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Contemporary Art Exhibition Programming in UK University Art Museums

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Abstract

This thesis examines the programming of contemporary art exhibitions in UK university art museums based on three case study institutions: The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts (SCVA), The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, and The Whitworth Art Gallery. It explores the conditions and principles of these museums' exhibition programming and specific examples of contemporary art exhibitions that have taken place between 2013 and 2016. The thesis puts these museums into the context of the UK Government's cultural policies and the Museums Association's vision whereby museums should be fostering positive social change. I am arguing that this objective can be supported by museums through displaying socially engaged contemporary art exhibitions that encourage visitors' active engagement and debate on contested social issues. A selection of relevant principles and ideas for developing the SCVA's engagement with contemporary art are identified through comparing the three museums' contemporary art programming. These include valuing experimentation and risk-taking, determining specific social and political topics that are explored in the programme, exhibiting local emerging artists' works, developing collaborative projects within the university and with other institutions as well as ensuring that curators and educators collaborate closely in developing exhibition ideas and determining a mutual agenda.

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Introduction

In the spring of 2016 the curatorial team at The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts (SCVA) began the process of rewriting the institution's Exhibition Policy (see Appendix I) as the previous one had become out of date and was not in active use. During this process, it became evident that one of the biggest struggles for the museum is establishing its engagement with contemporary art, the displaying of which seems to be hindered by various barriers. Being part of this process, I decided to research the SCVA's contemporary art programming and compare its conditions to other similar museums in the hopes of finding relevant ideas that could be useful when tackling some of the issues that were raised.¹ Therefore, this thesis studies the conditions of programming contemporary art exhibitions in UK university art museums that have a predominantly historic collection, basing the analysis on the examples of three case study institutions: the SCVA, the University of East Anglia (the UEA); The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, the University of Birmingham; and The Whitworth Art Gallery, the University of Manchester. The exhibition programming of these institutions is analysed in the context of the UK Government's cultural policies² and the Museums Association's vision document³ to see whether their principles are shared and carried out in the institutions' exhibitions of contemporary art. Thus, the key questions of the thesis are what kind of conditions and principles influence these university art museums' contemporary art programming and how are these borne out in their exhibitions. I am also questioning if and how contemporary art exhibitions can support these governing bodies' objectives, and how being part of a university affects these museums' exhibition programmes and the role they are taking in society. Based on the findings, I am suggesting general principles and practical solutions that could be considered in developing the SCVA's contemporary art programming.

In addition to informing the SCVA's practice, investigating the process of exhibition programming also has relevance in the broader context of museum theory and practice. Few

¹ 'Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts Exhibition Policy'. Internal document, 2016.

² '2010-2015 Government Policy: Arts and Culture'. In: the UK Government's homepage [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-arts-and-culture/2010-to-2015-government-policy-arts-and-culture>], accessed 9 July 2016.

³ 'Museums Change Lives: Museums Association's vision for the impact of museums', July 2013. London: Museums Association.

researchers have focussed on the principles of exhibition programming in university art museums in great depth, even though there is a wide variety of research available that touches on exhibition programming briefly.⁴ Furthermore, the publishing of reports like the Museums Association's latest vision 'Museums Change Lives' (2013)⁵ give reason to analyse whether and how exhibition programmes relate to such new governing documents. The choice of the Whitworth and the Barber as case studies is based on their comparability to the SCVA. The main criteria that guided the selection of these institutions were that they had to be university art museums in UK with a predominantly historic collection but an existing engagement with contemporary art in their exhibition programme. Thus, university museums or galleries whose main focus is exhibiting contemporary art were not chosen (such as Talbot Rice Gallery in Edinburgh) as their working methods are too different from the SCVA – for them, balancing a historic programme with contemporary practice is not an applicable issue.⁶ Museums that are part of art colleges or art universities were not included either, nor history or anthropology museums with art as one part of their collections.⁷ These criteria were established to make sure the chosen museums function in similar conditions when it comes to programming contemporary art exhibitions. Nevertheless, these institutions also have many differences which are taken into account in the analysis.

The time period that the research investigates is mainly from 2013 until 2016. The decision to analyse such a recent history stems from the need to understand the latest trends and tendencies in exhibition programming as this is most helpful in thinking about the present and future practice of the SCVA. However, the recent museum activity is put into a wider context of the 21st century, relating the latest trends to longer political and cultural developments that have taken place in UK and the international museum field. To clarify the scope of this research, it is also necessary to point out that it focusses on exhibition programming not public

⁴ See, for example, B. Lord; G. D. Lord (ed.). 2001. *The Manual of Museum Exhibitions*. New York, Oxford: AltaMira Press, pp. 261–315; and P. McKenna-Cress; J. A. Kamien. 2013. *Creating Exhibitions. Collaboration in the Planning, Development, and Design of Innovative Experiences*. Hoboken; New Jersey: Wiley, pp. 39-68.

⁵ 'Museums Change Lives: Museums Association's vision for the impact of museums'.

⁶ Exhibitions. In: The Talbot Rice Gallery's homepage [<http://www.ed.ac.uk/talbot-rice/exhibitions>], accessed 3 July 2016.

⁷ For example, the University of Aberdeen Museums [<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/museums/exhibitions/index.php>], accessed 28 June 2016.

programming or other educational activities, even though the existence and impact of these other modes of programming are taken into consideration as they are strongly interconnected with exhibitions. The attention is on exhibitions because this area of museum practice entails slightly different problems than museum education, influenced by the less direct mode of communication that it usually employs and the different roles given to exhibitions.

The thesis is composed of four chapters. The first introduces the relevant context and theoretical views on contemporary art programming in university art museums and explores the tensions that influence such museums' practice. The following three chapters each look at one of the case studies, the SCVA, the Barber, and the Whitworth respectively. All the chapters investigate the unique conditions of contemporary art programming in these institutions based on their policies and specific exhibitions that best exemplify their engagement with contemporary art. The most relevant examples from the Barber and the Whitworth's recent practice are explored in the context of the SCVA. The research is based on a variety of sources including theoretical studies on museum practice,⁸ contemporary art,⁹ and aesthetics;¹⁰ policy documents of national governing bodies,¹¹ art museums,¹² and universities;¹³ and interviews with museum professionals who work in the chosen institutions.¹⁴ In addition, other supportive data and materials from museums are taken into account such as visitor statistics¹⁵ and

⁸ For example, A. Dewdney; D. Dibosa; V. Walsh. 2013. *Post-Critical Museology: Theory and Practice in the Art Museum*. London: Routledge.

⁹ For example, A. Jones (ed.). 2011. *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945*. Malden MA, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

¹⁰ For example, C. Brown. 'Art, Oppression and the Autonomy of Aesthetics'. In: A. Neill; A. Ridley (ed.). 2002 *Arguing About Art: Contemporary Philosophical Debates*; Second Edition. London: Routledge, pp. 399-421.

¹¹ For example, '2015-2020 Government Policy: Museums and Galleries'. Updated: 1 June 2016. In: the UK Government's homepage [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/529489/2016Updateof2010to2015governmentpolicymuseumsandgalleries-GOV.UK20160425.pdf.pdf], accessed 9 July 2016.

¹² For example, 'The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham, Exhibition Policy'. In: The Barber Institute's homepage [<http://barber.org.uk/our-policies/>], accessed 1 July 2016.

¹³ For example, 'The University of East Anglia Corporate Plan 2012-2016'. In: University of East Anglia's homepage [<https://www.uea.ac.uk/about/our-university/publications>], accessed 7 July 2016.

¹⁴ For example, Interview with Ghislaine Wood, Acting Director of The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, 12 July 2016. Recording in the personal archive of the author of this thesis.

¹⁵ For example, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, visitor statistics – Reality. Modern and Contemporary British Painting (2014-2015). Internal document, 2015.

exhibition texts.¹⁶ There are limitations in terms of the generalisations that can be made based on this research. The small number of case studies that can be analysed as part of this study means that it is not possible to apply the findings on all UK university art museums without further research. However, in the context of informing the SCVA's practice, the Barber and the Whitworth provide enough ideas to create a fruitful discussion about possible ways forward. Another limitation is the lack of available visitor research that would help analyse their responses to previous contemporary art exhibitions which could give more weight to the research findings. Yet, there is some feedback and statistics available that gives an idea of the reception certain exhibitions have received. Overall, the availability of various documents, exhibition texts, articles and conducted interviews create enough scope to explore the topic in some detail as well as place it in a wider context of museum practice and cultural development.

The term 'contemporary art' is used in this thesis to refer to artworks made by living artists that critically engage with the current discourse of art. More specifically, the emphasis of this thesis is on art practice that engages with relevant issues in contemporary society. Jennifer Gonzalez and Adrienne Posner emphasise that even though all aesthetics are to some extent political, this political character must not be 'equated with art making that intentionally draws on, or points to, political concerns for the purpose of creating social change.'¹⁷ This is an important distinction as the present research points mostly to the type of contemporary art which is consciously engaging with social and political issues rather than unintentionally placed in that sphere. Therefore, the core arguments of the thesis are based on contemporary art that is here referred to as 'socially engaged art'. Being aware that it is very difficult to distinguish art that is socially engaged from art that is not, my judgement is based on my own reading of the works as well as interpretations provided by artists and curators. Such artworks have been the source of

¹⁶ Exhibition wall texts. *Reality. Modern and Contemporary British Painting*. 2014. In: Sainsbury Centre internal exhibition archive.

¹⁷ J. Gonzalez, A. Posner. 2006. 'Fracture for Change. US Activist Art since 1950'. In: A. Jones (ed.). *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945*. Malden MA, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, p. 212.

ample debates on the question of art's autonomy.¹⁸ Curtis Brown gives one description of what is understood when argued that art should be autonomous:

[...] the general view that artworks may and should be studied and appreciated as objects in their own right, without regard to the causes of their production, their historical context, their effects on an audience, or even their relation to the (rest of the) real world; and, moreover, that the contemplation or study of artworks should appeal only to some of the properties of the artwork, namely its aesthetic properties.¹⁹

That idea has received strong criticisms during the 20th and the 21st centuries as artists and curators have become more engaged with social and political issues. Paul O'Neill describes the changes that have taken place in art and curating since the late 20th century: 'a shift in the understanding of art's authorship, as something beyond the hands of an individual, acknowledges that art is not produced in isolation and that it should not be understood as being autonomous from the rest of life.'²⁰ Eileen John disagrees with the so called autonomists as well, arguing that moral value is also important in the evaluation of art because people care about moral value and, thus, it is one way for art to become precious to people.²¹ My standpoint coincides with O'Neill and John in valuing both aesthetic and social attributes in art, especially when looking at socially engaged contemporary art. Nevertheless, the debate about art's autonomy comes up again in the thesis when discussing art museums' overall role in society.

¹⁸ These debates reach back to the 18th century writings of Immanuel Kant and the 19th century notion of 'art for art's sake'. For further reading see: P. Bourdieu; A. Darbel. 1969. 'The Love of Art'. In: F. Frascina; J. Harris (ed.). 1992. *Art in Modern Culture, An Anthology of Critical Texts*, London: Phaidon in association with the Open University, pp. 174-180; and W. K. Wimsatt; C. Brooks. 1957. Art for Art's Sake. In: *Literary Criticism: A Short History*. New York: Random House, pp. 475-498.

¹⁹ C. Brown, p. 400.

²⁰ P. O'Neill. 2012. *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*. Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, p. 129.

²¹ E. John. 'Artistic Value and Opportunistic Moralism'. In: M. Kieran (ed.). 2006. *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*. Malden MA, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, p. 341.

Chapter 1 The Context of Exhibition Programming in UK University Art Museums and Related Theoretical Debates

1.1 University Art Museums in the Context of UK Governing Bodies' Cultural Policies and Vision Documents

UK university art museums operate in the context of diverse national and international governing bodies and cultural policies. These policies set guidelines for best practice and influence museums' access to funding and accreditation.²² Major influences on UK museums between 1997 and 2010 were the successive New Labour Governments that put significant emphasis on creating a systematic set of cultural policies.²³ A key aspect of these policies was the promotion of diversity – a multicultural society where everyone has equal access to arts and culture.²⁴ The '2010-2015 Government Policy: Arts and Culture' also states the importance of everyone having the opportunity to 'experience and take part in arts and cultural activities, whatever their social or economic background.'²⁵ The same objective is echoed in the Arts Council's mission: 'great art and culture for everyone.'²⁶ The Government is thus promoting equality and diversity through its own policies as well as related funding bodies, seemingly putting the most emphasis on the cultural field to mediate these values.²⁷ Several Acts of Parliament have also had a significant influence on museum practice. For example, due to The Charities Act of 2006, museums need to be able to demonstrate the public benefit they achieve

²² Accreditation Scheme. In: Arts Council England's homepage [<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/supporting-museums/accreditation-scheme-0>], accessed 20 August 2016.

²³ S. Selwood; S. Davies. 'Policies, Frameworks, and Legislation: The Conditions Under Which English Museums Operate'. In: C. McCarthy (ed.). 2015. *Museum Practice. The International Handbooks of Museum Studies*. Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, p. 43.

²⁴ A. Dewdney; et al. 2013. *Post-Critical Museology: Theory and Practice in the Art Museum*, p. 12.

²⁵ '2010–2015 Government Policy: Arts and Culture.'

²⁶ 'Arts Council England Mission and Strategy'. In: Arts Council England's homepage [<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/about-us/our-mission-and-strategy>], accessed 9 July 2016.

