



THE
NATIONAL
GALLERY

AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (CDP) studentship:

London's National Gallery and the 'Centre of Empire', 1824-1924

Start date: 1 October 2021

Project Overview

While Britain's traditional rivalry with continental Europe, not least France, is well documented, what has more recently been recognised is the constitutive role of empire in the development of modern Britain (Hall et al, *Legacies of British Slave-ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Modern Britain*, 16). Crucially, empire played an important but under-examined role in the emergence of public art galleries. Most obviously, imperial profits—from slave-owning, mining, and the management of Britain's global empire, which during the nineteenth century extended across most of India and large parts of Africa, Australia, etc.—contributed to the accumulation of vast individual fortunes, some of which was invested in significant art collections, parts of which entered the public domain as gifts or bequests. While the project acknowledges that The National Gallery's collection was restricted to the acquisition and display of western European art, it aims to shed light on the fact that the Gallery's history has its own particular connections to the British Empire, and that its collections have been shaped by colonialism in ways which are not yet known or understood.

Research questions

The student will be encouraged to formulate their own research questions and approaches but the following are potentially rich lines of enquiry worth considering:

- What are the imperial legacies hidden within the history of The National Gallery?
- How significant was empire to the formation of the Gallery's collection?
- Specifically, which of the NG's donors, trustees, patrons and sitters in its British portrait collection had tangible links with the British Empire? How pervasive were those links?
- What were those links? Particular emphasis is placed on tracing sources of wealth used to acquire art collections, either inherited or self-made, derived from the 'business of empire' (including slave-ownership, banking and marine insurance, colonial management, employment as army officers, surveyors and surgeons).
- Are there any patterns or networks of individuals associated with particular colonies (e.g. plantation owners with interests in the West Indies, or Company Men with links

to India) that can be identified among the individuals associated with the Gallery's history?

- Is there anything distinctive about the art collected or donated by collectors with significant links to the West Indies, India, Australia, South Africa or other former British colonies?
- What is the significance of the siting of the new National Gallery building in Trafalgar Square in 1838, at a time when its symbolic role as centre of an empire was being forged?
- To what extent have these imperial legacies at the National Gallery been lost from institutional memory, and how might this loss be rectified?
- How might such British imperial legacies be communicated in an open and meaningful way to diverse audiences at The National Gallery today, not least to engage new audiences?

Additional training and development Opportunities

Alongside training provided by Birkbeck, University of London and The National Gallery, sector-specific training will be offered through the consortium of museums, galleries and heritage organisations affiliated with the AHRC CDP scheme.

A range of professional opportunities will be discussed with the student throughout the project which would enable their research to address the colonial legacies of the Gallery's collection with wider audiences. There are a wide range of exciting and pertinent activities that the student may wish to pursue to foster encounters between paintings in the Gallery's collection, members of the public and specialists. Projects may include (but would not be limited to): interpretation, data training and inputting, research with the Scientific department, and/or exhibition research.

- **Closing date for applications:** Friday 14 May 2021, 2pm
- **Deadline for references:** Monday 24 May 2021, 2pm
- **Interview date:** w/c 24 May 2021
- Only complete and timely applications received, with both references, can be considered.

For more details visit:

<https://www.bbk.ac.uk/student-services/financial-support/phd-funding/ahrc-cdp-national-gallery>