore curatorial engagement with emotion. It focuses on historic houses that often place lived lives and family trees at the core of their interpretive strategies. In doing so, their links between objects, lives and intimacies are much more to the fore than would be usual in museum and gallery displays.


\(^{359}\) Hein, “Looking at Museums from a Feminist Perspective,” 57.

\(^{360}\) Hein, Looking at Museums from a Feminist Perspective, 57.
Queering the Historic House

Unravelling the National Trust was a three-year project that I co-curated with Polly Harknett and Caitlin Heffernan. Funded by Arts Council England, the National Trust and the Headley Trust, it involved three curatorial interventions in historic properties owned by the National Trust (Nymans House and Gardens in 2012, The Vyne in 2013 and Uppark in 2014). At each house, between ten and 12 contemporary artists (including myself) were commissioned to respond to the house and its histories. These commissions resulted in new site-specific work that examined some of the multiple stories contained in the properties. Rather than impose an exhibition theme or idea, we were keen that the site itself was the core of each exhibition. We asked artists to propose interventions based on their responses to the sites and the stories related to them, revealing the multitude of histories inherent in the houses and the compression of time, allowing the properties their place as 'sites of contradiction'. The artists took on a curatorial role, retelling and reinterpreting the site to reflect their interests, through visual art.

Two main things arose from this approach: the sense of a unified homogenous narrative was disrupted into multiple stories and the reliance on documented evidence was reduced. The whole Unravelling project could be seen as a queering of the National Trust, moving from overarching narratives and allowing diverse and discordant histories. It therefore works against the authorised heritage discourse that Smith argues ‘as a source of political power has the ability to facilitate the marginalisation of groups who cannot make successful appeals to or control the expression of master cultural or social narratives’. Mathieu argues that ‘[t]he dominant culture presents us with only two alternatives, co-optation (do as I do, fit in, follow the rules, conform to the strategies and conventions of dominant discourses within art or elsewhere) or marginalisation (silence and invisibility)’. Interventions allow this to be reversed, with the dominant culture marginalised and subaltern narratives given centre stage, at least for a limited period of time.

363 Mathieu, Sexpots, 93.
When selecting the artists, we are interested in honesty over fact and were willing to select work based on hunches, feelings and intuition as well as documented evidence. The exhibitions therefore occupy a place somewhere between historical accuracy and storytelling. This was an active decision, since if we rely solely on ‘documented accuracy’, we are confined to a narrow and selected view of history.\textsuperscript{364}

Two of the three National Trust properties provided the opportunity to work with gay male histories and provide practical case studies for queering historic houses. The interventions I produced for Nymans and The Vyne queered those sites in the double method previously described: both disrupting the normative curatorial methods and also exploring LGBT histories. These interventions: \textit{Piccadilly 1830} at Nymans and \textit{The Gift/Dandy} at The Vyne, allowed me to interrogate how historic houses deal with queer histories and the complexities that this might entail.

Historic houses that are open to the public occupy an odd position. Sites that have usually been used by successive generations over many years are preserved at a specific moment in time – what were (mostly) private spaces have become open to public gaze. The multiplicity and complexity of the many lives lived in historic houses means that they hold traces of innumerable, different individual experiences. These include class and economic difference, gender difference (often mapped by gendered rooms such as the parlour and the dining room), the effects of colonialism and international trade and collecting. These multiple stories are somehow condensed into a ‘visitor experience’ of the house as it is presented today.

Alison Oram argues, that the ‘presentation of historic houses in Britain generally reflects dominant ideas about the national past, and mobilises family narratives about aristocracy, class, lineage and family in order to forge a sense of stability and national identity’.\textsuperscript{365} This presentation is undertaken by the house custodians who choose what is and is not suitable for public consumption. With a few notable exceptions, non-normative sexuality is seldom included in that mix. This creates an interesting dichotomy, since at the heart of most visitor

\textsuperscript{364} See Chapter 4, Queering Museums and Galleries.
guides is the family tree that records the sexual relationships and procreation of members of the family, tracing the inheritance of the house through the generations and thereby making reproduction and heteronormativity a core part of the curatorial narrative. The family tree also presents a very fixed and clean history of heterosexuality, recording marriages and divorces. Not only do they provide a sanitised history of heterosexual intimacies, they also usually silence all same-sex relationships, which until recently could not be recorded through marriage or civil partnerships and so are not included in the family tree.

Oram argues that in order to unpack historic house sites, ‘it is useful to engage Michel Foucault’s concept of “heterotopia”, which can be broadly defined as a space of otherness and differences’. Foucault suggests, ‘[h]eterotopias are most often linked to slices of time’ and are ‘capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces… that are in themselves incompatible’.

The reality of historic houses as sites of constant change and the expectation that they can be historically ‘fixed’ creates a tension at the heart of these sites. These heterotopias or ‘other spaces’ are sites that also ‘contain alternative and contrary narratives of the past’ and we are at an interesting time in their interpretation. The transition of Britain from its repression of LGBT histories under Clause 28 to its recent introduction of same-sex marriage has seen a vast shift in the rights and visibility of sexual minorities. This shift is also registering in historic houses, which is unsurprising since ‘a society, as its history unfolds, can make an existing heterotopia function in a very different fashion’. However, this shift is not without complexity. Both Nymans and The Vyne have historic links to individuals who we would now define as queer. Each house involved men who lived lives that ran in contradiction to social norms, and did so openly in society. I found with both houses that the custodians, for many reasons, placed a heteronormative filter over these lives.

However, this is not surprising. Oram\textsuperscript{371} makes a convincing point about Shibden Hall, the former home of Anne Lister in West Yorkshire. In the car park where visitors enter the site are information boards proclaiming: ‘Welcome to Shibden – a family home from 1420 to 1933 and still a place for the whole family to enjoy today’.\textsuperscript{372} This can be read as a linking of a word (family) being used in two different ways (contemporary nuclear family group with historical hereditary property) but is more likely to be read as a description of a property that was a site of nuclear ‘family’ norms. The reality of the Lister family who owned the property was that they rarely married and had few children, ‘[t]aking the two hundred year period until 1933 when the last John Lister died and the property passed into public ownership…(there were) a mere thirty-two years out of two hundred… when children under the age of eighteen lived in the house’.\textsuperscript{373} Oram goes onto argue that what ‘family’ meant to the Listers was ‘sibling-based households rather than marital partnerships, celibacy and same-sex relationships rather than heterosexuality and a dearth of children rather than a secure succession’.\textsuperscript{374} Rather than discussing the changing role of family and relationships over time, the (false) impression given by the information boards is of stable, nuclear, heterosexual families.

Shibden does talk about Anne Lister’s lesbianism and refusal to comply with expected gender codes. However, even here, Oram argues that ‘[s]he is cast as an interesting (and now acceptable) anomaly, rather than as a critique of the meanings of family and sexuality in public history’.\textsuperscript{375}

Affrica Taylor argues that heterotopias are ‘[a]lways sites of contradiction, they can reflect an image of a perfect world, but at the same time they also reconfigure it’.\textsuperscript{376} It would appear, from Shibden Hall, and as we will see, Nymans, that this reconfiguration collapses a multitude of family and sexual relationships into conservative contemporary notions of what ‘family life’ is expected to be.

\textsuperscript{372} Information boards currently extant (2009–10) at both entrances to the estate, qted in Oram, “Sexuality in Heterotopias.” 540.
\textsuperscript{373} Oram, “Sexuality in Heterotopias,” 540.
\textsuperscript{374} Oram, “Sexuality in Heterotopias,” 541.
\textsuperscript{375} Oram, “Sexuality in Heterotopias,” 542.
\textsuperscript{376} Taylor, “A Queer Geography,” 8.
5.1 **Nymans House and Gardens**

Nymans is in the High Weald in Sussex and benefits from a particular microclimate, making it ideal for horticulture. It was with this in mind that Ludwig Messel bought the country estate in 1890 and began developing one of the foremost English gardens. Ludwig was born in Germany and moved to England in 1868, swiftly moving up from being a clerk to setting up his own stockbroking firm. Purchasing Nymans was seen as a way of sealing his position in English society, a trajectory that would see his great-grandson become the Queen’s brother-in-law when he married Princess Margaret.

The house that Ludwig Messel bought was an early Victorian villa which he added to and modified. However, this wasn’t to the taste of his daughter-in-law, Maud, who, on inheriting the house, rebuilt it as a “medieval” manor house ‘begun in the 14th century and added to intermittently till Tudor times’. Maud made her way around the Cotswolds picking up historic architectural fragments and incorporating them into her new vision, one she shared with husband Leonard and their three children: Linley, Anne and Oliver.

In 1947, as a result of warming a frozen pipe with a blow lamp, a plumber managed to set fire to the house, leaving most of it in ruins and providing the ‘ruined house with an even greater air of romantic antiquity’. This has left the property with a haunting quality: a small, habitable core of a building within much larger ruins.

Going around the house, there is an uneasy mix of elderly isolation and camp theatricality. The house was last lived in by Anne Messel who moved there when she was widowed and the house is preserved as it was during her final days. Traces of the solitary existence of this elderly woman still pervade the house. In contrast, there is a television set that was customised by her brother, the stage designer Oliver Messel, into a theatre with red curtains and tasseling.

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378 *Nymans*, 10.
I was interested in somehow collapsing time between Anne’s solitary final days and the period when Nymans was a site for make-believe, dressing-up, socialising and play, a time alluded to by her brother’s customised television.
Anne and Oliver and their brother, Linley are discussed in the 2007 guidebook, *The Nymans Story*. Anne and Linley were both married twice. Both Linley’s marriages and his divorce are written about in a paragraph in the guidebook. Anne’s first marriage is covered in a paragraph and her divorce and second marriage gets its own section and two paragraphs. Their brother Oliver gets three paragraphs devoted to him. All three paragraphs talk about Oliver’s professional career as a theatre and interior designer and his connections with other members of the family. The wider reality is that Oliver had a very public relationship with another man, Vagn Riis-Hansen, who was also his business partner, for nearly 30 years. Anne and Linley’s (heterosexual) relationships are therefore treated very differently in the Nymans guidebook compared to Oliver and Vagn’s (gay) relationship, which is not mentioned.

Oliver’s personal life and relationship with Vagn has been dealt with in different ways by different authors. The catalogue to accompany the Oliver Messel retrospective exhibition at the V&A’s Theatre Museum in 1983 states: ‘so it is natural that Messel, with his flair for handiwork, his ability to turn things into other more exotic things, should have turned to making masks. This was probably at much the same time he found that he was a homosexual’. Whether there is an implied link between mask making and being a homosexual is unclear, but the central importance of Vagn in Oliver’s life is noted in the biographical outline in the same catalogue. Of 29 entries, 22 relate to his career and seven to his personal life, these being:

- 1904 born the second son of Lt.-Col. Leonard Messel, OBE, TD., Eton.
- 1922 Lives at Lancaster Gate.
- 1946 Moves to Pelham Place, SW7, and meets Vagn Riis-Hansen who becomes his manager and friend.
- 1956 Makes first visit to Barbados.
- 1966 Moves to Barbados...

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1978  Messel dies of a heart attack.

Although two out of the seven personal biographical details concern Vagn, and that we have been told that Oliver was gay, Vagn is still presented as a ‘manager and friend’.382

Three years later, in his biography of Oliver, Charles Castle refers to Vagn as ‘the man who was to become his [Oliver’s] life-long companion and administrator’383 and just to add confusion over what this might mean, promptly adds that Vagn has previously ‘married a young Scottish actress, Zöe Gordon… [who] died tragically of a brain tumour, and he settled down with Oliver, sharing a relationship that endured for thirty years, until his death.’384

Castle includes a quote from Emlyn William, a friend of the two men, about Oliver and Vagn’s domestic arrangements: ‘Oliver would gently slip to the floor and lie on his back; nothing was interrupted. Then Vagn would say gruffly, “Oliver you silly bugger.” He was a Dane who did not mince his English. “I'm fine Vagnie dear, just relaxing”’.385

More recently, Oliver’s nephew, Linley’s son Thomas Messel, published a book called Oliver Messel: In the Theatre of Design.386 He describes the relationship between Oliver and Vagn as: ‘a devoted friendship, lasting twenty-seven years until Vagn's death. As Oliver’s companion, Vagn, affectionately known as “The Great Dane,” acted as his manager and organized his life both in their London home, 17 Pelham Place, and later in Barbados, where they moved in 1966’.387

During the course of the book, Vagn’s status moves from ‘companion’ to ‘partner’.388

384 Castle, Oliver Messel, 124.
385 Castle, Oliver Messel, 125.
387 Messel, Oliver Messel, 25.
388 Messel, Oliver Messel, 146.
Evelyn, the cook at their house in Barbados, is quoted in the Castle book discussing the two men’s separate bedrooms, describing Oliver’s as ‘a terrible mess’\(^{389}\) whereas Vagn’s was ‘beautifully neat and tidy’.\(^{390}\) Again, this leaves us in question as to the relationship, but since homosexuality in Barbados is still illegal today, punishable with a life sentence, it would seem prudent to keep some semblance of celibacy or asexuality intact.

The importance of Vagn, and also Nymans, in Oliver’s affections is demonstrated in his wish that ‘following his [Oliver’s] meticulous instructions, his and Vagn’s ashes were buried together at Nymans, in the walled garden which he had loved so much from childhood’.\(^{391}\) As in the case of Cardinal Newman and Father Ambrose (discussed in Chapter 4) it is through their final wishes that, in a period before legal acknowledgement through civil partnerships and same-sex marriage, the emotional bonds between two men were often documented. As in the case of Newman, this leaves us in a difficult position. Does labelling the two men as lovers implicate us in a retrospective outing of them, or is it a reasonable assumption based on the information we have? Certainly, terms like ‘partner’ have enough ambiguity to ensure no one is clear. This lack of clarity raises interesting and difficult questions for curators and visitors alike, and it is possibly unsurprising that the interpretation provided in the Nymans guidebook bypassed their relationship completely, excluding and erasing the relationship between these two men. However, this is not a neutral act.

Unravelling Nymans was being planned at the same time as a temporary exhibition on the work of Oliver Messel was held at the house. In conversation, one of the house team mentioned that there had been a complaint from a visitor that Oliver’s sexuality had been ignored and this was a concern for them. At the same time, I was told by another member of staff that we were not allowed to say that Oliver was gay. When asked why, I was told that it might cause offence to the family who are still actively involved with the property. There is something particularly challenging and poignant about omitting or erasing these

\(^{389}\) Castle, Oliver Messel, 251.
\(^{390}\) Castle, Oliver Messel, 251
\(^{391}\) Messel, Oliver Messel, 26.
relationships from domestic spaces – one of the few spaces where same-sex desire could be acted out safely before it was decriminalised in Britain in 1967. I was therefore interested in how an intervention in the house could speak of this relationship while negotiating the politics of the house. As previously mentioned, we were interested in the house because of the theatricality of Oliver’s designs, so it seemed sensible to start looking at the Messel archive held at the V&A. I was particularly interested in the costume that Oliver designed for the Russian dancer Serge Lifar to wear in Charles B. Cochran’s 1930 Revue that was performed at the Palace Theatre, Manchester, on 4 March and the London Pavilion on 27 March 1930 (Figure 5.2).
There were numerous reasons why this costume for a Highlander interested me. It had been worn on stage in 1930 by the dancer Serge Lifar, Diaghilev’s one-time lover. Oliver obviously had an affinity for it since he had it either ‘remade or adapted’ so that he could wear it to a party given by Daisy Fellowes, the editor-in-chief of French Harper’s Bazaar. I was also drawn to its camp theatricality, a pastiche of masculinity: it takes military dress and exaggerates it to the point of parody, the feather headpiece owing more to cabaret and show girls than the military.

Messel’s original costume for Piccadilly 1830 has already set up a visual confusion of the dancer’s masculinity (Figures 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5). By replacing a bearskin with ostrich feathers, the norms of military dress were questioned. Likewise, the compressing of two dates in one location – the Piccadilly of 1830 as a haunt for upper-class men was ‘a distant cry from what [it] had become by 1930… alongside the bespoke Savile Row tailoring trade… it was also known as a cruising ground for the working-class Dilly Boys’. It is unlikely that Messel would not have been aware of Piccadilly’s reputation in 1930 and that this could have acted as an in-joke for those in the know, fusing the dandy’s adoption of military dress with a site known for casual sex.

The original costume is still extant in the V&A’s store at Blythe House and I booked in to visit it. As with much theatrical costume, materials were chosen to create a visual impression from a distance rather than slavishly follow an original.

Figure 5.3  Oliver Messel, *Highlander Jacket*, 1930, Victoria and Albert Museum, Museum Number S.500: 1/12-2006.

Figure 5.4  Oliver Messel, *Highlander Jacket (detail)*, 1930, Victoria and Albert Museum, Museum Number S.500: 1/12-2006.
I was interested in how this costume could be used as a jumping-off point to discuss Oliver’s sexuality and relationship with Vagn, how it could speak to the silence that currently existed at the property.

Beth Lord argues that heterotopias are spaces of difference ‘in which ordinary cultural emplacements are brought together and represented, contested, and reversed’ and that ‘in presenting an illusory version of human life or nature they question and contest the “real” order of things’. It is this reframing of the ‘real’, a reframing that selects the narratives to tell that enables curators to provide reductionist interpretations of the complex histories of a historic house. Unlike the museum, whose heterotopic status in part relies on representing ‘objects in their difference from the conceptual orders in which those objects would normally be understood’, the historic house will often present objects in the context developed by their original owners. The historic house as a heterotopia relies more on a dynamic lived environment being presented as a

static space and the compression and juxtaposition of multiple times to be experienced in a single visit. It was this temporal aspect of Foucault’s definition of a heterotopia that interested me: the bringing ‘together of disparate objects from different times in a single space that attempts to enclose the totality of time’. Using one installation, I was aiming to link three separate times: Anne Messel’s time as a widow at the house, Oliver Messel in his 1930s heyday, and Piccadilly of 1830.

Jack Halberstam argues that there is a different, ‘a queer and fluid form of knowing, that operates independently of coherence or linear narrative or progression… [which in]… the absence of memory or the absence of wisdom – leads to a new form of knowing’. The suppression of information allows for gaps in histories and opens up ‘an alternative mode of knowing, one that resists the positivism of memory projects and refuses a straight and Oedipal logic for understanding the transmission of ideas’. This queer form of knowing might, in part, account for my desire to link these three separate historical times.

It could be argued that this merging of three separate times into an event that never happened is a queering of history. Foucault stated that “[d]iscontinuity was the stigma of temporal dislocation that it was the historian’s task to remove it from history”. Building on this, John Potvin suggests that:

> Modernist linear and chronological narratives which systematically occlude the possibility of that which threatens to make a mess of it all, or that which emerges as foreign and from outside its rigorous parameters, distinguish the very real and material experiences of otherness. The narratives of difference are always and by default must be differed, revealed only partially and gradually over time. Modernist history and historiography has made locating difference purposefully opaque, but not completely invisible or unintelligible.

399 Halberstam, The Queer Art of Failure, 54.
400 Halberstam, The Queer Art of Failure, 69.
It therefore seems appropriate that to unpick queer histories, chronological narratives should be confused, made unintelligible and a space given centre-stage to the narratives of difference.

I hand-cut and sewed the jacket in *Piccadilly 1830*. I then embellished it with thousands of mirror backed glass beads, each one individually sewn on. This labour-intensive process involved repetition over a long period of time, and during the making process, I entered into polychronic time. Marcia Tucker argues that unlike the ‘evolutionary, progressive, monochronic sense of time that informs the high art tradition’, polychronic time, which is ‘experienced in the long and complex processes of embroidery, lace-making, knitting and quilting… weaves the past and present together’ and through these objects ‘communal values and practices are brought forward into the present’. 405

The process of beading not only allowed for the connection of disassociated points in time, but also allowed for reflection on the lives of both men. Tami Katz-Freiman has suggested that ‘[l]ike other labour-intensive processes, the process of beading inevitably marks the passage of time it has thus been employed by numerous artists, who create rituals of mourning culminating in beauty-infused products’. 406

Figure 5.6  Matt Smith, *Piccadilly 1830*, 2012, turkey and ostrich feathers, ceramic, wool, linen, mirror-backed beads, dimensions variable, Nymans House and Gardens.
In my installation, the jacket was paired with an oversized feather bear
skin. The cage and feathers were commissioned from a feather wholesaler who
undertakes work for the Ministry of Defence. Partly to match the location of the
finished work, but also to exaggerate the ‘campy’ stage aspect of the finished
installation, I decided to enlarge the height of the hat which involved
commissioning a custom-made cage.

The bear skin band and rosette were made out of ceramic. The feathers and
wool of the intervention are relatively fragile materials, prone to decay. In
contrast, the ceramic band and rosette, unless smashed, provided an almost
permanent element to the intervention. I was drawn to the idea of a future
curator trying to include a ceramic band sewn onto a metal cage into the
normative, and heteronormative, interpretation of the house.

As Messel has replaced bear skin with ostrich feathers, I replaced the cotton
braiding with mirrored beads. Both these substitutions ‘betray many of the
characteristics and tropes of the Camp sensibility that Susan Sontag
enumerated in her seminal essay of 1964, namely: exaggeration, artifice,
aestheticism.’

The use of camp is fitting. Sontag suggests that, ‘Camp taste turns its back on
the good-bad axis of ordinary aesthetic judgement. Camp doesn’t reverse
things. It doesn’t argue that the good is bad, or the bad is good. What it does is
to offer for art (and life) a different – a supplementary – set of standards’.

Sontag is suggesting that camp allows a space for difference to exist. Here, the
overlap between camp as a means of opening up debate and questioning
norms acts in a similar manner to artist interventions. To reduce the intervention
down to a simple ‘outing’ of Oliver Messel is to miss the point. The intervention
plays with those subtle sleight of hands that shine light on how fragile
performances of masculinity are: a feather too high turns military butch into
showgirl effeminacy.

I first saw a photograph of Oliver Messel at an exhibition at Nymans a few years
before the exhibition. It was a similar sleight of hand, a smile, a wink in that

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408 Susan Sontag, “Notes on ‘Camp’,” (1964) A Susan Sontag Reader (Harmondsworth:
image that signalled to me that Oliver was other, was possibly gay. As Aaron Betsky posits, ‘queer men put on a show. It was show that presented them first of all to themselves, validating their existence in a real place, and then to others who shared their tastes, so that they might recognize each other, and, finally and defiantly, to the world’. Curatorial silence does not always erase queer histories. In a similar way in which objects can be read as queer, attuned visitors can sometimes intuitively read that something queer may be going on within historic houses. If these queer histories are not being discussed by the institution, it suggests to the visually aware visitor that queer lives (and possibly visitors) are unwelcome, or at least should be silent or silenced.

Figure 5.8  Anthony Armstrong-Jones, 1st Earl of Snowdon, Photograph of Oliver Messel, date unknown. Image courtesy of Anthony Armstrong-Jones, 1st Earl of Snowdon.

Figure 5.7  Matt Smith, *Piccadilly 1830*, 2012, Turkey and ostrich feathers, ceramic, wool, linen, mirror-backed beads, dimensions variable, Nymans House and Gardens.
The jacket and bearskin were placed on an existing Roman sculpture *The Antique Youth* – popularly known as the herm – at the property. The interaction between the new intervention and the existing object was a key consideration, since ‘juxtaposition queerly challenges and contests both accepted codes and a system of values that implies oppression and silencing, not only within sexuality but also within cultural institutions’.\(^{410}\) This juxtaposition directly responded to the institutional silencing that was in place at Nymans.

The intervention thereby allowed previously silenced histories to be spoken of. Ann Cvetkovich, in *An Archive of Feelings* (2003), argues for the need to take affect into account when exploring gay and lesbian history which ‘demands a radical archive of emotion in order to document intimacy, sexuality, love, and activism – all areas of experience that are difficult to chronicle through the materials of a traditional archive’.\(^{411}\) She goes on to suggest that both artistic representations and oral histories have value as affective transmitters.

As previously mentioned, *Piccadilly 1830* aimed to compress the time between when Oliver first wore the jacket and when his sister lived at the house, merging a high point for Oliver and a low point for Anne. By the time Anne moved to Nymans, both Oliver’s relationship with Vagn and Anne’s with the Earl of Rosse had ended, since they had both been widowed. Artwork and site came together when the piece was placed in location on the *The Antique Youth*. The sculpture, which has lost its nose and its genitals, lends the intervention a sense of the cadaverous as well as commenting on the de-sexing of the original designer: signposting both something queer and a memento mori. Adair argues that:

> Many historic sites and house museums carry on the tradition of concealing and denying the gayness of the men who have had so much to do with the preservation of those places – promulgating what a gay preservationist with the National Trust calls the “bachelor uncle” description of those men.\(^{412}\)

\(^{410}\) Mathieu, *Sexpots*, 132.


\(^{412}\) Adair, “House Museums or Walk-in Closets?” 265.
It is to the credit of the house team at Nymans that, following the *Unravelling Nymans* exhibition, Vagn was put on the Messel family tree and linked to Oliver Messel, unravelling his status as a “bachelor uncle”.
6.2 The Vyne

The second intervention in a historic house took place at The Vyne, a large, adapted Tudor property near Basingstoke. Unlike Nymans, which has a relatively short history and whose interpretation is specifically focused on the period when the last resident lived there, The Vyne presents the visitor with numerous histories ranging from the 1500s to the 1950s. The slicing of time at The Vyne therefore becomes that much more complex to navigate.

The history I chose to work with was that of John Chute (1701–76), who was the owner of The Vyne between 1754 and 1776. According to the guidebook:

John Chute as the youngest of Edward Chute’s ten children and, as he was unlikely to inherit the family estates, spent many years travelling in Italy… He was never to marry, but surrounded himself with younger men, including his handsome, wealthy and deaf cousin, Francis Whithead… In Italy the two inseparable cousins were called the “Chutheads”.

This is an odd paragraph and it is unclear what we are meant to make of it. It is hard to think that linking his unmarried status with handsome younger men and can anything but a thinly veiled indication that something queer is going on. Raymond Bentman is more explicit, arguing that ‘John Chute and Francis Whithead made no secret of their intimacy. They were inseparable, they referred to themselves as “the Chutes” or “the Whitheads” and their friends called them “the Chuteheads.” Chute referred to Whithead as “my other half”.

The unpicking here becomes difficult. Bentmen seems sure that Chute and Whithead were a couple but goes on to state:

We may debate what to call these men and we will never know what they did in bed. But when we survey all the information, the explanation that makes the most sense of the material is that these men were strongly

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413 Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 239.
interested in other males for sexual and emotional gratification and that they formed some kind of group around this common interest.416

Francis Whithead died in his early thirties, about ten years after he and John Chute met Horace Walpole in Florence on the Grand Tour and it is the relationship between Chute and Walpole that I was interested in exploring. We are fortunate that Horace Walpole was one of the most prodigious letter writers of the eighteenth century, and that provides us with insight into the specific intimacies between these two men.

Figure 5.9 Johann Heinrich Müntz, *John Chute (detail)*, The Vyne, National Trust Picture Library. ©National Trust Images/John Hammond

416 Bentman, “Horace Walpole’s Forbidden Passion,” 278.
The use of the term ‘other half’ was also used by Walpole, many years after Chute used it to describe Whithead. This time, it was used when Walpole wrote following the death of John Chute: ‘I am lamenting myself, not him! – no I am lamenting my other self. Half is gone; the other remains solitary’. While I am not arguing that this term is being used to signify a queer sexual relationship, it does suggest a strong homosocial intimacy. Walpole’s letters have been used

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to argue on one hand that Walpole was a homosexual and on the other that he was celibate and confined himself to epistolary relationships with both men and women. John Iddon, on the subject of Horace Walpole in the guidebook for Strawberry Hill, writes: ‘[r]eal wives, however, were not his [Walpole’s] orientation. As Wilmarth Lewis put it “the feminine part of his nature was strong” and he had a number of close urbane and effeminate bachelor friends such as Chute and Gray.

John Chute certainly displays mannerisms that would today be linked to gay culture, particularly gender reversal, as this excerpt from a letter to Walpole about a Raphael painting in Rome makes clear: ‘[s]uch a Christ, as beautiful, as graceful, and we may suppose, if his petticoats were off, as well made as his elder brother of the Belvidere’. Similar effeminacy in Walpole did not go unnoticed. A contemporary, George Hardinge referred to Walpole’s ‘effeminacy of manner’ and added ‘some of his friends were as effeminate in appearance and in manner as himself and were as witty. Of these I remember two, Mr. Chute and Mr. George Montagu. But others had effeminacy alone to recommend them’. That this effeminacy was not socially acceptable becomes clear in William Guthrie’s attack on Walpole in 1764. Although in the writing, Guthrie pretends to not know the recipient of the attack, Bentman asserts that he did. Guthrie writes:

This abuse it would be more unpardonable to reply to, or retort, since there is a weakness and an effeminacy in it... The feeble tone of the expression, and the passionate fondness with which the personal qualities of the officer in question are continually dwelt on would almost tempt one to imagine, that his arrow came forth from a female quiver, but as it wants both the true delivery and lively imagination which characterized a lady’s pen, the attack must have been from a neutral quarter, from a being between both, neither totally male or female... by

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418 Bentman, “Horace Walpole’s Forbidden Passion,” 278.
nature maleish, by disposition female… that it would very much puzzle a common observer to assign to him to his true sex…\textsuperscript{424}

This gives us an insight into the social expectations of male and female gender norms and the policing of their transgression. George Haggerty suggests that we concentrate less of what might be happening sexually and instead think ‘about the bachelorism, amicability, intimacy, and wit, then we will start to understand this man [Walpole] and his circle’.\textsuperscript{425} While I agree with Haggerty, I think there is enough evidence of non-conformity to create tentative, historical links between Chute and Walpole and what we would now call queer behaviour.

