The Paul Mellon Centre 1970–2020: A Brief History

By Mark Hallett

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Welcome to this special issue of PMC Notes, which has been redesigned to mark the fact that 2020 is the Paul Mellon Centre’s fiftieth anniversary. I have used the opportunity provided by our refreshed newsletter, and this special year, to offer a brief account of the Centre’s history. This takes the shape of an illustrated, year-by-year chronicle in which I focus on some of the people, events, and projects that have shaped the Centre’s development. In doing so, I hope to shed light on all of the main strands of our activity over the past fifty years: our role in supporting scholarly publications on British art and architecture; our dissemination of grants and fellowships; our academic events programme; our research collections, which today offer a rich combination of library and archival resources; our teaching, which has long included annual Yale-in-London courses, and now encompasses a graduate summer school; and, finally, our in-house research projects, which have generated a series of exhibitions, catalogues raisonnés, and online publications.

The following pages are also designed to suggest the ways in which the Centre has engaged with the wider field of British art studies over the last five decades. Over this period, this has been transformed from a small, rather closed area of art-historical specialisation, to one that is populated by thousands of scholars and researchers, who deploy a wide variety of approaches and address a multiplicity of topics. Furthermore, British art studies, like other areas in the humanities, has been transformed by the arrival of digital technologies, and by the changing demographics of higher education and the cultural professions. The Centre’s own history and activities have been intimately bound up with these wider developments.

As will quickly become apparent, the story offered here is a highly impressionistic one — a series of snapshots, rather than a comprehensive review, and one that can be dipped into, rather than read from cover to cover. But it does hope to address the most important aspects of the Centre’s evolution from the modestly scaled research institute it was in 1970 into the larger and more wide-ranging entity it is today.

In telling this story, I have benefited enormously from the earlier, far more encyclopaedic history of the Centre written by my predecessor, Brian Allen, which covered the years 1970 to 2010, and to which I would like to pay tribute. If any reader, having browsed through my own summary of the PMC’s development, should be tempted to find out more about its first four decades, his is the book to which they should turn.

I am also delighted that this account includes a series of entries and recollections by a number of scholars and colleagues who have been closely involved in the Centre’s history. I thank them all for their willingness to reflect and reminisce.

Mark Hallett
Director of Studies
According to its articles of association, the Centre was established in 1970 ‘to advance the education in, and appreciation and understanding of British art’. This new institution was the product of the generosity and vision of the American philanthropist and collector of British art Paul Mellon, pictured here by Yousuf Karsh. However, as Jules Prown, now Emeritus Professor of History of Art at Yale, and a crucial participant in the Centre’s creation, remembers, it experienced a difficult and contentious birth:

In the late 1960s, Paul Mellon became concerned about the Paul Mellon Foundation in London, which was devoted to supporting scholarship on British art, and which he funded annually through his Old Dominion Foundation. The London Foundation had embarked on an open-ended Dictionary of British Art project, and he could not obtain a firm estimate of the time and cost this Dictionary would require to complete. He consequently gave Yale five million dollars to take over the London operation. The Foundation’s chair and co-directors opposed the change, even though it would ensure funding, and publicized it as an American takeover of a British institution. Mellon told them that the change was definite. The Mellon Foundation in London was replaced by a new company, the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art.

The Centre began with only a handful of staff, under the leadership of Ellis Waterhouse, a highly respected museum director and scholar, whom Prown persuaded to became its first Director of Studies. Thanks in large part to Waterhouse’s can-do spirit, and to all the preliminary planning carried out by Prown, Paul Mellon’s new creation — despite its troubled pre-history — got off to a healthy start. Alongside the many other achievements of his three-year tenure, Waterhouse shaped an enduring publishing relationship with Yale University Press and oversaw the Centre’s move into handsome premises at 20 Bloomsbury Square, which it was to occupy for the next twenty-six years.
A Monument to Hogarth

‘This book is vast — a great river of words, flowing majestically on, but like most great rivers, it loops and winds and backtracks. Half a million words on Hogarth!’ So began J. H. Plumb’s review, in the New York Review of Books, of Ronald Paulson’s two-volume work, Hogarth: His Life, Art and Times, which was published for the Centre by Yale University Press in 1971. Packed with new information about Hogarth’s life and career, informed by the perspectives of a literary scholar, and built on more than a decade of archival research, Paulson’s study successfully placed Hogarth right at the heart of the crowded artistic and literary scenes of Georgian London, and offered a string of brilliant and provocative interpretations of his paintings and engravings. Though the past five decades have witnessed a good deal of new scholarship on the artist, Paulson’s great river of a text remains a classic, not only in Hogarth studies, but in British art studies more generally. One of the very first books published for the Centre, it set a high standard for its successors to follow.

Looking Beyond London

Small is sometimes beautiful. In its early years, the Centre offered an invaluable stream of support for regional museums and galleries through the means of what was, at that stage, a rather modest grants programme. Often, this funding would help finance the publication of exhibition catalogues. Thus, the annual accounts for 1972 reveal that the Centre provided £250 for the catalogue of an exhibition devoted to the Victorian painter Albert Moore at the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle; £250 for the catalogue of an exhibition featuring the work of the nineteenth-century sculptor Joseph Gott at Temple Newsam in Leeds; and £200 for the catalogue of an exhibition on the Edwardian painter and printmaker James Hamilton Hay at Liverpool’s Walker Art Gallery. These were relatively small amounts of money, but they proved very welcome to cash-strapped regional institutions, and to those curators who, having put on such exhibitions, wished to publish the findings of their research. Through these grants, furthermore, the work of accomplished but little-known artists such as Gott and Hay was preserved in print and opened up to new appreciation.
Entering the Establishment

This year saw the arrival of Christopher White as the Centre’s second Director of Studies. Like all Directors before and since, he enjoyed the benefits of being able to consult the Centre’s Advisory Council. The nine members of the Council in 1973 included no fewer than four knights: Sir Oliver Millar, Surveyor of the Queen’s Pictures; Sir John Pope-Hennessy, Director of the V&A; Sir Norman Reid, Director of the Tate Gallery; and Sir Francis Watson, Director of the Wallace Collection. The presence of this august quartet suggests the speed with which the recently created Centre had become part of London’s art-world establishment.

Nevertheless, White did go on to encourage a more open and youthful spirit at the Centre, largely through the Yale-in-London teaching programme that he and his colleagues developed in the years immediately after his arrival, and that formally began in 1977. Thanks to this programme, scores of American students, most of them women, went on to spend extended periods of time based at the PMC. Yet though they brought a breath of fresh air into the Centre’s proceedings, these students did not change some of its fundamental hierarchies and biases. Tellingly, no women were elected to the Advisory Council until 1993 and no people of colour until 2019.

