

Networking international and transnational approaches to contemporary art in heritage practice

Project report April 2025



Arts and
Humanities
Research Council



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01 Foreword

This report presents insights and outcomes from our 2023-25 Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded research project *Networking international and transnational approaches to contemporary art in heritage practice*. Our aim in producing this report is to share learning from the project with the wider international art and heritage sector to inform future thinking and practice. The insights presented here will have particular relevance to organisations that are commissioning and managing contemporary art programmes in heritage sites, or those thinking about initiating future engagement with contemporary artists, including through residency models.

This project is the latest in a series of initiatives reflecting Newcastle University's leadership in research around contemporary art and heritage practice. Previous projects (*On-Site/Off-Site: Contemporary Art and Thomas Bewick at Cherryburn*, *Volunteer Voices*, *All Our Histories* and *Mapping Contemporary Art in the Heritage Experience*) have together: examined the value of contemporary art in heritage places from the perspectives of artists, commissioners, and visitor audiences; considered the essential role of volunteers as public mediators of contemporary artworks displayed in heritage sites; investigated barriers to enhancing diversity within contemporary art and heritage commissioning; and explored how digital technologies might expand opportunities for public engagement with heritage-based art commissions.

In this networking project, we are indebted to the many artists, curators, heritage professionals, and academics in the UK and across the world who generously contributed their time, experience and voices to our events and pilot online research. It has been a privilege to have had this opportunity to meet and work with you all. Our thanks go also to our Advisory Group and our project partners who provided essential challenge and guidance particularly at the start of the project, and also to our two wonderful post-graduate student interns, Haidy Elemesiry and Dina Abdelsalam, who brought indispensable additional web production, research and communication skills to the project team.

We are grateful to the AHRC for the award that made this project *Networking international and transnational approaches to contemporary art in heritage practice* possible and to Newcastle University and the Institute for Creative Arts Practice for additional resource support.

The learning from this project shows that, while further research and financial support is required to deepen our collective understanding of international and transnational practice in this field, our pilot activities have already brought clear benefits to our curatorial colleagues and participating artists, and to heritage organisations in providing new opportunities to share expertise and knowledge and to work together for mutual benefit across national barriers.

02 The Project

Since the 1990s contemporary artists have been commissioned to create temporary, site-specific responses to a wide range of heritage places across the UK - from grand palaces and country houses to historic designed landscapes, industrial waterways, and city cathedrals. While UK heritage organisations such as National Trust, have been enthusiastic and leading proponents of such practice, pilot international mapping research undertaken through our 2017-2020 project *Mapping Contemporary Art in the Heritage Experience* and observations of the sector made since then, indicate that contemporary art in heritage practice is more than just a UK phenomenon.

Reflecting expanded global agendas within the museum and heritage community in the UK, much current art commissioning activity in this sector is concerned with articulations of difficult heritage, including a key focus on artistic and critical engagement with colonial and postcolonial narratives. We have found however that despite this engagement with global concerns, and strong arguments made for diversifying the presentation of heritage, existing academic literature on contemporary art in heritage has primarily focused on the national scene, with little exploration of a broader international or transnational context. It was with this observed gap in knowledge and understanding that our 2023-25 project, *Networking international and transnational approaches to contemporary art in heritage practice*, specifically sought to engage.

Led by Rebecca Farley and Judith King, Senior Research Associates at Newcastle University and delivered in collaboration with UK and international project partners Arts&Heritage (A&H), National Trust (NT), International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC), and the Artist's Studio Museum Network (ASMNW), the project had three core objectives:

1. To start to examine and map national and transnational practices, ecologies, and infrastructures for contemporary art in heritage in a critical and global context
2. To explore and test out new methods for transnational contemporary art in heritage activity
3. To initiate new transnational conversations and collaborations between academics and the contemporary art and heritage sector.

Due to the limited budget available through this strand of research funding the project was designed from the outset as an online-only activity, organised around an iterative programme of Zoom meet-ups, pilot virtual artists' residencies, a small-scale exploratory survey, and a closing online symposium open to all interested academics, artists, curators, and heritage professionals.

Transnational exchange

- Our pilot activity demonstrated strong interest and desire for international exchange around the subject of contemporary art in heritage practice, from within both the arts and the heritage sectors. Overall 146 individual artists, curators and heritage professionals participated in our research networking activities, with representation across 21 different countries.
- Network meet-ups generated significant transnational and interdisciplinary dialogue among participants on subjects ranging from contemporary artists engagement with heritage-based climate change and social justice issues, to indigenous arts practice, community co-creation, questions of artistic and historic integrity, discussion of comparative funding infrastructures and commissioning ecologies.

International practices

- Our pilot online research focusing on the artist's house museum sub-sector identified a mixed set of motivations for investing in contemporary art in heritage programming. These included: ensuring the continuing relevance of historic collections; inspiring and attracting new visitors through contemporary interpretation; and honouring the artistic legacy of historic artists through supporting the work of living creatives.
- Within this sub-sector internationally, temporary exhibitions, artist-led workshop and events were reported as being more common forms of engagement than artist's residencies or commissions, with most activity focussed on working with a national artistic pool rather than inviting participation from artists based outside the country.

Virtual residency model

- Our pilot activity provided a unique opportunity for our four host sites and their selected artists to test out what a virtual residency could offer and how the hosting relationship could be implemented 'at-distance'. These proved a great learning opportunity for both participating artists and heritage hosts, with two sites now considering development of further transnational residency opportunities.
- The virtual residencies proved a time and resource-efficient way for hosts to engage with artists based beyond the UK. They allowed hosts to open-up their sites and object collections to new transnational interpretations, and to do this in a way that minimised the heavy carbon footprint usually associated with international activity.
- Participating artists particularly valued the flexibility provided by the virtual nature of their residencies, which allowed them to develop their residency research alongside other continuing work and family commitments, and avoiding difficulties commonly associated with international visa applications and rising travel costs.
- While all hosts and artists were overall extremely positive about their residency experiences, our pilot did raise some valuable learning points for future virtual residency activity, particularly around: the benefits and negatives of an open research-based residency format rather than an output-driven artist's brief; appropriate levels of resourcing for heritage staff taking on hosting responsibilities especially for heritage sites with little or no previous experience of artist's residency work; finding the best ways to build an on-site and/or online public presence for the virtual residency; issues in communicating the concept of a virtual residency across site teams and externally to wider publics and stakeholders.

04 Online meet-ups



Four meet-ups were organised over the duration of the project, each co-hosted with one of our four project partners. Held via Zoom these meet-ups were designed as the core forum for discussion and exchange among network participants. Post-event, recorded Zoom presentations from the meet-ups were shared publicly on our research project website – allowing access for those who were not able to attend in real-time.

