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Research as a Vector of Change: Designing & Delivering Collaborative Research in the Contemporary Art Museum

Drawing on twenty years of experience of designing research projects for the contemporary art conservation in the museum, this paper draws on this learning to reflect on how research design has evolved to reflect changing priorities, artistic practices and ambitions for research. This paper asks: How can we best design research to bring about developments in theory and practice as well as maximise the potential for research to act as a vector of institutional change?

Taking a range of research projects as case studies, including new insights from our most recent research initiative 'Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum', this paper critically examines research design and how it addresses an increasing premium placed on transdisciplinary, interdepartmental research as well as collaboration between academic and non-academic institutions; in addition to the diverse range of stakeholders that surround an artwork and contemporary artistic production. This paper looks at what these ambitions mean in practice and the wider significance of the blockages and opportunities that surface; ultimately providing an examination of what is unique about conducting research within the contemporary art museum.