Taking Photographs

The PMC was abuzz with photographic activity in 1974. During the 1970s, the Centre devoted much of its energy to developing an ambitious photographic archive. The archive was made up of mounted black-and-white photographs that reproduced historic works of British art displayed at exhibitions, sold at auction, or held in public and private collections. It also provided photographic services to individual scholars in order to assist them in gathering images for their research. In 1974, two photographers — one of whom, Douglas Smith, was to continue working at Bloomsbury Square for another twenty-two years — and three photographic archivists were employed by the Centre, under the supervision of the librarian Frank Simpson. All were kept busy: in his annual report for 1973–4, Christopher White noted that the Centre’s photographers had visited 137 collections, and produced no fewer than 15,945 prints, over the previous twelve months. Their work had included trips to the Tate Gallery’s landmark exhibition *Landscape in Britain, c.1750–1850*, where they took a raft of photographs of the pictures on display. The year 2020 will see the launch of a fully digitised version of the PMC’s photo archive, which will open up this intensively assembled collection of images to new uses and possibilities.
This was J. M. W. Turner’s year. The bicentenary of his birth was marked by an enormous exhibition at the Royal Academy, accompanied by a major catalogue written by the show’s curators, Martin Butlin, Andrew Wilton, and John Gage. Another book published in 1975 offered a more modest introduction to the artist’s practice. Gerald Wilkinson’s Turner’s Colour Sketches, 1820–1834, the research for which was partly funded by the Paul Mellon Centre, reproduced scores of pages from the artist’s mid-career sketchbooks, while providing the reader with a deft and knowledgeable commentary on these works’ contents and contexts. This was one of four commercially successful books on Turner’s sketches written by Wilkinson, whose work on the artist, though unheralded by modern scholarship, reached a large and appreciative audience in the 1970s and 1980s. Today, Wilkinson’s publications can often be found enjoying a quiet retirement in the art sections of second-hand bookshops; opening their pages and encountering the artist’s sketches from different periods of his career still provides the thrill of discovering hidden treasures.

### Constable in Colour

We have become accustomed to seeing our art-history books illustrated in full colour; and even in the 1970s, the occasional trade publication would be awash with colour. However, until the last decade or so, the costs of colour printing were often prohibitive for scholarly or museum publishers, who were regularly forced to rely on monochrome images instead. Given this situation, it is not surprising that many of the early funding requests to the PMC were directed at financing colour illustrations for books or catalogues on British art. One beneficiary was the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, which, in 1976, published a catalogue of its John Constable drawings and watercolours, written by Reg Gadney. The Centre’s funds were used to reproduce eight of Constable’s watercolours in colour within the catalogue. Today, the resultant clutch of eight colour plates may seem rather insignificant, but they nevertheless played an important role in giving readers a fuller sense of the character of the artist’s watercolours than would otherwise have been the case, and in preventing these delicately hued images from being condemned, instead, to a lifetime of murky greyness on the page.
The Beginning of a Long Friendship

The Centre’s sister-institution, the Yale Center for British Art (YCBA), opened in 1977 in a stunning new building designed by the renowned modernist architect Louis Kahn. The Yale Center was built to house the world-class collection of British paintings, drawings, sculptures, and books that Paul Mellon had donated to Yale, and to generate an ambitious exhibitions and research programme. The Yale Center’s founding Director was Professor Jules Prown, who started work on the project in the late 1960s, a period in which he also played a crucial role in setting up the PMC. With both centres up and running, and having stepped down from his founding directorship in 1976, Prown devoted a great deal of energy to ensuring that the two institutions worked successfully in tandem with one another, and to contributing his own expertise to their activities. In the summer of 1978, for instance, he came to Britain to teach two courses on the Paul Mellon Centre’s Yale-in-London programme. His legacy of collaboration endures in the form of the many shared ventures that the two centres continue to embark upon, including, in 2015, the creation of the online journal British Art Studies. It seems fitting that the second issue of the journal should carry an audio-recorded interview with Prown, and that this interview should see him discussing another quintessentially transatlantic figure, the eighteenth-century painter John Singleton Copley.
Life in the English Country House

Mark Girouard’s landmark study *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History*, the research for which was partly supported by the Centre, was published in 1978. In its combination of architectural, social, and cultural history, and in its arguments regarding the changing role of the country house from the medieval to the modern periods, Girouard’s book set the scholarly agenda for country house studies for decades to come.

*Life in the English Country House* also became that art-historical rarity, a bestseller: some 150,000 copies were sold in hardback alone. As such, it helped fuel the increasingly widespread modern fascination with the English country house and its inhabitants, which has found recent expression in the popularity of such television series as *Downton Abbey*. Another unexpected consequence of the book’s success was the modicum of fame that came to be enjoyed by the image that graced its cover: Edward Haytley’s hitherto obscure *The Brockman Family at Beachborough*, painted in the mid-1740s. It was a perfect choice of jacket illustration: Haytley’s fastidiously choreographed depiction of personal and architectural display points directly to the concerns of Girouard’s ground-breaking work.

Crossing Cultures

Modern scholarship on British art has been shaped by the work of numerous individuals; for many decades, one of the most widely admired of these has been William Vaughan, whose book *German Romanticism and English Art* was published on behalf of the PMC in 1979. Among Vaughan’s many achievements, as both a writer and a teacher, is that of having pioneered research into the artistic cross-currents that have long existed between Britain and Europe. Given today’s political circumstances, and the worrying decline of language teaching in Britain’s schools, this kind of scholarly pursuit seems both more important and more fragile than ever. In recent years, Vaughan has added the skills of an etcher to those of the art historian; linking another two territories that are too often estranged from each other, he now moves happily between the study and the studio.
New Conversations

The intense exchange of ideas characteristic of a good seminar is one of the glories of scholarly life. The Centre’s first organised seminar programme took place in the last months of 1980, following an approach by the art historian David Bindman. This inaugural ‘Eighteenth-Century English Art Seminar’ consisted of four talks, geared towards academics, curators, and postgraduate students. Across its span, the speakers focused on the interrelated topics of the rococo (in France and in England) and the long British career of the distinguished French-born sculptor Louis François Roubiliac. The series kicked off a tradition of research seminars that has — with a few interruptions — remained part of the Centre’s life ever since, and that over time came to address a far wider range of historical periods. It also offered an important confirmation of the ways in which ‘English’ art has always been shaped by its international contexts and immigrant practitioners. Noteworthy is the fact that the first talk in this series — and therefore the first organised research seminar ever to take place at this ‘Centre for Studies in British Art’ — was given by Katie Scott on the topic of the rococo interior in France.

A Pioneer

This year saw the publication for the Centre of Ford Madox Brown’s diary, edited by Virginia Surtees. The book offers a wonderful insight into the working practices of this famous Victorian artist; just one of the diary’s many intriguing features is Madox Brown’s regular record of the number of hours he worked each day. The book also testifies to the scrupulous scholarship and deep art-historical knowledge of its editor. Surtees was a pioneering art historian, who forged a successful career in a male-dominated scholarly and curatorial world. Her most formidable achievement was the catalogue raisonné of the works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, published in 1971, and the Royal Academy exhibition on Rossetti that she curated two years later. Surtees also published on a wide range of other Victorian artists, writers, and activists, including Jane Welsh Carlyle and Rosalind Howard. She died in 2017, aged 100.
A Storm in the Landscape

A highly controversial exhibition on the eighteenth-century artist Richard Wilson, curated by David Solkin, opened at the Tate Gallery this year. The Centre had long supported Solkin’s research on Wilson, and commissioned its photographer to take a large number of images for the catalogue that accompanied the Tate exhibition. This publication also featured a modest number of entries — on Wilson’s portraits — written by the Centre’s then Assistant Director and Librarian, Brian Allen. The rest of the catalogue was written by Solkin, and it was his argument regarding Wilson’s landscape paintings that generated the backlash for which the exhibition is now best remembered. Here, he remembers the controversies generated by the show:

The opening of the exhibition precipitated a critical furore the likes of which — at least to my knowledge — had never been experienced in the hitherto tranquil acreage of eighteenth-century British art history. As the show’s curator, I had expected a Marxist critique of one of the founding figures of the native landscape tradition to provoke some degree of controversy; but I was entirely unprepared for the virulent and virtually unanimous critical backlash that, amongst other things, saw me castigated as ‘the wretched Solkin’ in a Daily Telegraph leader, and accused of being a Soviet agent by the editor of Apollo. Later I came to understand the circumstances underlying this conflagration: if the touch paper had been lit by the involvement of one of the UK’s leading national museums, and by the cultural establishment’s deep attachment to the belief that art transcended politics, then the flames were fanned by the febrile political atmosphere of the early Thatcher years, especially in the immediate aftermath of the Falklands War. Like all storms, that caused by Richard Wilson: The Landscape of Reaction eventually subsided — though not before exposing fault-lines in Britain’s art-historical terrain that remain visible to this day.
Exploiting the Archive

In the introduction to her book *Selling Art in Georgian London: The Rise of Arthur Pond*, published for the Centre this year, Louise Lippincott notes that a ‘superb source for the history of the London art world’ had lain virtually untouched since its entry into the British Museum’s Department of Manuscripts a century or so earlier. This was a rich archive of materials relating to the career of Arthur Pond, a minor painter and engraver of the eighteenth century, who was also a London print-seller and art dealer.

Lippincott, having discovered this archive, used it — and the story it told about Pond’s career — as the basis for her highly impressive study of the eighteenth-century art market. Her book, which reveals how artists would often move between very different kinds of activity in order to survive within a cut-throat professional arena, testifies to the art-historical riches that can be generated by the forensic scholarly investigation of a single substantial archive. In the hands of a scholar like Lippincott, even the most neglected and seemingly unprepossessing collections of materials — ledgers, minute books, collections of receipts — can spark suddenly into life, and be used to divulge long-lost worlds of artistic practice.

Eagle Eyes

He was Machiavellian in his dealings, mediocre in his talent, and prone to rather wearisome bouts of hypochondria; but the landscape artist Joseph Farington will always be redeemed by his eagle-eyed observations of the late-Georgian art world. He kept a diary between the summer of 1793 and the day of his death in the winter of 1821. ‘During that time,’ as Martin Postle has written, ‘Farington recorded in microscopic detail his daily round, chronicling conversations, dinner party gossip, politics, public affairs, and any issue that touched on his life as a professional artist and member of the Royal Academy.’

The scholarly edition of his diary, published for the Centre in sixteen volumes between 1978 and 1984, and edited by Kenneth Garlick, Angus Macintyre, and, most extensively, by Kathryn Cave, offers what Postle rightly describes as ‘an essential source of information for any scholar interested in Georgian art and culture’.

The publication of the final volume of Farington’s diary in 1984 was not the end of the story, however. That same year, the indefatigable Evelyn Newby, formerly the Centre’s Photographic Archivist, began the Herculean task of compiling an index to the whole series. It was finally published in 1998.
A Professor Arrives

‘Willowy, diffident, fastidious, literary’: these were some of the traits that the distinguished art historian John Gage identified in his friend and former teacher Michael Kitson, who was appointed as the Centre’s Director of Studies this year. Kitson, who had spent the previous thirty years teaching at the Courtauld Institute of Art, brought a distinctly professorial air into the Centre. He began his six-year tenure by instituting a new academic activities programme, the aim of which, he wrote, was ‘to enhance the Centre’s participation in the scholarly output of the art-historical community in London’. This new focus was timely. Thanks to the impact of the so-called New Art History, which was bringing Marxist, feminist, psychoanalytical, and semiotic theory to bear on the discipline of art history as a whole, this was a period when the field of British art studies was becoming ever more vital and contested. Most notable in this respect was the spate of publications that offered a radically politicised perspective on British landscape painting in the Georgian era: these included John Barrell’s The Dark Side of the Landscape, of 1980; Michael Rosenthal’s Constable: The Painter and his Landscape, of 1983; and Ann Bermingham’s Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740–1860, of 1986.

1985

Sculpture in the Spotlight

The 1980s saw nineteenth-century British sculpture enjoying a new, if temporary, prominence in the Centre’s publications programme. Benedict Read’s invaluable scholarly survey Victorian Sculpture appeared in 1982; Susan Beattie’s important The New Sculpture, the following year. The year 1985, meanwhile, witnessed the publication of Richard Dorment’s critical and biographical study of the Victorian sculptor Alfred Gilbert.

Books on sculpture — an art form that continues, frustratingly, to be relegated to the margins of art history — are rarely found clustered together in the Centre’s publications list in this way. Though the examples it has supported are often of a stellar quality — this is certainly true of David Bindman and Malcolm Baker’s Roubiliac and the Eighteenth-Century Monument, published in 1995; Anne Wagner’s Mother Stone, published in 2005; and Matthew Craske’s The Silent Rhetoric of the Body, published in 2008 — they remain relatively few and far between. Tellingly, after this mid-1980s flurry of publications on Victorian sculpture, the next books to be published for the Centre on the subject were The Albert Memorial, edited by Chris Brooks, which appeared in 2000, and David Getsy’s Body Doubles, which appeared in 2004.
A Resilient Canon

Ernst Gombrich famously, if contentiously, wrote that ‘There really is no such thing as art. There are only artists.’ Two major events organised by the Centre in 1987 served respectively to reinforce and, if only superficially, to call into question the long-standing assumption that the study of British art involved, in the main, the study of canonical British artists.

The first was an international symposium that was held in July to mark the opening of the Tate’s Clore Gallery of Turner’s paintings, which featured — as would have seemed entirely appropriate to many — twelve closely focused talks on the painter and his work. The second was a series of ten lectures that took place at the Tate later that year, which enjoyed the title ‘Nothing But Money? British Art and Society, 1700–1769.’ This title promised, and in part delivered, a rather different kind of art history to that encountered at the Turner symposium — one that looked at the broader historical, political, and cultural developments that shape artistic practice, rather than at a celebrated practitioner. However, on closer inspection, this series, too, remained bound to the notion of the individual genius — this time Hogarth, whose name featured in no fewer than six of the lectures’ titles.

Shaking off a discipline’s habits of mind is a difficult thing to do.

A Visitor to the Centre

Here, the art historian Kay Dian Kriz remembers her year as a pre-doctoral Fellow at the Centre, when she travelled from Washington State to study at Bloomsbury Square:

The Centre back then was a labyrinth of rooms, stairs, and hallways that somehow managed to be cosy; on Bloomsbury Square, it was conveniently close to the old British Library and offered an intellectual and social home, providing a wealth of resources, as well as excellent coffee, tea, and the occasional G and T.