Meet-Up One (7 December 2023) was co-hosted by our UK partner Arts&Heritage and focussed on international discussion around the theme of 'Common Lands', the working title for A&H's creative programme for 2023-25. The event included a keynote presentation on 'Common Lands' from A&H Chief Executive Stephanie Allen and panel conversation led by A&H Director of Projects Marie-Anne McQuay with guest speakers, Charlotte Hetherington (talking from Norway about the artist residency programme she directs at Artica Svalbard), Ukrainian artist Alevtina Kakhidze (via Zoom from Poland) and Victor Marinho (joining us from São Paulo in Brazil to speak about artist-led projects at the social justice organisation Instituto Procomum).



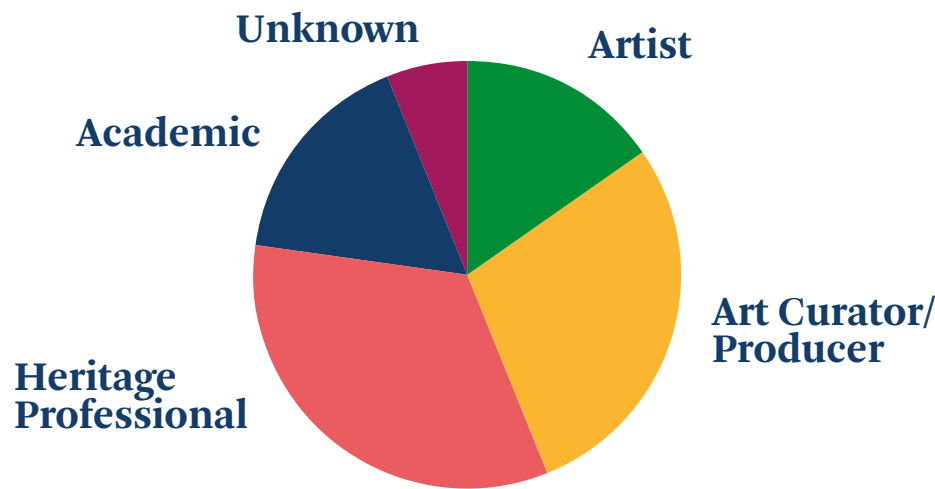
Meet-Up Two (26 March 2024) was co-hosted with our global partner organisation the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC) and explored the theme of community co-creation. Introduced by Linda Norris (Senior Specialist, Methodology & Practice at ICSC) the session heard from the experiences of three guest speakers, US First Nations artist Alex Ponca Stock (based in Tulsa, Oklahoma), US Museum Consultant and Curator Sean Kelley (calling from Philadelphia), and Bangladesh-based artist-curator Asif Imteaz.

Meet-Up Three (16 July 2024) was co-hosted by the Artist's Studio Museum Network and its sister US-based organisation Historic Artists' Homes and Studios (HAHS). Comparing UK and US experiences, this session focused on the question of how artist's house museums (as a particular genre of heritage site) maintain their historic integrity when engaging with contemporary artists. Our speakers for this event were Kate Menconeri, Chief Curator of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site in Catskill, USA, and Gaia Giacomelli, Curatorial Assistant at Cosmic House (the post-modernist London home of British architect Charles Jencks).

Meet-Up Four was co-hosted with the National Trust (NT). Focussing on wider discussion of public realm commissioning and arts ecologies in the UK, Europe and China, the session was introduced by Tom Freshwater NT Head of Visitor Programming, with discussion led by guest speakers Andy Brydon and Alison Brodie, co-founders and creative producers from UK commissioning agency Curated Places, and curator Ying Kwok at Tai Kwun Contemporary in Hong Kong.

Participation in these online events was promoted through a combination of targeted invitations (made through our project partner networks) and by open call. Overall, 146 individuals drawn from 21 countries attended the four Meet-Ups and our closing Symposium (held in November 2024) with at least 30 people attending more than one event. Perhaps influenced by our focus on English language participation, and the timing of the events, the largest attendee groups were either UK or USA based. Participants were a mix of heritage professionals, art curators/producers, artists, and academics.

Event participation (Meet-Ups and Symposium)



05 Sector mapping

In September 2024 we launched a two-month pilot online survey designed to test how we might start to build a picture of contemporary art in heritage activity happening outside of the UK. Set up as a simple to use interface via Microsoft Forms and directed primarily at curators and heritage professionals, our survey asked respondents to report basic information on any temporary, site-specific contemporary (visual) arts activity (including artists' residencies and commissions) that had taken place at their heritage site over the last five years. Reflecting the transnational research interests of our emerging network, we also asked respondents whether their engagement was with artists based in their own countries or internationally with externally-located artists.

An open invitation to participate in the survey was posted online (via the project's research website) and disseminated through our sector partner networks, A&H, ASMNW, ICSC and through new research connections made with HAHS in USA and the global International National Trusts Organisation (INTO).

Our pilot received responses from 31 heritage places, 29 of these being based in the USA, one in England and one in Guernsey, Channel Islands. Of these, 28 were from artists' house museums. Respondents included curators, museum directors, museum development staff and site managers.

Pilot survey response findings:

- Of responding places, 65% (n20) had only engaged with artists from their own country, while 35% had, or were open to, working with artists based abroad
- In responses, activity was balanced equally between commissions or residencies (18% for each category, n12/12) while 35% (n23) ran artist-led workshops, and 29% (n19) hosted other creative activities and events including on-site exhibitions
- Activity covered a wide range of visual artforms including painting (n26), sculpture (n23), photography (n20), installation (n18), print (n17), craft (n15), film/video (n15), performance (n13) and sound-based works (n10)
- Of the 31 responding sites, only 21% (n9) had engaged in online/virtual activity with artists
- Funding sources listed for this work ranged from government or state grants to endowments, charitable and private donations, corporate sponsorship, and visitor' entry/ticket sales.

Follow-up research into the heritage sites participating in the survey revealed a mixed set of motivations for investing in this type of programming: from the desire to support living artists; to ensuring continuing relevance and preservation of historic collections; as a way of inspiring and attracting new visitors through contemporary interpretation; and honouring the artistic legacy of historic artists. In many cases there was a specific desire to connect contemporary artist's work with critical place histories, including with the artistic, political and philosophical themes, questions and issues with which the historic artist had been themselves concerned.

