

Revealing the Renaissance

Engaging visitors with *Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings*

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This is an online version of a report prepared by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre for the British Museum. Commercially sensitive information has been removed

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Visitors are **impressed** by the unique approach and insight offered in *Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings*. They are **fascinated** to learn about the **drawings' journeys** and their social and political context.

The exhibition presents an **opportunity** for the Museum to build a reputation of **unique** art curating.

But the exhibition marketing currently fails to **communicate** the **breadth of appeal** to a wide audience, hindering its capacity to engage both specialists and general Museum visitors to become the Museum's next major art exhibition.

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1 What we were asked to do

1.1 Brief

The British Museum commissioned Morris Hargreaves McIntyre to carry out a formative evaluation of plans for a temporary exhibition: *Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings* which will run from 22 April to 25 July 2010.

The exhibition follows on from the success of the British Museum's *Michelangelo Drawings: closer to the master* in 2006. The exhibition will take place in the Round Reading Room and will be the first time that this space has been used for an art exhibition. Presenting an overview of the development of drawing throughout Italy, the exhibition will cover the period 1400 – 1510, from the beginning of the Renaissance to the early drawings of Raphael and Michelangelo. It will offer a rare glimpse into the mind and technique of some of the most celebrated Renaissance artists. Approximately 50 drawings will be displayed from the British Museum's own collection alongside 50 drawings loaned from the Uffizi Museum in Florence.

The research project was designed to test which aspects of the exhibition appeal to potential visitors, their expectations of such an exhibition, reactions to marketing material and how links could be drawn with another temporary exhibition that will be on at the same time: *Kingdom of Ife: sculptures from West Africa*.

The assumptions behind the planning for this exhibition are that it will have wide appeal following on from the success of *Michelangelo Drawings: closer to the master* and will also attract New Intenders¹ initially attracted by the Great Rulers series, in addition to the regular audience who come for the Prints and Drawings Department's exhibitions. The Museum also expects to attract visitors who have not previously been to the British Museum but who do attend art galleries and students of art history, history, art and design.

1.2 Research methods

In order to meet the needs of the brief, we moderated four focus groups at the British Museum involving 21 attenders. These allowed us to explore the views of visitors in depth and identify what visitors to *Fra Angelico to Leonardo*:

¹ New Intenders are defined as those visitors who were first attracted to the British Museum specifically to attend a special exhibition, and had not been previously

Italian Renaissance Drawings need to engage with the exhibition and which approaches to exhibition design and interpretation appeal the most.

Respondent criteria

The groups were recruited using the following criteria:

- Regular British Museum visitors who have attended both the collection and a free or paid-entry exhibition at the venue
- Infrequent British Museum visitors who have attended an art exhibition (free or paid-entry) in London
- Visitors who first attended the British Museum to see one of the Great Ruler exhibitions in the Reading Room
- Non British Museum visitors and lapsed visitors who do visit galleries in London (National Portrait Gallery, Royal Academy or Tate)

The groups encompassed a wide profile of culturally active visitors with varying relationships to the British Museum.

Group format

Attendees were initially shown the proposed exhibition poster and asked for top-line responses, before articulating their hopes and fears of such an exhibition. A presentation was then given by British Museum staff outlining the layout and design of the exhibition, the various themes that will be covered and supporting examples of drawings before discussions were conducted in small groups.

By examining respondents' reactions to the various aspects of the exhibition, we are able to make recommendations on how the British Museum can engage visitors through this temporary exhibition.

2 How resonant was the initial proposition?

We asked attenders to briefly consider the proposed exhibition poster and reveal their top-of-mind responses. In this way we were able to test whether the current poster design would firstly attract their attention, and what assumptions they would draw about such an exhibition having seen only the poster alone.

It is important to note however that the poster tested in this research represents only one element of the marketing campaign, and would be used in conjunction with a range of other media.

2.1 Visitors' expectations

Hopes

We asked attenders to quickly note down the hopes that they would have for such an exhibition after having briefly discussed the poster. In considering the below responses there is a clear expectation that the exhibition will provide not only art, but information on the social, historical and political context as well as personal information on the featured artists. Visitors would hope that this information is presented in an interactive and engaging way:

'That I would learn the history behind the art' Forum participant

'Varied drawing styles ... learn of different artists' Forum participant

'Hope it would blow me away' Forum participant

'Hope that the exhibition would offer a history of Italian Renaissance art with a wide selection of drawings and information' Forum participant

'I would expect more than just the paintings, perhaps an expert giving talks or explanations of the paintings' Forum participant

'I might expect a level of interactivity' Forum participant

Fears

Visitors' fears centre on being disengaged from the exhibition with there being little accompanying information to the art. Some visitors fear that the exhibition may be too focused on a specific style of art, and that they will not experience value for money, being able to see similar art elsewhere for free:

'Lots of very similar pieces' Forum participant

'Simply drawings, no further explanation' Forum participant

'That 'saturation point' would be reached rather quickly ... accompanying information may not be that extensive and / or useful' Forum participant

'It would bore me and put me off visiting further exhibitions' Forum participant

'It looks like a bog-standard art exhibition. If it was simply a series of paintings, I could see that at the National Gallery' Forum participant

