

International Training Programme



Spotlight Loan Project Report *Rodin: rethinking the fragment* curatorial mentorship *June 2017 - April 2019*

Barbara Vujanovic (ITP 2016, Croatia)
Senior Curator, The Ivan Meštrović Museums – the Meštrović Atelier, Zagreb

Summary

The British Museum's International Training Programme (ITP) seeks to develop a sustainable global network of inspired museum and heritage professionals, through sharing knowledge, skills and experiences. The ITP alumni now totals 276 fellows from 43 countries spanning the world and the Museum aims to develop and deliver a wide range of projects and programmes to ensure the Programme thrives in the years ahead.

Philanthropic support for the ITP has enabled the British Museum to plan with added confidence and provide for the programme's growing network of culture and heritage professionals. In the summer of 2018, with the generous support of the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust, the Museum was able to support ITP fellow Barbara Vujanovic (Croatia, 2016) to work on a spotlight loan exhibition to coincide with the British Museum's blockbuster exhibition *Rodin and the art of Ancient Greece*.

This report provides an account of Barbara's experience of working on the spotlight loan project, from its conception to touring. The exhibition *Rodin: rethinking the fragment* toured to Abbot Hall Art Gallery in Kendal, the Holburne Museum in Bath and ended in April at the New Art Gallery, Walsall.

Barbara Vujanovic: Spotlight Loan Project Report

For the last ten years I've been working at the Ivan Meštrović Museums – Meštrović Atelier in Zagreb. I hold the position of the Senior Curator and my main field of expertise is modern and contemporary art, particularly sculpture. I am finishing a PhD on the classical elements in Meštrović's art. Within my research on the life and work of Ivan Meštrović, Croatian sculptor and architect, I am especially focused on his European contemporaries, namely Auguste Rodin. In 2015, I co-curated Rodin's retrospective in Zagreb, and during the exhibition, I had the pleasure of meeting Ian Jenkins, Curator of Greece and Rome at the British Museum. Ian kindly recommended me for the British Museum's International Training Programme (ITP).



Above: ITP 2016 session: Barbara with session lead Jasper Chalcraft and fellow participant Saeed Bayashoot

So in the summer of 2016, with thanks to the generous support of the John Armitage Trust, I spent six weeks participating in this amazing programme. My time was split between the British Museum and my UK partner placement, Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester Museum and the Whitworth. The whole experience proved to be one of the best experiences of my life. During my departmental time at the British Museum I was consigned to the Greece and Rome department where I was able to learn from Ian Jenkins and Celeste Farge (Project Curator), who, at that time, were preparing the project of the *Rodin and the Art of Ancient Greece* exhibition, which opened in April 2018.

As a result of the ITP training, my work with Ian and Celeste, and my previous experience, Ian Jenkins encouraged me to conceive a small exhibition for the Spotlight Loan project, which would be tied to the Rodin exhibition. The intention of the Spotlight Loan project is the dissemination of single star objects and related information to venues across the UK, in order to engage the public who otherwise wouldn't have the opportunity to see the major exhibitions at the British Museum. It also enables the exchange of ideas and

skills between different institutions and museum professionals, in the UK and beyond, so I was very happy and honoured to have the chance to be involved in it.

In the summer of 2017, this project brought me back to the British Museum's Greece and Rome department where I was working again with Ian and Celeste. I did some research at the British Museum and visited the Burrell Collection in Glasgow, where I consulted their collection of Auguste Rodin's sculptures, which is the second largest in the UK.

The Spotlight Loan project is based on the idea of constructing a narrative of an exhibition around very few objects. I had become intrigued by one of the topics raised in the British Museum's exhibition *Rodin and the Art of Ancient Greece* – the principle of fragmentation, i.e. how Rodin studied the fragments of ancient Greece and Rome, converting the limbless, headless torso into a new art genre. The Spotlight Loan exhibition project therefore was named *Rodin: rethinking the fragment*, and conceived around the iconic sculpture *The Thinker*, which was generously loaned from the Burrell Collection. With the help of my mentors, I also selected complementary objects from the British Museum collections, which would explain *The Thinker's* outbreak from the fragment: a classical torso from a marble statuette of Venus; a Royal Academy medal showing the Athenian Acropolis alongside the Belvedere Torso; and Eugène Carrière's portrait of Auguste Rodin, *Rodin sculpting*. In addition, the exhibition also included various cast models representing different stages in the casting process.