06 Virtual residencies

Aims and objectives

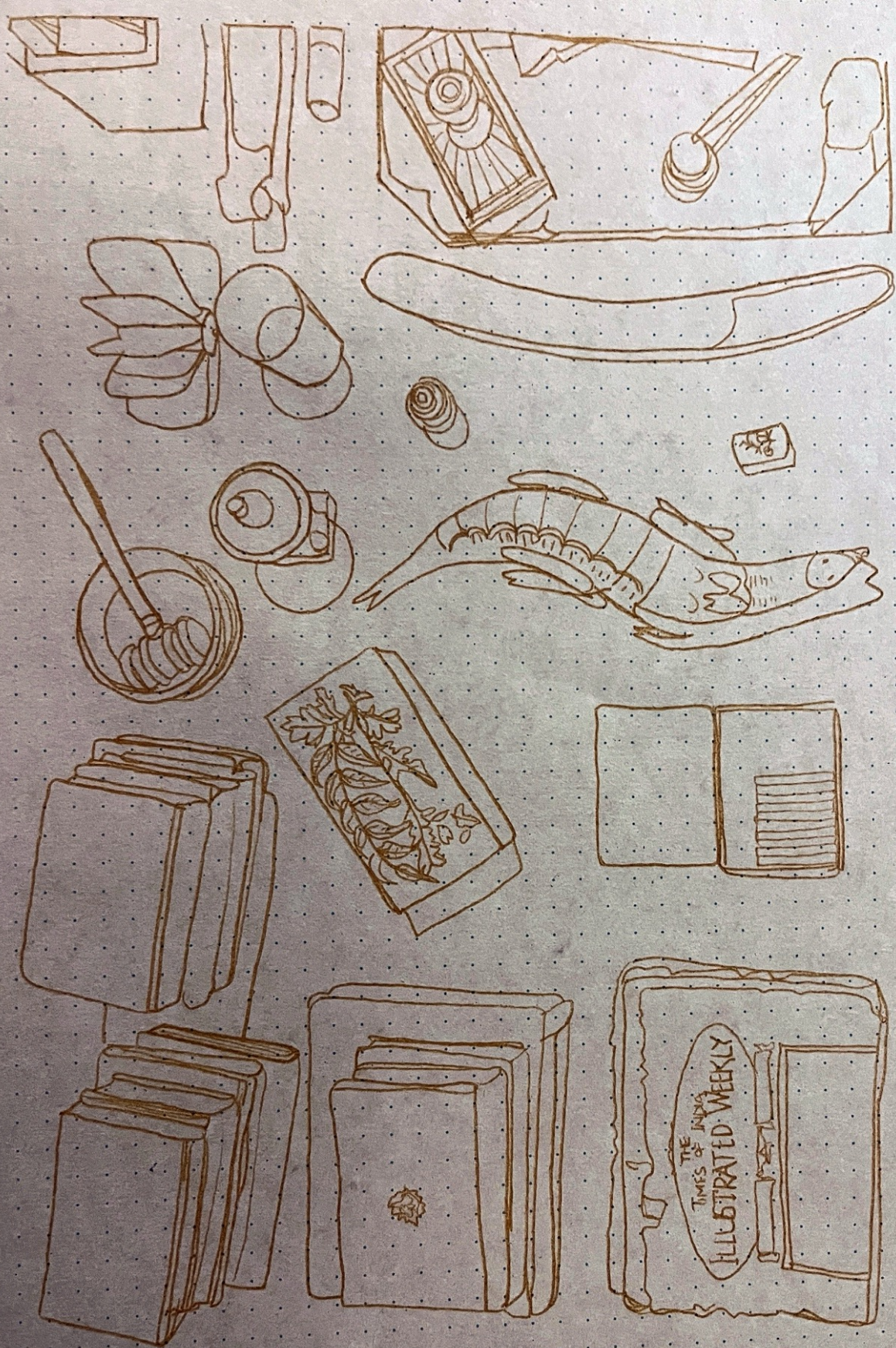
The purpose of the virtual residencies was to test out a potential new model for heritage place engagement with contemporary artists working in a transnational context. Devised collaboratively with staff teams at each participating site, our aim was to provide a flexible 'at distance' opportunity for each residency artist to research and virtually explore their host site, its history and collections, to build up a relationship with site staff and to formulate an initial creative response to their virtual residency experience. The residencies ran for three months from June to September 2024, with each artist paid a fee based on 100 hours of research, studio and host interaction time.

Host sites

In discussion with our sector partners, National Trust, the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience and the Artist's Studio Museum Network, and through a limited open call through these networks, four heritage sites were chosen as hosts for the pilot research – Bateman's, Van Gogh House, 575 Wandsworth Road, and the online museum Afghanistan Memory Home.

Artist selection process

In collaboration with the Newcastle research team, and in line with their own organisational interests and site programming, each host drew up its own artist's brief for its residency. Drawing on suggestions for artists submitted via the research team's curatorial networks and through our project partners, the residency briefs were then sent out to an international longlist of potential artists, inviting them to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) for one (or more) of the virtual residencies. In total 16 EOIs were received, with eight artists shortlisted for online interview with members of the research team and with the prospective residency hosts. Following interviews, four artists were then appointed to the residency programme – one for each of the four host sites.



The Artists

Nidhi Khurana (selected for Bateman's) is an Indian artist and educator based in New Delhi. Her studio work takes the form of drawings, textiles, carpets, prints, artist-books, and sculptures to reflect upon the role of the human within nature. In her recent works she explores her relationship with the natural world by mapping her experiences as cyclical graphs of time, inspired by a diversity in cognitive approaches such as the Australian aboriginal dreamtime, the Mappaemundi, pilgrimage maps, representations from Islamic cosmological diagrams and illuminated manuscripts. Nidhi often uses natural dyes, gold and silver leaf, handmade paper, and silk to document her experience of the world. <https://nidhikhurana217.blogspot.com> Instagram @nidhik2

Yingmei Duan (selected for Van Gogh House) is a Chinese artist based in Germany. Living in Beijing in the 1990s she was part of the Chinese avant-garde, working for many years in the legendary art district of Beijing's East Village. Originally a painter, Yingmei now works primarily in performance, developing her own system of performance art, which also incorporates elements of sound, video, and installation. Besides her solo projects Yingmei loves to work with people from different cultures, ages and areas of life and has realised over one hundred collaborative performance projects. Her artworks, frequently in progress, can stretch over long periods of time. www.yingmei-art.com Instagram: duan.yingmei

Liliya Lifanova (selected for 575 Wandsworth Road) is an American artist based in New York and Portugal. Her interdisciplinary practice is anchored by the idea of the fragment, a metaphor for her identity and a symptom of a broader cultural condition. Working on the fringes of many different mediums she produces paintings, sculptures, performative objects, and garments that are folded together in immersive mixed-media installations and performances that instigate at once the sense of familiar comfort and disorientation, uncertainty. She fabricates and stages her pieces, positioning the viewers amidst a tactile mise-en-scène where literary references are quoted, mistranslated, mispronounced, or misinterpreted –supplying a frame for the formal rituals and choreography invented around the activation of her various objects. www.liliyalifanova.com Instagram: @liliyalifanova