'Too specific, only drawings – could the subject matter be opened up to include other things?' Forum participant

2.2 What does the word 'Renaissance' mean to visitors?

Renaissance is a word that people are familiar with, although their knowledge of the subject may be limited to understanding it as an era of new thought and 'rebirth'. Many are unsure of the specific dates of the Renaissance, however some are able to list well known artists associated with the period:

'I know it means rebirth doesn't it? Or new dawn of thoughts and it centres on Italy, that's it for me' Infrequent British Museum attender

'Medieval Renaissance ... I am not quite sure where one goes into the other one, what date it is' Infrequent British Museum attender

'I've got some information, you know, I can pick the great ones like Leonardo and Michelangelo, but not a driving passion' Regular British Museum attender

'Renaissance is one of those things, it's a word that describes an era but kind of doesn't describe anything – you can't really hang anything on the term Renaissance ... it is ... quite woolly, it covers so much' Infrequent British Museum attender

'I don't have any specialised knowledge of Renaissance, I mean generally I understand it is the rebirth Leonardo Da Vinci, Michelangelo' Regular British Museum attender

Whilst specialist knowledge of the subject is relatively limited amongst the visitors we spoke to, a compounding idea surfaced that the theme of the Renaissance is somewhat overplayed. The drawing featured in the poster seemed familiar to many visitors and some expressed the attitude that such art is indistinguishable from its contemporaries:

'I think I would be quite worried ... with the word 'Renaissance' that it has been a bit ... done to death, especially if you have been dragged on school trips around Italy' **Infrequent British Museum attender**

'I just feel as if we have all seen it before, even though we maybe haven't because it has been over used in Christmas cards, that kind of image ... cherubs and all that stuff' **Infrequent British Museum attender**

'I am a bit worried that once I have seen one ... Renaissance painting or drawing, you have kind of seen them all' **Infrequent British Museum attender**

Whilst Renaissance art in isolation does not seem to be a major draw for the majority of visitors, there is a wider appreciation of the Renaissance period and visitors are interested in engaging with the historical and political context of the era:

'I don't have any specialised knowledge. I think - I don't want to generalise - but I think that a number of people, myself included, like Renaissance more for the history or for the effect of the Renaissance on England, on literature and so on, as opposed to exceptional art' **Regular British Museum attender**

3 Perceptions of the British Museum

Visitors' views about the British Museum as a whole will inevitably affect their reaction to the *Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings* proposition. Many visitors view the British Museum as a leading academic institution that takes a traditional approach to exhibiting as opposed to a more contemporary approach expected from other art venues:

'I think it is like the granddad of the London museums, which is not a bad thing at all, it is like a patriarchal figure' **Infrequent British Museum attender**

'I think funky might be the V & A and this might be a bit more scholarly' **Infrequent British Museum attender**

'It's a pillar ... rigid, institutional, empirical history and there are pros and cons to that' **Infrequent British Museum attender**

Some visitors expressed surprise that the British Museum would mount an art exhibition whilst others felt that there was a natural fit between this and other exhibits within the Museum:

'This is not the sort of thing I would expect to see at the British Museum because it looks like an art exhibition and that is not the sort of thing I would expect a museum to be doing' **Forum participant**

'I'm not surprised. It does fit in but I would expect it to be located much more at the Courtould or National Gallery' **Forum participant**

'I don't see why drawings don't fit in with the British Museum, I mean there's so many sculptures, I think it fits in well ... especially because it is drawings, because I think of them more as an artefact rather than a completed ... painting' **Infrequent British Museum attender**

Because visitors do not generally go to the Museum to experience only art, it cannot be assumed that general visitors, or those typical of the museum market, will visit this exhibition on the basis of the subject matter alone.

3.1 A new era for art exhibiting?

The *Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings* exhibition presents an opportunity for the Museum to build its reputation of establishing a unique approach to art exhibiting:

*'It does seem more kind of National Gallery or the Royal Academy's kind of territory. Is this something that the British Museum has always done or is this like a new direction?' **Infrequent British Museum attender***

The visitors that we spoke to had a clear idea of what to expect from an art exhibition or gallery, namely a 2-dimensional encounter with art in an exchange where they are left alone to do much of the interpreting, or carry out further independent research into a work of art's background if they are so inclined. An experience at a museum, on the other hand, is seen as more of a 3-dimensional encounter of art; as well as the opportunities for reflection and appreciation of art for art's sake, with art being treated as artefact, visitors are also presented with opportunities to develop their knowledge of the wider contributing factors that went into producing the piece of art.

