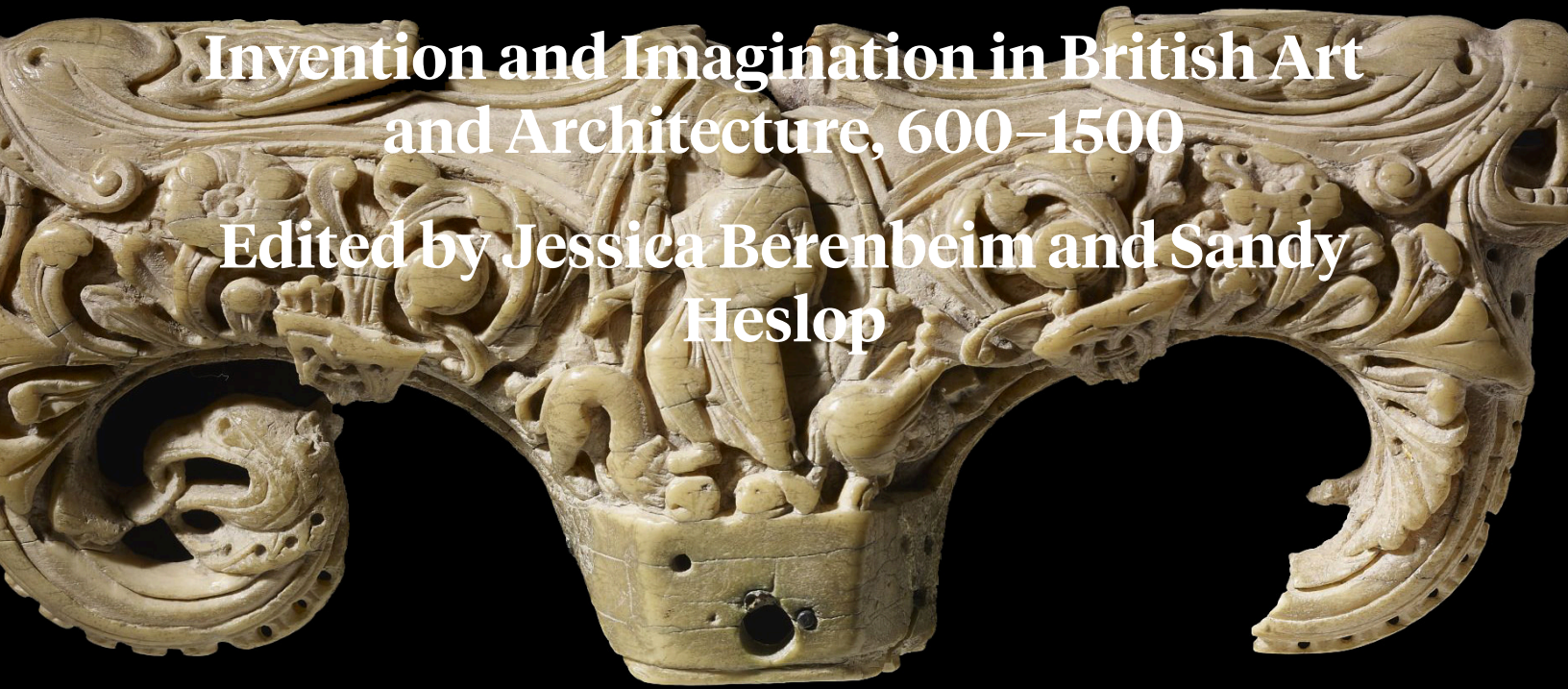


**British Art Studies**

**June 2017**

**Invention and Imagination in British Art  
and Architecture, 600–1500**

**Edited by Jessica Berenbeim and Sandy  
Heslop**



*British Art Studies*

Issue 6, published 29 June 2017

Invention and Imagination in British Art and Architecture, 600–1500

Edited by Jessica Berenbeim and Sandy Heslop

Cover image: Unknown maker, Ivory Staff Terminal from Alcester, 11th Century, ivory, 14 × 5 cm. Collection of the British Museum (1903,0323.1).. Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum

PDF generated on 15 February 2024

Note: *British Art Studies* is a digital publication and intended to be experienced online and referenced digitally. PDFs are provided for ease of reading offline. Please do not reference the PDF in academic citations: we recommend the use of DOIs (digital object identifiers) provided within the online article. These unique alphanumeric strings identify content and provide a persistent link to a location on the internet. A DOI is guaranteed never to change, so you can use it to link permanently to electronic documents with confidence.

Published by:

Paul Mellon Centre  
16 Bedford Square  
London, WC1B 3JA  
<https://www.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk>

In partnership with:

Yale Center for British Art  
1080 Chapel Street  
New Haven, Connecticut  
<https://britishart.yale.edu>

ISSN: 2058-5462

DOI: 10.17658/issn.2058-5462

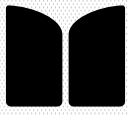
URL: <https://www.britishartstudies.ac.uk>

Editorial team: <https://www.britishartstudies.ac.uk/about/editorial-team>

Advisory board: <https://www.britishartstudies.ac.uk/about/advisory-board>

Produced in the United Kingdom.