Some of those resources were physical: the photo-archive and the library. But exceeding the importance of these were the human resources offered at the Centre. Michael Kitson and his colleague Brian Allen took the time and effort to speak to me not only about my chosen area of research but also about the equally daunting task of navigating the field, which was in the midst of exciting and controversial changes. Kim Sloan, who was then working at the Centre, offered me her friendship and taught me how to look at watercolours — both of which enriched my life in the decades that followed.

Then, as now, the Centre provided a meeting point for scholars who were occasional visitors from outside London, and, importantly, those who frequented the Centre repeatedly. This may seem like a small point, but it was incredibly helpful for a student like me to have continuing contact with my future colleagues.
The Back-Up

The Centre’s second decade ended with both a bang and a whimper.

In his annual report for 1989–90, Michael Kitson wrote with justifiable pride about the three-day symposium that the Centre had helped organise at the Tate in December 1989, entitled ‘Towards a Modern Art World: Art in Britain, c.1715–c.1880’. This was a landmark scholarly event, bringing together leading art historians with such distinguished interdisciplinary scholars as John Brewer, Marilyn Butler, and Ludmilla Jordanova.

In the same report, however, Kitson bemoaned the dwindling audiences at the Centre’s own evening research seminars, which he described as having ‘slumped to a handful of loyal friends’. To him, this suggested that the Centre ‘operates best when contributing ideas, money and administrative back-up to schemes in which other bodies are involved’. But it also made him conclude, more pessimistically, that ‘the Centre has almost no natural audience of its own’. Though successful in so many of its other activities, the Centre’s internal events programme was clearly struggling. Indeed, it temporarily ground to a halt: no seminars at all took place at the Centre between March 1990 and November 1992.

Combing the Newspapers

Numerous in-house research projects have been conducted by the Centre over its history; one that was drawing to a close in 1990 was the compilation by Clare Lloyd-Jacob of a repository of eighteenth-century newspaper exhibition reviews. This was a monumental task. Over a period of seven years or so, Lloyd-Jacob cast her eyes across thousands of pages in the British Library’s Burney Collection of newspapers, photocopying relevant reviews and other snippets of information about the visual arts, and assembling them in a carefully annotated series of thirty ring-bound files for the Centre’s library.

Lloyd-Jacob’s work on this project, which covered the years 1760 to 1793, helped transform scholarship on the art of the Georgian period. Modern art-criticism was born with the onset of regular public displays of contemporary painting and sculpture from the 1760s onwards, and the hundreds of commentaries unearthed by Lloyd-Jacob have provided the basis for a swathe of new studies on the burgeoning exhibition culture of eighteenth-century England, and on the art criticism it generated. All the art historians who have worked on these subjects, and who have repeatedly leafed through her red-covered files in doing so, are in her debt.
The Raj at the National Portrait Gallery

One of the expectations of the Centre’s scholarly staff is that, alongside their other professional commitments, they pursue their own research projects. This is designed to keep minds fresh and attitudes open. One of many such projects pursued by Brian Allen, at this point the Centre’s Deputy Director of Studies, was research towards the National Portrait Gallery’s exhibition *The Raj: India and the British, 1600–1947*, which ran through to the spring of 1991. Allen helped select the works of art included in the display, and wrote an essay and a series of entries for the accompanying catalogue, which was edited by Christopher Bayly.

Building on the important work of earlier scholars such as Mildred Archer, *The Raj* offered an ambitious new history of British art in India. It brought together the works of Western and Indian artists, and featured paintings, drawings, prints, photographs, and textiles. Most importantly of all, it played a crucial part in encouraging a much-needed focus on the topic of Empire in British art studies — one that was already beginning to shape exciting new work in the field, and that, in the years to come, was to transform our understanding of British art itself.

The Phenomenon

Thousands of words a week, week after week. Such was the relentless literary productivity of John Ingamells, who arrived at the Centre in 1992, tasked with the job of producing a dictionary of eighteenth-century travellers to Italy, derived from the gargantuan Grand Tour archive built up over many years by Sir Brinsley Ford. The idea for such a dictionary was of long standing, and Ford himself had hoped to write it; but having become overwhelmed by the sheer weight of the materials that he had accumulated over many decades of research, and by the many other demands on his time, he gifted his archive to the Centre in 1988. Following an important first phase of work by Kim Sloan and Ilaria Bignamini, the challenge of transforming this mountain of data into the long-awaited dictionary was taken on by Ingamells, who began work just a few days after his retirement from the directorship of the Wallace Collection. Before he started, he asked for two things: a computer and an ashtray. And then he went into action, cooped up in a small upstairs room at the Centre, where he was typically found surrounded by books and files, and enveloped in a haze of cigarette smoke. Running to more than a million words, and detailing the travels of more than six thousand Grand Tourists, *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy, 1701–1800*, was published five years later, in 1997.
New Approaches

Having worked successively as the Centre’s Assistant Director and Librarian and as its Deputy Director, Brian Allen became Director of Studies this year, following Michael Kitson’s retirement. He quickly set in train a series of ambitious new initiatives, including a dramatic expansion of the institution’s publishing programme. He did so in a year that saw the publication for the Centre of two landmark examples of the new social histories of art that were then transforming the field of British art studies: David Solkin’s *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England* and Marcia Pointon’s *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England*. Here, Pointon reflects on the gestation of her text:

>This book originated in an undergraduate seminar. In 1981 at the University of Sussex I blithely offered to teach a course on portraiture. By the time I realised there was almost nothing to give students to read that might help them think about what a portrait is, it was too late to retract. There were monographs on particular artists but generally portraits were art’s poor relations. Yet this was clearly a complex genre central to understanding society and one that, despite the odds, occupied a significant place in modernism. Only among classicists did I find anything like what I needed: J. D. Breckenridge’s *Likeness: A Conceptual History of Ancient Portraiture*, of 1968, helpfully addressed definitions. I resorted to copying extracts from primary sources: Alberti, De Piles, Farington’s diary. By the time I began writing, the map of the humanities was being transformed. Richard Sennett’s *The Fall of Public Man* with its arguments about the eighteenth-century city had appeared in 1977; slowly works like this filtered through to art history. Above all, Foucault’s work, with its insistence that meanings are not fixed by creators, enabled me to see that an empirical study did not have to be based on unexamined assumptions about artists and the societies in which they participated.
The Paul Mellon Lectures

One of the spate of new initiatives that characterised this period of the Centre’s history was the inauguration of a biennial series of Paul Mellon Lectures, given by distinguished historians of British art, normally at London’s National Gallery. Francis Haskell, Professor of History of Art at Oxford, gave the first Mellon Lectures in the autumn of 1994, entitled ‘The Dispersal of the Collections of King Charles I and his Courtiers’.

Over the years, many of the Mellon Lectures have subsequently been published as books for the Centre by its partner Yale University Press. Haskell’s, however, remained dormant until a number of years after his death in 2000, when his literary executor and long-time collaborator, Nicholas Penny, decided to work with the art historian Karen Serres to turn his old friend’s lectures into a book. The resulting volume, The King’s Pictures, was finally published in 2013. In the words of Gillian Malpass, who guided the book through to publication, it offered ‘a succinct account of one of the most important periods in English history and specifically in the history of collecting, made vivid by Haskell’s characteristically deft evocation of the personality and idiosyncrasies of his varied cast of characters’. As Malpass goes on to note, the book’s publication also commemorated ‘the beginning of a significant chapter in the history of the PMC’.