The next step was writing the exhibition's synopsis, the 'tour information document', which was shared with the British Museum's partner museums, inviting them to express their interest in hosting the exhibition. Three venues were selected to host the exhibition were Abbot Hall Art Gallery in Kendal, The Holburne Museum in Bath and The New Art Gallery in Walsall. The exciting aspect of the project was the possibility that each museum could adapt the exhibition's concept to their own space and collections' specifics, organise additional events, and even include objects from their own collections to support or build on the narrative.



Abbot Hall Art Gallery developed an interactive approach, posing the question "What's The Thinker thinking?" to visitors, and asking them to write answers on post-it notes. The project coincided beautifully with the ongoing exhibition of Elisabeth Frink, who was influenced immensely by Rodin.

The colleagues from the Holburne Museum added pieces from their collection to explain how the arts of ancient Greece and Rome influenced the collecting of Sir William Holburne, whose collection forms the core of this excellent museum. The exhibition was extended with pieces including: Antonio Susini's bronze statue *Kneeling Woman*; the newly restored cork models of Vespasian ruins at the Forum, modelled in 19th century in Rome by Luigi Carotti; and Giovanni Battista Piranesi's prints that depict the architectural fragments of the Eternal City.

The last display was the part of The New Art Gallery Walsall's *Sculpture in Focus* project, since it coincided with the 60th anniversary of Jacob Epstein's death. The exhibition acknowledged Epstein's affinity to Rodin and antiquity, and also communicated perfectly with the other current exhibition of Daniel Silver, a contemporary sculptor who is deeply influenced by Rodin, Epstein, and the classical tradition.



Above: 'What's the Think thinking?' question wall at the Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kendal

I visited each venue and was delighted by the opportunity to deliver a talk alongside Pippa Stephenson, Curator of European Art at Glasgow Museums. While I was focused on the subject of the exhibition, Pippa discussed Rodin and his work in the context of the Burrell Collection. Pippa's talks were very engaging and shed new light on Rodin's contacts with Scotland.

Being included in this project enabled me to develop my curatorial and scientific skills. I was inspired by all of my colleagues, especially by Ian Jenkins and Celeste Farge, to relate the extensive story of the complex sculptural procedure of fragmentation, with just a few objects. I enjoyed every segment of the project. One of my favourite moments was the preparation of texts for panels and labels and receiving the remarks from the Ian, Celeste, and Rebecca Penrose from the British Museum's Interpretation team. They helped me in brushing up my style, bringing maximum information and meaning into the limited frame of interpretation texts.

I have been able to use all the skills gained during this project while preparing an exhibition on the history of the Meštrović Pavilion, an iconic modernist building in Zagreb. The show opened in December 2018 and focused on only two objects. By bringing in additional materials (videos, interpretation texts, etc.) my collaborators and I devised an interactive exhibition that received many favourable reviews and great public interest. I truly believe that without my experience working on the British Museum's Spotlight Loan, this particular project would not have been the same.

The Spotlight Loan project changed my perspective on presenting museum objects within an exhibition's narrative. It refined my delivery of information and my approach to creating a museum project. Each display and venue allowed me to broaden my understanding of the subject and realise how minimal changes, for example those related to lighting and set up, can bring completely different qualities to the objects and to the exhibition itself.

I learnt a lot from the impeccable organisation of Eleanor Chant, Project Coordinator of the British Museum's National Programmes, who accompanied me on every step of this project. I was also helped along by Sophie Szynaka, Celia Pullen, Claire Messenger, Rebecca Horton and Jessica Jukes; and of course by the colleagues from the partner museums.

