

SGSAH Catalyst Event—Friday 27 February 2026

The Poetics of the Proxy

This Catalyst Event emerges from an investigation of the copy as a strategy for remediation and institutional critique. It examines the implications of physical and digital replicas across heritage and contemporary art through the ‘poetics of the proxy’. Here, ‘poetics’ is understood in its classical rhetorical sense, in close relation to politics: as proxies, replicas have the authority to act on behalf of the original. ‘The poetics of the proxy’ frames replicas as political sites of resistance, transformation, and remediation, challenging entrenched notions of ownership and authenticity that continue to shape contemporary museum practices.

Principal Seminar Room 1
The Glasgow School of Art
Reid Building
164 Renfrew Street, Glasgow G3 6RQ

Access: 15 minutes’ walk from Glasgow Central and Glasgow Queen’s Street train stations. Subway: Cowcaddens. First Bus Services: 3, 4/4A, 6/6A, 7/7A, 18/18A, 19.

Day programme

10:30 Registration & Coffee

Morning Session—Moderation: Stuart Jeffrey

11:00 Welcome from SGSAH

11:05 Francesca Zappia: Copies as Remediations

11:30 Patricia Allan: Replicating the
Sacred: Glasgow's Ghost Dance Shirt
Break

12:10 Matthias Wivel: Michelangelo Imperfect

12:40 Q&A

Lunch break

Afternoon Session—Moderation: Steve Love

14:00 Stuart Jeffrey: Digital Laocoön Immersive

14:30 Ferdinand Saumarez Smith: To Return to
One's Own Country. Digital reproduction
and repatriation

15:00 Q&A
Break

15:30 Panel discussion—Chair: Francesca Zappia

16:30 Digital Laocoön Immersive, XR Lab,
School of Innovation & Technology

Bios and Summaries

Patricia Allan

Patricia Allan is an independent museum consultant. She was formerly Curator of World Cultures at Glasgow Museums from 2002 until 2024. Patricia's research interests include international repatriation, indigenous cultures and heritage, post and pre-colonial art and history, and contemporary folk and tribal art of Northern India and South America. Patricia represented claimants in seven international cultural repatriations from Glasgow Museums. She is a board member of Museums Galleries Scotland's Working Group on Repatriation. She currently represents stakeholders and descendants in repatriation claims from Scottish museums and is the official representative of the Cheyenne River Lakota Sioux Tribe in Scotland. Patricia has published on the repatriation of the Ghost Dance Shirt to the South Dakota Wounded Knee Survivors Association in 1999 and has appeared in documentaries and podcasts on cultural repatriation.

Patricia's presentation will focus on a Lakota Ghost Dance Shirt, whose repatriation in 1999 to the Wounded Knee Survivors' Association of Cheyenne River Reservation in South Dakota from Glasgow Museums was the first return of a cultural artefact from a Scottish museum to an indigenous community. The shirt had been looted from the body of a Lakota Ghost Dancer from the battlefield at Wounded Knee Creek, South Dakota in the aftermath of the massacre of 300 men, women and children by US troops on December 29th 1890 and was and remains of great spiritual, cultural, historic and emotional significance to the Lakota people. At a public hearing in Glasgow in November 1998, held to decide the fate of the Shirt, the secretary of the WKSA presented Glasgow City Council with a representation of the original Ghost Dance Shirt, that aimed to reproduce the original Shirt as closely as possible within the practical limitations of sourcing materials and with a contemporary message. The choice of materials and the journey of bringing them together reflect multiple histories. Patricia will examine this contemporary Shirt and discuss whether a sacred artefact can be reproduced in such a way that it reflects more than a physical verisimilitude and whether it is possible for a replica to embody the multidimensional entirety of a complex cultural and spiritual event in a meaningful way.

Stuart Jeffrey

Stuart Jeffrey is Professor of Digital Heritage at the Glasgow School of Art. Stuart studied a combined honours degree in Computer Science and Archaeology at the University of Glasgow and completed his PhD in three dimensional modelling of early medieval sculpted stones, also at the University of Glasgow, in 2003. His work at the School of Innovation and Technology covers all aspects of heritage visualisation and the use of new technologies to create records, analyse, interpret, and present every form of heritage from built to intangible. Stuart's research interests focus on critical heritage and the ways digital technologies transform the relationships between individuals, academia and broader contemporary communities of interest. Stuart was Primary Investigator on the influential ACCORD project, Co-Investigator on the AHRC funded Scotland's Rock Art Project and the Unpath'd Waters Project, Co-Director of the Historical Archaeology Research Project, Staffa (HARPS), and was also Co-Investigator of GCRF funded One Ocean Hub. Stuart has published extensively on diverse topics in heritage, archaeology and computer science, including the concept of digital authenticity, creative responses in heritage, archaeological informatics, visualisation techniques, digital preservation, natural language processing, and the use of social media in archaeology.

This talk will discuss *The Digital Laocoön Immersive (VR exhibit)* project undertaken by The

Glasgow School of Art and the digital studio ISO Design—an interdisciplinary pilot project funded by UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council 'Next Generation of Immersive Experiences' funding strand. As source material, the project used a plaster cast of a renowned classical statue of *Laocoön and His Sons* which was destroyed during the 2018 fire at the Glasgow School of Art. This, now lost, artwork forms the basis for this presentation. In particular, Stuart will discuss the evolution of digital heritage objects from records to artefacts in their own right and finally to portals capable of operating in a broader information network. A key theme will be how the deployment of co-design and the intentionality underpinning the production process changes the ways in which the digital object might be received and how it can operate both as catalyst for the production of heritage significance and a focus for debate around contested heritage.