Walpole’s letters therefore give us a key insight into the early days of queer subculture (Walpole and Chute met in 1740), since it has been argued by Alan Bray, here quoted by Annamarie Jagose, that:

> the origins of modern homosexuality can be discerned… at the close of the 17th century, with the emergence of an urban homosexual subculture that sprang up around … “molly houses” …[where] men with sexual interests in other men gathered, but not necessarily for sex. For although “sex was the root of the matter… it was as likely to be expressed in drinking together, in flirting and gossip and in a circle of friends as in actual liaisons”\textsuperscript{426}

Bray therefore contradicts Foucault’s assertion that the move from homosexuality being an act ‘to which anyone might succumb’\textsuperscript{427} into ‘a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and feminine in oneself’\textsuperscript{428} happened around 1870. Bray, and the letters of Horace Walpole indicate that this non-normative, or queer, way of being and shared sensibility was happening from the later 1600s onwards. This would open up the potential to use contemporary identity terms to describe historical intimacies from at least the eighteenth century.

What I was particularly interested in at The Vyne, though, was how this homosexual subculture responded to and adapted their houses. During their 36-

\textsuperscript{424} William Guthrie, qtd in Bentman, “Horace Walpole’s Forbidden Passion,” 282.
\textsuperscript{426} Alan Bray, qtd in Jagose, \textit{Queer Theory}, 12.
\textsuperscript{427} Jagose, \textit{Queer Theory}, 11.
\textsuperscript{428} Foucault, \textit{The History of Sexuality}, 43.
year friendship/relationship Walpole and Chute continually sought to influence and adapt their own and each other’s properties and the contents of those properties. Peter McNeil has argued that ‘most contemporary evidence [of historical same-sex activity] is based on investigations of tavern-like brothels such as the infamous “Mother Clap’s Molly House” and parks, latrines and servant’s quarters, the sites described in court transcripts constitute a form of spatial “low life”’. However, Walpole and Chute, along with some other notable exceptions including William Beckford, provide us with a unique insight into how queer lives were being lived in a domestic setting, largely owing to the occupiers’ financial independence, which allowed them greater freedom in society.

Figure 5.11 Amended plan of The Vyne highlighting Walpole’s allocated rooms. Original plan M. Howard, The Vyne (Swindon: The National Trust, 2010) np. Print.

On the ground floor of The Vyne is a room now called the Print Room, which was named the ‘Strawberry Parlour’ by John Chute in honour of the ‘Committee of Taste’. According to *The Vyne* guidebook, ‘[i]t is possible Walpole used this and the neighbouring room when he was John’s guest here.’ As can be seen from the plan of the house (Figure 5.11), this places Walpole at the very heart of the house. It is difficult to know what to make of this – Walpole is placed centrally in the house, but with his sleeping accommodation on the ground floor, away from the other bedrooms on the first floor.

Alongside Richard Bentley, Walpole and Chute had formed the ‘Committee of Taste’, which supervised the enlargement and decoration of Walpole’s villa, Strawberry Hill. Taste occupies a very specific place here; according to Haggerty ‘taste became a code for a certain mode of shared sensibility that was often understood to suggest something about sexual predilection, or at least qualified masculinity’.430 Haggarty suggested that:

> Walpole and his closest friends… understood taste as a definitive arbiter, something that they shared and that defined them. Like the later concept of identity, taste, for Walpole and his friends, is a shared predilection for the artistically sophisticated, for the idiosyncratic, for the one item or series of items that can help to make Strawberry Hill a retreat worthy of its creator.431

Haggarty is here linking a domestic visual sensibility with identity politics. Therefore, I would argue that to understand how these men self-identified, we need to look at how they used, decorated and filled their homes as the two are intrinsically linked. To continue the conflation started by Haggarty, these are queer men and they designed queer houses. I was interested in using two more contemporary queer visual strategies: camp and kitsch within the interventions at The Vyne.

There are visual overlaps between The Vyne and Strawberry Hill, and the influence of the two men on each other is clear when you compare the painted

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vaulting in the Chapel at The Vyne (Figure 5.12) with the moulded ceiling in the Gallery at Strawberry Hill (Figure 5.13).

Figure 5.12 (left)  The Chapel at The Vyne. M. Howard, *The Vyne* (Swindon: The National Trust, 2010) np. Print. ©NT/Richard Holttum


This visual use of the gothic was a core element of Walpole’s developments at Strawberry Hill, but his love of gothic was not solely visual. In 1764, Walpole wrote *The Castle of Otranto*, which is credited as being the first gothic novel which ‘almost single-handedly made fashionable the taste for the bizarre, for love of doom and gloom. It also helped establish the Gothic as a site of sexual paranoia, especially the conflict between homosexuality and homophobia’\textsuperscript{432} and was used as ‘a stylistic innovation to describe the “unthinkable” and the “unspeakable”’.\textsuperscript{433} McNeil situates *The Castle of Otranto* by reference to:

The queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick [who] in her *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985) famously argued for the gothic novel, invented by Walpole, Beckford and Monk Lewis, as a type of paranoid writing that embodied “homosexual panic”. Similarly,


\textsuperscript{433} McNeil, “Crafting Queer Spaces,” 27.
Walpole’s invention of the gothic novel has been interpreted by Raymond Bentman as a stylistic innovation to describe the ‘unthinkable’ and the ‘unspeakable’.434

Gothic does not link solely to the homes of queer men – it was also exploited by the lesbian Anne Lister (1791–1840) when remodelling her house, Shibden Hall, ‘to combine display with concealment’.435 It has been argued that this architectural choice was for psychosexual as well as aesthetic reasons. Rowenchild argues that ‘disguise and hiding’436 accounts for her use of the gothic as well as the code in her diaries, with the gothic façade at Shibden Hall being an attempt to create increased importance and status, and provide a façade behind which to hide her (female) lover.

It is argued that the gothic architecture, as well as her diary, provided a safe social, physical and textual environment where her central and lesbian identities could coexist. It is interesting that the (public) molly house juxtaposition of a neutral exterior with an opulent interior is being replaced with a highly decorative, but visually intimidating (private) exterior. The use of gothic exteriors is interesting: it is a very visible display (of identity) which also provides a fortress-like defence from the outside world.

Charles Saumarez Smith describes Strawberry Hill as ‘a presage of the way interiors would be used in the future, as a conscious instrument of personal expression: the house was to become a private castle. An escape from time, a place of retreat’,437 again conflating domestic visual sensibilities with identity. While it is not hard to work out reasons why a gay man in the 1700s may want to escape from time, if we are to believe Saumarez Smith that the house is an instrument of personal expression, then we need to identify the visual characteristics of the house to determine the aesthetic chosen by this queer man. In addition to the use of gothic detailing, Walpole was renowned for his collections:

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436 Rowanchild, ‘Everything Done For Effect,’ 89–104.

the collections at Strawberry Hill also fuelled an interest in fantastical and incongruous juxtaposition, further popularised through Walpole’s published *Description* (1784) and the famous auction dispersal of 1842. Betsky notes that in the early nineteenth century, ‘queers turned palaces into quasi-museums’, with designs by Hope, Percier and Fontaine, looking ‘as if you had peeked behind the heavy curtains of daily life to find a space of fantasy… the inhabitant could mirror himself or herself in idealized human forms and luxurious stage sets of a royal life’.438

Both Walpole and Chute were avid collectors, both during and after the Grand Tour. Mieke Bal argues that collecting can form a narrative, and that the collector acts as an agent in this narrative.439 I would suggest that Walpole and Chute’s collections were used by the two men as a way of visually presenting themselves, and also a way of socialising and bonding, since:

Walpole’s interest in art is genuine, and he reserves a kind of abject devotion to those things that most delight him: a head of Caligula, miniature portraits, scandalous memoirs: all these begin to suggest an eroticism in things that for Walpole, at least, may be the only eroticism there is. There is no word for an eroticism of this kind: a group of men sharing enthusiasm for a particular miniature or a particular bronze… Objects for Walpole are what bring him in to closer touch with the men he loves.440

Michael Camille441 has argued that ‘collecting is a performance’442 and that collecting has a specific role in queer identity formation: ‘[i]t is not just that the unmentionable nature of same-sex desire has often meant that the subject had to communicate the ‘secret’ in a coded language, but the fact that this language was a system of objects. What could not be said could be spoken through

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442 Camille, “Editor’s Introduction,” 1.
things'. I therefore decided to use this love of collecting as the starting point for the first intervention at The Vyne: *The Gift* (Figure 5.14). While Walpole and Chute obviously influenced each other, there seems to have been some inequality, to the point that Walpole, writing to George Montagu comments: ‘I don’t guess what sight I have to come in Hampshire, unless it is Abbotstone. I am pretty sure I have none to come at the Vine, where I have done advising, as I see Mr. Chute will never execute anything’.

Not wanting to further hurt Walpole’s feelings, *The Gift* sees Chute bundling all of Walpole’s rejected suggestions together and hiding them out of sight, behind the main staircase. Unable to throw away the unwanted tokens and trinkets, Chute masses the divergent objects gifted to him, objects that map Horace’s travels and magpie-like search for beauty. Their collective display is adorned with strings of pearls. The pearls, while referencing innocence and good taste, also alludes to the term ‘pearl necklace’, slang for ejaculation, working with the unsolvable high/low, tasteful/distasteful, celibate/sexual dichotomy at the heart of their relationship.

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443 Camille, “Editor’s Introduction,” 2.
Figure 5.14  Matt Smith, *The Gift*, 2013, white earthenware, freshwater pearls, wire, 60cm tall, The Vyne.
Figure 5.15 Matt Smith, *The Gift*, 2013, white earthenware, freshwater pearls, wire, 60cm tall, The Vyne.
By recasting the discordant objects in the same material, and firing them together, they have been reworked to create ‘family resemblances between objects’. Whitney Davis has proposed the idea of queer family romance, where collections of objects can come together to form substitute queer family groups. He has suggested that this can work with the collector becoming either an inheritor – placing himself within a group of historical objects or queer biographies – or as a progenitor – creating new links between objects, sometimes physically as in the Walpole Cabinet in the V&A’s collections or the pietra dura casket at The Vyne to which John Chute added the rococo stand.

Figure 5.16 (left) Walpole Cabinet, 1743, padouk veneered onto a pine carcase with carved ivory plaques, figures and mounts, Victoria and Albert Museum, W.52:1, 2-1925. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Figure 5.17 (right) Pietra dura casket bought by John Chute in 1741–5 with rococo stand and glass cover which he added, The Vyne. © National Trust Images/John Hammond

Queer family romance offers an interesting counterargument to the heteronormativity of historic house histories based around family trees. If we are to accept Davis’ suggestions, then The Gift in some way acts as Walpole and Chute’s love child – admittedly one created via immaculate conception and

surrogate delivery. It seals the relationship between the two men further as the installation visually resembles a contemporary wedding cake.

The second intervention, *Dandy*, looks solely at John Chute and his self-presentation. *Dandy* is cast from a relatively contemporary mass-produced figurine of a dandy with a dog. This figure is placed on a tower of cast objects, formed from classical vases and plinths with neoclassical additions and pearls. The piece is placed on the central staircase at The Vyne, one of the areas of the house that Chute remodelled.

Figures 5.18 and 5.19  Matt Smith, *The Gift (details)*, 2013, white earthenware, freshwater pearls, wire, 60cm tall, The Vyne.
Figure 5.20  Matt Smith, *Dandy*, 2013, white earthenware, enamel, decals, freshwater pearls, wire, 130cm tall, The Vyne.
Figure 5.21 Matt Smith, *Dandy*, 2013, white earthenware, enamel, decals, freshwater pearls, wire, 130cm tall, The Vyne.
Figurines based on eighteenth century dandies were ubiquitous, cheap and mass-produced in the twentieth century and aimed at the mass market. They occupy an interesting place in popular culture, since they refuse to move with popular taste and are often imbued with nostalgia. Working with them ‘raises questions about high and low culture, class, taste and value in general’.447

The eighteenth century has been a recurring motif in interiors and has gone in and out of fashion, oscillating between being a source of good and bad taste. Referencing the work of Lisa Dowling, Jasmine Rault448 suggests that it is a period synonymous with decadence and gender abnormality:

for late-nineteenth-century artists and writers hoping to break from what they saw as stifling Victorian morality and dogmatic sincerity, the eighteenth century represented an era of languorous pleasures, ‘licentious freedom’, ‘inverted satire’ and ‘ambiguous effeminacy’… an eighteenth century understood as ‘elegantly sensual, artificial, uncommitted to anything but pleasures’…

The ceramic dandy therefore fuses two sensibilities affiliated with queer: camp and licentious freedom. The figurine from which the cast was taken was specifically chosen for the installation since it echoes ‘the cruising style that has come to be known as “stand-and-_pose”’ – a decidedly self-contained form of cruising that telegraphs something like: “I am indicating that I want you only to the extent that I am showing how desirable I am by demonstrating that I am capable to complete indifference to you”.449 This work therefore places John Chute as a queer, cruising man, and also shows him presenting himself to the world propped up on a collection of classical vases and plinths, which brings us back to the notion of camp:

449 Crimp, “Coming Together to Stay Apart,” 52.
Theatrical self-presentation and the establishing of subcultural taste are central factors in the manifold concept of camp. The collecting of objects, artworks, interiors, clothes, and memorabilia, and the ways that they are displayed, can be considered as two practices that allow for camping both as the objects are collected and as they are appreciated.450

The decision to use an original object of questionable taste was a conscious one. Exploiting camp, where ‘an engaged irony which (as the best definition of camp puts it) allows one a strong feeling of involvement with a situation or object while simultaneously providing one with a comic appreciation of its contradictions’451 charges the installation with a queer sensibility, for although John Chute is placed in prime position as the emperor of all he surveys, it is a slightly comic emperor at best. In addition to it being part of the house that Chute remodelled, there is another reason for the installation to be placed in the Staircase Hall, since it forms a queer triangulation with the two busts at the base of the staircase. These busts, of Caligula – with his indiscriminate sexual activities – and Antoninus, who was adopted by Hadrian following the death of Hadrian’s lover Antinous, resonate with queer once the installation is in place. In this way, the installation also fulfils Whitney Davis’ idea of queer family romance,452 but in this case with John Chute acting as inheritor rather than progenitor.

John Chute, is therefore placed at the apex of queer-associated historical biographies, ‘[q]ueer family romance would be the romance of a queer family – a romance that might make such family socially possible…’ a ‘queer self-genealogy’, and inheritor of an extraconsanguinary family tree.

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453 Davis, “Queer Family Romance,” 315.
454 Davis, “Queer Family Romance,” 316.
5.3 Conclusion

The emphasis in historic houses on the genealogy of the wealthy families that had owned them gives them a strongly heteronormative bias. However, there is a dichotomy at play, for in addition to being sites of heteronormativity, they were also sites of intimacy, including non-normative and queer intimacy, and lend themselves to exploring these intimacies in a way that objects held by museums seldom are. One of the criticisms levelled at historic houses – the elite nature of their owners – here benefits one minority – the lesbian or gay visitor. While identification will need to be ‘mobilised across class lines’, historic examples of lesbian and gay life have often had their ‘origins in the elite or the creative upper-middle class’ partially since economic independence allowed for lives to be lived outside the bounds of social norms.

The historic house – which provides us with collections of objects and environments developed by individuals in order to reflect their interests and desires – has the potential to provide us with rich and, as yet, under-mined, seams of knowledge about queer pasts. In addition, if we start to re-view the historic house as a site of queer family romances rather than merely one of heteronormative family trees, we have the potential to uncover the emotional and queer affects presented at the sites.

When considering these interventions in historic houses, it could be argued that the debates and discussions generated could be undertaken in other formats – though writing or speaking. However, I would argue that the physical interventions, with their ability to not only direct discourse, but to also confuse it and allow room for the viewer to draw independent thoughts and conclusions has a stronger potential. Beth Lord argues that:

> The heterotopia is a site for discursive analysis because it already does the work of discursive analysis: it undermines the relation between words and things and maintains the space between them as a space. In other words, heterotopias are spaces of the difference of words and things.457

In order to interrogate these heterotopias, and the things they contain and display, these new inserted objects work with those things in a way that words on their own cannot.

Working with the National Trust has shown how diverse the different sites and house teams can be. Even within a house team, there has been disagreement as to whether to, or how to, present queer histories and intimacies. These discrepancies can make it difficult at times to negotiate working with these histories and sites. In the summer of 2012, Nymans was representing the National Trust at Brighton Pride, where a spokesperson for the Trust was quoted as saying: ‘[w]e feel strongly that the Trust must get out to where people are and we were delighted with the response – members loved seeing us at the event and there was lots of interest from others too’.458

In a pilot study of LGBT visitors to cultural institutions in North America by Heimlich and Koke, when visitors were asked ‘What makes a visit or attendance different for a [LGBT visitor] than for a heterosexual, if any?’,459 ‘[r]espondents articulated three main concepts…the ability to be demonstrative, feeling represented within the content, and feeling accepted with[in] the context’.460 As Heimlich and Koke were told by LGBT interviewees, to experience a sense of truly belonging in cultural venues, they would like to see ‘inclusions of [LGBT] individuals, couples and groups within the imagery and narrative associated with exhibits [which would]… truly model its institutional acceptance to all patrons’461 and address the fact that ‘[LGBT] history is so hidden that often times [LGBT] artists and performers are presented as asexual or heterosexual, or their gender non-conformity is not mentioned’.462

While the National Trust’s attendance at Pride may help visitors feel that they would be welcome at National Trust sites, there is still work to be done in order that LGBT lives are represented and discussed within the curated histories of those sites. As museums have already realised, and we are starting to begin to see with this work in historic houses, these sites have the potential to help

societies to heal.\textsuperscript{463} The representation of ‘the other’ in these sites should not be seen as an intellectual exercise but as a step towards a more honest representation of the pasts. As these properties become more comfortable with negotiating and telling their queer histories, they may come closer in achieving their mission ‘to promote the National Trust as being relevant to everyone’.\textsuperscript{464}

In their own ways, each of the interventions commissioned for Nymans and The Vyne operate in a manner that Hein equates with feminist practice: ‘[o]ne tactic advanced in both feminist and museum endeavours is the reversal of foreground and background, which draws attention to the overlooked and suppressed, and, having exposed it, asks why it has been neglected’.\textsuperscript{465} For curators holding onto a position of absolute knowledge, this unpicking of histories can be very challenging, since feminist theory also ‘adopts the mundane and unexpected, the trivial and horrendous, disruptions of ordinary circumstances that undermine the determination to simplify and celebrate, which it shows to be premature and often meretricious’.\textsuperscript{466}

Historic houses allow visitors ‘the recognition of the house as an emotional framework, a space in which to “live”’.\textsuperscript{467} Personal narratives are embedded in these houses in a way that they seldom are within museums and galleries, and allow for a more intimate and personal response to the environment. This ready-charged atmosphere provides the potential for interventions in historic houses to connect with LGBT affect in a unique way.

For many, and complicated reasons, queer histories have been omitted or treated differently from heterosexual ones in many historic houses. This is unsurprising given the relatively recent and rapid changes in social and legal attitudes towards same-sex relationships, and we are in a period where historic houses are playing ‘catch-up’. These two case studies have attempted to

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{463} Lord, “Foucault’s Museum,” 11.
\textsuperscript{464} National Trust website, 30 May 2013. \url{http://www.nationaltrustjobs.org.uk/articles/proud-to-be-national-trust}
\textsuperscript{465} Hein, “Looking at Museums from a Feminist Perspective,” 57.
\textsuperscript{466} Hein, “Looking at Museums from a Feminist Perspective,” 55.
\end{flushleft}
facilitate this catch-up process and provide a practical means of addressing their histories of non-normative sexualities.
Conclusion

This research started with an exploration of what queer art made using craft techniques looked like and whether there is such a thing as a queer craft sensibility. What began as a mapping exercise moved into a practical analysis of the mechanisms that underpin cultural organisations and privilege heteronormativity within them. This change of direction is possibly unsurprising since ‘[q]ueer adoringly embraces fluidity, change and the process of coming to know that which one senses in the body, but cannot quite, yet, conclusively define through language’. The question of what queer craft is would possibly be best answered through a cross-disciplinary show of queer craft, which then leads onto the curatorial questions of what would be included and excluded by the terms queer and craft. As the chapter on curating has outlined, the question of what queer is has many answers and can be tackled curatorially in many ways. To some extent, this was the joy of the work: queer and craft’s slippery and elusive qualities always keeping them slightly out of grasp.

As an umbrella term, queer encompasses a large and diverse group. While attempts during the research have been made to be inclusive, the research has privileged the gay, white male viewpoint. This is partly due to the pre-existing knowledge of the researcher but also, in the examples of the historic house interventions, was based on the historic source material available to work with. It is hoped that the methodologies developed in the research may be used by other artists in the future to interrogate other aspects of queer. The research has also privileged queer over other identity terms such as race, nationality and class. The research has drawn heavily of the work of artists such as Fred Wilson and Glenn Ligon who have interrogated the representation of African Americans in museums and art galleries. This overlap suggests that in addition to exploring any unique aspects of identity, the work can be seen as a critique of overarching grand narratives and a troubling of institutional interpretation which, through the omnipresence of heteronormativity, gender and racial bias and class privilege, presents the history and voices of certain groups in society to a greater extent than others.

Craft’s status as an umbrella term has similar, but different, issues attached to it. ‘Craft is like any other word. It has no sacred right to exist, and the word may well fade in the coming decades… the individual disciplines have a strong identity as jewellery art, metal art, ceramic art, glass art, textile art, and wood art. It is their collective identity as craft that has lost its meaning.’\(^{469}\)

A queer craft exhibition could make visual connections between works, and the chapters on queer craft objects and queer curating drew out visual strategies that link some queer objects. However, the curatorial methodology would inevitably steer those associations and privilege some visual languages over others. It became clear during the research, that this exhibition, while potentially fascinating, was not necessarily the best way to address the subject for an academic thesis. As Susan Sontag explained in “Notes on ‘Camp’”, ‘[t]o snare a sensibility in words, especially one that is alive and powerful, one must be tentative and nimble. The form of jottings, rather than an essay (with its claim to a linear, consecutive argument), seemed more appropriate for getting down something of this particular fugitive sensibility’.\(^{470}\) Therefore rather than attempting to identify overarching visual strategies, the research began to unpick how cultural organisations represent difference, and particularly queer difference. In doing so, the research followed the assertion that ‘[q]ueer projects work to disrupt insidious, normalizing ideologies by way of re-appropriating parts of discursive systems and explicitly advocating for social change’.\(^{471}\)

The linking of craft with identity was a recurring theme in the research. As the chapter on queer craft explores, the intersection of craft with identity politics is a longstanding one. Whether this is owing to craft’s linking of the haptic and the intellectual, the ability of craft to allow for heterogeneity, or the under-exploitation of craft in the art world which left it open to feminist artists is debatable. Issues of the handmade, the personal, the domestic and the decorative all link with craft and are addressed by artists including Nick Cave,

\(^{469}\) Veitberg, *Craft in Transition*, 86.

\(^{470}\) Sontag, “Notes on ‘Camp’,” 54.

Robert Gober, Virgil Marti and Kent Hendricksen whose works resonate with queer. That their work is placed in the art world rather than the craft world raises interesting questions about the relationships and hierarchies involved. While there may be economic benefits of association with art rather than craft, I would suggest that these artists are drawn to craft materials and practices for a very specific reason, what Bruce Metcalf describes as craft’s role as a ‘social movement, often intuitive and without leadership… a collective attempt to relocate personal meaning in a largely indifferent world’.472

The capacity of queer craft to address the past and examine revisionist readings of objects and collections formed a large part of the practice in the research. ‘Culture in general, and gay and lesbian culture in particular, interprets and reconfigures the past in terms of the present’.473 For an identity group whose history has often been hidden or erased, this reconfiguration is a key strategy and the links between this reconfiguration of the past and the postmodernist technique of re-appropriation provides one of the strongest links between queer identity and a queer visual sensibility.

‘[Q]ueer readings and positions can (and do) become modified or change over time as people, cultures, and politics change’.474 That any examples of those historical understandings of queer sensibility still exist is, to a large extent, only a matter of chance. Whether cultural organisations will be better able to catalogue and preserve queer histories and associations is still debateable, but becoming more probable as society becomes more tolerant of difference. A possibly greater potential threat to the historical preservation of queer may be queer itself. Cathie Cohen, writing in response to the call to deconstruct identities has suggested that ‘[q]ueer theorizing that calls for the elimination of fixed categories of sexual identity seems to ignore the ways in which some traditional social identities and communal ties can, in fact, be important to one’s survival’.475

473 Rinder, “An Introduction to In a Different Light,” 4.
474 Doty, Making Things Perfectly Queer, 8.
This tension between queer theory and queer studies – the desire to destabilise and the desire to historicise and understand identity – shows no sign of abating. Likewise, queer craft practice, by its very nature will never be static, and the ‘unknown potential for queer suggests that its most enabling characteristics may well be potential looking forward without anticipating the future’. 476 Having said that, the potential for queer to interrogate the effects of identity and the bias of contemporary cultural organisations towards certain groups in society suggests that the need for queer filters to highlight organisational workings will not be a short-term project.

During the research, I found that in order to explore these organisational underpinnings hybridity was required: fusing the roles of artist, curator and historian together. This enables an examination of the cracks and fissures within cultural organisations, exploring what Potvin terms the narratives of difference. 477 The case studies, Queering the Museum, Other Stories and Unravelling the National Trust all provided different methodologies and attempted, in different ways, to overcome arguments that have been used to explain why queer representation in museums and galleries is so scarce.

Hybridity was not limited to working methodologies. Bruce Metcalf has argued that ‘many of the most interesting objects in the craftworld today are hybrids: they take characteristics of both craft and art’. 478 The erosion of binaries provides fruitful and exciting opportunities. That one of the most notable overlaps between craft and queer identity – the NAMES project – occurred outside of both the craft and art world suggests that there is still a long way to go towards cultural acceptance of difference. Fortunately, for some working on the intersection of queer and craft, the desire to reposition curatorial bias is an irrelevance since for many in the craftivism movement, “the radical potential” of an activity [takes precedence] over the actual object 479 and craft therefore moves from materiality into performativity.

476 Jagose, Queer Theory, 131–132.
Returning back to the original, and unanswered question – what is queer craft? Possibly the more appropriate questions to ask are why do we not recognise queer craft when we see it, and why might curatorial organisations and artists not want to take ownership of, and use, the terms queer and craft. While this might raise uncomfortable feelings in some, heteronormativity as an institution, which is so pervasive that it has become almost invisible, will continue to ensure what Monique Wittig identifies as ‘you-will-be-straight-or-you-will-not-be’\textsuperscript{480} unless more is done to question how identity is discussed in cultural organisations.

The potential of queer craft as an investigative technique is almost unlimited. The interrogation of white cube spaces was outside the scope of this research and has the potential for investigation in the future. Ideas around installation art and the creation of immersive, alternative environments and non-normative responses to gallery spaces both chime well with the notion of what queer craft could be.

Regardless of the specific arena queer craft is used to explore, it will be fluid and slippery. To try to pin down an ‘an identity without an essence’,\textsuperscript{481} while a very seductive prospect, is in reality an ultimately unrealisable project in any definite way. Rather, both queer and queer craft present an alternative to the normal, whatever that may be; and that alternative may or may not be restricted to individuals who identity as L, G, B or T.


\textsuperscript{481} Halperin, \textit{Saint=Foucault}, 62.
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Appendix 1 Installation images from *The Problems with History/Trouble with History*
Appendix 2  Queering the Museum Exhibition Catalogue
Queering the Museum

Andy Horn,
Exhibitions Manager, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

The process by which museums acquire their contents are many and various, the result of thousands of acts of donation and acquisition that happen for a multitude of motives. In the calm atmosphere of gallery displays, whether permanent or temporary, these contents are presented within often simple rationales - a brief history or description - which belies their rich and complex histories. The messiness and diversity of human life can be difficult to represent, and until recently has often been neglected in the agendas of museums which are often seen to present their collections with a single authoritative voice.

Museums are becoming more responsive to their audiences, and particularly to those constituencies of existing and potential visitors who are on their doorstep. As society changes, and has changed, in recent decades, there is a greater recognition of the different needs and interests of audiences; audiences who want greater representation within cultural institutions. As a consequence, museums such as Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, invite people to work with and re-interpret their collections to explore their appeal and meanings to visitors. Artists in particular delight in challenging and subverting the status quo and can have a natural affinity with objects and works of art which provide material for
The Ladies of Llangollen

Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby ran away together from their aristocratic Irish homes in 1778. They set up home together in rural Wales bonded by something more tender than friendship and lived there together for 51 years.

They attracted the attention of the outside world and visitors to their home at Plas Newydd included the Duke of Wellington, William Wordsworth, Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott.

them to work with, often taking at once both a playful and serious approach to how they engage with collections.

Society has historically placed very different values on the material it chooses to represent and the means by which it does this; whether this is the printed page, a work of art, television or organisations that control these – publisher, gallery or media channel. Objects are made and displayed according to social norms – figurines in heterosexual couples, the lives of artists suppressed in preference to the art historical value of the work, social history collections that respond to the concerns of the day such as rural or trade histories.

Queering the Museum is an opportunity to look at our collections with a fresh eye and explore further the multitude of possible perspectives and readings. As environments that showcase the creativity of others through the displays of fine and applied art, it is important that we continue to work with artists such as Matt Smith in order to communicate the currency of creative practice and the value of what art brings to society.
Carnation Cape

Sexual acts between men were illegal in the United Kingdom until 1967. Therefore gay men had to communicate with each other in covert ways to avoid persecution and prosecution.

Green carnations were worn on the lapels of gay men in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to signify their homosexuality. They were often worn by Oscar Wilde.

In 1894, Robert Buchanan anonymously published the novel The Green Carnation, based closely on the lives of Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas. It was used in the prosecution of Wilde during his trial for Gross Indecency. The cape is placed on Epstein’s sculpture, “Lucifer”. Lucifer was sculpted with the body of a man and the face of a woman.
There are numerous indications that were they alive today, both men would broadly agree with impressions of their work held by their contemporaries. Both men were in their early twenties when they met, and they were already recognized as great talents by the start of their careers. The Pre-Raphaelites were artists who were influenced by the work of the artists of the Italian Renaissance, and they sought to revive the art of painting and sculpture. Their work was characterized by a focus on accuracy and precision, and they were known for their attention to detail and their use of vivid colors and intricate brushwork. Their works were often inspired by classical mythology and literature, and they were known for their use of allegory and symbolism in their art. The Pre-Raphaelites were influential in the development of modern art, and their work has continued to be studied and admired by artists and art historians alike.
Political identity.