²⁷ It can be argued that the Government should put more emphasis on promoting these values through other areas. For example, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett argue that a more participatory management of companies would be an effective way of supporting greater equality. R. Wilkinson; K. Pickett. 2010. *The Spirit Level. Why Equality is Better for Everyone*. London, New York: Penguin Books, p. 255-256.

in order to receive charitable status.²⁸ This is measured based on 13 categories of charitable purpose, for example:

- The advancement of the arts, culture, heritage or science
- The advancement of education
- The advancement of citizenship or community development
- The advancement of human rights, conflict resolution or reconciliation or the promotion of religious or racial harmony or equality and diversity.²⁹

Therefore, museums are expected to make a positive impact on society. Art museums have traditionally been doing this by advancing the arts and education. However, many museums are now aiming to make a much wider impact by tapping into the other categories as well.³⁰ The question is how exactly can these ideas be brought about by museum practice, particularly by exhibition programming?

Cultural funding to support these aims was increased during the first half of the 2000s. Though, since the recession in 2008, significant downsizing in funds allocated for the cultural sector has taken place.³¹ At the same time, expectations for the impact museums should be making in society are higher than ever before. The Museums Association's vision document states:

All museums, however they are funded and whatever their subject matter, can support positive social change. [...] The time is right for museums to transform their contribution to contemporary life. As public expenditure continues to be cut, it is more important

²⁸ S. Selwood; S. Davies, p. 43.

²⁹ 'Charity Commission's Guidance: What Makes a Charity?' Published: 1 September 2013. In: the UK Government's homepage [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-makes-a-charity-cc4/what-makes-a-charity-cc4>], accessed 17.07.2016.

³⁰ See, for example, 'Tate For All Diversity Action Plan to 2015'. In: Tate's homepage [<http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/30715>], accessed 15 July 2016.

³¹ For example, in 2010, the Government announced a 30 per cent cut in the Arts Council's budget which meant several smaller arts programmes and organisations lost their funding. C. Higgins. 'Arts funding cut 30% in spending review'. In: *The Guardian*, 20 October 2010. See also R. Fisher; A. Ormston. 'United Kingdom/ 1. Historical perspective: cultural policies and instruments'. 15 April 2011. In: *Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe* [<http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/unitedkingdom.php>], accessed 9 July 2016.

than ever to have a strong sense of social purpose. Funders and policy makers expect museums to achieve greater social outcomes and impact.³²

Although the Museums Association encourages museums to increase their social impact, suggesting that this will also help their opportunities to win funding, it seems that the aim is to get higher quality results for less investment which means added pressure for museum management and staff.

Putting such vision documents and policies into practice is further complicated by the fact that they can rely on ambiguous terms such as 'social impact', 'social change' or 'social value'. Josey Appleton wrote in 2001 that 'few advocates of the museum's role in social inclusion can define what social inclusion actually means.' According to her, this was because there was no clear sense of how this agenda should be implemented in museum practice.³³ The Museums Association's vision document published more than ten years later is more precise as it identifies three categories that describe museums' social impact: museums enhance wellbeing, museums create better places, and museums inspire people and ideas; giving examples about each category put into practice.³⁴ Many theorists have also conducted research to bring more clarity into these terms. Carol Scott offers categories that describe museums' long-term social value, writing that museums can contribute to 'collective and personal development; economic value; and educational value.' These are further broken down, for example, museums can contribute to collective and personal development by:

- Providing an opportunity for the discussion and debate of emergent social issues
- Affirming personal identity
- Fostering tolerance and understanding
- Providing reverential and commemorative experiences

³² 'Museums Change Lives: Museums Association's vision for the impact of museums', p. 3.

³³ J. Appleton. 'Museums for the People?' In: *Spiked*, 8 November 2001 [<http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/10827#.V4t3QPnhDIU>], accessed 17 July 2016.

³⁴ For example, the Museum of the Manchester Regiment organised an exhibition in collaboration with Stitch in Time, a sewing circle of men and women, enabling them to get inspiration from the collection and feel part of the society by joining in the making of the exhibition. 'Museums Change Lives: Museums Association's vision for the impact of museums', p. 4-5, 10.

- Creating a collective identity through a shared history and a sense of place.³⁵

Scott believes that providing a supportive context for debate on relevant social issues helps collective and personal development which in turn enhances museums' long-term social value. Thus, displaying socially engaged contemporary art which encourages such dialogue can be linked to fostering collective and personal development as one aspect of creating positive social value and change. My aim is not to argue that there is a straight-forward or guaranteed impact socially engaged contemporary art has on creating positive social change as it depends heavily on how it is mediated, but to explore ways museum contexts can become more supportive of bringing about personal and collective development through such contemporary art.

Most museums are trying to increase their social impact through their education programme that enables direct contact with people. In doing this, many UK museum educators have embraced the constructivist approach in their practice and create learning opportunities that allow people to make their own meaning via active engagement in art.³⁶ This often means encouraging discussion and experimentation during various activities.³⁷ However, this thesis focusses on the potential exhibitions have to increase museums' social impact by becoming more open to active engagement and discussion. It is a more difficult task to increase exhibitions' social impact compared to education departments' activities because in the usual exhibition format communication between the curator and visitor is indirect and requires more independent engagement from visitors which can become a barrier. One option to increase the social impact of an institution's exhibition programme could be to tie it directly to current social issues and encourage debate through the way the works are interpreted. However, attracting wide audiences to exhibitions that pose challenging topics is not an easy task in an environment

³⁵ C. Scott. 2007. 'Measuring Social Value'. In: R. Sandell; R. R. Janes (ed.). *Museum Management and Marketing*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, p. 188.

³⁶ George Hein describes constructivist learning as follows: 'Constructivist learning situations require two separate components, first a recognition that in order to learn the active participation of a learner is required. Second, constructivist education requires that the conclusions reached by the learner are not validated by whether or not they conform to some external standard of truth, but whether they "make sense" within the constructed reality of the learner.' G. Hein. 1998. *Learning in the Museum*. London; New York: Routledge, pp. 34-35.

³⁷ See, for example, V. Sekules. 2015. Learning in a Wider World. In: *Art Worlds Social Actions. Education and Research 2012-2015*. Norwich: Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, p. 7; Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts Education, Our Approaches. In: Sainsbury Centre's homepage [<http://scva.ac.uk/education-research/our-approaches>], accessed 25 July 2016.

full of more entertaining leisure time activities that require less effort to consume. Such exhibitions can thus end up having a negative effect on the already fragile financial situation of museums.³⁸ For that reason, museums that depend on popular exhibitions to bring in large numbers of visitors and ticket money can lean towards the safer option of displaying either historic or already established and widely popular artists' works, deliberately avoiding possible controversy. As a result, experimental and lesser-known contemporary artists may become excluded from such institutions' exhibition programmes.

In addition to the financial challenge, there are also theoretical oppositions to the idea that museums are suitable vehicles for social change. Appleton is against the politicisation of museums, arguing that it turns museums into vehicles of political agenda and visitors into political parties' stooges. She also criticizes the social inclusion agenda because she believes 'it is indifferent to, and even contemptuous of, the activities on which the museum was built:'

As long as the DCMS [Department for Culture, Media and Sport] advocates in the museum think that an individual's self-esteem is being raised, that they are improving their skills or their mental health, it is incidental what activity they are involved in – they could be playing with building bricks or painting a masterpiece.³⁹

She seems to support the view that art must be autonomous of external functions, especially political agendas. Yet, she does not consider that museums can maintain their values in terms of artistic quality but at the same time also explore the social and political dimensions of art. Ignoring this side of contemporary practice would be leaving out an important facet of what is currently understood as part of the discourse of art. Appleton's critique does, however, show that it is necessary to make sure focusing on the social agenda does not result in instrumentalising art to a degree where artistic merits are not valued anymore. Nevertheless, it would be unreasonable to turn away from making museums more inclusive and dialogical out of stubborn opposition to align with any political ideas.

³⁸ E. M. Reussner. 2007. 'Strategic Management for Visitor-oriented Museums: A Change of Focus'. In: R. Sandell; R. R. Janes (ed.). *Museum Management and Marketing*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, pp 148-162.

³⁹ J. Appleton.

Andrew Newman is also rather critical of tying museums to social agendas since he believes museums can just as well have a negative impact on people and reinforce social inequality and isolation.⁴⁰ He finds that 'attempting to use museums and galleries to address social problems [...] and as "vehicles of social change" would have an unpredictable effect' because visitors react to what is displayed according to their existing cultural capital⁴¹ and not necessarily as policy makers and curators have envisioned.⁴² His research does, though, show that in some cases contemporary art exhibits do impact their visitors in a positive way by developing their cultural capital and opening them up to new ideas.⁴³ It seems that if museums truly have this negative side to them that Newman describes then documents such as the Museums Association's vision that offer specific actions for positive change are ever more needed.

One of the reasons museums find it hard to live up to the governing bodies' ambitious objectives is the lack of clarity in their institutional mission and principles.⁴⁴ The challenging daily life in museums can mean that mission statements and policy documents are neglected in decision making processes.⁴⁵ However, Polly McKenna-Cress and Janet Kamien suggest that 'the reason people feel so crazed may be that they do not have a clear path before them.'⁴⁶ They emphasise the importance of having a clear and up-to-date mission statement and exhibition goals that grow out from that mission, as these are meant to help museums make coherent decisions.⁴⁷ To clarify the process of exhibition programming, several museums have written an

⁴⁰ A. Newman. 'Imagining the Social Impact of Museums and Galleries: Interrogating Cultural Policy Through an Empirical Study'. In: *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 2013, vol. 19, issue 1, pp. 122.

⁴¹ A. Newman, p. 125.

The term 'cultural capital' is mainly attributed to Pierre Bourdieu who sees it in three forms – the embodied, objectified and institutionalized form – depending on the situation, for example, it can refer to objects that require specialised cultural abilities to use. P. Bourdieu. 1986. 'The Forms of Capital'. In: A. H. Halsey et al. (ed.). 1997. *Education: Culture, Economy, and Society*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 47;

Newman uses the definition provided by Grenfell and Hardy, according to whom cultural capital can be understood as 'symbolically valued cultural accoutrements and attitudes. [...] In this way, capital can be expressed materially, corporally or gesturally, but in each case it is symbolic because it attracts acknowledgement of value from those sharing positions within a given field.' M. Grenfell; C. Hardy. 2007. *Art rules, Pierre Bourdieu and the Visual Arts*. Oxford, New York: Berg, p. 30.

⁴² A. Newman, p. 133.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 132.

⁴⁴ N. Kotler; P. Kotler. 1998. *Museum Strategy and Marketing. Designing Missions, Building Audiences, Generating Revenue and Resources*. San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass Publishers, p. 28.

⁴⁵ P. McKenna-Cress; J. A. Kamien, pp. 41, 44.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 44.

⁴⁷ P. McKenna-Cress; J. A. Kamien, pp. 39-41.

exhibition policy⁴⁸ that sets guidelines for composing the programme.⁴⁹ Therefore, these documents are used as helpful tools in managing and unifying the different aspects of a museum. However, Andrew Dewdney (et al.) suggests that museums cannot be understood as unitary entities but rather as collections of overlapping fields or nexuses that exist only in relation to outside interests.⁵⁰ This shows that tying the museum's different parts under one common mission is not an easy process and cannot be fully successful if the external relationships that also impact museums, such as being part of a university, are not taken into account. In order to explore this dynamic, the analysis of the three case studies compares the museums' policies and the universities' overall strategies, providing a more informed understanding of the art museums' relationships with the universities. Nevertheless, my overall view is that guiding documents such as an exhibition policy and strategic plan are necessary tools to help communicate and reach the institutions' objectives, even more so if the specific museum's structure and external relationships are complex.

1.2 Exhibition Programming in University Art Museums

An apparent difference between exhibition programming in university museums and other museums lies in the fact that a university museum is part of and has access to an interdisciplinary community that focusses on research and high-quality education. It can thus be expected that this unique access is also integrated into these museums' programmes. One of the usual problems of museums is the disconnection that often occurs between theoretical research-based knowledge and practical museum work.⁵¹ In this respect, university art museums should be in a privileged situation as academics and museum staff have an opportunity to work more closely together. However, the question is whether this privilege is realised in practice and how it affects exhibition programmes? Lyndel King and Janet Marstine write that university art museums 'can become places for critical inquiry perhaps more

⁴⁸ See, for example, 'The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham, Exhibition Policy'.

⁴⁹ In the *Manual of Museum Exhibitions* the term 'exhibition policy' is defined as follows: 'A comprehensive statement of the purpose and philosophy of a museum's permanent and temporary exhibition programme, linking them to the museum's mission, identifying objectives and criteria and establishing procedures as to their selection, scheduling and implementation [...].' B. Lord; G. D. Lord (ed.), p. 502.

⁵⁰ A. Dewdney et al., pp. 99-100.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 76.

comfortably than other kinds of museums, because they operate in an academic climate where the questioning of authority is encouraged.⁵² They refer to the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery in Skidmore, United States, demonstrating how a young university museum is collaborating with other faculty members to initiate co-curated exhibitions. According to them, 'the Tang, as a university gallery, is governed by academic freedom; it is in the privileged position of making exhibitions that are provocative rather than popular.'⁵³ A similar example from UK – a young university museum making experimental exhibitions that engage with social issues – is the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (mima), which is now part of the Teesside University.⁵⁴ Their recent exhibition *Teesside World Exposition of Art and Technology* (2016) 'is an urgent reaction to the recent closure of Redcar's steelworks and a bid to make a positive contribution to the future of industry in the North East region,' demonstrating their engagement with current issues in their community through contemporary art exhibitions.⁵⁵ There are thus examples in both US and UK of university art museums that display socially engaged contemporary art exhibitions and collaborate with their universities in composing a boundary-pushing programme.

