

From Sketch To Product

CETLD Project – Interim Report

1. Overview of Project

Drawing upon the rich and diverse holdings of the V&A Word & Image Department Designs collection and the Archive of Art & Design (AAD), this project aims to add a new dimension to the learning experience by exploring the full trajectory of the design process from initial concept sketches through to working drawings, presentation schemes and prototype production. Further to this, the project will initiate a dialogue between two senior tutors at the Royal College of Art, one from a practice-based discipline and one from a theory-based discipline. These discussions will take place not only within the physical spaces of the V&A Prints & Drawings Study Room and AAD Reading Room but also within the virtual forum of a dedicated V&A blog, co-authored by the two RCA tutors.

Abraham Thomas (Curator, Designs, V&A) is leading the project in collaboration with Christopher Marsden (Senior Archivist, V&A) and the two RCA tutors: Glenn Adamson (Head of Graduate Studies, V&A) and Tristan Webber (Senior Tutor, Womenswear).

The project is being conducted under the terms agreed with CETLD in the letter of award, June 2008. Clarification was required for tutor costings; this was supplied by Beth Cook (CETLD Research Fellow, V&A) – it was agreed to pay Tristan Webber the suggested CETLD tutor day rate (£153.50). 70% of the award has been received, 20% is due upon submission of this interim report and 10% is due upon completion of the project and submission of the final report.

The intention had been to start the project in September 2008, however this was delayed because the practice-based tutor initially appointed to the project had to withdraw owing to personal circumstances. There was an unavoidable hiatus before his successor, Tristan Webber, was able to join the project - which began in earnest in January 2009.

2. Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of the project is to provoke discussion and debate around the broad range of material contained within the V&A's collections of design drawings. It is hoped that these conversations will reveal connections between strands of design

within the collections as wide-ranging as metalwork, sculpture, furniture, fashion, textiles, ceramics, architecture and product/industrial design. One of the ambitions of the project is that by bringing together two RCA tutors from contrasting disciplines, the ensuing dialogue will allow V&A curators to reappraise their collections in a refreshing, dynamic light. In particular, we are keen to examine the extent to which the issue of 'design process' is represented in the collections. We anticipate that the blog discussions will reveal key areas of our current holdings which could benefit from development in terms of future collecting. It is also hoped that this process will facilitate a better understanding of the potential that the collections offer to RCA students and tutors, and will offer us a foundation for future relationship-building with the RCA.

There are two primary deliverables for the project:

- I. Project blog – documenting the exploration of the collections and resulting dialogue
- II. Student seminar – object-based event for RCA students and V&A curators; an opportunity to summarise aspects of the collections which the two tutors found most interesting

It was proposed that the project blog would sit on the CETLD site, however after consultation with the V&A Web Team and CETLD ICT Officer Roland Mathews, it was decided that the blog would instead form part of a suite of existing blogs on the V&A website. The *From Sketch to Product* project pages on the CETLD website will subscribe to the V&A blog feed, therefore replicating the content on both sites. Roland Mathews is currently fixing a bug which currently results in images from the V&A blog site not appearing on the CETLD site.

3. Targets

Project Blog

The following targets were achieved:

- i) Blog induction training for Glenn Adamson, Tristan Webber and Abraham Thomas, delivered by Mark Hook (Web team, V&A)
- ii) Blog site now live on V&A website

CETLD dissemination seminar: a booking has been made for the Prints & Drawings Study room, 14th October 2009. This date has been circulated to all CETLD community members.

The date and booking for the student seminar is still to be confirmed. It was originally intended that this seminar take place in Autumn 2009, but due to the delays mentioned in *Overview of Project* above, it is likely that this will instead take place in January 2010.

4. Project Outputs and Project Outcomes

The project has progressed well so far, with the Sketch To Product blog proving to be one of the most frequently-updated and content-rich blogs on the V&A website. A good working relationship has developed between the two RCA tutors (who had not met before) and a number of stimulating conversations and discussions have resulted.

Project blog

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/things-to-do/blogs/sketch-product/home>

14 entries in total have been posted to the *From Sketch To Product* blog from April to July 2009. All entries are richly illustrated with images, and draw upon objects from both the V&A collections and from external sources. The entries are diverse in their range and approach, examining not only design drawings and 3D objects but also touching upon exhibitions, publications and key design figures.

The existing posts have been predominantly generated by one of the two tutors, and therefore the blog appears to be a rather one-sided conversation at the moment. However, both tutors have further material in progress, which is due to go up on the blog website imminently, and which will even out the content between the contributors.

