



## At Home in Renaissance Italy – An impact Case Study



Arts & Humanities  
Research Council



## Introduction

In recent years there has been mounting concern to understand the distribution, utility and influence of research findings in non-academic contexts. This concern originates in part from political imperatives to demonstrate public value, for research to move towards pragmatic concerns in wider public discourse, in cultural, industry and policy environments.

All UK Research Councils are expected to be able to demonstrate the wider impact and value of academic research. The important question that we must seek to address is: what is the contribution of arts and humanities research to society? Or, what is the impact or influence of arts and humanities research outside of the academy?

The Arts and Humanities Research Council has commissioned a series of case studies to investigate the impact of arts and humanities research. Across the series as a whole, impact has been defined in its broadest sense to include economic, social and cultural elements. The case study included in this publication focuses on the impact of a major exhibition, specifically concentrating on visitor responses.

Established in April 2005, the Arts and Humanities Research Council provides funding for a range of UK-wide programmes, supporting the highest quality research and postgraduate training in the arts and humanities.



**Front Cover:** Carlo Crivelli, *Virgin and Child*, Ascoli Piceno, c.1480  
© V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum.

**Back Cover:** Benedetto da Maiano, *The Birth and Naming of St John the Baptist*, Florence, c.1477 © V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum.

**Right:** Oil cruet with the arms of the Salviati family of Florence, Faenza, c.1531 © V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum.

## At Home in Renaissance Italy

*At Home in Renaissance Italy* revealed for the first time the Renaissance interior's central role in the flourishing of Italian art and culture. This major exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) provided an innovative three-dimensional view of the Italian Renaissance home, placing art and domestic objects within their original contexts. Together they highlighted the rhythms and rituals of Renaissance living – from entertainment and cooking, to marriage and collecting. This was a fresh look at the Renaissance from the perspective of household life.

*At Home in Renaissance Italy* was curated by Dr Marta Ajmar-Wollheim and Dr Flora Dennis, under the aegis of the V&A and the AHRC Centre for the Study of the Domestic Interior.

The AHRC acknowledges the support given by the curators and the V&A in the creation of this case study.

The AHRC commissioned an independent consultant to assess the impact of this exhibition: Annabel Jackson Associates.



Above: Girdle, Italy, 15th century © V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum.

Right: Pastry cutter, Italy, 17th century © V&A Images/ Victoria and Albert Museum.



## Impact

Annabel Jackson Associates conducted telephone interviews to investigate the impact of *At Home in Renaissance Italy*. The sample of 40 visitors and 15 conference participants were interviewed after the exhibition had finished, with questions focused on what they found memorable about their experience. A note on methodology and a logic model showing a summary of the processes involved in the exhibition can be seen in Annex 1.

The interviews revealed that *At Home in Renaissance Italy* had an impact on:

**Stimulating Creativity** by utilising an innovative form of display that allowed visitors to think about artefacts in new ways. This has particular relevance for people working in design, art, fashion, crafts and other creative industries. The visitor sample included 8% who described themselves as within this group.

**Encouraging Lifelong Learning** by presenting complex and multiple meanings around Renaissance life that created the basis for an innovative learning environment. The exhibition exemplified learning as about ways of thinking rather than just about content. This links to the government's commitment to lifelong learning and to the skills agenda.

**Deepening Social Identity** by showing how many modern practices and preoccupations started during the Renaissance, and how this bears upon current perspectives and identities.

**Strengthening Social Cohesion** by showing how material objects foster shared meaning and behaviour, and how this cements social relationships.

The AHRC conducted a complementary study on *At Home in Renaissance Italy* that suggested that there were **economic benefits** of:

- £2.85 million on the London economy
- £1.33 million of the UK economy

These figures do not include direct expenditure from ticket, book or exhibition sales. A note on the economic methodology is included in Annex 2.

## The Exhibition

### At Home in Renaissance Italy:

V&A, London, 5th October 2006 – 7th January 2007

*At Home in Renaissance Italy* was structured around the three main living areas of the Italian home in Tuscany and the Veneto – the *sala* (reception room), the *camera* (the bedroom) and the *scrittoio* (study). Its layout mirrored the progression of a visitor through a Renaissance house. Displays explored the relationship between space, furnishing and objects, evoking the activities and rituals associated with each room.