Mohammad Sabir, (selected for Afghanistan Memory Home) is a Hazara artist currently living in London. Born in Kabul, Afghanistan in 1991, in 1996, his family migrated to Pakistan, and during that period he developed an interest in art and learned painting in amateur courses. Sabir returned to Afghanistan in 2001 and continued to study painting in Kabul. In 2021 he was awarded a BA in Graphic Design from Kabul University and became an Assistant Lecturer at the Faculty of Fine Arts at Kabul University. He came to the UK in 2023 to undertake an MA Fine Art at Goldsmiths, University of London. Sabir works across media, creating installations, paintings, objects and intricately patterned works that draw on Hazara culture and their experience as a persecuted group in Afghanistan. Instagram: @moh.sabir_sabir



National Trust Bateman's

The Site

Bateman's is a Jacobean house nestled in the lush heart of rural East Sussex. Originally built in 1634, in 1902 Bateman's was purchased by the renowned novelist, journalist and poet Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) who, born in India and after a lifetime of travelling, decided to make the house his final home. The house held a sense of history and romance that appealed to Kipling as a vision of unchanging England. Surrounded by its large gardens and woodlands Bateman's also offered privacy for Kipling who was already an internationally renowned author when he moved in (*The Jungle Book*, *Plain Tales from the Raj*, and *Kim* being some of his best known works).

Following Kipling's death, in 1939 the ownership of Bateman's and its surrounding gardens was passed to the National Trust (NT). Today the Trust presents the house much as it was left by Kipling when he died, with oak furniture, Persian rugs and artefacts reflecting his strong association with India. The house also contains an extensive library of books collected by Kipling over his lifetime. <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/sussex/batemans>

Residency approach

National Trust Bateman's had not worked with an artist by virtual means before and were curious about how the relationship between the artist and property staff, particularly the property curator, could be developed through Zoom sessions and virtual guided tours. From NT's point of view, the aims of the research residency were quite fluid – to establish new connections between the selected artist and Bateman's 'Spirit of Place'. For NT the 'Spirit Of Place' document aims to distil the essence of a property and for Bateman's this was to focus on 'a place where history and imagination intertwine'. The selection of an artist from India meant that Bateman's staff would see Kipling's identity and narrative from a contemporary and transnational point of view and could explore new ways of presenting the author's life and Bateman's own history in this expanded context.

“We are delighted to collaborate with Nidhi on this exciting project at Bateman's. Not only does it reflect Kipling's enduring connection with India, but it also leverages technology in a manner that we believe he, as an early adopter of new technologies, would have wholeheartedly approved of.”

Freddie Matthews, NT Cultural Heritage Curator

Nidhi Khurana was the artist selected to respond to Bateman's. Based in India, Khurana is experienced in researching and immersing herself in place and history. The Bateman's team met her online and virtually 'walked' her through the house, with curator Freddie Matthews providing in depth information and background regarding Kipling's life, both personal and professional.

“At Batemans we see reflections of the writer's inner world, which in his absence is all we have access to. By inner world I mean the house he inhabited but also the universe in his head, a place for manifestation of thought. I want to reflect on how Kipling's personality was moulded by his time in India as a child. To get an idea of his inner world by reading the stories he wrote.”

Nidhi Khurana, residency artist

This dialogue between artist and NT curator proved to be extremely important to Nidhi, and she cites this relationship as being 'critical' to her thinking and approach. The virtual nature of the residency allowed the artist to focus on context rather than the physicality of the home and led her to discover other aspects of Kipling's life and work including making new connections to Kipling experts in India. Nidhi spent time re-reading Kipling's stories, which were familiar from her own childhood, to grasp how he might have developed them as a response to his own early years in India.

"To dig deeper into the project, Kiki and Freddie took me on a very enthusiastic virtual tour of Bateman's. Freddie was with me on the phone on a video call whilst Kiki took over a hundred photographs of the site and shared these with me. I felt like I had a better idea of the place and I used the photos to recreate the walk around Bateman's in the format I knew best: a photo book, putting it together as I remembered this virtual tour."

Nidhi Khurana, residency artist

Nidhi's residency resulted in the creation of a series of studio drawings and maps that were folded and constructed into a physical book. This book work was later shared with the Bateman's team when the artist had a lucky opportunity to visit England as part of another artistic project.

"The virtual residency format was a challenge initially. I'm used to being physically on-site and talking to people, getting a feel of the place. But I think at some point I did reconcile myself to the fact that I may not be able to go there and to try [instead] to access the place by reading a lot of Kipling's work. By making that photo book it became almost like going to the house. I wanted something tangible that I could see and touch, that would feel like I'm there."

Nidhi Khurana, residency artist



Van Gogh House

The Site

Van Gogh House is a Georgian terraced house in South London, a former boarding house where the young Vincent Van Gogh lived between 1873-1874. This was a formative year for Van Gogh, a time when he was absorbing the art and culture of the city, reading, collecting prints and creating a philosophical foundation for the kind of art he would go on to produce and become famous for.

More than a time capsule of Van Gogh's year in London, the house was established in 2019 as a site of creative production and hosts a programme of residencies, public exhibitions and events that support contemporary artists to make a living in their lifetime. www.vangoghhouse.co.uk

Residency approach

As a small organisation, the team at Van Gogh House (Director of Programmes Anna Bromwich, and Creative Director Livia Wang) were initially nervous about their involvement with the project due to limitations on staff capacity. However as the virtual residency progressed, the House team discovered that they could work with the artist quite independently. Because Van Gogh House already operated as a creative space, the team were very experienced in supporting their residency artist as she researched and developed her ideas.

The artist's brief for Van Gogh House was wide and allowed for artists working from all disciplines to apply. The brief asked the artist to spend time finding out about Van Gogh House and its ongoing artistic programme, and to create a unique response to the house and its creative history in the form of 'a piece of writing, visual response, music, or instruction'. The artist the team selected for the virtual residency at Van Gogh House was Yingmei Duan, a Chinese performance artist now resident in Germany.

“At first we were quite nervous about what a virtual residency would mean. We're so used to introducing people to the physicality of the house, we weren't sure how we'd make this work over the Internet but Yingmei has completely surpassed all of our expectations, and also our expectations around performance art. Anna and I work a lot with performance artists but learning about Yingmei's practice has been a real honour for use.”

