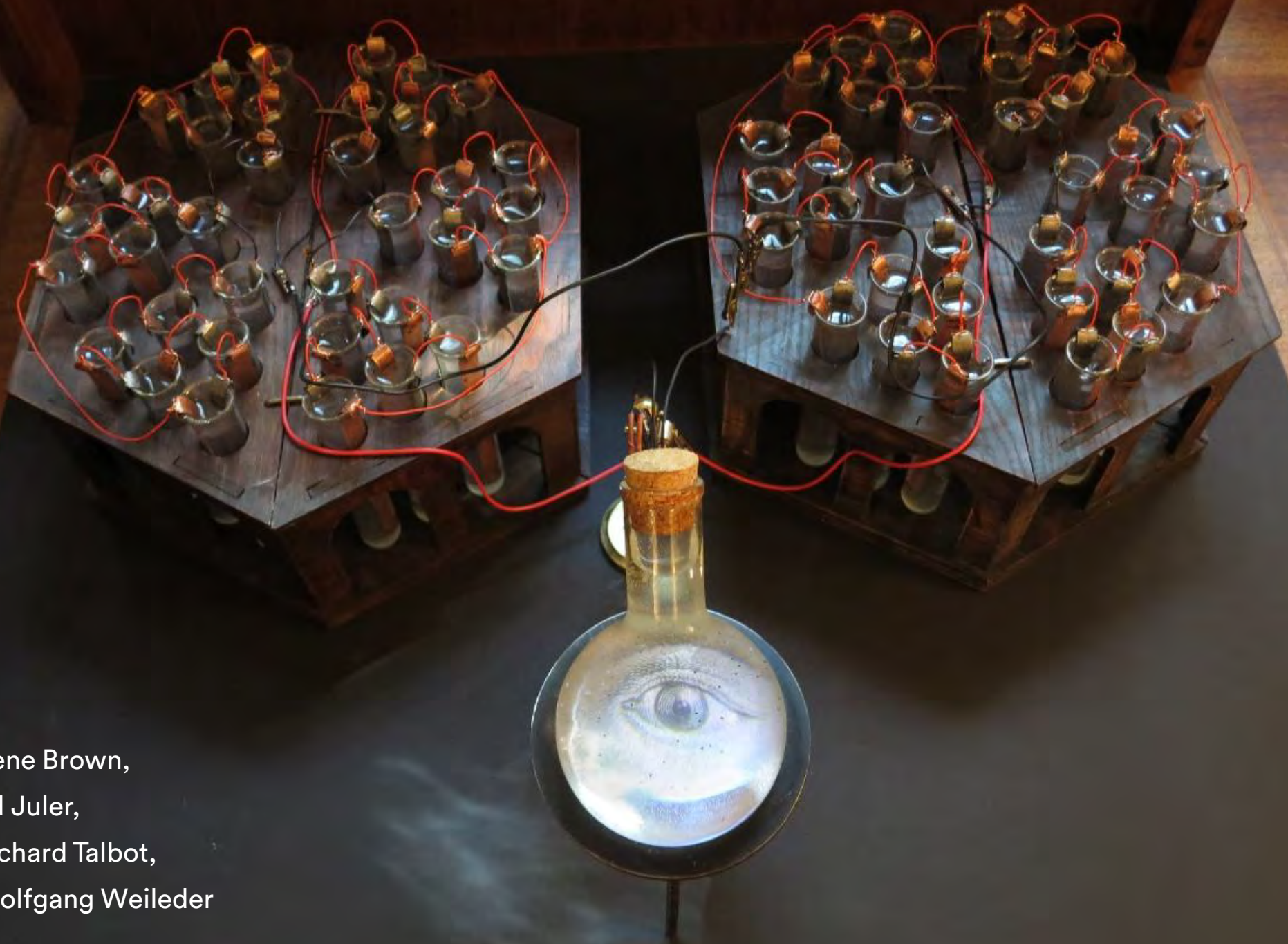


A Scientific Encounter



Irene Brown,
Ed Juler,
Richard Talbot,
Wolfgang Weileder

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The exhibition and other research outcomes were made possible by substantial in-kind support from the institutions in Montpellier alongside funding from Newcastle University's Faculty discretionary fund, and Newcastle's Institute for Creative Arts Practice.

A Scientific Encounter:

This multi-part research project examines how we see the world through scientific objects, and how those objects affect us. Originating in a research collaboration between Newcastle University, the Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Montpellier and Montpellier University, the research involved Fine Art researchers reflecting upon the collections of medical, scientific and other objects held by Montpellier University through the critical prism of the philosopher Bruno Latour's concept of 'inter-objectivity' - the idea of how objects interact with human and non-human subjects and objects.

Outputs include an exhibition - '**A Scientific Encounter: On inter-objectivity**', Faculty of Medicine, Montpellier University, (2017), and an edited book: '**Post-Specimen: Encounters Between Art, Science and Curating - Rethinking Art Practice and Objecthood through Scientific Collections**' (Intellect, 2020).

Researchers, working with the largely unmediated and uncatalogued collections, were able to tender new practice-led interpretations of the 'specimens' from outside the norms

of received knowledge or classification. **Brown, Talbot and Weileder's** new artworks were subsequently exhibited in Montpellier's Faculty of Medicine. The format and method of the exhibition consisted of pairing the artworks with specific objects for display in the museum vitrines, thus making the new and unforeseen interactions between the artworks, the chosen objects and the audience a central part of the exploration and the research methodology.

Building on the exhibition and associated symposium which included **Juler, Brown, Talbot and Weileder** from Newcastle and researchers from Montpellier, the book '**Post-Specimen**', co-edited by Julier, engages the original critical framework through exploring, in a series of essays, what a specimen or museum object might be when analysed in the light of contemporary arts practice. Alongside chapters by **Brown, Julier and Talbot**, it includes invited contributions from scholars in other disciplinary fields.