Studies in British Art

This year saw the appearance of the first two volumes of Studies in British Art, an occasional series of collected essays published in partnership with the Yale Center for British Art (in later years, the latter institution was to take the lead in co-ordinating these volumes).

Towards a Modern Art World, which launched the series, and which traced the development of London’s art world between the 1730s and the 1930s, was edited by Brian Allen, and grew out of a conference of the same name that had been organised with the Tate Gallery in 1989. Albion’s Classicism: The Visual Arts in Britain, 1550–1660, the second volume of the series, was edited by Lucy Gent, and also emerged out of a conference that the Centre had organised, this time at the Warburg Institute, in 1993.

Thereafter, the series, which consistently generated stimulating volumes edited by some of the most eminent scholars in the field, became an important vehicle for new scholarship on British art. After reaching its twenty-fourth volume, which was entitled Court, Country, City: British Art and Architecture, 1660–1735 and which I edited with Martin Myrone and Nigel Llewellyn, the series ended in 2016, its place having been taken — in a thoroughly new guise — by the online journal British Art Studies.
Slide Nostalgia

In May the Centre moved to elegant new premises in 16 Bedford Square. Beyond its walls, one of the Centre’s major events was the second series of Paul Mellon Lectures, given at the National Gallery by Lisa Tickner. These formed the basis of her book Modern Life & Modern Subjects, published by Yale University Press for the Centre in 2000. Here, Tickner reflects on one easily forgotten aspect of such lectures at the time:

What strikes me looking back is the use of slides. Unlike scans, slides are physical objects. Some were made by the ‘slide librarian’ but many were made by me on the ‘Reprovit’: a camera-stand with lights and a sheet of glass (covered in finger-prints and sometimes cracked), under which to slide the selected book, masking the image with strips of black paper and trying to avoid a shadow down the gutter. Lights off — focus — click — wind on — next. Film came back from the developers in 35mm strips that were cut into frames, each inserted on sprockets inside the two halves of a mount and sandwiched shut. Hours were spent sticking down tiny slivers of black tape to re-mask an imperfect image.

Between 1996 and 2000 the digital revolution was gathering pace in art history: in university offices (as memos gave way to email); in slide libraries (as academics scanned images into PowerPoint); in lecture rooms (where carousels gave way to digital projectors); and in publishing (where CD scans replaced hired transparencies).

After so much effort it’s hard to throw slides away, even where they’ve turned pink. Eventually I did. Marcia Pointon found a home for hers in prison — at HMP Wormwood Scrubs, where laptops were banned. The first Mellon lecturer to use PowerPoint was David Solkin, in 2004, and with it the high-res details, simultaneous comparisons and on-screen captions that are taken for granted now.
The Architecture Man

By the beginning of this year, the Centre was starting to make the most of its new home in 16 Bedford Square. In particular, the building’s large library was being brought into use as part of an intensified programme of scholarly events, shaped by Steven Parissien, who had been appointed as the Centre’s Assistant Director in 1995. Parissien brought energy, creativity, and good cheer to his role, together with a lightly worn expertise in architectural history. The latter had been put to good use during the move to Bedford Square, when he helped ensure that the building’s interior decoration was in keeping with its Georgian architecture. Once the Centre had settled in, he focused on developing and delivering an ambitious schedule of conferences and lecture series. In 1997, these included events devoted to Georgian sculpture and to William Hogarth. During his six years as Assistant Director, Parissien also ensured that architectural history was given a place at the heart of the Centre’s academic activities. Typical of his imaginative approach was a conference on the architecture of transport held in the library in 2000, which included presentations on the British airport and on the recent extension to London Underground’s Jubilee Line, together with a talk by David Jeremiah enjoying the delightfully downbeat title ‘Roadside Services’.

Funding Research on Colonial Landscape Painting

In the spring of 1998, the Centre’s Board of Governors approved a new grants and fellowships programme, which dramatically expanded the levels of financial support that it could now offer to institutions and individuals. From having given less than £60,000 in grants in 1997, the Centre gave almost £200,000 in 1998. In this first year of its new dispensation, one of the most striking of the Centre’s awards was a curatorial research grant to the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, to support the art historian David Hansen in his research for an exhibition devoted to one of the earliest and most famous colonial artists in Australia, John Glover. The subsequent exhibition and catalogue helped transform our understanding not only of Glover, but of the artistic overlaps and exchanges between Australia and Britain in the nineteenth century. Hansen’s project offered an especially successful example of the kind of research scheme that the Centre’s new funding programme had been set up to support. Subsequently, the Centre’s grants and fellowships programme has gone from strength to strength: today, it distributes £1,000,000 a year.
New Journals on British Art

The years 1999 and 2000 saw the launch of two new scholarly journals devoted to British art: the *British Art Journal* and *Visual Culture in Britain*. Since 1999, the *British Art Journal*, which unabashedly occupies the more conservative wing of British art studies, has published a steady stream of well-researched, empirically driven articles and reviews on historic British art, many of them written by independent art historians operating outside the academy. Meanwhile, *Visual Culture in Britain* was launched out of Northumbria University in 2000. It claimed a more theoretically driven agenda, disavowing what it described as the ‘narrow confines of traditional disciplines, especially of art history’, and embracing ‘an expanded view of what constitutes the visual and visuality’. In the years since its launch, *Visual Culture in Britain* — which now operates out of the University of Edinburgh — has published numerous articles on British film, television, and video, alongside occasional pieces on the historic fine arts. These publications — with which members of the Centre have regularly interacted, either as contributors or in an advisory capacity — provide just two of the vehicles through which new perspectives are now being brought to bear on British art and visual culture.

Reynolds and Tate Britain

The major event in British art studies in 2000 was undoubtedly the opening of Tate Britain, which was led with distinction for twelve years by its inaugural Director, Stephen Deuchar. Inside the Centre, one of the year’s most notable events was the publication of *Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Complete Catalogue of His Paintings*, by David Mannings (who wrote on the artist’s portraits) and Martin Postle (who dealt with Reynolds’s subject-pictures). This was the latest in a long line of catalogues raisonnés produced by the Centre since its inception, devoted to some of the most canonical figures of British art. These included Graham Reynolds’s catalogues of Constable’s paintings and drawings, and Martin Butlin and Evelyn Joll’s catalogue of Turner’s oil paintings. Such publications, many of them overseen by the editor and designer Guilland Sutherland, who worked at the Centre between 1993 and 2016, have provided one of the foundation stones of the Centre’s publication programme, and of scholarship on British art more generally. Appropriately, one of the beneficiaries of the catalogue devoted to Reynolds was Tate Britain itself, which mounted a major exhibition on the artist in 2005. Entitled *Joshua Reynolds: The Creation of Celebrity*, and curated by Postle, it built upon the research that he and Mannings had carried out over many years, and proved to be one of the landmark exhibitions of the new institution’s first decade.
A Conference and an Exhibition

Two events supported by the Centre this year proved seminal in the development of British art studies. One was the three-day conference entitled ‘Art and the British Empire, c.1600–2000’, which took place at Tate Britain in July. Organised by the art historians Tim Barringer and Geoff Quilley, and featuring no fewer than fifty-seven speakers, the conference proposed that the concept of empire belonged at the centre of the history of British art, rather than at its margins. This event, and the important collection of essays that it generated, reshaped the ways in which the history of British art was understood and described.