Barbara Ann Rothermel concludes in her doctoral thesis that the university art museum has great potential in fostering innovative interdisciplinary collaboration but recognises many barriers to this such as lack of administrative support and financing, feelings of ownership over collections by museum staff etc. She suggests that a common purpose or mission needs to be agreed on for the collaboration to work.⁵⁶ However, radical ideas from academics are not always welcomed in museums that are aiming to keep their rather conservative visitors and stakeholders happy.⁵⁷ Finding a common goal may become a challenge if the art museum is not

⁵² L. King, J. Marstine. 2005. 'The University Museum and Gallery: A Site for Institutional Critique and a Focus of the Curriculum'. In: *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 268.

⁵³ *Ibid*, pp. 283-284.

See also Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery's homepage [<https://tang.skidmore.edu/>], accessed 23 July 2016.

⁵⁴ Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art's homepage [<http://www.visitmima.com/>], accessed 1 August 2016.

⁵⁵ Teesside World Exposition of Art and Technology. In: mima's homepage [<http://www.visitmima.com/whatson/single/teesside-world-exposition-of-art-and-technology/>], accessed 1 August 2016.

⁵⁶ B. A. Rothermel. 2013. *The University Art Museum and Interdisciplinary Faculty Collaboration*. Ph.D. diss. University of Leicester, pp. 179-187.

⁵⁷ P. McKenna-Cress, J. A. Kamien, p. 64.

sufficiently integrated into the rest of the university's work and mission. This can easily happen in larger universities where the art museum operates rather independently. Nevertheless, as argued based on the examples of the Tang and MIMA, university art museums do have great potential to increase their social impact if they become integrated into their academic environments by actively employing the resources universities provide to a common social cause. In chapters 2-4, these issues are addressed to see whether being part of a university affects the three chosen art museums' contemporary art programming in practice.

1.3 Contemporary Art Programming in University Art Museums

Exploring the potential and barriers of programming socially engaged contemporary art exhibitions in university art museums brings me back to the argument presented before that exhibiting socially engaged contemporary art has a great potential to create an environment of questioning and debate around contemporary social issues, which can in turn support positive social change. It is not to claim that contemporary art, which does not directly engage with current social or political issues, cannot support positive social change, but to say that socially engaged contemporary art has a particularly strong potential in fostering aspects of personal and collective development.⁵⁸ In addition to many artists becoming interested in responding to current social topics and encouraging critical thinking and dialogue,⁵⁹ recent curatorial practice has also demonstrated an active wish to encourage debate on social and political issues. Panos Kompatsiaris describes the change since the 1990s when the art exhibition became 'a site of constructing rather than merely reflecting visions about the world,'⁶⁰ relating it to the emergence of discursive exhibitions described as exhibitions which position themselves deliberately in relation to 'political transformation, social change, equality, self-reflexivity,

⁵⁸ C. Scott, p. 188.

⁵⁹ Artists' interest in tackling social issues rose greatly in the middle of the 20th century. For example, Gavin Butt describes the rise of politicisation in American art in the 1950s that manifested in 'experiential' and 'participatory' forms of artistic practice such as Happenings. According to him, the politics of such art practice was 'based upon enlivening the perceptions of the spectator to the everyday realities of capitalist society [...]' G. Butt. '“America” and its Discontents: Arts and Politics 1945-1960'. In: A. Jones (ed.). 2006. *A Companion to Contemporary Art Since 1945*, p. 31.

⁶⁰ P. Kompatsiaris. 2015. *Curating Resistances. Crisis and the limits of the political turn in contemporary art biennials*. Ph.D. diss. The University of Edinburgh, p. 71.

emancipation and pedagogy.’⁶¹ He argues that such exhibitions aim to foster social change and raise awareness by enabling open-ended encounters with art.⁶² Therefore, art museums miss out on a valuable opportunity to increase their social impact if they shy away from displaying such contemporary art and exhibitions. Even though historical works can also be reinterpreted from the present perspective to provoke new ideas, the advantage of displaying contemporary artists’ works is that they have a more immediate contact with present issues and they can participate in an ongoing debate. Thus, many university museums with predominantly historic collections have found it necessary to incorporate contemporary art into their programmes, often by juxtaposing contemporary works with historic art.⁶³ The following chapters of this thesis compare three institutions that all have historic collections but exhibit contemporary art in different ways to find out how and why they have decided to integrate contemporary art into their exhibition programmes and what kind of barriers they face in doing this.

The relevance of contemporary art is not specifically stated in the UK Government’s cultural policies nor the Museums Association’s documents. Yet, what comes through rather clearly is the need to engage with contemporary life and challenging issues. The ‘2010-2015 Government Policy: Art and Culture’ states that ‘innovative, challenging and exciting arts and culture improve people’s lives, benefit our economy and attract tourists.’⁶⁴ Though the Government believes people’s lives can be bettered by innovative, challenging and exciting art practice, it is not clarified how to make sure an artwork matches this description. However, valuing attributes such as ‘innovative’ and ‘challenging’ implies that contemporary art which is experimental and challenges social and political conditions is supported. The Museums Association’s ‘Code of Ethics for Museums’ reads: ‘All those who work in and with museums should: ‘respect the right of all to express different views within the museum unless illegal to do so [...],’⁶⁵ thus

⁶¹ P. Kompatsiaris, p. 72; See also P. O’Neill, pp. 87-129.

⁶² P. Kompatsiaris, pp. 72-73.

⁶³ See, for example, the Whitworth’s exhibition: Elizabeth Price Curates. *In a Dream You Saw a Way to Survive and You Were Full of Joy* (2016). In: the Whitworth’s homepage [<http://www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/upcomingexhibitions/elizabethpricecurates/>], accessed 28 June 2016.

⁶⁴ ‘2010-2015 Government Policy: Arts and Culture’. In: the UK Government’s homepage [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-arts-and-culture/2010-to-2015-government-policy-arts-and-culture>], accessed 9 July 2016.

⁶⁵ ‘Code of Ethics for Museums’. 2015. Museums Association, p. 10.

supporting the coexistence of multiple voices in the museum space (including those questioning the museum's authority). In addition, the Museums Association's vision document states: 'museums foster questioning, debate and critical thinking. [...] Effective museums engage with contemporary issues.'⁶⁶ Seeing museums as platforms for debating contemporary and contested topics also suggests that displaying socially engaged contemporary art that encourages debate is supported. This leads to the question, how can museums make sure such art does indeed encourage debate and the coexistence of multiple voices?

As mentioned before, attracting visitors to art exhibitions that present tough topics is a difficult task. Even if people are open to engage with these topics, it can prove challenging to interpret contemporary art for those who are not used to it. This is demonstrated by Newman's research that studied 'the responses of older people (those over 60) to contemporary visual art [...] in north-east England.'⁶⁷ His findings suggest that in order to relate to contemporary visual art, 'specialist forms of cultural capital' are often needed.⁶⁸ Those who are aware that they lack the required knowledge can feel excluded.⁶⁹ Therefore, the interpretation provided in and around exhibitions have an important role in enabling visitors to overcome the feeling of exclusion. Newman suggests that museums should enable more opportunities for visitors' responses to be incorporated into displays as this would give visitors the initial cultural capital to engage with what is presented.⁷⁰ Hence, the traditionally authoritative voice of a museum curator could be productively challenged by introducing a less monological and more open-ended and participatory approach to curating.

Enabling multiple voices to coexist in art museums has both supporters and critics. The Museums Association encourages museums to 'bring more voices into interpretation and

⁶⁶ 'Museums Change Lives: Museums Association's vision for the impact of museums', p. 4.

⁶⁷ A. Newman, p. 124.

⁶⁸ See footnote no. 43.

⁶⁹ A. Newman, p. 129.

⁷⁰ A. Newman, p. 134. This is also supported by many others such as Eilean Hooper-Greenhill and Graham Black, encouraging museums to present multiple viewpoints in exhibitions and foster visitors' personal meaning-making processes. See, for example, G. Black. 2012. 'Conversations around Collections'. In: *Transforming Museums in the Twenty-first Century*. London, New York: Routledge, p. 149; and E. Hooper-Greenhill. 2000. 'Changing Values in the Art Museum: Rethinking Communication and Learning'. In: *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 6:1, p. 30.

devolve power.⁷¹ This can be done by including members of the target audience in the research and preparatory processes of exhibition curating⁷² or by creating an interactive access point for people to leave their comments or other kinds of contributions into the exhibition space itself as suggested by Newman.⁷³ However, as Pete Brown writes, 'there are also people who are wedded to the tradition of museum as authority and expert' and will not appreciate the museum taking a more dialogical approach.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, in order for an exhibition to encourage dialogue and debate, the desire to maintain complete control over the contents of displays should be given up.⁷⁵ The previously mentioned approaches to exhibition curating show how curators can foster visitors' active participation and engagement with current topics. This means that it does not need to be only the educators' job to increase the museums' social impact, especially as they do not usually have the capacity to reach as many visitors that enter the museum as exhibitions do.

Marstine makes a case for radical transparency, stating that museums should reject 'the patriarchal position of neutrality and omnipotence' and commit to social change.⁷⁶ Her idea is consistent with the Museums Association's vision which states that 'museums are not neutral spaces.'⁷⁷ This suggests that museums cannot present objective truths and should instead find ways to be open about their position while welcoming those that challenge it. Also supporting this idea is Claire Bishop who in her book *Radical Museology or What's 'Contemporary' in Museums of Contemporary Art?* (2013) analyses the current conditions of contemporary art museums:

⁷¹ 'Museums Change Lives: Museums Association's vision for the impact of museums', p. 4.

⁷² An example of this is the Whitworth's collaborative curating with various communities, introduced by Maria Balshaw in: E. Williams. 'Reimagining the Museum'. In: *Creative Review*, July 2016, vol. 36 issue 7, p. 65.

⁷³ A. Newman, p. 134.

⁷⁴ P. Brown. 'Us and Them: Who benefits from experimental exhibition making?' In: *New Directions in Museum Ethics*. J. Marstine, A. A. Bauer, C. Haines (ed.). 2013. Abingdon: Routledge, p. 72.

⁷⁵ This is supported by Marstine who argues that 'sharing decision-making processes facilitates public debate and empowers participants to take action.' J. Marstine. *Situated Revelations: radical transparency in the museum*. In: J. Marstine et al. (ed.). 2013, p. 5.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ 'Museums Change Lives: Museums Association's vision for the impact of museums', p. 4.

It is not hard to argue that the relativism of thematic collection hangs post-2000 is in perfect synchronicity with museum marketing: a gallery to please every demographic, without having to align the institution with any particular narrative or position.⁷⁸

Bishop uses three case studies (Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; the Reina Sofia, Madrid; and the MSUM, Ljubljana) to show how some museums have linked their contemporary art displays to local history in order to approach current social and political questions through a historical perspective. According to Bishop, these museums demonstrate an alternative path to the 'contemporary museum creatively and intellectually crippled by its reliance upon blockbuster exhibitions [...]'.⁷⁹ Thus, there are avid supporters to the idea that museums should not prioritise easy popularity by displaying seemingly neutral shows that will not upset any visitors, but should instead explore new means of communicating their positions in a transparent and contextualised way. In her review of Bishop's book, Sanne Kofod Olsen writes that the museums Bishop refers to function as institutions for curatorial experimentation and research and that the wider societal impact they make is questionable. She concludes that there is a need to answer the eternal question: 'How to combine and merge art historical and art theoretical research with more popular forms of communication/education activities that will be relevant to a larger demographic?'⁸⁰ A possible answer to this lies in being brave enough to engage with currently contested topics that are relevant to people through artworks and displays that encourage visitor participation and debate. This does not mean that museums are giving up professional working methods or engaging in political propaganda by aiming to force their opinions onto their visitors as Appleton fears.⁸¹ It does, however, mean that they are creating a space where people with varied views can come together and enrich each other's understanding of the world around them through art. This can result in some conservative visitors becoming disappointed in museums but it also opens museums up to new audiences that do not expect these institutions to keep up the pretence of functioning in isolation from

⁷⁸ C. Bishop. 2013. *Radical Museology or What's 'Contemporary' in Museums of Contemporary Art?* London: Koenig Books, pp. 24-27.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 55.

⁸⁰ S. Kofod Olsen. 'The Museum in the Age of the Experience Economy'. In: *Kunstkritikk*, 16 January 2014 [<http://www.kunstkritikk.no/kritikk/the-museum-in-the-age-of-the-experience-economy/>], accessed 15 July 2016.

⁸¹ J. Appleton.

social and political conditions and instead expect to be given an opportunity to explore these relations and make up their own minds.⁸² University museums have the privileged opportunity to start from attracting their existing communities of critically thinking students and staff and build on that as they develop their relationship with socially engaged contemporary art.

⁸² See, for example, E. Hooper-Greenhill, p. 30.

Chapter 2 The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts

The first of the three museums to be explored in this thesis is the central case study – the SCVA, setting a context for the following analyses of the Barber and the Whitworth. The centre was opened in 1978 in a purpose-built gallery designed by Norman Foster situated on the edge of the UEA campus (see Appendix II). It was founded by the patrons Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, whose collection forms the basis of the centre's identity and activities.⁸³ The SCVA's collections include a wide variety of art from prehistory to 20th and some 21st century pieces, juxtaposing artworks from all over the world.⁸⁴ The majority of the SCVA's exhibitions have a strong relationship with the existing collections. Due to this, one of the key features of the centre's exhibition programme is displaying international art. The current Exhibition Policy states:

The international perspective of the museum is a defining feature and the three principle themes of the institution are ancient, modern and international art. The display of art across time and place is at the core of the museum's identity and embodies the notion that art is a universal global phenomenon.⁸⁵

The museum's Acting Director Ghislaine Wood states that 'the Sainsbury Centre is an internationally important art gallery for the showing of international art, not regional art,' seeing a need to 'make sure that everything [the gallery does] is reinforcing the Sainsbury Centre's identity.'⁸⁶ This suggests that collecting and exhibiting international art is prioritised over local art. However, there have been various projects that focussed on artists connected to the region, a recent example being *Masterpieces: Art and East Anglia* (2013-2014).⁸⁷ It is thus not entirely clear to what extent and in which circumstances the centre aims to engage with regional art.