Visitors are highly receptive of this 3-dimensional approach proposed by the Museum in which art is treated as artefact and the social, political and historical context of the piece as well as its technical qualities explored - rather than the more traditional art exhibiting which focuses purely on the artform. They hold the British Museum in high esteem and view it as being better placed than other institutions to take on such a unique approach:

*'I really think once it opens it will get an awful lot of media coverage because it is such an unusual thing to do ... Because the art galleries, they don't do this kind of thing' **Non British Museum attender***

*'I think one of the reasons I like coming here is because I am never entirely sure what I am going to see when I go around the next corner, but I think if you are going to somewhere that is known more as [an] art gallery type place, you know you are going to see some art' **Infrequent British Museum attender***

*'I think there are things that [the] British Museum can provide that the others ... wouldn't ... they wouldn't even intend to provide any historical perspective, it's an appreciation of the artists' work more than anything else ... It is something more of a process rather than the end result' **Regular British Museum attender***

*'I would say that the British Museum is far better quality than the Royal Academy for instance ... I don't think that the National Gallery really, wouldn't really go for a drawing exhibition like that ... it wouldn't draw the sort of crowds to give up their space downstairs ... but if it is staged at the British Museum, there's people, connoisseurs who will go and have a look at the specialist drawings' **Regular British Museum attender***

Key to appreciating this approach to curating are perceived opportunities for learning. Visitors generally see the Museum as adding value to the exhibition,

and distinguishable from other venues, through the depth of accompanying information that will be provided. Unlike the usual art gallery experience where learning opportunities are arguably limited, *Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings* will provide a multitude of learning opportunities that satisfy a variety of interests and a range of visitors from Art Lovers through to Self-Developers:

'The Academy or Portrait Gallery would display the art with very little explanation or information, on the assumption that visitors simply want to see art for art's sake. A museum is a place of learning. I'd like to think that after seeing this exhibition ... I'll have gained an insight into the political, economical, religious, social and personal influences that affected the artists and ... helped to craft the finished pieces' **First time Great Ruler exhibition visitor**

'Some people go ... they see art and they like to interpret themselves, I like to have the text or to have somebody bringing in the history, bringing it out and explaining it a little bit more. So I would want some level of interactivity just to help me understand more about it' **Non British Museum attender**

'You walk round any floor in here, you go through time periods, you can see the tools as you walk around, whereas an art gallery is ... it's just there and you take it in rather than engage, I guess it's like a different aspect in looking at galleries ... as opposed to a museum' **Regular British Museum attender**

'It's what I hoped it would be because from a museum I want to gain knowledge, I want to come away knowing something I didn't know before, an art exhibition wouldn't give me that sort of knowledge, anywhere near that' **Forum participant**

4 Visitors' needs: interpretation

The above-described approach to curating involves including a wide variety of multi-layered interpretation and themes. This section looks at the main themes to be included in the exhibition and the reaction of visitors to these themes.

4.1 Human interest

Several visitors were interested in learning about the featured artists as people. They felt that this information would open up another dimension of understanding and raise questions such as what actually motivates an artist to draw – questions which are not necessarily answered elsewhere. Including such elements of social history also helps visitors to engage more deeply at an emotional and spiritual level:

*'I would like to know, did they know each other? Did they train together? Did they influence each other? Did they get on? ... I would like to know if they had ... any relationship with each other ... was there rivalry, was there poaching of clients?' **Infrequent British Museum attender***

*'I think the phrase that caught my eye the most at the very beginning of that presentation ... was 'why artists draw' which is something – I am not an art enthusiast particularly, I don't know a lot about it, I am more about the artefact, but that is a very, very interesting sort of hook, it is something that we take for granted ... we never question why artists draw, what is the motivation' **Infrequent British Museum attender***

*'[I'd be interested in finding out] about the artists' backgrounds and personal lives. Anything that will help me to feel an emotional connection with the pieces I'm looking at ... I believe it's details such as these that will make the difference between a standard art exhibition and one that will give visitors a memorable experience' **First time Great Ruler exhibition visitor***

4.2 Historical and political context

The wider historical and political context is very important to visitors; they want to know how society helped shape the art and what else was happening in the world at that time.

The Museum recognises that there will always be a proportion of British Museum visitors who are not attracted to the exhibition, and as such are not a target audience for this display.

'By putting a physical object in a museum, you don't know where it's come from, or what context it was used in, you're really not going to understand it as much as you would if you do have a history and the context of the object of the artist' **Regular British Museum attender**

'From a historical point of view I would come to read the labels and the audio guide, I wouldn't necessarily spend hours looking at the drawings' **Regular British Museum attender**

'The wider social environment ... art ... is reflective, the wider context which I think is quite important, it is interesting to draw those kind of things out. I think being [at the British Museum] ... it gives the opportunity for that'. **Non British Museum attender**

4.3 The technical elements of drawing: a drawing's journey

Seeing drawings that were never destined to be publicly viewed is very appealing to visitors, there is a definite appetite for this type of 'technical' art and it is something that many visitors and art-lovers will have experience of from previous art exhibitions.