The exhibition Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780–1836, opened at the Courtauld Institute Gallery in October. Curated by David Solkin, it offered a spectacular recreation of the Royal Academy displays of the Georgian period, in which pictures were packed together from floor to ceiling in the ‘Great Room’ at Somerset House. Art on the Line launched another wave of new scholarship, focusing on the profound impact of exhibition culture on the production, reception, and criticism of art in Britain.

The Russian Connection

Brian Allen, the Centre’s Director of Studies from 1993 to 2012, established the Centre’s long association with the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg. Here, he relates how the relationship developed:

This began in May 1994 when Duncan Robinson and I visited the museum to explore the possibility of a loan exhibition for the Yale Center for British Art. This was to be devoted to pictures from the legendary collection of Sir Robert Walpole, which had been purchased by the Empress Catherine the Great from the former Prime Minister’s heirs in 1779. It quickly became clear that the exhibition would have greater appeal if it consisted not only of Walpole’s pictures but also of British works of applied and decorative art collected by the Russian tsars from the eighteenth century onwards.

The exhibition, which I co-curated with the Hermitage’s Larissa Dukelskaya, came to fruition as British Art Treasures from Russian Imperial Collections in the Hermitage, which opened at the Yale Center in October 1996.

The association with the Hermitage continued for many years thereafter and led to the publication of the first full catalogue of the Walpole collection. A Capital Collection: Houghton Hall and the Hermitage, edited by Dukelskaya and Andrew Moore, was published in 2002.
Silence in the City

The Centre’s library has always been a place of calm; the quiet and reflective centre of an environment that elsewhere is often rippling with conversation. Following the move to Bedford Square, this crucial institutional resource has been housed in an elegant and spacious basement room that was once a private cinema. At the time of the move, the library already contained some 10,000 books, and substantial holdings of exhibition catalogues, auction catalogues, and periodicals. Thereafter, it continued not only to grow but to modernise: thus, the summer of 2003 saw the introduction of the library’s first online catalogue. Today, under the supervision of Emma Floyd, who arrived as the librarian in 1997, and Natasha Held, who has enjoyed a similarly long association with the Centre, it boasts a comprehensive collection of publications on British art and architecture of all periods. The library’s resources have been further boosted by numerous bequests and donations from art historians and art lovers, which have included, in recent years, an especially generous gift of books, catalogues, and journals from Peter and Renate Nahum. These scholarly riches, together with its open-access facilities and expert staff, mean that the Centre’s library continues to serve as an unparalleled place in which to read and learn about British art; it is a secluded treasure-trove, ready at all times to welcome new explorers in the field.

Anglo-American Interactions

Given that the Centre is part of Yale University, it is perhaps not surprising that its attention has periodically focused on Anglo-American forms of artistic exchange. This link has found one kind of expression in the major catalogues raisonnés published for the Centre on James McNeill Whistler and John Singer Sargent, two American-born artists who famously spent much of their careers in Britain. In 2004, it found another articulation in a major conference devoted to two great twentieth-century architectural historians from either side of the Atlantic, Sir John Summerson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock. The conference explored the many scholarly interactions between these two writers, while also using their work to think anew about the trajectories of architectural scholarship on either side of the Atlantic. Organised in collaboration with the Society of Architectural Historians, it was the brainchild of Frank Salmon, the Centre’s Assistant Director for Academic Activities between 2002 and 2006. Salmon proved vital in maintaining the Centre’s engagement with architectural history, and brought his urbane brand of intelligence to all that he did at Bedford Square.
Reinterpreting Victorian Painting

In October and November 2005 the Centre hosted the fourth of an annual series of autumn research seminars. This year they featured a presentation by Professor Liz Prettejohn, who had recently been awarded a Senior Fellowship by the Centre. Her talk was based on the research on Victorian art that she had been pursuing during her Fellowship, which ultimately found expression in the book Art for Art’s Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting, published for the Centre in 2007. Prettejohn has been one of the most important and inspiring scholars of British art over the past two decades, producing a series of highly impressive books and catalogues on Victorian art and artists, and supervising numerous doctoral students. Her work has been especially attuned to the relationships between nineteenth-century aesthetic theory and the artistic practice of the period, and, in more recent years, to the ways in which Victorian artists responded to the work of their predecessors. In the spring of 2011 she delivered the Paul Mellon Lectures, which in turn led to her book Modern Painters, Old Masters: The Art of Imitation from the Pre-Raphaelites to the First World War, published for the Centre in 2017. The work of Prettejohn, along with that of similarly distinguished art historians such as Caroline Arscott, Tim Barringer, and Lynda Nead, has helped give scholarship on Victorian art a new vitality in recent years, and made it a hot-spot in the study of British art more generally.

A Georgian Quartet

The Centre’s yearly lists of book publications tend to feature a mix of new and established names and voices. The books published in the autumn of 2005 and the spring of 2006 were typical in this respect: alongside works by such renowned figures as Anne Wagner, Michael Levey, and Aileen Ribeiro, they included an impressive quartet of debut books devoted to various aspects of eighteenth-century art. These were Matthew Hargraves’s Candidates for Fame: The Society of Artists of Great Britain, 1760–1791; Martin Myrone’s Bodybuilding: Reforming Masculinities in British Art, 1750–1810; Kate Retford’s The Art of Domestic Life: Family Portraiture in Eighteenth-Century England; and Angela Rosenthal’s Angelica Kauffman: Art and Sensibility. Together, these books — all four of which are distinguished by their originality and ambition — testified not only to the talents of their individual authors, but to the strength and depth that had come to characterise scholarship on eighteenth-century British art. When we look at the longer historiography of British art studies, we can observe that different historical periods come in and out of focus at different times; at this point, even as the study of Victorian visual culture was emerging as a comparably lively scholarly field, the art of the Georgian era — so long a central concern of the Centre — was still enjoying a place in the sun, and being written about with verve by a new generation of art historians.

2005

2006
Compiling a catalogue raisonné is a painstaking and sometimes thankless process. An artist’s works have to be tracked down, inspected where possible, and investigated in detail. The dates of different works have to be estimated, provenance histories assembled, and — most thornily of all — attributions decided upon. Often pursued in relative isolation, and attracting little in the way of scholarly kudos, these tasks demand exceptionally concentrated forms of research and a good deal of self-motivation.

Quite understandably, the numerous catalogues raisonnés published for the Centre have often taken a long time to produce. Judy Egerton’s George Stubbs, Painter, published in 2007, was the fruit not only of decades’ worth of thinking about the artist, but of a Mellon Senior Research Fellowship that she was granted in 1998, and that supported her subsequent nine years of work on the catalogue. Elizabeth Einberg, who had formerly been a colleague of Egerton’s at the Tate, was also granted a Senior Research Fellowship, in 1998, to compile a catalogue of Hogarth’s paintings. Hers proved an even more extended project: the resultant catalogue was published to acclaim in 2016. The Centre holds the archives of both Egerton and Einberg, which document their years of research on these two monumental projects.