Additionally disseminated through the **European History of Science Conference 'Visual, Material and Sensory Cultures of Science'**, Bologna, 2020.

RESEARCH CONTEXT: INTRODUCTION

This multi-part and cross-disciplinary research examines how we see the world through scientific and other objects, and how those objects affect us. The methods and outcomes of the research engage and inform the fields of curation, artists' engagement with museum and other collections, museology, critical theory and history of science.

Originating in an international research collaboration between Newcastle University, the Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Montpellier Agglomération led by **Nadia Lichtig**, and Montpellier University, the research has been driven by a cluster of researchers at Newcastle University: **Wolfgang Weileder, Richard Talbot, Irene Brown and Ed Juler**, working at the interfaces of art, science and the history of science. Kelly Richardson, a Newcastle researcher was also part of the project but has since gained a post in Vancouver.

As its starting point, the research addresses Bruno Latour's idea of how objects interact with human and non-human subjects and objects – a concept Latour has labelled

'inter-objectivity'. The overarching questions being asked concerned what responses can artists make to objects outside the norms of the received understanding or context of those objects and how can new insights be generated by artists responding to so called 'specimens' – those objects through which science and culture creates its narratives. The 'specimen' is thus a starting point for critical enquiry that interrogates the idea of fixed knowledge held within and around objects.

In order to investigate these questions, the researchers were given full access to Montpellier University's wide-ranging research collections.

The subsequent exhibition, *A Scientific Encounter: On inter-objectivity*, with the work by Talbot, Brown, Weileder and other invited artists, was co-curated by Alistair Robinson, Director of the Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, Sunderland, and Caroline Girard and Veronique Bourgade, curators of the collections at the University of Montpellier.

There are two key outputs from this research:

1. New artworks.

The first stage of the project involved an examination of Latour's ideas through a series of art interventions and a public exhibition titled: *A Scientific Encounter: On inter-objectivity*, 18th April – 24th May 2017, at the Montpellier Medical School and Library. This exhibition was accompanied by a symposium in Montpellier on 16 and 17 May 2017. The exhibition used the vitrines in the Medical Library and consisted of 'pairings' of the newly-made art works with objects from the collections.

2. An edited book titled 'Post-Specimen: Encounters Between Art, Science and Curating - Rethinking Art Practice and Objecthood through Scientific Collections (Intellect, 2020) (co-edited by Edward Juler)

Building on the themes and outcomes of the exhibition and the accompanying symposium. With essays from Talbot, Brown and Juler alongside invited contributions from scholars in other disciplinary fields, the book explores what a specimen or museum object might be when analysed in the light of contemporary arts practice.

Dissemination: As well as the staging of the exhibition in Montpellier, the research was also disseminated through:

1. A symposium: 'Parallel Lines: Art and Science' in Montpellier

Including presentations by Newcastle researchers Juler, Brown, Talbot, Weileder, 16 and 17 May 2017.

2. A Conference: Delivery of the entire research project by Talbot, Brown, Juler, Weileder and Robinson as the panel - *A Scientific Encounter: Artists responding to and engaging with research collections and museum objects*, at the 9th European Society for the History of Science (ESHS) Conference '**Visual, Material and Sensory Cultures of Science**' (Bologna, Italy, 31 August - 3 September 2020).



A Scientific Encounter: On inter-objectivity, Montpellier, 2017. Exhibition vitrines.

Irene Brown, Ed Juler, Richard Talbot, Wolfgang Weileder *A Scientific Encounter*

OUTPUTS IN DETAIL: EXHIBITION

1. Exhibition in Montpellier titled 'A Scientific Encounter: On inter-objectivity'.

The public exhibition **of new art works made by the researchers** explored the questions: What or who is a specimen? How is an object rendered into a specimen, and, as such, a distinctive kind of 'thing'? How can our understanding of historical scientific objects be informed and re-interpreted through the juxtaposition with contemporary art practice and, in return, how can contemporary art practice be informed and expanded through those objects?

The exhibition was staged in the University of Montpellier's medieval libraries – part of the Faculty of Medicine and Musée Atger, Montpellier. (Pictured right)

Research visits were first made by artists to the wide-ranging research collections belonging to the University of Montpellier, access to which had been granted the previous year, to allow for visits and research/investigations to be carried out.

Newcastle researchers and other invited international artists subsequently made new and unique artworks that were to be presented in dialogue with objects from the University's collections, which included herbariums, scientific apparatus, scientific models, archaeological and geological objects, books, texts, Old Master drawings, and historical medical objects and specimens.



2. Edited book - 'Post-Specimen: Encounters Between Art, Science and Curating - Rethinking Art Practice and Objecthood through Scientific Collections (Intellect, 2020).

Edited by Ed Juler (Art Historian, Newcastle University) and Alistair Robinson (Independent curator and Director of The Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, NGCA).

The invited essays examine the ways in which scientific objects held within museums and other collections act as inspiration for contemporary art practices, curating strategies and their histories. It draws upon the concept of the 'specimen' – a paradigmatic object in science, as a means for investigating these hybrid art-science practices as well as a means of innovating the practice of art writing itself. It intends to inspire new understandings of the relationships between art, science and curating.

The book hosts essays by **Talbot, Brown, Juler** (Newcastle), Christy Ducker (Newcastle UoA27), Gavin Parkinson (Courtauld Institute), Gemma Anderson (Exeter), John Mack (UEA), Andrew Patrizio (Edinburgh), Marion Endt-Jones (Manchester), Jane Wildgoose (KCL), Alistair Robinson, Nadia Lichtig (ESBA, Montpellier), Ludmilla Jordanova (Durham) and Rahma Khazam.