Our sense of gender, class, race, local, national, religious or
political identity, and in a much broader sense, contribute to our
understanding of a museum, and in turn, a museum serves to construct and
reassert that identity. The displays shape the identity of the
duction, and the space suggested by the display, define the identity
expected to be encountered within that space. These influences, or under
shopping centers, look at commodified visions of museums.

A visit to a museum to see objects from a view to the gilt
museums, is a cultural experience of time and space. It is this
displays, museum educators and curators, to order of the
distinguish between a museum's role and function.

Principally, organized around a thematic categorization of
and meaning, that the museum's spatial arrangements and discussions,
are key to the visit. The support of interpretation, narrative
are kept alive on the visit. The support of interpretation, narrative
are kept alive on the visit. The support of interpretation, narrative
from physical decay. Once admitted into the museum, objects are
representative set achieved, which in a museum does not.

The potential of things and the subjectivity

Of chaotic desire and the subjective

Over 7,000 people in the UK are currently living with HIV.

AIDS awareness campaign. The awareness raised the expectation of people with

Drugs are:

Oliver Winchell, V&A
However, this warm and fuzzy communitarian logic conceals the always present fact that museums function through exclusion in order to make sense of the material to hand, separating ideas from the chaos of things. A museum’s potential to explain is always based in its ability to focus on a particular set of relations and meanings. In the silence of the museum gallery, the cacophony of potential associations that the exhibits display is suppressed to ensure the communication of a singular, coherent and audible intellectual narrative. Thus the luxury of this authoritative and contemplative educational space is always predicated upon exclusions that may slip into an authoritarian, exclusive or undeniably dismissive mould, intolerant of atypical narratives or unrepresentative stories and ideas.

But of course museums do not stay still in this way and the ideas, narratives and objects that they deem important flow and change with time. Over a long trajectory, museums are far from quiet and they thron with intellectual change and movement. The key to successful museum collection management is to keep pace with society’s mores and desires. Exclusions must therefore be considered, rather than arbitrary, and meaningful in their absence, rather than pointed in their denial.

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans experiences and histories are a relatively new area for examination within the museum sector. An area of research currently in its infancy, the telling of such histories – and

Contemplating Mr Buturo
Consensual acts between same-sex adults are criminalised in 80 member states of the United Nations and being charged with homosexuality can result in the death penalty in six of these countries.

In 2009 James Nsaba Buturo, the Ugandan Minister of State for Ethics and Integrity campaigned for the death penalty for gay men. He said of same sex acts: “not even animals do that”. These half man-half animal figures are concerned as to their place in this logic.

Mr Buturo has also denounced sub-standard service delivery and the wearing of miniskirts.
the methods for so doing - is exciting, complex and difficult: a field littered with political, moral and personal challenges. Any investigation into this area throws up many questions and provides only partial answers. Perhaps the most complex question stems from the inherent contradiction that lies at the centre of the gay liberation movement and its legacy - the desire to eradicate discrimination whilst enshrining difference.

Thus, when sexual identity is discussed with any kind of thoughtful sensitivity beyond that of a simplistic, restrictive trans-historical essentialism, the museum project hits a problem. Many recent exhibitions have sought to address the exclusion of same sex desire from their collections and displays by presenting a series of ‘discovered’ identities and ‘hidden’ histories, telling self consciously bright and optimistic narratives that are built upon a retrospective outing of notable men and women of the past whose sexual desires could be described as non-normative.

Yet, as is well documented, the crystallisation of homosexuality as an identity rather than a set of activities occurred only towards the end of the nineteenth century and the simultaneous medicalisation of desire led to the disregard for, and in many cases wilful persecution of, homosexuals. How then can museums play catch up without producing reductive and overly simplistic stories of gradual transition from repression to liberation over the course of history, a form of telling that fetishises a breaking free from the closet? Desire is chaotic and can not be confined to neat binaries and tidy labels.

Dandies in Love

Civil partnerships have given same-sex couples an opportunity to publicly and legally celebrate their relationships. Civil partnership photographs have increased the regularity with which lesbian and gay male couples are shown in a positive light.
Donkey Man

In addition to describing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and activities, ‘queer’ can also mean odd or unusual.

Most people will experience situations where they are the odd one out. Donkey Man never fits in.

What can be said of the post-op, male-to-female transsexual lesbian for example? How can this radical desire be translated into the museum without a tacit acknowledgement of the gaps, disruptions, fissures and exceptions that such desire inflicts upon the objective museum system? How can museums engage with this messier, more confusing, far more chaotic queer reality?

Queering the Museum by Matt Smith is a deliberate act of wilful confusion and disorder, a rummaging through the museum dress up box to see just what we might be missing. Consisting of a series of calculated and provocative additions, amendments and small changes to the gallery displays and sealed vitrines of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, each change that Matt has made – each object that Matt has inserted, moved or recontextualised and that now patiently lurks around the corner of each successive gallery space for the visitor – is intended to playfully upset the museum applecart, play with visitor expectations, upend the sober, educational and rigid conceptual boundaries that usually constitute a museum display. Matt’s interventions confuse and question the conventional narrative of objects on display and thereby undermine the authority of that same system. Matt is messing about with the museum.

The fun Matt has had with the gallery spaces signifies and enables much more than a wry smile or bemused shoulder shrugging. Matt’s deliberate provocations and mischievous changes are made from the inside out and counter the typical idea of the museum object as
Fitting In

Unlike ethnic groups, the gay, lesbian and bisexual community does not share visually identifiable characteristics. This has allowed us to hide within the heterosexual population during times of persecution. It also means that we have to actively come out, telling family and friends that we are queer.

Drag refuses to fit in and is linked to performance and camp. Drag queens are men dressed as parodies of women, with make up and clothes that few women would wear. Drag kings are women dressed as men, often with extreme masculine looks.

Drag's aims are very different to those of transsexual people. Transsexual people want to live in a different gender to the one they were assigned at birth and generally seek medical interventions to support that.

The confused visitor, staring blankly at the garland of green carnations that currently adorns Jakob Epstein’s Lucifer, will readily perceive a breakdown of meaning within the museum system. The question is not so much ‘what does that mean’ as ‘why is that there?’ In fact if these garlands mean anything the question should read ‘what do these garlands here mean to me?’ As Bob Mills has noted, in these kinds of circumstances, queerness is less a state-of-object that a position-as-subject, a ‘relational concept that comes into view against the backdrop of the normal, the legitimate, the dominant, and the coherent – and it would be precisely the challenge that queer poses to the normative structures of the museum that constitutes its subversive potential’². The museum visitor is thus implicated within the creation of narratives and meaning through the use of jarring, confusing or ‘provocative juxtapositions’ in a model of active experiential participation. Here the meaning of objects and their display is always an unfinished process and meanings are necessarily provisional, dependant upon the freedom of the visitor to bestow significance upon a chaos of things and the subversive potential of desire. Emphasis is upon the ‘provisional and
partial, the ways in which meaning is made and felt by the visitor[…]
a multiplicity rather than a single authoritative museum narrative,
and the ways in which meaning becomes a process rather than a
product, one in which the visitor in wholly implicated.

Chaotic? Perhaps.
Subversive? Certainly.

Radical in its embrace of the contingencies of spectatorship as part
of the museum’s open ended project? Well yes.

But most importantly, go see for yourself.

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Where is Queer, Volume 3, Number 1, Spring, 2008, (Michigan State University), p.46

2 Ibid, p.46

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Polari

Polari is a secret gay male vocabulary which was popular in the 1950s and 60s
as it allowed same-sex activity to be discussed secretly at a time when being
homosexual could lead to imprisonment.

Polari probably developed from Parlyanee, a 19th century slang used by fairground
and circus people as well as prostitutes, beggars and buskers. It became widely
known when it featured in the 1960s radio show, ‘Round the Horn’. The
programme featured Julian and Sandy, two out-of-work actors, who used Polari to
say explicit things whilst avoiding the censor’s radar.

Polari is seldom used – or arguably needed – today. However, some words live on.
Naff, bimbo and camp were all part of the Polari lexicon.

Bona arm: nice penis
Reflection

“Living in a body that did not fit my self-image was like living in a very personal prison.”

Lore MDickey

Few people feel delighted with every part of their body. For some, the sex of the body they inherited at birth and their innate gender do not match at all.

Lore was born with a woman’s body, but identified as male. He is now living as a man and has made the decision to have gender confirmation surgery.
When displaying human figures, there is a tendency to pair up male and female figures with heteronormative couples. Evidence that male same-sex relationships happen.

The assumptions the handbook of were both used metaphorically, as in other men.

You know you Were gay.
SIMEON SOLOMON (1840-1905)

Bacchus 1867
oil on panel

Solomon was a close friend of Burne-Jones and the poet Swinburne. This is one of Solomon's most celebrated works. Bacchus represents the god of wine in classical mythology and was inspired by a portrait by the fifteenth-century Sienese Renaissance artist Sodoma in the Uffizi, Florence. The art critic, Walter Pater described this picture as an embodiment, not of the joyous Dionysus of the Renaissance, but a melancholy and sorrowing Dionysus-'the god of the bitterness of wine, "of things too sweet"'.

Solomon's sensual but androgynous images can be linked with his own homosexuality. His career collapsed in 1873 when he was convicted of homosexual offences and spent the last twenty years of his life living mainly in a London workhouse.

Bequeathed by Miss K E Lewis, 1961 (P52'61)

Queering the Pitch

Matt Smith, Artist and Curator

Queer has a number of meanings. Its primary use in this exhibition is as an inclusive word for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities. However, its dictionary definitions also include: 'differing from the normal or usual in a way regarded as odd or strange' and 'to be put in a difficult or dangerous position'. This ambiguity is one of Queer's biggest allures.

In the early 1990s, when I first started visiting Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, there was one mention of same sex relationships. It was a label that accompanied Simeon Solomon's painting of Bacchus.

The world was a different place in the 90s: Clause 28, which prohibited local authorities from promoting same sex relationships had been in force since 1988; the age of consent for gay men was different to that for heterosexual men and civil partnerships hadn't been dreamt of.

Before civil partnerships were introduced in 2005, there was no positive state recording of same sex relationships. Particularly pre
Double-Spouted Teapot

‘Tea-rooming’ is American gay slang for anonymous male-male sexual encounters in public toilets.

1967, when being a gay male could result in criminal prosecution, most gay men and women kept their sexuality a secret. Since Oscar Wilde was a married man with two children, a degree of judgement needs to be taken with historical ‘facts’ and records of ‘bachelor uncles’ who were ‘married to their work’.

Most museums have been slow to represent the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered communities. Even when there is willingness on the part of museum staff, few objects can relate to all sections of the diverse queer community, and museums rely on material culture – objects, things – to tell stories.

This lack of material culture created a dilemma when we were developing the exhibition. A more lateral – and fragmented – approach to the subject matter was needed. If an exhibition of ‘queer’ objects wasn’t possible, could we ‘queer’ the whole museum instead?

Interventions using the existing collections and galleries enabled us to draw out queer stories and themes, exploring subjects that a queer viewer might overlay onto objects the museum already held.

Same sex pairings were an obvious starting point. Once we started to look, male and female pairings were ubiquitous. Sometimes they were originally made to form pairs, on other occasions it was curatorial decision-making that paired these men and women together.
Looking for a Chicken Hawk

Chicken is gay slang for younger men and 'hawks' are older men who are attracted to them.

In some cases we swapped female figures with male ones from the collections, in others I made new figures, and same sex couples, which were placed with their heterosexual counterparts.

Using craft to tell these stories seemed a natural decision. It has strong gendered links – woodwork for boys and sewing for girls – as well as a domestic connection. Its homely connotations make it an idea vehicle for conveying potentially unsettling messages.

The museum allowed me access to its stores to search for objects which could be brought out to tell other queer stories. Museum objects are categorised by material or subject matter. It is unusual to have the opportunity to select objects from across a museum’s collections.

It brought up exciting connections; pairing a stuffed otter with ceramic bears to explore slang and stereotypes; linking polychrome figures from a fairground organ with coded language used by itinerant travellers and the gay community.

Other connections were quieter and more difficult. Using drug jars to explore the impact of HIV, and ceramic sphinxes to consider homophobia in Uganda.

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery has taken a very positive and proactive step towards further social inclusion with this exhibition. Their commitment to the project is possibly best illustrated by
The Orange Seller

In 1985, Jeanette Winterson won the Whitbread Award for a first novel for *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. The book explores the tension between Jeanette's lesbian desires and the rules and regulations she has been brought up to believe in.

Working with opposites: good and bad, friends and enemies, the book explores how Jeanette's lesbianism places her outside the heterosexual male/female norm.

allowing one of their most iconic objects – Epstein's figure of Lucifer - to be 'queered' with a cloak of green camomile at the entrance to the museum.

No exhibition could adequately, and equally, convey the subtleties and complexities that are inherent in such a large and diverse group as the queer 'community'. Rather, I hope this very individual take on the museum's collections reminds people that there is more than one story to tell about any object.

This exhibition could not have happened without the good natured help and support of numerous people. I'd like to thank Dave Viney at ShOUT! and Andy Horn at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery who have backed and facilitated the project from the outset.

Andy's colleagues at the museum have ensured that it was a pleasure to work there. They include Fiona Slattery, Linda Spurdle, Oliver Buckley, Victoria Osborne, Zelinda Garland, Brendan Flynn and Dave Rowan.

Thank you to Arts Council England for financing the project, Carolyn Conroy for her advice on Simeon Solomon, Lady James (aka Robert Clothier) for the loan of his heels and lashes, Gavin Fry for sewing assistance, Richard Sandell and Maria-Anna Tseliou at Leicester University, Catherine Harper at Brighton University and Oliver Winchester at the V&A.

All Photography by David Rowan © Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery
Stereotypes

Stereotypes and slang abound within the queer community. Twinks, daddies, lipstick lesbians and femmes are joined by muscle marys and nice queens.

Bears are large, hairy gay men who often have beards. Others are slimmer hairy gay men. They are sometimes seen playing together in the wild.
Appendix 3  Queering the Museum Evaluation Report

Structure of the evaluation report

1. Aims of the evaluation
2. Methodology
3. The sample
4. Findings
5. Conclusions
6. Additional notes

1. Aims of the evaluation report:

- The overall scope of this evaluation is to assess the success and impact of ‘Queering the museum’ from the visitors’ perspective
- Who visited the exhibition in terms of age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, and religion
- Visitors’ motivation/purpose of visit
- Visitors’ likes and dislikes
- Visitors’ perceptions about Ig representation in the museum
- The message that visitors got from the exhibition
- Visitors’ interpretation of the word ‘queer’
- 1) Demographics, 2) Visitors’ motivations and expectations, 3) Quality of visit and its outcomes

2. Methodology:

This report aims to present an evaluation of the exhibition ‘Queering the Museum’. Its sample is not a big one; however, it does include a variety of visitors. In more practical terms, the evaluation consisted of face to face semi-structured interviews with visitors who were approached mainly at the Round room because this particular space seemed to be the best place to monitor who appeared to be interested in the exhibition so they could be approached later on. It was also good for approaching people at the end of their visit, leaving the museum, rather than interrupting them during their visit. However, in some instances interviews were also held in Gallery 23, which seemed to be the 2nd most popular gallery after the Round room. They usually lasted no more than 7 minutes. Overall, the interviews were held during 12 days. Each time almost 30-35 people were approached, and these were the ones who appeared that they may be engaging with the exhibition either because after having a closer look at Lucifer, took a leaflet, or because they were seen staring at a particular object of the exhibition. From these, the majority replied that they could not take part in the evaluation, mainly because they were not aware of the exhibition or less often, because they were aware of the exhibition but did not choose to engage with it. From those who had seen the exhibition, almost everybody was willing to take part, apart from a couple of persons each time who said no, due to lack of time, or in two cases due to lack of interest in taking part in an evaluation.
3. The Sample:
  o The sample consisted of 61% male and 39% female visitors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>No. of visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

  o A broad age range was represented with 6,5% aged 17-24, 29% aged 25-34, 22,5% aged 35-44, 35,5% aged 45-60 and 6,5% aged 60+.
  o The sample also consisted of 54,8% identified as heterosexuals, 3,2% identified as bisexuals, 35,5% identified as homosexuals and 6,5% who did not reply.

  o The sample consisted of 32,3 % religious people and 67,7% of people with no religious beliefs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>No. of visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-24</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-60</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>No. of visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have religious beliefs</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jehovah’s witness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quaker</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religious beliefs</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual Orientation</th>
<th>No. of visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To sum up, in terms of the visitors seeing the exhibition it appears that:

  • There were 20% more male visitors than female ones
  • the vast majority of visitors were between 25-60 years old
4. Findings:

1. What was the reason for your visit today? 54.8% of visitors found out about the exhibition randomly whereas 45.2% came specifically for it, and in particular, 6.5% of them came for the guided tour of the exhibition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LGBT</th>
<th>Heterosexual</th>
<th>Unspecified</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>54.8%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45.2%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Which part(s) of the exhibition did you like the most or find more interesting and why? Among visitors’ answers it was clear that the most popular exhibit was the Carnation Cape which was mentioned by 1/3 of the visitors whereas the second most common answer was the general idea of the exhibition and the way it was developed, in that it repositioned things, changing their meaning and re-interpreting them, which was mentioned by 1/3 of the visitors. The rest of the positive comments were about the green carnation idea (2 references), the Fitting In case (2 references), the ceramics in general (3 references), the Stereotypes case (1 reference), “the exhibits’ inscriptions” (1 reference), “the spreading out of the exhibition” (1 reference), the Reflection case (1 reference), the title of the exhibition (1 reference) and the Figure of a Youth Cruising case (1 reference).

3. Were there any part(s) of the exhibition that you didn’t like or you found least interesting and why? Almost 1/3 of visitors replied that everything was interesting whilst the rest of the answers were mainly about specific exhibits, such as the complexity of Reflection (4 references) or of Ulysses (1 reference), the displeasure with the jokes with bears in Stereotypes (3 references). However, there were some negative comments about the lack of lesbian and transsexual representation (2 references), the lack of connection with Newman’s exhibition (2 references), the difficulty of getting to Gallery 33 (2 references) whereas there was one person who expected to see more exhibits. Finally, it seems interesting that there were 2 references to the difficulty caused by the nature of the exhibition, that is the fact that it was spread out within the museum space, but both visitors explained that despite this, they understood the reasons behind this choice.

4. Were there any particular parts of the exhibition that prompted you to pause for discussion or to share your thought? For example, was there any part that you found especially provocative? Almost 40% of visitors said that the whole idea of this exhibition and in particular its topic, along with the way it was developed within the museum space were thought-provoking. Furthermore, 4 persons replied that this exhibition made them think about the developments that occurred in LGBT history and in the law concerning the LGBT community here in the UK. The only specific exhibits that came up as parts of the exhibition that prompted discussion or pausing for thinking were Polari as an exhibit that made them think about the existence and usefulness of such a language in the past (3 references) and Reflection as an exhibit that appeared quite complex and not easily understood by people (4 references). In terms of whether or not the exhibition was provocative, nobody found it as such. Instead, visitors kept mentioning that it was thought-provoking but not at all provocative.
5. Do you feel that the exhibition is trying to communicate any particular message? Almost 1/3 of visitors replied that this exhibition promotes diversity, either in terms of the existence of diverse communities within society (5 references) or of ways of looking at things (4 references). The next most popular answer was about the exhibition’s objective to increase visibility of LGBT community (5 references). Among the rest of the responses, ‘Queering the Museum’ was identified as trying to present a mix of old and contemporary ideas (3 references), to celebrate homosexuality (2 references), to promote acceptance of LGBT people (2 references) and finally, to inform public about the life of homosexual people in the past and how it has changed so far (2 references).

6. Do you think it is appropriate to have gay and lesbian culture represented in museums? / Would you like to see more gay and lesbian culture represented in museums? All the interviewees answered to yes to the above questions. Out of them 74,2% said agreed whereas 25,8% said yes but with some specifications. These specifications included not being displayed all the time (2 references), to have it displayed at museums but to reach a point where it will not be a big deal (2 references), “to be done discretely like ‘Queering the Museum’” (1 reference), “to represent it but in more provocative ways” (1 reference) or “without labels” (1 reference) and finally, one person said that “it is fine to have it displayed although he disagrees with this life” (1 reference). Regarding more specific suggestions for future exhibitions, visitors said that it would be nice to include in the permanent BMAG’s collection Dana International’s dress that she was wearing at the final of Eurovision song contest (1 reference), to display more contemporary gay and lesbian artists (1 reference) or more contemporary gay and lesbian history (1 reference), to present the stories of homosexual people in 2nd World War (1 reference), to have more permanent exhibits that are LGBT related in BMAG’s collection (1 reference) and finally, to display homosexuality with an exhibition on the history of sexuality in general (1 reference).

7. What does the word queer mean to you? In almost half of the answers it was obvious that queer had negative associations for visitors, with only 7 interviewees being aware of the word having been reclaimed and re-appropriated by the LGBT community. Furthermore, almost 1/3 of visitors said that ‘queer’ is kind of synonym for LGBT (10 references) whereas it was also explained as something different or unusual (7 references).

8. Where did you hear about the exhibition? The majority of visitors who were interviewed learnt about the exhibition at BMAG (54,8%) either through the leaflets or because of having seen the Carnation Cape. Among the rest of the interviewees who came specifically for visiting ‘Queering the Museum’, the most popular sources were Internet (8 references) and word of mouth (6 references).
To sum up, visitors’ answers to the above questions show that:

- almost 4 in 10 visitors visited BMAG specifically for seeing ‘Queering the Museum’
- the idea of introducing visitors to ‘Queering the Museum’ with the Carnation Cape at the round room was very successful, especially in terms of prompting it to visitors who were unaware of the exhibition before visiting it
- the methodology of ‘Queering the Museum’ and its particular features, such as the idea of re-positioning or re-interpreting things, was highlighted as an effective way of producing and presenting an exhibition
- the only parts of the exhibition that were quite problematic, such as Reflection and Stereotypes, were exhibits whose interpretation appeared quite difficult
- the nature of ‘Queering the Museum’ regarding its spreading out within BMAG was well-received even in cases when people found it hard to get around, as the importance of presenting it in such a way was clear to them
- the messages received by visitors were mainly related to the main concern of LGBT community, that of visibility and acceptance, and to the significant role that choices about the exhibition design and development play in interpretation
- representing the LGBT community in a balanced way within museums in general, and BMAG in particular, was well-received by all the interviewees, even in cases where their personal beliefs were opposed to LGBT lives
- the word ‘queer’ is a term most commonly perceived negatively and as a synonym for LGBT
- Internet, such as BMAG’s website and Facebook, as well as suggestions for visiting ‘Queering the Museum’ by people who already had seen it, were the main reasons for prompting people to come and see the specific exhibition
5. Conclusions:

- According to the many visitors who missed ‘Queering the Museum’, it could be summed up that it was not very easily accessible to the general public of BMAG, but according to those who saw it, it seems that this exhibition managed to have an impact on the majority of them. This impact was identified as a spark for thinking or changing attitudes/beliefs (‘thought-provoking’) and as gaining new knowledge (‘informative’). It could be argued that although the main concern was to reach out particularly the LGBT community, it was a success that many people identified as heterosexual were tempted to engage with the exhibition.

- Although this was only a small sample, the exhibition was well received by visitors and it had an impact on the majority of them, either in terms of knowledge/learning or of attitude/opinion towards LGBT culture. What became very clear among the 31 visitors’ answers was that for the vast majority of them this exhibition appeared very effective and thought-provoking. It made them aware of the importance of content and object positioning in museums and the diversity of ways of living but more importantly of ways thinking and looking at things but also realizing how much progress has been made and the developments that happened during the last decades in LGBT history.

- The exhibition was not easily noticeable. Even when I explained to the visitors which exhibition I was talking about while showing them the leaflet, most of them appeared to have no idea about it. I also made a reference to the green carnation saying that the cases with exhibits of ‘Queering the Museum’ exhibition were signified by a green carnation, but again the majority response was that they had not noticed it. Therefore, since the nature of the exhibition was not like the typical temporary exhibitions placed within a specific gallery/space, perhaps more effort should have been made regarding the exhibition’s marketing.

6. Additional notes:

- On the 5th of February a woman in her sixties commented about the lack of detailed information about the shoes in the Fitting In case at Gallery 23. She told me that overall she found the exhibition really interesting and that she came along with her friend specifically to see ‘Queering the Museum’, and her only disappointment was about the Fitting In case. She was so interested in this particular case but as she said she wished she could learn more about what she enjoyed more in this specific exhibition.

7. Observation notes:
• Due to the lack of interviewees, I attempted to get some data through observation, which was also useful to see which visitors noticed the exhibition and could be approached for an interview later on.
• At the Round room, Lucifer drew the attention of people mainly under the age of 50 and was one of the most popular exhibits, even for people who didn’t see the rest of the exhibition.
• The least popular galleries appeared to be Gallery 26 ‘Ulysses Bending the Bow’ and 33 ‘Civil Partnership Card’. Regarding Gallery 26 it seemed that people were just passing by it without noticing it whereas for Gallery 33 it appears that the location of this gallery was the problem and not the lack of interest to this specific exhibit.
• The most popular gallery appeared to be Gallery 23 ‘Stereotypes’, ‘Contemplating Mr Buturo’ and ‘Fitting In’.
Appendix 4 Review: Social History in Museums Vol 35

Queering the Museum

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

4th November 2010 - 30th January 2011

The question of whether museums are doing enough to address LGBT audiences has been raised on several occasions in Museums Journal and other publications. In October 2007 Jack Gilbert argued that most museums or galleries were not collecting, framing or interpreting the lives of LGBT people meaningfully. The Museum of London’s Pride Prejudice: Lesbian and Gay London (1999) and Queer is Hero (2006), along with The Warren Cup: Sexuality in Ancient Greece and Rome (2006) at the British Museum, were significant temporary exhibitions but for Gilbert they were exceptions.

There have been some notable museum displays, exhibitions and other initiatives since Gilbert’s article. Gay Icon at the National Portrait Gallery (July – October 2009) was a particularly high profile exhibition and some significant literature has been published recently (see below). References to LGBT history and experience within exhibitions or collections-based interpretation have arguably continued to become more frequent. The recent British Museum and BBC Radio 4 series A History of the World in 100 objects, for example, included two programmes which addressed same-sex relationships in ancient and modern times. The question of whether museums are doing enough, however, remains pertinent and there is still plenty of scope for thoughtful critiques of the different approaches that have been adopted to date.

Queering the Museum at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (November 2010 – January 2011) is the latest addition to the growing corpus of exhibitions to explore LGBT experience and arguably one of the boldest and most innovative. Visitors arriving at the Museum encounter Jacob Epstein’s (1880-1959) bronze statue of Lucifer, the head of which was modelled on a woman, the body on a man, creating a figure which suggests a merging of genders. The statue is a permanent feature at the Museum but for the duration of Queering the Museum the statue holds a green cape, a contemporary creation made by Matt Smith that is adorned with green silk carnations, a flower worn by men in the 19th and early 20th century as a symbol of gay identity. The transformed Lucifer acts as the introduction to Queering the Museum, an exhibition that features eighteen further displays distributed throughout the building and integrated with the permanent galleries. These displays are identified with a green carnation graphic and a distinctive label that reflects aspects of LGBT history and experience. Most visitors will encounter some of these displays serendipitously as they move through the Museum. On the other hand visitors who have come specifically to see the exhibition, or who have become aware of it on arriving at the Museum, will probably proactively seek out the displays, particularly if they have collected a Queering the Museum map from the holder next to Lucifer.

The nature of the displays is varied. In a Tribute to Simeon Solomon (1840-1905) and Lord Frederic Leighton (1830-1896) are displayed together in a freestanding case along with a new ceramic work by artist and exhibition curator Matt Smith. At first glance the display blends into the rest of gallery. It is only with a closer look that the distinctive carnation logo on the side of the case and the green strip on the label become apparent, revealing that there is something different about this case. The text explores the impact that Solomon’s sexuality had on his work and career in contrast to that of Leighton. Solomon’s same-sex encounters resulted in his arrest in London and later Paris, events that led to the collapse of his career whereas Leighton’s...
discretion meant that his career continued to prosper. Historically, biographical references to same-sex encounters or relationships have usually been excluded from interpretation in museums and galleries; in contrast, equivalent references related to heterosexual experiences of artists and other figures are commonplace in many institutions.

Two male sculptures from the Museum’s own collections, a statue of Ulysses and one of Achilles, have been paired together in the Medieval & Renaissance Room with a text that argues that cultures have a tendency to unconsciously heterosexualise displays, for example by often pairing unrelated male and female sculptures. Elsewhere, a Civil Partnership Card from 2006 has been added to an existing display which explores celebrations. Both of these thought-provoking interventions, which utilise objects in the Museum’s collection, underline the varied ways in which heterosexual assumptions have been or remain in museum displays or subtle biases in interpretation.

The majority of the Queening the Museum displays feature new ceramic art works made by Matt Smith, and at first glance most of these look like as though they are ‘archaic’ objects that have always been there. For example, it is only on closer inspection that Smith’s The Ladies of Langollen reveals itself to be a contemporary interplay amongst genuinely historic ceramics. The piece represents Evans Butcher and Sarah Penrose, two ladies who set up home together at Pens Newedd in rural Wales after running away from their aristocratic lives. They received visitors... 

The labels that support the displays in Queening the Museum are always close to the objects and in a clear visual relationship with them. The texts themselves are clear, concise, informative and thought provoking. However, there is only one point for collecting the overall exhibition leaflet and plan, and this is discrete and easily missed.

More leaflet holders somewhere alongside other displays might have been helpful for visitors encountering Queening the Museum for the first time elsewhere in the Museum and in converting these chance encounters into a deeper interest.

The historian Robert Mills has argued that some recent LGBT-themed exhibitions have offered an overly simplistic narrative and have run the risk of inadvertently reinforcing the idea that individuals are either completely heterosexual or homosexual, which Mills terms the “homo-hetero binary calculus”. These are not criticisms that can be made of the interventions that form Queening the Museum. The integration of the displays throughout the Museum building with the main collection ensures that it is encountered by a large and diverse audience, including those who perhaps otherwise might not visit a self-consciously exhibition with an LGBT focus. The exhibition’s dispersed and sandwiched approach is likely to have posed challenges for some visitors but Queening the Museum succeeds on many levels, fulfilling the aims outlined in an essay in the on-site catalogue available as a PDF. It is to the Museum’s credit that it has embraced an alternative approach that will have elicited a wide range of responses from deep engagement to some bemused shrugs of the shoulders and confused glances.

