



# Opening doors to learning

**University Museums**  
for 21st Century Scotland

University Museums in Scotland 2004

## INTRODUCTION

Research, discovery, creativity, innovation, daring, passion, analysis, patience: all contributed to the diverse and immensely rich museum collections of more than 1.6 million items in Scottish universities, all of which are members of University Museums in Scotland (UMIS)\*. These museums are the result of Scotland's distinctive and ancient traditions of higher education, which inspired explorers, scientists, scholars, artists and ordinary people in almost every field of life and endeavour. Once seen as the preserve of academic teaching and research, university museums play an increasingly important role in the cultural life of the nation as a whole. Ensuring the sustainability of these museums will enable us to open the doors wider to:

- Provide friendly, stimulating public spaces to encourage access to some of the country's best museums for people of all ages and abilities
- Use the collections to widen access to higher education from all parts of the country and every section of the community.
- Contribute to the mission of universities to conduct innovative internationally recognised research and inspirational teaching
- Contribute to professional museum training and vital research on the museums and cultural sector.
- Promote the development of a confident, prosperous and just Scotland and the image of its universities at home and abroad.

## INTERNATIONALLY-SIGNIFICANT COLLECTIONS

The National Audit†, conducted by the Scottish Museums Council as part of the Executive's National Cultural Strategy, showed the international, UK and national significance of Scottish university museum collections. The three largest university museums hold a striking proportion – 14% – of the items of international and national significance overall within Scottish museum collections. University museums demonstrate a lead role and subject pre-eminence in areas such as: medicine (74% of Scotland's entire collection); science (32% of the national scientific collection); fine art (24% of Scotland's fine art); and world culture (18% of Scotland's ethnographic collection). The scale and significance of university museum collections compares well with those of the larger local authorities, and the National Museums and Galleries of Scotland.

† In July 2002 SMC published The National Audit of Scotland's Museums and Galleries. Funded by the Scottish Executive it was the largest ever museum and gallery audit to be conducted in Europe. The audit identified more than 12 million objects in Scotland's distributed collection and the findings have proved invaluable to our advocating the extent, wealth and diversity of our rich cultural heritage.

\*\*The Strategic Change Fund is funded by the Scottish Executive and administered by the Scottish Museums Council. It aims to promote strategic change through funding projects that deliver or test sustainable outcomes. The Strategic Change Fund has delivered £357,000 to innovative projects involving university museums working in partnership with other organisations.

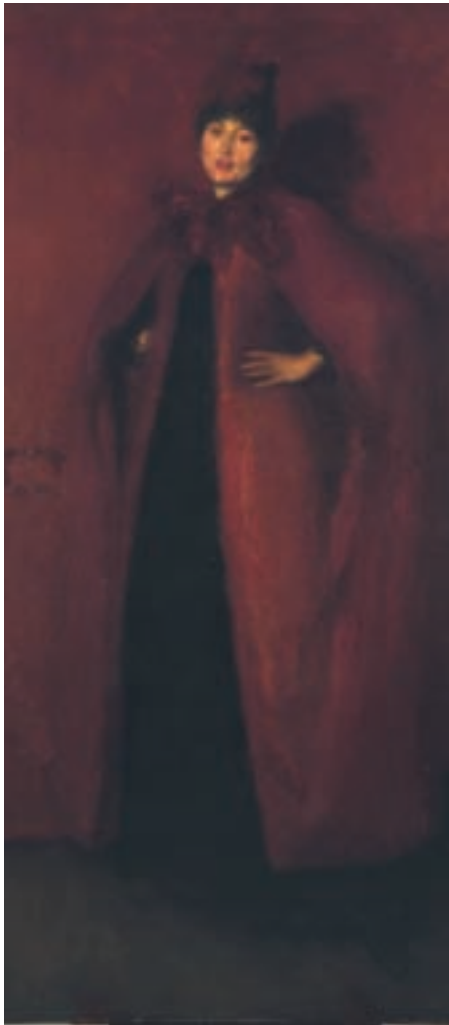
### Below

Learning with Museum Resources in Aberdeen. Creating a virtual museums and image database is increasing access to the collections for students on a wide range of university courses, as well as the international public.

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\* List of UMIS members  
[www.dundee.ac.uk/umis/](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/umis/)  
University of Aberdeen,  
University of Dundee,  
University of Abertay,  
Dundee,  
University of Edinburgh,  
Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh,  
University of Glasgow,  
Glasgow Caledonian University,  
Glasgow School of Art,  
Heriot-Watt University,  
University of Paisley,  
The Robert Gordon University,  
University of St Andrews,  
University of Stirling,  
University of Strathclyde



**Above**  
James Abbott McNeill Whistler 1834-1903  
*Harmony in Red: Lamplight* 1884-1886  
Oil on canvas  
© Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow

## UNIVERSITY MUSEUMS IN ACTION

### Whistler 2003- collections and tourism

The University of Glasgow's Hunterian Art Gallery used its superb collections of works by James McNeill Whistler as the springboard for a citywide festival of 122 events in his centenary year. The Festival attracted around £200,000, including European funding and private sponsorship, to deliver an 88% increase in attendance at the Hunterian and almost £6m to the local economy. The marketing campaign won The UK Museum and Heritage Show 2004 Award for Excellence.

