Fashion Cities Africa: A collaborative doctoral studentship between the Sussex Africa Centre, University of Sussex (US) and Royal Pavilion & Museums, Brighton & Hove (RPM)

Background

The World Art section at Royal Pavilion & Museums, Brighton & Hove (RPM) cares for a nationally-important collection of 13,000 objects and images from Africa, Asia, the Pacific and Americas. The section actively promotes public understanding of the collection and, with the support of the James Henry Green Charitable Trust, runs a vibrant programme of collections research, display, interpretation and community engagement activities.

Fashion Cities Africa is a temporary exhibition being developed by the World Art section for display at Brighton Museum & Art Gallery in spring 2016. The exhibition will feature within the high-profile Brighton Festival and be a charging show.

Fashion Cities Africa will explore how fashion and dress are experienced in five African cities: Dakar; Johannesburg; Lagos; Nairobi and Casablanca. The exhibition will focus on city-based individuals within each city whose engagement with fashion/dress reveals some of the diverse ways that these are experienced within the city, whether as designers, tailors, bloggers, consumers, stylists, barbers and photographers. The focus on individuals within the context of a city will enable different registers of fashion and dress to be explored – from streetstyle, to ‘ethnic’ or ‘traditional’ dress to couture. The exhibition will present examples of dress and fashion alongside film, photography and other media.

The doctoral studentship

The studentship is a full-time, three-year, fully funded doctoral studentship to commence in April 2014 (or as soon thereafter as possible). Funding includes a tuition fee waiver (at Home/EU rates) plus a stipend of equivalent to Research Council rates. We will NOT consider applications from candidates currently enrolled on Masters programmes who will complete September this year.

The student’s research will focus on two to three of the five African cities proposed for the exhibition. Working alongside museum staff, they will explore how fashion/dress is created and experienced within these cities and contribute significantly to the exhibition content and interpretation. In structuring their own PhD research project the student will be supervised by academic staff working with the Sussex Africa Centre at the University of Sussex (US), and by RPM.

A key element of the studentship will be the elicitation of exhibition content supported by a clear and informed intellectual framework and rationale. RPM will provide funding for the costs of purchasing / securing exhibition content (and associated rights). The student is expected to prepare funding applications for travel costs and expenses once the details of these are known, to apply for US sources and others, such as the Royal Geographical Society/Institute of British Geographers.

Exhibition content to be gathered by the student as part of the research might include:

- Examples of fashion and dress and accessories
- Photographs
- Films and other media
- Oral histories, including interviews with fashion designers, makers and consumers
- Archival sources (e.g. from newspaper and other institutional archives, personal albums)
• Ephemera (e.g. magazines, posters, blog entries)

The student will work with museum staff on a work programme, activity plan and budget for those aspects of the research directly related to the Museum’s exhibition. Office accommodation will be provided for the student and there will be an expectation that the student works onsite one day a week. The student will be invited to participate in organisational activities, particularly where they concern the exhibition, and will be a member of the exhibition project team.

The research design for the PhD will follow usual US procedures, with the production of research outline and ethics clearance process completed in the first 6-9 months of the project, followed by up to a year of data collection and a final year of writing up. Academic supervision will be provided through the US Sussex Africa Centre (by Profs S. Newell and J. McGregor.)

Application procedure

Applicants must hold an MA or MSc in a relevant social science/humanities field (e.g. anthropology, museum studies, human geography, African Studies)

Experience (necessary):

• Training in research methods at Masters level (qualitative)
• Experience in conducting independent research
• Experience in ethnographic and life history methods
• Experience of planning and undertaking research / fieldwork outside Europe

Experience (desirable)

• Experience of museum work
• Experience of research in Sub Saharan Africa and/or North Africa

Enquiries about the exhibition can be sent to Helen Mears, Keeper of World Art, RPM:

Helen.Mears@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Expressions of interest for the studentship must be sent to Professor JoAnn McGregor by 31 March 2014:

J.Mcgregor@sussex.ac.uk

Please include a Curriculum Vitae and covering letter.

Shortlisted applicants will then be invited to submit a formal application for the PhD itself. For further information on PhD entry requirements please see:

http://www.sussex.ac.uk/study/pg/2014/research/1660#qualifications