Importantly visitors want to learn from their exhibition experience, and *Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings* may be an ideal platform on which visitors with little art exhibition experience are trained to look at and understand art. Here visitors are offered the 'behind the scenes' insight that galleries deprive them of, and they are presented with a chance to learn connoisseurship by understanding artistic processes:

'It is like all these things they do with Picasso ... they show you all the things he made to prepare the Guernica, it is not the same as the Guernica but you have a look at it' **Non British Museum attender**

'[At] the David Hockney exhibition at the Royal Academy they showed all his ... little sketches of all his family from when he was young, it was just fascinating, to see, absolutely fascinating' **Non British Museum attender**

Again, this approach to the art is seen as original, offering an experience that might not be widely available and having a broader appeal than if the 'finished product' was the main focus:

'I was interested in what they actually used to draw and the development of paper. I am interested to see ... the links and things that they used, and did they actually have pencils?' Forum participant

'I think I would prefer [seeing the drawing and then the end product] so you get a sense of the process, but then I think that it would change the whole focus, it wouldn't just be really drawings anymore, even if it wasn't the real images it would be much more about the process and the kind of journey I suppose of putting it together which I think actually would probably appeal to me more' Infrequent British Museum attender

Generally visitors would prefer to start with the initial sketches before moving on to reproductions of the finished piece, and would expect this to be presented side-by-side or even in a format which allowed them to control such as interactive screens (discussed further in the next chapter):

'How it turns into a painting ... to have them side by side would be really good even if it was just a reproduction' Infrequent British Museum attender

'Clicking through ... to be able to do that yourself [and show a drawing's progression] ... to be able to go from one to the other and then back' Non British Museum attender

Scientific analysis

The British Museum has recently been using non-invasive techniques to analyse drawings in order to reveal details which have remained hidden since they were originally created. These details divulge how the drawing has evolved over time, where the artist changed their mind about the composition, erased mistakes or built up the drawing in layers. We wanted to test whether such hidden details would be of interest to visitors, how familiar they were with such techniques and how they would expect such information to be displayed.

In a similar vein to uncovering a drawing's journey, the scientific analysis had widespread appeal, instilling a sense of privilege amongst visitors and the idea that they are gaining 'insider knowledge':

'Fantastic' Forum participant

'I think everybody likes to feel a bit like a detective, like they discovered something hidden so ... when you can see ... the mistakes or the changes of heart ... makes you that bit closer to the artist I suppose' Infrequent British Museum attender

'That's really good' Regular British Museum attender

As with the previous themes covered in this section, the scientific element is a 'way in' for those not comfortable with an entirely 'art' experience but who prefer studying the technical elements of art, and may have specific appeal to those with a scientific background:

'It's creating an interest ... it's also a scientific X-ray ... so interests all sorts of people, maybe not just art-lovers ... it could be people in the medical profession ... people who are studying these type of technologies' **Regular British Museum attender**

'I was at Russell-Cotes Museum in Bournemouth a couple of weeks ago and they have had lots of paintings and sculptures renovated ... They talked about scraping off the layers of paint, what they did it with, what was under it, what they found, there were X-rays and it was ... really, really interesting ... you could actually see as they took off the paint and it was absolutely fantastic, I mean I didn't know anything about the art but talking about what was under it ... was brilliant' **Infrequent British Museum attender**

'I think [the scientific analysis] would be great for teenagers, young people would enjoy this too and art students ... it would be of great benefit' **Non British Museum attender**

How should scientific analysis be included?

Visitors were undecided as to whether scientific analysis should be given a thematic prominence throughout the exhibition or whether it should have a separate section. On the one hand it makes sense to some to have this theme running throughout as it fits in with the idea of a drawing's journey, on the other hand some visitors felt that it merited a dedicated section in which it could be explored to a deeper, more specialist level and in which the technologies and methods used in this process could be included:

'I think there's a sort of thematic integrity to having the [scientific] analysis because a sketch in itself is a working process, showing the process going into the sketch, it seems very relevant and so I think it should be spread around the exhibition' **Regular British Museum attender**

'Probably near the end when you've finished seeing everything and then say 'well this is how we did it, this is how we got these images underneath' ... I think you could probably do a whole exhibition just on the use of technology and science in this sort of field' **Infrequent British Museum attender**

'There could be a room dedicated to specific examples of ... the X-raying or the cleaning or the storing, one section all about that, so if people didn't want to they didn't have to go in there' **Infrequent British Museum attender**

'For that kind of thing it makes sense to have it in a separate area so you can really appreciate everything that goes with it' Non British Museum attender

4.4 Understanding the significance of drawings

In order for the exhibition to engage a wider audience than just those with specialist knowledge visitors need to be made aware of the significance of the drawings. It should not be assumed they have the background knowledge to appreciate their work in isolation, we have already seen how some visitors may 'lump together' drawings of this period. Understanding a drawing's importance through relating it to wider context and artistic developments will lead to a deeper level of engagement:

'I think for me one of the biggest things that doesn't get addressed in any ... guides ... panel or audio, I always want to know why is this important? Why has this survived and why has it earned a place being shown in an institution like the British Museum ... why is this significant, why is this one here and not something else?' Infrequent British Museum attender

'Sometimes I look at paintings and I think 'it's very nice but I don't know why it is here'' Infrequent British Museum attender

'I am always left slightly thinking well it's nice, even if I don't understand it, I mean I can see that it is very old or it is a nice pot or a nice drawing, but why did this one make it in and not something else ... what's so special about this one?' Infrequent British Museum attender

5 Visitors' needs: layout and exhibition design

This chapter examines how the interpretation should be presented in order to maximise visitor engagement, detailing visitors' reactions to the exhibition space, interactives, projections and audioguides.