FURTHER RESEARCH CONTEXT

Montpellier University is one of the oldest in Europe - established in 1289 and has the oldest working medical school in the world. The collections in Montpellier are largely related to research activity across numerous disciplines and are not on public display.

What particularly distinguishes this research therefore is that the researchers were given access to unmediated collections. Objects or 'specimens' - many of which were neither accessible to the public nor catalogued or accessioned in any way, were open to interrogation outside the norms of received knowledge or interpretation. Researchers could make creative responses to objects and could make largely open, free and anachronistic associations across the collections. This allowed the concept of 'inter-objectivity' to be addressed in new, innovative and imaginative ways.

A central part of the research methodology consisted of the format of the exhibition in which the artworks were paired with specific objects for display in the museum vitrines, thus creating new and unforeseen interactions between the artworks, the chosen objects and the audience. As a result, the artworks also took on the form of a new 'specimen' - established by the way in which they were exhibited.

The exhibition thus complemented three hundred years of wider collecting by the institution and brought in to play the central tenets of philosopher Bruno Latour's concept of 'inter-objectivity' - the idea of how objects interact with human and non-human subjects and objects.



EXPLORING THE COLLECTIONS: EXAMPLES OF OBJECTS IN MONTPELLIER'S RESEARCH COLLECTIONS.



DETAILS OF THE RESEARCHERS' CREATIVE WORKS – TALBOT, BROWN, WEILEDER AND RICHARDSON

Talbot's research is centred on drawing, but he brings to this a particular interest in the theory, history and practice of Linear Perspective.

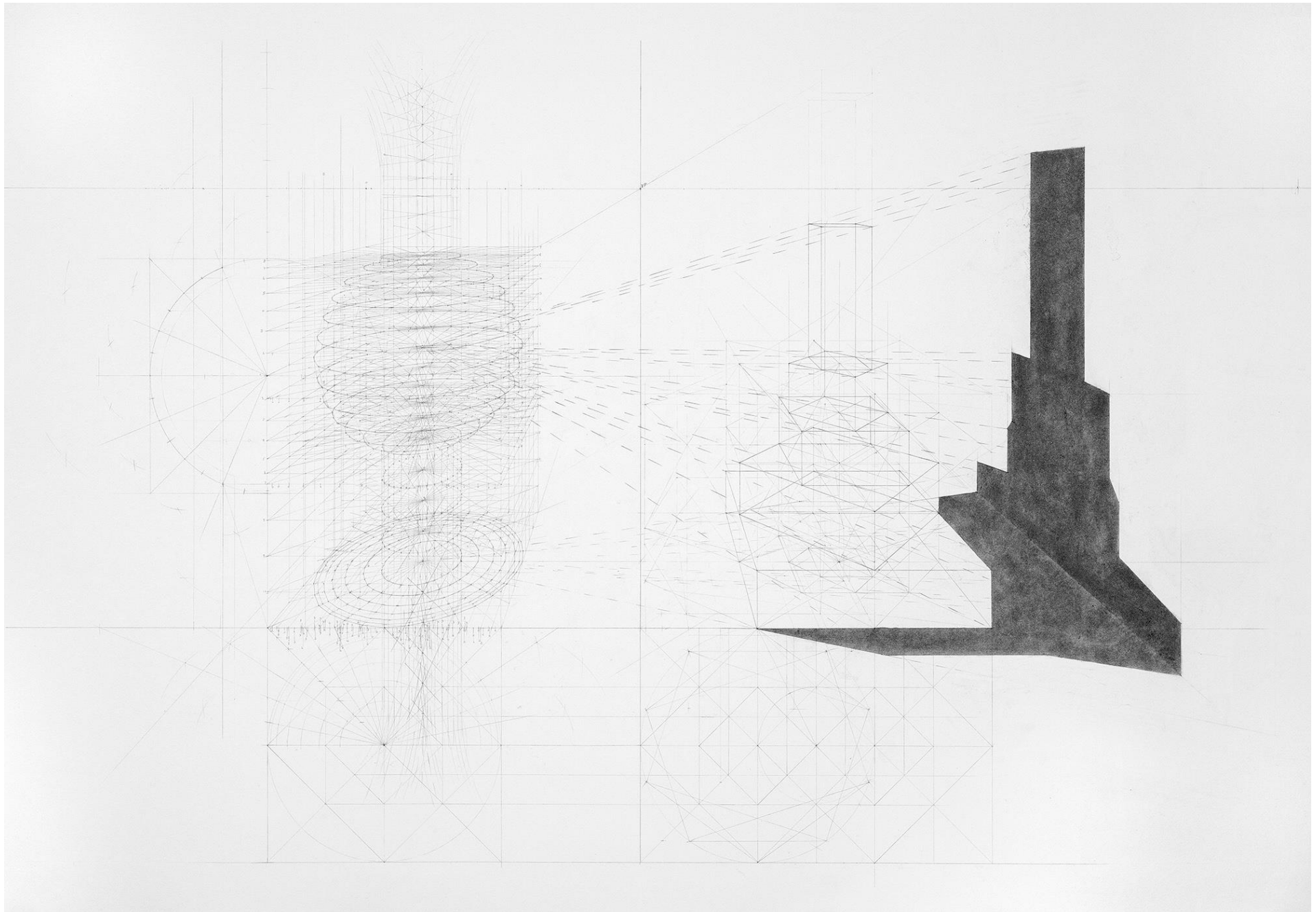
For Montpellier, he chose three seemingly unconnected objects – models of geological crystal structures, a piece of glassware involved in generating X Rays and Nicéron's 17C treatise on Linear Perspective. *La Perspective Curieuse (Curious Perspectives)*, 1652.

