

# Modern Classicisms Launch Event

## Impact Report



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## 1. Introduction

The first phase of the *Modern Classicisms* project was launched on 10th November 2017 with a workshop held in the Great Hall at King's College London. The event, entitled *Modern Classicisms: Classical Art and Contemporary Artists in Dialogue*, featured 35 speakers and was attended by over 250 delegates.<sup>1</sup> This report focuses on the impact of this event for participants.

Evaluation data was collected by means of questionnaires handed out as part of the delegate information and collected by conference assistants at the doors at the end of the event. A total of 45 questionnaires were completed and collected on paper. An additional 17 respondents filled out a version of the survey online. A further 4 respondents returned surveys electronically by email. This report is primarily based on the data from these 66 responses, representing around a quarter of the attendees. It also draws on audio recordings of interviews conducted with a number of participants on the day.

The author of this report attended the workshop but was not involved in gathering the questionnaire or interview data, all of which were supplied to her following the event. The report was written in her capacity as independent impact consultant employed by the Classics Department at King's College London.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://modernclassicisms.com/workshop/> for more details (accessed 16th November 2018)

## 2. Demographic data

Of the total respondents 40 (61%) identified themselves as female, 19 (29%) as male.<sup>2</sup> This imbalance may reflect willingness to complete an evaluation and cannot necessarily be taken as an accurate guide to the gender split of attendees as a whole. The age breakdown of respondents is shown in Table 1. The predominance of students, from undergraduate to PhD level, described below, may help explain the relatively high number of attendees in the 18-25 bracket.

Age range	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Under 18	0	0%
18-25	19	29%
26-39	25	38%
40-65	11	17%
65+	7	11%
No answer provided	4	6%
<i>Total</i>	66	<i>101% (due to rounding)</i>

Table 1: Age range of respondents

Most respondents were resident in the UK, with almost half giving a London postcode (31 of 66 respondents or 47%). A further 6 respondents were from London commuter areas (Greenford, Croydon, Carshalton, Epsom, Westerham and Egham). Nine respondents did not provide details of their place of residence. The remaining 20 respondents had travelled from further afield. UK university cities featured repeatedly, perhaps unsurprisingly, with 2 respondents from Oxford, 4 from Cambridge and 2 from York. Other UK locations listed were Bradford, Dorchester, Leicester, Milton Keynes, Sheffield and Southampton. International respondents came from Belgium, France, Greece and the USA (3 respondents).

The questionnaire also asked respondents for their occupation/job title/affiliation. Answers to this question indicated that the audience attending this event was primarily made up of students (15 respondents either listing simply 'student' or specifying MA or undergraduate studies, and 12 describing themselves as PhD students), artists (12 respondents) as well as university academics (6 respondents) and museum/art gallery professionals (3 respondents). People listing other occupations not counted as belonging to the categories above (15 respondents) sometimes worked in other cultural or academic-related occupations, for example Antiquities Consultant or Academic Programmes Programmer.<sup>3</sup> Again, the relative numbers in different categories may to some degree reflect willingness to complete evaluation forms rather than being an accurate indication of the audience as a whole, with students perhaps more likely to complete a form requested by a senior academic.

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<sup>2</sup> Seven respondents (11%) skipped this question.

<sup>3</sup> Where respondents listed more than one occupation they were counted in both categories.

### 3. Positive and negative feedback

There were two spaces on the paper questionnaire where respondents could leave very open-ended comments, not tied to a specific topic. At the bottom of the first page there was a space for 'any other comments' and at the bottom of the second page there was a space headed 'Please share with us any other reflections on the day, or your own ideas about *Modern Classicisms*'. The online version of the questionnaire also included the same two questions. The 'any other comments' heading on the online survey seems to have been grouped together with the question about outcome categories, and mainly attracted responses attempting to clarify a technical problem making selections in that section. Responses to that question on the online survey have therefore been excluded from the data (see also Section 4 below).

On the paper questionnaire (including those submitted by email), responses to 'any other comments' tended to focus on opinions about the day. The space headed 'Please share with us any other reflections on the day, or your own ideas about *Modern Classicisms*' was used by some respondents to both the paper questionnaire and online survey to add other similar congratulatory or constructively critical comments about the day, which are also included here.