Queening the Museum will close at the end of January 2011, just as LGBT history month is about to begin. By working with an artist Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery has been able to look at its collections with fresh eyes, to make new connections between objects, histories and audiences that have usually been overlooked. Collectively, the displays in the exhibition capture the diversity of LGBT experiences in an imaginative and creative way, arguably more effectively than many previous approaches. Although Queening the Museum is a temporary exhibition it underlines the potential that exists for museums to reinterpret their existing collections in thought-provoking ways and provides another case-study for the museum community to consider.

Stuart Frost is Head of Interpretation at The Brindley Museum

Select Bibliography


Online Resources

LGBT History Month
www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk

Queening the Museum at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery
http://www.bmop.org.uk/events/id=1013
OTHER STORIES

MATT SMITH
Foreword

Linda Bloom

This catalogue has been published to coincide with the exhibition 'Other Stories: Queering the University Art Collection' part of wider celebrations throughout the UK for LGBT+ History and Gay, Bisexual, Transgender History Month in February. In recognition of this occasion, the Stanley & Audrey Burton Gallery presents a two-part exhibition: the first part concerns the life of Victorian writer, philosopher and gay rights activist Edward Carpenter, whose letters can be found in the University of Leeds Library Special Collections. The second part, LQBT History through the lens of contemporary art, is a series of "interventions " in our main collection room by the artist Brett Smith. Smith researched personal stories from the LGBT+ community at Brighton, Worthing and other areas from found objects. Each work connects to a piece in the University Art Collection, offering new ways of understanding and reading these objects, as well as opening up debate about the meanings given to objects in museum and gallery displays. It is hoped that Carpenter's vision of a better world alongside Brett Smith's very personal response to our collection will encourage visitors to reflect on alternative and multiple possible interpretations of these objects, perhaps like Smith - drawing on their own personal associations and experiences.

Special mention must go to my colleague Dr. Zoe Anna Reed-Pegg, who conceived this project. Her passion and dedication - through effective research, writing and organisation - has allowed the Gallery to bring together this special exhibition during her absence on maternity leave. Many thanks to my Gallery colleagues, especially Laura Millward, Paul Stilgoe and Liz Marshman, for helping make these plans a reality.

We are immensely grateful for support from the National Lottery through Arts Council England, which has made this project possible.

Linda Bloom

Editor
Ordinary Gaze: Lent
Lara Perry

Among the demarcations of any work or act of art, the present piece is entering into dialogue with both art and subject that defines the gap of time. However, we now more can separate the act of making an artwork from the act of building it. We go through the choice of materials, of concept. The artist's emotions are no longer a part of the sculpture's form, but instead of a part of the history of its making. The artist's emotions are no longer a part of the sculpture's form, but instead of a part of the sculpture's history of its making.

This means that our relation to the history of art is itself embedded in each other, opening the way to the conventional stories of art. What is usually described as an inheritance, Matt Smith's work follows that of artists who have invented and collected unique collections or by directly reworking the present form and interpretation of their history. Scientific artifacts, such as those found in the Fossil Reefs collection at the National Museum of Natural History, offer a different perspective on the history of art, and perhaps, a new way to understand the relationship between the present and the past.

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In this exhibition at Leeds, the artist's intervention is focused on creating and evolving a sense of queerness, the history of the many people who have been excluded or the act of self-identification. The exhibition, which is a reworking of the past, is itself a part of the history of the art, and perhaps, a new way to understand the relationship between the present and the past.

In the next eleven cases the museum offers as an extension to the exhibition a collection of arts such as those found in the Fossil Reefs collection at the National Museum of Natural History, offer a different perspective on the history of art, and perhaps, a new way to understand the relationship between the present and the past.

1. For an introduction to the problem, see K. Michels, "The Dance of the Elephant," in Encounters and Other Stories, 1999.
Edward Carpenter was born in 1844, the seventh child of a well-off family in Brighton. He went on to become one of the best-known reformers of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, as a vegan, a poet, an animal rights campaigner and a sexual reformer for sexual reform. Recent interest in Carpenter has been significant, as the themes that were central to his work—a concern with social justice and sexual politics, and an effort to make connections between various radical causes, from socialism to feminism and sexual reform—are important issues in our own day. In her new biography of Carpenter, Sheila Rowbotham notes the remarkable range of interconnections evident in his life, through his networks; his role of cause, his interests and his thinking, which forced him to recognize the way that his many interests intersected and complicated each other.

Those interests included both sexuality and spirituality, which Carpenter saw as operating in dynamic relationship to each other. Carpenter was one of a number of figures who were trying to create some kind of ‘spirit’ at this time. In America, for example, the poet and the love activist Louise Michel was arguing for a ‘spirit’ that fostered a way to express the idea that ‘heaven’ was ‘good’ and ‘the way to heaven’ and ‘the establishment of a world that unlock the spirit of the world’.

Within the context of spiritual movement, the ‘spirit’ was also a space in which both men and women found opportunities to break social, sexual, and gender rules, assisted and sometimes encouraged by the presence of ‘spirit’. For most of the time, though, it was heterosexualism which was seen as linked to creation—an ‘essential’ ‘feminine’ spirit was identified with the ‘adversary’ and linked to ‘spiritual perversion.’

Carpenter was unusual in the very positive role he gave to non-moralistic, non-heterosexual forms of sexual desire. Influenced by Walt Whitman, Carpenter saw desire as at the heart of all personal, social, and evolutionary change. In a chapter of his book On Love: Its Causes and Ends (1890), Carpenter described how the desire, or inward change, comes first, action follows, and organization or outward structure is the result. Whether the result was a person building a house or a supposed growing antecedent, evolution was a true underlying of a higher form of being—an organic growth of the creative soul. Thorough this process, "resultation—the point at which the old forms are thrown off like a husk", he emphasized the moment at which desire or feeling broke through into the material world, transforming it. This result was to blur the distinction between the ideal and the real, presenting the material world as a kind of crystallization of desire, and so continually susceptible to being modified by the power of that desire. For Carpenter, "love had to be the driving force behind all change, love was the force saturating through the old dead forms of western civilization to make way for new possibilities."
Carpenter is writing about love and sex at the same time both words are carried with political, social, and historical connotations and suggest that social and political changes are sometimes brought about by scientific research. He claims that the scientific method can be used to explore human behavior and that the principles of behaviorism can be applied to understanding love and sex. Carpenter suggests that love and sex are not just emotional experiences, but also physical and biological processes.

In his early writings, Carpenter questioned the idea of love and sex as separate entities. He argued that love and sex are closely intertwined and that they are both physical and psychological processes. Carpenter believed that the biological basis of love and sex is the same, and that the same physiological mechanisms are involved in both.

Carpenter's ideas were influential in the development of the science of human sexuality. His work helped to break down the traditional barriers between science and culture and to broaden our understanding of human behavior. Carpenter's ideas continue to influence the study of sexuality today.
Other Stories
Matt Blitch

When I started talking with Zane Caplansky and Natalie Blasdel at the Stanley & Audrey Herschel Gallery about developing a project that would bring together the Edward Desnoyers materials in a new, interactive way, she mentioned the idea of looking at sculpture as a form of installation art using the Edward Desnoyers materials as a base. Recently, some have been using this technique.

A true Pandora's box, Levine was born in 1948 and had a very open relationship with a number of artists. She worked in Harlem in the 1970s and 1980s, and her journey as a sculptor was influenced by the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s, which she found to be an especially formative period in her life.

Adopting a different approach, Levine transformed her life experiences into her art, which included exploring the intersection of sculpture and photography. Her work often involved creating installations that incorporated found objects and mixed media, allowing her to explore the relationships between different forms and materials.

Throughout her career, Levine worked closely with the third wave artists in the early 1990s, and her work often reflected these collaborations. She continues to be an influential figure in the art world, inspiring many artists to explore new forms of expression.

Museums and galleries are often thought of as spaces where art is presented in a static form, but Levine's work demonstrates that art can be dynamic and interactive. By using her personal experiences and the objects that were important to her, Levine was able to create works of art that were deeply personal and meaningful.

In conclusion, Levine's work serves as a reminder of the power of art to connect with the viewer on a personal level. By creating installations that were informed by her own experiences and the materials that were important to her, Levine was able to create works of art that were both visually striking and emotionally resonant. Her work continues to inspire artists around the world, and her legacy will be remembered for years to come.
Apparantly, whilst painting The Serenade, artist John Currall had succumbed to the two models, who took less than resplendent by it and instead seem to be transcribing the male presence in their lives.

"She and I started dancing and the feeling between us was getting a bit powerful. We disappeared one night up into my room, she was just overwmo with desire. I didn't seem to care about people knowing. We both still think there was nothing wrong in what we were doing. So, they would see us lying on the bed and, in fact, we were to lie outside, on the lawn, and copulate in full view of everyone."

— Gill, circa 1949
Sex between men was legalized in the UK in 1967. Dennis' account highlights his belief that anonymous sex was the safest way of having physical contact in an era when men having sex could face arrest and imprisonment.

As well as overcoming decoration and estrangement, Bird Cope also shares its name with the 1996 adaptation of Joan Pimentel's 1952 play La Cope ou le Rubis.

I never kept the names and details of... friends written down. It was a myth but I never wrote it down or anything and I would only think new dreams of being a diary because I knew loads and loads of queens who were arrested and then they'd go to their house and go through their rooms and they'd find diary and there'd be names in that and I could never, it was a terrifying thing.

I always thought it wasn't safe to have affairs. One night stood with someone whose name you didn't know and certainly who was a person you didn't know and they didn't know yours was really a much safer idea.

— Dennis, circa 1960
Not all the materials in the archive agreed. For many, the illegality of male same-sex relationships before 1967 did not have a major detrimental impact. For George, however, it did. His best testimony is in stark contrast to ideas of the 1940s or a time of sexual liberation and youthful existence. I tried to capture this discrepancy with the use of the Babaham glasses, engraving his story on the glasses made for one of the camps of drifters placed in most of identity's passing which used optical tricks; the message plays and hide from the viewer. The painting's combination — to my eye — of celebratory bubbles and constraining bars echoes the contradiction of this period for some gay men.

I had a great sense of relief when the law changed. I was terrified of the law. When you grow up and you find that you've applied the law — it works you. It is the very fact that your existence is threatened all the time and you have to behave in certain ways. And you're vulnerable.

In bars, for example, you never discussed where you worked; you never gave your name; never gave your telephone number; you'd be hit or Harry I have friends who don't even know my real name...

I used to terror is never get over that as long as I live it's born into us. It's part of our history and what we are. I will die for it too.
...
Untitled VI

Soap, Mixed media, 2002

This is the last permanent intervention in the exhibition. Graham's oral history was recorded months before his death of an AIDS-related disease. When I read his history, I knew I wanted to work with soap. It took much longer to realise all the connections that were inherent in it as a medium. There was the connection with the repetitive nature of caring and cleaning for the chronically ill. Other cultural responses linking washing with AIDS range from liquid laundry products to the sink pieces by Robert Gober.

The intervention is paired with Trevor Bell's image of Blue, Blue being the title of Derek Jarman's 1994 film in which he conveyed his experiences with AIDS. At the interview, he talks in thought and jarrenici, his right, the soap will eventually lose its shape, its message, and its form.

— Graham (1949-1990), 1989

Trevor N. BLAKE, Image of Blue, oil on canvas, PhD, Gift of Audrey Burton, 2003, The University of Leeds Art Collection. © The artist
For many people in same-sex relationships, having children was not seen as a possibility. The changes that have happened between when these discussions were made and when they were embroidered — new family groupings, artificial insemination and changes in adoption legislation — are enabling people in same-sex relationships to make decisions about whether they want to become parents.

My mother said she would have regretted if I couldn't have been a parent; she would let it go by my decision, and when she knew that I was planning to have children she was really pleased. I don't think she mentioned it to my father.

—I would like to have children, I don't know how exactly and I don't know how much it would be. It would take a lot of thinking about. You have to choose where you lived quite carefully.

— Ellen, 2000
The complexity of the relationship described by Keith illustrates that "family" can be used in many ways to describe many relationships.

"He cooks me dinner and listens to my problems, he's a good listener. His walls are covered with pictures of me he's taken. We've got an understanding. He leaves my money on the sideboard every week... that's like the family I never had."

— Keith, circa 2005
null
Artefacts of LGBT life

Other Stories: Queering the University Art Collection
Stanley & Audrey Burton Gallery
University of Leeds
27 February to 5 May

Bernard Meninsky’s Mother and Child, painted in 1919, is a touching image of a woman breastfeeding in a bedroom. Next to it, the artist Matt Smith has hung two vintage christening dresses embroidered with the reflections of a lesbian recorded in 2000. Although she would “really like to be a parent”, she says, “I don’t think I would want to be the one that has to give birth. One advantage of a gay couple might be that the other one can do that. That might be quite a good idea – you can draw straws for it.”

For LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) History Month, the Stanley & Audrey Burton Gallery in Leeds is mounting a two-part exhibition. One strand is devoted to the Victorian gay rights campaigner, pacifist and advocate of “the simple life”, Edward Carpenter (1844-1929), whose papers are held in the university library’s special collections. For the other, Smith has produced eight separate “interventions” in the permanent collection.

Each is a domestic object inscribed in some way with a testimony of gay life from the Brighton Curiosity archive. And each is juxtaposed with a painting, drawing or photograph already on display. His aim, explains Smith, is to “repurpose the collection in terms of the oral histories that would normally be discounted”.

There are stories of satisfied desire, blossoming romance and even a surprisingly tender description by a young sex worker of an “old queen” who had become “like the family I never had” (“I call him Grandma and he calls me Cheryl”). But there are also harrowing accounts of the time before male homosexuality was legalised in 1967, when anonymous one-night stands were safer than even the most secretive “steady affair”, and when a boy spent three years in jail after his father reported him to the police.

These reminiscences are cut into a Victorian tray, written into an old address book, engraved into an Art Deco photo frame or Babycham glasses, often to startling and discordant effect. Looking back to the 1980s, Smith recalls “the constant cleaning and caring of people with AIDS. The sheer repetition altered one’s sense of time.” In one of his “interventions”, he has attempted to create a “transient memorial” to the losses of that era, carving a terrible description of the ravages of the disease into a huge marble-like slab of soap.

“Unlike most other minority groups – those linked by religion, ethnicity and race,” he notes in the catalogue, “the LGBT community produces a paucity of unique material culture. There are few ‘gay objects’. It is also a group which seldom passes knowledge down through familial, intergenerational links.” By “queering” the Leeds collection, he has attempted to challenge that situation.

Matthew Reisz
unravelling nymans

Nymans House and Garden
4 May – 31 October 2012

unravelled arts
Unravelled at Nymans  Geraldine Rudge

In the Book Room at Nymans is a diminutive-screened, black and white, tube television—nothing especially interesting about this apart from the element of nostalgia. What is striking about this object is the fact it is has been customised, transformed into a chandelier, framed by a prominent arch of rich red silk swags; this witty intervention is the work of Oliver Moseley and is just one example of the artistry which gives Nymans its unique style. The summer Oliver’s theme will be joined by a number of other such interventions commissioned from a new generation of artists.

Art interventions—works that change an existing environment in some way to give new meaning—have become increasingly popular with both the public and practitioners alike. For the artists there is the unique opportunity to use context and existing meaning as a vehicle for change and to display work beyond the confines of a gallery wall. For the public there is more sense of involvement with the art, in part due to a less inhibiting environment.

Unravelled has commissioned twelve artists to make site-specific works responding to aspects of the social and cultural history of Nymans House and Gardens. As the name implies, these artists aim to challenge the status quo, sometimes in extreme or alternative ways. The resulting works demand responses; they surprise or change our perceptions. Some are tongue-in-cheek, others poignant, but all are arresting. The twelve participating practitioners use a mix of traditional and avant-garde materials including Pompeian, screen and wood. All are committed to conceptual exploration. As such these are not commercial pieces but exercises in stretching and developing the craft vocabulary, moving their disciplines forward. Unravelled Nymans is the first of three Unravelled exhibitions at National Trust properties over the next three years.

The word craft is an umbrella term for a wide range of practice from a homemaker’s patchwork to an installation in a fine art gallery. Within the term craft is an imprecise understanding and knowledge of materials. The crafts have always been adaptable, with an almost amorphous ability to adapt to prevailing artistic demands. Where once there was a clear differentiation between art, craft and design today these divisions have blurred and blended.

While once the material itself was the subject of the piece, now it is just as likely to be the idea expressed by it. The work of the 2003 Turner Prize winning potter Grayson Perry illustrates this point well. Today contemporary makers are stretching the boundaries, combining traditional skills with new technology and new materials to develop new aesthetics.

As a site for artistic interventions, the National Trust property in West Sussex could not be more appropriate. Home to generations of the Moseley family from the 1860s, the estate not only has a fascinating history, but a dramatic one—surviving both the War and the Great Storm of 1987 which destroyed large numbers of mature trees, changing aspects of the garden forever. In addition to these events there is the accretion of history for artists to draw on and, last but not least, the colourful lives of the Moseley family themselves.

The Moseleys were gifted, artistic and wealthy. Perhaps best known was Oliver, a celebrated designer of sets, film sets and costumes in the 1920s and 1940s and laterly, in the 1960s, an architect and interior decorator. Oliver’s maternal grandfather was a cartoonist for Punch while his mother Maud and his brother Sydney, Countess of Rosse, both worked with textiles. White Maud set up a local embroidery guild, Anne produced fine embroidery and cut-thread work which adorns the rooms and remains a testament to her artistry. Displayed in the house are also photographs by another artist member of the Moseley family; Anna’s son Antony, later Earl of Snowdon.

At Nymans, artists have worked in both the house and garden and have found no shortage of sources of inspiration. The house is filled with fine examples of seventeenth-century furniture, Flemish tapestries and an abundance of objects, textiles and paintings, while the garden has the few bone structure of arts and crafts garden design, with a collection of rare plants from around the world providing interest all year round.
Art has been an integral part of garden design throughout garden history, but during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, pioneering events such as the International Festival of Gardens at Cheverny in France have had a significant impact on the appearance of outside spaces. The resulting installations and interventions have pushed established boundaries and helped publicize and promote more conceptual approaches to artworks and planting schemes for outside spaces.

The formal gardens at Nymans cover some 30 acres. They are intimate in scale and laid out as a series of rooms punctuated by fountains, statues and topiary. Working with the existing garden statuary, Alex Strevers has mischievously given one of two stone cherubs above the Italian archway in the Wall Garden a bright-red sashincon, changing an angelic expression from benevolent to malevolent with one simple gesture. I'm sure Oliver Twist would have appreciated the wit and theatricality of the naughty cherub and the many other strange happenings in his old home this summer.
Unravelling Nymans - Polly Harknett, Caitlin Hefferan, Matt Smith

Unravelling offers opportunities to artists who work conceptually using craft skills. This aim is expressed through the three year project: Unravelling the National Trust. Unravelling Nymans is the first of these exhibitions staged within National Trust properties and follows on from the organisation's debut exhibition, Unravelling the Interior House.

What we do (unravelling) is intrinsic to what we call ourselves (unravelled), and it is what draws us to working with historic properties. We unravel and decipher the different and multiple histories that can exist within a single property. This is in contrast to conventional ideas about historic properties, where often a unified story is told from a single viewpoint. These lead to concentrating on the architectural details of a house and its furnishings, or look at the achievements of the first-born male of the family who owned it. We unravel by commissioning a number of artists to produce site-specific responses to the property. Importantly, these are displayed temporarily within the property, and placed very carefully and intentionally to respond to particular rooms, spaces or objects.

Our motivation is to give artists working in this genre the opportunity to exhibit in a venue that attracts a large audience, and to challenge their working practice by giving them a commissioning environment in which to work. We also value the opportunity to present multiple histories in our exhibitions, exalting the historic properties from their frozen moment in time, and offering visitors a glimpse of the complex and messy lives of the people who lived there. We deliberately select artists who are working at different stages of their careers, often giving newly emerging artists a chance to exhibit with the more established.

Artists who work with craft skills, however conceptually these are realised, automatically tap into a heritage of making. This provides them with a tangible connection to the past, as often the skills they employ have not changed over hundreds of years. When we, as visitors, recognise these skills through a contemporary employment of them, it helps us to make a connection with the past that we may not have been aware of before.

One way we select artists is for their ability to express alternative or multiple realities through their work. We support artists who tell us something from a different point of view, and can enlighten us to a different way of thinking about the world. This is enriching, entertaining, and of course very revealing.

When we first visited Nymans we were instantly drawn to Maud Mossell's television, which sits proudly in the corner of the cozy Book Room. She wasn't fond of the television's form, so her son, the theatre designer Oliver Mossell, made a stage set for it, complete with red curtains and tasseling. He has presented the television within a theatrical set, as it appears on the television itself, quite enough in itself. The object symbolises the atmosphere of fun and frolic that the house once evoked, but which is less obvious when visiting the property now. The National Trust currently shows the house as it was when Anne lived in it during her retirement and up to her death in the mid-1950s. We felt that the theatrical television set represented a small but significant window into the world of how the house had been used in earlier times - when it was a place for socialising and parties and dressing up and playing, for adults and children alike. To reveal something of this and the many other stories to be told at Nymans, was the challenge that we gave to the twelve commissioned artists.

Of light and dark

Nymans house is a shadow of its former self. This is realised physically since much of it lies in ruins following the accidental fire that wiped out its large botanical library and Great Hall in 1947. In addition, National Trust conservation policy requires light to be kept low in the house in order to preserve the rich textiles made by the Mossell family that furnish the house. This gives a cold and detached feeling to the house, and divorce it from the light and colour of the gardens that surround it. Add to this the choice to stage the house as it was at the time of Anne's death, and there is a palpable feeling of loss and encroaching darkness.

Steven Follen has interviewed directly with this concept and made a light for the porch that combines fan imagery from the interior and pine cone and monkey puzzle tree forms from the garden. It is a beacon, quiet and reassured in its form, putting a shining 'light at the end of the tunnel' at the same time. In contrast, Sally Pitchford's worn Multiforme, made of over 3000 flowers on canvas, brings the garden into the house. Born from repetitive action comparable to other textile practices evident in the house,
this reflects both Anne, Countess of Fossa’s desire to wear the outfits of
the garden, and the frequent references to flowers in the textiles visible
in the house.

Matt Smith’s work Piccadilly 1830 brings Clerk Messel back to the house
by reimagining a costume designed and worn by Messel and displaying
it on an antique Roman statue. The costume returns to the heady days
of parties, youth and possibilities, but sits in a different reality of emptiness
and abandonment, suggested by Smith’s placing of it in the time between
1870 and 1885 when brother and sister were both widowed.

David Cheesman addresses the devastation of the fire directly, as well as
responding to the “dark hermetic quality” of the mirrors. His work physically
encapsulates a world of burnt botanical imagery within a pomegranate shape.
It sits like an alien form within the Gun Room. A whole world is played out
within it, which has already happened outside of it. We are invited to play
with ideas of time, place and perception of our history. As we look into,
through and beyond the sphere, inside and outside become blurred
and confounded.

Lucy Brown’s work invites us further into this world. Her installation in the
Long Gallery, they tried to debate beauty, tradition and conventional sets
up a stage for an intervention that caters around her invention of Elisa
Messel, a distant and fictional relative. She converts the Long Gallery into a
space reflecting on objects that have previously been used but are currently
unseen or unobserved within the house, looking particularly at the work
of the Messel women and those who served them. The work includes a first
for Brown: a moving image piece starring Elisa. This has used the house like
a film set, exposing the spaces within the property that the public don’t get
to visit or which are concealed off. Helping us to experience those spaces
for ourselves.

Julian Walker’s work dealt with loss in contrasting ways. | Don’t Want
To Lose | looks moody to sadness, by relating to a romantic fake-
medieval plaster scene that hangs on the wall in the Old Staircase Hall.
The town in the scene play out the fictional farewell of a knight going to war
and his lover, but Walker’s contemporary piece refers to the same time to
Messel Messel, who died during the First World War. His piece As it uses a
texty phrase spelled out with white embroidery on white linen to emphasise
the invisible but essential work undertaken by servants at Nymans. It is as if, once the roof is quiet and unheated, these voices can come to the surface, voices that would normally be completely unheard.

Makel Belief

The Kessel family were nineteenth-century immigrants to England and made their money through business. Nymans was a fabrication and pretension of a medieval manor, and represents the Kessel family's attempt to be accepted as aristocratic family with a history that began in medieval times. Looking closely at the details of Nymans, the fabrication becomes obvious. In the garden Charlie and Alexander were stuck upon walls with valentines holding them up from the back, and in the house, oak-panelled walls are put together from a mish-mash of architectural fragments salvaged in the 1930s. Artists like Gavish Fry with the idea, his over-romanticized Tortoise tumbling in front of the fire in the garden, weighted down with a wonderful gaudiness of beads and golden petals. It is at once a reflection of the family's inventiveness and creativity, and an expression of their wealth and the opportunity it afforded them to indulge in their own playful fantasies.

Lauren Adams has used the fan form, taking her inspiration from Leonard Mascalls fan collection, now held in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, but enlarging this to a radically oversized scale. Her use of contemporary imagery plays with the beauty of bucolic scenery by deliberately subverting them, depicting Grafton Park in Grand Tour Fan. There is a subtle suggestion that, banal as these scenes may be, Grafton Park represents a gateway to the rest of the world. We often enter contemporary celebrity self-made families as being just another, and the Kessels in their heyday at Nymans were equivalent. Guy Hecker's ceramic work of Stilton also alludes to what it means to create an identity, as he has drawn his inspiration from the heraldic symbols he found in the house, as well as the hunting and sporting scenes that traditionally appear in paintings to symbolize a family's degree of aristocracy.

The architectural and interior design at Nymans suggest that what we see isn't necessarily the truth of what we are seeing, and this is strongly expressed in Caitlin Heffernan's sculpture figures Tye Boys and Hides and Saw, as well as in James Sutton's marble sculptures, Toy III and Toy IV. Heffernan's figures at first suggest cuteness, innocence and softness, and Sutton's grapes and elephant are calm and unassuming in their rounded, quiet presence. However, this gives way to a sense of mischief, and an uncertainty about how we should react to these forms presents. Heffernan's figure begins to pounce or spring into action at any moment, their chunky limbs are full of energy but it is not clear how positively the energy might be expressed. Sutton's pieces whilst looking like toys give the impression of softness, ale crock and unyielding and too heavy to lift or hold.

Architectural historian Helen Elstone has looked at the history and evolution from the perspective of the exterior. He has re-imagined how the schoolboys who were educated at Nymans during the Second World War played, and in response has created wooden carved objects, Nymphs and Gargoyles. There is a warmth to the carvings, especially because Stavens' manipulation of the material is very sensitive to wood's natural form. Stavens is created naturally, connecting it back to its source and giving the work the impression of sparsity and execution, reminiscent of youth and vitality.

As we have asked artists to reconsider the house and its history through objects, we were interested in how contemporary writers would in turn respond to the interventions. Therefore, we are delighted to have commissioned four writers, Paul Johnstone, Eleanor Thompson, Julian Waller and Gertrude Rudge to bring four very different views on the re-contextualised house, to interpret the interventions.

Nymans House and Garden is a place for experimentation, reflection, inventionness and fun. The artists represented in Unraveling Nymans have explored these themes, bringing their own interpretations into play at the same time. It is a huge privilege to work in such a setting and be allowed to delve beneath its surface. Unravelled would like to thank Nymans staff Simon Lee, Rebecca Graham, Vicki Phipps and Romy Merithew and the National Trust Contemporary Arts Programme Manager Tom Freshwater for their support and enthusiasm for the project.
Growing up and dressing up

The women of the Sambourne family, Maud and her daughter Anne, understood the importance of objects in storytelling and celebrating family identity and genealogy. The Sambourne women inherited these sentiments, expressed by their mother, "We have what we hold." Maud's mother, Marion Sambourne, was a keen collector of textiles, and her daughter, Anne, was equally passionate about this form of collecting. The Sambourne family's connection to fashion and genealogy was not just a matter of taste, but a way to preserve and celebrate their history.

The Sambourne family's collection of textiles was extensive, and their daughters, Maud and Anne, were both instrumental in preserving and displaying these items. Maud's collection of textiles was particularly impressive, and she was known for her skill in collecting and preserving pieces. Her daughter, Anne, was equally passionate about textiles and spent much of her time collecting and preserving pieces from the family's past.

The Sambourne family's collection of textiles was not just for display, but for the preservation of history. The pieces were carefully preserved and displayed, and were an integral part of the family's identity and genealogy. The collection was not just a collection of objects, but a way to celebrate the family's history and traditions.

The Sambourne family's collection of textiles was not just a collection of objects, but a way to celebrate the family's history and traditions. The pieces were carefully preserved and displayed, and were an integral part of the family's identity and genealogy. The collection was not just a collection of objects, but a way to celebrate the family's history and traditions.
1911 Chelsea Arts Club Ball, undoubtedly aware of the impact such a connection would make on her social profile.

In 1915 Leonard married Nymans, the Sussex countryside residence, and it was here that Maud spent the majority of her time with the couple’s children, Linley (born 1896), Anne (born 1902) and Oliver (born 1904). Life at Nymans was dictated by Maud’s romantic imagination; on taking possession of the house, she had it painstakingly remodelled into a patchwork of a medieval manor, the perfect backdrop for the frequent pageants, plays and fancy dress parties she organised.

Involved in the cultural life of the neighbouring villages, Maud channelled her creative energies; she directed the local Shakespearean Society and the May Day festivities at Staplefield Village Green. At the May Day celebrations, costumes were designed by Maud and made by her with assistance from the ladies of the Woman’s Institute. Her vision for the festivities was that of a historical past, drawing heavily on a fantasy of the medieval and the ‘picturesque’. Local resident, Doris Genge, remembered that “there was always a procession with characters like.... Robin Hood and his Merry Men......The May Queen was crowned after the dancing by the Maypole which was the traditional one with garlands of leaves.”