5.1 Exhibition Space

Some visitors that we spoke to had experience of the Reading Room as an exhibition space, whilst others were new to it. All, however, responded positively to this space, appreciating the grandeur of the architecture and the fact that the Reading Room is a contained, manageable space:

'I think the venue gives it a good stage. But you haven't got much colour in there' Regular British Museum attender

'This would be a really nice building [for this exhibition] ... you walk in ... you catch your breath almost ... so when they said it's going to be in that circle I do think that's the perfect place for it' Non British Museum attender

'It is not too daunting that is it? You can just make your own journey ... it looks really good' Non British Museum attender

5.2 Interactives

Interactives were generally seen as an ideal way in which those visitors with less background knowledge could engage to a deeper level and become familiar with the subjects covered in a short space of time. They are viewed as being particularly effective when exploring a sketch's journey (discussed in the previous chapter) and generally visitors could see the merit of including interactive terminals in which visitors could control a sketch's progression.

'A narration ... a little film ... they are always good. Video boxes. Then you could then get in your head the dates, what happened, who taught who etc' Infrequent British Museum attender

'[Interactive / audiovisual equipment is] a guide if you are not knowledgeable in art history, it's a guide to get to understand it quicker when you're looking at the exhibition ... I think it's educational' Regular British Museum attender

'A stand-alone unit and then people will just go and they press the button'

Non British Museum attender

Whilst it was viewed that such forms of exhibition presentation would appeal to those with limited background knowledge, their integration should be carefully balanced. Some visitors expressed the view that specialists might see interactives as diluting the subject matter whilst others thought that they might be a distraction:

'I do think that anyone who knows more about the art might see that as just a bit demeaning almost ... by putting a monitor screen in front of it as well I don't know if that would ruin it ... I know you would have the original out there as well' ***Non British Museum attender***

'Depends how [interactive / audiovisual equipment] is based on the sensitivity to the rest of the exhibition ... so some would sort of distract you from what you originally came to do which was to view the process' ***Regular British Museum attender***

5.3 Projections

Visitors appreciated that the 'finished product' to which the drawings and sketches contributed could not feature within the exhibition and they responded very positively to projecting large-scale versions instead. For some visitors this aspect of the exhibition design would set it apart from others, offering a unique visual experience.

'... projected ... so there could be a 'fake' of the real thing ... life-size. Would be amazing, wonderful' ***Non British Museum attender***

'Perhaps keep one or two pieces for the end and blow them up so they take up an entire wall (or as much space as possible)- I'm thinking of the impact that the Sistine Chapel has. Obviously it can't be matched, but perhaps scale is the most effective way to make this a 'blockbuster' [exhibition]' ***First time Great Ruler exhibition visitor***

'The original images are very small and the finished images are rather large ... this whole process of projecting the images onto the larger surface is very interesting' ***First time Great Ruler exhibition visitor***

Visitors want to be able to see and understand how specific sketches were worked into such large-scale projections and may need assistance in locating particular elements:

'[Projections] would be really good yes. Then just the small sketch obviously on something, or on the wall next to it. I suppose with the lady [with the jug] it would be a case of actually finding her [in the projection], how that relates back in' **Non British Museum attender**

Projections would also help alleviate problems caused by people queuing to see smaller exhibits, allowing several people to engage at any one time:

'By the time you get there and also someone is jostling for their position, you can't really appreciate it for any length of time ... it just feels like a series of queues. I would definitely worry about that, especially if it was a big sell out' **Infrequent British Museum attender**

5.4 Audioguides

Visitors were generally divided over audioguides, for some they are essential elements of the exhibition experience, for others they are constraining and cumbersome whilst others simply prefer absorbing information visually rather than audibly.

'I can't bear them' **Non British Museum attender**

'There is only so much you can put on a little info panel ... otherwise it just gets dull' **Infrequent British Museum attender**

The choice of audioguide narrator is likely to affect levels of engagement. Whilst visitors do not necessarily expect to recognise the narrator they would want someone with suitable intonation and tone:

'Somebody juicy, somebody with a good voice ... Somebody who has got the right kind of voice, doesn't have to be a celebrity, somebody who ... specialises in voice work, someone who understands acoustics and audio' **Infrequent British Museum attender**

'The thing about audioguides is that they are ... quite monotone and not very engaging so you can actually switch off without even realising' **Non British Museum attender**

'David Starkey, I quite like his voice' **Non British Museum attender**

For some audioguides are an ideal tool allowing visitors to satisfy particular personal interests, and they like the idea of each exhibit being approached from a variety of angles:

'You could maybe have ... on the audioguide one of them could be telling you about the actual physical nature of the painting, what it's painted with,

*look at this section here you can see [this] ... and on the other hand ... the curator telling you why this picture was considered to be important, so not why they thought it was important, but why it was considered by many to be important' **Infrequent British Museum attender***

However, information on the audioguide should not necessarily be exclusive to this form of interpretation. Instead the content should be provided in different forms to cater for different learning styles:

*'But the other thing is that we all have different capacities. I find it very distracting, instead of wearing headphones. I think with more visual, we are all different' **Regular British Museum attender***