Twelve respondents simply wrote non-specific favourable or complimentary comments, such as 'Thank you!!!' (MC3) or 'Brilliant project and initiative' (MC38).<sup>4</sup> A further 21 respondents wrote positive comments which provided detail about specific aspects of the event which were most appreciated. For example:

Absolutely fantastic and inspirational. Loved having the panel with artists and their views. (MC13)

The range of media covered was fantastic (is there space for e.g. architecture?) and it was great to hear from collectors, artists, curators, researchers and academics. (MC14)

Interesting combination between artists and academics, opened up the lens on Classicism in many different senses. (MC15)

Excellent variety - both in terms of the speakers and the format of each of the panels. Brilliant conference - thank you to all involved in the organisation! (MC20)

Fantastic day! Very well organised and structured. One of the best events I've been to in a while. Thank you!!! (MC22)

Love the variety of talks and material and the tone of the day has been just right - playful, not coy - a modern classicistic feeling has been very well-achieved, I think - thank you for a very curious day which illustrated how fun the Greeks and Romans still are. (MC24)

It was an extremely enjoyable workshop that King's and Michael organised. It was extremely great to hear all these artists and their view on classical sculpture and especially Marc Quinn. The format of interviews and panel discussions worked really well (MC32)

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<sup>4</sup> Where comments included both positive and negative aspects, they were counted in both categories.

Thank you for putting this together: a really wonderful source of inspiration across many disciplines. (MC42)

I thought the first part of the day was really engaging. I liked the approach of panels, interviews and questions. The videos were a great touch to keep engaged. I like how different mediums were all used and mentioned. (MC45)

By comparison with this total of 33 positive responses only 14 responses included negative comments or suggestions for doing things differently. These were generally constructive criticism of very specific aspects seemingly intended to improve any similar events in future: for example, 3 respondents mentioned the photographers present at the event, which they had found distracting.

The space headed 'Please share with us any other reflections on the day, or your own ideas about *Modern Classicisms*' was also used by some participants to share more general thoughts about the topic or their own reactions to the day. For one participant, the day had clearly sparked a whole series of meaningful reflections about their own artistic practice and sense of identity as a artist/scholar:

Thanks especially for broaching the difficult topic of the 2D form! For me, this session raised more questions than answers but it certainly was thought provoking and certainly helped me make sense of what I am doing/trying to do with my paintings - there is certainly a tension in my work between the subject & the 2D form & the viewing modes this demands/denies. The whole day certainly also made me think about my role as an artist as different to the work I produced as a scholar: something that had been at the back of my mind since I made the transition, but have now faced with more clarity. I feel as though I still trade in ideas, making connections, joining things up, but I am more comfortable with the freedom that manifesting this in art brings than an academic investigation. (MC7)

Another wrote ' Today will remain more important than one may immediately realise, it will inform understanding in both a modern and classical context' (MC43).

Overall, the comments discussed in this section suggest that the event was very positively received by the participants, with a high number of enthusiastically favourable comments. Aspects which seem to have been particularly appreciated include the format of the day, which included panel discussions, interviews and 'interventions' as well as more traditional presentations, and the range and variety of speakers, including artists and academics from a range of disciplines. The reflective comments described above have begun to suggest that these successful features of the day created an atmosphere in which attendees were actively engaged in the content, with the potential for considerable impact.

#### 4. Summary of outcomes

One of the questions asked respondents to select from a list of options describing their experiences from the day. The breakdown of responses to that question is presented in Table 2. There appears to have been a glitch on the online survey which meant respondents could select only one category and while respondents attempted to explain the other categories they wanted to tick, this data is unclear and has therefore been excluded. The table therefore presents only the responses from the paper and emailed questionnaires, which totalled 49 responses. Here respondents could select more than one category.