⁸³ Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection. In: the SCVA's homepage [<http://scva.ac.uk/about/collections/robert-and-lisa-sainsbury-collection>], accessed 6 June 2016.

⁸⁴ Collections Overview. In: the SCVA's homepage [<http://scva.ac.uk/about/collections/collections-overview>], accessed 6 June 2016.

⁸⁵ 'Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts Exhibition Policy'. Internal document, 2016, see Appendix I, p. 55.

⁸⁶ Interview with Ghislaine Wood.

⁸⁷ *Masterpieces: Art and East Anglia*. In: the SCVA's homepage [<http://scva.ac.uk/art-and-artists/exhibitions/masterpieces-art-and-east-anglia>], accessed 6 June 2016.

The SCVA puts on four large temporary exhibitions per year which are ticketed. In addition, it displays smaller shows in the East End Gallery and a permanent display of the collection in the Living Area which are free to enter. The centre is supported by a combination of funds from the University and Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) as well as various Sainsbury charitable funds and donors, but despite the range of funding sources, the museum still relies rather heavily on self-generated income.⁸⁸ One reason for this is that it is very expensive to fill the museum's large exhibition spaces (more than 1300 square metres) with constantly changing exhibitions of renowned international artists' works. In addition, recently the SCVA has not been able to secure large grants from, for example, the Arts Council, and has not received enough private sponsor funds.⁸⁹ The need to put on exhibitions that are attractive enough for large numbers of people to buy the relatively expensive ticket (£12/£7 per exhibition) has created many limitations in the kinds of exhibitions the SCVA has been programming and the types of visitors they predominantly attract – the majority of the visitors being people over 60 years old who generally have more free time and financial means than, for example, students.⁹⁰ However, these financial problems could be alleviated by developing collaborative projects and demonstrating extensive community engagement to become more eligible for significant grants,⁹¹ in addition to widening the donor base, which is one of the centre's strategic aims already.⁹²

Comparing the SCVA's practice to the Museums Association's vision of positive social change and the Government's diversity policy shows that some aspects of the museum's practice have stronger links to these ideas than others. The Education Department's approach is based on very similar principles, supporting diversity, encouraging discussion and debate to challenge

⁸⁸ Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia, Annual Review 2014-2015. 2015. Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, p. 63.

⁸⁹ According to the SCVA's Strategy document 'external funding has declined in real terms between 2011 and 2014.' 'Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Strategy 2015-2019'. Internal document, 2015.

⁹⁰ Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, visitor statistics summer 2014 to summer 2015. Internal document, 2015.

⁹¹ Arts Council England, our mission and strategy. In: Arts Council England's homepage [<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/about-us/our-mission-and-strategy>], accessed 20 August 2016.

⁹² 'Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Strategy 2015-2019'.

prejudices, and promoting experimentation.⁹³ The Exhibition Policy refers much less to the programme's social role or impact, even though it does briefly state that projects offered to the centre need to include education potential and social impact. What kind of social impact is expected is not specified. Supporting diversity is also not directly mentioned, though one of the selecting criteria for exhibitions is 'popular and accessible', suggesting that displays, which are relatable to many people, are favoured. Although, the desire to show some more focussed research projects is also expressed.⁹⁴ The management of the SCVA see bringing about social change as the outcome of the centre's educational work, the main manifestation of this being reaching out to new audiences. On the other hand, the primary task of its exhibitions is understood as educating people about art.⁹⁵ The specific themes mentioned in the Exhibition Policy that the museum's displays focus on are based on art historic movements (Art Nouveau, etc.), mediums (drawing, etc.) as well as periods and regions but make no mention of any social or political topics.⁹⁶ It is curious that there is no mention of, for example, questions around identity, social hierarchies or impacts of war as all of these have a strong presence in the collection. For example, numerous works by artists such as Henry Moore, Antonio Saura and John Davies critically point to man's inhumanity and the misuse of power in social and political conflicts (see Fig. 1).⁹⁷ There have also been exhibitions that engaged with these topics, like *Monument: Aftermath of War and Conflict* (2014).⁹⁸ Though, the absence of these themes in the latest policy is explained by both Wood and the Acting Deputy Director Calvin Winner, whose views are that it is not the SCVA's priority to curate shows that specifically look at social

⁹³ Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts Education, Our Approaches. In: Sainsbury Centre's homepage [<http://scva.ac.uk/education-research/our-approaches>], accessed 25 July 2016.

⁹⁴ 'Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts Exhibition Policy', see Appendix I, p. 57.

⁹⁵ Interviews with Ghislaine Wood, Acting Director, and Calvin Winner, Acting Deputy Director of The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, 12 July 2016. Recordings in the personal archive of the author of this thesis.

⁹⁶ 'Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts Exhibition Policy', see Appendix I, p. 58.

⁹⁷ S. Hooper (ed.). 1997. *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, vol.1: European 19th and 20th century paintings, drawings and sculpture*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press in association with University of East Anglia, pp. 33-38; 158-159; 280-285.

⁹⁸ *Monument: Aftermath of War and Conflict*. In: the SCVA's homepage [<http://scva.ac.uk/art-and-artists/exhibitions/monument-aftermath-of-war-and-conflict>], accessed 6 June 2016.

or political circumstances, clearly wishing to avoid making statements on such issues.⁹⁹ This reveals a difference compared to Bishop and Marstine's opinion who encourage museums to

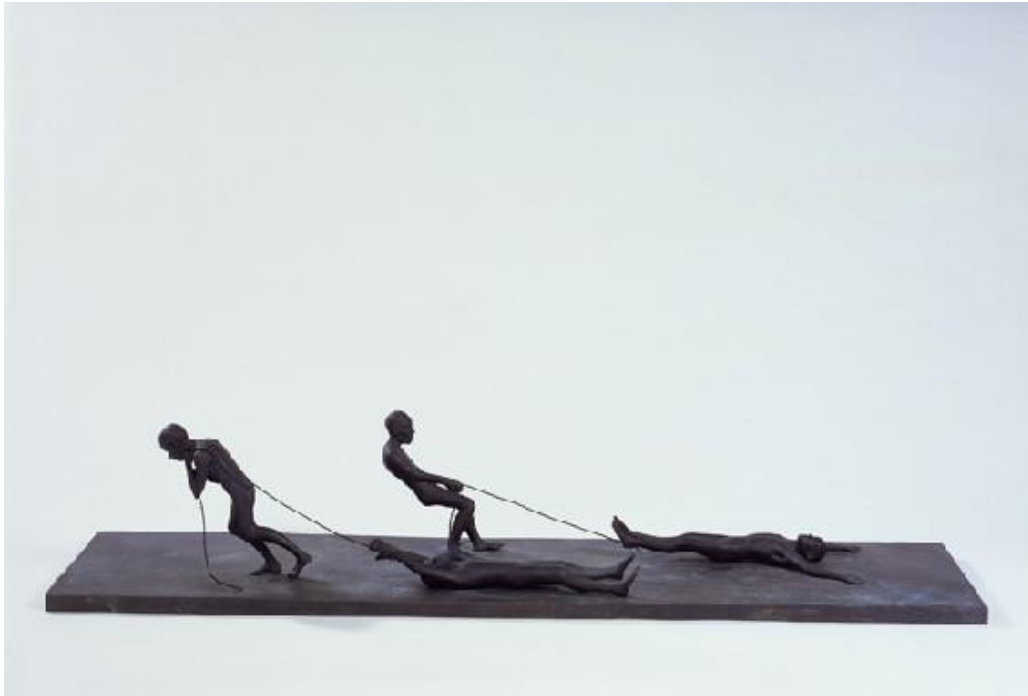


Figure 1: John Davies, *Bitter Fruit 1 (four figures)*, 1982-1991, bronze, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, image courtesy of the SCVA.

reject the position of neutrality.¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, the SCVA's Education Department's approach and activities show that they do tap into a variety of social and political issues that are related to art.¹⁰¹ However, as I am arguing in the first chapter of this thesis, it is not entirely justified to task only the education officers with engaging people and relating artworks to current social issues as there are ways curatorial practice can also support increasing the museum's social impact. The lack of coherence between the two departments' policies suggests that ensuring a closer collaboration between them where a common goal is established and

⁹⁹ Interviews with Ghislaine Wood and Calvin Winner.

¹⁰⁰ C. Bishop, p. 55; J. Marstine, 2013, p. 5.

¹⁰¹ The SCVA's Education Department's approach states that their programmes 'may on request tackle some of the more challenging and political areas [the collections] open up, such as stereotyping, post-colonialism, primitivism, gender and body politics, beliefs and rituals, death, magic and supernatural power.' – Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Education, Our Approaches.

See, for example, AGORA, a series of talks organised by the SCVA's young people's forum Young Associates'. In: the SCVA's homepage [<http://scva.ac.uk/whats-on/events/young-associates-present-agera>], accessed 6 June 2016.

jointly carried out should perhaps be considered. Yet, this would probably require re-evaluating or broadening the role the centre's exhibitions are usually given.

The question of the museum's social impact is also relevant in the wider context of the UEA. The Corporate Plan of the UEA 2012-2016 establishes that part of its aim is to create public benefit by engaging with wide communities, promoting fairness, equality and sustainability.¹⁰² The SCVA is mentioned in the plan as supporting the engagement agenda by attracting wide audiences but it is not defined who these audiences are and whether there are any specifically prioritised groups.¹⁰³ Therefore, even though the University acknowledges its art museum's place in its social impact agenda, this appears to be a slightly limited account, suggesting that clarifying the relationship between the aims of the UEA and the museum could be useful. According to Winner, the museum's lack of integration into the UEA's corporate plan stems partly from the fact that the SCVA has always been functioning rather independently. This was the wish of the patrons who during their lifetime were very actively involved in the centre's management and wanted to have autonomy from the University.¹⁰⁴ However, the current management sees the need to start building stronger connections with the UEA and also improve the gallery's engagement with the student community as this audience has proven challenging for the SCVA to attract.¹⁰⁵ Wood admits that additional research needs to be conducted to learn how to appeal to more students. Although, she emphasises that the SCVA is not there only for the students and that there is also a need to attract people who will create revenue for the centre.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, the museum's Strategy 2015-2019 and Exhibition Policy both highlight the importance of collaborating with the University and attracting university students and staff to the SCVA's exhibitions.¹⁰⁷ The Strategy identifies the following aims: 'maximise the value of the Centre to the University by making it a focal point of the campus [...]'; 'collaborate with all parts of the University to develop teaching and research in

¹⁰² 'The University of East Anglia Corporate Plan 2012-2016'. In: The UEA's homepage [<https://www.uea.ac.uk/about/our-university/publications>], accessed 7 July 2016, pp. 9, 11.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 40.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Calvin Winner.

¹⁰⁵ Interviews with Ghislaine Wood and Calvin Winner.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Ghislaine Wood.

¹⁰⁷ 'Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts Exhibition Policy', see Appendix I, p. 56; 'Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Strategy 2015-2019'.

key specialist areas, and in interdisciplinary study.¹⁰⁸ These aims are carried out by various collaborations with the UEA, such as putting on displays curated by art history lecturers and museum studies students as well as collaborations between the UEA's scientists and the Education Department.¹⁰⁹ Several of these projects have introduced new themes or approaches to the centre's regular exhibition programme. For example, the exhibition *Points of Departure: Photography of African Migrations* (2015, Fig. 2-3) curated by Senior Lecturer Dr Ferdinand De Jong explored the current issues around migration through contemporary photographers' works,¹¹⁰ a topic which has not recently been taken up by the SCVA's curators. Whereas the



Figure 2-3: Hélène Amouzou, selection from *Self Portraits Series*, 2008-2009, digital prints, displayed in the exhibition *Points of Departure: Photography of African Migrations* (2015), images courtesy of the SCVA.

latest Museum Studies MA students' exhibition *Looking Beyond. Conversations Between John Berger and John Christie* (2016) aimed to activate people's personal meaning-making by proposing open-ended questions and encouraging visitors to exchange messages. Thus, it created an opportunity to share people's own ideas within the exhibition space, deliberately

¹⁰⁸ 'Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Strategy 2015-2019'.

¹⁰⁹ Children's Summer School. In: the SCVA's homepage [<http://scva.ac.uk/whats-on/events/category/workshops/childrens-summer-school>], accessed 26 August 2016.

¹¹⁰ *Points of Departure: Photography of African Migrations*. In: the SCVA's homepage [<http://scva.ac.uk/art-and-artists/exhibitions/points-of-departure>], accessed 6 June 2016.

reducing the dominance of the curators' voices.¹¹¹ Despite these examples, there is more scope for collaborative experimentation between the museum's curators and other departments of the UEA as recently these have predominantly been with the art history lecturers. Nevertheless, the existing collaborations have diversified the centre's programme through displays that engage with contemporary art and issues and experiment with curatorial work, demonstrating the potential universities' resources have for exhibition practice.