The resulting work – a drawing titled '*Point, Line, Plane, Solid*', takes the form of a still-life, loosely depicting the chosen objects, and is akin to the elaborate tableaux found in perspective treatises such as Nicéron's – one of the selected objects thus creating a circularity. The drawing explicitly shows the mechanisms and expressions of

Linear Perspective – projections, light rays, reflections and shadows, and the complex matrix of lines used to construct (and connect) the visual phenomena and objects that are depicted.

The content and form of the drawing became serendipitously an embodiment of the act of choosing from the collections, of connecting, and the processes of depicting. The still-life theme was then mirrored in the arrangement of the objects that had been chosen; the two elements of the work – the chosen objects and the drawing - were shown in adjacent vitrines, also mirroring each other.

A full critical reflection on the process is in the essay '**Choosing, Unpicking and Connecting: On Drawing Museum Objects**' in 'Post-Specimen' ed. Alistair Robinson and Ed Juler. Intellect Books 2020.



Richard Talbot: Drawing *'Point, Line, Plane, Solid'*, 2017, Pencil and graphite on paper, 84cm x 59cm

Talbot's work from Montpellier has also been presented in:

Interalia Journal - as part of their April 2018 Issue 'Drawing as Process. Drawing as Document. [A perspective on drawing - Interalia Magazine](#)
[Interalia Magazine](#)

2017

Drawing Matters, York St John University

2017

Seeing Beyond the Immediate Symposium, Gracefield Arts Centre, Dumfries

2020

Drawing Conversations 3 - Drawing Talking to the Sciences, Lancaster University



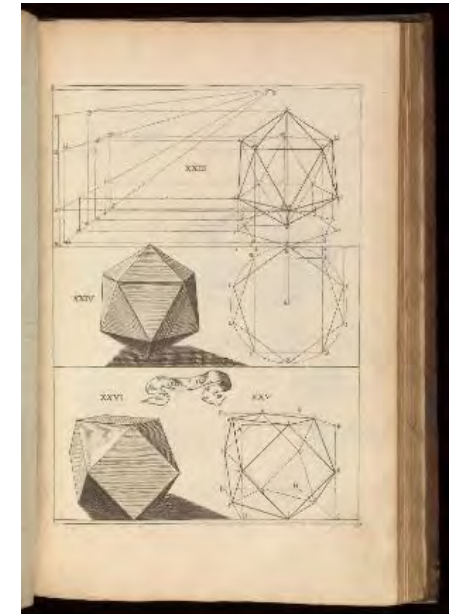
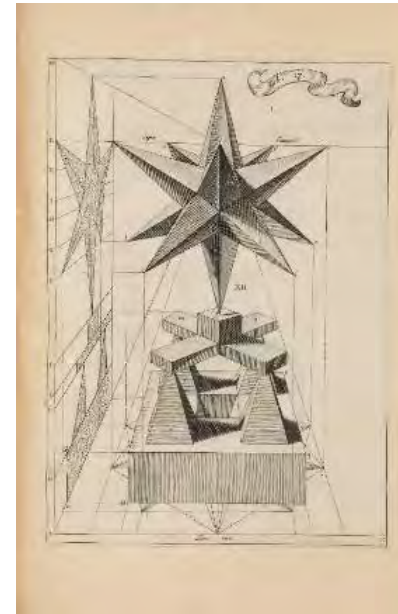
Chosen objects from collections combined in adjacent vitrine. These objects prompted the content and form of the drawing *Point, Line, Plane, Solid* seen in the vitrine behind.

Objects and material used as the basis of the new drawing: 'Point, Line, Plane, Solid'

The title '**Point, Line, Plane, Solid**' refers to the combined physical and mathematical means of describing tangible space and its dimensions.

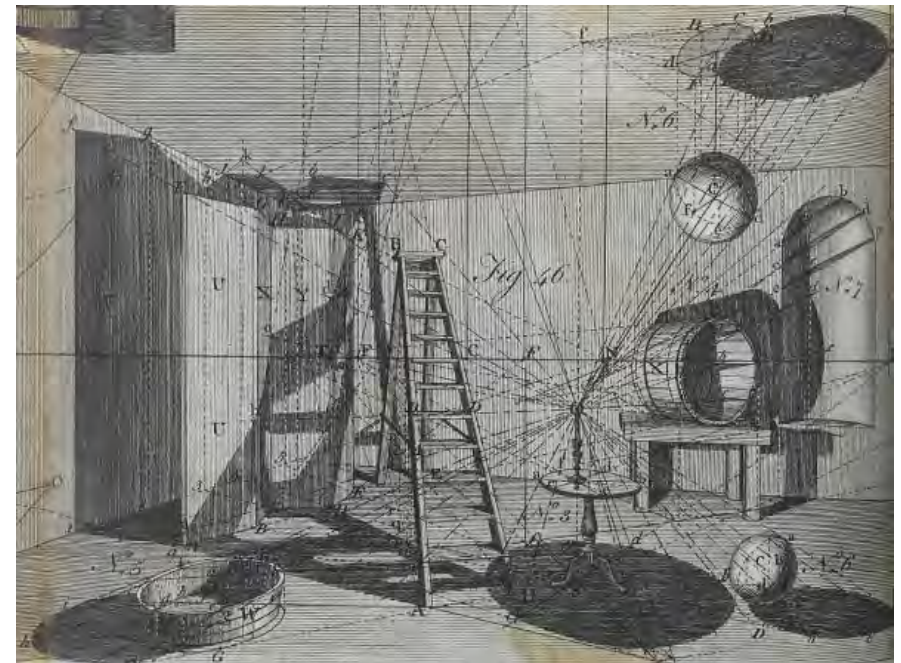
The making of the drawing and its 'composition' called upon imagery from explanatory drawings related to the practice and theory of linear perspective, as well as that of still-life painting.