Maud used her embroidery skills to philanthropic uses with the establishment of ‘The Nymans Needlework Guild’, which was aimed at providing training and an income for local women. Unemployed girls from the surrounding villages were taught to create little-embroidered bags, hankies and runners which Maud sold to family and friends. A selection of these textiles remain in storage at Nymans, some of which have been included in the installation by Lucy Brown.

Anne’s recollection of her own upbringing at Nymans is that it was “most eccentric; filled with the white and wisdom of her parents”. Maud and Leonard circulated in cultural, artistic circles as avid collectors of art, textiles, porcelain, hats and furniture. The couple befriended art dealers, museum curators and composers. Anne recalled that “Museum came into our lives very early. Oliver and I started being taken to the V&A as small children – which was my only real schooling.” Maud and Leonard engaged the services of a traditional governness, but the true education of the two youngest Maud’s children came from the ‘incessant stream of specialists and continental teachers’ who taught weaving, needlework, music, singing and gardening but not traditional academic subjects. Anne replayed in her unconventional lessons which provided fond memories of rambling through the Sussex countryside gathering wool with an eccentric old weaving instructor dressed as a shepherd, she-making taught by a nun and ‘Umbrian needlepoint from a charming Italian’. There were, Amy de la Haye writes, extended periods without any form of schooling, at which time the children let loose their vivid imaginations in fantastical games of dressing-up.

Photographs exist in Nymans which capture the children in costume: Oliver as a Cypol with cape and wings, or as a Harequin, and Anne in a white gauze muslin dress with either flowers in her hair dressed as a May Queen or with wings on her back looking like an ethereal fairy. The Maud’s children’s games left a powerful impression on Oliver, whose earliest memory was waking to hear him four years old and dressed as a French soldier.

The dyed, creative freedom of their childhood was to have a profound influence on the direction of both Anna and Oliver’s professional and personal interests. Oliver’s metamorphic rise to fame as a stage, film and costume designer is well documented. The pleasure of making and creating invited in early childhood assumed no less importance for Anna.
Before her marriage, she put her needlework skills to use professionally in the fashionable London shop Vittorio and continued her mother’s example of creating and embellishing clothing for herself and her daughter Susan. So accomplished was Anne, Amy de la Haye notes, that both her brother and her friend, the couturier Charles James, drew on her skills to help realize their costume and fashion designs.2

The hours Anne and Oliver spent playing together as children forged a close relationship between the two youngest Messi family siblings, which continued throughout their adult lives. During the 1920s and 1930s Anne was Oliver’s frequent companion at fashionable London parties and fancy dress balls. Following their mother’s example, the parts evocations of historic personas on these occasions were carefully constructed for maximum impact. Dressed as the mythological beauty Athena for the Pageant of Great Lovers in May 1927, and accompanied by Oliver dressed as Apollo, Anne was singled out by the Duke of Kent as “the best boxing girl in the event” — a great compliment considering the Hollywood actress Tallulah Bankhead, dressed as Cleopatra, was also present. Anne reinforced the family’s Linley association wherever possible by portraying historical figures from that period, giving her the opportunity to wear late-eighteenth styles and even original period dresses. For the 1922 Devonshire House Ball, she wore the same dress Maud had worn to the 1911 Chelsea Arts Ball dressed as Elizabeth Linley. An undated outgoing from the Thistleton described Anne attending a ball wearing “...a gorgeous brocade gown which was worn by one of her ancestors”. This dress was in fact, most probably a gown purchased by Maud and Levedard in 1924 from an antiques dealer in Bath, though the Messis did not disburse any observations that it was a family heirloom. A similar eighteenth-century dress, also purchased by the Messis in the 1920s, remains in The Messi Family Dress Collection at Nyamere and continues to reference the family’s romanticized historical lineage.

The fascination for dressing up that the Messi family shared was not continued to childhood. Even as adults, fancy dress was core to the Messi identity, it enabled them to represent an idealized genealogy and become the medium by which family stories and mythology were passed down through the generations. The women of the Messi family were acutely aware, in Amy de la Haye’s words, that “mementos can be drawn and histories constructed from deep within the fabric of our clothes”.3 The dress as they preserved in The Messi Family Dress Collection live on as testament to the amours, aspirations and aesthetics of their wearers.

5. Ibid.

Family Dress Collection at Nyamere and continues to reference the family’s romanticized historical lineage.

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the artists
Lauren Frances Adams

Grand Tour Fan

alms, paint, wood

My work explores historical propaganda and the role of decoration in the construction of political and cultural identity. Strategies of appropriation are at the core of my practice, and archival research is a large part of my process. I am interested in the intersection of contemporary global reality with an often idealized collective past. I aim to slow down a capitalist sense of time by making art "products" with a shelf life, such as the expendable consumer hand-held fan commercially produced today.

This project explores the Messe-Ross collection of antique fans at the Fitzwilliam Museum, in Cambridge, UK. It is inspired by several fan forms from the collection that serve as templates for new iterations that merge ornamental with contemporary landscape scenes from around Sussex. Following the examples of fans which appear to be windows into other worlds, I bring "other worlds" into the Nymans gardens, with the eye of a tourist looking for the not-so-picturesque. Grand Tour Fan appropriates from the original eighteenth-century Grand Tour Fan on display in Cambridge. This fan inserts intentionally bland public places from contemporary Sussex life into the historical framework – substituting scenes of Italian ruins with those of Gatwick Airport (just a few miles from Nymans House).

Made of expanded PVC material and hand-painted, the fans are like out-of-scale theatrical props. Their placement in the Nymans setting provides a rich contrast to the work of the National Trust, in protecting and preserving historic heritage. Representations of Gatwick Airport (historically a minor and dairy farm, or the M23 roadway (the basis for the Road to Nymans) fan, are elevated into absurd revisions of the ornamental fan scenes, challenging site-specific concepts of fantasy and utopia.
I serve only you...
human hair, vintage embroidery threads, early 1900's steel hair curlers

Lucy Brown

My work for Unraveling Mawils has been driven by the desire to get to know the Mawils women, Maud and Ann. Both women were talented, creative and highly skilled costume/dressmakers, embroiderers and designers with a passion for collecting, preserving and archiving textiles, dress, antiques, their lives and family heritage. I have also been interested in Maud's lady's maid, Miss Barbara Adamsen – Addy – and her silent, loyal role as an employee.

They lived to breathe beauty, tradition and romanticism; an upstairs installation consisting of vintage garment, woven sculptures, a short film and small woven hair mementos.

In my normal practice, the tying on and wearing of such materials takes place in private. For Unraveling Mawils, I was asked to make a short film of this process, through which the fictional character of Elisa emerged. Elisa is descended from Lina Mawil (1851-1910), a sister of Ludwig Mawil (1847-1915). As Elisa moves through the gardens, main and interior rooms, she senses the presence and lives of Maud and Ann. Elisa has left a photograph of herself on top of the piano in the Garden Hall, amongst the Mawils family photos and hopes to return one day...

The vintage-garment woven sculpture developed in response to investigations into Maud and Ann’s personal styles and characters. The small woven hair mementos interact with the layers of Mauils Regency sewing box and Anna’s sewing machine and explore Maud’s and Ann’s favourite tools for sewing, craftsmanship and her mother-and-daughter’s unique connection through their creativity.

There is a separate woven hair memento titled “I serve only you… Addy gathered hair from Maud’s hairpin and made the hair curler mementos. The work references how Maud and Addy aged alongside each other and Addy’s repeated tasks for Maud during her stay at the original service.
David Cheeseman

There is a gardener who works night and day in the garden, his name is Death
acrylic sphere, 2014

I am fascinated with how the body apprehends and interprets the world. My work has been trying to come to terms with this ontological predicament for some time and sculptural activity has been my mode of analysis and means of exploration. A significant aspect of my practice has been an interest in responding to particular historical and cultural locations. In site-specific installations, material processes and craft skills are selectively chosen to provoke or complement prevailing aesthetic or ideological values. Alongside these concerns, formal preoccupations with surface, light and reflection generate phenomena that encourage the audience to focus on our haptic, experiential and temporal encounters with things.

What interests me about working with Nyman is the opportunity to make something that references aspects of the inside and outside of the site. I find there is a strange, dark, hermetic atmosphere in the house that is in contrast to the open and expansive feel of the topography in the landscape. These intense spaces full of charm and privilege feel divorced from the real world. The theatrical manor house provided fuel for the formatting of ideas, releasing fragile, fantastical bubbles that are burst by the lethal fire in 1947. The work in situ, There is a gardener that works night and day in the garden, his name is Death, is my response to this extraordinary place and the loss of the unique archive of botanical illustrations.
Steven Follen

Light Fitting
Lacquered plywood

Nymans is full of stories and snippets of information. Like the house, separate components come together to build a picture of what once was and no longer is.

I visited Nymans several times, getting a feel of the place, listening to the stories told by the staff. I learnt about the Pincetum and the Monkey Puzzle Tree, and was drawn into the forms and geometric patterns in the plants. I was intrigued by the wicker market at the entrance to the house, the beautiful panels of embroidered floral designs produced by the Sewing Group. I learnt about the Messrs Rose collection of fans, now in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge.

Many of the stories grew from the family’s love of plants and I wanted to make something inspired by these. Light caught my attention, I was aware of visual layers, being able to look through to different spaces. I liked the way in which archways, entrance-ways and empty windows framed the view to other parts of the house or the grounds beyond.

The porch in the forecourt garden had a special atmosphere. A place to shelter, or to meet, it linked the inside of the house to the garden, a bridge between the two parts of the site that were important to the Messrs. The curves of its arches echo around the garden in the natural and man-made structures. Light had once existed but was no longer there. It seemed appropriate to design a new one for the space, inspired by the curves of the urn, the patterns and forms of the plants and the shapes of the fans, making use of components to form a larger whole. At right a light would make the place feel safer. It offers an opportunity to re-tell some of the stories of the house and family and for a new tale to begin.

1. Nymans was built from parts of many older houses, some of the elements of these older houses are said to contain examples of elements of Nymans house. In some houses built in the 18th-19th centuries, such motifs as windows, chimneys, and doors were incorporated into the frames of staircases. These were placed at entrance to the staircases, doorways, and floors, to shield evil or for good luck or protection against fortune from entering the house.
Sally Freshwater

Mult flora
pressed flowers, funeral net, linen, gold thread

I began working with pressed flowers in response to an invitation to make work for the exhibition The Honeycomb and the Hive at Contemporary Applied Arts in 2010. Commenting on the potential demise of the bee, and by implication man, the resulting piece for this exhibition used only fake lavender, though there is an intensity and variety in the range of blue in the flowers, trapped behind black funeral veiling, inaccessible and useless to the bee in its pressed state.

Researching the history of Hymae and the people who lived there, visiting the house and the gardens, accompanied by constant thoughts around colour-related painting and the potential of shaped canvases such as those of Richard Smith, I took the Meares family's passion for their gardens and aspects of their interior decor to create a new work responsive to the location and history. A new flower work on a large scale reflects aspects of the long borders, the constant seasonal regeneration of the painting and the floral motifs echoed in the rugs and tapestries in the house as well as in the Meares women's dresses through the generations.

As a location, the fireplace in the Library was proposed, as this was a focal point for Anna, Countess of Rosse, in her last years, as her health was failing and she was no longer so active. So a scale was prescribed by the fireplace, possible colours were suggested by the room, flower types by the garden.

I went for the smell of the fireplace, the final view of the work by the visitor to Hymae is held at a distance by the access to the room, so the detail of the individual flower motifs and the intermingled gold thread lines remain hidden, the surface seemingly defined by bands of merging colour. Hovering somewhere between painting and carpet, the rhythmic geometric pattern of the surface becomes more chaotic and meadow-like towards the centre as the flowers take control.
What's in the cupboard, Anna?

At Umayan a glittering tortoise footstool proclaims the family. The furniture in the house is an impressive collection of period styles but is predominantly suited for comfort, not as domes-ticated lap-creatures. A humming stool transformed to guard the Missel family in their romantic mock Elizabethan Sussex Ukiah.

I wanted to add what Missel Missel would have described as 'a bold experiment' to the house. This sparkling hybrid is there to bewitch us and guard the inventiveness of the family.

Missel Missel made things: they lived, pleated gauze, dress, cloth, and bath scrubbies, cellulose, polyethylene and roasting foil. They became steely-fairy and exotic materials, suggestions of the strange or of the familiar made strange. Ordinary materials were expertly utilized but using tortoises, pipe cleaners and felt tips was beyond the conventional approach of some costume makers so Oliver worked on ideas himself, helped by his sister Anna.

Similarly, Renaissance designer, Linnet Hannan helped me, I too needed an accomplice for Tortoise.

Many pet tortoises remain at the same property for a great number of years, but unfortunately their arrival is often forgotten, that a creature's length of stay is a matter of conjecture. In the year 1600, Elizabeth I received as a New Year gift, four hundred and fifty-one buttons of gold like tortoises, in each one a pearl. If Oliver and Anna had found one, its case would sparkle with hand embroidery, bower absolutes, metal discs, tufted and shredded cellulose and chandelier drops.

No further confirmation of the details of the origin or species of this creature has been found.

Caitlin Heffernan

Tree Boys
children's clothes, wood, fabrics, polyfibre, wire, hand stitching, card

I use craft practice, in particular stitching and fabrics, to unsettle the viewer via a combination of the sweltering domestic and mundane and a sense of the uncanny. My work for Nymans draws on themes of childhood, fancy dress and play.

Prompted by the childhood of Anne and Oliver Messel and the family's love of dressing up, the sculptures reflect the family tradition of theatricality and their love of commissioning flamboyant costumes for parties. In particular I was drawn to the poignant photos of the Messel children – Oliver wearing a pair of wings and Anne and Oliver as teenagers or young adults in fancy dress.

The series Tree Boys has been developed directly in response to Oliver Messel's Tree-Mum drawings, which were part of the many costume ideas he developed for the Kurt Weill play The Arlecchino, which opened in April 1932 at the Lyceum Theatre.

I wanted my child-size sculptures/costume pieces to convey the sense of ebullience and play that I found in these drawings. This wonder and delight at dressing up has also been closely felt and experienced in my own relationship with my young son Wylie.

The two sculptures situated in the Book Room reference Anne and Oliver as children, playing hide and seek and also relate directly to the simple notion of childhood play.

On first visiting Nymans I was struck by the spectacular gardens, full of both colour, and the spectacle of ruins nestling atmospherically next to the house. The house and the extraordinary Messel family who once lived there, have been a rich source of inspiration. Their stories were central to the process of making the costumes and sculptures and the house offers a wonderful stage-like location.
Guy Holder
Field of Vision
Porcelain, cobalt, saflorn glaze, serving platter

I notice the merlins carved in stone on a shield, above a doorway outside.
A merlin is a fast bird based on a swallow. Here they are again. I see them occasionally around Sussex, on cricket, mounted on county buildings or stitched onto cricket shirts.

Then I go into the modest Dining Room that is sort of a thoroughfare as well, which has the effect of marginalizing what would have been, once before this fire, the room where the servants ate. More recently though, it was the only dining room. It is not a banqueting hall. It is hardly even a dining room. The picture room where the lady of the house sat to eat is full of images on blue and white pottery from Stoke. It reminds me of the willow pattern, with its story of forbidden love and the swallows that symbolize the spirits of the murdered lovers, depicted in blue and white on plates.

And in my mind, a connection is made, between the pottery and the swallow, and the swallow and the merlin. And that these birds and their stories connect with the potteries of the diminished house, set in the faded natural splendour of its grounds. And eventually, I think of the ground that welded the clay and glaze that make up the images of these birds. It is the ground, to which all birds must return. I think of the one under my feet, that does not belong to the National Trust or the clay company that supplied my clay. Ground that is common to all living things, and where all living things began and end.
In 1630, Oliver Messel designed a high-lender stage costume for a production called Piccadilly 1830. Following this production, the costume was adapted for Oliver to wear at a party in Paris given by Daisy Redway, the editor-in-chief of French Harper’s Bazaar.

Military dress is one of the few occasions for men to wear feathers without raising eyebrows. Oliver took this one stage further by incorporating ostrich plumes, more commonly associated with showgirl than soldiers. Contrary to Oliver’s original design, and counter to his utilization of the cheap materials for the maximum effect, I hand-beaded the jacket with thousands of individual mini-beaded glass bugle beads.

When Anne Messel was widowed in 1979, she reluctantly moved to Nyman’s from Birk Castle in Ireland. Nyman’s had been a house where she and her brothers had played as children, but was now where she would live alone. The sober repetitive task of beadning the jacket, mimicked Anne’s solitary counting of time at Nyman’s.

When making this piece, I imagined Oliver coming into Nyman’s buoyed up with excitement from the London show and the after party and throwing the jacket over the statue in the house to saie and show his star.

However, time isn’t kind to this story. By the time Anne moved back to Nyman’s, Oliver was herself a widow. His partner of almost 30 years, Val Re Hensen had died.

It is only when finally placed in location that the true impact of a site-specific work becomes clear. The Roman sculpture The Antinous Youth on which it is placed has lost its niche, lending the intervention sense of the medallor; maybe it was too late to bring the exhaustion of youth back to the house and what begun as a celebration has become a memento mori.
During the Second World War, Nymans House housed and educated numerous young people evacuated from London.

The two pieces Slingshot and Rifle, displayed in the Wall Garden and the rear of the country house respectively, are linked by their dyed colour, chosen to match the school uniform in which the evacuees arrived. Both are handmade with the notion of them being used by the children that were relocated to Nymans. The pieces were made as toys, with the added function ofsubverting and highlighting their surroundings.

I made Rifle by first drawing the piece and then making based on that drawing, so the piece evolved like a childlike game of Chinese whispers. I made it with the intention that it would be used by the children that were there, as a toy, made to be played with, to have fun with and to make mischief with.

Rifle is placed at the exit of the home to highlight that the children evacuated to Nymans were nearly of age to fight in the war they were escaping. P. Clover was one such child who was later to become part of the armed forces.

I carved Slingshot from a block of wood and crafted to look like a common stick. It was made through drawing what I thought a sling shot looked like, then making the carving true to this drawing. The main function of the piece is to change the way we perceive the chimneys. The lead of the piece draws attention to the intervention because it is the brightest part of the composition. Taking one of the chimneys a toy that a child evacuee might have used changes the scene from innocent to ominous.
James Sutton

Toy IV (rabbit) and Toy IV (giraffe)
Portuguese marble

Working mainly in stone and bronze from my studio at Hall Farm in Salfords, I experiment with sculpture and ideas, and have spent the last six years establishing my practice and studio.

My work is often inspired by nature and emotions, both figurative and abstract but is often simply an interpretation of simple, beautiful shapes I observe and try to bring to the awareness of others. Toy IV and Toy IV are part of a series of marble sculptures inspired by children’s toys. I was getting a little bored of just creating the beautiful, simple shapes that I had been obsessed with for the last five years.

So I began to experiment with what I could do with the stone, how thin I could take it and what I could get away with. I was also looking at sculptors who were pushing the boundaries with stone including Alexander Selon and Fabio Viale, creating unusual objects like paper planes, t-shirts and tights.

The toy series comes about just after my daughter was born. I loved the softness, shapes and curves that her toys contained but also the emotions they evoke.
Julian Walker  
As if
silk on linen

In the embroidered works made for Unraveling Myrsins I have worked on existing textiles, in some cases undoing work embroidered on them. The works thus created become conversations, with the site, within the object, and with myself. Interfering in and iterating another person’s work is not undertaken lightly.

I Don’t Want To Lose You is about the pseudo-medievalist plaque above the chair on which the cushion sits. A knight says goodbye to a lady before going off to fight, just as Leonard Mesael would have said goodbye to his family before going to serve in the First World War. The words refer to a contemporary song, ‘Your King and Country Went You’, from 1914. In embroidery, the name of the maker – usually a woman – tends to be lost; similarly, it was Maud Mesael, not Leonard, who lost her life during the war.

The involvement of the housekeeping staff in the embroidery guild set up by Maud Mesael is referenced in As if, the white on white stitch on linen, reflecting the invisibility of the competent running of a large household.

Culture, the Library, considers the relationship between inside and outside. Plants from the exterior world become the materials used to create the fabric of the building and the objects within it, as well as being the subjects of study, guarded behind glass in the bookcase. The plants’ scientific names are sewn onto an anti-macassar, designed to protect the cloth fabric of the chair from human contact.

The time-consuming nature of hand embroidery, especially embroidered text, in a world of instantaneous digital text production, is an anachronistic anomaly. Taking an hour over each letter is a luxury of slowness allowing time for the consideration of the potential for mulled and varied approaches to the text-embroidery relationship. The texts refer to the business of making art, justifying it, and the relationship between artist and work, one of skill, learning, intimacy and parallel growth followed by loss and distance.
A Twitch on the Thread: Olivier Messel between Past and Present + Paul Jobling

It might seem ironic, if not downright perverse, in a project whose ambition is to unravel and thread strands of history together again. However, like something of a latter-day Pandora, I want to inject this as a matter of simultaneously piecing and unpicking the threads of the day's hard labour so as to keep the ends in sight. But what is the end view here? What is the bigger picture? And what is on the surface and what lies beneath? These are the questions that seemed to underlie and unify the work of the three artists/natives/people I concentrate on in this essay: Gwyn Fry, Carmiti Haftman and Matt Smith, all of whom enter Nymans House under cover, so to speak, and through the strategies of masquerade and intrigue seek to represent — to one degree or another — the mythological archetypes of past and present in the work and life of one of its inhabitants, the celebrated theatre and costume designer Olivier Messel.

As Fry attests, one of the hallmarks of Messel's practice was his sense of invention in reworking familiar materials and objects and manipulating them in new, unexpected ways. For instance, his 1966 production of 'Twelfth Night', the remarkable footloom cover which Fry has fashioned as a homage to the great medieval tapestries, offers a collage of what might otherwise be considered as nothing more than commonplace materials, transformed into something extraordinary. Set against the ornate setting of the Garden Hall, and echoing Messel's interest in the exotic, the shimmering object resembles a spangled crown to the extent that it draws the eye. In Handel's opera Gluck's 'Orfeo', Fry's costume design for the head of the Roman poet, elegantly designed to have the head of the Roman poet for a footstool.

And yet, Fry's footstool is not a simple object to behold. It is not a mere footstool, but rather a beautifully crafted piece with trailing garlands as it does crown. Fry's object is in turn radiant with the jewelled encrusted tortoise shell that appears in Joel Katz-Hansmen's novel about the wealth and decadent aesthetic of Les Essentialistes, 'A Requiem Against Nature' (1954). Joseph Hofmann has described the work as "written against itself", a language that is that of "divine", expressed in the idiom of truth", and certainly its anti-hero inhabits an escapist dream world that is threatened by disruption as soon as reality intrudes on it. For Les Essentialistes, it is not the thing itself that matters but ultimately the vision it provokes and he mediates at length on how acts of consumption and imagination interact. Hence, observing the chair tortoise against the luxurious colours of a Turkish carpet, Fry designed a bouquet of flowers with the 'leafy and petals of each and every flower are in keeping with the tortoise' so as to bring out the kaleidoscopic pattern of the carpet. Moreover, as Fry iterates, while most tortoises may live at the same property for many years, Les Essentialistes' tortoises never were to share a
similar fate. Since things exist for him only to stimulate an essentially personal memory or mood, once they are achieved he feels no regret if the object fades away or dissolves. Thus he shows no remorse when he discovers that the unfortunate creature that died under the weight of its jeweled Caprice. A similar sense of things springing out of human control is also conveyed by the stone-capped helix and loose threads of the frosted glass which suggest it is floating or unfolding at the edge.

The symbol of the tortoise and theme of loose ends and indebtedness also spill over into art. Smith's commission, a military history studded with glass beads and a painted volume of Strickland's Kalender, with which he identifies a harm, a form of Ancient Greek sculpture with a chryselephantine head on top of a squared column onto which male genitals are also sometimes carved. The name of the god harmes, son of Zeus and the nymph Alke, is derived from the same root, and it was he who was responsible for inventing the fire by stretching strings across a scooped-out tortoise shell. Harmes was also originally associated with roads and travel and thus some hares were often placed at crossroads and borders as a form of protection. Depicted in a costume based on Messa's designs for Troilus and Cressida in his 1930 glove that was performed at the Palace Theatre, Manchester on 4 March and the London Pavilion on 21 March, the 'Nymera' harmes/represent another kind of border crossing in time and space.

As Doshi Massey has argued in For Space (2005), the meeting place/passage involves a fresh understanding of past and present, or the 'here and now'. 'Here is where spatial narratives meet up and form new configurations, conjunctures or trajectories, which have their own temporality (so 'now' is as problematic as 'here'). ... 'Here' is an intertwining of histories in which the spatiality of those histories (then as well as here) is inescapably entangled.' Thus the web of associations that is embodied in Messa's original costume design suggests a kind of neat temporal symmetry in the hundred-year leap from 1530 to 1930. And yet, in keeping with Messa's design and Smith's reconstruction of it also, explicitly that the web is a tangled one and the cross-overs of time between past and present it involves is far from straightforward when it comes to male dress and masculine identities.

It is illuminating, for instance, that Cochrane's production and Messa's costumes travel back in time to the reign of George IV and its attendant dandyism. Certainly, dandy-style dress was incorporated into the dandy cut both through its archetype George 111 (who in 1794 had joined the regiment of the 10th Hussars, as well as two other masculine stereotypes: the hyper-masculine Hercules, and the esoteric-yet-vain Adonis. This intense interest in looking good and being informs contemporaneous accounts of the dandy's lifestyle, from Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novel Partisans, or Adventures of a Gentleman (1829) to Jules Barbey d'Amélie's
Although in Piccadilly 1939 Lilar’s character fills with a woman, the subversion of gender norms in the dandy’s lifestyle is signified by Messel’s military dress, where he substitutes ostrich feathers for beard in his helmet design and thereby echoes D’Aurevilly’s axiom that dandyism is “... almost as difficult a thing to describe as it is to define. It is thus Feuillet on the one hand ... on the other imagination”. Moreover, as a haunt for fashionable upper-class men in 1930, Piccadilly and its purists were a distant cry from what they had become by 1930. Alongside the bespoke Savile Row tailoring trade, the area was then the locus of middle-market department stores – Austin Reed had opened its flagship Regent Street store in 1925 and Simpson went on to open its on Piccadilly in 1927. Yet it was also known as a nightlife destination for the working-class gay D’Lors Boys, who were tolerated and allowed by the police and the popular press alternately as “efficient looking people”, “West End Punks” and “Poofs”. One wonders, then, rather than associating Piccadilly with its seedy synchronic reputation for casual sex, Cochran’s 1930 Flora transposes the action dichronically to 1928 in order to rehabilitate its former reputation as a site for fashionable males to promenade, while not losing sight also of the dandy’s queering of masculinity. It is interesting to observe how Smith embodies a parallel double identity in his adornment of the humans’ arms on the one hand he mimics Messel’s original costume design for Piccadilly 1939 by using ostrich feathers; and on the other, in decorating the jacket with thousands of mirror-backed, glass bugle beads, he evokes the way that Messel customised...
the outfit, allegedly to pose as Lilli at a party given in Paris in 1901 by Daisy Fellowes, sister-in-law of Harper’s Bazaar. By extension, this kind of masquerade and the material impermanence and improvisation in both his and Messel’s designs bespeak many of the characteristics and tropes of the Camp sensibility that Susan Sontag enunciated in her seminal essay of 1964, namely: exaggeration, artifice, aesthetics, ‘being-as-playing-a-role’ (narrative, impersonation, theatricality), ‘gesture-full of duplicity’, compressed innocence and the permanence of ‘new-style fancy’, who ‘sheds the skin and pride himself on strong nerves’. As she contends, therefore: ‘Camp derives from its setting in the good-bad axis of ordinary aesthetic judgment. Camp doesn’t revolve things. It doesn’t argue that the good is bad, or the bad is good. What it does is to offer art (and also a different – supplementary – set of standards).’

It is, of course, well known that Messel demonstrated such a supplementary set of standards in his love for masquerade and the fandango. His designs were an integral part of both his and his sister’s life since an early age. Hence, photographs in the Messel family album of the dress-up became the springboard for Cathrin Helfmann to explore and recapitulate the creativity and theatricality of their childhood years in her exquisite work with fabric covered in taffeta mottled and lace and brocades. By contrast, Messel’s series of Two Men drawings, which he executed when designing costumes for a 1932 production of Karl Vollmoeller’s Directoirese wordless pantomime The Artichoke (1911), led him to explore an uncertainty and a thematic embodiment of childhood in terms of the theme of the hybrid Two Boys, stitched together from organic shapes of stuffed taffeta. Just as Fry’s football tracks on the conclusive aspect of ‘the one’ becoming ‘that one’ before one’s very eyes so also, therefore, do Helfmann’s fabric sculptures. And just as Smith’s ‘dandyish’ costume has a lineage with Antiquity through its link with the Hermes, so too is there a correspondence between her dandies and the Latin poet Ovid, who in Metamorphoses relates several instances of the relationship of human love to fire, such as the prodigious oak inhabited by one of the nymphs of Daphne, or Penelope and Odysseus’ transformation of the nymphs into a laurel tree in order to save her from the amorous pursuit of Apollo. At the same time, The Artichoke is reported by only two years from Cochran’s 1930 Revue and the sense of fantasy evident in Messel’s designs for both productions also share a social or political dimension, that is to say, in common with Hollywood cinema, they satisfied the public thirst for escapist spectacles as the world economy was beginning to unravel during the Great Depression.

This is to suggest, however, only a set of equivalences in the illusive work of Messel and the three artists represented in this exhibition rather than to bundle it up into a neat package. For I am mindful that when I started this essay I also wanted to respect the theme of unraveling, and what sets their work apart, as much as what binds it together into a tangled web of associations. On this level, then, we might speak of their individual responses to Oliver Messel’s rich legacy as ‘a theatrical designer as a matter of the harmony of differences’. And we might also frame the way that their site-specific installations at Niland thoughtfully enact a switch on the thread (to coin Evelyn Waugh’s phrase from Brideshead Revisited) between time and space in regard to Piers Gough’s concept of las leyes del maltrato (rules of restraint) and the constant ‘push and pull’ between history and memory that it entails.7

5. Ismail,盛世, p. 64.
The Nature of Intervention  • Julian Walker

Let us accept straightway that Nymans is preserved in a way that
renders it very different from how it was when people lived here. It is
not the business of the National Trust to pretend that we are all inviolable,
and that the real inhabitants have gone out for the day. As we walk round
enjoying objects and views we may not see ourselves in the space, but our
presence is an intervention, and the nature of the site as it is depends on
our engagement with it. The positioning of new artworks within a site like
the disrupts our vision, putting us in a position where we can acknowledge
our own presence.

