



**The VARI Pilot Project
2014 - 2015
AN ALBUM**

The V&A Research Institute (VARI) Pilot Project has been supported by a generous grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation



A history *of an* **OBJECT** *in* **100 worlds**



Running from January 2014 to December 2015, The V&A Research Institute (VARI) Pilot Project used the Victoria and Albert Museum's Textile and Fashion Collections –and the recently opened Clothworkers' Centre at Blythe House– as a testing ground for new models of collaborative, object-based research at the interface of history, theory and practice.

We set up our pilot activities across a range of platforms in order to explore methods and formats. These include traditional academic conferences; collaborative and cross-disciplinary research workshops; experimental 'labs' devoted to making and thinking things; hands-on 'object lessons' presenting projects, processes and practices that constitute research in the context of a museum collection; an informal 'Thinking Things' reading group for V&A staff and V&A/RCA History of Design students; and a series of 'object pitches' by staff from across the Museum helping us identify the ideal object of focus for the exploratory project 'A history of an OBJECT in 100 worlds'.

All these activities are charted on our dedicated website (www.vam.ac.uk/vari) under the VARI 'fruit-machine' banner –reinterpreted here on the album's cover pages–, an animated surrealist 'exquisite corpse' spelling out V-A-R-I with objects from the collection and evoking collaborative exploration and creative production based on unexpected combinations and serious play.

This album is a memento of our VARI Pilot, reflecting on the journey so far, celebrating the projects we've started, documenting the events in which we've taken part and recording the relationships we've built along the way. Inspired by the early modern 'album amicorum' – essentially a cross between guest book, yearbook and Facebook– this multi-author 'friendship album', is a compilation of entries by friends and colleagues who have taken part in the Pilot Project. It should provide a window into the wonderful intellectual and personal exchanges that we've had on this journey.

VARIously Yours,
Lina Hakim, Marta Ajmar and Bill Sherman



making a space between museum and academia

connecting history, theory and practice

participant communities

experimental research

learning through objects

innovative educational programmes

a lab for making and thinking

opening up exhibiting practices

learning from conservation

multi-media production

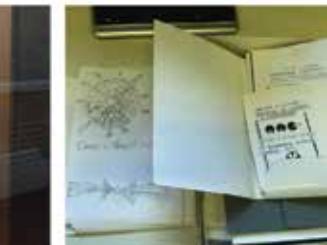
seeing with our fingers

Marta Ajmar





Giskin Day



*Step Blythely
through portals,
to press and pattern -
the threads of ideas
a tapestry of inspiration*

GISKIN ♦ IMPERIAL COLLEGE
DAY ♦ LONDON

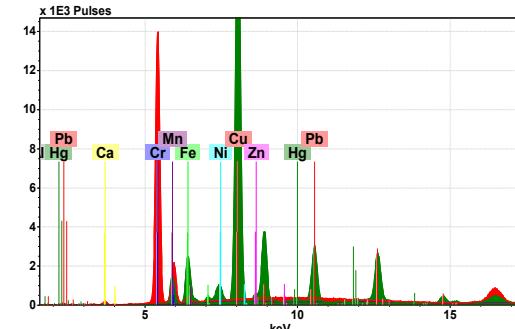


Joanne Hackett

The Cigarette Shoes: What Makes them Silver?
Examination, X-Ray, XRF Analysis, Trade Literature Search, Word-of-Mouth and Still No Answer.



Joanne Hackett ACR, Dr. Lucia Burgio and Paul Robins. V&A



XRF spectra from the shoe (files T97-1988a/b).
Chromium (Cr) was the predominant element on the silver finish of the shoe (red trace) but small amounts of iron (Fe) and calcium (Ca) were also seen. The brass coloured heel (green trace) contains copper (Cu) as main element. Lead (Pb), manganese (Mn) and iron (Fe) and small amounts of zinc are also present.

This pair of Charles Jourdan shoes from 1979 (T.97 and a-1988) with silver leather, clear PVC straps, and copper alloy heels, were made by a process where the dried and unfinished leather is sprayed with an adhesive, pressed with a foil, and then cured until the foil is stuck down. Trade literature from Dunmore for their Dun-Tran and Dun-Aura transfer films describe a very fine foil applied to a 25 micron thick carrier film which is pressed onto leather pre-treated with an acrylic latex base with a heated platen press. What exactly the metallic foil is made from remains unclear, as the leather on the Charles Jourdan shoes failed to register a significant metallic components when examined by XRF.

Dunmore Corporation. *Dunmore Dun-Tran & Dun-Aura. The Gold Standard of Transfer Films.*
<http://www.dunmore.com/products/metallic-transfer-films.html>

Personal Communication via E-mail. Paul Evans, Senior Lecturer in Leather Technology, University of Northampton, U.K.

Thank you V&A and VARI for creating the breeding grounds from which Bill Sherman and Lina Hakim galloped straight into our hearts.

