V&A RESEARCH INSTITUTE (VARI) OPENING THE CABINET OF CURIOSITIES
ARTIST RESIDENCY CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

SUMMARY
Residency dates: February 2018 – April 2018
Residency Stipend: £6,500
Production/Research/Facilitation/Public Engagement Budget: £2,000
Deadline for applications: 15th January 2018
Interview date: 26th January 2018

The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) is seeking applications for a 3-month residency at the Museum. Applications can be from artists and practitioners of any age and nationality who meet the criteria of the residency outlined below. We welcome applications from artists based in or outside London (in the UK), but please note that there is no separate budget for accommodation or travel.

VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM RESEARCH INSTITUTE (VARI) AND VARI RESIDENCIES

VARI is the Andrew W Mellon Foundation-supported Research Institute nestled within the V&A Research Department. Over the five years from 2016 to 2021, VARI is supporting and resourcing a portfolio of specific research projects as well as responsive research positions involving academics, makers, designers, conservators, and other practitioners of all kinds, creating a unique research environment.

VARI aims to incubate new methods for interdisciplinary collections research, education and public engagement. In line with these aims, we have launched a new strand of VARI Residencies, both onsite at the V&A South Kensington and offsite in East London, in collaboration with different partner organisations.
The purpose of the VARI Residencies is to bring together creative practitioners with curators, scholars and diverse audiences to explore cross-disciplinary connections and strategies to see and show our collections in new ways, by creating encounters with new constituencies and/or exploring new methodologies of disseminating and communicating research.

VARI residencies constitute a new and experimental model of residencies whereby the Museum is inviting an external and independent voice to help us develop new ways of working with our collections and members of the public. Proposals can envisage the creation of new work, interventions, learning and/or public programmes that engage directly with the site, but we are also interested in suggestions for interventions in the digital realm. Each VARI Residency has a defined thematic focus.

This call for applications is for a 3month residency based at the V&A South Kensington’s Research Department with a follow-on installation/performance/event at the V&A in September 2018 during the London Design Festival.

As part of the V&A’s research community, VARI Residents are required to abide by research ethics policies and guidelines detailed in the V&A Research Handbook. A link to the V&A Research Handbook can be found here: Research handbook link.

OPENING THE CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

‘Opening the Cabinet of Curiosities’ (OCC) is a two-year research project that investigates the role played by the early modern concept of the cabinet of curiosities in the Victorian era. The Cabinet of Curiosities (or Wunderkammer) has been widely studied by historians of art, science and collecting and has often been seen as a chapter in the prehistory of the modern museum. The aim of 'Opening the Cabinet of Curiosities' is to re-examine the 19th-century reception of the Renaissance Wunderkammer, as well as its contemporary legacies.

The project is supported by a VARI team composed of two leads, Dr Marta Ajmar, Deputy Director for VARI and Dr Hannah Young, OCC Co-Investigator and Co-Lead. Dr Hannah Young is undertaking research that seeks to uncover some of the unexplored histories of the V&A, which in many respects became a large-scale nineteenth-century ‘cabinet of curiosity’. In particular, she is investigating some of the links between British slave-ownership and the development of the museum. Her research focuses on absentee slave-owners who used their wealth, rooted in the exploitation of enslaved people, to invest in collections in the metropole.
Objects that were once collected by absentees and their descendants can now be found throughout the museum.

The V&A began to engage with questions relating to the impact of slavery on the history of both the Museum and wider British society in the 2007 exhibition ‘Uncomfortable Truths: The Shadow of Slave Trading on Contemporary Art’. For the ‘Opening the Cabinet of Curiosities’ Artist in Residence we are inviting applications from practitioners who will work closely with and respond to Dr Young’s research and continue this dialogue, raising the question of how, in a twenty-first century museum, we can confront and engage with this difficult and uncomfortable history.