Nymans is a site which is about change; the destruction of one form on the site has
created space for a different form; a number of times, both deliberately and through
the agency of catastrophe. How do we read the removal of the mid-nineteenth-century
house, the extension of the Italianate villa, or the replacement of the with a medievalist
building? How do we understand the burnt part of the house beyond the locked door,
which confounds our sense of space? Is it outside or inside, is it predominantly
useful, romantic, challenging, anomalous or mountful? Do we read it as an documentation
of history, as a reference to the Gothic, as a

In this context, where the site is a palimpsest on which people and the have inscribed new
diachronies for the building and its surroundings, proposing different kinds of engagement, the
insertion of works of intervention and alteration is entirely appropriate. It is the house, as a
site, that the former-owners engaged with and reacted to and it is the that invites
contemporary engagements and reactions
from others.

Works made to engage with a site can
enliven, inform, critique, outrage, delight and
amuse, they can lead us to look at things and
place in new ways, and they can ask us to
look at our own way of looking – even in
leading us to reject them they help us to
confirm our own standpoint and opinions.

Making work that reacts to and is situated
within a site of heritage is bound to excite
comments, often discomfort, annoyance
and frustration. Both as makers and as
viewers we should note these feelings,
and use them as a space to look at our
expectations, to consider and note the
relationships others have with things and
places that mean something to us.

My own work has involved taking things
apart, undoing work made before I
rework them; this is not preliminary to
the work, it is part of the work. Making
work that involves a certain amount of
destruction of heritage material opens a
door to many difficult questions. Having
installed the process of alteration, can I
complain if someone takes my work and alters it? – No, I cannot. What gives me
the right to change another's work? – The
same right with which I change anything
in the world. Does not presenting this
kind of work make me run counter to the role
of the host organisation as a custodian of
heritage for posterity? Art is in a position
to ask new questions about how we relate
to the culture we operate in; we should not allow the concern that things
will not survive for posterity to prevent us from asking those questions in
the present. What about the cultural value of the thing I am altering? – The
intervention shifts its cultural value, inviting new ways of thinking about both
the item and the structure of cultural value surrounding it.

Destruction has a recognised place in contemporary art. In 1953 Robert
Rauschenberg was making work that involved erasing his own drawings;
inspired by that time by the work of Willem de Kooning, he asked that
artist for a work that he could erase. De Kooning gave him a
crayon-and-ink drawing, it took Rauschenberg a month to remove, almost
completely, all the marks, creating Erased De Kooning Drawing. In 1960
The act of taking away, seen through the deliberately left marks of undoing, is a greater irreversibility, a deliberate act marked by a trace, a mark of memory, the unmarking is permanent, while the marking is capable of being changed.

The works I have made for this exhibition are clearly specific to the site, but the items I start with, having histories before they come to me, have become sites themselves, as much the context of my working on them has to be reconsidered. There is no question of avoiding the issue of gender in this medium. It is fundamental to the process that we should be aware that embroidery in the West has traditionally been undertaken by women, and my intention as a named individual is for this work to take place in a feminist site. I am writing with a clear knowledge of, and a clear reference to, the embroidery school set up by Nalini Misson, in which local girls were taught embroidery, with the help of some of the housekeeping staff of Nymans. Given the context of the work, the process of named intervention in embroidery here turns works of craft into works of art, explicitly authored, and with the rights of authorship.

Yet, despite the anonymity of the makers who originally created the objects I work on, the context of all of these handmade interventions is that they were once closely associated with individuals, and mostly became family possessions. The process of becoming commoditized detached them from these associations, rendering them more able to accommodate new stories, imagined, adapted, projected or translated. In this sense they are "re-housed" into a new context of meaning, very domestic artworks given a new home.

Each of these works must then be about loss, the loss of the previous work or the loss of the empty clay space. The work I Don't Want to Lose It, while referring the midwinter cycle, also relates to the loss of the work on the cushion, necessary to make the new work just as much as it is about the history of loss within Nymans itself, the desire not to lose the medieval, and the desire not to lose the past. We carry the past around with us. Ultimately these works open up a conversation with the role of the National Trust, which alters the route towards attrition by pleasuring sites such as Nymans, allowing the continuing questioning of how we see and know this aspect of the world and of ourselves.

1. A peep, a moment on which two or more successive verbs have been written, with one being erased to make room for the next (Collins Dictionary of the English Language, Collins, 1983).
Appendix 8  *Unravelling The Vyne* Catalogue
unravelling the vyne

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28 June - 22 December 2013

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The Vyne has been a site of constant change over time. Many generations have owned and altered it, social morals have changed and allegiances have formed and broken. With its complex history and equally rich heritage, the property offers a stimulating environment within which to create art and bring stories to life. It provides today’s visitors with a complete history. It operates as both a public space and a private home, a showpiece and a retreat. Its many owners and occupants have continually adapted the house and its contents to reflect their lives and interests, and it is this accumulated collection of objects, ideas and styles that we are left with today.

Trying to understand and communicate a coherent story through a house of this age is difficult. For every story told, a dozen remain untold. We were therefore delighted to ask four artists to pick out the stories of the house that appealed to them and create work in response to those stories.

Historic houses that are open to the public occupy a unique role. What was private – in the case of The Vyne, until recently – becomes public.

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Historic houses that are open to the public occupy a unique role. What was private – in the case of The Vyne, until recently – becomes public.

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Eliza Gluckman writes about the desire to explore and re-present foreignness and the exotic. Global exchanges of goods and ideas have a long history. The desire to escape into another world mirrors the experience of visiting historic sites and Gail Meller, John Gaskin, Sime Smith and Charlie Whitney all adopt make-believe and performance in their attempts to recapture the past.

Finally, George Haggerty shines a light on the relationship between Horace Walpole and John Chute. Alongside Richard Barnley, the two men created the Committee of Taste and influenced each other’s houses. However, impeccable taste is not the only idea they bring into question. Masculine aesthetics of the 18th century were very different from those of today, and trying to understand the intimacy shared by the two men is a fascinating and at times frustrating endeavour. Haggerty, with an insatiable skill, unpicks the letters of Horace Walpole and re-weaves them to explore their shared lives.

These ideas of taste, dandyism and the hedonistic atmosphere of 18th century Venice – the party stop par excellence of the grand tour – are explored by Maria Rivans, Matt Smith and Sharon McGilley.

Working with the team at The Vine, it has been clear how dedicated and emotionally invested in caring for the house and its visitors they are. It has been a huge privilege to be invited in, and we would like to thank Dave Green and his team for their help, warmth and generosity throughout the project.

1 Howard, ‘At The Vine’, Hampshire, National Trust Guide, 1988, p.4
A Woman’s Place: Power, Gender and Work in the Country House

Jill Seddon

The history of The Vyne, like that of any other British country house, is woven from the stories of its inhabitants, from the men whose wealth and taste shaped its architecture, to the women who oversaw its daily routines and ensured its survival through the legacies of succeeding generations. The beauty of stories is that they don’t require a solid foundation in fact in order to capture our imaginations and they are likely to be embroidered in their telling. The artists taking part in this Unravelled project have embraced the opportunity it offers to engage with the stories of The Vyne, spinning their own tales and, through the objects that they have created, contributing an extra layer to the living history of the house.

Words like spinning, weaving and embroidery come easily when describing the process of storytelling and it is not purely coincidental that they refer to activities most frequently associated with women. The interiors of The Vyne are full of visual reminders of the presence of women, from the carved wooden emblems of a queen whose expected visit never took place, explored by Aiko Sweeney, through the portraits that have attracted the interest of Lisa Pettibone and Penny Green, to the tapestries that Caitlin Hoffman has been fascinated by, which, although created by a male professional weaver, were doubtless cut down and altered by female members of the household as they were moved from one room to another. These rooms also display embroideries and watercolour paintings created by women themselves.

The women whose stories have inspired these four artists to create new works all came from the upper echelons of society, from the gentry up to the monarchy, although we know that their social positions, and certainly the maintenance of their houses, were underpinned by a hierarchy of servants. Despite the gulf between the life of a noble born woman and her maid, however, they were both women who lived their lives under a patriarchal system. Indeed, some of the most poignant and fascinating aspects of their stories are the ways in which they were able to manoeuvre within the system and what happened when they came up against its restrictions. Patricarchy, literally the rule of the father, governed the lives of these women, working selflessly for the family, with its emphasis on male lineages, to the institutional structures by which the country was ruled.

Up until the 19th century woman had virtually no rights as individuals. This is dramatically illustrated by the fate of Cathwina of Aragon, given visual
expression by A. S. Byatt, who envisaged the ideal "sweeping aside" of Henry VIII's first wife, their marriage annulled because of her inability to produce a surviving male heir. By engaging with this story, 

Stevere draws attention not only to the plight of a solitary woman, but reflects on the prevailing condition of her sex. Henry VIII's break with Rome resulted in his obtaining a divorce from Catherine through the offices of the Archbishop of Canterbury, but for nearly three centuries, until the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, divorce remained a largely male prerogative, requiring an Act of Parliament and considerable wealth. The decoration of the, now restored, panel of the Coat of Arms in the Wren Library at St. John's College, Cambridge, the emblem of the pomegranate, in anticipation of a royal visit to the house that only took place after Catherine had been replaced by Anne Boleyn, bears material witness to monumental events in English history. The story also has a more general significance for the country's great houses and the desirability of passing them down through successive generations of male heirs. Within the Chute family at The Vyne, the direct line of descent was broken three times in three centuries and the estate had to be drawn from the female line, adopting the family name. As has been pointed out, women were the transmitters of not the holders, of the property.11

The physical ownership of property, denied to most women, was not however the only indicator of power, as is illustrated by the figure of Dorothy, Lady Davie, whose story and those of other female family members is taken up by Penny Green, who depicts them on a series of plates she has made to be displayed in the dining room at The Vyne. Lady Davie continued the idea of the male owners of the house from gentry to nobility through her marriage in 1650 to Charles Chute, following the marriage of her daughter to Chichester Chute's son by his first wife. The unremarkable nature of this alliance was commonly regarded as a female preserve and Lady Davie seems to have been acutely aware of the importance of herself and her ancestors in the social hierarchy of the Chute family, as demonstrated by the family portraits she brought with her to her new husband's house on her marriage. She was a figure of some influence and authority in her own right through a fortune settlement from her first husband. Nevertheless, the management of her income was transferred to her male relatives and her final years were spent in legal wrangles with her son and grandson about their alleged mismanagement of her finances. Her tenacity and willingness to engage with legal proceedings was anachronistic of the battles of her predecessor Mary Neville, an earlier Lady Davie, who fought, ultimately successfully, to have the land and titles restored to the male heirs of the family following their confiscation by the French, who in 1541 had ordered the execution of her husband for the murder of a gamekeeper.

The ideology of femininity entrenched in the laws and institutions of the country was also the essence of women's everyday lives. Although concepts of femininity subtly shifted through the centuries, they remained centred around marriage, children and the home. Perceived as more emotional and more intuitive than men, women were expected to assume responsibility for the moral and physical welfare of the family. Aristocratic women, just as much as those further down the social scale, were expected to acquire and practise the skills of housewifery. In the large households of country houses, these could be demanding, including as they did the overseeing of provisioning, management of servants, upbringing of children, involvement in the furnishing of the home and its use for entertaining and philanthropic duties within the estate and beyond. Details of the extent of domestic consumption at The Vyne in 1743 survive, which provide a scrapbook of the extent of the house's household.12 A major contribution from its family members was through their sewing, both of household items and of decorative pieces that could be sold. The role of embroidery in the construction of the feminine ideal was exemplified by Rozalia Parkes when she wrote ... because embroidery was supposed to signify femininity - docility, love of home and a life without work. It showed the embroiderer to be a dutiful, worthy wife and mother. ... Parkes has described how, in the 16th and 17th centuries, the stitching of samplers developed into bands of whitework embroidery, which included the creation of the fine needlepoint lace used to trim the fashionable caps and ruffs of the period.
It is the depiction of the ruffs, both in the early family portraits adorning the walls of many of the rooms at The Vyne and in the 16th century sculpted bust of Mary Queen of Scots in the Oak Gallery, that has attracted the attention of Lisa Pettenbone. Not only has she explored the cultural and symbolic meanings of the ruff, but also its material properties. Within the interiors of the house the stiff, intricately pleated length of fabric is represented both in hard, unyielding marble and in malleable, formless oil paint. Pettenbone adds a third material—transparent, fragile glass. The visual and material equivalences thus created afford the viewer a fascinating insight into form and technique.

The tapestries dating from the 1720s, chosen by Caitlin Helfman as the inspiration for her installation, most clearly illustrate the division between amateur (domestic) and professional (textile) production. When this was on a commercial basis, in this case in the renowned Soho workshops, it became part of the public sphere and therefore the professional practice of men, exemplified by John Vandyke, the weaver and finisher at the Great Wardrobe, who did the work on these tapestries. Once installed inside the house, their sheer size became the responsibility of women and they also served as inspiration across the centuries for 20th-century embroiderers like Laure, Lady Chute. She then used her own needlework to upcyle the two 18th-century walnut stools that currently furnish the Tapestry Room. In Helfman’s installation, the tapestries evoke a meditation on The Vyne and the fortunes of its inhabitants. As with neglected plants that are left to “bott,” the natural imagery of the tapestries has sprouted from the walls, rooting downwards and branching upwards to reclaim the space. This slightly sinister vision perhaps echoes the experience of Caroline Wiggett, who in 1833, aged three, arrived at the house to be brought up by the childless William and Elizabeth Chute, and was familiar with this tapestry that then hung in her aunt’s bedroom, where she slept.
In the 19th and 19th centuries embroidery became firmly established as a female accomplishment, along with music and watercolour painting. It signified gentility and eligibility for marriage. Natural evidence of this ideology resides not only within the embroideries still to be found in the house, but also in the watercolours by Elizabeth Chute, her sister Augusta, and their governess Margaret McLaren, painted between 1794 and 1807. These include both exquisite botanical illustrations and accomplished depictions of rooms in the house. The group of paintings illustrates another division between amateur and professional, the time based on class. What it would have been socially unacceptable for the female family members to have practised as professional artists, their governesses were obliged to earn their own living, which included the teaching of flower painting, itself considered a feminine domain. She demonstrated her skill in this medium in her publication of Exotic Plants from the Royal Gardens at Kew (1790).4

Despite its status as a female accomplishment, Caroline Wigram in her recollections of life at The Yyne refers to her and her aunt's sewing as "work." The conventions that we can enjoy at The Yyne today would also be described by their creators as work, although the meaning of the concept has completely changed as a result of campaigns for women's rights and, more generally, new attitudes towards education, professionalism and creativity. In the early 19th century, Rosalia Parker noted that the development of an ideology of femininity coincided historically with the emergence of a clearly defined separation of art and craft. Since the 1970s, however, the work of many artist-makers has been concerned with exploring and challenging both this separation and the ideologies of gender that it embodies. The four makers discussed here are, by various means, continuing this project. More than this, through the beautiful and evocative objects they have created, they introduce us to women from the past and make us listen to their stories.

2. A portrait was superseded by an etching that was then transferred to a copper plate and aquatinted, a process which often involved either the use of a template or the employment of a printmaker (photolithography and photostatography) during the 18th century, with the etching of the copper plate often being carried out after the death of the owner.
5. Two of the most noted of these are the Aqbat Korns in the Royal Collection and thecoderedжалдкм, often then available in Europe; for example, John Marshall (ed.), The English Country House (London: Country Life, 1970).
7. Lunn, op. cit., 199.
A House the Size of a Horse was always a status symbol. Through its physical presence, it not only marked the wealth and power of its owner, but also served as a declaration of their social status and influence. The house was a reflection of the owner’s aspirations and achievements, and its grandeur was often a source of pride and admiration. In this context, the English countryside house was not simply a place of residence, but a symbol of the owner’s status and prestige. The house was a manifestation of the owner’s wealth, power, and influence, and its size and grandeur were a testament to their success and achievement. The house was a reflection of the owner’s aspirations and achievements, and its grandeur was often a source of pride and admiration. In this context, the English countryside house was not simply a place of residence, but a symbol of the owner’s status and prestige. The house was a manifestation of the owner’s wealth, power, and influence, and its size and grandeur were a testament to their success and achievement.
of what became the British Empire, based on a deep belief that the British model of
monarchy and Christianity was one that should be imposed upon the world.

Glimmering with real mother of pearl in
the candlelight, or glowing deep glaze on
porcelain or lacquer, these artifacts symbolize a theatrical engagement between cultures. The
wealthy classes often played out ‘orientalism’ or stayed ‘oriental’ (particularly from the
17th and 18th centuries) through exotic balls and fictitious visual narratives. A specific
example can be seen in the rage for all things chinoiserie, or Chinese-taste, that blossomed
with the return of the first voyages of the East
India Company in 1600. Wallpapers and whole
rooms were decorated in the ‘Chinese style’. It
was a fashion that inflated newly every niche of
the decorative arts and even architecture.

Much of it was based on a fantasy of China,
with little knowledge and even less regard for the
reality China became a foreign land that
represented exoticized ideals and an outlet for
theatrical interiors. In wallpapers and vases it
was often depicted as a peaceful place where
musicians played in beautiful gardens and philosophy and poetry occupied the
peace-loving people.

Each object at The Vyne, like the contemporary pieces in Unravelling
The Vyne, is a small hint at the world beyond. Chaloner W. Chute wrote a
detailed history of The Vyne in 1898 which included many inventories of
the house’s contents. Take for example the ‘oriental blue china’ and the
‘punchbowl chased with Orient figures of oriental character, engaged in
various field sports’. These two items illustrate the influence of China on
English visual culture. From the 17th to the 19th centuries, European countries
were regularly sending ships across to the East and returning with goods filled with
ceramics, textiles and silk. The East India Company was granted a
Royal Charter by Queen Elizabeth in 1600 and went on to dominate, along
with the Portuguese and Dutch, the trade routes to the East. The two items
of chinoiserie described in Chute’s book illustrate the fashion for chinaware
or porcelain which first came to England on these ships.

The fashion eventually led to the setting up of myriad English potteries
to satiate this new love of porcelain. English imitations of Chinese
porcelain-created anomalies, not least the mythical ‘Chinese’ tale about
a princess and a willow tree which led to the ubiquitous willow pattern
ceramics. Another phenomenon was the export wares that were ordered
by aristocrats in England from China in the 17th and 18th centuries. It is
likely that the punchbowl ‘chased with Orient figures of oriental character’
was from one such order. Often the craftsmen in China copied images
from watercolours sent to them and had never seen a European in the flesh.

Unravelled amongst the various artifacts in the Print Room at The Vyne is a
newly-made collection of snuffboxes. Snuff originated from the Americas
The Vindictive
Bunchcock, Henry
Thomas Allom
and became hugely popular in the 17th century. Imploining notions of the historical and contemporary, the contemporary artist John Gayson interweaves both narrative and craft with his exquisite enamel and metal work. Gayson is interested in the decorative collections of previous owners of The Vyne and their links to politics. Each fox includes text and image transfers and, on opening, a small brass automation, all creating a visual narrative. Using both images from 16th century Punch magazines found at the house and references to contemporary politics, Gayson’s swift and quick actions become miniature theatres in themselves. Within one of the boxes he takes a story from The Vyne’s hunting days when a duke was refused passage through a gate by a field worker, and mirrors it with the recent ‘Plebgate’ scandal to great (miniature) dramatic effect.

For some of the artists these contemporary commissions offer up an opportunity to reinvigorate and capture something of the life that only an inhabited house can generate. Ruffling through the history of The Vyne, snippets of information about the purpose of the house are revealed. As with most large houses, The Vyne was a status symbol and host to great gatherings and parties that helped ease political pressures and reinforce prestige. As was ever the case, alliances were forged through toasts and large quantities of food and drink. Such glimpses can be seen in the everyday, such as the first owner of The Vyne, Lord Sandys, the Lord Chamberlain, sought a licence to embroider twenty tunics of wine for the provision of his house. Indeed in Chetwynd W’s Chase’s book there is reference to ‘great revellings’ in 1601. For Unravelling The Vyne, it is the aim of the self-proclaimed textile graffiti artist,Mrs Smith, to recapture the party atmosphere with a brand of renegade pilgrims. A popular dish in Tudor times, the regular past has decided to shake it up a bit for the National Trust viewer. Trail of party dribble and the glimpse of a pigeon in its glide, and a dash of flour to the houses show home status, whilst also echoing the excesses of years of entertaining. The gauze seamstress aims to ruffle some feathers and muck the ordinariness of a house that has seen the excesses of Henry VIII and the dancing feet of one Miss Jane Austen.

By the 19th century when the world was opening up through global trade, the swelling Empire line dresses would have graced the oak panelled rooms of The Vyne. Charles Whinney’s steamboat would sculpture resonance the dancing days of the house. Fashion changed in music, and new
Instruments from around the world influenced the development of song and dance. The Tudor uses of oak and carving are mirrored in Shakespeare's forms and, using new techniques to emboss and imprint on the wood, the artist incorporates the footsteps of a Tudor dance.

The Vyne's contents and history not only take us on a journey to China and the East, but much further, into the imagination of writers from Morefield Park to Morlot. Famously both Jane Austen and Tolkien found inspiration here and it is in this imaginative spirit that Colston-Hewson has created a tree to pass through the floors of the house. The_text wrapped oak reaches through two floors of the house creating a sylphic dash of theatricality. The tree relates to the ancient wooden elements of the house that date back over 500 years playing on the oak's status as a symbol of strength and endurance and, for many nations, a political symbol of solidarity. Yet the tree also seems to evoke something a little otherworldly, a fairy tale destination linked to storytelling, or Tolkien's power in A Midsummer Night's Dream. It is hard to escape the tree's cultural resonances. Again fiction, Otherness and political strategy come hand in hand under the roof of The Vyne.

In essence, the house is a theatre for the politics and imagination of the owners. The domestic details of craft and decoration offer physical clues to the world outside the confines of the establishment of the English country house. Through these we can understand fashion and taste and find clues to the wider world in which these objects were made. The exotic and foreign become props in a fantasy world explored through the safety of the domestic setting. As the curtain falls The Vyne ignites our imagination.
the artists
In a world that is redefining the environmental legacy of the Industrial Revolution, whose manufacturing industry is changing the old ways of making in favour of new digital technologies, the notion of sustaining dying or endangered Black Country metalworking processes through crafts practices seems anachronistic.

My practice uses the processes and visual aesthetic of the Georgian enamelled box industry of the Black Country. Patch boxes, snuff boxes, and other related enamelled objects, often small in size, were highly intricate, often requiring the skill of several craftsmen to complete. By juxtaposing the visual language of the past with contemporary thinking, I create a world of fantasy and delight in order to confuse the viewer as to the origins of my contemporary, artisanal craft objects.

For Unveiling The Wynne, I have created Gate Gate, a large enamel box containing a simple automaton that fuses together two narratives: the historical story surrounding The Wynne Hunt, where the Duke was banned passage through a gate by a member of staff, with the contemporary Ryecroft affair involving the Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP, where he was refused permission to cycle through the main gates of Downing Street by a police officer.

The object coalesces the 18th with the 21st century. The base is a classically inspired 'enamelled port' form. Structurally, the cut is taken out of the tiled side and the interior with a deep red motif drawn from the bole of a tree. In the Large Drawing Room, the base and the decorative metal components are finished with a motif from the same textile pattern, with some elements distressed to mimic the patina of age. The enamel base and lid are held together with a hinge and mounted that is clearly traditional in form, but a large section of the sheet brass still remains to make the viewer question the era of manufacture.

The images on the lid are inspired by illustrations from the satirical Punch magazine and the prints of The Wynne Hunt gate alteration. These images were digitally manipulated using Photoshop in order to add subtle references to contemporary events including headlines on the newspapers and cuts of meat marked out on the huntsman's horse.

Open the lid and inside is a small automaton.
Lady Dacre’s wedding gift – a conceit

In 1616 Dorothy, Lady Dacre, the widow of Chairman Chute I, commissioned me to make 12 ceramic dishes to give to her grandson Edward Chute and his bride, Katherine Hack, as a wedding gift. Remarkably these still survive at The Yyne.

It might be said that this was her way of making amends after a tumultuous period of intermarriages, intra-family feuds and lawsuits, including her notorious court case against her own stepson, which culminated in her losing all the timber on the estate.

In commissioning the dishes, Lady Dacre has provided an insight into the crucial role of aristocratic women in an age of huge political turbulence and tragedy of life. What may seem to have been purely a man’s world, where marriage secured wealth, authority and power, some women were able to exploit the patronage networks essential to ensure their own and their family’s success, but widowhood or the whim of a monarch could equally spell financial disaster.

The dishes include references to Mary Neville, Chrysogone Baker, Dorothy’s daughter Catherine Lannard, the effect of the Reformation years and the transformation of The Yyne by John Webb, a family connection of Dorothy’s. They also incorporate architectural motifs from The Yyne including the cushion cover Lord Sandys commissioned with the house’s name and the Fillery floor tiles in the Chapel.

The story behind one painting in particular offers much insight into the fortitude of women of the time. Hans Eworth’s painting of Mary Hake. Mary is depicted beside a portrait of her dead husband Thomas Fiennes, Baron Dacre, who had been hanged for murksompp a gamekeeper and whose lands and titles had been forfeited. Mary battled to gain them back and upon the accession of Elizabeth I the family honours were restored. That she had married twice and had six children in the intervening 17 years was irrelevant to her position as a ‘good widow’ and keeper of the Dacre dynasty.

Unlike the ancient oak trees in the park that Lady Dacre failed, the Dacre family portraits and dishes still remain at The Yyne – silent witnesses to the determination of Lady Dacre to preserve her family’s memory.
We Could Have Been Anywhere

To work, I use, adapt and transform domestic objects and create sculptural forms that are inspired by a variety of elements drawn from social and personal histories. I also create immersive installations that use craft elements, drawing and photography as well as traditions of assemblage and installation. I am interested in ideas surrounding memory, home, the real and the imagined, and many of my works have elements that suggest longing, escape and melancholy.

My practice is also influenced by the notion of place and landscape and how these strands can be experienced through common domestic objects and materials such as wallpaper, curtains and furniture coverings. I find these mediums offer the chance to rework familiar patterns, adapting them to recall a relationship between waking and dreaming, a world where images, shapes and memories morph in the mind of the viewer.

My installation of a tree within the Tapestry Room, with the roots growing and spilling into the room below, may at first seem out of place and alien but equally at home and familiar.

The Vyne, as the name suggests, has associations with trees and vine, and looking out at the surrounding landscape there are many trees surrounding the building. The history of the house spans over 500 years and the scale of the property has allowed me to incorporate a tree within the house, as though it has transplanted itself within the room and grown quite naturally without effort.

The Tapestry Room was inspiration for both the placing and making of the tree. For me it evokes imagined lands with motifs of trees, birds and people. By situating the tree within the Tapestry Room and working with bound and stitched textiles, the tree was its own magical spell and hope becomes part of a new history of the room and house, if only for a short time.

The roots that spill out of the fireplace in the room below are made using satin fabric and are imbued with the red colour of the surrounding beech wall hangings. The shocking red provides a hint of what might be elsewhere in the house.
I was inspired to make this work after seeing John Chute’s collection of Lalitte ware plates in the China Room. The depictions of iconic Venetian scenes evoke the city’s celebrated masked carnivals that John Chute, Horace Walpole and their friends would have experienced during the Grand Tour.

Many young men adopted extravagant and unconventional dress and behaviour on their return from such travels. This was seen as unnatural by society and they were nicknamed ‘macaronis’. I have contended the challenge to 18th century notions of masculinity by the macaronis with the gender-bending and fantasy role-playing of the 1970s glam rock era, both of which were derided and parodied as outré and affectionate.

My film recognises the importance, historically, of musical performance and socialising at The Vine, and recreates some of the spectacle and intrigue of the carnivalesque dilettante performances to a limitless party scenario in the house. As the narrative unfolds, Chute’s contribution to The Vine’s aesthetic and atmosphere is acknowledged when theatrical features of its interior become highlighted. Chute, Walpole and their friends share an aesthetic sensibility and enjoy dressing up. As they re-enact themes of secrecy, love, pursuit, desire and betrayal in the guise of Harlequin, Columbine, Eagle and Cupid, they experiment freely with different personas and genders. The rule-breaking keeps their true identities concealed, and entices the group to ignore society’s restrictions and expectations concerning gender, sexuality and class. During Venetian carnival times, costumes and masks similarly maintained a person’s anonymity and any perceived transgressions remained unchallenged.

The hybrid costumes allude to the feminine, but confirm the possibility of the existence of alternative genders and sexual identities. The characters’ expressive, affected gestures within stylised tableau and the film’s soundtrack reflect an overarching camp of a type that is found in theatrical melodramas, and in the avant-garde performances of the early glam era. Visitors to the house will encounter discarded items of clothing, which are the traces of the frivolity of the self-styled ‘Committee of Taste’ as they abandon their usual decorum and their responsibilities.

The Vine provides a rich and seductive backdrop in which self-conscious challenges to the constructed nature of gender are made. In a retro-futurist spirit of a glam sensibility, the task transpose from the ‘twisting fingers’ of the macaronis to their posturing, guitar playing, glam successors.
Lisa Pettibone

Offering
fused and gold fused glass

A fascinating tour of the house in July left me intrigued by its Tudor history. Although the history of the house emphasises the Chute family, I was struck by its pivotal role in the Elizabethan story of power play, grandeur and art. This era continues to surprise me with its rich theatrical texts and costume, both of which are deeply layered with political and religious meaning.