Category	Number of respondents	Percentage of total 49 respondents
I learnt something new	46	94%
I was entertained	42	86%
My creativity/imagination has been enhanced	33	67%
I have been inspired	31	63%
I'm going to plan a new activity/project	13	27%
Other	1	2%

Table 2: Summary of outcomes

An extremely high proportion of respondents agreed that 'I learnt something new' (94%) and 'I was entertained' (86%). The former is perhaps the most likely anticipated response for a workshop organised and hosted by a university department. Such a high level of entertainment, however, is perhaps a less predictable response. The previous section presented some of the extremely positive feedback received in response to the very open questions on the evaluation form and suggests that the format of the day made it a particularly enjoyable experience for attendees. Around two-thirds of attendees selected each of the options 'my creativity/imagination has been enhanced' (67%) and 'I have been inspired' (63%). Over a quarter of respondents indicated that they were 'going to plan a new activity/project'. In addition, a further three respondents wrote an answer against this option: one indicated 'perhaps' and the other two wrote that the event would develop or may influence existing or planned work. The sections below, presenting an analysis of the answers to open-ended questions, reveal ways in which attendees were inspired or creatively enriched, and some of the kinds of projects and activities they anticipated undertaking as a result. Only one respondent selected the category 'other', specifying 'Introduction to some new academics who I will stalk online (in a non-weird way)'.

## 5. Thinking differently about classical art/the classical tradition

Respondents were asked, 'Has the event made you think differently about classical art/the classical tradition?', to which 56 people (85%) responded 'Yes'. Where details were provided, some (8 respondents) were thinking differently about the influence of classical art or the classical tradition on contemporary art or artists, or the relationship between them. For example:

The key fact is that the classical 'baggage' is unavoidable for modern artists even if they want to react against it. (MC17)

Raised interesting connections and juxtapositions between the relationship with contemporary art and ancient art that I had never considered before. (MC26)

I never considered Classical Art as something so dynamic and useful for contemporary artists. (Online 1)

In addition, two respondents who described themselves as artists expressed the view that they had been made to think differently about classical art in relation to their own artistic practice:

Refreshed my thinking and given me permission in a way to continue exploring the classical in my work in a fluid and unrestricted and sometimes contradictory way - feeling renewed in my approach! (MC7)

I had to chance to talk with many different persons about classical art & traditions. Artists, historians, it helps me to better understand classical art and open a new range of creation about it. (MC48)

Other responses (6 questionnaires) related more generally to the relationship between the classical past and the present day, with comments such as 'reinforced the sense that the classical is always with us' (MC33). Further attendees (5 respondents) seemed to be thinking in new ways about broader issues relating to classical reception, such as reinterpretation over time and the lens through which we view antiquity in the modern day:

Each age reinterprets ideas of the past to suit its own aims. I can only study Renaissance art, Georgian architecture or Italian fascism, but I can experience the present day classical legacy daily. (MC16)

It makes me realise that we often get a filtered understanding of the classical tradition, e.g. through the lens of Romanticism. (Online 17)

Two respondents specifically reflected on their understanding of the terms 'classicism' or 'classical tradition' (MC46 and Online 2). Two responses referenced the discussion of 'fragments' (MC2 and Online 7). Finally, there were other responses which are difficult to categorise, either because they were very general or specific and idiosyncratic. For example, from a Greek museum curator:

Considering classical antiquity through the work of British based artists and curators has been particularly enlightening. (MC49)



## 6. Thinking differently about contemporary art/artistic practice/museums

To the question, 'Has the event made you think differently about contemporary art/artistic practice/museums?', 53 people (80%) responded 'Yes'. The greatest number of explanations provided (30 responses) related to thinking differently about contemporary art and artistic practice. Some respondents had been introduced to new artists, artworks or media. For example:

Opened my eyes to the wealth of contemporary artistic practice responding to the classical. (MC33)

The event revealed different practices other than conventional exhibitions that are interesting and effective in engaging with the classical past like video, performance, musical theatre, public installations, workshops. (MC49)

Others wrote of being made to think differently about the ways contemporary artists have been influenced by the classical past. For example:

I hadn't considered before how classics and classical art impacts contemporary artists, and the conversations with Marc Quinn, Christopher Le Brun and other artists showed how it influences/reflects/or is called on by these artists. (MC12)

Understanding exactly how modern artistic minds read ancient work without the 'veil' of academia informing or perhaps obstructing their view. (MC43)

Others had changed their opinion about contemporary art in some way. One respondent wrote 'I'll appreciate it more' (MC22) and another 'I feel more hopeful for contemporary art having seen the work of today's speakers' (MC24). Two practising artists referred to their own art. One wrote:

Although I already am fairly aware of current practice due to my academic background it is really interesting to think about how I could reframe my own practice in relation to the ideas brought up today. (MC42)

A smaller number of comments (10 questionnaires) related to thinking differently about museums or collections. Two referred to the Liquid Antiquity session, and three to the Musée d'Art Classique de Mougins (MACM). This points to the impact of involvement in the Modern Classicisms project for MACM, in terms of awareness raising and opinion forming.<sup>5</sup> The museum's founder and owner commented in an interview:

It's absolutely fantastic that a museum like Mougins and its collection in the south of France can build relationships with universities like King's, being such a leading one, that's a privilege for us and it's also helpful for the Classics Department at King's. Therefore any collaboration that we can do with King's, particularly in the area of modern classicism, which is really what the Mougins Museum is all about is absolutely fantastic. (Interview with Christian Levett 10th November 2017)

Another questionnaire commented:

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<sup>5</sup> The impact of the broader project for MACM is further explored in the *Impact Report on The Classical Now exhibition*.

Museums and similar institutions and especially universities could be less concerned with displaying the past and information and more engaged with creatively engaging with current artists and providing more opportunities for multi-faceted collaboration - opportunity to bring more people together. (MC7)

Reference to inter- or cross-disciplinary work was also made on two other questionnaires. One simply commented that it was 'interesting to see connections made across periods and disciplines' (MC39), while another commented:

It is often considered that contemporary art is highly elitist, institutional, alien and frivolous whose only commitment, if any, is to serve the modern notion of 'l'art pour l'art' and the art markets. However, this event has proved otherwise through an interdisciplinary an open dialogue between the contemporary art world, the academy and the public. (Online 2)

Contact between disciplines was also seen as a key benefit of the project by academic Elizabeth Prettejohn:

Classics and Art History tend to be in separate university departments, here in the UK. I think that's regrettable, because it means that art historians aren't learning about the classical tradition which is so important to the material that they use, and classicists aren't learning about how art historians use the visual. There should be much more of a crossover between Classics and Art History, between classicists and art historians. This exciting new project, *Modern Classicisms*, could give a whole new way for classicists and art historians to work together. (Interview with Elizabeth Prettejohn, 10th November 2017)

## **7. Anticipated future impacts on professional, artistic or personal work**

The questionnaire also asked, 'Is this event likely to impact your own professional, artistic or personal work?'. A very high proportion of respondents, 58 out of 66 (88%) responded 'Yes' to this question. The anticipated impacts have been categorised primarily by the respondent's occupation, largely in order to distinguish whether they are impacts for students, academics, artists or other cultural professionals, as these were key constituencies of the audience.

### **7.1 *Impact for MA and undergraduate students***

On 12 questionnaires or online surveys, respondents who identified themselves as students (either unspecified, or specifying undergraduate or MA) elaborated on the ways in which attendance at the event was likely to impact on their studies or future choices. Some described how what they had experienced at the event would inform later participation in seminars, or future dissertation work. Other comments suggested that the event may be transformative for the student's ways of understanding aspects of their subject. For example:

In my mind I only saw how classical sculpture could affect modern art. But I have been inspired to see modern art as a way to view and response to ancient sculpture. (MC21)

Much more than a conference, Modern Classicisms has informed and enlightened a new view of antiquity. This rich archaeological record is far more than a study of the ancients, but a means of which we enrich ourselves, as people of a shared cultural heritage. Undoubtedly, this will enrich my study here at King's. (MC43)

In one case, the comment related to the student's future career plans:

I would like to work as a curator in art institutions where classical art is collapsed with its own visual legacy across different periods. In this sense, the Modern Classicisms' event was a extremely useful and stimulating experiment upon how bringing together past and present through a polyphony of different voices and artistic practices. (Online 2)

Academic Elizabeth Prettejohn (Interview 10th November 2017) also reflected on the potential for the Modern Classicisms project to transform Art History students' engagement with the subject:

Students who come to university to study history of art know that they love contemporary art and know that they want to study contemporary art. They don't yet know that they love classical art and that they want to study that. So giving students the opportunity to learn about classical art in its dialogue with contemporary art could really change the way they think about their studies.