*'I prefer having something to read, you sort of see a tourist wandering around, walking into people' **Non British Museum attender***

6 Who would visit?

6.1 Specialist audiences

Some types of visitors are guaranteed to be attracted to this exhibition, they are likely to be Art Lovers - visitors wanting a deeply moving experience through engagement with collections and objects - and would go to this exhibition regardless of whether it is held at the British Museum or not:

'It looks fantastic. Fluid - fabulous ... I have been to Uffizi, I have been to all those galleries but I would really love to see this, I'd really love to see it ... I am not an artist, but to see the technique of how it all develops and that particular time in Florence ... the paintings ... that's on at the Uffizi and the Santa Maria Novella, and it's just so wonderful' **Forum participant**

'It really appeals to me and I find Renaissance really interesting ... so that would probably encourage me to go but having had everything explained what's going to be in it, you could attract a wider audience I think' **Non British Museum attender**

As with the Great Ruler exhibitions, due to the focused and specific nature of the exhibition's content there is a sense that the exhibition will attract purposeful, intentional visitors rather than tourists and incidental visitors:

'The First Emperor, Hadrian ... they were very difficult things to go and see, but ... you have people coming from all over the world and to come see them here, it may be boring to a lot of people ... I don't think you'll see a lot of the tourists' **Regular British Museum attender**

Whilst the presentation as to what the exhibition would contain whetted the appetite of several visitors who initially dismissed the exhibition as being too narrow to satisfy their interests, many still felt that it would attract and be mainly relevant to a specialist audience:

'I think unfortunately for me just drawings on its own is too specialist, I would rather [the] exhibition was wider and had paintings and maybe architecture and other things in it' **Infrequent British Museum attender**

'It's just something that doesn't really appeal to me ... I am sure there are lots of other things that I would much rather go to that I would find more interesting ... this is something that I think I would whiz around really quickly and think I don't know enough about it to be drawn in' **Infrequent British Museum attender**

'I think I'd worry that it might be a bit worthy, especially because it is just drawings, not paintings that are a bit jazzy and colourful, I ... might think it's a bit high end, for the experts to understand the process of painting'

Infrequent British Museum attender

'I think ... it's a kind of specialised area, drawings, and I would think mainly connoisseurs would be really interested in drawings and want to see it'

Regular British Museum attender

'I suppose it has blockbuster qualities in terms of the size [of the exhibition] and also Da Vinci ... the drawing itself seems more specialist' **Regular British Museum attender**

'Specialist students, that might be here, professors who are teaching art, and going all over Europe' **Regular British Museum attender**

'It's interesting but you would have to be an expert really I think to gain a lot from it' **Forum participant**

6.2 Engaging a wider audience

There are certain revisions that could be made to the marketing communications that would work to attract a wider audience and these are discussed in the following chapter. In terms of engaging a wider audience during the exhibition, the Museum should ensure that those visitors with little background knowledge are adequately supported. In addition, narrative themes, such as history and human interest, should be given equal prominence to the art itself so that a variety of learning styles and interests are catered for:

'It needs to have something [for those with no background knowledge] otherwise you are cutting off a big chunk of eventual audience. I think maybe just, even at the very beginning some information that you can either read or you can choose to ignore' **Non British Museum attender**

'I have to say I am not an art exhibition person So drawings to me is not what appeals to me the most. But early Renaissance I find interesting ... the evolution from early Renaissance into late Renaissance ... between the social environment that's to do with the harmony in art. Then it goes less harmonic because the social environment is more ... troublesome' **Non British Museum attender**

'It's the history side of it. It seems to mingle the two really, really well and that is what I find interesting about it ... initially ... I thought 'oh it's going to be more art based, but in fact you ... can see the linear progression from

early on in the Renaissance, I think ... this is the first time they have been shown ... [it's] really quite unique' **Non British Museum attender**

6.3 A legacy of 'blockbusters'

The brief for this research states that the Museum expects the majority of visitors to *Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings* to have visited before, either to see *Michelangelo: Closer to the Master* or to recent Reading Room exhibitions in the Great Rulers series. The discussion groups revealed that whilst this is certainly the case for some visitors who view this exhibition as on a par with the Great Rulers series, other visitors feel that the different exhibitions do not have corresponding areas of interest and that the actual content of *Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings* would not have the same impact as the artefacts included in the Great Rulers series:

'I would feel rather special and overwhelmed that I would be one of few to see this ... that would be a great pull for me as it was for the First Emperor'
First time Great Ruler exhibition visitor

'I know they do things out of the ordinary like the Terracotta Army ... This is a big thing again, they just seem to get the best, more so than sticking with parameters I think' **Non British Museum attender**

