



*UCL Museums & Collections present:*

# **Touch and the Value of Object Handling**

***Workshop 3:  
“Touch and memory: the  
role of reminiscence”***

## **Touch and the value of object handling**

### **An Arts and Humanities Research Council Research Networks Scheme organised by UCL Museums & Collections**

During the winter of 2006 and the spring of 2007 UCL Museums & Collections organised a series of workshops investigating touch and value of object handling in museums. Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the workshops brought together a diverse range of experts from academic and museum environments, with a view to establishing a network where information relating to the value of object handling can be shared and developed. Participants in the project came from a variety of backgrounds and brought with them a diverse range of expertise, research interests and museum access requirements. Scientists shared their knowledge of the underlying psychological and neurological mechanisms behind touch and sensation. Museum staff discussed the types of practical applications of touch employed in museum such as interactive displays, handling boxes and new technologies for interpreting objects. The union of these two groups afforded a unique opportunity to understand the true value of object handling and provide the museum world with a valuable toolkit for improving access and interpretation.

***For further information about this initiative please contact:***

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# Workshop 3: Abstracts

## “The ‘remembered present’ in touch”

**Dr Alberto Gallace**

Department of Experimental Psychology,  
University of Oxford

Our ability to remember stimuli/objects experienced via the sense of touch as well as in other sensory modalities is supported by long term and short term storage systems in the brain. Long term memory allows one to store and recollect information regarding particular qualities of manipulated objects such as their roughness or shapes. By contrast, short-term memory appears more related to the processing of information used in on-going activities, and appears to be essential for our conscious experience of the tactile world. The expression "the remembered present" has frequently been used in order to describe this latter concept. The existence of very short-term forms of storage system has been well-established experimentally in the case of visual perception while very little research has been dedicated to study our memory systems for touch. The importance of gathering knowledge regarding both forms of tactile memory, and, in particular, using stimuli presented on the body surface (rather than solely on the fingertips), is of great importance for both applied and theoretical purposes. For example, research in this domain has just started to provide important insights into our conscious experience of touch.

## “The elderly as curators in North London”

**Professor Mike Rowlands**

Department of Anthropology,  
University College London

My talk will focus on how the elderly make collections of photos and artefacts to accompany their move to sheltered accommodation. Selections have to be made in making the move to more restricted space and a certain consciousness of making a life complete lies behind the choice of objects and photos chosen. The ethnography is based on a study of 15 case studies in Harringay and demonstrates that people generally curate their domestic environments - make choices that often are guided by the tangibility and intimacy of objects and images. The focus on completing a life however has a special relationship to age and in particularly the focus on care that is also basic to the philosophy of curating a life.

## **“The benefits of learning, breaking down barriers and experiencing emotional, spiritual and cultural understanding through objects and collections based material in Museums - Exhibitions and Outreach.”**

**Emma Clarke**

Head of Audience Development and Communities  
Learning and Information Department  
The British Museum

Overview of previous Reminiscence project work with the National Maritime Museum, including 'Across The Seven Seas' and Port Cities cross-generational work. Objects as outreach tools in different communities and sharing dialogue across communities of all ages - Examples of personal stories exhibition elements, Over 55's research report in Camden and future provision for object led workshops throughout Brent with the British Museum.

## **“Reminiscence - recent work at The British Museum”**

**Laura Phillips**

Department of Coins and Medals  
The British Museum

In order to build upon previous experience, reach out to local communities, diversify the Museum's visitor group and generate knowledge for future development of programming for older adults, a pilot reminiscence project has recently been conducted by the Department of Coins and Medals, in conjunction with the Learning and Information Department, within the British Museum. Research by the Museum into the needs of older adult audiences was utilised in the design of an eight week project, where museum objects from the dedicated Handling Collection formed a focus for learning, discussion, reminiscence and socialising. Creative elements were built into the project, as was a facilitated visit to the Museum. This presentation will explain the motivations for the project, the partnership forged with a local community association and the previous experience drawn upon in the project's design. The project itself will be described and analysed with particular attention paid to the use of the Museum's collections and the reactions of participants to the objects, which were recorded through observation and evaluation.

# “Getting a Handle on the Past: The Use of Objects in Reminiscence Work”

**Bernie Arigho**

Age Exchange

The Reminiscence Centre

London

The opportunity to handle, explore and experience objects is part of good practice in Reminiscence Work. This presentation will clarify Reminiscence Work, and illustrate how the use of objects can perform many functions in reminiscence projects:

Helping to start projects off well

Helping participants to find memories, make contributions and achieve their objectives

Assisting successful group reminiscence

Helping participants and groups to identify themes of interest

Helping participants to find activities to take part in

Reminiscence work is person-led and not object-led. The objects are only important in so far as they relate to some aspect of remembered life-experience, and act as a trigger for some form of positive engagement. Reminiscence work advocates a multi-sensory and inclusive approach, defining objects in the broadest meaning of anything presented to the senses or the mind. Reminiscence Work may use the imagination and creative art forms to recreate objects and experiences from the past. Some examples of this will be shown in the presentation.



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