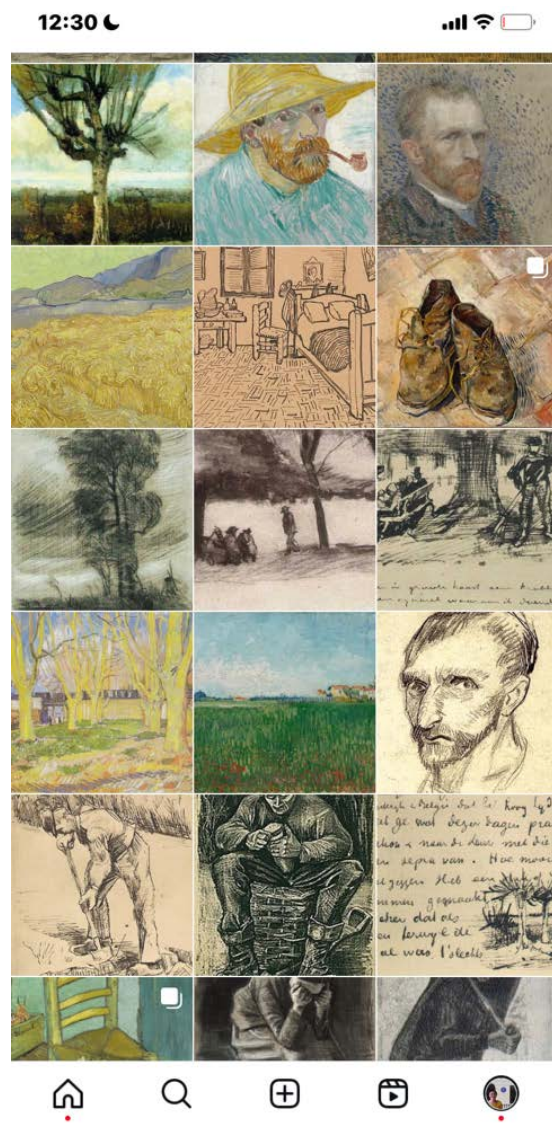
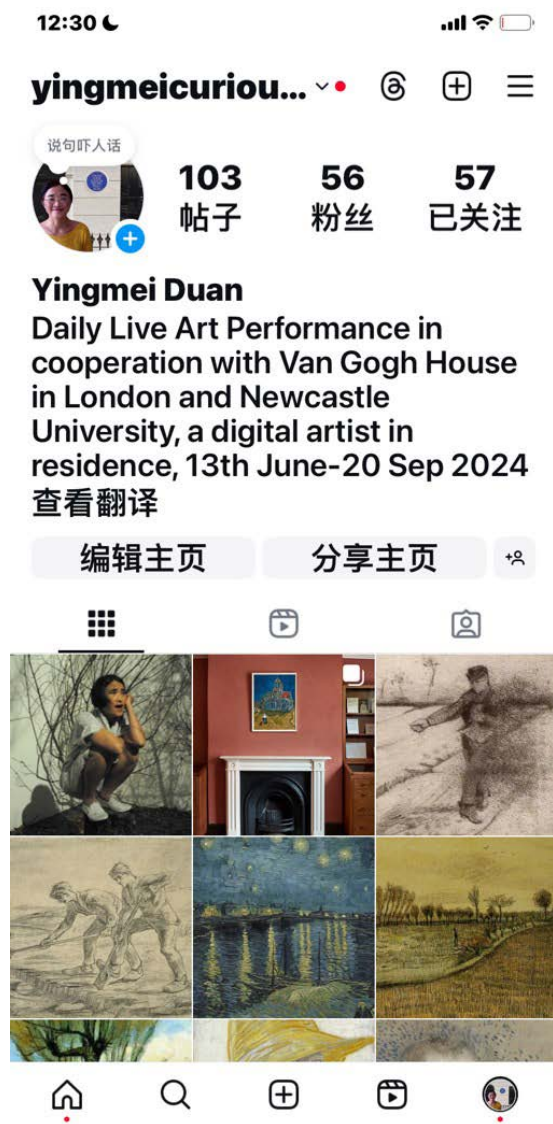
Livia Wang, Creative Director, Van Gogh House

Always attracted to daily routines of creative working Yingmei decided that she would use her 100 hours residency time to dedicate one hour per-day over 100 days to online investigations of Van Gogh's letters, drawings, and paintings – intensively searching these for insights into the artist's personal desires, joys, worries, passions and fears and for emotional parallels with her own creative and family life. Through this work (termed by her as a 'daily live art performance') Yingmei was especially drawn towards Van Gogh's personal relationships with his brother, and with his own loves, and how thoughts of these might have been pre-occupying the young Van Gogh as he sat in his little room in the London boarding house. Each day Yingmei documented her investigations and personal reflections on a private Instagram account, at the end of each week sharing this online journal with the Van Gogh House team who then published it for visitors to read as an expanding blog on their public website.

Yingmei concluded her residency with a virtual performance which was presented online as part of our project symposium.

“If I had been physically at Van Gogh House throughout the residency I might have got distracted. Instead I was afforded the time to fully research online and immerse myself in his life, his thoughts, his relationships. I feel I haven't finished with Van Gogh – another project is always in my mind!.”

Yingmei Duan, residency artist



“I have cherished the opportunity to spend time learning about Van Gogh’s life experiences and artistic development. Van Gogh’s passion, dedication, hard work, and perseverance in art deeply moved me. I feel very lucky to be able to connect with Van Gogh across time and space.”

Yingmei Duan, residency artist



20 575 Wandsworth Road interior (photo: courtesy National Trust)

575 Wandsworth Road

The Site

575 Wandsworth Road is located on the busy Wandsworth Road in South London. It is the former home of Kenyan born poet, philosopher and British civil servant Khadambi Asalache (1935-2006). Asalache bought the house in 1981 and over a period of 20 years gradually transformed his home into a work of art. Prompted by the need to disguise persistent damp in the basement dining room, he initially fitted pine floorboards to the damp wall. He went on to embellish almost every wall, ceiling and door in the house with exquisite fretwork patterns and motifs, which he hand-carved from reclaimed pine doors and floorboards found in skips.

Today 575 is owned and managed by the National Trust and is open to visitors only through pre-booked tours. The house stands much as Asalache left it, with his painted decoration, handmade fretwork furniture and carefully arranged collections of beautiful and functional objects, including pressed-glass inkwells, pink and copper lusterware, postcards, and his typewriter.

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/london/575-wandsworth-road>

Residency approach

The curatorial team at 575 Wandsworth Road already had strong experience in working with contemporary artists as part of its community programme. But a virtual artist's residency was very much a new departure for the team and personally for our NT lead Laura Hussey, 575's House and Gardens Manager, who was especially keen to take on the management of the residency as a professional development opportunity.

The artist's residency brief from 575 Wandsworth Road was written with Laura and was designed to align with 575's already planned 2024 arts programme 'Common Threads' which specifically aimed to enable new connections between the appointed artist, site staff, volunteers, and local communities through explorations of the house's rich textile collection.