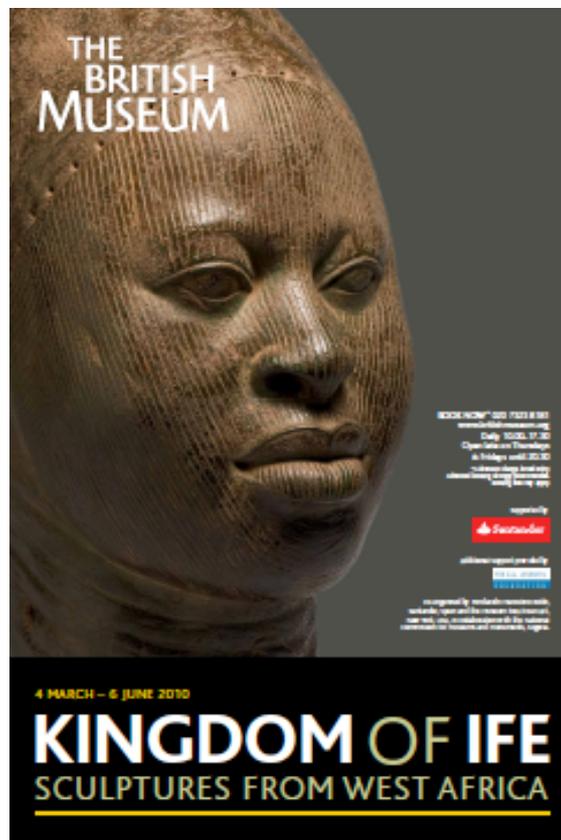
'I actually actively avoided the three big ones lately, they are slightly too historical for me and ... I am worried that they feel a bit worthy and I will feel foolish' **Infrequent British Museum attender**

'I would say that the main difference and potentially the main challenge, for the Renaissance exhibition is the 'wow' factor. Nothing could have prepared me for the incredible impact of seeing the life-sized terracotta soldiers together at the end of the First Emperor exhibition, it literally took my breath away. I think it will be very difficult to achieve the same effect in the Renaissance exhibition, purely because of the scale' **First time Great Ruler exhibition visitor**

7 Complimentary propositions

The British Museum is holding another temporary exhibition that will coincide with *Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings*, running over a concurrent 6-week period. *Kingdom of Ife: sculptures from West Africa* will run from 4th March until 6th June and will display sculptures from the Ife culture, a civilisation that flourished in the 12th to 15th centuries AD in West Africa (present day Nigeria) in what is the homeland of the Yoruba people. It will be the first time that a major exhibition has focused exclusively on Ife art and culture outside Nigeria.

We wanted to find out to what extent *Kingdom of Ife: sculptures from West Africa* would appeal to visitors interested in seeing the *Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings* exhibition. The exhibitions compliment each other through drawing light to the absolute comparable quality of the Renaissance drawings and African sculptures. The British Museum hope that the exhibitions will offer visitors the chance to gain great insight into two cultures' world view and artistic tradition which co-existed in the 15th century.



7.1 Initial responses

Visitors were generally receptive of the idea behind the dual proposition, appreciating the contrast in perspective a visit to both would bring:

'Is the art from the same time period? That to me would be really, really interesting, that on one side we have got a rebirth, but on the other hand ... we are looking at this as something that is almost ... primitive' **Infrequent British Museum attender**

'It is a nice contrast' **Non British Museum attender**

'I find it interesting insofar as it was the same period, I like to ... compare what we were doing in Italy or Europe to what we were doing there' **Regular British Museum attender**

However, there were many attenders whose interest in art simply is not strong enough to motivate them to extend their exhibition experience in this way. Nevertheless marketing both exhibitions as a dual proposition is a potentially effective way of encouraging those who have no prior frames of reference to become more adventurous and engage with African Art. Confidence gained from the knowledge absorbed in *Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings* would help visitors interpret and spark interest in the mostly unfamiliar concept of Ife culture:

'I wouldn't go to see [Kingdom of Ife: sculptures from West Africa] unless I had been to see the Renaissance [exhibition] ... because I have never really been very attracted to African art but actually looking at this and finding out that it is the same time gives me a taste for it which I wouldn't thought I would have had' **Non British Museum attender**

'I don't think I would go out of my way to attend Kingdom of Ife. It this was an added extra onto the Italian Renaissance ticket, I would certainly have a look around, especially if it happened to be in the room next door' **First time Great Ruler exhibition visitor**

7.2 Gaining wider perspectives

Whereas the Renaissance, at least the archetypal drawings and word itself, is familiar to the majority of visitors, Ife culture is an 'unknown', and this in itself is appealing to some:

'It looks really interesting ... I haven't heard much about, well I've heard nothing before' Non British Museum attender

'[Seeing both exhibitions] would just be really ... a curveball combination that you wouldn't see normally. That would surprise me so if I got the email about it and I was just scrolling down I would think 'ooh that's totally out there'' Infrequent British Museum attender

The experience of both exhibitions may help overcome a potentially dominant euro-centric viewpoint and is likely to appeal to those visitors who already have a strong interest in art, offering a new and original stance from which to consider the perhaps familiar objects of the Renaissance:

'It sounds different. If there was going to be a draw for it I think it would be the name ... it is something slightly different and it is really what you are going to take from it. Like many things it is what you are going to learn and I think that would be the appeal of going' Non British Museum attender

'I think it ... would put the world in balance, the fact that we always look at everything from a completely almost European point of view and that the Renaissance was seriously the most cool thing that happened in art ever, and it clearly wasn't because people had been doing far better things for an awful lot longer in other places' Infrequent British Museum attender

7.3 Propositioning Lines

Most visitors would expect to find out about the dual proposition when purchasing tickets to *Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings* or in emailed information.