Forever honoured to have been part of the pilot project,

Hande Akcayli

Murat Kocyigit

Rozi Rexhepi

V&A Digital Design Residents 2014

T-Shirt Issue





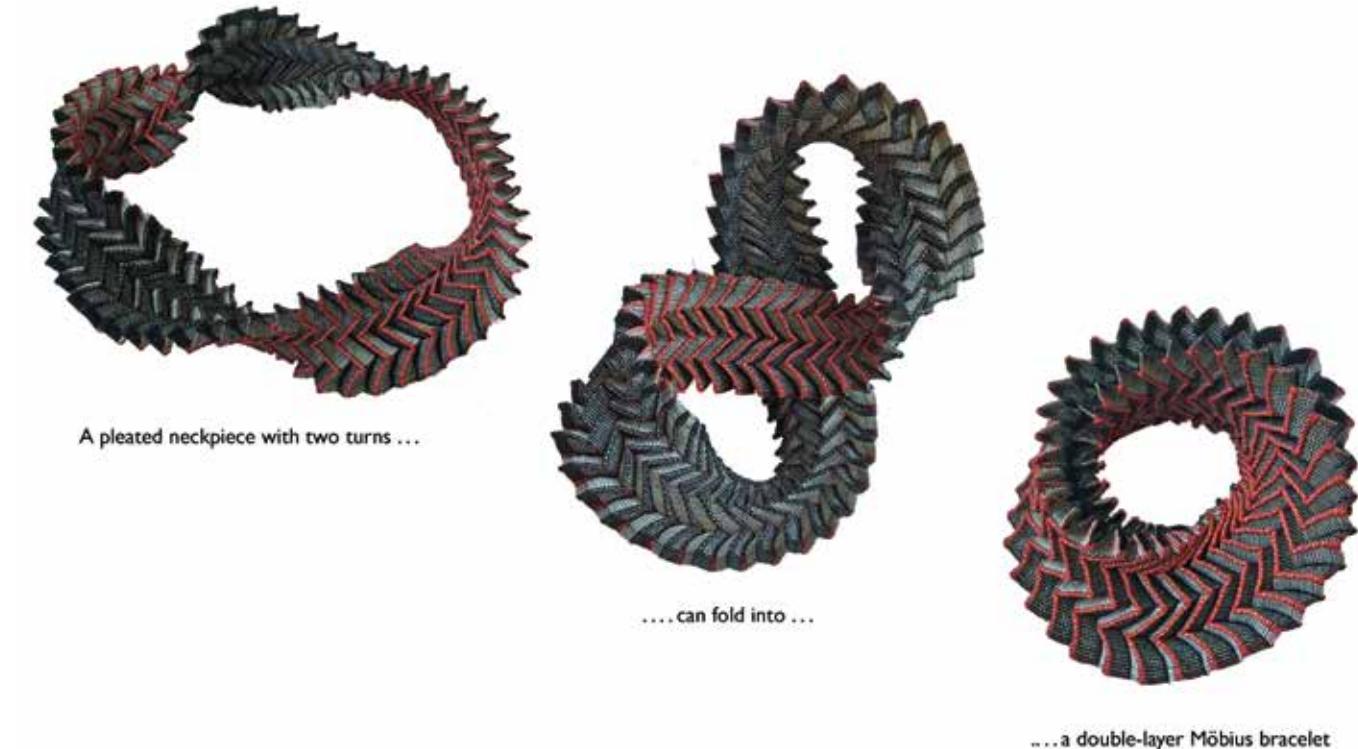
John Styles

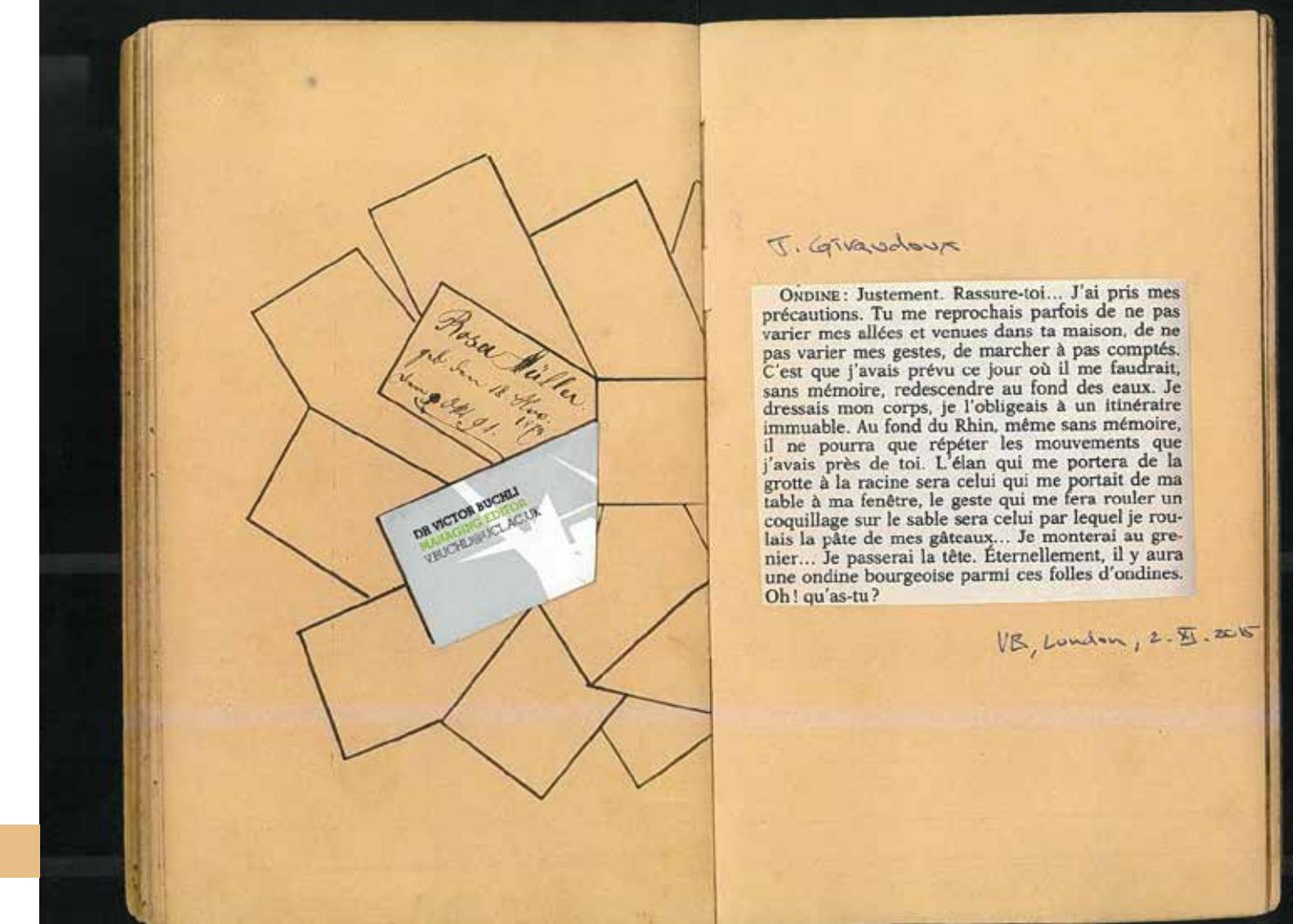




I've had some great experiences during the VARI project, with access to wonderful textiles and expertise both from the V&A staff during the workshops and also the many participants in the spinning day run by John Styles. Another high point was being able to see Jane Harris's beautiful pleated fabric in the flesh, after only seeing photographs for so many years. I've also been very glad to meet Lina and get to know of her work on scientific objects that have become playthings. When we all visited the Science Museum to see the textile machinery, it was a pity there was not time to also see the gallery with surface models, Möbius strips and other strange objects – perhaps these provide the most fun there is to be had with mathematics. Textiles work rather well for exploring curious mathematical surfaces – I know that hyperbolic planes have been constructed using crochet and the mind-blowing Klein bottle has been rendered in knitting! In my own work I've enjoyed playing with the Möbius strip, using its half turn to make neckpieces that lie attractively on the body. Talking to Lina got me thinking about another entertaining property of the Möbius strip that I'd neglected up until now – when cut along its centre, it does not separate into two pieces but instead forms one long strip with two complete turns. Working in reverse, a long double-twisted strip can, of course, be folded up to form a Möbius strip. I've found that this is a good way to make a neckpiece with two twists, that can transform into a double-layer Möbius bracelet. So thanks Lina!

