Smugglerius Unveiled

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Research project by Joan Smith and Dr Jeanne Cannizzo

The project examined the origins and history of the cast known as ‘Smugglerius’ and research was both archival and practice based. The cast was shown, along with artworks made by the researchers and historical research, at an exhibition in the Talbot Rice Georgian Gallery, Edinburgh 30 January – 5 March 2010.

Two photographs from the Smugglerius Veiled series – Joan Smith and Jeanne Cannizzo in collaboration with Caroline Douglas
Summary of research process

Initial discussions by the researchers led to focus on reinstating the identity of the man whose body was flayed and cast in the pose of the Dying Gaul in the 18th century. Skin as a protective layer both physically and metaphorically tied in with Jeanne Cannizzo’s research into Aztec ceremonial flaying practices.

Artworks made by both researchers made directly from the cast of Smugglerius in order to engage with the cast as it was originally intended – as an object used in the teaching of anatomy to art students.

Reading art historical references to the cast helped pinpoint an accurate date of the making of the Royal Academy’s original cast (1776) – now lost. The eca cast is a copy of the original and dates from 1854.

Old Bailey records of hangings at Tyburn in 1776 were consulted in order to find a candidate for the hanged criminal. Through a process of elimination, James Langar, hanged 12 April 1776 was identified.

Refining of ideas relating to the artworks led to both researchers working together to drape the cast with different protective layers. The drapes replaced the lost skin and also served as funerary coverings. The draping of the cast was documented by photographer Caroline Douglas. Both researchers worked with Caroline on lighting, composition and production of the images which were subsequently shown at the Talbot Rice’s Georgian Gallery.
Press Release

Smugglerius Unveiled

The Georgian Gallery at the Talbot Rice, University of Edinburgh 30 January to 5 March 2010

Central to the exhibition is the cast of a flayed man, or ‘écorché’ known as ‘Smugglerius’. The original cast was made in 1776 under the direction of the anatomist, William Hunter. Hunter was so impressed by the musculature of a man who was hanged at Tyburn that, rather than dissect the man, as he had intended, he decided to preserve the body, placing it in a pose based on the classical form of the Dying Gaul. A bronze cast of the man was made and was used for teaching purposes at the Royal Academy in London. Using mock Latin, students of the Royal Academy nicknamed the cast ‘Smugglerus’, likening the flayed man to the grander classical statues seen alongside him, whilst acknowledging his criminal status as a smuggler or thief.

The original bronze cast of ‘Smugglerius’ has been lost but two known plaster copies exist: one in the Royal Academy in London (dated 1834) and one in Edinburgh College of Art (dated 1854).

For many years, casts of ‘Smugglerius’ have been used in the teaching of anatomy to art students. In the Royal Academy artists such as William Blake would have been amongst the first to draw from the cast. At Edinburgh College of Art (eca) the cast was in a neglected state, hidden in a cupboard, until very recently. Funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund has enabled the eca to have restoration work carried out on Smugglerius and this exhibition celebrates and draws to public attention this important cast.

The cast first came to the attention of artist Joan Smith, when she was working as an anatomy tutor at eca. Several years later and still fascinated by the fine anatomical detail of the figure and by the folklore attached to it she showed the cast to Dr Jeanne Cannizzo of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh, who was also immediately struck by the pathos of the man made into a specimen. Both academics immediately agreed to work together on a research project focussing on ‘Smugglerius’.

The collaboration between artist and anthropologist as main researchers is an unusual one and brings together practices and ideas from quite distinct backgrounds. Joan Smith’s background is in Fine Art and she is a practicing artist and lecturer at Edinburgh College of Art. Dr Jeanne Cannizzo is an ethnographer who teaches photographic anthropology. Both researchers, however, are interested in contemporary interdisciplinary practice, particularly in relation to peoples’ complex relationship with human remains.

For the past two years artist and anthropologist have worked together, learning from each other’s practice through researching ‘Smugglerius’. The exhibition aims to bring attention to this important cast, to describe its history and the identity of the flayed man and so reverse the process by which a living man with a name became an anonymous specimen and eventually a replica cast. The photographs of the draped cast, using funerary black crepe and white linen, interrogate the physical and cultural meanings of his missing skin and have been made in collaboration with photographer Caroline Douglas.