The unseen commonalities of the three original objects become visible and interlinked. They perhaps also become hermetically sealed together – akin to the vitrines and the worlds from which the objects originate.

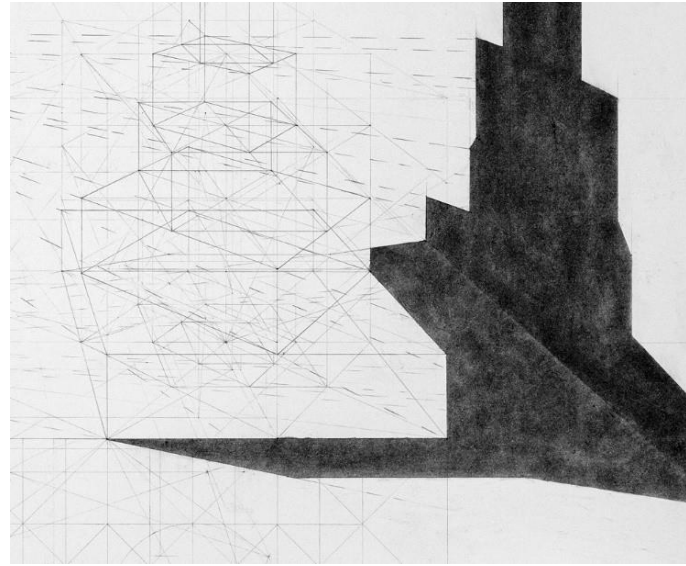
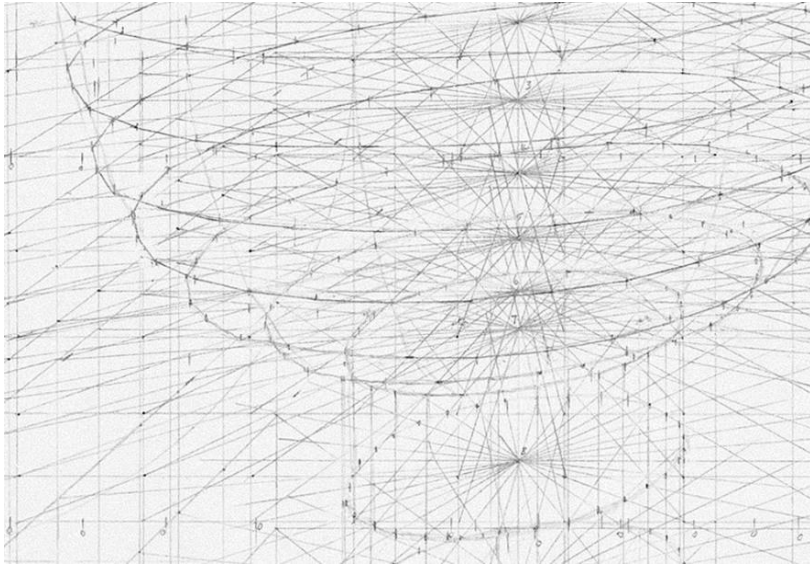


Top: Pages from Nicéron's treatise on Perspective held in Montpellier University's library. (*La Perspective Curieuse* (Curious Perspectives, 1652).

Below: Thomas Malton, 1775 . *A Compleat Treatise on Perspective in Theory and Practice, on the Principles of Dr. Brook Taylor*.



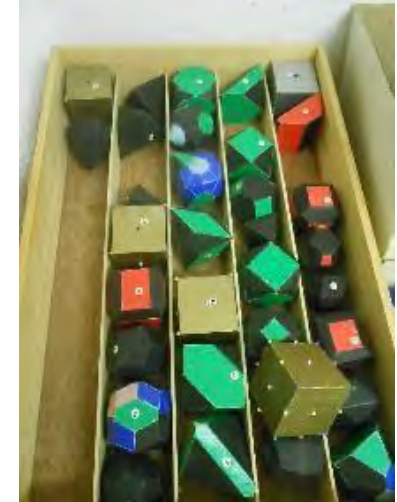
Details from drawing showing the relationship between the chosen objects and material used as the basis of the new drawing