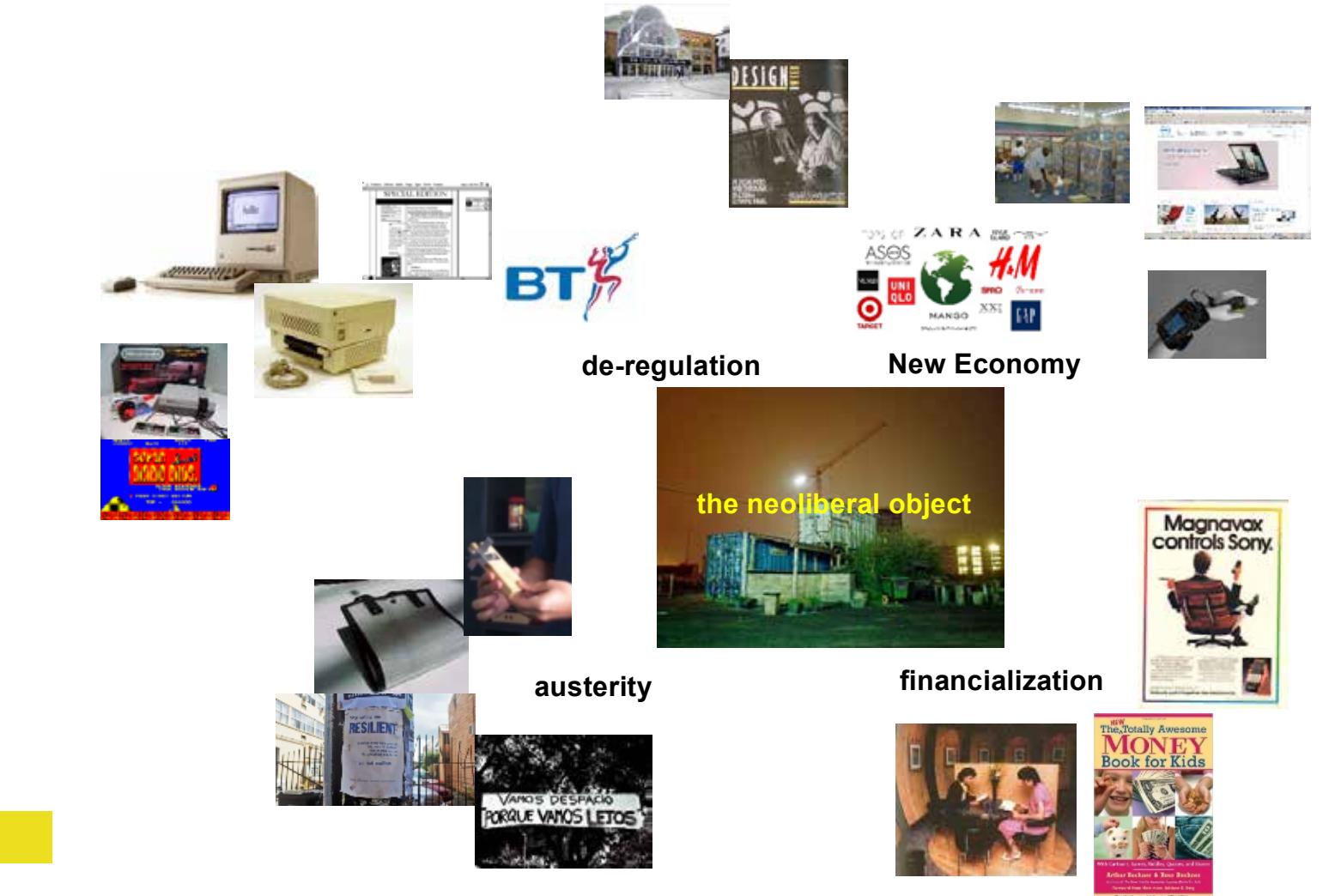
Ann Richards





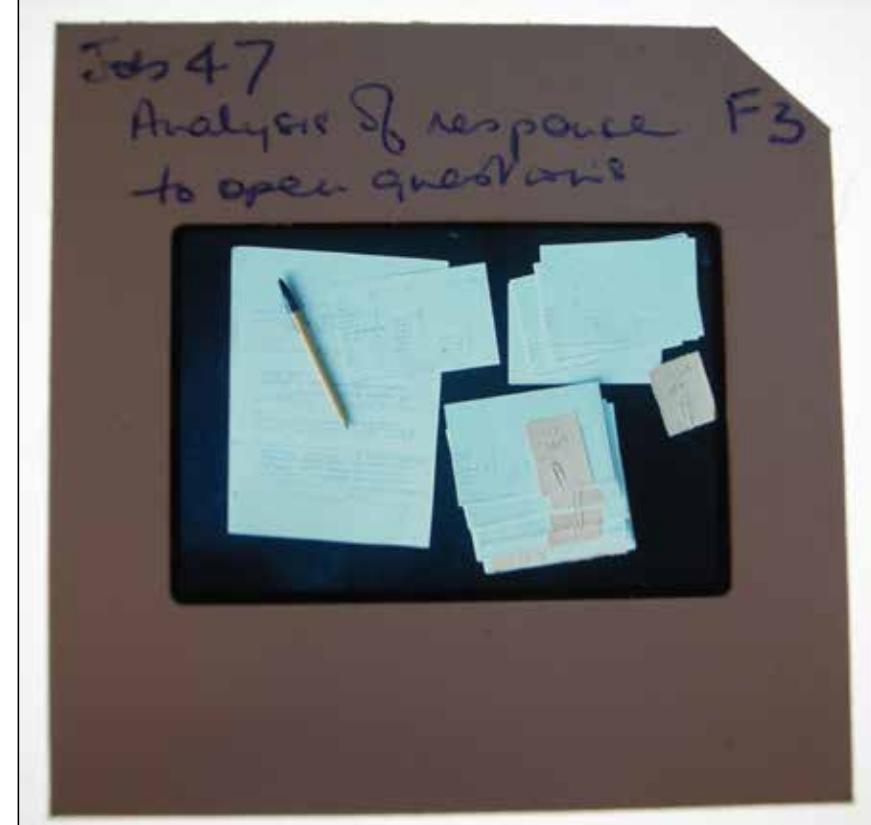


Guy Julier





Tobie Kerridge



Guide to the Archive of Art and Design
Royal College of Art 192
Department of Design Research
Records ca 1960 - 1986
ca 5,000 files
Reference AAD/1989/9
BOX 2 - slides of research jobs, researchers, promotional material
Slide from Job 46



The VARI participants hand-stitched a nine patch block using light and dark fabric squares to emphasise the design of the patchwork block. The arrangement of nine squares in a block is one of the simplest quilt patterns; one that goes back to the early nineteenth century. The nine patch design was often used to teach children to sew and was a favourite for utility quilts. Several fabrics had been pre cut into a particular sized square or patch and participants made a selection of nine patches while considering the placement of their dark and light toned patches. Each patch was carefully marked with a seam allowance and then the patches were hand sewn together in rows of three using a small running stitch. Many participants, both male and female, expressed difficulty in mastering the specific fine motor skills needed to stitch the fabrics together and through practical experience gained a better understanding of how a patchwork quilt is made and what decisions and adjustments have to be made along the way. Later, a small hanging was made from some of the completed blocks. We had hoped for more finished blocks to make a proper utility nine patch quilt but lacked sufficient numbers!

Caroline Wilkinson & Linda Le Pard







Roger Kneebone

Sewing two patchwork squares together

Q: It's not rocket surgery, so how many ways can a surgeon get this wrong?

A: At least three ...





Victoria Broackes



Revolution by Alan Aldridge from *The Beatles Illustrated Lyrics* (1969)

You Say You Want a Revolution

Records and Rebels 1966 – 70

The lyrics of the song, 'Revolution' by The Beatles, form the basis of the title of a new exhibition Geoffrey Marsh and I have been developing which will open at the V&A on 10 September, 2016. Taking the perspective of some of today's challenging questions as our starting point, and covering the cultural, political, musical and social revolutions of the late 1960s, we look forward to revealing the finished exhibition to the public next year. It has been fantastic to work on this exhibition alongside the supportive environment of the VARI pilot project.



Edwina Ehrman

Working with Students:
CSM Fashion History and Theory BA project for Vionnet, 2013/14