The SCVA's relationship with contemporary art dates back to the founding of the institution since the patrons were keen supporters of young artists and actively collected their works.¹¹² Due to this, contemporary art has always been a part of the museum's exhibitions, even though it has not dominated the programme.¹¹³ Recently, there have been some smaller solo shows of contemporary artists (Thomas Houseago, Bill Viola and Avi Gupta all in 2012; John Virtue in 2014)¹¹⁴ as well as larger thematic group exhibitions that showed contemporary art alongside historic works (for example, *Magnificent Obsessions: The Artist as Collector*, 2015-2016).¹¹⁵ However, as Winner points out, these have not necessarily been developed according to a clear agenda or policy but in a rather opportunist way when a seemingly suitable project has come along.¹¹⁶ A recent group show initiated by the museum's Director Paul Greenhalgh and artist Chris Stevens,¹¹⁷ *Reality: Modern and Contemporary British Painting* (2014-2015; see Appendix III), looked at mostly figurative painting by contemporary artists, placing them in the context of earlier 20th century painters such as Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud. The exhibition aimed to demonstrate 'the survival of painting as a medium and the impact of British painting today', reacting to the impression that painting was becoming marginalised amidst new forms of

¹¹¹ *Looking Beyond. Conversations Between John Berger and John Christie*. In: the SCVA's homepage [<http://scva.ac.uk/art-and-artists/exhibitions/looking-beyond-conversations-between-john-berger-and-john-christie>], accessed 26 August 2016.

¹¹² In the 1960s and 1970s, before the SCVA's opening, the Sainsburys gave out the Sainsbury Award to contemporary artists. One of the recipients was John Davies (b. 1946) in 1970. S. Hooper, p. 127.

¹¹³ Interview with Calvin Winner.

¹¹⁴ Exhibition Archive. In: the SCVA's homepage [<http://scva.ac.uk/art-and-artists/exhibitions/archive>], accessed 6 June 2016.

¹¹⁵ *Magnificent Obsessions: The Artist as Collector*. In: the SCVA's homepage [<http://scva.ac.uk/art-and-artists/exhibitions/magnificent-obsessions-the-artist-as-collector>], accessed 6 June 2016.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Calvin Winner.

¹¹⁷ A. Geitner. 2014 Introduction. In: C. Stevens (ed.). *Reality. Modern and Contemporary British Painting*. Norwich: East Publishing, p. 9.

artmaking and teaching.¹¹⁸ Yet, the display also included many works that respond to social and political issues in the contemporary world, an aspect which was briefly mentioned in one of the exhibition's wall texts:

The painters in REALITY tackle a range of diverse subjects, including the body, politics, social issues, urban decay and personal identity. [...] An underlying theme of current British art is the problematic definition of British identity, including issues concerning the environment, gender, race and ethnicity and class.¹¹⁹

This is another example that the SCVA's recent exhibitions have acknowledged this side of contemporary artworks. Even though, in the curatorial concept of *Reality*, this was clearly secondary to the fact that most of these works are figurative paintings. There was no additional interpretation within the exhibition space about how specific works tackle these topics, or what do the curators think about the presence of these themes in British painting, providing little support for discussion. Though, more engagement with these questions can be found in the accompanying book, which includes curatorial essays and short paragraphs about each work. For example, John Keane's painting *Hopeless in Gaza (Road to Settlement)* from 2002 (Fig. 4) is introduced as follows:

In 1991 [John Keane] was commissioned to be an official war artist during the Gulf War. [...] *Hopeless in Gaza* is taken from the iconic photograph of the dying moments of Mohammed al-Durrah in the arms of his father. 'I'm interested in the process of painting,' [Keane] says, 'and I am interested in why human beings want to kill one another for political ends. These two apparently diverse preoccupations I attempt to reconcile [...].'¹²⁰

I believe that the exhibition could have benefitted from a more active attempt to engage visitors with social and political topics, for example, by making these short but rather helpful

¹¹⁸ *Reality: Modern and Contemporary British Painting*. In: the SCVA's homepage [<http://scva.ac.uk/art-and-artists/exhibitions/reality-modern-and-contemporary-british-painting>], accessed 6 June 2016.

¹¹⁹ Gallery 2 wall text. *Reality: Modern and Contemporary British Painting*. 2014. In: the SCVA's internal exhibition archive.

¹²⁰ C. Stevens (ed.), p. 86.

texts available in the physical display space. This does not necessarily mean that the museum would have imposed on visitors a specific interpretation of these artworks but rather provided some initial entry points that would have encouraged people to start thinking about the works



Figure 4: John Keane, *Hopeless in Gaza (Road to Settlement)*, 2002, oil on linen, 137x183 cm, Flowers Gallery, London and New York, image courtesy of the SCVA.¹²¹

in the social and political context that brought them to life. Greenhalgh argues in the book that a distinctly British realism or an anti-idealism is felt in these paintings.¹²² This argument could have functioned as a thought provoking discussion point if it was presented in the exhibition as such with an option for visitors to respond to it. I am not suggesting that the focus on exploring the medium of painting should have been overshadowed, rather I am arguing that a stronger connection could have been built between the art and the wider world around it, which the

¹²¹ C. Stevens (ed.), p. 87.

¹²² P. Greenhalgh. 2014. 'Reality'. In: C. Stevens (ed.), pp. 11-14.

theme of reality is so tied to. This would have enabled the gallery to function more easily as a space for critical engagement and discussion.

Even though there are various examples of displaying contemporary art in the SCVA's recent programme, the reworking of the Exhibition Policy has highlighted that the principles of the museum's engagement with contemporary art have not been fully agreed on and there are several unanswered questions relating to this topic. The policy is rather vague in terms of contemporary art, stating that 'there is an ongoing commitment to contemporary practice' aiming to bring 'the work of artists with both established and emerging international reputations to East Anglia.'¹²³ However, what this commitment entails is not fully explained. In practice, the centre has recently displayed less international than British contemporary artists' works as well as very few emerging artists. This suggests that the relationship with local and emerging artists should perhaps be more clearly defined. Especially as continuing to support these artists alongside international art could benefit the museum's engagement with its local artist community. In terms of displaying emerging artists, Winner is concerned that the visitors will start comparing their works to older masters which would perhaps be unfair. Yet, he acknowledges that when other museums display emerging art, they usually give it a clear context and communicate it as a more experimental strand of the programme. He thus agrees it is necessary to rethink the SCVA's relationship with emerging art while at the moment there is no clear path ahead.¹²⁴ Wood, on the other hand, emphasises that the SCVA is not an experimental display space and that contemporary art is not very high on the centre's agenda, even though it will remain as one strand of the programme as long as it relates to the collection. She sees several barriers to programming contemporary art in the SCVA.¹²⁵ For example, one of the primary strategic goals of the centre is to curate shows that can tour, and she sees a much bigger potential for the SCVA to tour shows of historic art than contemporary, probably based on the strengths of the existing collection, which lies more so in the 20th than the 21st century art. Similarly to Newman,¹²⁶ she points out that contemporary art can be hard

¹²³ 'Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts Exhibition Policy', see Appendix I, p. 56.

¹²⁴ Interview with Calvin Winner.

¹²⁵ Interview with Ghislaine Wood.

¹²⁶ A. Newman, p. 129.

to understand for visitors and that the SCVA's aim is to be as non-elitist as possible so exhibitions are prioritised that make art accessible.¹²⁷ Yet, these reasons do not necessarily eliminate the option to display socially engaged contemporary art if placed alongside the museum's historic works and mediated through accessible curatorial approaches that support personal meaning-making, participation and dialogue. One logical target audience for such exhibitions would be the student community made up of predominantly critically thinking people who are likely to be interested in the contemporary world around them. However, as mentioned, a barrier for many students is the need to pay for a ticket, even though there is a discount for them (student ticket is usually £4 per exhibition).¹²⁸ Securing additional Arts Council funds or displaying contemporary art in the free East End Gallery have been identified by the management as possible solutions, though it is not yet clear, what specific actions will be taken to implement these options.¹²⁹ Overall, the various barriers and uncertainties around exhibiting contemporary art in the SCVA suggest that establishing clearer principles within the Exhibition Policy about how the SCVA wishes to engage with contemporary art in its programme and what kind of practical actions are taking place to deliver it could be of help. This chapter has briefly explored some options in relation to funding, policy development, collaborative practices, curatorial approaches and engagement with local and emerging artists. The following two chapters will look at the Barber and the Whitworth's practice to see whether there are specific ideas and examples that could be relevant for the SCVA.

¹²⁷ Interview with Ghislaine Wood.

¹²⁸ Email correspondence with Carla Marfleet, Visitor Services Assistant Manager at The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, 16-17 August 2016. Emails in the personal archive of the author of this thesis.

¹²⁹ Interview with Calvin Winner.

Chapter 3 The Barber Institute of Fine Arts

The second case study I am investigating is the Barber Institute of Fine Arts (see Appendix II) which is part of the University of Birmingham. The institution was founded in 1932 ‘for the study and encouragement of art and music’ (in addition to displaying exhibitions, it is also a concert venue).¹³⁰ The founding objective is still at the centre of its mission whereby ‘the Barber uses its world-class collections to create inspirational opportunities for learning and enjoyment for students, staff and the wider public.’¹³¹ The Barber and the SCVA are comparable in many aspects. For example, both museums have a significant international collection of historic artworks.¹³² The Barber was founded thanks to private patrons Sir Henry and Lady Barber¹³³ as the SCVA was founded by Sir Robert and Lady Sainsbury. Due to this, both museums have endowment funds that still support their activities which enable certain financial autonomy from the universities.¹³⁴ However, unlike at the SCVA, all of the Barber’s exhibitions are free to visit.¹³⁵ This is thanks to the support of the Henry Barber Trust and the fact that its display spaces are significantly smaller than at the SCVA which means their exhibitions are less expensive to produce. Another key similarity is that both of these museums put on temporary exhibitions based on their historic collections and integrate contemporary art into their programme as an additional strand.¹³⁶ The central question of this chapter is what principles and conditions impact the Barber’s programming of contemporary art and whether its practice provides valuable examples in relation to the SCVA’s contemporary art programming.

¹³⁰ Our Mission. In: The Barber's homepage [<http://barber.org.uk/our-mission/>], accessed 7 July 2016.

¹³¹ ‘The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham, Exhibition Policy’.

¹³² See, for example, Paintings. In: the Barber's homepage [<http://barber.org.uk/paintings/>], accessed 7 July 2016; and Collections Overview. In: the SCVA's homepage [<http://scva.ac.uk/about/collections/collections-overview>], accessed 6 June 2016.

¹³³ Our Founders. In: the Barber's homepage [<http://barber.org.uk/our-founders/>], accessed 7 July 2016; History. In: the SCVA's homepage [<http://scva.ac.uk/about/history>], accessed 6 June 2016.

¹³⁴ Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia, Annual Review 2014-2015, p. 63; Our Governance. In: the Barber's homepage [<http://barber.org.uk/our-governance/>], accessed 7 July 2016.

¹³⁵ ‘The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham, Exhibition Policy’.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

A helpful document in understanding the principles of the Barber's exhibition programme is its Exhibition Policy that sets guidelines for composing the programme. The policy states that 'the primary aim of the exhibition programme is to create opportunities for visitors to increase their understanding and enjoyment of the permanent collections.' Drawing from this aim, priority is given to temporary exhibitions 'which focus upon particular aspects of, or individual works in, the Barber collections, in particular, those which provoke and present new research on the collections and/or show works in a different light.'¹³⁷ The policy does not specify any particular themes or mediums that are most relevant for the Barber but when looking at the exhibition programme of the past few years, there are recurring interpretations of portraiture and landscape which are often explored through paintings and works on paper. This also corresponds with the primary contents of the Barber's collection.¹³⁸ It is noticeable that the programme does not directly engage with current social or political issues, although, indirect connections can be made based on the themes of several exhibitions.¹³⁹ However, the interpretation provided by the curators does not usually address these issues directly or offer questions to be discussed in relation to the present moment. Robert Wenley, the Barber's Head of Collections and Learning, states that preference is given to art historical displays and controversial or politically engaged exhibitions are not at the fore of the Barber's agenda (similarly to the SCVA).¹⁴⁰ Thus, most of their exhibitions are not positioning themselves in the context of current debates nor aiming to raise awareness about specific issues in contemporary society as discursive exhibitions would do.¹⁴¹ When asked in relation to the Museums Association's vision whether the Barber aims to bring about positive social change, Wenley mentions that the institution was not set up to have any role in social change, but to educate people in the history of art.¹⁴² Due to this, the museum's exhibition programme is dominated

¹³⁷ 'The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham, Exhibition Policy'.

¹³⁸ See Collections. In: the Barber's homepage [<http://barber.org.uk/>], accessed 7 July 2016.

¹³⁹ For example, the exhibition *Rebel Visions. The War Art of CRW Nevinson* (2014-2015) made some people think about the presence of war in the contemporary world as well as in a historic context, one of them writing: 'Shows the utter reality of war. We need a Nevinson for the 21st century.' *Rebel Visions. The War Art of CRW Nevinson*. In: the Barber's homepage [<http://barber.org.uk/rebel-visions-2/>], accessed 7 July 2016.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Robert Wenley, Head of Collections and Learning at the Barber Institute for Fine Arts, 22 July 2016. Recording in the personal archive of the author of this thesis.

¹⁴¹ P. Kompatsiaris, p. 72.

¹⁴² Interview with Robert Wenley.

by didactic displays¹⁴³ rather than constructivist approaches that would prioritise fostering personal meaning-making and active participation.¹⁴⁴

While the Barber's exhibitions seem to be focussed on teaching art history, the University of Birmingham wishes to have a much more active and diverse role in society, stating that their aim is to make a difference and enhance the impact of their research for the benefit of the community in areas such as public policy, society, health outcomes, and the economy.¹⁴⁵ It is not clear if and how the Barber's exhibition programme fits in with this ambitious agenda as there is no direct mention of the museum in the University's strategy. Though, it does refer to its arts facilities as part of improving the quality of life for the region's people, the specific way they do this is not addressed.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the Barber does collaborate with the University in several ways, although, this is mostly limited to the art history staff and students as in the SCVA. For example, every year, it provides the central temporary exhibition space (Lady Barber Gallery) for an exhibition curated by MA students.¹⁴⁷ The recent shows do not strike as exploring experimental or risk taking curatorial approaches, as recommended by King and Marstine,¹⁴⁸ at least not in the form of giving the exhibits new meaning through the present social and political context.¹⁴⁹ Thus, the SCVA's programme appears to have embraced more boundary-pushing collaborations with its university than the Barber. However, there are similarities between the two museums in terms of the lack of integration and coherence

¹⁴³ Email correspondence with Robert Wenley, 1 August 2016. Email in the personal archive of the author of this thesis.