Ferdinand Saumarez Smith

Dr Ferdinand Saumarez Smith is the Director of Factum Foundation London, the UK branch of Factum Foundation for Digital Technology in Preservation, Madrid, and a historian of ideas and religion. Working with Factum Foundation, he has curated exhibitions at Sir John Soane's Museum, the Nigerian National Museum, and the British Museum, and run cultural preservation projects worldwide, including in Nigeria, Brazil, Chad, Niger, and Easter Island. A focus of his work is the use of facsimiles in the debate on repatriation, on which he has written extensively, including in *The Bakor Monoliths: Preserving Ancestral Stones in South-Eastern Nigeria* (2022) and in forthcoming books on the topic published by Routledge and De Gruyter. As an intellectual historian, his monograph *Eleusis and Enlightenment: The Problem of the Mysteries in Eighteenth-Century Thought* was published in Brill's Studies in Intellectual History Series in 2024. More recently he has written on the subject of calendrical time in the Enlightenment for Routledge's *A Cultural History of Time* series. A forthcoming chapter 'The Parthenon and the Telesterion: Digital Technology and Cultural Preservation' in *Conservation in Crisis*, edited by Simon Schaffer, Jenny Bulstrode, and Daniel Margocsy, will reflect on the relationship between his work for Factum and his academic interests.

Cultural property is often conceived of as a zero-sum-game in which, as in geopolitics, one nation's loss is entailed in another's gain. This chapter reflects on the application of digital recording and reproducing technologies alongside training and teambuilding to shift the terms of the debate from an either/or to a both/and model in the context of Nigerian cultural heritage. A key focus is the use of 3D-scanning and 3D-printing technologies alongside more traditional casting methods to make facsimiles of cultural artifacts accessible to people and source communities; essential in a country as large and with as many security risks as Nigeria. The case is made for the importance of digital imaging and archiving, alongside communities that love their heritage, in preventing the illicit removal of cultural property. Finally, the complex issue of to whom repatriated cultural heritage belongs in a nation-state made up of a mosaic of communities first joined under British colonial rule in the early twentieth century is explored. Under consideration are three remarkable areas of Nigerian cultural heritage: the Bakor (formerly Cross River or Ikom) monoliths, the Igbo-Ukwu bronzes, and the Benin bronzes, which the authors have collaborated with colleagues from the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) and several Nigerian universities in preserving at various times over the past decade.

Matthias Wivel

Matthias Wivel is Head of Research at Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek. He was Curator of Sixteenth-Century Italian Paintings at the National Gallery between 2013 and 2024, where he curated or co-curated the exhibitions *Michelangelo and Sebastiano* (2017), *Lorenzo Lotto Portraits* (2018-

19), *Titian: Love, Desire, Death* (2020-21), *Raphael* (2022) and *Parmigianino – The Vision of St Jerome* (2024-25). He has published widely on the art of the Italian renaissance in the sixteenth century, particularly that of Titian, Sebastiano del Piombo and Michelangelo, with particular attention to the creative process and workshop practice. He is co-founder of the Danish Comics Council and has been active as a critic, curator and organizer within the sphere of comics and cartoon art for over 25 years.

Michelangelo Imperfect was a research and exhibition project hosted by SMK, the National Gallery of Denmark, March-August 2025. It brought together original drawings, sculptural models and documents with historical plaster casts and newly produced, hi-fidelity facsimiles for a monograph presentation of Michelangelo's sculpture. It combined art historical methodology with cutting-edge 3D technology and traditional sculptural craftsmanship to study Michelangelo's practice as a sculptor and, through that, his artistic sensibility and continued place at the centre of the Western canon. This paper will discuss the thoughts and work that went into the project, the research questions it tried to elucidate, and the learning we as art historians and curators might take from it.

Francesca Zappia

Francesca Zappia is a curator and PhD researcher at the Glasgow School of Art. Her curatorial work explores transmission of cultural memory in artistic and curatorial research, with a particular focus on artwork reproductions and heritage reimagination. Grounded in 'the curatorial', her practice encompasses educational, discursive, polyvocal, editorial, and digital formats to shape research-driven projects, museum interventions, and public and social engagement. Recent curatorial projects include *Monuments for the Present* (Glasgow International 2024), a year-long community engagement and exhibition project co-created with Maryhill Integration Network's art group and co-led with artist Paria Goodarzi and heritage curator Mia Gubbay; *Tomorrow Never Dies. Laocoön's Hyperrealities* (2024), part of the research project *The Grey Zone of the Original (from Bifaces to NFT)*, led by Haute Ecole d'Art et Design (HEAD) Geneva and presented in the plaster cast collection of the University of Geneva; and *Flâneurs. Copies, appropriations, citations from the collection of the Centre national des arts plastiques* (CNAP & Shelter Press, Fr/En 2021/2023, 572 pp.).

This presentation will explore the potential of the copy as a mode of remediation. Francesca's doctoral research focuses on the practices of artists such as Michael Rakowitz, Nora Al-Badri, Morehshin Allahyari, Yinka Shonibare and Renzo Martens. In distinct, yet intersecting ways, these artists mobilise analogue and digital forms of copying as instruments of institutional critique directed at the universal museum. Their work extends beyond museological critique to address broader issues of social and economic justice, the expropriation of land, and the role of Western technology corporations in the production, circulation, and ownership of data derived from cultural heritage. These artistic practices have developed alongside the increasing deployment of digital reproductive technologies for heritage preservation and restitution. The presentation analyses both the convergences and the tensions between what may be termed the 'creative' copy and the 'heritage' copy, tracing how reparative gestures emerge, and how they might be further activated, through these distinct modalities of reproduction.