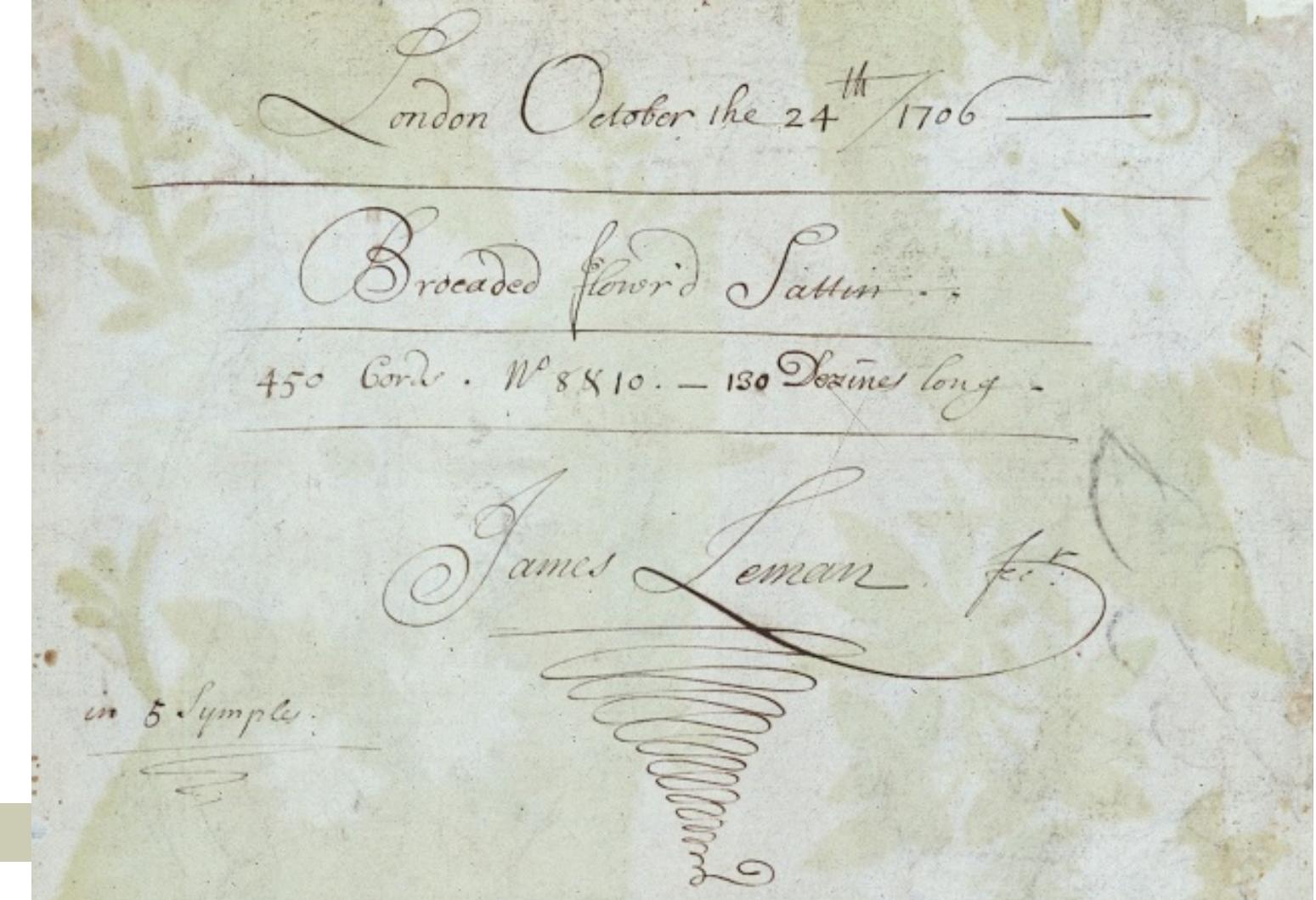


Studying and describing objects and their condition at the Clothworkers' Centre



The exuberant signature of one of the heroes of the VARI project, while still a teenage apprentice weaver to his father, but allowed to try out his already clearly apparent talent for silk designing.

Clare Browne



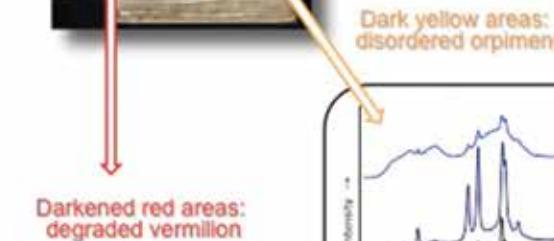


Lucia Burgio

Lucia Burgio
Science Section,
Conservation Department

Can science help understanding
the Album better? YES!

The scientific analysis of the Leman Album



- Evaluate the state of the object (conservation and storage issues)
- Identify the artists' materials – compare them with what was available and used at the time
- Were textile dyeing materials used rather than watercolour materials?
- Help to reconstruct the original appearance of the patterns





Jane Rutherford





Victoria Button



'A Compendious Account of the Whole Art of Breeding, Nursing, and the Right Ordering of the Silk-Worm Illustrated with figures engraven on copper: whereon is curiously exhibited the whole management Of this profitable insect.' Thomas Boreham. Pub. 1732



Colour: fabric dyes / artists' pigments

Layers...
Patterns of use...
Patterns of damage...
Patterns...



Margot Finn



**There was an unbound album by Leman
The curation of which was a demon!
By VARI alone
Could curation be done,
The unbound old album by Leman**



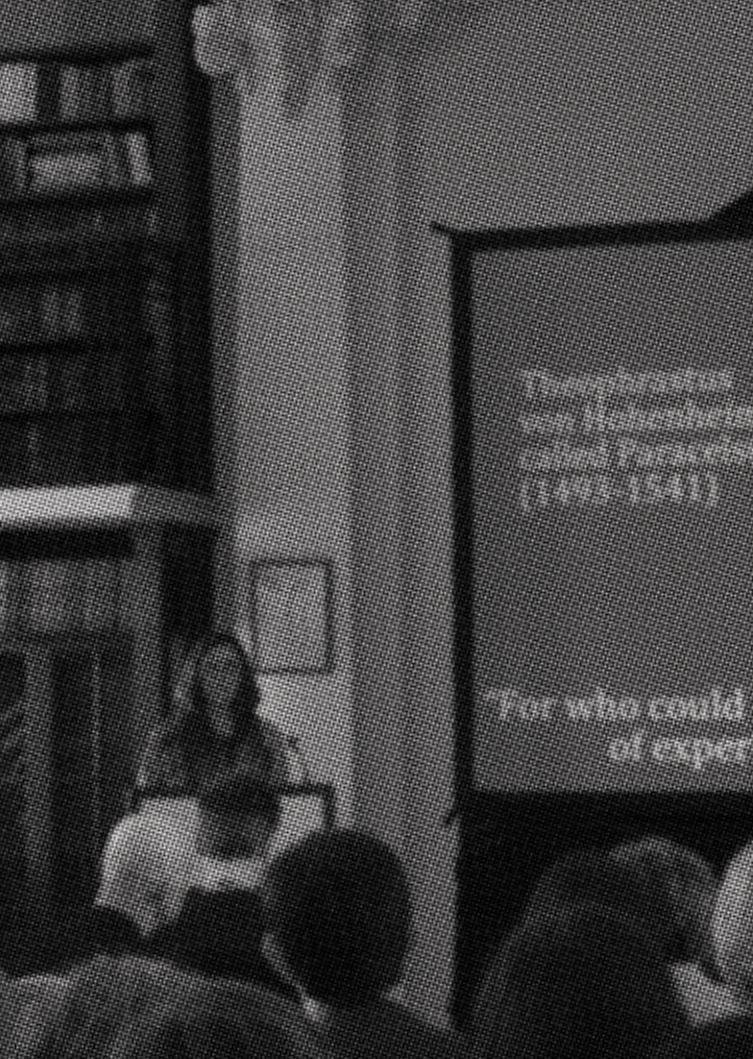


*For my VARI friends worth 1000
stitches (actually 6400 pieces
stitched together).*

