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## **British Art Network Seminar Displaying Art in Domestic Settings**

**Monday 13 July 2015, 11.00 – 17.00**  
Gainsborough's House, Sudbury, Suffolk

The British Art Network brings together professionals working with British art from the 16th century to the present day. The aim of the network is to contribute to the sharing of expertise, research and ideas across cultural organisations; to enable improvements in curatorial skills and collection knowledge; and to foster greater collaboration between partners leading to enriched understanding and enjoyment of British art for audiences across the UK.



Thomas Gainsborough  
Giovanna Baccelli, Exhibited 1782  
Oil paint on canvas  
Purchased with assistance from the Friends of the Tate  
Gallery 1975  
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Historic house museums and galleries face the shared challenge of how to display their collections to the visiting public. Ensuring that these kinds of spaces are used to their best advantage – both practically and intellectually – is not always straightforward.

Organisations like Gainsborough's House, which are recognised as the birthplace or home of an artist, face the additional question of how to display and interpret that individual's work in a space implicitly connected with their life, or what we know of their biography. Potential strategies may include the re-creation of period rooms or domestic studios to create an immersive visitor experience; alternatively, the historic setting may be approached more neutrally, as a more conventional museum or gallery space.

This British Art Network seminar brings together curators and academics who have had to deal with some of these issues in a variety of contexts. Programmed by Mark Bills, Director, and Peter Moore, Research Curator, at Gainsborough's House in collaboration with Martin Myrone, Lead Curator pre-1800 British Art, Tate.

We will select a number of attendees to complete evaluation forms following the event. Once you have completed an evaluation form you will not be asked again at future events.

## Programme

10.30-11.00 Welcome tea and coffee on arrival

### 11.00-12.30 **Session One**

11.00-11.20 Welcome and Introduction to the seminar and *The Painting Room* project at Gainsborough's House by Mark Bills, Director, Gainsborough's House

11.20-12.10 Tours of Gainsborough's House (delegates will be split into two groups)

Group One: Mark Bills, Director of Gainsborough's House

Group Two: Peter Moore, Research Curator, Gainsborough's House

12.10-12.30 Q&A and group discussion chaired by Mark Bills

12.30-13.30 Lunch will be served in the Hills Room

### 13.30-15.00 **Session Two**

13.30-13.45 Giles Waterfield

#### *The Picture and the Room*

From fresco to illusionistic painting to overmantel to free-standing work of art, the role and position of the painted surface within an interior evolved over many years. In the eighteenth century such paintings arguably became increasingly independent of the interiors in which they were placed, but this process of liberation (if it can be so styled) was a gradual and hard-fought process. This paper looks at a handful of eighteenth-century interiors and considers the evolving role of the painting in these spaces.

13.45-14.00 Kate Retford

#### *The Heart of the Home: The Hearth in Eighteenth-Century British Portraiture*

The hearth has long been at the heart of the home: the focal point of a room; a site and symbol of warmth and hospitality. As such, it is a prominent feature in many eighteenth-century conversation pieces, in which families and friends are often shown clustered in domestic settings, enjoying card games and/or drinking tea in front of the fireplace. This paper will consider the representation and significance of the hearth in these portraits, together with the relationship between the common picturing of this architectural element and the fact that many of these paintings were, themselves, displayed on chimney breasts.

14.00-14.15 Kim Clayton Greene

*Understanding the display of prints in the Nineteenth-Century home.*

This paper will examine several contemporary paintings of the Victorian domestic interior that include the print, contrasting their depiction against contemporary domestic advice writings. It will also consider the display of the print in the house museum/stately home today and how this relates to the author's historical and archival research.

14.15-14.30 Martin Myrone

*William Blake's 1809 Exhibition*

In 1809 the visionary poet and printmaker William Blake (1757-1827) held a one-man show of his 'Poetical and Historical Inventions' in upstairs rooms above his brother's hosiery shop in Golden Square, Soho – the house they had grown up in. The show was a disaster; only a single, viciously critical, review was published in the press, and it was very poorly attended, to the artist's profound dismay.

This paper will reflect on modern attempts to reconstruct and interpret the exhibition, the questions of methodology these raise, and on the organisation and reception of the in-focus display about the 1809 exhibition held at Tate Britain in 2009.

14.30-15.00 Panel Q&A and group discussion and chaired by Peter Moore

15.00-15.20 Tea and Coffee will be served

15.20-17.00 **Session Three**

15.20-15.35 Jenny Hand

*The House of his Dreams: Reimagining The Munnings Art Museum*

In 1919, when Sir Alfred Munnings found and bought Castle House, near Dedham in Essex, he called it 'the House of my Dreams'. After his death in 1959 the house was opened as a museum, a 'shrine' to his talent, by Lady Munnings but in the subsequent decades the museum was often criticised for not promoting access to the artist's work. A recent change in the governance and staffing of the museum has brought about an entire redisplay of the artist's home for the 2015 season. This talk gives an overview of the interpretation opportunities and obligations faced by the curatorial team as well as some of the practical issues they encountered during the rehang.

15.35-15.50 Michael Huijser

*The strength of intangible cultural heritage*

“The intangible cultural heritage is transmitted from generation to generation, and is constantly recreated by communities and groups, in response to their environment, their interaction with nature, and their history. It provides people with a sense of identity and continuity, and promotes respect for cultural diversity and human creativity “(UNESCO). Michael Huijser, executive director of Rembrandt House Museum and advisor Council for Culture for the Dutch Government, will explain the importance of the intangible for the lifeline of a contemporary heritage museum.

15.50-16.05 Nigel Walsh

*Nothing ‘of serious historical or artistic interest’  
Temple Newsam House, Leeds*

When Grayson Perry’s series of tapestries ‘The Vanity of Small Differences’ appeared in the rooms of the South Wing of Temple Newsam House in the autumn of 2014 it was the first time since the war years that contemporary art had featured at this Elizabethan-Jacobean house. Director Philip Hendy’s embryonic plan when he took the house on as part of Leeds City Art Galleries in 1937 had been to move it away from it being a ‘habitation of ghosts’ to it being a gallery for modern art : ‘The Art Gallery has yet to be built which is as beautiful as the English country house..’. Post-war, and after Hendy’s departure for the National Gallery, the agenda changed markedly, and in the 70 years that have elapsed the decoration, furnishing, and acquisitions of objects following general principles of repatriation under successive directors and curators have led it assume a position as one of the leading country museums in Britain.

16.05-16.20 Simon Martin

*Historic and Contemporary at Pallant House Gallery*

Pallant House Gallery is a unique mixture of a Grade 1 listed Queen Anne townhouse and a contemporary extension designed by Colin St John Wilson and Associates. This presentation by the Gallery’s Artistic Director will discuss the evolving curatorial approach, from the original historic house displays to the current more nuanced and flexible approach to presenting the ‘collection of collections’ of Modern British art and the programme of site specific contemporary installations.

16.20-16.50 Panel Q&A and group discussion chaired by Martin Myrone

16.50-17.00 Final comments and closing from Mark Bills

17.00 Event closes at Gainsborough’s House.