The Centre is today recognised as Britain’s leading archive of art historians’ papers. In its early years, collections of such materials were acquired on a rather piecemeal basis, but they gradually grew in number and in importance. Even in the institution’s first decade, it was gifted a cache of papers and photographs that had belonged to the first Director of the Courtauld Institute of Art, W. G. Constable. In its second decade, the Centre’s holdings expanded to include a selection of the working papers of its own first Director, Sir Ellis Waterhouse, and the archive of the Grand Tour scholar Sir Brinsley Ford. The 2000s saw the acquisition, amongst others, of the archive of Sir Oliver Millar, formerly Surveyor of the Queen’s Pictures. At this point, it became clear that the quantity and quality of the Centre’s archival holdings necessitated the appointment of a professional archivist. The year 2008 saw the arrival of one such archivist, Charlotte Brunskill, who has expertly overseen the transformation of this once-modest archive into what is now a major resource for the understanding of British art and its historiography. One of the most striking of its many recent acquisitions is the rich archive of the art historian Paul Oppé (1878–1957), which has come to the Centre through the government’s Acceptance in Lieu scheme.
Overseeing the PMC

The first two months of the year saw Duncan Robinson giving the eighth series of Paul Mellon Lectures at London’s National Gallery, entitled ‘Pen and Pencil: Writing and Painting in England, 1750–1850’. As was customary, he then repeated the lectures at the Yale Center for British Art in April.

Robinson, as well as being a distinguished art historian in his own right, enjoys an intimate and long-standing connection with both the London and New Haven centres. He was the Director of the YCBA between 1981 and 1995; as such, and as was to be the case with his two successors, Patrick McCaughey (Director between 1996 and 2001) and Amy Meyers (Director between 2002 and 2019), he was also the ex-officio Chief Executive of the centre in London.

This was a challenging task. Robinson, McCaughey, and Meyers, even as they carried out the responsibilities of running the YCBA, were also required to regularly turn their minds to their distant London outpost, more than 3,000 miles away. All three rose to the challenge with distinction, and fostered what has become a mutually supportive relationship between the two institutions. They also provided an important link between the London centre and the wider university at Yale, ensuring that each of these far-flung communities understood and appreciated one another.

The Advisory Council

A meeting of the Centre’s Advisory Council, in October 2010; not the most exciting subject for a photograph, one might think. However, such meetings — which take place in the spring and late autumn — are a crucial event in the Centre’s calendar. They are the moments in which decisions are made on the hundreds of grant and fellowship proposals received by the Centre each year. The application process itself is overseen by the Centre’s Grants and Fellowships manager: in 2010, this was Mary Peskett Smith, who carried out the role with great expertise from 2004 to 2016. A great mass of materials — abstracts, proposals, references — is gathered together, and then scrutinised in detail by the Council. Here, the then Director of Studies, Brian Allen, who chairs the meeting, gestures with his hand to the far end of the table, where we see the late Gavin Stamp, in a blue shirt, turning towards a trio of his fellow Council members: Penelope Curtis, Marcia Pointon, and Amy Meyers. That all those present seem intently engaged in the conversation taking place seems only appropriate. At a time when UK funding for the arts was already experiencing the cuts that were soon to have such a dramatic impact on the sector, the Council’s decisions were becoming ever more charged with importance.
A commitment to architectural history and to accomplished and engaging forms of scholarly writing has been fundamental to the Centre’s publication policy for many years. In 2011, these commitments found eloquent expression in John Goodall’s *The English Castle, 1066–1650*. This magisterial survey has become one of the best-selling books that the Centre has published with Yale University Press, and proves that — with the right combination of subject and author, and with the backing of a strong publishing team — serious art books can still enjoy a readership beyond the realms of the academic world. The same qualities have been characteristic of the other Centre-supported publications that have proved especially popular in recent years, which have included Todd Longstaffe-Gowan’s *The London Town Garden, 1700–1840* and *The London Square: Gardens in the Midst of Town*, published in 2001 and 2012 respectively. As these latter successes indicate, top-rate scholarly books on garden history tend to find a good market: this has certainly been the case for such modern classics as Stephen Daniels’s *Humphry Repton: Landscape Gardening and the Geography of Georgian England*, published in 1999, and Mark Laird’s *A Natural History of English Gardening, 1650–1850*, of 2015.

I arrived as Director of Studies in October 2012 with two broad aims for the Centre in mind. On the one hand, I wanted to see it maintaining all of its traditional values, including those of scholarly excellence and warm collegiality, the latter of which had long been embodied by Kasha Jenkinson, who retired as the Centre’s Assistant Director for Administration in the summer of this year. On the other, I hoped to effect substantial change. One priority was to expand the range of the Centre’s scholarly interests and activities, and see it embracing such topics as modern and contemporary British art. I also wanted to encourage an ambitious digital programme, including the creation of a new website and online journal. And, perhaps most importantly of all, I wanted the Centre to open up its doors to new audiences, and to become a place that was even more alive with people, discussion, and debate.

This kind of uplift was going to require a commensurate expansion of staff and facilities; and thanks to the strength of our financial resources, and the astute management of those resources by Jenkinson’s successor, Sarah Ruddick, this has been possible. The Centre’s staff numbers have more than doubled over the last eight years; and, having occupied a single terraced property in Bedford Square in 2012, we are now fortunate enough to occupy two, both of which are regularly animated by the presence of large numbers of scholars, students, and members of the general public.
Creating a Buzz

Kicking off with a two-day conference on international Pre-Raphaelitism, and ending with a one-day conference entitled ‘Contemporary Painting in Context’, 2013 witnessed the rapid expansion of the Centre’s programme of academic events. This included the inauguration, in January, of a new, year-long series of research seminars and a matching programme of research lunches, to supplement the other kinds of academic activity regularly taking place at Bedford Square. The seminars, which took place in the evenings, were designed to showcase the research of more established scholars; the lunches, in turn, were initiated to give doctoral students and early career scholars the opportunity to share their research in a supportive and informal setting. This was only the beginning, however: November 2013 saw the appointment of Sarah Victoria Turner, formerly of the University of York, to oversee the Centre’s schedule of symposia, conferences, workshops, and seminars. Turner’s presence proved transformational, and in the years that have followed, the Centre has developed a consistently energetic and ambitious academic events programme: in 2019, for example, over fifty such events took place across the year, including five major conferences.