“With a fragile interior, and limited physical access to the site, the NT team at 575 is especially interested in how we can foster meaningful engagement opportunities remotely, and this is a unique opportunity to build connections and inspire creativity far beyond our physical boundaries.”

Laura Hussey, 575 virtual residency brief

“During the course of the residency, Laura invited me to appear to be part of the Heritage Open Days, and this was virtual. And there was also a community coffee morning which I attended virtually. There were all these people gathered there which made me think, what is this place, and what does it mean?”

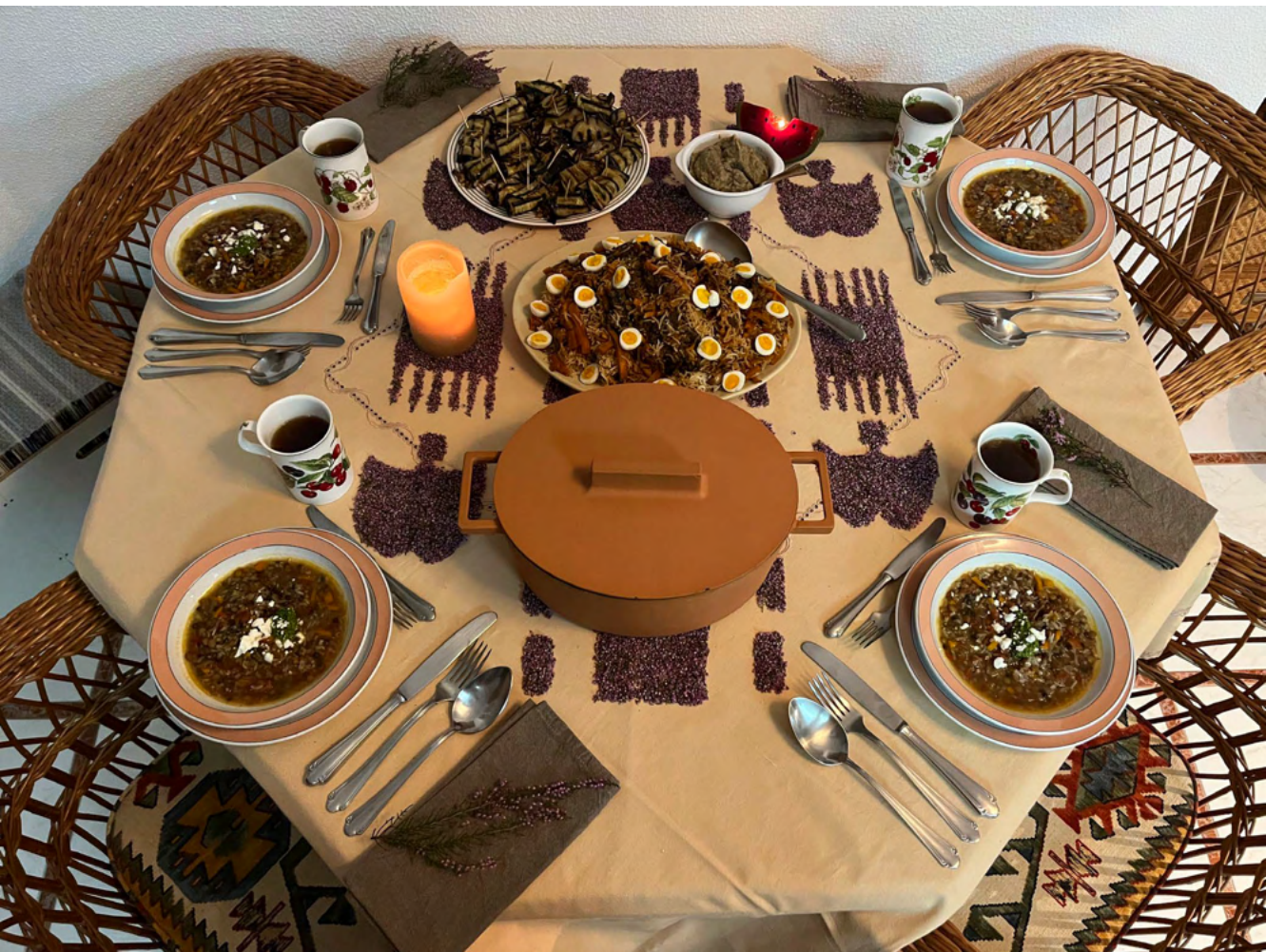
Liliya Lifanova, residency artist

Inspired by this brief, appointed artist Liliya Lifanova quickly became fascinated by one particular textile garment that hung on the back of one of the doors in the house. As Laura guided her on a virtual private tour through the property, Liliya (herself a researcher into Central Asia textile crafts) recognised the pattern on Asalache's house robe as an Ikat fabric – a distinctive design created through a resist dyeing process prior to the weaving of the cloth. Responding to this fabric in her studio (in Portugal) Liliya played with the repeated pattern of the robe's motifs in a series of drawings and paper collages, and as she worked, began to recognise a commonality between her own processes and the cutting techniques employed by Asalache in his creation of the unique wooden interiors at 575 Wandsworth Road.

To conclude her virtual residency at 575 Liliya organised a celebratory meal/performance for invited friends in Portugal producing perfectly curated recipes within an interactive installation inspired by Khadambi. The virtual at-distance nature of this residency was wholly appreciated by Liliya, who regarded it as a very productive and positive experience that continues to have a legacy in new creative works.

“I kept thinking that if Khadambi was here he would encourage me to think outside of a fixed format. So I went back to my books and decided to make a dinner reflecting the cultural crossroads of Central Asia. So I made this seven course, seven dish meal for my friends. I made the table in the pattern of the ikat robe and then there was the dinner. It was quite a big hit. The flavours are extremely strong. It was a big production.”

Liliya Lifanova, residency artist



For Khadambi Asalache: A Dinner Reflecting the Cultural Crossroads of Central Asia,
installation and performance, Liliya Lifanova, 2024 (photo: Liliya Lifanova) 23



Afghanistan Memory Home

The Site

Afghanistan Memory Home is a cultural initiative of the Afghanistan Human Rights Democracy Organisation (AHRDO). Launched in 2023, it exists as a digital museum and online space dedicated to the memory and voices of Afghan war victims. The site contains a vast digital database documenting serious crimes, incidents and victims since 1978. The aim is to provide both a space for remembrance and to ensure that these records contribute to long-term accountability. afghanistanmemoryhome.org

Before embarking on this pilot project AHRDO had previously worked with artists through its international body mapping and memory box work and the team were keen to extend this experience through close connection with the virtual residency artist. For AHRDO it was especially important that the selected artist was aware of the sensitive nature of the archive that is set up to memorialises victims' lives and lived experiences.

