

Decolonising Collections: Curatorial Research Network 2021

Call for proposals

UAL Decolonising Arts Institute in partnership with
Arts Council Collection, British Council Collection and
Manchester Art Gallery Collections

About the curatorial research network

Decolonising Collections is an emerging curatorial research network led by UAL's **Decolonising Arts Institute** in partnership with the **Arts Council Collection (ACC)**, **British Council Collection (BCC)** and **Manchester Art Gallery Collections (MAG)**, generously supported by the Art Fund Professional Network Grant scheme. The network will focus on three virtual connected research residencies, hosted remotely and digitally by the Arts Council Collection, British Council Collection and Manchester Art Gallery Collections.

Three curatorial researchers will be awarded bursaries of £5,000 each, to support c.25 days of collections-based research undertaken flexibly on a part-time basis over a nine-month period through 2021. The virtual residencies will interrogate specific aspects of the three collections' practices, policies, histories, holdings and objects through critical and creative strategies that engage decolonial thinking/doing and address questions of decolonisation. The network/residency programme will culminate in an online digital display and related e-publication.

Residencies will be largely remote while lockdown restrictions remain in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Physical access arrangements to the three collections are under constant review in accordance with government guidance. As such, proposals should not rely on physical engagement with the collections and need to be adaptable to the rapidly changing circumstances. Curatorial researchers may propose, for example, to work primarily with digital artefacts (digital research sources, digital art works or digital assets of art works), and/or the narrative practices and interpretative processes around the collections, and/or specific acquisition or exhibition histories. We welcome proposals that focus on a specific collection or aspect of a collection, and/or a specific artwork(s), with approaches that may challenge, for example, dominant narratives of identity, nation, culture, language, heritage, Britishness, Eurocentrism, Westernisation, modernism, feminism, radicalism, activism, whiteness, blackness, race, class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, age, belief, and the politics of institutional memory and silence.

The objectives of the network are:

- To lead innovative curatorial research to directly inform specific aspects of programming and make practical recommendations towards concrete organisational change
- To support the career development of emerging curator-researchers by facilitating professional connections and exchange with peer networks committed to decolonising museum and collection practices
- To develop a connected virtual residency model, where curator-researchers and host collections mutually benefit from shared critical insights and learning
- To establish spaces for sharing best practice, failings, ideas and strategies for challenging address conscious and unconscious biases in collecting, operational, display, writing and contextualising practices
- To support the critical examination of collection practices, policies, histories and objects through focused case studies
- To identify specific past and/or current examples of critical, creative and pragmatic strategies that address or counter colonial thinking and practices
- To develop and share findings and/or new resources through online events and content in collaboration with other networks, in order to facilitate reuse and cross-pollination with other collections
- To expand audiences and increase access and connectivity across collections through an online display, critical writings and an e-publication
- To ensure research feeds into internal reports and decision-making processes, and broadens impacts on the wider museum and arts sector

Curatorial researchers will:

- Receive a bursary of £5,000 to cover fee and any expenses
- Undertake an agreed programme of work / case study over a nine-month period (c.25 days)
- Digitally access materials in the three collections, supported by collections curators (limited physical access will be facilitated where possible, subject to COVID restrictions)
- Participate in regular online research network meetings and workshops convened by the Institute and supported by the three collections
- Work with the three collections to develop and curate an online digital display
- Produce a short essay for an edited Institute e-publication (c.2,500 words)
- Participate in evaluation and feedback at the end of the programme

About UAL Decolonising Arts Institute

The UAL **Decolonising Arts Institute** has been in development since late 2018. Conceived as a decentred, porous and evolving space, the Institute seeks to challenge colonial histories and imperial legacies, to drive and support cultural, social and institutional change through arts practice and research, recognizing past

and ongoing work. The Institute seeks to place questions of decolonisation and decolonial praxes at the core of collections practice and research.

Our 2020-21 pilot programme has grown out of new and ongoing internal and external partnerships. Building on connections established through the major Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) project, Black Artists and Modernism (BAM, 2015-2018), we have been in dialogue with the three collections from the Institute's inception. The Arts Council Collection and British Council Collection has supported preliminary research into their recent acquisitions and policies, taking part in the Institute's recent British Art Network Seminar Series, *Decolonising British Art* (2020). Meanwhile Manchester Art Gallery is contributing to the year-long programme, *Doing the Work: Embedding anti-racism and decolonisation into museum practice*, co-developed with the Contemporary Arts Society.

About the Arts Council Collection

Arts Council Collection is a national loan collection of approximately 8,000 works of art by over 2,000 artists. Founded in 1946, the Collection reaches the broadest possible audiences through exhibitions, loans and education activities. The Collection supports artists in the UK through the purchase and display of their work, and safeguards it for future generations, using the highest possible standards of collection care. ACC is committed to addressing and improving representation across its collections, policies and programmes.