### **7.2 *Impact for PhD students***

Comments on 7 questionnaires or online surveys described anticipated impacts on attendees' PhD research. For some this was quite specific - 'I'm preparing a paper on the poetics of fragmentation and this will certainly help' (MC23) - while others spoke in more general terms. For example:

New theories, examples, ways of seeing classicism and reception. (MC22)

A King's PhD student also commented:

It's been great to have the opportunity to be a student ambassador on the Modern Classicisms project. Quite apart from getting great experience of helping out with conferences, workshops, exhibition, it also fits in really well with my research [...] This workshop gives me such a great wealth of information and examples that I can feed into my research, looking at not just classical art history but also the whole history of art that has started from the classical period. (Interview 10th November 2017)

### 7.3 *Impact for academics/ lecturers*

A small number of questionnaires and online surveys included references by academics to anticipated impacts on their teaching (1 respondent) or research (4 respondents). A lecturer at the V&A anticipated that they would 'reference contemporary artistic practice more in [their] own teaching' (MC33).

### 7.4 *Impact for artists*

Responses from 11 artists attending the event described impacts they anticipated on their own practice. These ranged from quite a general comment - 'Bound to set off trains of thought...' (MC39) - to much more specific expected impacts. In some cases, this related to ideas for future artworks:

I am doing artworks about modernisation (of cities) and have been making connections with classicism so it has been really exciting to be here, and now have lots more to think about. (MC3)

These ideas will very likely shape some exhibitions I am formulating at the moment; I really like the ideas of continuously bringing old dialogues into the present and giving them a new space in which to cultivate artistic thought/reception. (MC42)

Definitely, because it makes my art in dialog with institutions and other specialist of this field of research. It also inspire me in many ways that I am sure will open some new ideas on my upcoming art pieces. (MC48)

For others, the expected impact related to potential collaboration and new contacts. For example:

I have collaborated with actors and writers in the past (as a painter and sometime-sculptor myself) and it was so wonderful to see other artists creating work that touched on theatre and word play too - definitely has inspired me to do more of this! I would also love to collaborate with more academics. Exciting times! (MC7)

In addition to having been exposed to the many different ideas, projects and research... I have also formed new contacts. I have exchanged contact details and already initiated conversations. (MC47)

Artist Alexandre Singh, one of the speakers at the event, eloquently expressed the benefits of this kind of network formation:

I hope that the connections that we're making here, some of which are with people that I've met professionally before, and others which I haven't met before, will continue. it's nice to bring together disparate minds that have been thinking about the same problem for a long time. It feels like suddenly we're in a community whereas before we were little torches in the dark. (Interview with Alexandre Singh 10th November 2017)

#### 7.5 *Impact for other professionals*

Questionnaires and online surveys also included responses relating to impacts on other kinds of professional practice. A museum Director wrote, 'We want to increase our offerings in contemporary art where it makes sense in terms of our holdings' (MC46), and a Greek museum Curator commented, 'It is a very good paradigm on how to rethink public events as collaborative thinking rather than transmission of knowledge' (MC49). A magazine editor had been inspired with ideas for future features (MC27). Another respondent referenced their 'business project [...] very closely related to supporting emerging artist and small/new galleries and curators' (Online 1).

#### 7.6 *Other*

Other respondents made less specific references to the event informing their thinking or giving them references to follow up. Finally, two participants referred to other future plans:

One of my career goals is to find innovative and creative ways for people to engage and interact with ancient art, particularly in a museum environment. I liked how the speakers today had their own ways of interpreting or displaying ancient art and they inspired me to do the same. (MC12)

I'm planning to apply for a MA in Classical Reception so today has been a fantastic insight into Classicisms and King's. (MC13)

## **8. Conclusions**

This report has demonstrated that the event was very positively received. A particular aim of the launch event was to bring together a range of different perspectives:

We're involving in today's event all manner of other individuals: artists, critics, art historians, classicists, academics. We're trying to build bridges between all sorts of different perspectives, between all sorts of different people interested in that idea of Modern Classicisms. (Interview with Michael Squire, 10th November 2017)

The evaluation responses suggest that the cross-disciplinary nature of the event, with the involvement of both academics and practitioners, led to a particularly engaging event and a rich cross-fertilisation of ideas, sparking new ways of thinking with a high level of anticipated impact for a very high proportion of participants.