“By engaging with contemporary art, we can also present our archives in innovative ways that resonate widely. We believe that art has the power to bridge gaps and build solidarity across borders, which is vital for our mission.”

Nicole Valentini, AHRDO Researcher and Project Manager

“Sabir's work produced during this Residency will be shared widely, not just on AHRDO's social media channels, but also through future publications and exhibitions, and in our museum and digital archives. This collaboration represents AHRDO's continued commitment to engage with the Afghan communities and the global audience in meaningful and accessible ways, using art to illuminate the stories that define Afghanistan's complex history [...] we are committed to giving survivors a platform, whether through the Afghanistan Memory Home, the memory box initiative or collaboration with artists like Sabir.”

Nicole Valentini, AHRDO Researcher and Project Manager

Residency approach

AHRDO's appointed artist Mohammad Sabir has direct experience of living in war ridden Kabul and had previously produced a series of poignant textile and found object works, delicately embossing and painting Hazara embroidery motifs on symbolic items such as bones, trees, clay pots and shoes. Sabir's approach to the virtual residency was to have regular online conversations with AHRDO as he conducted his research into the online archive and museum. In response, Sabir created a series of new paintings that reflected upon the stories and experience of Afghan war victims and his own personal history. He wanted to explore the impact of war on Afghan communities and the attempt to erase Hazara culture. The delicate bleeding of paint alongside the shredding of drawn marks creates a series of silent poignant images that reflect upon the most persecuted and largest ethnic group in Afghanistan.

“When I first engaged with Afghanistan Memory Home I felt a profound sense of connection. This organization is not only preserving critical stories of Afghan lives impacted by the war but it also giving voice to survivors whose experience are often overlooked. Those commitments to documenting these lives and stories also felt deeply aligned with my own mission as an artist. I'm inspired by the way AHRDO has created a space that brings a visibility to those whose stories are often hidden. Engaging with AHRDO's work gives me a renewed sense of purpose and reinforces my belief in the power of art and memory to eliminate the experience of those who have suffered.”

Mohammad Sabir, residency artist



07 Symposium

The aim of the symposium (held on Zoom on 9 November 2024) was to share insights into the ways in which our four experiments with virtual artist's residences had worked out in practice, as experienced by the residency artists and the host site teams concerned. The event also featured keynote presentations from two project partners, Tom Freshwater, Head of Visitor Programming at National Trust and Linda Norris, Senior Specialist at the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience who spoke to contextualise this work within the broader heritage context. The symposium was attended by 59 artists, curators, academics, and heritage professionals, including participants from Israel, Singapore, Trinidad, Turkey, UK, and the USA.

To expand this dialogue we invited independent curator and art writer Holly Willats to act as a reporter for this event. The following text is her commentary on the symposium discussions.

It is clear since 2020, that remote and virtual ways of working have become more accepted and widespread; however, it is still a very new approach and in terms of artist residencies, it is unestablished and relatively unknown territory. This poses an exciting area for exploration and testing, particularly in providing the means for a more transnational approach to working with artists in heritage settings. This is something that researchers Rebecca Farley and Judith King, at Newcastle University, wanted to consider as part of the Transnational Art in Heritage Network that they set-up in 2023 supported by funding from the Arts & Humanities Research Council. As part of this networking activity they sought to investigate the potential of virtual residencies: what opportunities do they offer and how can this be expanded upon?

When thinking about what a virtual artist residency can be, it is hard not to compare it to an in-person residency and therefore see it as lacking. It recalls the well-known saying, 'comparison is the thief of joy', and so I think it is best to see the virtual as not attempting to replace in-person residencies but instead offering something in addition to. As Tom Freshwater said in his keynote, working virtually can be really exciting and should be embraced; in particular as an opportunity to work transnationally, and with communities anywhere.

The virtual residencies allowed the four host heritage organisations (of differing scale and capacity) to be less constrained by financial limitation or geography, and to work with artists based all over the world, allowing

for international exploration. To be able to encapsulate such a scope of experience and artistic practice is hugely exciting for a project with a very modest budget.

Despite being an international research project that covered a wide geography, its methods greatly reduced its impact on the environment. A virtual residency is not without any carbon footprint considering the amount of data used for emails, online storage, video calls, etc. but by not incurring any physical travel – air miles, train, car – it is a significant step forward. Particularly for a sector that piles up carbon emissions on a daily basis whilst being requested by funders to make big changes towards a more environmentally sustainable approach to project delivery.

Residencies can also become more accessible if done virtually. Often residencies are only compatible with a select group of artists who can be away for extensive periods of time; but a virtual residency means that artists with caring responsibilities, people with jobs, families, disabilities, illnesses, mobility and access needs can take part, able to shape the opportunity around these responsibilities and requirements. In addition, artists can continue to work on other projects alongside their residency. The host curators found that they were surprised at the possibilities of these virtual residencies and what the artists were able to do. Except for AHRDO, which is currently an online museum, the curators realised that they were so used to introducing artists to the physicality of their buildings and collections that it was a challenge to approach hosting in a new way.

Experiencing an artist's practice virtually offers not just a new experience for the curators involved, but also for the audience. This different approach to hosting creates space to reconsider what an artist can offer an audience, and how to share their experiences and stories with people beyond a physical space. 575 Wandsworth Road for example, has a maximum of 2,000 visitors a year as the building is small and fragile, and Laura Hussey (House and Gardens Manager) wants to play with how the public can experience the house beyond its physical boundaries. Working with artist Liliya Lifanova was a way of doing this and tested out new approaches to engaging virtually with audiences. 575 programmed several online events to encourage interactions, including an artist talk, virtual tour, and panel discussion, all of which were also good experiences for the artist, giving further ways to connect to the site and have dialogues with staff and visitors.

In the hope that it would bring less pressure, it was emphasised at the start of the project that the focus was on research and not on commissioned outputs. The artists could focus on relationship building and not feel they had to achieve something in particular. However, several

of them did create works and commented that making these tangible artworks made them feel closer to the site, even as if they had been physically there.