We wanted to test how the dual proposition would be best communicated and the Museum had five propositioning lines to test amongst attenders:

1. Sophisticated, technical, beautiful: Italian drawings, African sculpture, 12th – 16th centuries
2. Discover two cultures, two traditions, one world: Italian drawings and African sculpture, 12th – 16th centuries
3. Society, culture, science and art: Discover Italian drawings and African sculpture, 12th – 16th centuries
4. World view – 12th to 16th centuries: Italian drawings and African sculpture

5. Travel the world back to 12th - 16th centuries: Italian drawings and African sculpture

For those who had an opinion there was a clear preference amongst attendees for the second proposition: 'Discover two cultures, two traditions, one world: Italian drawings and African sculpture, 12th - 16th centuries'. Importantly, visitors felt that they needed to know the dates covered by the exhibitions and for it to be explicit that they cover the same time periods:

'I think some reference needs to be made of the fact that they are at the same time. You think 'Renaissance', you think of ... winsome women with ringlets, but this is exactly the same time period ... these look modern. This is what you would expect people making now - so I would be more struck by the fact that [the African sculptures] are as old as that [Renaissance drawings]' **Infrequent British Museum attendee**

However, for some visitors the coinciding time periods could be misleading, for the era covered in *Kingdom of Ife: sculptures from West Africa* begins three centuries before that covered in *Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings* and it was felt that the proposition should be qualified in some way to convey this:

'The Renaissance exhibition goes from ... 15th century and 16th century, so the 12th and [15th] ... are in Africa, so that is a little misleading ... so in fact they are not that contemporary really are they?' **Non British Museum attendee**

7.4 Ticket offers

Many visitors expressed concern at the rising cost of going to both exhibitions and would expect a form of discount or promotional offer:

'It's the expense I am thinking of two exhibitions If there were an offer, to entice you to go to both I would consider it' **Infrequent British Museum attendee**

'Buy one get one free' **Non British Museum attendee**

'If you bought a ticket for this one, if they then were to say 'for an extra £3 you can also then go into this one if you like at the same time' and explained it then people might' **Non British Museum attendee**

Visitors would also like the flexibility of being able to attend the second exhibition at a later date. Whilst some visitors would prefer to visit both on the same outing, saving time and whilst the first exhibition is fresh in their mind, others felt that it would be too demanding and too much information to see both in the same trip:

'I think people would do that in a day ... when you think about how big the Royal Academy and places like that are, this isn't anything like as big is it? It's quite small really, I think people would do [both] in a day' **Non British Museum attender**

'I wouldn't have the energy for two exhibitions' **Regular British Museum attender**

'Well to me it does appeal tremendously ... we should be given the option not to go the same day' **Regular British Museum attender**

'If people have the option if they wanted to be able to return to the other one the next day ... that would probably suit quite a few people' **Non British Museum attender**

8

Conclusion and recommendations

In the main Italian Renaissance art is viewed as a special interest subject matter, and subsequently the exhibition could initially be deemed most attractive to experts, with little to tempt more generalist audiences. Whilst ‘Renaissance’ is a term that most attenders are familiar with, the majority have little background knowledge of the era or artistic movement and are thus immediately alienated from the current exhibition poster. As a term, ‘Renaissance’ does not equate to a ‘must-see’,

The primary proposition conveyed in the title *Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings* indicates a range of artists – an academic review – and many visitors will be unclear on the quality of those included. Some visitors cynically ‘see through’ the title’s inclusion of Leonardo and, unaware of the size and range of works, may view it as a marketing attempt to maximise footfall. It is also currently unclear to what extent visitors can explore the lives, characters and motivations behind the names, an element that we found to have widespread appeal, and key to the success of the *Michelangelo: Closer to the Master* exhibition.

However, we found people to view the approach of exploring the ‘stories behind the drawings’ – the human interest, social and political context – and the concealed artistic techniques and characteristics of the drawings as highly appealing. Through such an experience, more generalist audiences are given the tools to interpret and engage with art in a context that they are perhaps more familiar and comfortable with, with the drawings being treated as artefact (a museum approach) rather than artform (a gallery approach). It is here that the British Museum will add value to a subject that is otherwise deemed as widely available elsewhere or unoriginal. Perceptions of the British Museum’s brand are such that visitors view it as being more qualified than other venues to pioneer what is considered such a groundbreaking approach and is what made this such a popular proposition. The British Museum is faced with an opportunity of building its reputation in this unique approach to art curating.

Marketing *Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings* as a dual proposition alongside the exhibition on the lesser known Ife Culture is likely to encourage some visitors to be more adventurous, offering a refreshing angle from which to consider European Art from the 15th century. This interest, however will be mainly amongst those visitors with a more specialist interest in art and even their propensity to visit is likely to be on the condition that they are offered discounted dual tickets that are flexible, allowing them to see

Kingdom of Ife: sculptures from West Africa on a subsequent visit. The propositioning line should draw attention to the coinciding time periods covered in the exhibitions and the scope for drawing comparisons and gaining a unique perspective.



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