It is hoped that the viewer will be able to contemplate the complexities of the relationship between identity and anonymity, the changing nature of criminal punishment and the importance of anatomy in both science and art.

Link to the press release on the Edinburgh College of Art website: http://www.eca.ac.uk/index.php?id=1373
Press and Web interest

The Times 19.1.10

From Tyburn Tree to anatomy tuition, the story of an 18th-century footpad is laid bare

The Herald 30.1.10

Edinburgh Evening News (30 January 2010)
http://edinburghnews.scotsman.com/features/Mystery-of-hanged-man39s-corpse.6029061.jp

Edinburgh Evening News (21 January 2010)
http://edinburghnews.scotsman.com/news/Universitys-gallery-plans--exhibitions.6001195.jp

The Scotsman (1 February 2010)
http://thescotsman.scotsman.com/features/-The-art-of-anatomy.6029953.jp

Daily Mail 23.1.10

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Joan Smith
Press and Web interest (contd)

Radio Scotland – Radio Café Wednesday 27 January 2010: Joan Smith talks about Smugglerius Unveiled and James Holloway, Director of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, talks about the BP Portrait Award exhibition at the Dean Gallery: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b00q94w5/The_Radio_Cafe_27_01_2010/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b00q94w5/The_Radio_Cafe_27_01_2010/)

Joan Smith also interviewed on Radio Scotland Drive Time 22 January 2010

Selection of Web and blog listings:

Wandering Educators website:


Exhibition announced on the gg-art website:


On the Nice Day blog:

[http://www.thanks.mw/?p=586](http://www.thanks.mw/?p=586)

Links to Getty Images pictures of the Smugglerius Unveiled story

[http://topics.npr.org/photo/00TI09f71aS7](http://topics.npr.org/photo/00TI09f71aS7)


Listing in Audience Business’ Visual Art EBulletin 4 February 2010

Cited in Art Review 11.4.11

On Christine Borland:

‘The work bears an echo of Smugglerius Unveiled, shown last spring at the Talbot Rice Gallery in Edinburgh, in which artist and teacher at Edinburgh College of Art Joan Smith and anthropologist Jeanne Cannizzo restored an 18th-century cast of a flayed man used by artists in anatomy lessons, and traced his probable identity to a highwayman hanged in 1776. Borland’s figure would yield no such clues. He dates from just after the Anatomy Act, which permitted the use of unclaimed bodies - those who died in the workhouse or in prison or whose families had no money to bury them - to be used in medical research, and there was no shortage. She set about recalling his humanity not by naming him, but by making a fresh cast based on the discarded one, repairing his broken hands and feet. The results are transformative.’

Reference to Smugglerius research in Cast Contemporaries exhibition catalogue essay, ‘The Cast Collection at eca’ by Margaret Stewart 3.8.12

Smugglerius Unveiled at the Georgian Gallery installation photograph by Caroline Douglas
Public Engagement

Notice in the Smugglerius Unveiled exhibition:

Smugglerius was made to be drawn.
Please feel free to use the easels and boards provided if you would like to draw in the gallery.

To be part of the continuing story of Smugglerius email your drawings to Joan Smith j.smith@eca.ac.uk

Easels, paper and drawing materials were left in the gallery so that anyone who wanted to do so could draw the cast of Smugglerius. More than 30 people left drawings in the gallery and images were also emailed to Joan Smith.

Drawing by Kaimes Primary school pupil left in the gallery

Drawing by Deirdre Nicholls emailed to Joan Smith

Drawing by Jane Howe emailed to Joan Smith
Public Engagement (contd)

Smugglerius: An Anatomy Class
Talbot Rice Gallery 13.2 10
Joan Smith: talk on the cast and the exhibition, followed by a drawing class focusing on Smugglerius as an aid to understanding human anatomy.

Joan Smith: Talk at Surgeons Hall Museum
September 2010
‘Smugglerius Unveiled: an archival research and art project by Dr Jeanne Cannizzo and Joan Smith’

Above: Hunter Lecturing at the Royal Academy
by Johann Zoffany c1772 collection of the Royal College of Physicians of London

Below: James Langar’s defence from Old Bailey records

Forthcoming Public Engagement: Joan Smith will be presenting a paper at the Artefacts conference at the Royal Museum of Scotland 7-9 October 2012. Speakers have been asked to address the entanglement of national styles and identity and scientific, technical and medical artefacts in a global context.