'Festivals on the scale and of the international calibre of Whistler demonstrate that Glasgow continues to use culture as a platform for growth, tourism and economic development!' (Frank McAveety, Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport)

### Collections for a healthy Scotland

Scotland's Universities and Royal Colleges are world famous for their role in the development of modern medicine. A partnership led by the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh and eight university museums aims to increase public access to Scotland's outstanding medical collections – promoting health; citizenship; cultural, social and economic development throughout Scotland.

### Cultural entitlement and creativity in Dundee

Chinese and Korean art students at the University of Dundee recently took part in *Past & Present*, a project in which they curated an exhibition of oriental objects from the collections alongside their own artworks. The exhibition contributed to the understanding of the collections and highlighted the importance of overseas students in the University.

### Object lessons in Edinburgh

In 2003 Edinburgh University attracted new audiences to an exhibition, *Object Lessons*, at the Talbot Rice Art Gallery by exhibiting together some outstanding objects from the University's art and medical collections. It showed links between collecting in the past and current research in genetics, acoustics and medicine.

### Creative art outreach

Following on the success of the *Hunterian Art Gallery Goes into Schools* project, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, (University Museums in the UK, p. 16), the University of Glasgow has developed its partnership with East Dunbartonshire Council with the help of private sponsorship to publish **Art Themes**, *Creative learning at the Hunterian Art Gallery*, an educational resource pack distributed to every cultural coordinator in Scotland by the Scottish Arts Council and available on sale.

### Learning with museum resources in Aberdeen

As well as being used by students of Art History, Archaeology and Anthropology, students studying Geography, Women's Studies, Law and Divinity are now learning in the University of Aberdeen's Marischal Museum. These classes enliven conventional teaching and stimulate critical discussion. The JISC-funded £240,000 *LEMUR: Learning with Museum Resources* project has created an on-line database and virtual museum for higher education throughout the UK.

## ACCESS FOR ALL

Throughout their history, Scotland's universities have been committed to offering access to everyone, from the most privileged scholar to the lad o' pairts. University museums are now continuing this distinctive tradition. From major public museums in Glasgow and Aberdeen to a host of small imaginative displays, exhibitions are the life-blood of museums, providing access to the unrivalled expertise of Scottish universities as well as their collections. Such exhibitions have already won national awards, but the potential is even greater. Workshops for schools, hands-on activities for adult learners and summer schools can introduce people to new ways of thinking. Intrinsically valuable, such activities can also introduce people to higher education.

University museums offer innovative, cross disciplinary learning experiences for higher education. This is an international strength of Scottish higher education that could become envied worldwide. Universities with museum collections also contribute to the profession as a whole, notably through the museum training offered by the University of St Andrews, but also through the specialist knowledge of their staff. With their expertise in education and ICT in museums, Scottish university museums could become even greater centres of excellence for the whole sector.

### Below

The Mackintosh Library at  
The Glasgow School of Art, 1907-09



### **A national textile database for research and design<sup>++</sup>**

The fashion and furniture design industries, as well as students of the creative arts, will benefit from the on line textile collection database being developed by Heriot-Watt University in partnership with the Universities of Dundee and Glasgow, the Glasgow School of Art and two local authority museums. Supported by the Strategic Change Fund, the project brings designers, conservators, curators and researchers into partnership to create a resource of national and international significance.

### **Mackintosh flies the flag for Scottish culture**

The buildings of the Glasgow School of Art and the Hunterian Art Gallery are two of the leading sites associated with Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Recent projects curated by Glasgow School of Art have included an exhibition of Mackintosh furniture in Norway in 2003 and an exhibition in France as part of the 2004 Entente Cordiale programme, funded by the Scottish Executive.

### **Access to science at the Hunterian**

The University of Glasgow is harnessing its extensive collections of the Victorian scientific giant, Lord Kelvin's instruments, experimental material and archives with its expertise in research, teaching, computing and design, to create an innovative, activity-rich display. Supported by the Rediscover Fund, from autumn 2004 it will provide a quality of display and

interpretation to match the importance of the collections.

### **A University for everyone**

In 2003-4 the University of Aberdeen's Marischal Museum welcomed 4500 school children to curriculum-focused workshops to handle and investigate the collections. Relying on project funding, including the SHEFC-funded University for Children and Communities, the museum is working with secondary schools that have a low take-up of higher education.

### **Conservation of St Andrews collections**

A wide-ranging project to conserve the most outstanding items in the St Andrews collections has been funded by sponsorship from alumni and friends, the Scottish Museums Council and American charitable foundations. The University won the national Kintore Conservation Award in 2001 for part of this project, which also provided exhibitions organised by the University's postgraduate Museum and Gallery Studies students.

