



## Reframing art: Opening up art dealers' archives to multi-disciplinary research

### Introduction

#### Project team:

- Alan Crookham (alan.crookham@ng-london.org.uk)
- Dr Stuart Dunn (stuart.dunn@kcl.ac.uk) (PI)
- Laura Noble ([laura.noble@ng-london.org.uk](mailto:laura.noble@ng-london.org.uk)) from November 2019
- Dr Barbara Pezzini (barbarartpezzini@gmail.com) to October 2019
- Valentina Vavassori (vale.vavassori@gmail.com)

#### Project description:

The focus of our project, which builds on several strands of existing work in digital art history carried out by the team, is the relationship between the circulation of works of art and their archival information, and how these relationships can be explored and enhanced using digital analysis. Our project addresses and expands this investigation by researching archives as multivariate networks of information.

This project stems from work we have already done together. The pilot of Reframing Art was a collaboration between the Department of Digital Humanities at King's College London and the National Gallery, funded by the Cultural Institute at King's. In this, three members of the team, Stuart Dunn, Barbara Pezzini and Alan Crookham (with the collaboration of King's College Digital Lab) established a proof of concept based on the stock books of Thos. Agnew and Sons (Agnew's).

Agnew's were a principal firm of London art dealers who held some of the most significant European pictures, such as Velazquez's *Rokeby Venus* (London, National Gallery) and Rembrandt's *Nicolaes Ruts* (New York, Frick Collection). Their stock books (held at the National Gallery Archive), contain much detailed information about the works of art and their sales. In the pilot project a sample of the stock books of the years 1894 and 1895 was digitized and turned into structured data in a Django framework and enhanced with biographical and geographical research. A preliminary article for *British Art Studies* by Barbara Pezzini and Alan Crookham focused on the econometrics of Agnew's activities and their trade with the United States of America (Pezzini and Crookham, 'Transatlantic Transactions: British Art in America', *British Art Studies*, June 2019). Reframing Art has revealed a wealth of geographical, social and personal relationships between the dealers and their buyers and sellers, and formal network analysis is a fitting methodological development to enhance and interpret the data collected.

#### Timetable:

##### 2020

Jun onwards: Project meeting [virtual to be held monthly]

22 Jun: Virtual gathering of NA+DAH projects

Jun-Aug: Data analysis work; network analysis on identified art works

31 Aug: Submission to special Issue on "Computational Archival Science" of the ACM Journal on Computing and Cultural Heritage

2021

Jun: NA+DAH workshop/symposium

## Research Investigation

Research questions:

1. Can we identify "taste trend" (i.e. buyers' preference) using network analysis?
2. What kind of spatial narratives can we identify?
3. Using social media analysis, what significance do the works of art under examination have in the contemporary digital world and how do visitors interpret them?

What do we want to measure?

1. Measure changes in time of purchases of certain artists by buyers
2. Measure what relationships we can map between museums and the market (degree, clusters).
3. Test Bourdieu's 'Distinction' (theorization of taste) and Field Theory (theorization on disciplinary boundaries/connections)

The scope of the research investigation will focus on a selection of art works and the networks in which they exist.

Data: data on sales has now been compiled for 1874-1875, 1894-1895 and 1910-1911. We also have inventory data for the National Gallery in a spreadsheet. All artist data is linked to Getty ULAN and further enhancement work could be undertaken, e.g. linking buyer's data to VIAF, this work would benefit from library resources when these become accessible again. Network analysis of data, visualisations: edges = (1) number of sales; (2) amount in pounds sold; nodes = (1) artist; (2) buyer with integrated nationality and types of supplier categorical attributes; (3) artistic movements, e.g. British historic; (4) genres (5) artworks.

For Social Media analysis, two datasets on Twitter were collected between November and April: tweets which mention National Gallery Artworks and tweets which mention the Rokeby Venus as an example of an art work which maintains significance in the contemporary world. The choice to create two distinct datasets has been made because the Rokeby Venus is considered so famous and emblematic that it does not need spatial coordinates to be recognisable. All the artworks mentioned in the tweets which cite the National Gallery have been identified and associated with Artist and Genre. The Rokeby Venus tweets instead have been analysed using InfraNodus, an open source tool which calculates word frequencies and visualises relationships between keywords as networks. The visualisation therefore shows how the artwork has been currently interpreted and according to which narratives.

Methodologies: A combination of data analysis and contextualization via archival evidence.

Network analytic approaches: Sampling a selection of art works and placing these within networks. We would use some of the well-known artworks found in our data sets, e.g. *The Execution of Lady Jane Grey* by Delaroche and *The Abduction of Europa* by Rembrandt. In social media the Delaroche has been used by Hong Kong protesters and artists; it is also used a lot for the Getty initiative

"Represent artworks at Home". Another painting that has developed a social media presence and passed through Agnew's is Titian's *Tarquin and Lucretia*, which has become a symbol of the Me Too movement.

Due to the complexity of our interests and data, the edges and nodes have been structured in a modular way in order to create multiple visualisations and deal with multimodal networks. The resulting networks are "snapshots" of different periods of time. The original idea was to create a network based on temporal intervals but because we have selected three different time periods, a continuous temporal element would have been a limited and inaccurate visualisation. Treating them as timestamps instead proved to be problematic due to the complexity of the network.

Preliminary conclusions: To be worked up for August article.

### **Project Management**

The transcription and enhancement of the data has progressed very well to the extent that we now have three complete periods of time to analyse (1874-1875, 1894-1895 and 1910-1911).

Barbara Pezzini left the team to take up a new position in October 2019. We were very sorry to lose Barbara's expertise on Agnew's. Laura Noble joined the team in November 2019 and has since made excellent progress on transcribing and enhancing our data sets.

The project has suffered from a lack of face-to-face contact as the team was located close to one another. We have not been able to have a face-to-face meeting since February. The COVID-19 crisis has also diverted attention away to other management tasks.

### **Looking Ahead**

Questions for the summer:

- Expanding data sets, e.g. National Gallery inventory? What are the benefits/disadvantages?
- How might we aggregate data better, e.g. Knoedler stock data and Agnew's stock data?
- How should we treat missing data? Missing data are currently included in order to give as complete a picture as possible. Gephi integrates a Non-NULL filter, however, the visualisation is quite cluttered.
- How do we best contextualise network analysis?
- Can we integrate time in a better way?
- How can network analysis be reimagined, so that an artwork is viewed as a as a network of styles, places, ideas, people, rather than as part of a network?