Here is a selection of some of the subjects covered so far in the blog:

- Brook Stevens, American post-war industrial designer
- Pattern and design, as related to the work of Owen Jones, 19th Century architect and designer (and the subject of a current V&A display)
- The role of the 'wandering line' in the design process (and featuring a key design drawing in the V&A collection by the designer Tom Dixon)
- The role of drawings and design amongst the Russian avant-garde (sparked by the recent Rodchenko & Popova exhibition at Tate Modern)
- Creating copies of drawings using pricking and pouncing
- Retail architecture

- The use of photography in 19th Century textile pattern books (focussing on the Courtauld textile pattern books in the AAD collections)
- The Omega workshops (featuring the current Courtauld Gallery exhibition and V&A loan objects which include a number of design drawings)
- Jane Dillon, 1960s furniture designer (AAD collections) as an adjunct to the forthcoming major V&A exhibition, *Postmodernism* (2011) co-curated by Glenn Adamson

Introducing the collections

Abraham Thomas has hosted a number of sessions in the Prints & Drawings Study Room, in an effort to familiarise the tutors with the V&A collections and most importantly to ensure that they are comfortable with the procedures for requesting and accessing material, in particular in regards to the online and offline catalogues. During these facilitated sessions, a number of boxes of material have been called up (often informed by suggestions from the tutors) and the contents discussed, to initiate conversations around the themes of the project. These sessions have proven invaluable, both in terms of framing the context for the blog discussions, but also in offering me an insight into how RCA tutors might find our collections useful for their role not only as educators but also as a practitioner and a theorist, respectively. In addition to these facilitated sessions, Tristan Webber has returned on a number of occasions to use the Study Room resources on a self-facilitated basis. Glenn Adamson already has a good knowledge of the collections (due to this role as a tutor on the RCA History of Design MA) and therefore has not returned as often to the Study Rooms for self-facilitated sessions.

A session was hosted on 15th May 2009 at the V&A Archive of Art & Design by Christopher Marsden, to introduce the tutors to the collections and to the facilities offered by the AAD Reading Room. An excellent range was examined including metalwork (Barnard Silver archive), furniture (Jane Dillon archive) and architecture (Eileen Gray archive).

Student participation

A number of Glenn Adamson's students (from both MA and PhD programmes) have accompanied the project team during sessions in the Prints & Drawings Study Room, making valuable contributions to the discussions, and relating many of the featured drawings to their own current research. One student in particular, Ann Christie (RCA History of Design MA) has contributed a guest post to the project blog, looking at the AAD's collections of Courtauld textile pattern books.

A significant achievement has been to invite Tristan Webber's students to actively participate in the project. The RCA Womenswear MA 1st year students were set a Spring term project which required them to select three objects from the V&A Prints & Drawings collections in order to generate a single composite research image. This single image was then used as a springboard for a design development process which led to a number of design drawings and a final toile. I was asked to join the end of term critique panel, and to contribute comments on the final presentations. During their research, all the students made a number of self-facilitated visits to use the resources of the Prints & Drawings Study Room. With one or two exceptions, none of these students had ever visited the Study Room (or had known of its existence) before.

One of the most rewarding aspects of the project so far has been seeing these RCA students, from both the Womenswear and History of Design faculties, participating in the CETLD project in such a lively and engaged manner. I do hope that we are able to continue this active involvement for the later stages of the project, and are able to maintain the momentum in developing links with RCA students on a more strategic basis.

Glenn Adamson is planning to bring his History of Design students to visit Tristan Webber's Womenswear students in their studios at the RCA, so that they may learn more about their work. It is Glenn's intention to set his students a writing project where their subject will be the various projects and working practices currently being undertaken by Tristan's students. It has been very exciting to see an embryonic relationship develop between the History of Design and Womenswear strands, and to bring two cohorts of students together in a critical discussion, facilitating discussions and collaborative projects which may never have taken place otherwise.

5. Risk Analysis

As discussed in detail earlier in this report, one of the main risks that has emerged is that the dialogue/discussion between the two RCA tutors is currently looking rather one-sided when viewed through the lens of the project blog (which is at present dominated by entries authored by Glenn Adamson). However, Tristan Webber and his MA Womenswear students have been very active participants in actually working with the collections onsite at the V&A, and the issue is therefore that their contribution is not yet adequately represented in the blog. The contributors are aware that the blog will be an important aspect of the legacy of this CETLD project, and should offer a true

reflection of the conversations/discussions which have occurred ; Tristan Webber is planning to upload more of his work-in-progress blog entries in the near future.

6. Budget

The total award for the *From Sketch To Product* project is £6,000. This was reduced from the original £10,010 which was requested in the project application.

Expenditure to date is £1,688.50 (11 tutor days for Tristan Webber)

We have allocated £1,000 for administration backfill for Glenn Adamson's time, and £500 for catering for the student seminar. Allowing for a contingency fund of £500, this would leave budget for 15 further days for Tristan Webber's time.

7. Dissemination Plan

The *From Sketch To Product* blog is intended to be the main dissemination outcome for the project.

A CETLD dissemination seminar is planned for 14th October 2009, and the RCA student seminar (to which V&A staff will also be invited) will be scheduled for January 2010.