Court and aristocratic fashion designs from Henry VIII to the end of the Tudor era were among the richest in history. I was drawn to a variety of objects that reflected this. The statue in the Oak Gallery of Mary Queen of Scots with her off, regal ruff served as a poignant reminder that power is fleeting. As Elizabethan style took hold over the next 40 years, the ruff evolved into a theatrical adornment,强调ing the head, elevating it away from the body and into another realm. This can be seen in the full-length portraits of women courtesans nearby. These fashion accessories were layered with copious yards of expensive linen or lace and embellished with gold and jewellery that signalled the wearer's wealth, holiness and political allegiances (coats of arms were often woven into the lace). I was attracted to their sculptural form, construction and use of luminous materials. Building up layers to create a dense mass in fused and bent glass that became an important part of my recent work and I wanted to apply this to a new sculptural form.

In the Dining Parlor the portrait of Charles Chute (1620), the father of Cherieour Chute I, wears a brilliant white ruff made of soft, gauzy-like material. Below this painting on dark wood sits a simple, elegant set of white porcelain tableware—the ethereal quality of ghostly white contrasting with dark backgrounds stylistically with ruffles. Later deep red was added to my colour scheme as I became aware that attributes paid for their stature with their own blood whether by death or through producing heirs.

The stunning and curious objects in the house (more permanent than their owners) convey the fragility of life; the body decays while sculpture, painting and ideas live on and are captured at the Vyne.
During my first visit to The Vine, two things immediately struck me – the beauty of the magnificent grounds and the layer upon layer of history in the house, connecting important figures such as Henry VIII and Jane Austen. The intense atmosphere created an emotional response that I wanted to capture using my 3D collage techniques.

Having chosen the Library for my installation, I assembled a micro-environment made from hundreds of carefully sourced vintage books, specifically selected to reflect the collection displayed on the library shelves. Importantly, the books had to contain relevant imagery for me to cut and collage, including fauna, the hunt and dairies on the Grand Tour, enabling me to bring the stories of The Vine to life.

Whilst exploring the house I felt an uncomfortable, eerie, penitent mood. This inspired the ghostly vision of the chair being knocked over and the selection of paragraphs from the horror novel ‘The Little Wolf’, cut into strips, which shape the waterfall and river.

The mini-adventure tells a narrative in true pop-up style, flowing across the table, like the river of words, like the river surrounding The Vine, like the stories the novelists wrote that were inspired by the house.
Matt Smith

The Gift

white earthenware, translucent pearls

John Chute was the youngest of Edward Chute's ten children. It was therefore surprising that he eventually inherited The Vyne in 1754 when he was in his fifties. Chute, alongside his friends Horace Walpole and Thomas Gray, formed the well-named 'Committee of Taste' which was most famous for its designs for Walpole's home Strawberry Hill. Their influence was also felt at The Vyne when Chute began a programme of remodelling and redecoration of the house. One of the most obvious manifestations of this is the neo-classical Staircase Hall.

In doing so, Chute moulded The Vyne, controlling the Domestic space to meet his aspirations and present the world with a carefully crafted self-portrait. The Dining Room was a figure of Chute within this setting, propped up with neo-classical detail and oriental-inspired ceramics, rearing his height and position. Rained by stately busts of Caligula and Antoninus, John becomes an 18th century domestic emperor of all he surveys, albeit on a scale which makes these pretensions to grandeur slightly comic.

Horace Walpole was one of the most prolific letter writers of the 18th century and through his correspondence with John, we can start unpicking their relationship. There was a sizable age gap between them and Walpole, the younger of the two, comes across as the more excitable, energetic and impulsive.

Their shared loves of collecting and decoration provided a bond that cemented their friendship. Walpole's letters to Chute – especially those written when travelling around Italy – were peppered with the mention of objects that Chute 'must to acquire' and suggestions for improvements to The Vyne. The more considered Chute would act on some suggestions but reject most of them. The Gift is the legacy of those discarded suggestions. Walpole expressed his frustration with Chute's sifting of his ideas and enthused my writing to George Montagu: 'I have done advising as I see Mr Chute will never execute anything'.

Not wanting to further hurt Walpole's feelings, The Gift sees Chute bundling all of the rejected suggestions together and hiding them out of sight, behind the main staircase. Unable to throw away the unwanted tokens and trinkets, Chute releases the divergent objects gifted to him which map Horace's travels and magnoli-esque search for beauty. Their collective display, adorned with strings of pearls, questions the subjective and temporal nature of good and bad taste.
Upon exploring the Oak Gallery at The Vyne, my interest as a contemporary wood carver lay within the oak paneling that monopolizes its walls. Commissioned by Lord Sandys and made by local craftsmen, the paneling depicts the height of contemporaneous pomp and celebrity through the use of symbols and representative imagery.

The most noteworthy of appearances within the permanent paneling are the visual references to King Henry VIII (the Tudor Rose) and his wife, Catherine of Aragon (the pomegranate). It has been noted that Henry attended The Vyne during and after the divorce from Catherine, leaving the paneling to become faded and subsequently covered up, or disguised in the post-divorce walls so as to not offend the king.

Within my intervention the pomegranates are plucked from their origin within the paneling and piled in haste under the hall rug, moments before being hidden from the king’s sight. The multitude of discarded fruit made for the floor of the hall directly references the number of times Catherine’s symbol is carved within the paneling.

This subversive act of making represents a historic moment in time where the king’s decision to detach from the Catholic Church in order to divorce Catherine and then remarry was prevalent. The crafted intervention is made of fruit, also making reference to Catherine who was fruitful in that she conceived six times in order to satisfy the king’s need for a son, but was ultimately rebuffed after producing only stillborns, short-lived sons and a daughter who would become Queen Mary I.
The Architectural Love Affair between Horace Walpole and John Chute: Strawberry Hill and The Vyne in the 18th Century

George E. Haggerty

In 1764, The Vyne was inherited by John Chute, who was aged 60. As the youngest of ten children, it was unlikely that he would inherit the house. However, the years during which he owned The Vyne saw a fascinating architectural exchange take place between Chute and his close friend, Horace Walpole—an exchange that shaped both The Vyne and Walpole’s home, Strawberry Hill.

Horace Walpole lived from 1717 to 1797. Educated at Eton College and at Cambridge, Horace was the youngest son of the great Sir Robert Walpole (1676-1745), the first prime minister of England.

John Chute (1701-1776), first bailiff of Horace in Rome, who died in 1744. Horace and Thomas Gray in 1761. Walpole’s first wife from Eton College and at Cambridge, Horace was the youngest son of the great Sir Robert Walpole (1676-1745), the first prime minister of England.

John Chute (1701-1776), first bailiff of Horace in Rome, in 1744. Horace and Thomas Gray in 1761. Walpole’s first wife from Eton College and at Cambridge, Horace was the youngest son of the great Sir Robert Walpole (1676-1745), the first prime minister of England.

When talking about Chute and men like him, William Hutton Smith, one of the editors of Walpole’s Correspondence, puts it this way:

Aesthetes, dilettante, men of taste, gentlemen of leisure: the labels which can be attached to John Chute used to sound glamorous, and now merely signify decadence and aimless frittering. For more than two centuries, England and America have been producing these decorative gentlemen, mostly well-to-do who have passed their lives in collecting treasures and adorning their homes.

The 18th century perhaps saw men readier toying when Italy’s glittering hostels lay open to English travelers and collectors, and when a gentleman’s embroidered waistcoats and lace ruffles seemed to signify the richness of his cultural opportunities.

They seldom married, and had few children. Their beautiful collections are dispersed or dissolved, their beautiful homes are often in very strange hands; their beautiful friendships are regarded with suspicion by modern psychologists.

When Smith mentions ‘suspicion’, he is talking about homosexuality and by ‘modern psychologists’ he means Freud, of course, but also the notorious Kinsey — of Kinsey Report fame — with whom the editors of Walpole’s Correspondence actually consulted on matters sexual when they were confronted with Horace and his friends. If Smith is coy about bachelorhood and collecting, or decadence and frittering, the 18th century social commentator Henry Fielding is not.
I call these Fellows 'fingure twisters', meaning a decent word for Sodomites. Old Sir Horace Mann and Mr. James the Palmer had such an odd way of twirling their fingers in Discourse — I see Stouton tells us the same thing of one of the Romanappers.\(^2\)

Whether or not Pietzzi is basing her observation on anything more than hearsay or superficial memories, we can hardly avoid the connection between 'effeminacy' and what she elsewhere calls sexual propriety.\(^4\)

George Harding (1743–1816) wrote an account of Walpole's 'effeminacy' which included a reference to Chute and Georgina Montagu.

There was a degree of quaintness in Walpole's wit, but it was not unbecoming in him because it seemed part of his nature. Some of his friends were as effeminate in appearance and in manner as himself and were as witty. Of these I remember two, John Chute and Georgina Montagu.

One can only imagine what Hardinge is trying to say about Walpole's 'nature', but we might be forgiven for imagining that he was trying to evoke something akin to our contemporary understanding of sexuality. These witty and effeminate friends are bound by class and interests, to be sure, but there is also a deeper abiding friendship that comes from this shared sensibility. Walpole and Chute, so obviously connected to this world of bachelorhood and effeminacy, offer a special insight into the quality of friendship. Their letters are replete with references to sado-masochistic scandal and even jokes in this vein.

I must tell you a story, which is rather adapted to the Irish part of my letter, than to the seriousness of the last paragraph. A young Sir Winstanley happened to go into a coffee-house in the City, where some grave sisters were taking over a terrible affair that has just happened in the country, where a man broke into a house, ravished the mistress and killed the master. Winstanley said very coolly, 'It was well it was no woman!' The sisters stared,
but friendly, and that is more likely (really) to intensify their friendship than to make them lovers.

The friendship between Walpole and Chute was largely played out in their architectural affairs. After Francis Wharton died, in 1751, Chute decided himself almost entirely to Walpole, and he made Strawberry Hill one of his fondest projects.

The work of turning this simple farmhouse on the Thames into a Gothic castle was engaging on a number of levels. The simple construction held a fascination for Walpole, and he and Chute worked tirelessly to lay out plans and design Gothic figures for a staircase or a hallway.

Walpole responded by taking interest in Chute's family house, The Vine, in Hampshire, especially after Chute inherited the house in 1754. As he says to Marry (Mrs. Chute) Jenkins level.

I am going with him in a day or two to The Vine, where I shall try to draw him into amusing himself a little with building and planting; I mean he has done nothing with his estate but... good.° (20:449, 10 October 1764)

In the National Trust guidebook about the house, we are told that Walpole offered particular help in redesigning the Chapel with a Gothic cast, offering specific materials and designs that transformed the gloomy room into a Gothic gem.

Walpole's influence is unmistakable in the Chapel at the Vine, which would certainly be a suitable addition to Strawberry Hill.

But Chute's input on Strawberry Hill was invaluable to Walpole as well. He offered advice, materials, and often specific designs for construction. At Farmington there are pages of Chute's drawings for Strawberry Hill. When he and Bentley are in conflict over design, Walpole almost always sides with his friend Chute. They seem to understand each other in a way that Bentley can only approximate. In the following letter, Walpole is praising Chute for a design he has offered for the select of the chaste at Strawberry Hill.
Well, how delightful! How the love did you continue to get such pleasure? Yes, we certainly have all the women with whom boys come to us, to design high, walks, or terraces, this collar, instead of a white collar, last the third of a century. I have already known them to last. Mr. Jekyll has recommended this place of every language, and why, he says, it is this moment, coming to pass, because — as you see, it is a place you shall always have in your garden. You shall design every sort of flower, and I must build a place, or build a shed, and I am not exactly it. The flowers you have lost, you have found a proportion, and given it simplicity and lightness to it, that never expected. [P. 113, 24 November 1756]

The slightly peculiar tone that Walpole takes with Chute is a feature of their letters, and it is not uncommon for young deep friendship is. In this letter, he also clearly expresses through the aching of Strawberry Hill and the creation of the prose Gothic style.

Strawberry Hill is remarkable by its situation. The walking in the garden, the entire Gothic style, the Hobby, the Garden, are all of these things, and nothing can give us a clue into the aesthetics of sense. Walpole himself concludes, and they have lost all of the country pleasures playing too much in the most elaborate way, they have lost, this house shows itself in the most remote corners, because that is where Walpole hopes to retire when his health permits.

Walpole finds the Gothic effects atrocious, like a stage set; they are little more than shams of the stonework he is trying to use, but he is convinced with the effect for him, even with the authenticity of materials or techniques.

More than once, these letters went traveling around England in hopes of finding materials that they could use either of their houses. Indeed, Walpole writing to the letter, when he and Chute are in the Sussex:

Here we are, my dear Sir, in the middle of our pilgrimage, and we should never return from the lovely land of Albemarle Gothic style, I begin a letter to you that I should not have undertaken, when he has made our houses, will collect together. We have had some pleasant discussions, but I have seen our houses.

The two minds met in the English province, seeing cut Gothic masonry. These are granite houses, and these rocks you used to suggest, as architecture, that the champagne is not here. They were never happier than when they were composing together to create one of the most beautiful houses of the century.

When Walpole is writing to the letter, he is talking to the young Montagu about him, there is a special quality to the correspondence. They encourage each other in their work, and Walpole shares his ideas about the details of a building, without having to say, to explain certain concerns to each other. He says, with a very keen eye, in the construction of Strawberry Hill because they know that they bring from both sides into the open and forces their transition from the old place. Of course, the stairs turn out to be nothing compared to the one they have, and the entire design, the flat of seating, their ideas so beautifully realized.

Walpole and Chute worked together in improving their homes and their relationship until 1749. Chute died in 1759, leaving an estate for his son, or anyone else, to imagine the world. All Chute's losses. Walpole, a courtier, one of the most deeply felt losses.
intelligent, and witty enough to be a match for the indispensable House of Waipole. I am lamenting my other self, this intangible praise and deeply felt loss, and this loss echoes through the Strawberry Hill that Chute helped design and decorate. I am lamenting myself, not him — no, I am lamenting my other self. Half is gone, the other remains solitary. How would it be possible to articulate personal intimacy more powerfully? Waipole identifies with his friend, and in doing so he recalls what Montaigne calls "perfect friendship." The perfect friendship I am talking about. Montaigne says it indivisibly each gives himself so entirely to his friend that he has nothing left to share with another.*

As one of the most prolific letter writers of the 18th century, Waipole has provided us with an encyclopedic and intimate account not only of his houses' architecture, but also a snapshot of historical masculinity and intimacy between men.

3. On the Importance of Early Modern Drama, see David M. Murphy, "The Influence of Early Modern Drama on Modern Drama." Literature and Drama, 45(3), 236-247.
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Inside front cover: Arrangement, Caitlin Heffernan

Opposite: Seawage, Zoë Hilyard

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Unravelling Uppark is the third and final exhibition of the series Unravelling the National Trust. In 2012 we unraveled Nymans House and Gardens, West Sussex and in 2013 The Vyne, Hampshire. Unravelling Uppark asks us adding 11 new commissions to the stable of work, where again we have charged artists with the task of making new work that is conceptual, rooted within a craft practice, and also responsive to some aspect of the historic site where it is exhibited.

Making the family, who were essentially ‘new money’, appear as they had always been part of the English establishment.

The Vyne was a substantial powerhouse now layered through with complex architectural modifications, political alliances starting from Tudor times, and difficult familial relationships. The estate itself has experienced periods of crumbling decay as well as rehabilitation glory, reflecting mostly on the disposition of the inventors of the place.

Uppark is like a giant doll’s house perched on top of the South Downs, that is a status symbol of merchant wealth. It boasts views to the sea that have been uninterrupted for centuries. However, in contrast to these unchanging views, the site has been one of transition and possibility. At Uppark, it is as if the grand views have offered people a chance to broaden their own personal notion of potential, and that the potential for social movement is reflected in the presentation of two floors of the house – the grand upstairs and the working downstairs.

Unraveled has worked with 20 artists across these three properties, artists who have explored myriad different histories within each site. Yet through the very specific and individual responses to the houses, common themes have emerged.

Firstly there is the concept of intervention itself. This is something discussed in detail by Julian Walter both through his work placed at Nymans and his accompanying essay in the Unravelling Nymans catalogue. Within this catalogue, Sara Roberts introduces us to the idea that the site is host to continual interventions and that these interventions, no matter how short-lived, leave a long-lived legacy of change. We should be under no illusion that interventions in historic houses are a new idea. Throughout their histories, these properties and the histories we use them to tell, have
been continuously modified and rearranged. At every stage of the history of these properties there have been interventions of different natures. These interventions proved fertile ground for artists, whether it be imposing a particular style of new architecture onto an older space, as was very evident at The Vine, where John Chilton superimposed a grand neoclassical staircase within a Tudor palace, or the incorporation of the 20-year-old working class Mary Ann Bullock into the centre of the family tree at Uppark through her marriage to Sir Harry Parker-through; thereby accepting and incorporating a working class sensibility into an upper-class environment. Unwaveringly Missavis's interventions have all been brief—six months at most—but at the same time long-lasting. The properties have purchased objects made for exhibition, which have now become part of their permanent collections, and which will be recognised fully from now on as part of the complex history of each house. As each property purchases work, so they link themselves to each other, through our series of interventions.

Intervention may also not necessarily be physical. Matt Smith’s research and conceptual approach to his piece, Accidentally 1830, shown as part of Unveiling Nymans, prompted the recognition of several family relationships previously unacknowledged. The work centred around the theme of stage designer Oliver Messel, who lived at Nymans during his childhood. Smith reinterpreted a costume by Messel (who had originally designed it for the theatre production, Accidentally 1830), but then altered it so that he could wear it to parties. Smith placed the costume on an antique Roman statue within the house, staged as if Messel had casually thrown the jacket and bonnet over the figure on a visit to see his recently widowed sister Anna. Anna’s two marriages are of course duly noted in the National Trust Nymans guidebook and family tree. Oliver’s long-term homosexual relationship with Vagn Pre-Hansen was not noted. However, despite it ending longer than either of Anna’s marriages. Smith’s work speaks to this relationship, through the story he tells of one widower (Oliver having lost Vagn) visiting another (Anna having lost The Earl of Rosse) and the prompt the National Trust to acknowledge Oliver’s relationship and write it into their interpretive materials and the Messel family tree.

Uppark itself is a site of contentious intervention. The disastrous fire that destroyed most of the upper part of the house in 1989 led to international debate around the appropriateness of another form of intervention—the conservation and restoration of historic staircases. The National Trust decided to embark on a full programme of restoration. They reopened the house to the public in 1995, re-presenting Uppark as it stood the day before the fire six years earlier. Helen Caraccio discusses this in her essay as there ever a first-time visit, and how will we remember in the future the act of restoration is one of the ways we tell that time moves forwards and continuously. The act of restoration by the National Trust at Uppark can be directly compared to the work of David Cheeseman at Nymans. Matt Rixen at The Vine and Simon Ryder at Uppark. All of these artists have, like the National Trust at Uppark, created visions of different worlds and other realities. Cheeseman’s most striking piece being the life-size, full-colour image of a castle, placed in the garden, that had been lost in the 1947 fire at Nymans, a fire that destroyed much of the medieval-style building, including the library. Rivers gave characters from The Vine’s history three-dimensional form in the library in her work, Short Cuts and Pop...
On one side of the staircase, a collection of books, and Fyson emphasises the sculptor’s mastery of the rhythmic patterns expressed inside bowls of glass in his work. Throughout the rest of the house, the responsible for the interiors of Uppark show an affable reality, and we are invited, as we walk, to create our own realities, constructed through our continuous seeing and being.

Fyson’s collection has allowed us to see the house through the eyes of the artists who have previously owned it. This is not a retrospective exhibition, but a way of experiencing the house as a whole, and seeing how the different periods of its history have influenced each other. The exhibition is divided into two parts: the first part focuses on the history of the house, from its origins as a medieval manor to its transformation into a country house in the 18th century. The second part explores the art and design of the house, from the early 19th century to the present day.

The exhibition is a celebration of the rich history of Uppark, and a reminder of how the past is always present in the present. As we move through the house, we are invited to see it as a living, breathing space, where the past and the present coexist in a harmonious balance.

At the end of the exhibition, there is a film which explores the history of the house, from its origins as a medieval manor to its transformation into a country house in the 18th century. The film is a powerful reminder of how the past is always present in the present, and how the history of a place is always shaping its future.
justaposing historical and contemporary events and attitudes as well as factual and fictional events and historical points in time.

At Uppark, Alice Hivate and Helen Fossey's collaboration The House of SLR places the theories of the adult H. G. Wells within a space he knew as a child (when his mother was Uppark's housekeeper). At The Vyne, Sarah Meek's exhibition for Eliza Boudnay Fruit, 191700, green rook with the Vyne's history as experienced by John Chute in the mid-19th century, comparing the hedonism and disempowerment with gender and power of both eras. At Nymans, Cathie Hofmann's period of life and seek, childlike to updates that excite the childhoods of Anne and Cicely Masefield at Nymans, which is now presented by the National Trust as it was at the time of Arnold's retirement. These mingling of time allow us to see historical and contemporary events from different perspectives, introducing other, more inclusive stories into our fields of vision, and an understanding that that are always multiple truths.

To conclude, we hope that Unravelled has helped demonstrate that there is value in opening up historic spaces to the imaginations of artists, and unearthing our perceptions of truth, convention and intervention. Moreover that objects can be powerful storytellers, and their authenticity is not necessarily bound up with origin or age.

Unravelled would like to thank Sarah Foster, Andy Lewis, and all the team at Uppark for their invaluable help in making Unravelled: Uppark possible.

5. Louise Smith, Gender/class or the pre-Great White: House and the perception of social inequalities, in Hatfield, Hattemen, Smith (eds) Unraveling Nymans (How: Unravelled 2012), pp. 9-13
Walking down the great slope of concrete, the vast space seems perfect in its modularity, and the destruction of its vastness means it is a while before you notice the scar. But it is there, and you will notice it, sharpening and jagged, a rough diagonal across the expanse of the floor, a smooth, expert repair of concrete, in concrete.

This is the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern, the great entrance hall to one of Europe’s most significant spaces for contemporary art, offering a daunting challenge to the artists commissioned to exhibit there: a huge space, taller than it is wide, interrupted by a raised walkway and staircase, overlooked from several levels on one side. Whose work then is the subtly filled crack in the concrete surface? It is nobody’s as such, but is nonetheless a permanent and wild physical trace of Dora Salcedo’s commissioned piece, Jutabehisht (2007), part of the Unilever series. This work was a great fissure where the visitor was expected to walk, contemplating its depth, making decisions about which side to walk on, navigating its meandering length.

The Salcedo repair is a clear mechanical example of how artists’ interventions leave traces which become constitutive presence in the projects which follow. But these connections are not necessarily physical. Each action becomes part of the history of the space and changes it with expectation, contributing to the meaning of whatever happens there. Thus the movement of people across and around the crack in the floor seemed to be echoed by the crowds of visitors who saw with the choreographed participants of Tino Sehgal’s later work, These Association (2012), and listened to their confessions. In turn, the very particular blend of confidence and decentered uncertainty exhibited by performers’ and audience members in the piece seemed also to call up the ghosts of the giant spider of Louise Bourgeois’ first artist intervention on the site. Meanwhile, the sheer self-awareness of people throughout the great space was a reminder, as large crowds there so often are, of the crowd of friends and strangers which lay on the floor in 2003 to see their own reflections on the far distant mirrored ceiling, in the glowing sun of Clarity: Eclissi’s Weather Project.

Of course, this particular space also had a whole other previous life as the heart of a power station, the essence of industrial strength and modernist
ambition for the capital city. Any art placed within these huge walls has to contend in equal measure with the history as well as with the history of recent usage, and it is open to discussion as to where the Turbine Hall sits on the spectrum of exhibition sites, which runs from white cube to non-gallery venue.

Its counterparts at Tate Britain, the Duveen Galleries, as purpose-built sculpture galleries, are uniquely gallery spaces, but similarly laden with a sense of their own history. When Simon Starling was commissioned in 2013 to develop a new work in response to the Tate collection, his Phantom Ride highlighted exactly this aspect, presenting on large screens in the space a rollercoaster view of it, in which the major works that have been shown there over the years reappeared like ghosts.

This is the challenge of making all site-specific art, whether for gallery- or non-gallery spaces: it requires not just creative acts and aesthetic judgements, but an active play with existing narratives, and with layers of history. The process is selective, offering a choice of one narrative over another, and of one aspect of the fabric or history of the building over another. And the process is cumulative: once the work has been installed in a space, it too becomes part of its story.

Naturally, the histories of older buildings tend to be more complex: many have served several purposes, they have been added, extended, damaged and repaired; rationalised and restored. The social and political events to which they have borne witness, have changed not only their use but also the attitudes of society towards them; some have been commandeered in times of war and served as playgrounds to the wealthy in times of peace. Their expansion and occasional contraction bear witness to the prosperity or failed fortunes of their occupants.

The experience of such properties in the care of, say, the National Trust, tends to be filtered by simplified narratives: editorial decisions are made about which stories should be told and how best to tell them, with which artefacts and decoration. Stories tie objects together in a comprehensible and appealing way, and locate the house themselves within wider historical narratives. The practical challenges for artists are not to interfere with the fabric of the buildings, nor to confound visitor expectation of access to authentic historical material. Compensation for these difficulties comes from the reassessment of the scale of rooms, the familiarity of domestic scale and the scope for situations in scale or material to be conspicuous and sometimes startling. Artists become animators – they curate and re-frame, they present and perform, draw out new connections and references, allow new readings of old stories and relish attitudes to familiar objects.

At Barrington Court in Somerset, for example, the entire volume of the kitchen was recently filled with piles of corn made of bad pasta of willow. The tradition of basketry is well established in Somerset and the material is local, but there is no specific link between the craft and the house, or the kitchen area. But this intervention by Laura El-Tantawy, with its human-scale gestures, functioned as an analogy for the kind of activity which would once have taken place in this kitchen. Piece work, assembled later into a pedestal whole, the repetition of fairly simple actions to make a spectacular collective presentation. The art was neither formal nor narrative, but still conveyed a sense of the history of the site and, once again, contributed to that history.
At Romdon in Hertfordshire, there was a massive hitler’s defenestration in 1943. A contemporary spectacular of the Reformation, it involved the burning of effigies of the Pope and other religious figures in a dramatic scene of nationalist fervour and religious zeal. The event was designed to portray the Tudor kings as heroes and to rally the people to support the Protestant cause.

At Uppark, the site of the present palace, the architectural style is a mixture of English and French traditions, with the use of stone and brick. The exterior is adorned with ornate carvings and statues, and the interior features a rich collection of furniture and paintings. The house was built in the 18th century and is a fine example of Georgian architecture.

In the century that followed, Uppark became a haven for artists and intellectuals. It was here that the writer Charles Dickens spent much of his time, and it was also the place where the poet John Keats lived and wrote. The house is now a museum and is open to the public. It is a fine example of the Georgian style and is a reminder of the rich cultural heritage of the area.
and artists Alice Kettle and Helen Pebby close the creative loop and bring the 8th Home. Their figures are carefully crafted on the scale of the doll's house, but they play house on a grand scale with the whole building, soaking themselves in corners, appropriating objects for their own use, conducting a parallel and gently parodical life. They turn the house visitors into the 'other race'; they embody part of Wall's socialist literary project and give face to its divisions and stiffness.

The disastrous fire at Uppark in 1989 has laid a different kind of historical narrative upon the building - that of restoration and rebuilding. It is the kind of story the National Trust tells well, and it is appealing to the public. In that it involves painstaking craftsmanship, time and tragedy, and ultimately the triumph of endurance over adversity. For Unveiled, Matt Smith thoughtfully recaptures the 'above-stairs' fires burned, the archives were said to be lost in the 1978 disaster en route to their new purchaser, the Metropolitan Museum in New York. As artists, however impractical, they draw together narratives and themes from several ways, and contrast mundane processes with romantic stories of tragic loss, of the crossing of class boundaries through marriage, of the potential of fire to destroy layers of material history.

Zoë Hiltay has supplemented the Uppark ceramics collection, which includes pieces salvaged from the fire, with her own salvaged ceramic patchwork pieces. The works extend the story of restoration of rescued objects through the imagery printed upon their surface. Their meticulous reconstruction, and their cool acceptance of mismatching and missing parts, are part of the evolution of the object and its physical reaction to events. Hiltay's work perhaps sums up the apathy of the historic house as host for artists' interventions; the house is stimulus and receptor, it is both interpreted and altered by the intervention, and every action and installation contributes to its accredited history.

1 Tate Modern was the most visited contemporary art museum in the world, with 5.5 million visitors in 2012. www.tate.org.uk/about/offices-public-relations/tate-modern-attended-3-5-million-
4 Ibid.
Vessels: has been conceived and designed as a series of objects for the Beer Cellar at Uppark. The space has a particular quality that I respond to: its muted colours, curves and vaulting, the stone floor and the white-painted bricks. Its enclosed, subtle/neutral atmosphere contrasts with the rest of the house. The space is full of vessels, beer barrels and other containers. Nearby, in the Butlers Pantry, are dozens more glass vessels with their assorted stoppers.

Often, my work responds to the spatial or architectural nature of the space it proposes to inhabit and also to the objects that already occupy the space. My response is initially visual: the shapes, forms and colours that intuitively feel right for a space. My ideas develop as I spend time in a space: looking, drawing and making photographs. The group of elongated vessels felt right.

Although these works are new, the tiny bricks that I have used to make vessels have been used in many earlier sculptures and recycled into the current work. Once exhibited, these earlier sculptures were then broken up, the component parts salvaged to form the building blocks for the next work. As the sculptures were often painted or glazed, over time, and with the continual re-use, the tiny bricks have become accreted with scraps of the paint and cement that glued them together. Their encrusted, palmpest-like surfaces convey a sense of the way that traces of memory and history can remain visible, overlaying one another in apparently simple forms. The bricks are hand-made in my studio using the same processes as is used to make building bricks.

This process seems to have a particular resonances at Uppark where the house itself is a kind of patchwork of the wildly divergent episodes and memories that form its narrative. Most recently, the house has been reformed after the devastating fire in 1996.