I would like to develop a similar project for my Museum, in which we would send out different works of Ivan Meštrović to regional museums, thereby involving other colleagues who could bring their own fresh views and contributions to disseminate new knowledge.

I felt even more connected to the British Museum when I was invited to the opening of the *Rodin and the Art of Ancient Greece* exhibition and to deliver the lecture *Rethinking The Thinker*, which was both an exceptional honour and a challenge. I am amazed by the generosity of the British Museum's staff, their

openness and willingness to offer such amazing opportunities that make us grow in every possible way. I gained invaluable experience, new skills, but also new contacts and friendships. I visited three beautiful towns, and got to know the UK much better than I did previously. I see this whole project like a celebration of museum skills, international heritage and cultural values, which will always bring us together, make us learn about our mutual histories, and help us create our future.



Above: Barbara at the British Museum exhibition opening

Thank you to the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust for supporting my visits to museums across the UK, which enabled me to work on this project, present my work and see final installed exhibitions at each host venue.

Conclusion

The Spotlight Loan exhibition project, *Rodin: rethinking the fragment* has further supported the ITP's key aim – to provide professional development opportunities and to enable cross-cultural dialogue and knowledge sharing. The project has helped to demonstrate the success of the International Training Programme, and the fruitful learning opportunities and research outcomes that result from collaborative international engagement. Legacy projects such as Barbara's spotlight loan are helping to create additional links between colleagues and strengthen the global community of museums they represent.

The British Museum is very grateful to the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust for its involvement and encouragement of the project, and for providing support to enable this legacy project to happen.

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Thank you to colleagues at our UK partner museums, Abbot Hall Art Gallery, The Holburne Museum and The New Art Gallery, for their vital support.

Appendix

Blog Posts:

4 September 2017: Planning the Rodin spotlight loan

<https://bmtrainingprog.wordpress.com/2017/09/04/barbara-vujanovic-itp-2016-croatia-planning-the-rodin-spotlight-tour/>

19 October 2017: Rodin touring venues confirmed

<https://bmtrainingprog.wordpress.com/2017/10/19/rodin-touring-venues-confirmed-barbara-vujanovic-croatia-itp-2016/>

18 December 2017: Barbara is back, Rodin spotlight loan update

<https://bmtrainingprog.wordpress.com/2017/12/18/barbara-is-back-rodin-spotlight-loan-update/>

26 April 2018: Visit, Rodin and the art of Ancient Greece

<https://bmtrainingprog.wordpress.com/2018/04/26/barbara-vujanovic-itp-2016-visit-rodin-and-the-art-of-ancient-greece/>

12 July 2018: Barbara Vujanovic rethinks the thinker

<https://bmtrainingprog.wordpress.com/2018/04/26/barbara-vujanovic-itp-2016-visit-rodin-and-the-art-of-ancient-greece/>

6 October 2018: Barbara Vujanovic gives lecture for Rodin exhibition at Abbot Hall Art Gallery

<https://bmtrainingprog.wordpress.com/2018/10/06/barbara-vujanovic-itp-2016-gives-lecture-for-rodin-exhibition-at-abbot-hall-art-gallery/>

22 November 2018: Barbara Vujanovic introduces Rodin at the Holburne Museum

<https://bmtrainingprog.wordpress.com/2018/11/22/barbara-vujanovic-itp-2016-croatia-introduces-rodin-at-the-holburne-museum/>

8 February 2019: Rodin spotlight loan in Walsall, Claire Messenger and Barbara Vujanovic

<https://bmtrainingprog.wordpress.com/2019/02/08/rodin-spotlight-loan-in-walsall-claire-messenger-barbara-vujanovic-itp-2016/>

2 May 2019: Barbara Vujanovic (ITP 2016) reports on the Rodin spotlight loan's final venue!

<https://bmtrainingprog.wordpress.com/2019/05/02/barbara-vujanovic-itp-2016-reports-on-the-rodin-spotlight-loans-final-venue/>