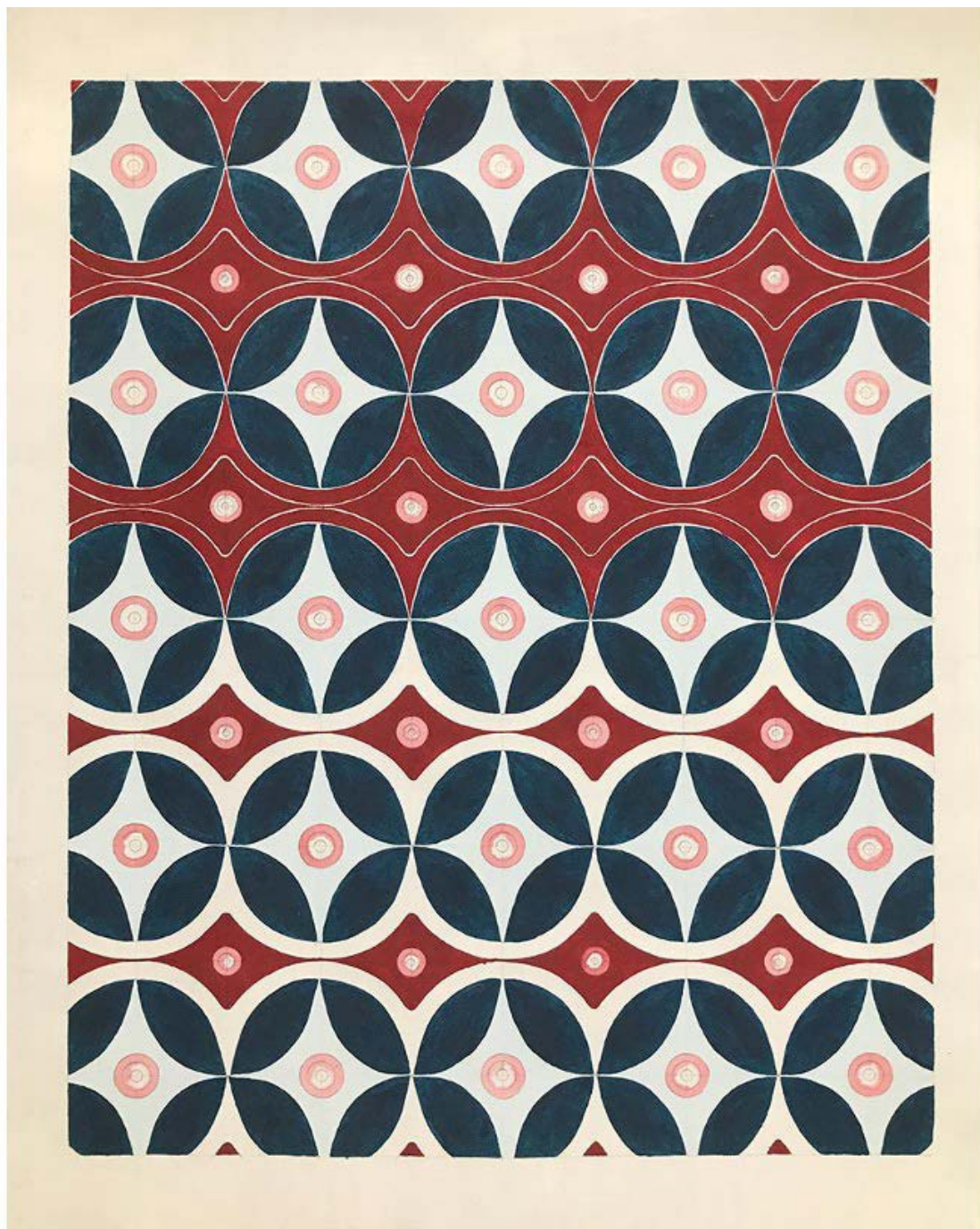
In her presentation Anna Bromwich from Van Gogh House commented on how a residency relies on the host site to have an object archive or collection, or a digital archive, for there to be resources for the artist to explore. Van Gogh House does not have this and as a result usually works with artists who have an interest in the stories of the people who have passed through the building, or the local communities surrounding the organisation. Yingmei Duan's response was therefore quite unusual for them, in that she was drawn to the personality and career of Van Gogh himself, rather than the domestic history of the house.

Laura Hussey shared videos of herself walking round 575 Wandsworth Road with Liliya, as if to give the artist a personal tour of the building. Creating such content is a really nice way to engage the artist more with the site and to offer some understanding of the physicality of the property. Sharing resources and information in this way could be a lot of work for the curator though and may prove problematic when heritage teams are often small and working close to capacity.

As Linda Norris commented during her conference keynote, failure and risk should be embraced when working with artists, but this can be hard with heritage sites. There is a lot at stake in terms of representation and so taking new approaches to storytelling, sharing and engagement can be extremely challenging and can sometimes go wrong. But going back to the idea that this unestablished mode of creativity is exciting and opens the prospect of new, accessible and transnational exchange, I hope that fear does not hold it back and that more virtual residencies and artist projects will be programmed by heritage organisations.

Holly Willats is an independent curator and writer, and the Director of Art Licks. She lives on the North York Moors where she runs artist residencies in a remote dale. <https://www.artlicks.com/>

To view and listen back to the presentations made at the November 2024 symposium please visit <https://research.ncl.ac.uk/transnationalartinheritagenetwork/>



Networking international and transnational approaches to contemporary art in heritage practice was set up as a small-scale pilot project designed to test the waters for interest in developing an international conversation around this subject. The research team have been pleased and excited by the high level of interest and the wide international spread of participation in our pilot networking events. Feedback from these activities suggests that there is a strong appetite to continue these transnational conversations, and we are actively seeking ways in which this 'proto' network might be developed and sustained in the future.

The project team is especially delighted with the success of the four virtual residencies as a methodology for generating transnational collaboration between artists and heritage places. From an initial proposition it has been fascinating to see how these have unfolded in practice. Here we would like to commend both the artists (Nidhi Khurana, Yingmei Duan, Liliya Lifanova, Mohammad Sabir) and their host sites (Bateman's, Van Gogh House, 575 Wandsworth Road, Afghanistan Memory Home) for rising to the challenge of conducting a residency purely through remote means and for embracing the risks that such experimental and open-ended activity inevitably entails. We hope that the examples and learning points presented in this report will provide a stimulus for the trialling of future virtual residency opportunities and practice models.

In terms of the project's ambitions in starting to map the international terrain of art in heritage practice this is an area of research that requires significant more resourcing. Our pilot has made a start on this, particularly in relation to the picture in the USA surrounding contemporary artists engagement in the artist's house museum (thank you HAHS members!) but we know that there is so much more to learn – both about the international context for art in heritage programming and in terms of the potentialities of transnational activity. To borrow from Tom Freshwater's words given at our project symposium, expanding contemporary art in heritage practice beyond national boundaries creates a positive new entanglement between artists and heritage places and one which provides fertile ground for new creative collaboration and exchange.

Report written by: Rebecca Farley & Judith King

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Front cover: *Bateman's House* (cyanotype and silver on paper from the series *Blueprints of another time*), Nidhi Khurana, 2024

Back cover: *Bateman's Wallpaper* (gold, silver, drawing and aquarelle pencils on dotted paper) Nidhi Khurana, 2024

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