



Arts and
Humanities
Research Council



V&A and AHRC announce Early Career Fellowships in Cultural and Heritage Institutions

Today, the V&A and Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) are delighted to announce the eight successful recipients of a new funding opportunity – **Early Career Fellowships in Cultural and Heritage Institutions**.

This new fellowship opportunity, which is supported by the AHRC, part of UK Research and Innovation, and co-ordinated by the V&A, will enable the eight fellows to gain experience in the cultural and heritage sector. A key feature of the opportunity is developing the fellows' skills to catalyse research careers in the sector.

Each fellow will undertake an ambitious research project hosted by a cultural or heritage organisation that holds Independent Research Organisation (IRO) status. The fellows' diverse and innovative research will build on and increase the capacity of cultural and heritage organisations to deliver new, public-facing activities, plan future exhibitions and associated events, and produce content for wide-ranging audiences that is rooted in cutting-edge research.

Individually and collectively, these new fellowships will play a role in building and diversifying research capabilities in local, regional, and national cultural heritage, research and innovation ecosystems, as well as providing a new form of training and development for the fellows to equip them for their future career.

The fellowship projects have been co-designed by the successful fellows in collaboration with their host organisations, which range from museums (Imperial War Museums, the British Museum, Natural History Museum and V&A) to botanic gardens (Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh) and heritage organisations (Historic Environment Scotland). The projects respond to institutional and sector priorities, including climate change and colonial legacies, and the fellows' research is intended to contribute to the development of collections knowledge, the planning for future exhibitions and events, and public engagement at and beyond their host organisation. Together, the fellowship projects demonstrate the rich variety of arts and humanities research across these organisations, and the ways in which research can help us to better understand the collections these organisations hold, inform conservation, preservation, and environmental policies, and work collaboratively with communities to address contemporary and future challenges. The full list of objectives of the opportunity is:

- create new opportunities for early career postdoctoral researchers to build, deepen or broaden their experience of working in, and with, major cultural and heritage organisations
- develop the fellows' skills and future research career in areas of relevance to the work, collections and practices of cultural and heritage organisations
- deliver high quality and impactful research and innovation projects
- enhance the host organisation's capacity to undertake research and innovation activities closely aligned with its priorities and strategies, and leading to practical benefits and outcomes for the host
- address a need across the GLAM sector in respect of the lack of dedicated support at the early stage of research careers
- promote equality, diversity and inclusion principles
- strengthen efforts to build and diversify research capabilities in the cultural heritage research and innovation ecosystem
- further extend the GLAM sector's engagement with, and contribution to, society
- catalyse high quality and impactful research and innovation projects

The awarded fellowships and their host organisations are:

Dr Marleen Boschen, *Future Ecologies of Art: Exploring Kew as a site for past, present and future artistic collaborations* – Royal Botanic Gardens Kew.

Dr Ann-Marie Foster, *Accessible Pasts, Equitable Futures* – Imperial War Museums.

Mr Thupten Kelsang, *Reanimating Tibetan Heritage: Transforming collections, Empowering communities* – V&A.

Dr Jennifer Morris, *Interpreting Borneo in Britain: Interrogating the colonial legacy of the Charles Hose collections in British museums* – The British Museum.

Dr Aparajita Mukhopadhyay, *Mediating Imperial Science: Economic Botany and Agrarian Ecology in Colonial South Asia* – Royal Botanic Gardens Kew.

Dr Sophia Nicolov, *Cetacean (Re)Sources: Reconnecting London's Natural History Museum cetacean specimens with the legacies of empire and whaling* – The Natural History Museum.

Dr Siôn Parkinson, *Fragrance in the Fungarium: Capturing Heritage Scents of Mushrooms and Mycological Art* – Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

Dr Audrey Scardina, *The Historic Environment as an agent of change in the climate emergency: a community-centred approach* – Historic Environment Scotland.

In 2022 an award was made to the V&A to act as the cohort coordination and development team for this pilot fellowship scheme. The V&A are working closely with AHRC and the IRO community to create and deliver a cohort development programme that will provide diverse professional development opportunities, expert sector training, and wide-ranging cohort support, to help the fellows to build a career pathway through and beyond their fellowship. Through the delivery and evaluation of this pilot development programme, we aim to create a blueprint for future research training programmes that can be rolled out across the cultural and heritage sector.

The V&A will be coordinating a series of public showcase events and symposia through the programme, with further details on these to be communicated in due course [here](#).

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For further PRESS information on the fellowships, please contact press.office@vam.ac.uk

About the V&A

The V&A is a family of museums dedicated to the power of creativity. Our mission is to champion design and creativity in all its forms, advance cultural knowledge, and inspire makers, creators and innovators everywhere. We share a 5,000-year-old story of creativity through exhibitions, events, educational programmes, digital experiences, conservation, research, and an ever-evolving national collection of over 2.8m objects spanning every creative discipline.

About the AHRC

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), part of UK Research and Innovation, funds internationally outstanding independent researchers across the whole range of the arts and humanities: history, archaeology, digital content, philosophy, languages and literature, design, heritage, area studies, the creative and performing arts, and much more. The quality and range of research supported by AHRC works for the good of UK society and culture and contributes both to UK economic success and to the culture and welfare of societies across the globe.

About the Independent Research Organisations

The status of [Independent Research Organisation \(IRO\)](#) recognises organisations which conduct research and development activities in the UK but are not higher

education providers, research and technology organisations, or research institutes. To be recognised as an eligible IRO the organisation must satisfy [UKRI eligibility criteria](#). Since 2006, a number of museums, galleries, libraries, archives and heritage bodies have been successful in obtaining IROs status. This made them eligible to apply for AHRC and UKRI support for research and training projects delivered in this environment. For these organisations, IRO status acknowledges the excellent research that takes place in them , often centred on unique, world-class archives and collections. Between them, these cultural and heritage organisations attract millions of visitors every year. The cutting-edge research they undertake ensures that visitors have a fuller and deeper experience. These IROs also play a vital role in training the next generation of researchers. Many of them are involved in the AHRC [Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships \(CDP\)](#) and are now host organisations as part of this pilot early career research fellowship scheme.