Exhibition highlights included:

- A section devoted to the famous study in the Palazzo Medici in Florence.
- The re-uniting, after centuries of separation, of Paolo Veronese's double portrait of the da Porto-Thiene family, who were one of the grandest Renaissance families in Vicenza.
- *The Birth of the Virgin* painting (c. 1504-8) by Vittore Carpaccio, depicting a succession of rooms.
- Surprising survivals from everyday Renaissance life – including the only known baby-walker, the earliest surviving Italian spectacles, embroidered sheets and unexpected items such as a pastry-cutter and an ear cleaner.



- *Sisters playing Chess* painting (c. 1555) by Sofonisba Anguissola, showing an intimate family scene by one of the few prominent female artists of the period.
- Rare examples of Renaissance furniture, including a 16th-century inlaid table and a Florentine painted wedding chest.

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### AHRC Centre for the Study of the Domestic Interior

The Centre was a collaboration between the Royal College of Art, the V&A and Royal Holloway, University of London. Its goal was to develop new histories of the home, its contents and its representation. It led research into the changing appearance and layout of rooms in a range of buildings, from tenements to palaces. It also considered the objects that furnished those rooms, the ways rooms and objects were depicted, the manner in which people used them, and how they thought about them. The Centre focussed on the domestic interior in western civilisation from 1400 to the present. The AHRC was the major funder of the Centre.

The AHRC Centre for the Study of the Domestic Interior contributed to *At Home in Renaissance Italy* by:

- Funding one of two curator posts, including travelling and research expenses.
- Funding the curator to attend international conferences.
- Providing administrative support for the conferences organised during the preparation of the exhibition.
- Providing computer equipment.
- Providing an intellectual base for the development of ideas about the exhibition.
- Providing the basis for comparison with other areas of work and other periods.



The V&A was central to the success of this exhibition, both as its host and for its commitment to the research. The research project also received funding from the Getty Grant Program. This wide support is fully reflected in the scope and depth of the research and exhibition.

### Landmark Research

The planning for the exhibition worked systematically and collaboratively through the selection of themes, the selection of exhibits, the production of the exhibition book and the design of the exhibition.

The process involved:

- **Individual research by team members.** This included a review of V&A collections and field trips to Italy, the US, France, Holland and Denmark.
- **Symposia and seminars to discuss key issues.** The research process included three symposia, four seminars and a conference.



■ **Research Weeks.** There were three research weeks, one in London and two in Italy. They provided an opportunity for the international research team and for members of the AHRC Centre for the Study of the Domestic Interior to get together and discuss the development of the research and exhibition.

■ **Shared planning documents.** This included a shared object database that held comments from different scholars on potential exhibition items. Also, each member of the research team wrote at least two formal, illustrated reports on their work.

The research process was exceptional in:

- **Its length.** Most exhibitions take three years to plan; *At Home in Renaissance Italy* took seven.
- **Its breadth.** The team was cross-disciplinary, including researchers in art and architectural history, decorative arts, medieval archaeology, anthropology, literary studies, gender studies, Islamic studies, material culture studies, social history, economic history, cultural history, music history, history of science, food history and design history. Overall, the research process involved over 180 scholars.

This landmark research constructed a new conceptual framework in which to situate artefacts, and formed an entirely new way of looking at the Renaissance. The exhibition mixed familiar and surprising objects and ideas in ways that challenged visitors' assumptions. It also explained and displayed some objects which were formerly of uncertain status, while revealing that other pieces had been wrongly attributed to the period. The research and exhibition stimulated a new scholarly approach to the Renaissance.

### Innovative display

The guiding principle for the exhibition was 'fragment'. The presentation was impressionistic, creating installations based around collections of objects. Rooms were defined by a metal skeleton, suggesting their size and shape, and

allowing visitors to make visual connections across and between rooms. This pioneering form of display marked a radical departure from more traditional, white wall presentations. It also represented the voices of the period by including many contemporary quotes that gave context and depth to the interpretations of the objects.

### The authoritative text

The research team produced a book that reflected the innovative design of the exhibition. It included thematic essays on a wide range of topics, an extensive bibliography and a catalogue of objects. It was designed to be of interest

to both scholars and to the general public. The book was published by V&A Publications, and 3,900 copies were sold during the exhibition.

*Far Left: Comb, northern Italy, c.1400 © V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum.*

*Left: Salver, probably western Iran, late 15th to early 16th century © V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum.*

*Below: Tapestry with the arms of the Contarini family of Venice: A Woodland Park with Palace and Pavilions, Brussels, before 1589 © V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum.*



## Exhibition Profile

### Exhibition Visitors

The exhibition received 70,970 visitors, creating a ticket income of £251,057. A profiling survey of 179 visitors undertaken by the V&A suggests that:

- 84% of visitors came from the UK;
- 7% came from the rest of Europe;
- 6% came from North America; and
- 3% came from the rest of the world.