Coolidge X-Ray Tube c1920s



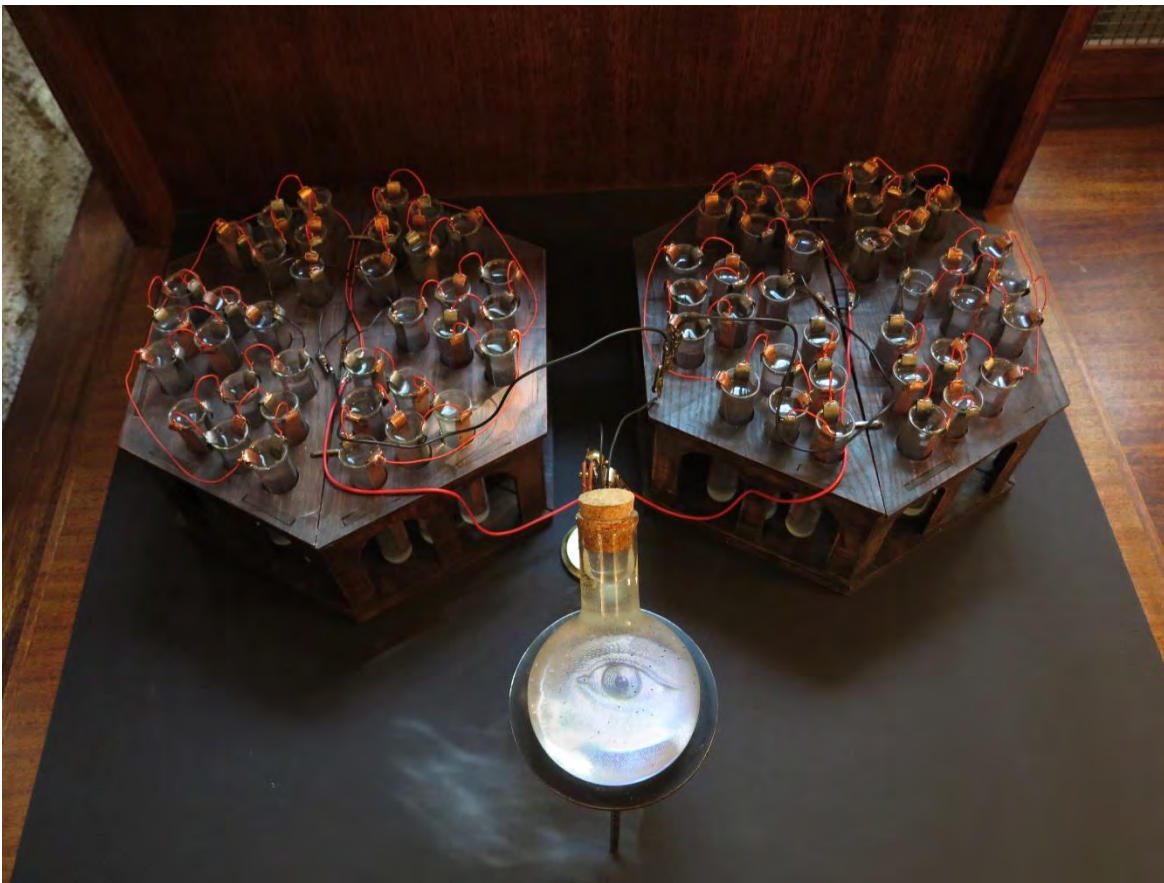
Models of geological crystals showing their geometric properties/ structures, c1970s



Irene Brown

Phantasmagoria Electric utilises electrical technology originally developed by Alessandro Volta in 1800. It consists of racks of 'home-made' electric cells in test tubes that power a projection of a 'home-made' slide, which is then magnified through a flask of water. The glass sphere acts as a lens that also distorts the image, and creates the illusion that the image is floating within the liquid.

The projected image of an eye, which itself is both an image and a symbol of curiosity, appears to be observing the viewer. The construction creates a circular 'circuit' of curiosity looking back on itself.



Irene Brown: *Phantasmagoria Electric*, Montpellier, 2017, mixed materials.

Irene Brown

Phantasmagoria Electric was exhibited alongside a Tiepolo drawing '**Head studies with lion head in profile**', Feather, wash, black stone on paper, Atger Museum, Montpellier.

The reasoning behind this pairing is that scientific thought could be perceived as founded on curiosity for the natural world and the quest for the experience of wonder and the marvellous through its inexhaustible diversity and inventiveness. The creatures drawn by Tiepolo, in their swarming and their grimaces, can be regarded as the “dark Wildlife” of the diversity of species that science, philosophy, mythology and art attempts to describe and explain.

A full critical reflection by Brown on the context of the work is in the essay '**The Scientist and the Magician**' in 'Post-Specimen' ed. Alistair Robinson and Ed Juler. Intellect Books 2020.



Kelly Richardson

For Montpellier, Richardson presented a digitally-created image of a tree in an imagined future desert landscape in which environmental conditions have crystallized the terrain. The tree is sculpted digitally and covered with four billion computer-created crystals – one for every alternate species on the planet.



Richardson's work was paired with one of the very first independent drawings of landscape by Annibale Carracci, (c1602). The aim of this anachronistic pairing was therefore to lay bare the massive shift in our and in art's relationship to nature, as well as the shift in our relationship to the earth.