*A joint publication by*



PAUL MELLON  
CENTRE

YALE CENTER FOR BRITISH ART

# Contents

Handling Digital Objects, Lloyd de Beer and Naomi Speakman

# Handling Digital Objects

Lloyd de Beer and Naomi Speakman

## **Authors**

Ferguson Curator of Medieval Europe at the British Museum

Curator for late medieval European collections at the British Museum

## **Cite as**

Lloyd de Beer and Naomi Speakman, "Handling Digital Objects", British Art Studies, Issue 6, <https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-06/object-sessions>

The present project was borne out of the collaborative partnership fostered by the 2014 conference, "Invention and Imagination in British Art and Architecture, 600–1500". The British Museum's medieval collections were embedded into the fabric of the conference through a series of gallery talks and handling sessions that explored the conference's themes of experimentation, the exceptional, envisioning, process, and the roles of response. Making the British Museum's collection accessible and freely available to all "studious and curious persons" has been at the core of its mission since the eighteenth century, and it was important that there was an opportunity for conference delegates to engage directly with objects.

A variety of objects of different sizes, media, and functions were selected in order to tie the conference themes to the widest possible range of medieval objects. Several are not normally removed from permanent display, but were made available for close analysis. Through this level of access, it was hoped that new types of discussions could be fostered by allowing delegates to view the objects in the round, to gauge their size, weight, and condition at first hand. The importance of 360-degree study of objects cannot be overestimated, and the four objects which have been rendered in digital 3D format here aim to recreate the spirit and ethos of these object-focused sessions. These are the Alcester Crozier, an eleventh-century walrus ivory tau-cross shaped crozier terminal; one of the Warden Abbey morses, a fourteenth-century enamelled plaque related to Abbot Walter Clifton; and two badges: the first an enigmatic lead alloy badge depicting a hood filled with a harvest of cherries, the second, a pilgrim's ampulla from the shrine of St Thomas Becket. However, 3D reconstructions of these four objects allow for a different type of engagement than would normally be possible either in the gallery or in a 2D image. For those with access to a 3D printer the objects can theoretically even be recreated anywhere in the world; the data being made freely available. The wider potential for both scholarly and public engagement applications has only just begun to be explored.

For museums, 3D models are currently being promoted as a proxy for physical handling. The digital model is a modern player in the long history of reproduction, encompassing prints, drawings, casts, photographic and photomechanical technology. Digitization projects, such as the British Library's online catalogue of illuminated manuscripts, have been in progress since the early 1990s. However, 3D modelling can allow for a more tailored experience because of the user's freedom to manipulate the digital image in space and the "tagging" facility which allows the institution to guide the viewer around the object through numbered annotations. At the British Museum, 3D collections are made available via the online platform SketchFab, which features models of the collection ranging from one of the earliest known human footprints from Happisburgh in Norfolk to the colossal head of Amenemhat from the Temple of Bastet in Egypt. This allows anyone

with internet access to experience objects at the museum from the miniature to the monumental, although in some cases, the monumental becomes the miniature on the computer or smartphone screen.

The four medieval objects featured here are rendered on most screens only slightly larger in size than real life; all four are small enough to fit into the human hand. The density of detail is an element which connects them all, from the textile embellishments on Becket's collar, to the minutely gilded figures on the morse, and the carved foliate tendrils on the crozier. The impact of 3D modelling on scholarship, museum curatorship, and collection stewardship is currently a point for debate, a topic addressed by the Conversation Piece published in this special issue. This "digital handling" section is also conceived as a contribution to that discussion, allowing the digital reproductions of these historic objects in the British Museum's collection to circulate beyond the walls of the institution and participate in new and expanding digital worlds.

# Licensing

The Publishers of *British Art Studies* are committed to supporting scholarship on British art and architecture of all periods. This publication is made available free of charge at <https://www.britishartstudies.ac.uk>. We ask users to identify the use of materials made available through this website and to provide an appropriate credit to the author and the publication, so that others may find and use our resources.

Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 2.0 UK: England & Wales Licence (CC BY-NC 2.0 UK). To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/uk/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

The Publishers fully support the protection of intellectual property and are committed to complying with, and strictly adhering to, all applicable copyright law. In many cases, copyright or other proprietary rights may be held by individuals or entities other than, or in addition to, the Publishers. If a work or a photographic image is still protected by copyright, you must cite the relevant copyright information when using the image and comply with all other terms or restrictions that may be applicable to that material.

In some cases, exceptions to copyright that permit limited use of protected works without the permission of the copyright owner may have been applied. We are confident that we have carried out due diligence in our use of copyrighted material as required, but we apologise for any inadvertent infringement of rights.

Digital copies of resources are made accessible for research for one of the following reasons:

- they are in the public domain;
- the rights are owned by the Publishers;
- we make them accessible under an exception or limitation to UK copyright law, as outlined in the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (as amended);
- we have permission to make them accessible;
- or, there are no known restrictions on use.

If you believe that we have made a mistake and wish for your material to be removed from our site, please contact us at [copyright@paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk](mailto:copyright@paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk).

Please include the following information with your request:

- Name and contact information, including email address and phone number.
- Identification of the resource for consideration of removal. Providing URLs in your communication will help us locate content quickly.
- The reason for the request.

The Publishers respond promptly, normally within 21 business days. We may remove the resource from our site while we assess the validity of the request. Upon completion of the assessment, we will take appropriate action and communicate that action to you.