### International Conference

An international two-day conference held at the V&A during the exhibition's run provided a forum for the presentation of innovative research from a variety of perspectives. It explored the visual and cultural complexity of the domestic interior, and presented a fresh approach to the Italian Renaissance. There were 153 conference participants.

### Events

The exhibition included a series of related courses and events:

- **Adult education events**, including workshops in gilding techniques, dyeing, embroidery, tempera painting and an introduction to the Italian Renaissance. There were 127 participants.
- **Demonstration programmes for adults**, including life casting, dyeing and embroidery. Overall 650 people participated.
- **Lectures**, including lectures on the Life and Recipes of Renaissance Italy, Palaces and Villas of the Renaissance and Shopping in the Italian Renaissance. The eight lectures in this series had a total of 774 participants.
- **Formal education events**, including a private view for teachers and lecturers attended by 275 participants. The exhibition was also promoted to schools, colleges and universities, with 2,022 students attending the main exhibition.

- **Talks and workshops for people with disabilities** included six events with 61 participants.

- **Family Events** took place over Christmas and New Year. 6,033 family visitors participated in activities over the 12 day holiday period. The events included mask making, designing a miniature room, musical instrument handling and Commedia dell'arte.

### The Exhibition Shop

The sales from the exhibition shop totalled £520,000, which included sales for a smaller, linked Leonardo da Vinci exhibition. There was also £147,000 of additional sales from the two exhibitions in the main V&A shop.

### Website

The *At Home in Renaissance Italy* website containing background information, educational resources and activities received 75,849 visits during the course of the exhibition.



*Right: Spinet, Italy, c.1600  
© V&A Images/Victoria and  
Albert Museum.*

*Far right: Sandro Botticelli,  
Portrait of a Lady, known as  
'Smeralda Bandinelli',  
Florence, 1470s © V&A  
Images/Victoria and Albert  
Museum.*



# Visitor Survey

## The Learning Environment

The exhibition gave a multifaceted view of the Renaissance. This encouraged a complex understanding of the period through the coexistence of different voices, and so allowed the visitors themselves to create meaning from the evidence. This produced an innovative learning environment that encouraged 15% of the visitor sample to start educational courses in history or art, with another 10% planning to carry out independent research into the period. The visitor interviews highlighted potential educational uses:

- 'Learning via the domestic setting as opposed to a courtly or government setting would be a good approach on a course.'
- 'I got ideas for improvisations for the children's drama group I run.'

This learning environment also affected the conference participants, 93% of whom taught regular or occasional classes related to the Renaissance. All of these interviewees emphasised the value of the exhibition and how it would stimulate their teaching:

- 'When I research the courses I will include a lot of the information. Pupils are absolutely fascinated by the details'.
- 'The exhibition was an incredible teaching resource. I teach a course on the domestic interior and this year the class visited this exhibition.'
- 'This exhibition will drive a new approach to art history, not just looking at elevated art. The exhibition is very much of its time.'

## Insight into the present

The exhibition showed how many modern practices and preoccupations started during the Renaissance, with 91% of all the people interviewed saying that *At Home in Renaissance Italy* was relevant to how we live today. Comments from interviewees included:



## Explanation of modern life

- 'It is fascinating to see how objects used today originated in the Renaissance period. It is quite enlightening, explains so much of their setting.'
- 'The exhibition shed new light on life then and what we share with the past.'
- 'I noticed personal things: the child walker, games boards, and compared these with modern equivalents.'

## Public interest in domestic interiors

- 'This exhibition was even more relevant than most because domestic interiors are everyday art of particular relevance to members of the public.'
- 'It is more relevant than a traditional exhibition because members of the public can relate it to their own lives.'
- 'There is a big concern with the domestic interior. You only have to look at the television programmes. The good thing about this exhibition is that it tapped into a trend in the here and now but is still high quality research.'

## A sense of belonging

- 'The people I teach are fascinated by this material. It gives them a sense of belonging.'
- 'The exhibition enriches a person's experience by giving a sense of where they have come from, the history of houses. It won't make you want to redesign your kitchen but it will improve the quality of life.'

## Social Cohesion

- 'It is a way of looking at how people live, seeing differences and that they are not threatening. Anything that educates people to seeing different ways of living are not wrong just different is useful.'
- 'It is not just a visual experience. It encourages different ages to come together to talk about what they have seen.'