**Theme for the Residency**

We are looking for artists who are keen to engage with the histories of slavery and slave-ownership that are ‘hidden in plain sight’ within the V&A, embodied in many of its objects but rarely acknowledged or discussed. The selected artist will be encouraged to engage with both the V&A’s collections and the information we are unearthing about them to make visible these histories not currently reflected in the Museum.

There are limitations to the display or the direct handling of objects within the V&A’s collections. We are therefore seeking an artist who will utilise alternative ways, such as performance, sound, film, projection mapping or a digital intervention, for making their presence known.

Artists should seek to use the V&A’s objects and galleries as catalysts for discussion and debate, relating to how both this Museum and wider British society benefited from the enslavement of fellow human beings. Artists are invited to interrogate how this history has (and has not) been remembered and how the legacies of this history continue to shape the world we live in today.

Artists will also have a follow-on opportunity to showcase the work of the residency with an installation/performance/event at the V&A in September 2018 during the London Design Festival.

We particularly welcome proposals from artists from culturally diverse and underrepresented backgrounds.
ROLE AND EXPECTATIONS OF VARI RESIDENTS

The appointed Resident will be expected to:

- Spend a time equivalent to at least two days per week¹ throughout the duration of the residency, carrying out research, meeting with/presenting ideas to Museum staff and developing ideas for public programmes;
- Present their research and work in progress both offsite and at the V&A South Kensington to Museum staff and the general public on a regular basis;
- Undertake Museum-focused and/or collections-based research;
- Develop an online presence for their practice on the V&A website, including blogging (technical support will be offered);
- Develop their practice into new areas in collaboration with VARI staff and Fellows;
- Author a reflexive document concerning their methodologies and processes that can be a contribution to VARI’s developing modus operandi;
- Make the VARI Artists in Residence Programme a significant commitment, although a part-time role.

N.B.: The copyright and other intellectual property rights in any works created during the Residency shall vest with the Resident. The V&A and any partners shall be granted a non-exclusive, non-commercial, royalty free licence to copy and to reproduce the works for any purpose whatsoever relating to VARI and the V&A Residency Programme.

Works created during the residency period at the V&A shall remain the joint property of the V&A, any partners and the Resident until the end of the Residency, when the V&A will transfer ownership of the Works to the Resident with the agreement of all Parties (the V&A, any partners and the Resident). Work produced with the public as part of this residency is owned by the V&A.

¹ It should be noted that there is flexibility to accommodate other commitments that the Resident may have (travel, teaching, exhibitions etc.) so the Resident can work more intensively during some periods and less during others, but we are looking for a practitioner who will make the Residency a primary commitment.
**VARI Residents will be offered:**

- Direct involvement in the culture of the Museum through the activities and mechanisms listed above;
- Formal affiliation with VARI (V&A Research Institute) as part of the Museum’s Research and Collections Division;
- Appropriate introductions to staff and departments of the Museum and support from the VARI Project Manager;
- Access to relevant curatorial expertise and collections on display and in storage;
- Access to a personal computer, including V&A intranet login and email address;
- Temporary V&A Museum Security pass for the duration of the Residency, subject to Security clearance.

**NB:** The V&A cannot offer secretarial or administrative assistance to Residents beyond access to the desk mentioned above and any related stationery required to support the research needs of the Residency. Moreover, the V&A cannot offer technical support for the production of new work and depending on the resident’s practice, he/she may have to use their residency budget to rent equipment or hire specialised support.

**Residency Budget**

The VARI Residencies are supported through a stipend of £6,500 and a production/research/facilitation/public engagement budget of £2,000.

The £6,500 will need to cover the Resident’s living costs, including accommodation in central London (if required and to be arranged by the Resident), subsistence and travel costs to and from the artist’s normal working location and the V&A.

The £2,000 production/research/facilitation/public engagement budget can be used for research travel, equipment rental, consumables and costs attached to interventions and/or public programmes.