¹⁴⁴ G. Hein, pp. 27-29, 34-35.

¹⁴⁵ 'The University of Birmingham, Strategic Framework 2015-2020'. Making Things Happen. In: University of Birmingham's homepage [<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/strategic-framework/strategic-framework-2015-2020.pdf>], accessed 7 July 2016, p. 4.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Robert Wenley.

¹⁴⁸ L. King; J. Marstine, p. 268.

¹⁴⁹ Several of the MA exhibitions such as *Lasting Impressions. 20th-century Portrait Prints* (2014) and *The Modernist Face. Smith, Dobson and British Portraiture 1920-1960* (2015) have looked at the artistic qualities or historic contexts of 20th century portraiture.

Lasting Impressions. 20th-century Portrait Prints. In: the Barber's homepage [<http://barber.org.uk/lasting-impressions/>], accessed 7 July 2016.

The Modernist Face. Smith, Dobson and British Portraiture 1920-1960. In: the Barber's homepage [<http://barber.org.uk/modernist-face/>], accessed 7 July 2016.

between the universities' strategies and their art museums' approaches, validating Rothermel's criticism of insufficient collaboration between these institutions.¹⁵⁰

Despite the generally rather traditional approach to exhibitions in the Barber, its recent engagement with contemporary art reveals a quite experimental side of the museum's programme. From 2013 to 2015 the Barber took part in the contemporary art exhibition *New Art West Midlands* (see Appendix III) that displayed work by graduates from five West Midlands university art schools.¹⁵¹ The inclusion of contemporary art in the institution's programme is interesting as the Exhibition Policy states that 'it is not in the Barber's remit to acquire contemporary art,'¹⁵² the principle stemming from the initial collecting focus stipulated by Lady Barber.¹⁵³ This reveals a significant difference compared to the SCVA whose founders were very passionate about collecting contemporary art.¹⁵⁴ Therefore, the SCVA has a much more fundamental relationship with contemporary art than the Barber, whose collecting principles construct its identity as a museum of historic art. The difference is also evident when looking back at the history of the display traditions of these institutions. While contemporary art has always had a presence in the SCVA's programme, the Barber only started displaying contemporary art in the late 2000s.¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the museum's recent attempt to display young regional artists' works is a sign that the museum finds it necessary to explore ways to engage with contemporary art.

New Art West Midlands is an initiative launched in 2013 to support the region's art school graduates in a pivotal moment in their careers and offer them opportunities for displaying their

¹⁵⁰ B. A. Rothermel, pp. 179-187.

¹⁵¹ *New Art West Midlands* (2015). In: the Barber's homepage [<http://barber.org.uk/new-art-west-midlands-3/>], accessed 7 July 2016.

¹⁵² 'The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham, Exhibition Policy'.

¹⁵³ Wenley: 'In her original founding Deed of Trust (1932), Lady Barber stipulated that the Henry Barber Trust [HBT], which acquires works of art for display at the Barber Institute, should not obtain items that dated from later than 1899; this was amended by the HBT in 1967 so that acquisitions now have to be at least 30 years old (i.e., from date of creation).' Email correspondence with Robert Wenley, 18 July 2016. Email in the personal archive of the author of this thesis.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Calvin Winner.

¹⁵⁵ Email correspondence with Robert Wenley, 18 July 2016.

work in recognised art institutions.¹⁵⁶ The reasons for the Barber's involvement were to increase their visitor appeal to students, support local artists, and collaborate with the other local exhibition venues.¹⁵⁷ Supporting local artists reveals that the Barber's exhibition programme has been contributing to positive social change by including artists that are usually excluded from the museum's programme and through this supporting their professional development. The relevance of that step is also visible in some of the exhibitions' feedback, one visitor writing: 'Fantastic! Gave me motivation. One day this could be me!'¹⁵⁸ Students are specified as one of the Barber's key target audiences¹⁵⁹ but they are struggling to get them to visit the museum¹⁶⁰ – a problem the SCVA is also facing. Taking part in these exhibitions shows that the museum recognises the potential displaying contemporary art made by young people can have in becoming more attractive for students. According to Wenley's impression, the visitor demographic did change a bit during these exhibitions towards a younger audience.¹⁶¹ Even though visitor statistics specifying different age groups are not available, the social media engagement also shows young people's interest in the exhibitions.¹⁶² Thus, taking part in *New Art West Midlands* diversified the programme and created a possibility to increase the museum's relevance for a younger audience.

However, the displays also got some negative responses from people who were not used to seeing experimental contemporary art in the Barber. One visitor wrote: 'Self-indulgent rot! This has no place here – where is the craft? The vision? To call this art is to debase art itself.'¹⁶³ In 2016 the museum decided to change its approach and offer one young artist a residency and display opportunity (upcoming) instead of being one of the venues displaying the group show. Wenley explains this decision, claiming that the quality of the pieces displayed was not consistently high enough and it is debatable whether the works displayed fully responded to

¹⁵⁶ J. Butler; W. Law. 2015. Turning Point West Midlands. In: A. Payne; R. Bradley (ed.). *New Art West Midlands*. Birmingham: Birmingham Museums Trust, p. 7.

¹⁵⁷ Email correspondence with Robert Wenley, 18 July 2016.

¹⁵⁸ Visitor feedback. *New Art West Midlands*. 2015. Information provided by The Barber Institute of Fine Arts.

¹⁵⁹ 'The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham, Exhibition Policy'.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Robert Wenley.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Social media statistics. *New Art West Midlands*. 2015. Information provided by The Barber Institute of Fine Arts.

¹⁶³ Visitor feedback. *New Art West Midlands*.

the collection (a condition in the Policy for displaying contemporary art).¹⁶⁴ Another reason could have been that many of the works displayed engage with controversial topics (the change of traditional value systems – Lucy Dore, *The Idol Project*, 2013, see Appendix III; loss of privacy in an increasingly digitalised world – Jodie Wingham, *Looking*, 2014, Fig. 5, etc.) and demand more interpretive skills from the viewers.¹⁶⁵ Although, the exhibition was accompanied by several layers of interpretive materials such as wall texts, artist statements as well as a



Figure 5: Jodie Wingham, *Untitled* from the series *Looking*, 2014, screen print on aluminium.¹⁶⁶

catalogue that introduced the topics and questions being raised.¹⁶⁷ To encourage visitors' active engagement with these works, the exhibition in 2015 also included interactive elements, for example, urging people to think of their idols and draw them.¹⁶⁸ All the interpretive materials provided a variety of entry points to relate the works to current social topics and engage in a

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Robert Wenley.

'The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham, Exhibition Policy'.

¹⁶⁵ A. Payne; R. Bradley (ed.), pp. 38, 70.

¹⁶⁶ Image from A. Payne; R. Bradley (ed.), p. 85.

¹⁶⁷ *New Art West Midlands* exhibition wall texts and artist statements. 2015. Provided by The Barber Institute of Fine Arts; A. Payne; R. Bradley (ed.).

¹⁶⁸ Interactive materials. *New Art West Midlands*. 2015. Provided by The Barber Institute of Fine Arts.

personal meaning-making process. Nevertheless, the Barber's decision to change its way of participating in the initiative shows that there is an internal struggle in the institution to attract younger audiences and engage with contemporary practice but also retain its identity and reputation among their perhaps more conservative core visitors as a museum putting on traditional didactic exhibitions. That dilemma is very similar to the SCVA's situation. However, the latter has not put on any graduate shows in recent years.¹⁶⁹ The Barber's participation in such an initiative thus provides a relevant example in thinking about the SCVA's future engagement with contemporary art.

¹⁶⁹ This is excluding one day interventions organised by the education team with the young people's forum Young Associates. Young Associates. In: the SCVA's homepage [<http://scva.ac.uk/whats-on/events/young-associates-10>], accessed 6 June 2016.

Chapter 4 The Whitworth Art Gallery

The final institution I am analysing in comparison to the SCVA is the Whitworth Art Gallery which became part of the University of Manchester in 1958.¹⁷⁰ The gallery has many similar features to the SCVA – it is part of a large public university, has a significant international collection of historic art, but also contemporary artworks,¹⁷¹ and puts on a variety of temporary exhibitions, incorporating contemporary art into its programme alongside historic displays.¹⁷² The SCVA and the Whitworth both have spacious buildings with many areas dedicated to temporary exhibitions¹⁷³ (see Appendix II) so in this aspect they are more similar than the Barber that is substantially smaller.¹⁷⁴ However, while both the SCVA and the Whitworth acquire new contemporary works to the collection, the Whitworth's contemporary art collecting practice is more active and varied¹⁷⁵ and exhibitions of contemporary art also have a more prominent place in its programme.¹⁷⁶ As in the Barber but unlike in the SCVA, all of the Whitworth's exhibitions are free for the public.¹⁷⁷ This is possible thanks to a variety of funding sources that the museum has secured in addition to the University funding and HEFCE, such as significant grants from the Arts Council and funds from numerous donors who support the museum's activities.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, the sources of external funding that the SCVA's management wish to increase have recently been successfully utilised by the Whitworth. Another difference

¹⁷⁰ 'Whitworth Art Gallery Strategic Plan 2012-15'. In: the Whitworth's homepage

[<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=25526>], accessed 28 June 2016.

¹⁷¹ 'The Whitworth Art Gallery Collections Development Policy'. 2014. In: the Whitworth's homepage

[<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=25524>], accessed 28 June 2016.

¹⁷² Exhibitions. In: the Whitworth's homepage [<http://www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/>], accessed 28 June 2016.

¹⁷³ The Building. In: the SCVA's homepage [<http://scva.ac.uk/about/the-building>], accessed 6 June 2016;

About. In: the Whitworth's homepage [<http://www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/about/>], accessed 1 June 2016.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Robert Wenley.

¹⁷⁵ 'The Whitworth Art Gallery Collections Development Policy';

Interview with Samantha Lackey, Senior Curator of the Whitworth, 28 July 2016. Recording in the personal archive of the author of this thesis; Acquisitions 2013-2016. Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts internal collection database Adlib.

¹⁷⁶ Exhibitions. In: the Whitworth's homepage [<http://www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/>], accessed 28 June 2016.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Samantha Lackey.

¹⁷⁸ 'Whitworth Art Gallery Strategic Plan 2012-15'; Interview with Samantha Lackey; Successful applicants – Round 6, *The New North and South*. Arts Council England, Ambition for Excellence grant. In: Arts Council England's homepage [<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/ambition-excellence>], accessed 22 August 2016.

is that compared to Norwich, Manchester is a much larger and more ethnically diverse city with a big Asian minority which has influenced the Whitworth's programme significantly.¹⁷⁹ Nevertheless, it is interesting to explore the Whitworth's programming practice and engagement with contemporary art because in recent years it has gained considerable recognition in UK. This chapter explores which principles guide the gallery's present practice and how these have been carried out in their recent contemporary art exhibitions to see whether there are useful examples to be considered in relation to the SCVA.

The motivations behind the Whitworth's exhibition programme are strongly related to its overall ethos and approach to its role in society. The Whitworth introduces itself as 'a gallery that is historic and contemporary, academic and playful',¹⁸⁰ emphasising the coexistence of these seemingly opposite traits. The Whitworth's Strategic Plan 2012-2015 further states:

International in outlook, but rooted in Manchester's history: what matters are the ideas that bring our works to life and the discussions about art we have with our visitors. We want to be thought provoking and irreverent, a gallery that is informed by its rich history but which is excited about the culture around us in Manchester today.¹⁸¹

This suggests that the Whitworth focuses on maintaining a balance between displaying both historic and contemporary, and local and international art, not giving clear preference to one over the other. According to Samantha Lackey, Senior Curator of the Whitworth, the institution's present approach has been developed during a 10 year period of gradual changes coinciding current Director Maria Balshaw's leadership.¹⁸² A large redevelopment of the gallery and successful reopening in 2015 have resulted in several prestigious awards (Art Fund's Museum of the Year 2015;¹⁸³ Visit England's gold prize for Large Visitor Attraction of the Year

¹⁷⁹ E. Williams, p. 66.

¹⁸⁰ About Us. In: the Whitworth's homepage

[<http://www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/visit/thenewgallery/aboutus/>], accessed 28 June 2016.

¹⁸¹ 'Whitworth Art Gallery Strategic Plan 2012-15'.

¹⁸² Interview with Samantha Lackey.

¹⁸³ J. Galliver. 'Museum of the Year: The Whitworth'. 19 June 2015. In: BBC News' homepage [<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-33185934>], accessed 5 August 2016.

2016).¹⁸⁴ Amidst these changes and gained recognition, visitor numbers have grown substantially.¹⁸⁵ One reason for such success appears to be the Whitworth's increased engagement with its diverse communities and collaboration with other institutions, enabling them to widen their reach and win large grants.¹⁸⁶ Curator Helen Stalker has commented on the institution's role in society, stating that 'the Whitworth has always had this ethos of the transformative power of art and the engagement with the public', explaining that the new building allows them to increase their engagement with different communities.¹⁸⁷ This ethos is carried out by the Whitworth's rich education programme, for example, by exploring ways of increasing people's wellbeing,¹⁸⁸ but it also manifests in the institution's work with its collections and exhibition programme. The museum's collecting practice focuses on many controversial issues in society such as national identity, place and belonging, industrialisation, politics, gender and sexuality¹⁸⁹ which are present in celebrated contemporary artists' works (Rachel Whiteread, Tracey Emin, Gillian Wearing etc.),¹⁹⁰ as well as in the museum's Outsider Art Collection.¹⁹¹ As a result of collecting such works, these topics also come through in the exhibition programme, encouraging visitors to engage with these themes.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁴ 'Winners 2016'. In: Visit England Awards' homepage [<http://www.visitenglandawards.org/about-home/winners/winners-2016>], accessed 26 August 2016.