Giorgio Riello



Bed hanging: Patchwork of printed cottons, linens, and fustians, and some examples of embroidered cotton, Made in England, c. 1730-50. V&A: Given by Major Harlowe Turner 242 to G-1908



Pamela Smith

THE **MAKING & KNOWING** PROJECT
CONGRATULATES THE V&A ON THE
CREATION OF VARI

THE WORLD WILL BE A BETTER PLACE

The Making & Knowing Project

Lab Seminars



Reconstructing the 16th-century workshop of BnF Ms. Fr. 640 at Columbia University

Welcoming and engaging - as a bit of an outsider (and a slightly intimidated one too), I was warmly welcomed, and engaged with and felt I could make a contribution and I came away with lots of thoughts whizzing through my head both personal and professional.

Professionally I thought how do we make all these incredible collections at Blythe House more visible and accessible so they can stimulate reaction in others as I have just experienced. Sir Roy Strong's comment from 1979 came to mind:

Surely Blythe Road—which is a marvellous building—should be not just a dumping ground but an exciting new complex for the public.

Personally, those intricate medical tools from Wellcome stick in my mind for their perfect match of form and purpose, and despite seeing many hundreds of them in store at BH on that day I saw them with new appreciative eyes that has stayed with me. They are no longer just forceps or tweezers, but beautifully crafted instruments.



Collaborative working is a management mantra often spouted (and not always followed), but on those VARI events I really felt that everyone was working together bringing their varied backgrounds, disciplines, specialisms, and approaches together for a common purpose.

It was great to meet a maker hero (being able to chat to Vicki Ambery-Smith about her work and how she makes it was a joy for me, I'm a fan and wearer of her work).

Glenn Benson





Sandra Kemp



"I venture to think that this tea service may be regarded as a link in the chain of circumstances leading to that great exhibition which sowed the seed for the beginning of the South Kensington Museum, originated by the Prince Consort ..."