Residency grant funding is disbursed over two installments of 50% of the grant amount, based on the completion of project-specific contract-specified benchmarks, so planning for good personal cash flow and host venue collaboration is essential.
APPLICATION PROCESS: SHORTLISTING, INTERVIEW AND OFFER

Applicants are required to submit an application form (enclosed) and the following supporting documents: their CV, their portfolio and statement of support from a referee. All supporting documents must be in PDF format and emailed to variresidencies@vam.ac.uk by the deadline.

Shortlisting will take place within a few days after the application closing date. Applications will be considered by at least three members of V&A staff. Once a shortlist has been selected, unsuccessful candidates will be informed by email and shortlisted candidates are invited to interview. Please note that we are unable to provide any feedback on unsuccessful applications (we will only be able to provide feedback to shortlisted applicants that are interviewed).

Interviews will include a short presentation and a series of interview questions. The interview panel will most likely consist of the V&A Residencies Programme Manager, a Museum curator, a member of the VARI team, a V&A Learning staff member and frequently an external curator or creative practitioner. NB: Please note that we cannot cover travel costs for the interviews.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

We are looking for outstanding practitioners who meet the following Essential Criteria:

(i) A strong track record of public presentation of their work (through exhibitions, talks, publications etc.) and a demonstrated record of artistic accomplishment;

(ii) The ability to create a strong proposal that responds to the defined residency theme and makes use of the V&A’s resources;

(iii) An interest in working in research-led creative practice and an understanding and desire to work collaboratively with both the public and the Museum community;

(iv) Ideas for innovative ways to respond to opportunities to work with the V&A’s collections;

(v) Dynamic and inspiring ideas about how they would use this opportunity to develop their practice and how they intend to meet the Residency brief and aims;

(vi) Creative originality and professionalism in their work;

(vii) The ability to work independently;

(viii) A working knowledge of spoken and written English;

(ix) Past experience working with collections, historic sites, archives or museums is desirable.

NB: Please note that we cannot accept applications from those who are already an employee of the Victoria and Albert Museum. V&A staff can however nominate / act as referees for practitioners for the residency.
VARI RESIDENCY APPLICATION FORM

Please do not alter this form in any way and complete each section in the relevant boxes adhering to the word count. **Referees will be asked to submit a statement in support of the practitioner’s application.**

1. **APPLICANT**

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2. **APPLICANT REFEREE FOR THE RESIDENCY**

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3. SECTION TO BE COMPLETED BY THE REFEREE
Describe your relationship with the applying practitioner and why you think he/she would be a good candidate for this residency (maximum 500 words).

4. SECTION TO BE COMPLETED BY THE PRACTITIONER FOR THE RESIDENCY

A. Describe your creative practice and the thinking behind it (maximum 500 words).

B. Give details of any experience you might have working with a museum, historic collection or archive and/or community or educational setting (maximum 500 words).

C. Give details of how you propose to use this opportunity to develop your practice (maximum 500 words).

D. Give details on how you propose to respond to the V&A’s collections (maximum 800 words) and in particular the histories of slavery and slave-ownership that are ‘hidden in plain sight’ within our objects.

E. Give details of how you might engage with V&A staff and the V&A’s diverse audiences both onsite and online. (maximum 500 words).

F. Give an outline of how you envisage drawing on V&A expertise and engaging Museum staff and the public with the process of developing creative work. (maximum 500 words).

G. Please provide any other information or skills that you think are relevant to this application / opportunity (maximum 500 words).

In one email, applicants are expected to submit:

A. A completed version of this application form in PDF format.
B. A CV/resume
C. Portfolio (only one pdf file with all images and texts).

In the subject line of your email, please write: LastName FirstName.
Important: Do not include any important information in the body of your email. Only information in your application form and the requested documents will be assessed. Also do not submit more than the three required attachments.

CONFIRMATION

I confirm this information to be correct. I have completed the application form and submitted all additional required materials, by email only.

Place and date

Applicant
Type or input electronic signature

Place and date

Referee
Type or input electronic signature