¹⁸⁵ About Us. In: the Whitworth's homepage [<http://www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/visit/thenewgallery/aboutus/>], accessed 28 June 2016.

¹⁸⁶ For example, the £730,000 Ambition for Excellence grant from the Arts Council for the *New North and South* project with [Manchester Art Gallery](#), [Manchester Museum](#), [Liverpool Biennial](#), and the [Tetley](#) in Leeds. Successful applicants – Round 6, *The New North and South*. Arts Council England, Ambition for Excellence grant. In: Arts Council England's homepage [<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/ambition-excellence>], accessed 22 August 2016.

¹⁸⁷ J. Galliver. 'Museum of the Year: The Whitworth'.

¹⁸⁸ Health and Wellbeing. In: the Whitworth's homepage [<http://www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/learn/healthandwellbeing/>], accessed 28 August 2016.

¹⁸⁹ 'The Whitworth Art Gallery Collections Development Policy'. 2014. In: the Whitworth's homepage [<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=25524>], accessed 28 June 2016.

¹⁹⁰ There is also a deliberate emphasis on collecting female artists' works to make a change in the context where historically, female artists have been underrepresented in museum collections. Interview with Samantha Lackey.

¹⁹¹ Our Collection. In: the Whitworth's homepage [<http://www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/collection/ourcollection/>], accessed 28 June 2016.

¹⁹² For example, *Cai Guo-Qiang. Unmanned Nature* (2015) – an installation of gunpowder drawings commemorating the centenary of the First World War. In: the Whitworth's homepage [<http://www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/pastexhibitions/caiguao-qiang/>], accessed 28 June 2016.

The institution's ethos appears to fit in with the University of Manchester's mission rather well. The University's Strategic Plan 2020 states: 'We are distinctive in UK higher education as the first university to make social responsibility a core strategic goal. ... Our view is that universities are primarily for public benefit and should be able to deliver this benefit in a way that has a positive impact on people's lives.'¹⁹³ The delivery of this objective is explained in the document in various contexts, including that of cultural institutions:

Our cultural institutions will be at the vanguard of our social responsibility agenda, embodying world class excellence and locally relevant social benefit. They provide a gateway to the University for hundreds of thousands of learners, families and members of the local community from under-represented groups.

The Whitworth is mentioned as one of the institutions responsible for delivering this strategic aim.¹⁹⁴ Such general documents and short statements provide a limited view of the actual ways universities engage their art museums in achieving their goals. Although, pointing out the importance the Whitworth has in the delivery of the University's social impact and emphasising the focus of engaging students, families and under-represented groups from the local community suggests that the two institutions have to some extent aligned their approach to social impact and clarified who their target audiences are.

Lackey emphasises that being a university art gallery means that research and experimentation are extremely important in the types of exhibitions the Whitworth displays,¹⁹⁵ thus appearing to agree with King and Marstine's ideas that such museums are suitable environments for pushing boundaries.¹⁹⁶ She explains that the aim of the Whitworth's curators is to find ways to work with other departments in the University, not only the art history department, to support the institution's identity as a 'creative laboratory' that enables experimentation¹⁹⁷ The aim to

¹⁹³ 'Manchester 2020. The University of Manchester's Strategic Plan'. 2011. In The University of Manchester's homepage [<http://www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/vision/>], accessed 7 July 2016, p. 19.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 20.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Samantha Lackey.

¹⁹⁶ L. King; J. Marstine, p. 268.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Samantha Lackey.

foster interdisciplinary collaboration is also present in the SCVA's strategy,¹⁹⁸ however, experimentation does not appear to be a priority when it comes to composing the SCVA's exhibition programme¹⁹⁹ (though it is present in the educators' approach),²⁰⁰ demonstrating a difference in comparison to the Whitworth. Although there seem to be few examples of recent exhibitions in the Whitworth following this mentality, in 2015 a project took place where the museum collaborated with the artist Cornelia Parker and Nobel Prize winning scientists at the University to make graphene from the graphite taken from the collection's drawings and turn it into an artwork (meteorite) displayed (exploded) at the reopening of the gallery.²⁰¹ It is not clear whether other innovative curatorial collaborations with the University will follow in the future, though the Whitworth's present mentality seems to foster such projects, seemingly supported by a mutual understanding of the two institutions' role in society.

There are more examples of risk-taking approaches that the gallery has developed on its own or with other partners when working with contemporary art. The Whitworth does not shy away from displaying artworks that can be considered controversial or risky in terms of their subject matter or visual language, which is not surprising as the museum's strategic plan states that they 'aspire to have a risk taking, internationally significant exhibition programme.'²⁰² For example, the exhibition *In a Dream You Saw a Way to Survive and You Were Full of Joy* (2016) includes photographic documentation of a performance by Cosey Fanni Tutti that shows her bleeding and lying half-naked on the ground in contorted positions (Fig. 6-7).²⁰³ Lackey says it is important to provide visitors with an appropriate context for looking at such works, however, she believes great art is accessible no matter the format. Also, as there is a wide variety of works on display, the museum's visitors have the opportunity to choose what they want to

¹⁹⁸ 'Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Strategy 2015-2019'.

¹⁹⁹ 'Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts Exhibition Policy', see Appendix I; Interview with Ghislaine Wood.

²⁰⁰ Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Education, Our Approaches. In: Sainsbury Centre's homepage [<http://scva.ac.uk/education-research/our-approaches>], accessed 25 July 2016.

²⁰¹ Cornelia Parker. In: the Whitworth's homepage [<http://www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/pastexhibitions/corneliaparker/>], accessed 28 June 2016.

²⁰² 'Whitworth Art Gallery Strategic Plan 2012-15'.

²⁰³ E. Price. 2016. *In a Dream You Saw a Way to Survive and You Were Full of Joy*. London: Hayward Publishing Southbank Centre, pp. 60-61.



Figures 6-7: Cosey Fanni Tutti, photos of *Action* (Hayward Gallery), 1979, images courtesy of the artist and Cabinet, London.

look at.²⁰⁴ A contemporary art exhibition that raised controversial social issues related to place, politics and identity was *The M+ Sigg Collection: Chinese Art from the 1970s to Now* (2015; see Appendix III), including works by artists such as Zhang Huan and Ai Weiwei. The exhibition also introduced the *On the Wall* series (2002) by Weng Fen (Fig. 8), which shows China during speedy urbanisation. Through powerful photographs of teenagers sitting on a wall, China's accelerated economic, political and social change is presented. Another work depicting China's recent social and economic changes is Cao Fei's *Whose Utopia* (2006) described as 'an emotive film that presents the secret dreams of workers in a regimented light bulb factory.'²⁰⁵ These works approach the social and economic conditions in China through individual experiences, making these complex topics more relatable. The exhibition was one of the first large displays after the reopening of the Whitworth, and as such, seems to have carried a strong statement of the kinds of shows the museum would be exhibiting, also illustrating the museum's focus on South-Asian art. The exhibition had a clear social and political dimension by displaying works that critically comment on the conditions of Chinese society. From this perspective, it can be seen as a discursive exhibition that positioned itself in relation to a specific social context and raised the visitors' awareness about that country, showing the connections between its art and everyday life.

²⁰⁴ Interview with Samantha Lackey.

²⁰⁵ *The M+ Sigg Collection: Chinese Art from the 1970s to Now*. In: the Whitworth's homepage [<http://www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/upcomingexhibitions/msiggcollection/>], accessed 28 June 2016.



Figure 8: Weng Fen, *On the Wall – Shenzhen (I)*, 2002, image courtesy of the Whitworth.²⁰⁶

Although the Whitworth has been open to a wide range of contemporary practice, it has not displayed very young early-career artists in its recent programme. The museum has not made a decision to exclude young artists' works all together,²⁰⁷ but their absence from the latest programme shows that following its reopening a preference has been given to more established names (Cornelia Parker, b. 1956; Cai Guo-Qiang, b. 1957; Thomas Schütte, b. 1954 etc.),²⁰⁸ revealing a similarity with the SCVA's recent programme. This shows that the difficulty of including young contemporary artists' works into prominent university art museums' programmes is present in several places and that the Barber's step to open up to young artists is an example that stands out. Despite this limitation, the Whitworth has engaged underrepresented groups through exhibitions in many ways, for example, by curating a series of its recent displays in their new Collections Centre with members of various communities.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Image from Art Fund's homepage [<https://www.artfund.org/what-to-see/exhibitions/2015/07/01/the-m-sigg-collection-chinese-art-from-the-1970s-to-now-exhibition>], accessed 9 August 2016.

²⁰⁷ Interview with Samantha Lackey.

²⁰⁸ Past Exhibitions. In: the Whitworth's homepage [<http://www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/pastexhibitions/>], accessed 28 June 2016.

²⁰⁹ Interview with Samantha Lackey.

Balshaw explains:

In order to reach a particular inaccessible demographic – older men – for example, a member of Whitworth staff spent significant time with a local care home to understand what was preventing them from visiting the museum. The result was an exhibition curated by men from the home.²¹⁰

Such exhibitions are usually on display for three months at a time.²¹¹ The SCVA's education team also works with different community groups and enables them to curate their own exhibitions. However, these displays are usually up for one evening during a special event or at the end of a workshop in the education studio.²¹² One of the possible reasons why they have not been integrated into the SCVA's recent exhibition programme may be that the centre's curators have not participated in these projects as this could give these initiatives more momentum and support. A possible location for this could perhaps be the East End Gallery which provides a number of spaces for such smaller exhibitions. However, this would need more time and money to execute and would thus be more realistic as part of a longer project. Nevertheless, the Whitworth's commitment to making these displays accessible and giving them a public platform provides an example for the SCVA when thinking about developing their participatory curating further.

The Whitworth's recent practice also provides a potentially helpful example in making sure the curators and educators work in close collaboration with each other. To achieve this, ideas for exhibition projects in the Whitworth must be presented by both a member of the education team and the curatorial team who write a full proposal together before these can be discussed by the Director and heads of departments.²¹³ Although the programming group at the SCVA consists of both curators and members of the education team as well as management,

²¹⁰ M. Balshaw. In: E. Williams, p. 65.

²¹¹ Interview with Samantha Lackey.

²¹² For example, *Your Magnificent Collections* was a public participation project during the exhibition *Magnificent Obsessions: The Artist as Collector* (2015) that finished with the participants gathering and curating a display in the museum's education studio where they displayed parts of their own collection. The display was up for a few hours during the event. *Your Magnificent Collections*. In: the SCVA's homepage [<http://scva.ac.uk/education-research/projects/your-magnificent-collections>], accessed 6 June 2016.

²¹³ Interview with Samantha Lackey.

exhibition ideas are not usually developed in this collaborative way and they tend to come either from the management, the curatorial team or external curators and the centre's educators are invited to start developing them once the programming of a project is already decided.²¹⁴ Overall, the Whitworth's engagement with contemporary art and its programming practice provide several relevant examples from displaying socially engaged contemporary art in discursive exhibitions to including community members and educators in curatorial decision-making processes.

²¹⁴ Observation based on participation in the SCVA's programming meetings between autumn 2015 and summer 2016. Notes in the personal archive of the author of this thesis.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have analysed the programming of contemporary art exhibitions in UK university art museums in order to put the programming practice of the SCVA into a wider context and explore related principles and practical ideas that could be relevant for that museum. The findings show that one of the primary principles followed by all of the three case study institutions, when programming contemporary art exhibitions, is the need to have a strong relationship with the museum's existing collection. Therefore, as out of the three museums, the Whitworth collects contemporary art most actively, this also shows in its exhibition programme that contains the biggest proportion of contemporary art displays. While both the SCVA and the Whitworth point out certain mediums, regions and time periods that the collections and exhibitions focus on, the Whitworth also specifies social and political topics, which the SCVA's policy does not. Yet, these topics are present in the collection and several recent exhibitions have also explored them to some extent, suggesting that the SCVA's engagement with socially engaged art should perhaps be clarified.

There are also programming principles that are related to being part of a university. All of the three museums value exhibitions based on innovative research which enables collaborating with its university. As an extension to this principle, the Whitworth also supports experimentation and risk-taking which are not prioritised in the exhibition policies of the Barber and the SCVA. This makes a noticeable difference in the Whitworth's programme, which also engages more regularly with socially engaged contemporary art. It would be worth considering the usefulness of these principles in relation to the SCVA's contemporary art programme since I have argued in this thesis that exhibiting socially engaged contemporary art has a great potential to create an environment of questioning and debate around contemporary social issues. This can in turn support positive social change, which is one of the key objectives in the Museums Association's vision for museums and is also (in slightly different forms) present in all of the three universities' strategic plans. However, the research has shown that the three museums have rather different relationships to this objective. The Whitworth's exhibition programme appears to be most committed to this ethos, using its displays to encourage debate

on contested issues and engage underrepresented groups. Yet, the Barber and the SCVA's exhibitions are seen mainly as educating people about art history, not bringing about any wider social change. Though, the SCVA's educators' approach has very strong connections to the Museums Association's vision, demonstrating a slight incoherence in the principles that the different departments in the SCVA follow. Thus, if the SCVA wishes to increase its exhibitions' social impact, unifying its policy and practice with the educators' approach and the UEA's strategy as well as encouraging debate through exhibiting socially engaged contemporary art could be helpful ways forward.