Henry Cole, *History of a Tea-Cup and Saucer*, 1878



Lisa Skogh



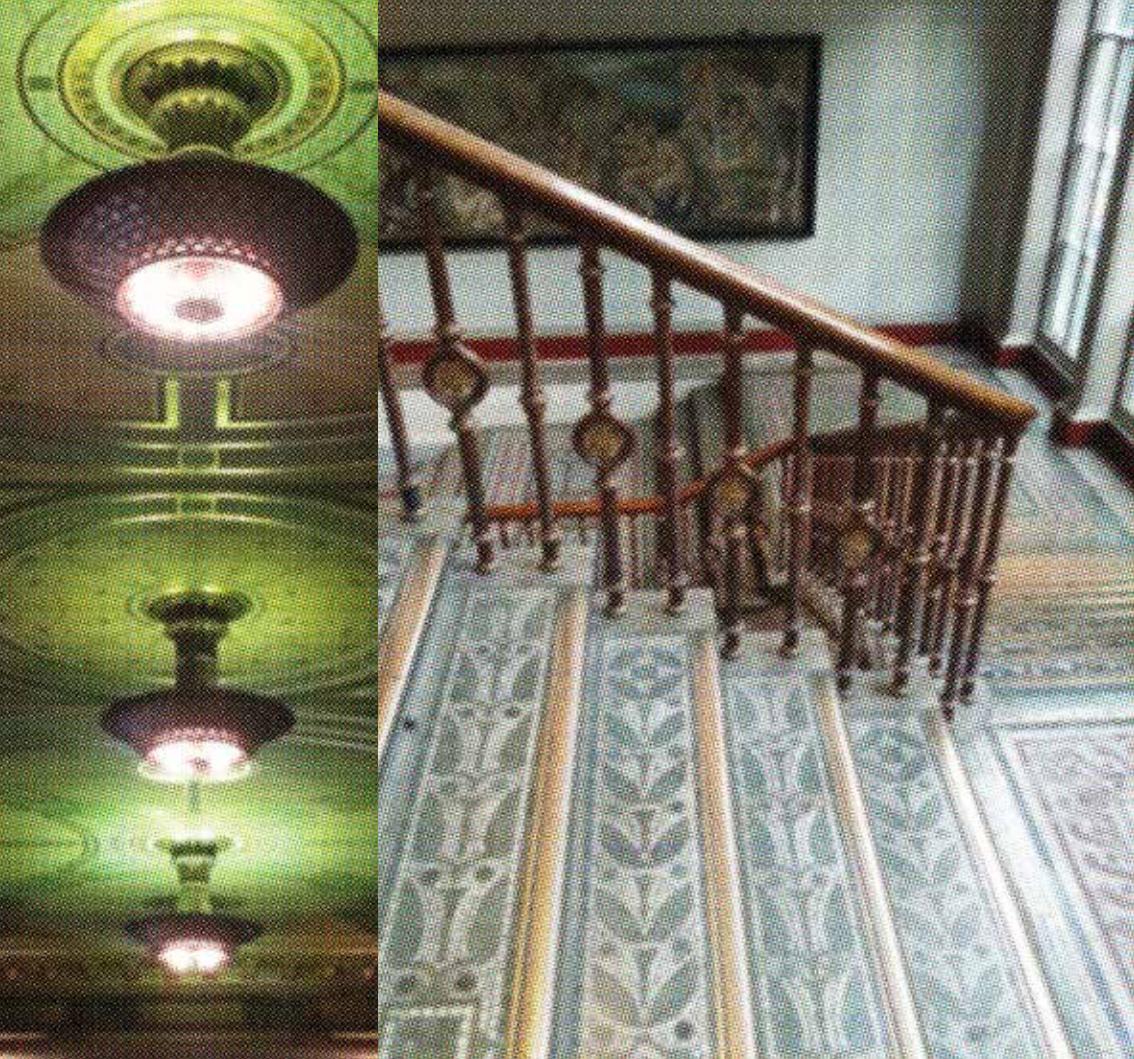
Shawl
c.1805

Shawls were useful accessories for the light muslin dresses fashionable in the Regency period. They could be arranged to imitate classical drapery and kept the wearer warm. Luxurious shawls imported from India were popular and inspired slightly cheaper British imitations such as this one. British weavers adapted their floral motifs to follow the small repeated 'buta' patterns used in India.

Silk twill, patterned with supplementary wefts
Made in Britain, possibly in Spitalfields, London
Museum no. T.26-2015