## Making the Renaissance accessible

- 'This exhibition overcame one of the biggest problems in teaching. Having domestic objects helps the general public to understand the Renaissance.'
- 'It showed that the concerns of people in the Renaissance were the same as ours.'
- 'The exhibition encouraged dialogue between specialists and the wider public. Curators have a responsibility to engage on this level, academics don't necessarily.'

## Insight into the Renaissance

The exhibition used domestic objects to illustrate how the wider cultural, artistic and socio-economic changes associated with the Renaissance affected people's everyday lives. Overall, 78% of the visitor sample said that the exhibition encouraged them to want to know more about the Renaissance.

### Domestic life

- 'I had not considered the material world, not thought about women and children. It gave all sorts of insights into home life, eg table wear, changes in fashion and taste.'
- 'I thought of earthy, everyday tasks.'
- 'Seeing the needlework and imagining the role of women then.'

### Insight into the social context

- 'This is the only way it should be shown. The art remains outstanding in its own right. The function is up for study always. This eliminates the possibility of seeing the art in a vacuum.'
- 'The girdles and things they wore put a human side into the art.'
- 'It is important to look at art work in context; to know why paintings were painted, for whom, for which rooms. Fabrics were of phenomenal importance during the Renaissance but they deteriorate. There is so much more to the Renaissance than paintings.'

### The feeling of having assumptions challenged

- 'Life was not as serene as the art sometimes suggests.'
- 'I learnt more from the way the places were put together than I learnt from the last four exhibitions together.'
- 'It changed my view of the role of Renaissance women. They were only free in their own homes.'

### A wider cross section of society

- 'It is a different image from the typical picture which is focused on high art.'
- 'If you just focus on the great and the good you don't get a picture of how people's lives changed over history.'
- 'It made me think more about non-elite settings. I liked the way they used archaeological evidence, which art historians don't usually do.'

## Insight into artefacts

The exhibition established a new relationship with visitors, with 93% of the visitor sample saying that the positioning of art near household objects deepened their appreciation.

### Greater visual depth

- 'It gives more colour and impression of how the room would have looked as a whole, how objects played off each other.'
- 'The positioning added to my appreciation greatly. Existing scholarship has tunnel vision. All everyone ever thinks about is what masterpieces are on the wall. The linen, cushions add texture and depth to the visual field.'
- 'There was a memorable layout. I liked the skeletal house and contrasts between Florence and Venice.'





## Exhibition Book

### A Contrast from the usual display

- 'The exhibition presented the Renaissance in a different way to the way it is conventionally presented, and in a way that is accessible to the general audience, but still with its original research context.'
- 'More curators are likely to try to display art differently in the future, rather than the typical view.'
- 'Having an innovative display was thought provoking. We need to be shaken out of our distinctions.'
- 'It felt as if you were in a living space, a house, in context.'

### Wider range of artefacts

- 'I knew that pins from the Renaissance existed. It was impressive that the V&A tracked them down. I am still moved by great art, but I also found the pins very touching, viscerally touching. We are less familiar with the familiar such as pins and chamber pots.'
- 'There were objects I didn't know much about, eg. Middle Eastern objects, table wear, textiles.'
- 'It brought together some beautiful objects, some from private collections, which would not be generally available for public view.'

Overall, the exhibition increased appreciation of the V&A's collection:

- 'It was wonderful to realise how much of this material was in the V&A.'
- 'The exhibition contextualised and gave meaning to a large number of objects in the V&A collection.'
- 'The exhibition genuinely broke new ground. This was a genuine contribution to knowledge and it was right that the V&A should have done it.'
- 'It created a sense of buzz around the collection.'

The exhibition book is a lasting reminder of the exhibition.

- 'It is a very intelligent short account of all these aspects of life. The book will be the authoritative text for years to come.'
- 'It is a remarkable publication. It will live in people's minds for many, many years. Not just looking at the homes of the elite. Thinking about how spaces were actually used. It is a fundamental contribution to the history of the Renaissance.'
- 'History tends to be different between museums and universities. The book bridged that gap.'
- 'Across the board it is wonderful, the introduction, layout, colour plates, very readable, rich bibliography.'

- 'It is interdisciplinary. Every aspect of the Renaissance is explored with a helpful level of detail.'
- 'When I think about the Italian Renaissance I will go back to the book. It is a first reference.'
- 'It is probably going to be useful ten years down the line.'