In addition to general principles, the Barber and the Whitworth's recent contemporary art exhibitions reveal several practical ideas that have a potential to be relevant for the SCVA. The most significant example from the Barber's practice is its decision to display young regional artists' works with the aim of becoming more attractive to students, collaborating with other institutions and supporting the region's young artist community, which created an access point for a younger audience. This suggests that the SCVA could benefit from a similar approach in becoming more engaged with the local student and artist communities. Investigating the Whitworth's practice has also revealed relevant ideas. The museum has developed ambitious collaborative projects that engage diverse audiences in the museum's activities. This has increased its social impact as well as helped alleviate financial barriers by securing significant grants. As mentioned, another way the museum has increased its social impact is by prioritising contested subjects in both its collecting practice and exhibition programme, exploring the relationship between art and current issues in the contemporary world. The recent high visitor numbers suggest that this has not driven more visitors away than the museum has attracted. In addition, the Whitworth has experimented with participatory curating by developing exhibitions with people from different underrepresented communities and dedicating display spaces for these shows. This demonstrates a real commitment to facilitating multiple voices in curatorial practice. Furthermore, in order to ensure the exhibition programme takes into account both curators' and educators' expertise and that there is a shared agenda, these staff members have been instructed to develop exhibition ideas together. I believe that all of these

examples have a potential value for the SCVA and considering these options in developing its engagement with contemporary art exhibitions can be beneficial.

This research's wider relevance for contemporary art programming in UK university art museums lies in the fact that it has investigated and gathered information about very recent history which is not thoroughly covered by existing analyses. In addition, it also contains information from a variety of primary sources that have not been introduced anywhere else. Thus, this thesis has a potential to be a helpful resource for future researchers who are interested in the programming principles and practice of university art museums and their relationship to UK governing bodies' recent cultural policies.

Appendix I

Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts Exhibition Policy (revised 2016)

Introduction

The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts is one of the most significant university art museums in the UK. It is situated on the campus of the University of East Anglia in the city of Norwich. It opened in 1978 after Robert and Lisa Sainsbury donated their art collection to the university. The museum is situated in an extraordinary building by Norman Foster which was his first major public work and now considered a seminal work of the second half of the twentieth century. The Sainsbury Centre is the largest art museum in the region and serves the university community of staff and students, the city of Norwich and the wider region of East Anglia. Because of its remarkable collections, building and exhibition programme, the Centre attracts national and international attention.

Context and Collections

The Sainsbury Centre collections include works dating from prehistory to the late twentieth century from across the globe. There are a significant number of works by acknowledged masters of European modern art such as Pablo Picasso, Edgar Degas, Francis Bacon, Jacob Epstein, Jean Arp, Henry Moore, Alberto Giacometti, Amedeo Modigliani and Paul Gauguin. These works are displayed alongside major holdings of art from Oceania, Africa, the Americas, and Asia, the ancient Mediterranean, classical cultures of Egypt, Greece and Rome, and Medieval Europe. The Centre holds a notable and significant collection of twentieth century studio ceramics which represents one of the UK's principal collections. Alongside the Sainsbury Collection sit two further major collections: the Anderson Collection of Art Nouveau, and a collection dedicated to Abstract and Constructivist Art and Design. The international perspective of the museum is a defining feature and the three principle themes of the institution are ancient, modern and international art. The display of art across time and place is at the core of the museum's identity and embodies the notion that art is a universal global

phenomenon. The collections are displayed across the ground floor of the building in flexible open-plan spaces juxtaposing works from different periods and cultures. The principle permanent display is called the Living Area and reflects the attitude of Robert and Lisa Sainsbury who believed that art should be viewed, not in isolation, but rather as an integral part of everyday life. They also wished to challenge museum orthodoxy, allowing visitors the freedom to explore works of art without generic prejudicial viewpoints, while creating a relaxed social environment so that art became integrated into everyday experience. Alongside this display is the East Gallery, a flexible collection display area where there is a greater emphasis on thematic, didactic or survey presentations of works from the collections. In addition, works on loan that relate to the collections or artist interventions can be integrated into the displays.

Exhibition Programme and our audience

The Sainsbury Centre organises a changing programme of temporary exhibitions of art historical relevance to the collections and the principle themes of the institution.

The exhibition programme typically relates to, or informs and expands elements key themes of the collections. There is a desire to show the highest quality art, whether it is ancient, modern or international art, photography, architecture or design. There is an ongoing commitment to contemporary practice. We invite our academic colleagues from across the university campus to explore inter-disciplinary approaches to art and culture and look to represent this in our programmes.

As well as exhibiting historical art, we are committed to contemporary art, bringing the work of artists with both established and emerging international reputations to East Anglia. We aim to make our exhibitions accessible, exciting and stimulating to a broad range of audiences including from university students and staff as well as general visitors. The Sainsbury Centre is committed to encouraging visitors to the museum and also to experience the university campus as part of a commitment to public engagement.

We use a broad range of criteria to assess the suitability of an exhibition project which includes the following:

- Popular and accessible
- Collections-based (contains works from the collections)
- Collaboration with the university
- Touring capability
- Unique research
- Relates to the collections
- Target audiences
 - academic students as well as staff
 - general visitors – regional, national and international
 - HE/FE, schools, families, young people

We aim to create a balanced and broad programme consisting of exhibitions that may appeal to a broad audience with popular appeal (blockbuster), as well as more focused projects that we may have a desire or responsibility to programme, or which are the result of a specialist research project. This will typically be reflected in the respective funding stream created to support the project.

The exhibition programme covers the broad themes of the institution – ancient, modern and international art – but there are also specific subject areas that we aim to explore in exhibitions. Modernity and, more specifically, Modernism is the overarching point of reference. The building and the university campus are seminal examples of several phases of modern architecture and design. The programme aims to investigate the effects of modernity on art and culture, the making of art and the circumstances of collecting art. The collections deal in varied ways with modernity in visual culture – either art made in the modern period or art collected through a modern sensibility – notably the way in which the art of many civilisations outside of the European canon were encountered and embraced in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

Exhibitions that explore and expand our understanding of these phenomena but also explore ancient art from across the world are an important area of work.

Exhibitions that explore artistic practice and, in particular, challenge established genres, definitions, and preconceived ideas of art and design practice are encouraged. There remains a strong ethos supporting the idea of the art object and the processes of making art from established practices such as sculpture and sculptural form, painting and drawing, printmaking, ceramics and photography. However we embrace new forms of art practice such as film, video or performance. Design practices and architecture are embraced to create a wider perspective and integrated approach to the visual arts. More specific themes include:

- Twentieth century European Art including the Paris avant-garde and post-World War II École de Paris
- International Modern Art of the twentieth century with a focus on both figurative and abstract art practices
- Post-World War II international abstract and constructivist art including integrated design practice
- Drawing practice
- Ceramic art from post-World War II and contemporary practice
- Post-World War II sculpture with a particular focus on British artists
- European ancient art
- Ancient and classical works of Europe and the Mediterranean region

Ideas that relates to or compliments existing artefacts/objects or that presents strong formal qualities associated with notions of European sculptural form, figures, vessels for example, Oceania, Asia (principally Japan, India and China), Africa (more specifically sub-Saharan west Africa), The Americas, Mesoamerica or pre-Columbian art and Native North American art

- Art, design and architecture from the nineteenth century until the present with a particular focus on Arts and Crafts movement, Art Nouveau, Art Deco, Modernism, Post Modernism including practice that relates to the building and more recent practice

Associated programming

Integrated into the exhibitions is a public programme of education and learning aimed to inform and engage all our audiences. This work aims to build bridges between the curatorial agenda of the Centre, its associated Research Institutes and wider academic and research activity across the university as a whole.

As a university art museum, the overriding aim is to produce scholarly and yet fully accessible programming and reach the widest possible audience regionally, nationally and internationally. We wish to promote and enhance the understanding and enjoyment of the visual arts. We organise a seasonal programme involving thoughtful engagement between people and things: talks, discussions, training and professional development, practical idea and skill-based workshops in gallery and studio, performances and readings, film programmes, and young people's events. We also host academic conferences, subject-focussed study days, and colloquia.

Recent programme

In recent years the Sainsbury Centre has hosted a number of ground-breaking exhibition projects. Recent highlights have included:

- Masterpieces: Art and East Anglia, which celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the university
- Reality, a survey of Contemporary painting in Britain which toured to the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool
- Francis Bacon and the Masters, a remarkable collaboration with the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg

- Alberto Giacometti: A Line through Time, a re-examination of the artist Alberto Giacometti in the fiftieth anniversary year of his death.
- Other projects have included monographic presentations of artists such as Thomas Houseago, John Virtue and Bill Viola, and a series of shows examining the legacy of Art Nouveau including the recent survey of Alphonse Mucha. Thematic exhibitions that relate and inform the collections such as Magnificent Obsessions.

Project development

Exhibitions are initiated and developed by the Sainsbury Centre team and this is often done in collaboration with artists, external art historians, academics, gallerists and other institutions. The Sainsbury Centre aims to tour its programme wherever possible and, on occasion, is the venue for shows developed by national and international partners. The team at the gallery undertakes ongoing research into art historical and contemporary practice to produce a programme of outstanding quality and depth. Proposals are considered by the Programming Group at meetings held monthly.

Exhibition spaces and timings

The temporary exhibitions are held principally in two locations. First, a major temporary exhibition suite of galleries on the lower level which constitutes 820 square metres across four spaces. This is one of the largest exhibition suites outside of UK National museums. In addition there is the Mezzanine Gallery which has 495 square metres of flexible open plan space. There are usually two major exhibitions per year which open in the lower galleries in the autumn and spring. In addition, two projects per year are also housed in the Mezzanine Gallery. In the East Gallery we periodically programme small displays that relate to and inform the permanent collection displays or intervention display. The Sculpture Gardens are also programmed periodically for specific projects. There is a desire to create a campus wide sculpture park for the university and this will expand incrementally. Exhibitions tend to run for between 3-5 months, which is the standard and accepted time frame for the loan of works by national and international partners. Smaller in focus exhibitions/interventions can be short or indeed longer.

Wherever possible, exhibitions are opened to coincide with university terms or public partnerships. The major exhibitions tend to open either in the spring or autumn and are naturally aligned to the art world calendar so that we are able to negotiate and facilitate loans. The Sainsbury Centre has a published Facilities Report outlining the temporary exhibition suite showing that the spaces meet both Government Indemnity Insurance Scheme (GIS) and National Security Advisor standards.

Exhibitions Proposals

The Sainsbury Centre accepts exhibition proposals submitted for the attention of the Exhibitions Coordinator. They will be discussed by the Programming Group and a decision on whether to pursue a project will be taken.

The majority of exhibitions are self-initiated by the Centre but also by direct invitations to artists, curators and institutions. They are typically several years in the planning, not least because most institutions require up to one year advance notice of a loan request.

However, we welcome exhibition proposals from artists, art historians or curators, with a short statement and summary of the proposal with explanation of how it will meet the criteria described in this policy document and how it will be funded. The content of the exhibition should be described, preferably with an illustrated contents list and a provisional budget including projected visitor numbers, economic and social impact, research and education potential. Original artwork should not be submitted, as The Sainsbury Centre cannot be held responsible for work that goes astray. Artists or guest curators who are invited to work with the Sainsbury Centre team to deliver a project will be bound by a contract setting out the agreement by which the project will be delivered.

Due Diligence and exhibition financial planning

A process of due diligence is undertaken by the Sainsbury Centre before any work of art is borrowed and displayed. The Sainsbury Centre adheres to all established national and international standards concerning the loan and display of works of art. We undertake a checklist designed to ensure that all possible checks have been carried out in order to ascertain

that the lender has legal title to the work and to compile a full provenance record to mitigate risk. The Sainsbury Centre is able to provide Immunity from Seizure provision in accordance with UK Government legislation. The Sainsbury Centre aims to retain creative freedom and to produce exhibitions that are innovative, exciting and challenging as well as informative. We also aim not to cause offense, whether morally, culturally or politically, and to be respectful of the views and opinions of our audiences. The Sainsbury Centre team develops exhibition Budgets based on a number of criteria including popular appeal and susceptibility for funding whether through sponsorship or grant. The Finance sub-Committee of the Sainsbury Centre Board monitors the financial viability of the programme and advises the Board.

Appendix II



The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, 2016. Photo from the personal archive of the author of this thesis.



The Barber Institute of Fine Arts. Photo courtesy of the Barber.



The Whitworth Art Gallery after reopening in 2015. Photo by Allan Williams.

Appendix III

Exhibition Views

The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts



Exhibition views of *Reality: Modern and Contemporary British Painting* (2014-2015). Courtesy of the SCVA.

The Barber Institute of Fine Arts



Exhibition view of *New Art West Midlands* (2015), image from: *Redbrick*, the student publication of the University of Birmingham [<http://www.redbrick.me/culture/at-the-university/new-art-west-midlands-exhibition-at-the-barber-institute/>], accessed 29 August 2016.



The Idol Project, Lucy Dore, *New Arts West Midlands* (2015), image from: Lucy Dore's homepage [<http://www.lucydore.com/#!New-Art-West-Midlands-2015/c1mwf/61AB3127-9E7A-4DE9-BBE3-FFFA0606095F>], accessed 29 August 2016.

The Whitworth Art Gallery



The M+ Sigg Collection: Chinese Art from the 1970s to Now at the Whitworth, Manchester. Background *New Beijing* (2001) by Wang Xingwei. Foreground *Artificial Rock No.31* (2001) by Zhan Wang. Photography by Michael Pollard 2015. Image courtesy of the Whitworth.



The M+ Sigg Collection: Chinese Art from the 1970s to Now at the Whitworth, Manchester. Photography by Michael Pollard 2015. Image courtesy of the Whitworth.

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