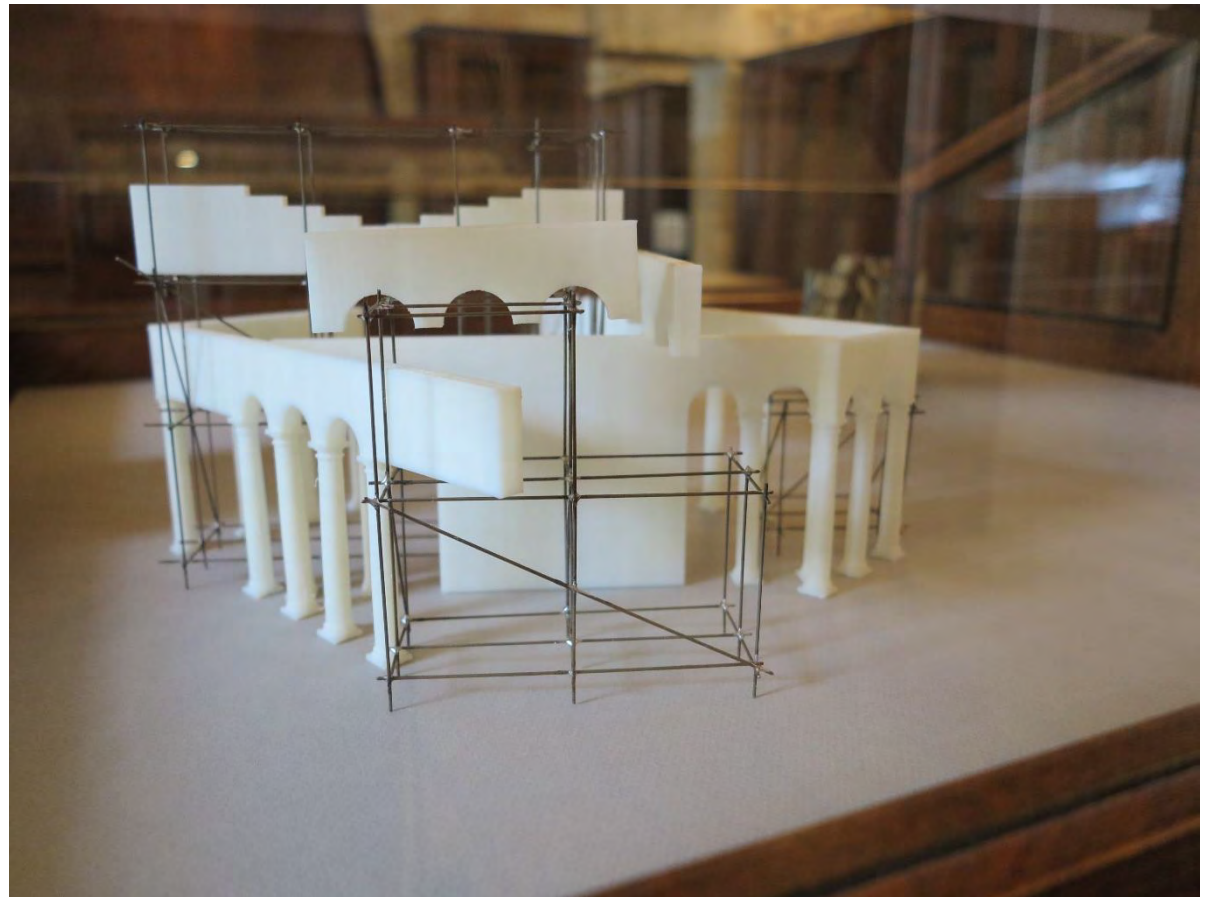
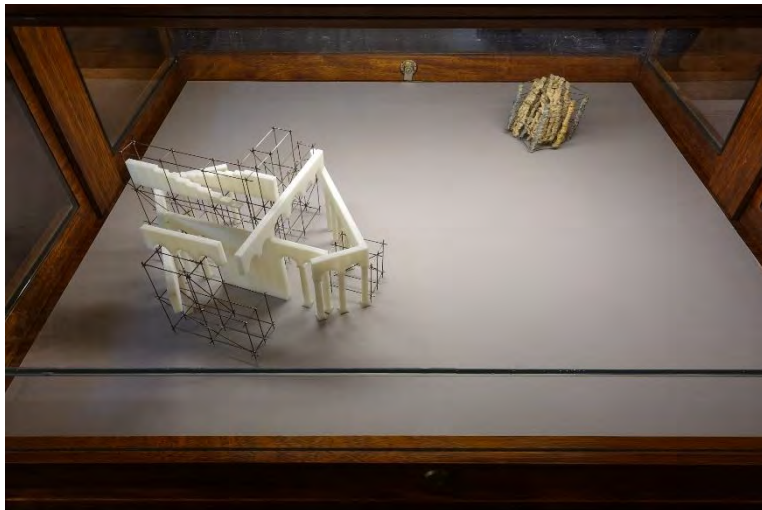


Kelly Richardson, 'Pillars of Dawn' (2017) and Annibale Carracci, 'Landscape with tree in front of a hill' (c1602-9)

Wolfgang Weileder

Weileder responded to the models of the structures and circulatory systems of plants in the Montpellier collections and to Utopian visions of the neoclassical architect Claude-Nicolas Ledoux. The Ideal City of Ledoux provided a model for the movement of people where all parts of the 'political body' were in harmony.

Weileder's response to the collections in Montpellier '**Salon de Ledoux**', reflected his interest in the parallels between architecture and the structures found in nature. The work made for the exhibition can be read as a sculpture in itself or as a model of a project for a public monument.