Exploring the Medieval Imagination

Although the Centre, up until relatively recently, has been especially identified with research into eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British art and architecture, it has also long supported scholarship into earlier and later periods, particularly through its grants programme and publication activities. One particularly happy result has been the relationship it has enjoyed with Paul Binski of the University of Cambridge, four of whose celebrated books on medieval art have been published for the Centre. The year 2014 saw the publication of the third of this impressive quartet, the prize-winning Gothic Wonder: Art, Artifice and the Decorated Style, 1290–1350. Fittingly, the book was officially launched at a reception held during a three-day conference organised by the Centre and the British Museum in the late autumn of 2014, entitled ‘Invention and Imagination in British Art and Architecture, 600–1500’. The conference, which was developed in collaboration with the art historians Sandy Heslop and Jessica Berenbeim, together with the British Museum curators Lloyd de Beer and Naomi Speakman, offered an innovative mixture of research papers and ‘object sessions’ that took place in the museum’s medieval galleries. It confirmed that Medieval Studies were at the heart of the Centre’s concerns.
In 2015, the Centre completed a major expansion of its premises on Bedford Square. Martin Postle, Deputy Director for Grants and Publications, led the project on the Centre’s behalf, and here describes its gestation and history:

In the autumn of 2013, it was clear that the Centre’s building at 16 Bedford Square was becoming too confined to accommodate growing numbers of staff, visitors and collections, and an increasingly ambitious events programme. Loath to leave our lovely building, we decided to take on the lease from the Bedford Estates of the adjacent townhouse at number 15, and join the two premises together. Early in 2014, the architects Wright & Wright began to draw up plans, and the process intensified throughout the year, until Christmas, when the staff and the building’s contents were decanted; the contents into various storage units, the staff into offices at nearby 12 Bedford Square. In February 2015, the builders, Sykes & Sons, came on site, and thus began the challenging task of bringing together as one, two historic houses, which could operate effectively for the needs of the 21st century but still retain their aesthetic and historic integrity. Remarkably, by September 2015 the job was all but done, and the two houses had been united seamlessly. Following the return of the staff to their ‘new’ old home, the Centre re-opened to the public on 26 October, and a new phase of its history had begun.

British Art Studies

Sarah Victoria Turner, the Centre’s Deputy Director for Research, is the co-editor of the PMC’s journal British Art Studies. Here, she reflects on one of the issues raised by a digital publication — that of what to do for a ‘cover’:

2016 saw the first anniversary of British Art Studies, the open-access, peer-reviewed, online-only journal published by the Paul Mellon Centre and the Yale Center for British Art. The first issue had appeared in November 2015. It was, and still is, one huge experiment, an aspect of which has been the use of new formats for displaying images and text in combination. The ‘covers’ of each issue tell their own story. A digital journal doesn’t really need a cover in the same way as a print journal, but the editorial team decided that we could play with this format. We created the ‘Cover Collaboration’ feature, a dynamic display of images that change each time a user clicks on the page, often supported by a text by an art historian or curator. Responsive, visually powerful and a little bit surprising — this was the message we hoped to convey on the front page of the journal’s website. That ethos still lives on now that we are in the fifth year of publishing British Art Studies: for a recent issue, we commissioned original art for one of our cover collaborations, thereby transforming this ever-changing part of our journal into something like an online exhibition space.
In the last decade or so, the study of twentieth-century British art and architecture has become a particularly vibrant field, and is now generating some of the most original and important scholarship being supported by the Centre. One eye-catching example is Lynda Nead’s book *The Tiger in the Smoke: Art and Culture in Post-War Britain*, published for the Centre in 2017. As well as offering yet another testament to her well-established excellence as an art historian, Nead’s work — which was edited and designed in-house at Bedford Square — signalled the more active role that the Centre was now taking in the publication of its books.

For many decades, the editing, design, and production of the Centre’s books had been undertaken by its long-term partner Yale University Press, latterly under the supervision of the Press’s art and architecture publishers, Gillian Malpass and Sally Salvesen. In 2016, having successfully launched a series of digital publications, including Paul Spencer-Longhurst’s online catalogue of the works of Richard Wilson, the Centre also decided to take on more of the responsibility for its book publications. Building on the arrival of the editors Emily Lees and Baillie Card in the autumn of that year, the Centre has subsequently pursued a twin-track strategy, in which similarly scrupulous oversight is afforded to both its print and digital publications.

As part of their active involvement in the field of British art, senior scholarly members of the Centre have regularly acted as curators for major exhibitions. Martin Postle, for example, has co-curated a series of international exhibitions on the eighteenth-century artists Johann Zoffany, Richard Wilson, and George Stubbs. In another such project, in 2018, Sarah Victoria Turner and I co-curated *The Great Spectacle: 250 Years of the Summer Exhibition*, which ran at the Royal Academy from June through to August. We agreed that it would be thrilling to develop a digital publication, alongside the exhibition catalogue, that would provide an enduring scholarly resource for all those interested in the history of the world’s longest-running annual exhibition of contemporary art. After a long and intense period of preparation, during which we worked closely with Centre colleagues Baillie Card, Jessica Feather, Maisoon Rehani, and Tom Scutt, and with numerous external collaborators, *The Royal Academy Summer Exhibition: A Chronicle, 1769–2018* was launched in July. It features searchable digital facsimiles of every summer exhibition catalogue, and individual essays on the Academy’s first 250 summer exhibitions, written by more than ninety authors and supplemented by lists of useful facts and figures.
Over the past five years, the Centre has made a concerted effort to reach out to new audiences and to broaden the scope of its research. In 2015, there began an annual programme of public lecture courses. This was followed, in 2017, by the launch of an annual festival of the arts held in Bedford Square, in which the Centre plays a leading part, and Write on Art, an essay competition for 15- to 18-year-olds, and organised in collaboration with Art UK. Meanwhile, a new graduate summer school was launched in July 2019, designed to bring together graduate art students in art and art history from both Yale and the UK.

In 2019, the Centre also collaborated with Tate Britain in initiating a new, ambitious phase in the development of the British Art Network, which, among other things, fosters curatorial research on British art in some of the UK’s most financially straightened museums and galleries. Finally, the year saw the publication of a special issue of British Art Studies entitled ‘London, Asia, Exhibitions, Histories’, which marked the culmination of the first phase of the Centre’s London, Asia research project, led by Sarah Victoria Turner and Senior Research Fellow Hammad Nasar. This ongoing project explores London’s role in shaping the narratives of Asian art and art history in the twentieth century. As such, it suggests the more expansive and international conceptions of British art that the Centre is now articulating and addressing.

The year ahead promises many exciting developments for the Centre. These include new collaborations with the Yale Center for British Art, under its recently appointed Director, Courtney Martin. They also include the realisation of two major in-house research projects. The first of these projects, managed by the Centre’s Digital Manager, Tom Scutt, will see the Centre’s archive of more than 100,000 reference photographs being published online in its entirety. This year will also see the publication of Art and the Country House: Collection and Display, a monumental new digital resource, edited by Martin Postle, that will offer an unprecedentedly detailed investigation of the ways in which works of art have been collected and displayed in the British country house.

The completion of both projects in the Centre’s anniversary year seems especially appropriate, given that they gesture so unmistakably to the PMC’s longer history — to the photographic collection that was one of its earliest priorities, and to the study of the country house, one of its most enduring scholarly preoccupations. Even as they express our commitment to finding the most up-to-date and accessible means of communicating research into British art and architecture, both projects suggest the continuities that bind together today’s version of the Centre with its many earlier incarnations.
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Mount from the Paul Mellon Centre's photographic archive featuring Pamela Lady Edward Fitzgerald by George Romney. Photographic Archive, Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art

Mount from the Paul Mellon Centre's photographic archive featuring the engraving Eyes by George Bickham, the Younger. Photographic Archive, Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art

Mount from the Paul Mellon Centre's photographic archive featuring plate 15 in 'Monkeyana' by Thomas Landseer, etching, 1827-8. Photographic Archive, Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art

Mount from the Paul Mellon Centre's photographic archive featuring Francis Howard, Duchess of Richmond and Lennox after Mytens, undated, oil on canvas. Photographic Archive, Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art