The curatorial researcher will contribute to our research strand as we interrogate our histories and those of the artworks under our care. Our story is closely tied to that of Arts Council England, the Hayward Gallery and Southbank Centre. Restrictions permitting, the researcher will be able to access our exhibition history archive at the V&A, Blythe House, with some relevant material held at the Hayward Archive. The Hayward Library holds copies of all of Arts Council Collection's print and publications and guided access to our provenance information can be made available. You can search the Arts Council Collection public online catalogue here.

About the British Council Collection

Since 1938, the **British Council Collection** (BCC) has been collecting contemporary works of art, craft and design for use in its cultural relations programmes. Now comprising 8,700 artworks, the Collection was never intended to be comprehensive, but responsive to the needs of the organisation's cultural relations mission. The Collection has no permanent gallery and is used in international collaborative exhibitions, digital exhibitions, skills development programmes, and loans. Since 2017, it has worked consistently to broaden the representation of artists in the British Council Collection to ensure that the Collection reflects the present and past reality of the people of the UK, its history, and future. You can find a brief overview of the history of the British Council here and an introduction to British Council Arts here.

The curatorial researcher will be able to access British Council Collection's public digital collections catalogue, as well as supported access to additional collections

database information, digitised documents from artists files or exhibition catalogues and where possible some minutes/reports. The Visual Arts Archive is held at [Tate Archives](#) (TGA9712), and British Council organisational policy records, committee minutes, and reports on British Council activities are held at the [National Archives](#). Materials relating to exhibition histories are also relevant due to the relationship between Collection development and exhibition programmes. [You can search the British Council Collection here](#) and [British Council exhibition histories here](#).

About the Manchester Art Gallery Collection

The history of **Manchester Art Gallery**'s collection is entangled with the histories of the city and the social, political and economic shifts that have shaped its expansion, ambition and identity over two centuries. Intention and accident, opportunity and frustration, idealism and realism, along with individual and collective aspiration have all contributed to the rich and multi-faceted material legacy that is today's collection. This history can be mapped thematically according to the periods below:

- 1823 to 1902 Commerce into Culture – From Royal Manchester Institution to Art Gallery
- 1902 to 1940 Collecting the World – The Art Galleries Committee
- 1915 to 1945 'Art like charity begins at home'
- 1945 to 1978 'Filling the Gaps' – Chronology and Connoisseurship
- 1978-1997 Strategies for Survival – private and public support
- 1998-2011 Expansion and contraction

We are committed to interrogating these histories and the histories of the objects in the collections: What are they? How did they come to be here? And what do we know about them? The curatorial research will contribute to our ongoing programme of collection reviews which are being shaped from decolonising perspectives. We aim to understand the complexity of the institution's history: to examine how knowledge, value, significance and meaning have been attributed in the past, to acknowledge its underlying ideologies over time and to address their legacies in the present. Past collection and interpretation research projects include [Decoding Art](#) (2005), [Mary Mary Quite Contrary](#) (2006-2009) and [Revealing Histories](#) (2007). [You can search the collections here](#).

In addition to Manchester Art Gallery's publicly accessible digital collections data, the curatorial researcher will have supported remote access to additional relevant fields in our collections database. We also hold physical artist files and an extensive archive and library full of undocumented materials (letters, scrapbooks, curators' handbooks, meeting minutes), and aim to support the researcher by digitising relevant requested materials as far as possible, within Covid safety guidelines.

How to apply

Your application should provide the following information:

- Your full name and your affiliated institution or organisation (if applicable)
- A full CV including relevant links to related past projects
- Your proposed project / case study title
- A summary of your proposed project / case study (max 100 words)
- A detailed project proposal / case study (max 500 words) outlining:
 - Your interest in a particular collection
 - Your preliminary research question(s)
 - Your anticipated approaches and methods
 - How your proposal / case study meets the aims of the opportunity

Applications will be accepted by email only to: decolonisingartsinstitute@arts.ac.uk and should include the subject line: 2021 Decolonising Collections – Curatorial Research Network application

The deadline for applications is **14 February 2021, 5pm**. Applications will be reviewed by a panel of representatives from the Institute and three collections. Online interviews for shortlisted applicants will take place on **19 February 2021**.

Key dates

- Call live: 22 January 2021
- Deadline for submissions: 14 February 2021, 5pm
- Online interviews: 19 February 2021
- Residency period: March – November 2021
- Digital display and e-publication: December 2021

Further information

For general queries about the curatorial research network, please contact:
decolonisingartsinstitute@arts.ac.uk

For queries about a specific collection, please contact:

- Beth Hughes, Curator, Arts Council Collection
beth.hughes@southbankcentre.co.uk
- Moira Lindsay, Head of Collection, British Council Collection
moira.lindsay@britishcouncil.org
- Kate Jesson, Curator, Manchester Art Gallery
kate.jesson@manchester.gov.uk