

Collaborate project proposals

National Museums Liverpool - <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/>

What do you want to explore and why?

How can objects from the past help us understand the complexities of gender in our own times? We want to explore how historical objects in National Museums Liverpool's (NML) collections can be used by individuals to narrate their own lived experiences of gender, within and beyond the gender binary.

We want to work with visitors and community interest-groups – cis-gendered, trans and non-binary people – to create knowledge about gender, and about gender in our collection, facilitating the telling of their gender stories through particular objects.

We will experiment with a method of co-curating our collections and explore how we can generate a dialogue around historical objects through individual contemporary narratives. Through this research we will not only explore the gender stories that exist within our objects but also how such objects allow individuals to examine the historical context for their understanding of gender and their own identity, how these understandings have come about and how are they changing.

We are in the early stages of developing a touring exhibition about gender, in which lived experiences will be paramount. This initial project is key to exploring methods of bringing together our collection (which will be at the heart of the show) with the personal perspectives of people with diverse gender identities.

As we develop the exhibition, we are acutely aware of the limitations and challenges of interpreting expressions of gender in the past – they often do not fit with our modern-day frameworks – and of attempting to produce an objective, institutional account of gender.

Instead, we want to involve audiences in creating an account of gender that is less fixed, more open to change and debate, in dialogue with the expertise of our curators. Equally, the project – and the exhibition eventually – aims to encourage audiences to reflect on their own gender identity and how their views on gender can impact others.

This is an innovative method of dialogue between audiences, museum workers and objects. It stresses the value of objects and art in understanding the way we live now.

Outside the topic of gender, the method we want to develop through this project has implications for our exhibition-making practice and the ways we present our collections.

One of NML's key aims is to ensure that our audiences and displays are representative of the communities we are here to serve. By engaging with diverse groups through this research we can ensure that our collections are more accessible, relatable and relevant to our visitors.

There is an increased emphasis in the sector on co-curation with audiences, and this project will explore innovative methods for interpreting the collection through the eyes and experiences of our audience. The hope is that these methods will inform the developing gender exhibition, but also future work.

What are you looking for in an academic research partner?

Our specialist knowledge of gender within NML is limited and we would like to work with an academic who is an expert in this subject area and able to support us in exploring this complex and often controversial topic.

We would like to work with a specialist who is able to:

- Work with us and relevant focus groups to select objects from our collections that can be used to examine the subject matter
- Support us in developing a framework from which we can explore these objects in terms of gender
- Work with focus groups and curators from NML to capture research and responses to the objects through workshops and interviews
- Develop new texts to go alongside the chosen objects that will explore their relevance in terms of the history of gender and offer a contemporary reflection on the item's relevance today
- Support in the development of a collections-based exhibition on the topic of gender, helping to steer the narrative and ensuring that the subject matter is approached in a safe, considered and informed manner with an underlying core of robust theory and science

We would like to work with someone who:

- Has recent research experience in the field of gender and a demonstrable knowledge of the subject matter from both a historical and contemporary view-point
- Has an understanding of the museum environment and an interest in using historical collections to help us to interpret and examine contemporary issues
- Is experienced in communicating their research through written papers, articles, presentations and other media
- Can demonstrate strong interpersonal skills through leading and facilitating discussion groups of diverse people
- Has a passion for equality and diversity and the protection of minority groups