### **Digital Media in Glasgow**

The University of Glasgow's Hunterian Museum and Department of Computing Science have pioneered a wide variety of student projects using collections ranging from archaeological sites to zoological specimens. A £100,000 Strategic Change Project *What Clicks?* is now studying the use of ICT to extend access to Scotland's heritage and to promote new learning styles.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

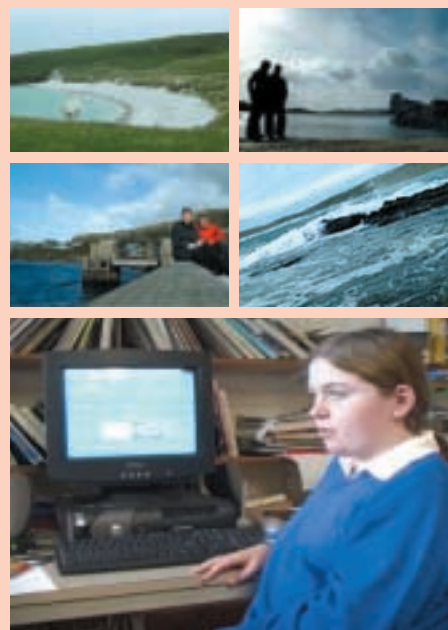
With the immense resources of their collections, the skills and knowledge of their staff and their access to the expertise of Scotland's universities, modest additional financial resources would enable university museums to contribute more effectively to the national priorities for education, cultural policy, tourism, health, regeneration and social justice. We urge the Scottish Executive to ensure that the potential of university museums is given full consideration in the Cultural Policy Review and its resultant strategies, resource streams and action plans. We also urge the governing bodies of the Scottish universities to devise appropriate structures for the management of their collections for the 21st century.

| RECOMMENDATION   | <b>Recognise and Invest in Scotland's nationally significant university collections</b> |
|--|---|
| <p>University museums lack the resources to match the quality of their collections with display facilities and access. A funding scheme that recognised the significance of collections could have a dramatic effect, enabling university museums to care for and provide access to their share of the Distributed National Collection, perhaps developing displays in partnership with local authority museums and innovative ICT projects.</p> <p>We recommend that the Scottish Executive establishes a sustainable funding scheme to facilitate increased access based on the significance of collections.</p> |   |

| RECOMMENDATION  | <b>Improve the management of the collections</b> |
|---|--|
| <p>University museums should be integral to their universities with strategic access to planning, decision making and resource allocation. Some have been marginalised resulting in poor access to decision-making and missed opportunities for teaching, research and outreach. Many collections rely on unpaid and unacknowledged volunteer support, rendering collections vulnerable and inaccessible.</p> <p>We recommend that university governing bodies act on the recommendations of <i>University Museums in the United Kingdom</i>** to ensure that their museums can actively contribute to the strategic objectives of the institution and achieve consistent levels of management, resourcing, planning and staff development.</p> |  |

| RECOMMENDATION  | <b>Increase core funding</b> |
|---|------------------------------|
| <p>Only five universities in Scotland are currently in receipt of core funding through SHEFC for their museums. A modest increase in core funding would improve care and management of collections and facilitate new means of access to hitherto hidden or neglected treasures. Indirectly, it would also enable opportunities for external funding and partnerships to increase access.</p> <p>We recommend that the Scottish Executive increases the funding provided to universities for their museums through SHEFC non-formula funding.</p> |                              |

| RECOMMENDATION   | <b>Provide targeted project funding</b> |
|--|---|
| <p>A new display or the creation of a shared resource centre could dramatically improve access to collections. Applying for external funding requires matching resources at a level beyond many institutions' capacity.</p> <p>We urge the Scottish Executive to establish a fund to support one-off projects for heritage accommodation improvements and access innovation, open to all university museums in Scotland irrespective of their SHEFC funding status and a simple application procedure, perhaps through the SHEFC Knowledge Transfer Grant.</p> |   |



### Above

Still from interview held at Castlebay School on the Isle of Barra with one of the pupils (Sarah Ferguson) explaining how the provision of electronically delivered e-learning resources from Scottish Museums (the image on the screen is the Hunterian home page) has transformed her ability to overcome the issues of studying in an area remote from where most museum collections are held. She can now prepare classwork and homework by bringing the resources to her classroom and home via the internet.

The University of Glasgow, Hunterian Museum and Department of Computing Science.

\*\* This leaflet has been originated and funded by University Museums in Scotland supported by the Scottish Museums Council. It is published to complement and provide a Scottish perspective on the report of the *UK University Museums Group, University Museums in the United Kingdom: A National Resource for the 21st Century*. May 2004.



SCOTTISH  
MUSEUMS  
COUNCIL



[www.dundee.ac.uk/umis/](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/umis/)

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**Above**  
Jan Koblasa,  
Three Samurai: The Young Man, 1983  
University of St Andrews

**Middle**  
Doors Open Day,  
Pathology Museum,  
Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh.

**Right**  
Korean Tea Kettle,  
Courtesy of University of  
Dundee Museum Services