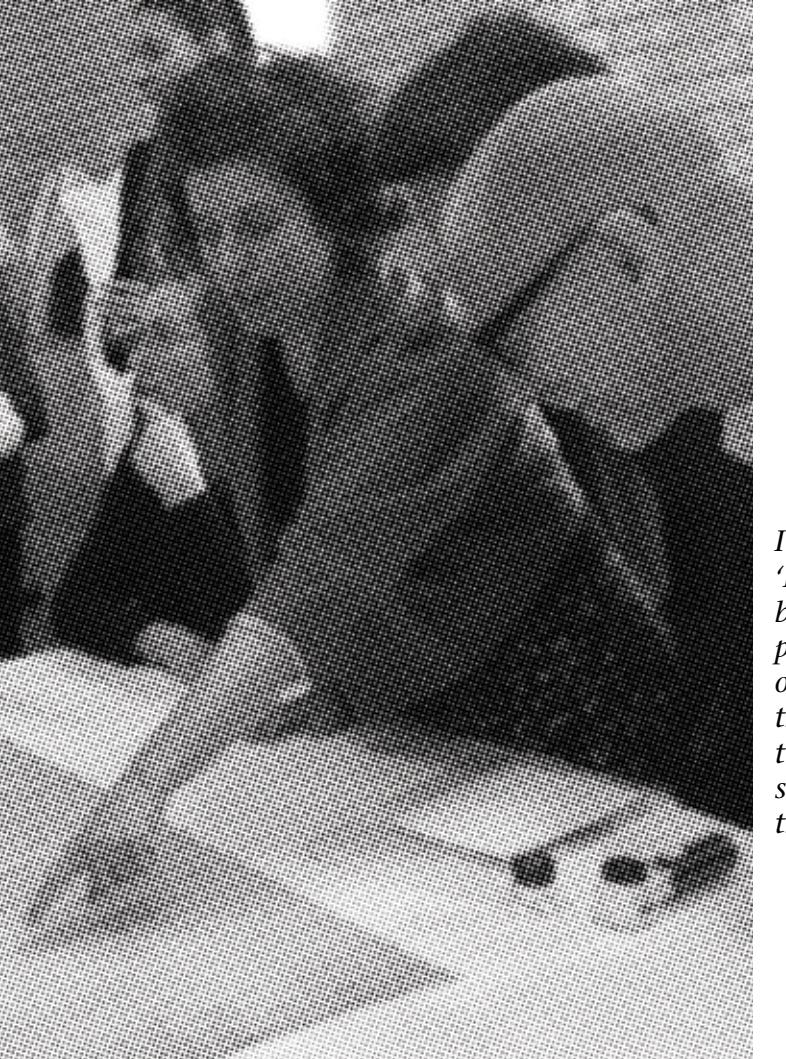
Jenny Lister





Kate Dorney

The pilot project has been so eye-opening and inspiring for me personally and has real transformative potential in the museum



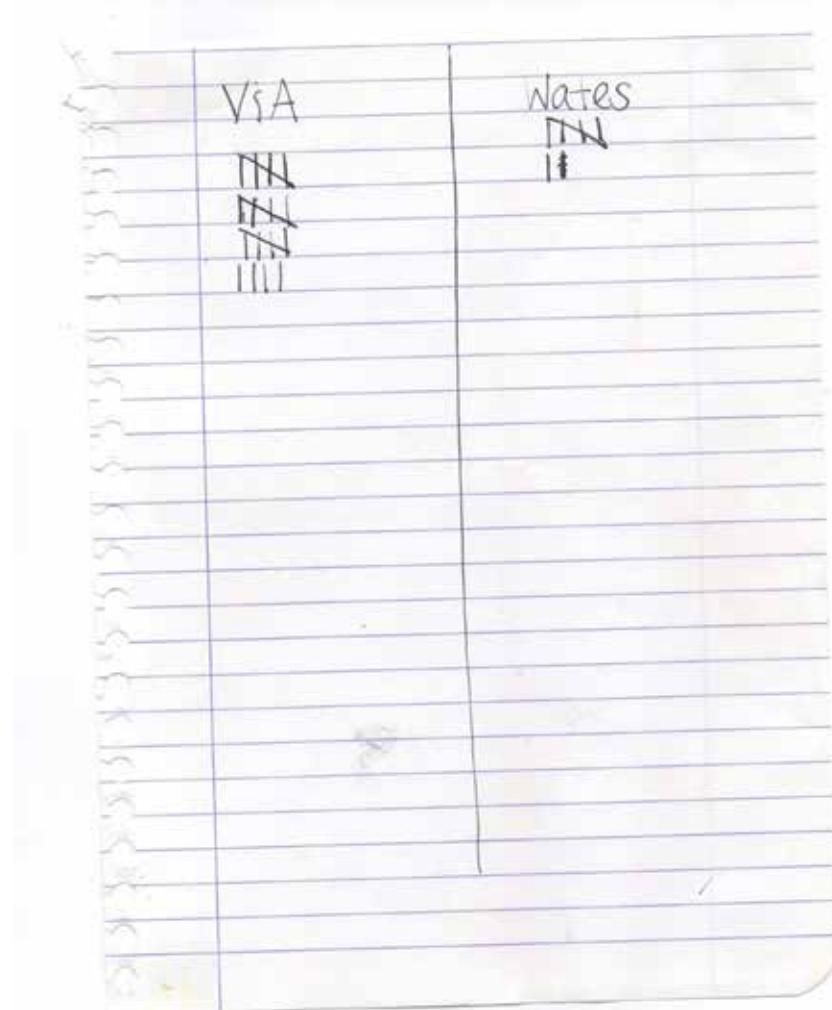
I have chosen a picture of the really quite old 'Prittlewell' flagon. It seems appropriate, partly because of its associations with feasting, but partly also because the twisted wire metalwork on the handle and hammered decoration round the body of the vessel recall basketwork / textiles. The appreciation of textiles for their beauty, skilled execution and value seems to be something that continues down the ages.