The ambiguous form of vessels, both bomb-like and vessel-like, and the way that the bricks from which they are made have changed across time, struck me as having an oblique association with the narrative of H.G. Wells’s The Time Machine. Perhaps tentatively, I felt a sense of Wells’s presence in the Beer Cellar – one could imagine the time machine departing from here. Wells’s mother was housekeeper at Uppark and the poignant and sad image of her extraordinary sculptural ear trumpet, twisted and vessel-like, influenced my thinking.
Robert Cooper and Stella Harding

Dish of the day: chicken in a basket
porcelain paper clay, on-glaze ceramic transfers

Inspired by H.G. Wells’s reference to the child-like Box as ‘delicious people’, in The Time Machine, our Dish of the day re-contextualises the relationship between Sir Henry Fetherstonhaugh and Emma Hart.

In 1780, Sir Harry, connoisseur of ceramics, fine food and horse-flesh, brought 16-year-old Amy Lyon (nee Emma Hart) to Uppath. He’d hired her for a year from an exclusive brothel in St James where, as one of Mrs Kelly’s ‘cheerers’, she’d been groomed as a high-class courtesan.

Tradition has it that Amy danced naked on Uppath’s dining table for Sir Harry’s male guests – proudly in the manner of a ‘pedestal mole’, a tavern harlot who performed strip tease on a large pewter plate to arouse the punters. In Georgian times, when one fifth of London’s female population (including chambermaids) worked in the sex industry, their status would barely have raised a false eyebrow. Although Amy later attained celebrity status as Emma, Lady Hamilton, such was the sexual double standard that her reputation never recovered from the gossip surrounding her past.

Playing on the multiple connotations of the word dish, shallow serving vessel, attractive person, scandalous gossip and ruined reputation, we’ve combined our practices of ceramics and basketry to weave a dish reminiscent of a Soho sexens basket collected by Sir Harry.

Sited in the Stone Hall amid the ravages of the hunt, pastoral innocence is stripped away and formal decoration is reduced to the dark stains of weathered walls. Lines from Mary Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) encircle our dish of contemporary news stories, drawing parallels between the Georgian sex trade and modern slavery. Then, as now, invisible chains of debt bondage, emotional manipulation and fear bound thousands to lives of virtual servitude. Then, the rich gratified their appetite for young flesh with impunity. Now, sexual predators are themselves consumed in a tabloid feeding frenzy of moral outrage – begging the question: who are today’s delicious people?
I work with texts, images, installations, and particularly sound and the voice. The speaking and singing voice has great potential in terms of its narrative and seductive qualities: evoking people, events and meanings, including hidden or forgotten ones.

I like to sublimate the voice in a "fabric" of sound gleaned from field recordings, often of specific sites. My piece A Milkmaid's Song, staged in the Dairy at Uppark, includes recordings made outside the dairy of birds singing, a cockeral crowing, and of traditional butter-making machinery. These then filter into a dialogue with the non-recorded sounds experienced by the listeners when they come to the work. When the visitors come to the Dairy, whisper to one another, walk on the flagstones, more layers of sound come into play. These layers of sound combine with the recorded sounds, whose source is uncertain, and another meaning is created.

Sound can bring the past into collision with the present. Here I sing a newly composed melody, which supports the traditional words. And the story of the singing dairymaid who reared the master of the house is brought together with sounds of Shirley Hill, National Trust employee, demonstrating how to make butter.

As soon as I visited Uppark, I knew I wanted to make a work about Mary Ann Bullock singing in the Dairy, and the way in which her voice attracted Sir Harry who had yet to see her. The sound pieces works both outside the Dairy — as the sound is directed from a single speaker out of the door; across the fields, enticing visitors to approach — and also inside the Dairy, where the hard surfaces and resonant space are like a resonant chamber. The voice is alive, breathing out through flesh. But from what kind of body, one living or dead?
Having spent time in India and Bangladesh I was interested in Sir Matthew Brencherston (1714-1774) connections with the East India Company (EIC). He is said to have been one of its largest stockholders and per-
owned several East Indiamen ships used to transport goods back from the EIC trading centres, including Bengal.

Uppark has a history of play and learning. H G Wells wrote of how his experiences in the house informed events later in his life. The grand doll's house belonging to Sarah (Sir Matthew’s wife) was a tool for both play and instruction, encouraging an understanding of how to manage a home.

Sir Matthew was heir to a linen-man, Sir Henry Fetherstone (1654-1746), who taught him the trade of investment and speculations.

I've made a group of tin boats, inspired by the shapes of traditional vessels from Bengal. They are tiled with cargo which the EIC traded such as tea, pepper, cinnamon, cloves, ginger, vanilla, turmeric, cardamom, jute, cotton and indigo. They wind their way across the floor beneath the pagoda cabinet in the Little Parlour, as if left by a child who has finished playing. The boats can be seen as a boy’s equivalent of the doll’s house, designed to encourage an interest in shipping and trade.

There were major famines in Bengal between 1769-1776 when approximately a third of the population died. Some believe this was caused by EIC policy in the region, which forced farmers to produce cash crops like opium, cotton and indigo, and forbade the storage of surplus grain.

Robert Cline (1725-1776) was employed by the EIC and was twice the Governor of Bengal. Cline was challenged in Parliament during the 1600s and 1700s for his activities in India, which generated vast wealth for EIC stockholders and himself. Cline received support from a number of MPs, including Sir Matthew.

It is hoped the smells of the spices will gently waft around the room adding to the dewy atmosphere of the space and evoking far-off places.
Caitlin Helfman’s installation, Remnants: hay bales, hay nets, horsehair, felt, rescued fragments of fabric from Uppark’s 19th-century stables. This evocative space houses many of the charred remains from the house fire at Uppark in 1989, but the sounds and hint of the empty stable bays also reveal the traces of the horses once stabled there.

My response has been to use fragments of burnt and charred fabrics from the house fires to re-create horse coats, feeding bags and part of a fabric work of clothing. There are also objects made from felt, partly-revered horses in thick felt, horsehair and reins made from leather.

Suspended and embedded within the space, these fragmentary elements are designed to draw out the stories of the building’s history and to play on the idea of horses as status symbols through fleeting glimpses of jewels within the stables, hidden in and around the bays.

I am fascinated by the history of the space and the markers—the traces literally etched on the walls and floors—left by the former occupants. It is these elements that have informed my intervention within the stables.
Zoe Hilliard

Salvage

Ceramic, fabric, thread

In 1989, Uppark was devastated when a fire, which started on the roof, ended up gutting much of the house. As the fire burnt downwards, the debris rose like smoke, collecting artifacts, paintings, textiles and furniture from below. Chains of people passed priceless items out onto the lawns. Eventually ceilings and fireplaces caved in, plasterwork and remaining items were smashed and all ground floor rooms were left exposed to the sky.

In the afternoon, the four feet of damp ash and debris which lay in the rooms was gathered and stored in fragments of black dustbins on the lawn, waiting for their contents to be carefully sorted. After some debate, the decision was made to restore Uppark to ‘the day before the fire’. What then emerged was a vibrant community of skilled craftspeople, taking up residence in makeshift workrooms and offices in the grounds of the property. Old skills were remembered and expertise shared. Salvaged fragments were grafted into replacement sections. Today the people come and go and slowly Uppark is reborn. From the traumatic event came an amazing opportunity for discovery and innovation and the collective energy of the undertaking left its mark on everyone involved. My ceramic patchwork pieces celebrate the painstaking duplication of this remarkable temporary community.

Playing on the aesthetics associated with archaeological restoration and traditions of Japanese ceramic mending, the hand-stitched pieces revive materials, embrace faults and celebrate the outcome of mishap. They sit in the Red Dining Room as ‘replacements’, alongside ‘first survivors’ and original ceramics. Their hand-stitched construction echoes the pioneering textile innovation work undertaken by Margaret Mee and Katherine Nash in the 1930s-40s, and features that later enabled them to withstand being wheeled from the windows.

Because I am interested in the journey objects make, all the ceramics I create are second-hand finds, making for an interesting play between Grand Tour treasures and revived mass-produced reproductions. The fabrics are a mixture of old and new, either gathered on my own Grand Tour of charity shops and vintage sales, or digitally printed with repurposed classical and oriental imagery.

There remains a room, stacked high with bread trays, containing smoky fragments of an array of beautiful ceramics found within the ash after the fire. Photography, digital fabrics, printing and hand-stitched construction enable these fragments to once again take on three-dimensional form and return to sit, if still incomplete, within the elegance of the Red Dining Room.
I am an artist blacksmith who uses steel to draw – I make sketches which I then re-create in steel, retaining the exciting feel and energy of the original drawings. Each piece has a life and character brought out by the use of a single line running through the piece.

Since I work primarily to commission, the location of an object I make is always important, because the work interacts with the environment around it. An object should always fit the location it is designed for, and on the visit to Uppark it was clear that the two niches on either side of the portico would be perfect for work which would tell the visitor something of the people of the house. The two who impressed themselves on me were Mary Ann Bullock and Emma Hart, two women who experienced amazing transformations in the house.

As a young woman, Emma Hart was painted a number of times by George Romney. In the guise of various Greek goddesses and nymphs, based on Romney’s combining of classical dress with contemporary attire, she created a set of choreas. These involved her dressing up, dancing and posing to evoke images from Greek mythology in front of an audience who would guess the names of the classical characters and scenes. This, and the huge classical influence of Sir Matthew Shippen, made me think about ancient Greek goddesses as characters who would work as playful sculptural counterparts.

Emma Hart, who was the daughter of a blacksmith, was society hostess and later the mistress of Lord Nelson, linked perfectly to Euthenia. The daughter of the blacksmith and Hesperides, Euthenia was the goddess of prosperity, growth and fertility.

For Mary Ann Bullock, the milkmaid who Harry Fetherstonhaugh fell in love with and married, love was perfect – a nymph that Zeus fell in love with, but had to turn into a cow to prevent Hes from noticing her. He was forced to wander the kingdom until Zeus could turn her back into a woman. She became a queen and was the ancestress of Hercules.

I drew the two women as goddesses, showing how they are through the symbolic gestures used to identify them, and providing a narrative based on the similarities between them which the audience can piece together to retain her cow horns and carries an olive branch of peace, whilst Euthenia carries a cornucopia of plenty, has a wheat sheaf crown and a flowing dress to symbolize water.
Alice Kettle and Helen Felcey

The House of Eli
Cloth, thread, beads, glass, Perspex, ceramic, plastic

As a child, the doll's house at Uppark had a huge impact on me as a repeat visitor with my mother and two sisters. We acquired our own monumental doll's house and each of us made furniture and costumes for it. I still have the doll's patchwork quilt made by my mother. Alice Kettle

As a young boy, H G Wells spent a great deal of time at Uppark where his mother was the housekeeper in the late 1890s. He immersed himself in the rich contents of the library which inspired his imagination and desire to become a writer.

His science fiction book The Time Machine describes an alternative universe, which moves between virtual dimensions of the earthy world, in The War of the Worlds, the earth is subjected to a near-apocalyptic invasion by Martian beings. We have used these novels by H G Wells to make our own futuristic cityscape in the doll's house room.

The House of Eli wallhanging depicts a city destroyed and inhabited by strange and curious creatures. -- Eli -- from H G Wells's original text. A futuristic, Perspex house is erected next to the existing doll's house. The lower section contains the streets: ceramic dioramas of broken buildings and a destroyed world. In the top section, the creatures make a new environment, where the familiar becomes unfamiliar and magical. The creatures are explorers: they begin to venture beyond their house to occupy conveyors, corners and cabinets in other rooms.

Helen Felcey (pencilling) and Alice Kettle (textiles) have a history of collaborating with each other, and co-creation. They combine their practices to make collections and environments of cloth, thread, slip-cast ceramics, fragments and stitch. The creatures are both beautiful and strange, which like H G Wells's visions of the future, question our perceptions of the real and the unknown.
The Dining Room at Lippincott provided the stage for one of Amy Lyon's early famed performances. Did she or did she not dance on the mahogany table for Sir Harry and his friends when she was 12? Was she rude? Over the almost two centuries since her death in 1815, Amy — later transforming into Emily Hart and finally Emma, Lady Hamilton — has been seen for various projected fantasies about women. She is the hyper-aesthetised sexualised object of the male gaze, the beautiful object subject of paintings, the lover of Nelson or his nemesis, the 'vulgar woman' first acclimatised, then reacclimatised, by polite society. Alternatively, she is an important artist whose 'attitudes' — classical and mythological tableaux, created in Naples — are a forebore of performance art and interpretative dance.

My work is often about the marginalised or outsider and in this installation I use video-projected images in layers of semi-aluminiumised mirrors to reflect some of the fragmentation of a complex life. There is no one optimum viewpoint; there is always a different way of looking at things.

Emma was always a composite construction. She was partly self-made and partly constructed by others. The piece on the table was her at the height of her self-actualisation before her final, sad end. The main performance in the video is intertwined with fragments of the significant series of marine paintings by Claude-Joseph Vernet collected on the Grand Tour and displayed in the Dining Room. Emma's life is intimately connected with the sea, most especially through her relationship with Nelson, and of course Emma herself became part of the Grand Tour in Naples. The 'stories' embedded in the installation contain a variety of references to her life and times ranging from the statue of Nelson's unveiled in Greenwich, the mosaics collected by Lord Hamilton, to the classically inspired dancers on a Wedgwood masterpiece and the paintings of Emma by many artists and, most significantly for this piece, by Elisabeth Vigée-LeBrun.
Quartet brings the songs of four birds encountered in the gardens of Uppark into the interior of the house. A single phrase from each of the birds reappears (one lasting less than a tenth of a second and beyond the ability of the human ear to discriminate) and is then plotted as an undulating landscape—the position, shape, and height of the topography an accurate reflection of the song dynamics. To capture and preserve this sonic form within crystal glass, lasers are used to map pertinent fractures in the vitrified material, each fracture corresponding to a single point of data. As the fractures accumulate, so the song reappears, its cadence now turned into an etching.

So much of our understanding and appreciation of the natural world is mediated through the many technologies that accompany us in our everyday lives. At Uppark, the house is full of different representations of the world in a variety of media and crafts, the whole estate itself is in many ways a grand re-presentation of the nature that was here before. Into this tradition, Quartet offers both a scientific record of that world as well as an etched composition—a murmuration from the avian world beyond the window.
Garnitures: The Bullock Buckets

In 1825, Uppark’s owner Sir Henry married his distant relative Mary Ann Bullock, 50 years younger than Sir Harry. Mary Ann was promptly sent to Paris to acquire the social graces. 3 I was interested in the transition from below stairs to above stairs and how this transformation could be visualised.

Outside the Still Room in the basement at Uppark is a row of five buckets. The fire at Uppark in 1949 caused most damage to the upper floors. It therefore seemed prudent to bring a new set of the buckets – suitably embellished – upstairs.

Mirroring Mary Ann’s life, these buckets went on their own fictional journey to Paris to acquire social graces. The once humble buckets now form a garniture 4 in the Staircase Hall. Whilst on initial inspection they may suit the new location, the effect of manual labour upon their form is still visible in the twisting marks, seams and joins.

The buckets are no longer able to fulfil their original duties and instead occupy a decorative position static upon a marble-topped table to be gazed at by the master of the house, under the watchful eyes of his parents’ portraits.

Country houses ran on strict adherence to one’s place, and unsettling the hierarchy was unusual. In visual art, treating things that would normally be considered lesser or of marginal importance as a core method of camp. Indeed this garniture embraces the idea of camp, with its ‘philosophy of subversion and doubt which questions the legitimacy and seriousness demanded by social and cultural hierarchies’. 5

1 Christopher Howell. The National Trust: Uppark. Rossdean. 2010. p29
Domestic bliss or the great divide? Country houses and the perpetuation of social inequality

Laurne Jane Smith

Uppark was the home of Thomas Deker for 60 years. It is often forgotten, as we peer across the red ropes into gold plated living spaces, presented as if frozen in time, that country houses were people's homes – dynamic spaces where the day-to-day messiness of living was carried out. We may, as we wander from room to room, imagine what it must have been like to live among such opulence and luxury. However, the collective imagination tends to focus on what it might have been like for the 'family' to imagine Sir Matthew or Sir Henry or Sir Herbert sitting in their dining room, or strolling through the halls decked out with the artworks collected on their travels through Europe. However, let us stop and consider what calling Uppark home may have been like for Thomas, as Uppark also happened to be Thomas's workplace as the butler, where he slept, ate, and went about his entire life when not tending to the needs of his employers.

Indeed, Uppark, like all such houses, was both workplace and home: places where the divisions between 'work' and 'home' became strangely blurred. In the case of domestic servants and estate workers, these houses, often perceived as aesthetic objects, are of course statements of power, built to assert, cement and document the owner's position in British social hierarchies. The employment of servants and estate workers was also part of that statement of social position. Thus, the activities of home and work were performed by those employed to maintain house and grounds, and the privileged lives of their employers, tare on more meaning than the completion of the worker's day-to-day tasks. The labour of work and home experiences, particularly for domestic workers, undertaken within the theatres of symbolic monuments to public and history, was a daily economic and social performance of the legitimacy and naturalness of the class system. The country house parade a very public, but nonetheless domestic, setting in which class relations were performed, and this sense of domination normalises and naturalises the experiences of house employees and the 'place' of workers in British life – a place which ultimately is about providing for social elites. That the 'below stairs' was exploitative has been well documented. However, the exploitative realities and consequences of these lives has often been obscured or lost, as the performance of a 'good' servant was measured in the degree to which they could go about their duties unread and unregarded. Thus, in the domestic performance of the country house, workers fade into the background, playing supportive roles for the social performers of British history, and are easily forgotten.

The country house performance in the 20th century has not substantially changed since the times of Sir Matthew or Sir Henry, but the players have. While these houses may no longer be the workplaces and homes of large numbers of domestic or estate workers, the houses nonetheless, as theaters of memory, play a role reminding visitors to them of their place in British society and the place of the social and political elites. Visiting Uppark and other historic houses is itself a performance, which might be part of a pleasant Sunday afternoon excursion – a nice day out – or as a place to take an overseas visitor, but nonetheless our visits and the maintenance of these properties has meaning. The way we use and maintain these houses speaks out and sends a social message about the historical importance or unimportance of the people who called these houses home.

Visitor research at historic houses has illustrated that visitors engage in individual and collective acts of remembering and forgetting, which help perpetuate the social meaning and significance of these houses in the present. Visitors will often look with envy or awe at the lives of owners and employers, and the following are examples of visitors talking about the emotions conjured up while touring houses like Uppark:

A bit anthropoid, but proud of the history.
(CH252, male, 50-59, painter and decorator, 2004)

Overwhelmed by opulence.
(CH2006, female, over 60, retired, 2004)

Yes it's very grand, very awe-inspiring to see how much, how big an area it covers.
(CH432, female, 25-34, house, 2007)

Cleaners at Uppark House and Garden in 1930

The Butler's Pantry at Uppark House and Garden
In awe of it, I wouldn’t be able to live here.
(CH318, male, 35-39, student, 2004)

The size produces awe. How nice the people are.
(CH319, male, 21, student, 2004)

Awesome to think one family needs such a huge place to live.
(CH320, female, 18-25, teacher, 2004)

These feelings of awe work to focus attention on the sequentials of ‘the
family’, as CH319 does, to consider what it might have been like to live in
such surroundings. Such feelings also help to reinforce pride in the country’s
history and offer reassurance that the elite who led here were, as CH319
observes, ‘nice people’. Often coupled with the sense of awe are feelings of
comfort:

I like the house – it is warm and welcoming. I feel comfortable and at
home here.
(CH321, female, 30-35, computer systems operator, 2004)

Comfortable, pride as well.
(CH322, female, over 60, housewife, 2004)

Proud and comfortable.
(CH323, female, 40-59, teacher, 2004)

Exciting, and feel very comfortable being here.
(CH323, female, 40-59, engineer, 2004)

Contented – wouldn’t change my lot for this.
(CH323, male, over 60, company director, and who identified that their
mother had been ‘in service’, 2004)

Visitors to Uppark have stated that they are simply visiting, they know,
as CH318 states, that they could never live here. Nevertheless, feelings of
being in a comfortable ‘home’ of domestic bliss, staged and on display,
manage the language of the social elites is recognized, and although
awe-struck and humbled by the display of wealth these is nonetheless
comfort in knowing one’s place in British society. CH339 would not change
his lot in life for such a lifestyle, he can feel content with what he has.

When walking through Uppark and similar establishments the roped-off
rooms let us know that such lifestyles are beyond our reach. I feel I am
on the outside looking in.
(CH335, male, 40-59, teacher, 2004)

as one visitor noted. The position of looking in reinforces the idea that it
is the upper classes that are both the caretakers and subject of British
history, a history that they alone
made, and were and continue to
be responsible for. Stately homes
embody the gravitas and weight of a
particular understanding and vision
of history, and solidify the intangibility of
historical consciousness, so that
the survival of these houses offers
assurance for those anxious about
social change and lost traditions, and
provides a sense of historical and
social continuity:

Feeling of satisfaction of solidity
of continuuity in this modern
restless world.
(CH337, male, 40-59, writer, 2004)

Honoured that these places existed and still do. We need to
maintain them for our identity and future generations.
(CH370, male, over 60, stores
manager, Ministry of Defence, 2004)

Thus, these houses come to stand in for a particular vision of British
national and social history – and even national identity – their grand solidity
lending literal weight to a particular collective remembering and forgetting in
which only the elites have agency. Mary Ann Bullock, who at 30, and from
the position of diary-keeping, described the septuagenarian Sir Henry, inherited
Uppark on his death and herself passed on the house after her death to
her sister Frances Bullock. Interestingly, the tenures of these women from
working-class origins as owners of the house has been described as a
‘long Victorian afternoon’, a sleepy period in which both women were
characterised as being "devoted" to the preservation of Uppark as Harry had left it. Indeed, they are praised as having handed the estate on "intact and well maintained" to the Meade-Fetherstonhaugh's, as if they were simply passing through the house, looking over the red roses from their Victorian afternoon, and had not actually lived in Uppark. This implies that their greatest life achievement was the maintenance of the legacies of the house, so that it could be passed on to "appropriate" inheritors. Re-imagining the house as a home, a place lived in by workers, allows us to think, and exercise our imagination and emotions, about the limited and limiting choices that might be presented, as they were to Harry Ann Bullock at 20 by her 70-year-old employer, and what it may have been like for Emma Hart at the age of 15 to be thrown naked on the dining table for Sir Harry's rotisserie, and to be "chicken off" and discarded when six months pregnant.

To what extent, however, does the country house performance allow us to engage in such re-imaginings? At a number of houses located in Yorkshire, and similar to Uppark, visitors were asked to comment on installations and exhibitions that examined the lives of domestic and estate workers. Visitors were asked to think about what the lives of such workers might have been like. As one visitor noted, the exhibition revealed:

"It was a very tense and bleak time, full of struggle and hardship. The conditions were very poor, and the workers had to work long hours in very difficult conditions."

This is not surprising, given the harsh realities of life in the countryside during the 19th century. However, the performance of the country house allows us to see beyond these difficulties, to imagine a different reality for those who lived and worked there. This is a powerful tool for re-imagining the past, and for understanding the complexities of life in the countryside.

The desire that the idea of the country house, as an icon of national heritage, should produce or affirm national narratives that one could feel proud about or confused by, is strong, and these visitors hope to maintain that sense of comfort by believing in a benevolent employer. Other visitors took a different stance and, while noting that they were glad not to have been born into service back then, went on to observe:

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The thoughts jumbled in my mind: the fear, the doubt, the uncertainty. I felt like I was drowning in a sea of confusion. I knew I had to make a decision, but every option seemed equally daunting. I was torn between my past and my future, my desires and my responsibilities. The weight of the world felt pressing in on me, threatening to crush me under its burden.

I tried to clear my mind, to focus on what was important. I thought of my family, the ones I loved. They were counting on me, waiting for me to make the right choices. I knew I couldn't let them down. I had to find a way to make things right.

As I stood there, staring out into the distance, I realized that the only way to truly understand where I was going was to look back on where I had come from. I had to embrace the past, to accept the mistakes I had made and the lessons I had learned. Only then could I move forward, stronger and more determined than ever before.

I took a deep breath, closed my eyes, and stepped into the unknown. Whatever lay ahead, I knew that I was ready to face it.
Is there ever a first-time visit, and how will we remember it in the future?
Helen Carnac

The sensation of succession and so duration imbues human experience, providing it with its unique character. We are able to compare the present with memory with the present as currently experienced.¹

Part I
Time is an ever-present feature of all our lives, we can’t and don’t get away from it, the seconds and minutes that course through each day, and the seasons shifting, light changing and memories fading. Sometimes it is the smallest details that fade in and out that can bring to bear the memory of something distant, that can’t quite be recollected and yet is still there, lurking in our minds. Visiting somewhere for the first time can trigger a feeling of remembering and having seen something before.

When I was seven years old my family visited a Greek Island for our summer holiday. During our stay we went on a day trip to Crete which I still remember as, while we were there, even though for the first time, I remember being there before. I recall now that, even at that young age, I had a real sense of déjà vu and more than that I seemed to know where things were and how to walk to them. I often recalled the episode and wondered about it — about memory and time and how we remember — and it has made me wonder whether we can really experience a place as if for the first time.

What we remember...

of ourselves
As we move about in space we are constantly accruing memory, a bodily memory, how we walk, how we move, what we feel as we move, a brush of air across the face, through the hair, a stiffness in the back, the leg, a crack of bone, a feel of stone through shoes. We take this accrued memory with us.

of others
When we enter something familiar in or of a person, a thing recalls us of another, a slight movement, a touch to the hair, the crease of a brow, the way someone smiles, a distant wave.

of everyday objects
When we see a familiar or everyday object it can bring to bear the memory of use, of a familiar person or a particular moment in time, an animal fur, a teapot, beam, spoon, fork, or pile of plates. A reminder of something in object form.

of unfamiliar objects
Of recognising something in the unfamiliar, a shape, a form, a material that makes something all the more familiar? Perhaps a familiarity in the unknown.

of tasks being undertaken?
The knitting, stitching, threading, folding, polishing, chopping, cutting, tying, reaching, packing, writing, painting, mending, that remind us of something else.

of a landscape and place
Over time and through generations we remember through landscape and the form it takes. The word ‘scape’ is a derivation of ship or shape — working or understanding the landscape is a derivation of a shaping process of social and material things. Simon Schama writes in Landscape and Memory:

Here was the new land for which the people of Gaul had died and of which, in a shape of their memorial tombs, they now had been added. Their memory had now assumed the form of the landscape itself. A metaphor had become a reality, an absence had become a presence.²

of material
Memories held in the object, in curtains, in the colour of the wallpaper, the fading of old paint to a silver grey, the faded furniture, the light dispersed through a stained glass window, or the reflection in a gilt mirror.³

of a fleeting...
view from a window, sound of birdsong, smell of beachwood and basil...
Part II

I still have not visited Uppark and so I have no physical memory of it. My research into it has taken place completely online. In this search these pieces of writing have helped me to think about the place from afar and about the physical nature of place changing, and yet at the same time, the things that stay the same.

In extracts from Department in Autobiography, H.G.Wells recounts his memory of Uppark, from its "wide undulating downs and park" to "the walled gardens containing the gardener's cottage which my father occupied" - which "still give a sense of the life of the land." Wells also recounts being with his father at Uppark:

"Once when I was somewhere in my twenties and he was over sixty as I was walking with him on the open downs out beyond Uppark, he said casually, "when I was a young man of your age I used to come out here at six o'clock every night, just looking at the stars.""

It made me wonder that we still see the same stars and sky as he did, that this is something that changes somewhat but can't entirely remain the same regardless of other things. The stars are not controlled by human forces. In a blog post, recently written by the current assistant gardener at Uppark, Jennifer Sivertsson, she wrote about the passage of time and things changing and yet the things she writes of are "the same except for centuries", when she writes of one of her "unexpected jobs" - winding the clock at the top of the East Pavilion at Uppark which she describes as:

"...a weekly ritual that must have taken place since the 1750s (albeit with occasional gaps) and while winding away...it occurred to me that the clock hand chimed its way through centuries of change in the garden.

Some of the "change" occurred in the house too and I read about it with interest in an article in an Independent newspaper about the re-opening of Uppark after it was "restored" by the in 1959 and subsequently restored and re-opened in 1966 in a "determination to restore the house to its state the day before the fire." Here we learn close to a notion of time stopping for a short while, a frozen stop in which things are rewound.

In the restored house where the 'Still decoration' has been painstakingly bumshe and then dressed with an overcoat of artificial dirt designed to resemble two or three centuries of grime, and 'A Flock wallpaper in the red drawing room, which was a bright crimson in 1851, has been restored to resemble its faded 1920s colours'.

Whilst the clock (even though dependent on the consistency of its winding) passed over events, maintaining a regularity of time, time in the house seemed to stop between 1939-1945 while it was restored to its 1920s version. And if time did stop, what of the real time taken in the restorations by the craftsmen and women who rewound the times, unmade, in their minds and capabilities, the foiled walls and colour of the paint to understand something of what had been before, to then restate it?

My mind now travels forward to the future and the Unveiled exhibition and installations which will be at Uppark from May 2014. How will these pieces intervene with time and place and add to the memory of any visitor's
encounter with Uppark? Will they feel something in time – an idea, a material or a gesture – or will they activate something more transient and fleeting? Will encounters with these installations enable us to experience something new of the place through the work? And as, in so many ways, the installations are fleeting, as they are temporary, what of them once they are gone – will they leave a ghost of their presence, will their memory only remain in the pages of the catalogue or in photographs, or will they permeate further? Will they exist somewhere else or are they gone forever, confined to a memory now?

And when these memories intertwine with your current present and one thing reminds you of another, will you experience time in a different way? Something that isn’t linear, but unrolling over time, overlapping and expanding – a layering and/or condensing of time?

What I find fascinating about some experiences of visiting a place is how, as Cecil Day-Lewis has written, you may have a feeling of another time where a... constant merging of now and then, and... associated layers of memory, exist. And as W G Sebald noted in Austerlitz... memories behind and within which many things much further back in the past seemed to lie, [are] all interweaving... perhaps drawing us in to remember something.

I will start now at the beginning again – is there ever a real first-time visit? I will visit Uppark for the first time in 2014 but right now I imagine I have almost been there before. My paternal grandfather’s family lived in Midhurst, very close to Uppark, and as I have written this I have wondered if they ever visited, if they wished the land or heard the chime of the clock bell. But there is one thing I am sure of, that they saw the stars in the sky.
