

University Museums Group Member Projects Case Study

Case study title	Arthur Silver Award
Institution name	Museum of Domestic Design & Architecture (MoDA), Middlesex University
Summary [100-150 words. What is this case study about? What was the problem, issue or challenge and how did you tackle it?]	This case study looks at the launch of an undergraduate Award aimed at encouraging more Middlesex students to use MoDA's collections for inspiration. In around 2008, we became aware that we had previously tended to promote the collections as an historical resource, and that this was of little interest to one of our key target audiences, namely Middlesex Art & Design students. Our collections are an excellent resource for visual research leading to students' own creative practice, but we had not promoted the collections on these terms. Middlesex students were not using the museum's resources for their own creative work despite being on their doorstep, although they often visited museum collections elsewhere. We realised that we needed to offer a tangible incentive for students to use our collections, and that a cash prize would raise the profile of the museum and give us a way of publicising our resources to the undergraduate body.
Keywords [please choose up to 5 keywords to describe your project which will help members to find your project within the website database.]	Undergraduate – inspiration – collections – cash - award
Background [100 words. Give brief details of your Museum/Gallery and any relevant background to the project.]	At MoDA's core is the Silver Studio Collection, relating to the work of a commercial design studio which ran from 1880 to 1963. The collection consists of wallpapers and textiles designed by the Studio, as well as visual reference material collected by the designers. However, when the museum opened in 2000, the emphasis of the exhibitions was on wallpapers and textiles as a way into social history narratives, rather than as design inspiration. This approach worked for a general audience but was less relevant to undergraduate students.

<p>Objectives [100 words. Describe the objective(s) behind the project.]</p>	<p>The objective of the project was to make Middlesex undergraduate students aware of the potential of MoDA and its collections as a resource for their own creative work. We wanted to raise the profile of MoDA's collections among staff and students, and be more clearly integrated into the creative life of the School of Art & Design at Middlesex University. We also wanted to make MoDA's collections visible at key points in the academic year, notably the Art & Design Degree show.</p>
<p>Project details [400 words. What did you do? This might also include details of project partners, financial and staff implications etc.]</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We discussed the idea with academic staff and agreed the format of entries for the Award. It was important that entry to the Award would not require students to produce work in addition to that already required by their tutors. We wanted to avoid asking students to write essays or long pieces of text, since this is not the strength of the majority of Art & Design students. We agreed that the Award would be open to final year students only, and that their entries should relate to the work they include in their final year show. Students do not enter their work itself (which might be a textile, a piece of jewellery, or furniture, or a garment etc), but a series of three A3 sheets which explain how they gained inspiration from MoDA's collections; how they used this to develop their work, and how their ideas evolved to the final outcome. 2. Having agreed the format of the Award we next had to secure the funding. The Silver Studio collection was given to Middlesex University (in a previous incarnation as Hornsey College of Art) in the 1960s. Descendants of the Silver family have been involved with the museum since then and are still represented on the museum's Advisory Board. We decided to capitalise on their ongoing interest and ask members of the extended Silver family to support this Award. With support from the University's Development Office we devised an appeal letter and wrote to family members outlining our request. We had agreed that we should offer an Award

	<p>of £1,000 per year over three years. With the help of Gift Aid, we needed to secure slightly less than £3,000 from the Silver family in order to make this achievable.</p> <p>3. Once we were confident that the funding would be achieved we started to promote the Award to students. In the first year we saw a significant increase in Middlesex students using the Study Room facilities, although only a handful of applications were received. In the second year we were able to use images of the first winner's work to promote the Award. Study Room use increased again, as did the number of applications and their overall standard. In 2010 we were able to award £1,000 to the overall winner with an additional two students being 'highly commended' .</p>
<p>Project outcomes and impact [200 words. How did this project make a difference to your museum?]</p>	<p>As we prepare for the third academic year in which we have offered this Award, we are delighted to find that levels of interest in the museum by students and tutors is higher than ever. Having struggled for years to attract attention from academics, we have now succeeded in making use of our collections a compulsory element of several third year courses (BA Fashion & Textiles and BA Illustration), thus guaranteeing that more students will enter for the Award. We are working more closely than ever with tutors to embed the museum's resources into teaching and learning across the Art & Design department, helping us to demonstrate the value of the museum to the University.</p> <p>We now promote the collections to students in terms of their value as a visual resource for inspiration. We try to make it clear to students that the collections are relevant to their own creative practice and that participation does not require knowledge of facts or dates. Thus the Award is part of a shift in emphasis in the way we present the museum's collections to this important audience.</p>
<p>What went well? [200 words – what were the most successful outcomes or learning points of the project?]</p>	<p>In addition to fulfilling the main objective, which was to increase use of the museum's collections by Middlesex students, we have also found that the business of handing over the Award to the winning student (£500 given at the</p>

	<p>degree show, £500 at the University's main awards ceremony) raises the profile of the museum and provides 'good news' stories and photo opportunities.</p> <p>Thus the Award has had a huge impact, disproportionate to the relatively small amount of money involved.</p>
<p>What could have been done better? [200 words – barriers , failures and things that could have gone better provide some of the most valuable learning points for others.]</p>	
<p>Conclusions and recommendations for the future [150 words. Briefly identify the most important points in the case study for others and where this project might lead in the future.]</p>	<p>As a University museum we need to balance the needs of our public audience and our responsibility to the academic community of which we are part. It took us a long time to realise that Art & Design students are not interested in approaching our collections in the same way as 'general' visitors, and that we needed to do something quite different to attract their attention.</p> <p>We hope to secure further funding to enable us to continue to offer the Award for three more years, thus building on the success of the project so far.</p>

Image [please attach an image connected to the project.]



Annie Skipper, winner of the Arthur Silver Award 2010.

Contact name and email address
[contact details for someone connected with the project who is willing to share more information with members.]

Zoe Hendon
z.hendon@mdx.ac.uk

Date of submission

3rd August 2010