Kirstin Kennedy





Liam O'Connor





Mieke Bal



Marja Skaffari as Emma in Madame B, by Mieke Bal & Michelle Williams Gamaker, 2013
Earring design, Herman Hermsen, 1983

a piece of junk, a means of seduction, or beauty?

In the course of planning and making the film and installation pieces *Madame B*, co-director Michelle Williams Gamaker and I were facing the challenging task of designing costumes, jewelry, hair, as well as writing a script worthy of a world-class masterpiece and directing actors, professionals as well as non-professionals. For each scene, even for each sequence, our main character Emma had to change clothes and jewelry. The point of this was to express the emptiness of the character's sense of self.

Assigning costumes and jewelry to a particular scene is an act of interpretation. This act becomes a superimposition, layering further the historical interpretations the VARI programme makes to provide the V&A holdings with meaning, context and affect. We have experienced this several times during our *Madame B* adventure.

One of the scenes is when Emma and her husband Charles are invited to a reception in Paris. For Emma it represents the last hope of excitement in her dull marriage. She buys a new dress - and fatally overdresses. The result is a social disaster. Her over-dressing was matched by an over-decoration - a choice of jewelry that exceeds a trifle the decent modesty expected of a lady.

On one side of her hair she wears a red rose. In the other ear she has this earring. Materially, it is not precious. The bright red earring in the shape of a lipstick-painted mouth consists of a flat sheet of plastic, cut so as to allow the earlobe to be inserted. The lobe thus becomes a tongue. The seductive meaning of the earring is just a bit too obvious. But the genius of the design is that the earlobe-tongue has another meaning. Not only "kiss me if you find me desirable" but also, "fuck you if you don't". Another layer.

Mieke Bal

Teresa Whitfield
"Nottingham Machine Lace"
Ink on paper 2012 (66 x 78cm)

Characterised by a close resemblance to real fabric, this highly detailed ink drawing references the extraordinary growth in the production of Nottingham lace at the end of the C19th, marking the end of the once thriving British hand-made lace industry.

The current re-evaluation of the role of craft within British culture has provoked considerable debate about lace-making and by using a low-tech labour-intensive process such as drawing my work prompts discussion about the loss of the hand-made in a digital age and the social and cultural changes that this represents. Not only do my drawings lament the end of the hand-made lace industry but they highlight the vulnerability of the few remaining lace factories which are at risk of becoming part of history.

My fascination with lace was instigated by the recognition of a close similarity between lace and line drawing; in both machine-made and hand-made lace the threads are woven in minute detail and remain visible on the flat two-dimensional surface of the fabric exactly like a drawn line. The drawing method that I use is intensely meditative and bears a striking resemblance to the process of using thread so that the drawings are more like a re-enactment of lace-making than simply a likeness to the end product.

I would like my drawings to encourage the viewer to take a closer look at lace and by contemplating the relationship between the painstaking method of production of the drawing and the highly skilled and time-consuming production of lace, to reconsider their understanding of each.

Teresa Whitfield





Lina Hakim





Bill Sherman

If one object has come to represent the activities and aspirations of this pilot project toward a V&A Research Institute, it's the humble three-legged stool now on display in Room 143 (Museum Number C.35-2009). Its date, place of origin, designer and maker are unknown, but for many years it served as a perch for Lucie Rie, who fled her native Austria in 1938 and became one of Britain's most celebrated modern potters. When she died in 1995 the contents of her studio were donated to the Potteries Museum & Art Gallery in Stoke-on-Trent; and when the V&A redeveloped its ceramics galleries in 2009 the studio was transferred to South Kensington and recreated in its entirety in a glassed-in corner of the 'Making Ceramics' room. Part archaeological reconstruction, part shrine, it invokes a place of making (two wheels), a place of listening (two radios) and, at least occasionally for this notoriously energetic artist, a place of sitting (two chairs—though the stool also doubled as a shelf for Rie's two aprons).

In the course of our diverse programme, we made our own space for making and knowing, exploring a range of places in and around the Museum, from our most elegant galleries to the utilitarian warehouse behind Blythe House known as Hut K. We have scoped out spaces that sit between lecture hall, seminar room, scientific laboratory and artist's workshop. But it was as we articulated our model for our new research institute—in the course of writing and rewriting our



application to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation—that the three-legged stool came into its own. We found ourselves building a structure involving three components, Teaching/Training, Research Projects/Partnerships and Print/Digital Publications. While we struggled to put these components around a triangle or pyramid, the Mellon Foundation's Vice President Mariët Westermann suggested that our structure could serve as a sort of three-legged stool. Here's hoping that the fruits of our work are as simple and as beautiful as those produced by Rie.