*Left: Pomander, Italy, 14th century © V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum.*

*Below: Inlaid table with trestle supports, northern Italy, 1500-1550 © V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum.*



## Annex 1: Logic model for *At Home in Renaissance Italy*

A logic model is a visual depiction of a project which shows the hidden or explicit assumptions, and therefore makes a link between means and ends. Logic models provide a clear and succinct image of the work of exhibitions, and draw attention to the process as well as the product.

ASSUMPTIONS	RESOURCES	PROCESSES/ ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES	IMPACT
<p>That researchers and visitors would benefit from a holistic view of the Renaissance, moving towards an integrated approach that unites the traditional focus on sculpture and paintings with a new emphasis on household objects.</p> <p>That highlighting household objects would give a fuller understanding of the Renaissance and would give a fresh view of the V&amp;A's existing collections.</p> <p>That, aside from their aesthetic value, household objects provide an important source of meaning regarding life and rituals that is complementary to written sources.</p> <p>That an understanding of Renaissance home life provides insights into current day preoccupations and has impacts upon our experiences and behaviour.</p>	<p>V&amp;A</p> <p>AHRC</p> <p>Getty Foundation</p> <p>Harvard Centre for Renaissance Studies, Villa I Tatti</p> <p>The Samuel H. Kress Foundation</p>	<p>Collaborative research process</p> <p>Exhibition</p> <p>Talks, lectures, seminars etc</p> <p>Tours and invited viewings</p> <p>Conferences</p> <p>Family events</p> <p>Website</p>	<p>Objects database</p> <p>Publication</p> <p>Visitors</p> <p>Website hits</p> <p>Media coverage</p>	<p>Insight into modern life</p> <p>Insight into modern society</p> <p>Insight into the V&amp;A's collection</p> <p>Insight into the Renaissance</p> <p>Stimulation of new ideas</p> <p>Enjoyment</p> <p>Enrolling in educational courses</p>	<p>Providing inspiration for Early Adopters with benefits to society wide innovation</p> <p>Exemplifying lifelong learning as about ways of thinking rather than content</p> <p>Deepening social identity</p> <p>Developing understanding of the material basis of social capital</p>



*Far left: Lotto carpet, western Turkey (probably Ushak), 16th-17th century © V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum.*

*Left: Handkerchief, Italy, c. 1600 © V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum.*

*Top right: Acquaio from the Girolami palace, Florence, c.1500 © V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum.*

*Bottom right: Shoes (pianelle), probably Venice, late 16th century © V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum.*



## A Note on Methodology – Annabel Jackson Associates

**Annabel Jackson Associates** employed a constructivist methodology (Personal Construct Theory) which showed how artistic endeavours are distinct in their thought processes by encouraging ways of thinking that are non-linear, sensory based, open ended and personal.

This approach provides the following possibilities:

- Looking at the way arts events generate ideas.
- Looking at the path of ideas.
- Looking at the impact of those ideas.

These possibilities acted as a background to the evaluation of *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, with the methodology rooted in the specific objectives and values of this exhibition. Telephone interviews were undertaken a month or more after attendance and so analysed lagged or sustained impact.

## Resources

<b>AHRC</b>	Money and help in kind through the AHRC Centre for the Study of the Domestic Interior. The total AHRC award to the Centre for 2001-06 was £846,208. The exhibition was one of many activities supported by this funding.
<b>V&amp;A</b>	Money and help in kind: £1,000,000
<b>Getty Foundation</b>	Money: £169,000
<b>Samuel H. Kress Foundation</b>	Money: £4,500 towards symposia expenses
<b>Harvard Centre for Renaissance Studies</b>	Help in kind towards a conference in Florence

## Annex 2: A Note on the Economic Methodology

AHRC conducted a complementary study that considered the economic benefits derived from *At Home in Renaissance Italy*. These figures do not include direct expenditure in the form of ticket or book sales.

Gross visitor expenditure was estimated by examining how far visitors travelled to visit the exhibition and their motivations for travelling (i.e. whether the exhibition was the main reason for their travel). The UK Tourism Survey was used to estimate average daily and overnight visitor spending. Taking into account deadweight and displacement factors, a net economic impact was calculated. A multiplier was added to ensure that secondary impacts on the local economy were included in the overall calculation. Multipliers: 1.44 for London, and 1.56 for the UK.





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Arts and Humanities Research Council, Whitefriars, Lewins Mead, Bristol BS1 2AE.  
Tel: 0117 987 6500. Fax: 0117 987 6600.

[www.ahrc.ac.uk](http://www.ahrc.ac.uk)