

M4C DTP Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) Marketing Template

Project Title				
New Collecting Narratives: Birmingham Museums' Italian Renaissance and Baroque Decorative Arts Collections				
LEAD INSTITUTION				
Name of HEI institution	University of Warwick			
Lead regional city	Birmingham <input type="checkbox"/>	Coventry <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Leicester <input type="checkbox"/>	Nottingham <input type="checkbox"/>
PARTNER ORGANISATION				
Name of organisation	Birmingham Museums Trust			
Website URL	https://www.birminghammuseums.org.uk/			
THE RESEARCH PROJECT				
<i>(Max 750 words)</i>				
<p>Birmingham's Italian Renaissance and Baroque decorative art collection, comprising ceramics, glass, textiles, furniture and metalwork, was among the first to be acquired for the city and was exhibited in a dedicated display when Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery (BMAG) opened in 1885. Dating from the 15th-17th centuries, this material was acquired largely either by the BMAG's first director, Whitworth Wallis, during two research trips to Italy, or from the South Kensington Museum's first curator, Charles Robinson. These objects were apparently purchased from Italy's most important 19th-century dealers of Renaissance art including Stefano Bardini and Giuseppe Salvadori, who sold to major institutions across the world. Initial research suggests that material was acquired not only from Florence but from Rome, Milan, Venice, etc.</p> <p>Despite its obvious potential, this collection has not been studied in any depth since its purchase and its significance is little explored. In contrast, a second period of acquisition at Birmingham occurred in the mid-20th century, when further acquisitions, this time of 17th-century Italian Baroque painting and sculpture was purchased. This latter collection has already been the focus of initial research, identifying it as nationally significant. As BMAG prepares for a major refurbishment and redisplay, it is crucial that the related holdings of decorative art are researched in greater depth, and their significance and connections to other collections fully revealed.</p> <p>How, where and from whom was the BMAG's Italian Renaissance and Baroque decorative art collection acquired? Where were the centres of supply and how did this export system from Italy operate? Were these particular objects selected for their artistic quality or for didactic purposes? What was the relationship between the selection rationale and broader debates and practices (in the region and nationally) about education (both public and artistic) and industry? What role did the early exhibition of these objects play in public education and artistic training, as well as in the development of local industries? Did the acquisition pattern fit with that of industrial cities of the Midlands and the North of England who practiced bulk buying or was it closer to that of the South Kensington Museum and Wallace Collection?</p> <p>This collaborative doctoral project will feed directly into planned new displays and will allow the PhD student to benefit from access to curators who have detailed knowledge of individual objects and of the collection itself, as well as from academic supervision by experts in Italian art (including archival research) and in 19th-century display histories and Anglo-Italian artistic relations.</p>				

The studentship will be based at the University of Warwick and is a collaboration with Birmingham Museums Trust (BMT). The project is supervised by Professor Louise Bourdua and Dr Rosie Dias in the History of Art department and Dr Rebecca Bridgman, Curatorial and Exhibitions Manager at BMT. In Birmingham, the student will be offered site inductions, practical work-based training in collections handling, cataloguing and curatorial practice, suitable for a potential career in the cultural sector. The student will have the opportunity to join the wider team, contributing to curatorial seminars and the development of collections significance surveys. There will also be opportunities to develop their practice with wider learning, conservation, technical and exhibitions teams in developing plans for new displays incorporating their research on BMT's Italian collections. This could also include the opportunity to create, plan and deliver a means of opening-up provenance research in a publicly accessible and engaging way through audience consultation as well as considering how Decorative Art objects could be mounted and physically displayed. Through this work, the project would bring a major aspect of art historical research to new audiences.

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE

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