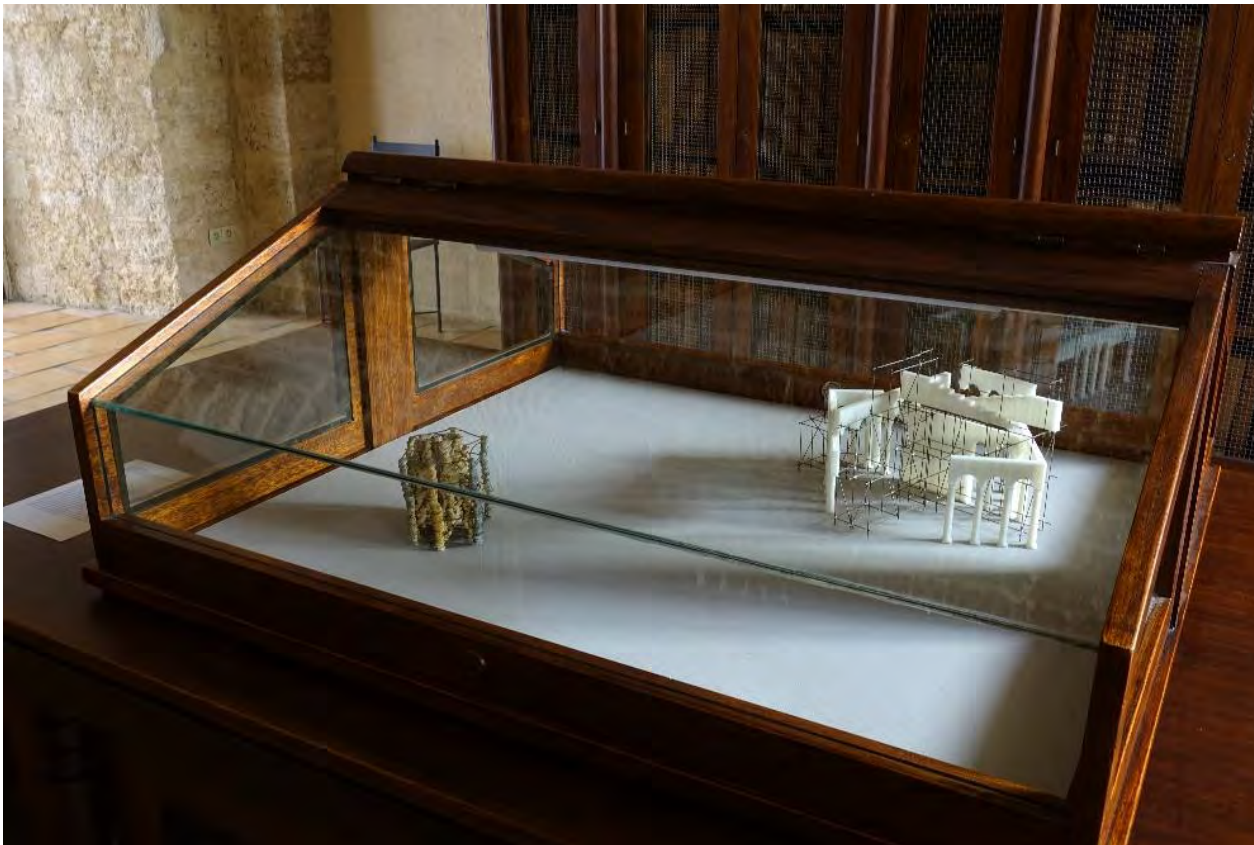


Wolfgang Weileder, *Salon Ledoux*, 3D print & steel wire construction, 2017

Wolfgang Weileder

Paired with models of the structures and circulatory systems of plants in the Montpellier collections, *Salon de Ledoux* engages with the formal and conceptual qualities of these science models to propose a new interpretation of utopian architecture - an architecture in constant flow and change.

Weileder's model suggests that our scientific understandings and our social relationships go hand in hand.



Wolfgang Weileder, *Salon Ledoux*, 3D print & steel wire construction, 2017

DETAILS OF INVITED RESEARCHERS

‘A Scientific Encounter: On inter-objectivity’. Other participating artist/researchers.

Alongside Newcastle University researchers and Nadia Lichtig (Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Montpellier) other artist/researchers were invited to participate in the research, in order to broaden the range and diversity of artistic responses to the concept of inter-objectivity. These were therefore specifically artists/researchers known to have a strong interest in critiquing collections and museums, objects, technologies and materials – old and new. Resulting responses took the form of drawings, 3D printed objects, videos, projections, photographs, and constructions.

Murray Ballard, UK - photographer with a long-term interest in cryonics – the practice of freezing the dead in the hope that future science and technology will be able to bring them back to life.

Daniel Brown, UK – a creative-technologist, working in the fields of generative and interactive design and art.

Keith Brown, UK and based at MMU – a researcher whose focus is on digital sculpture, the discovery and realization of new three-dimensional entities.

Bettina Dittlmann, Germany – artist/jeweller who uses overlooked and novel materials and techniques to imbue meaning into her objects.

Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva, Macedonia/UK – contemporary visual artist working across sculpture, installation, video, sound, photography and architectural interventions.

Rosalind McLachlan, UK – trained originally in archaeology and whose work includes sculpture, video and installation.

DISSEMINATION AND REACH

Symposium, 'Parallel Lines: Art and Science',
La Panacée: Centre d'art contemporaine, Montpellier, 16
and 17 May 2017, including presentations by Newcastle
researchers Juler, Brown, Talbot, Weileder to an
international public and academic audience.

http://esbama.fr/art_et_science/

Conference opened by Nicolas Bourriaud, Director of La
Panacea and the Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de
Montpellier Agglomeration.

International participants Included:

Ed Juler, art historian, Newcastle University

Richard Talbot, Newcastle University

Irene Brown, Newcastle University

Wolfgang Weileder, Newcastle University

Alistair Robinson, curator and Director of Northern Gallery for
Contemporary Art, (NGCA) Sunderland

Shila Khatami, artist, and guest professor at Hochschule für
Bildende Künste Braunschweig (HBK)

Rahma Kazam, art historian/critic, Paris/London

Thomas Hausberger, mathematician, University of
Montpellier

Agnès Fichard-Caroll, neurologist, University of Montpellier

Heike Fuhlbrügge, curator/art historian/critic, Berlin

Hélène Lorblanchet, conservator, Bibliothèque de la Faculté
de Médecine, Montpellier

Nadia Lichtig, researcher at Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-
Arts de Montpellier

The book **'Post-Specimen: Encounters Between Art,
Science and Curating - Rethinking Art Practice'** included
contributions from six participants at this symposium – Talbot,
Brown, Juler, Robinson, Lichtig and Kazam.



The book - ‘Post-Specimen: Encounters Between Art, Science and Curating - Rethinking Art Practice and Objecthood through Scientific Collections (Intellect, 2020), provides a point of reference for discourse and new knowledge in the fields of curation, artistic/creative practice and engagement with museum and other collections, museology, critical theory and history of science.



Conference presentation at the 9th European Society for the History of Science (ESHS) Conference “**Visual, Material and Sensory Cultures of Science**” (Bologna, Italy, 31 August - 3 September 2020). **Talbot, Brown, Juler, Weileder and Robinson presented the entire research project within the panel titled – ‘A Scientific Encounter: Artists responding to and engaging with research collections and museum objects’.** Presented virtually to an international academic audience. <https://sites.google.com/view/eshsbologna2020/program/final-program>





University of Montpellier's Faculty of Medicine and Musée Atger.