Gestured
Dr Anneke Pettican | Brass Art
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Gestured (2017) comprises a constellation of installed blown glass, cast and 3D printed sculptural pieces, single channel video works, a series of public events and an accompanying publication, created in response to the archive at Chetham’s Library, Manchester.

Project Description

Pinch 2017. 3D resin print, coloured glass. 25cm x 10cm x 10cm

Project Duration:
Exhibition, 16 October - 8 December 2017 Chetham’s Library, Manchester, UK.

Funder:
Brass Art received £11,500 from Arts & Heritage as part of Meeting Point 2, a year-long project involving ten contemporary art commissions inspired by museums and their collections led by Arts & Heritage and funded through Arts Council England’s Museum Resilience Fund. Gestured later featured in the solo Brass Art exhibition that-which-is-not (2018) at Bury Sculpture Centre and the artists received a £7000 production award to research and generate new neon artworks as part of the Gestured series.

Research Partners, consultants, collaborators:
Arts & Heritage, Chetham’s Library, Arts Council England (ACE) Museum Resilience Fund, University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University, Edinburgh College of Art, University of Edinburgh, University of Huddersfield, Ogle Models Ltd.


Collaborators: Established in 1999, Brass Art is the collaborative practice of Chara Lewis, Kristin Mojsiewicz, Anneke Pettican.

Pinch 2017. 3D resin print, coloured glass. 25cm x 10cm x 10cm
Photo Credit Brass Art
Research Aims & Objectives

Research Aims:
• To reanimate Chetham’s library spaces through an embodied response to gesture discovered in the archive by developing original approaches to sculptural thinking and making.

Research Objectives:
• To take influence from a range of emphatic hand gestures uncovered in the archive, including the original hand drawn manicules of John Dee to inform a novel approach to the archive.
• To extend Brass Art’s engagement with 3D scanning processes to successfully replicate poise and gesture originating from the archive.
• To consider how alchemical approaches might inform sculptural processes to generate embodied sculptural forms.
• To create a constellation of new artefacts within the spaces of Chetham’s Library to engage a new audience, by building upon Brass Art’s long term engagement with uncanny doubling, metamorphosis and material transformation.
• To explore new approaches to defamiliarisation and encounter by re-presenting images discovered in the Library collection.
Research Context

The research emerged from Brass Art's invitation and competitive selection for an Arts & Heritage commission to work with Chetham's Library. Art situated in heritage settings is an emerging branch of site specific art practice demanding particular attention to creative and installation processes, as opposed to art placed in unusual/non-gallery spaces.1 Brass Art were chosen for their sensitivity to sites and ability to create immersive experiences evidenced by earlier projects, using light-based, digital and analogue approaches to embodiment, replication, shadow-play and sculptural making.

The collection is housed in a 15th century medieval building and Chetham's Library is internationally renowned as the oldest surviving public library in the English-speaking world. Founded in the 17th century through Sir Humphrey Chetham's philanthropic legacy, it is famous for its association with John Dee (1527-1609), resident warden, alchemist, polymath, and advisor to Elizabeth I, and visiting readers such as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.2 Brass Art's initial archival research focused on the book *De re mediciis secretis* owned by Dee. It contained marginalia of Dee's original hand-drawn manicules – tiny ink drawings of hands – pointing to key discoveries in the text. This discovery allowed Brass Art to make the first application of sculptural thinking to Dee's original hand-drawn manicules and influenced their approach to the constellation of gesturing artworks.

In contemporary thought, Dee has been resurrected as a talismanic figure of alchemical practice and has been the focus of: an exhibition at The Royal College of Physicians; a short film by artist, writer and curator Jeremy Millar; and an opera, *Doctor Dee*, by musician Damon Albarn.3 Taking their influence from Dee's gestures, and the quiet symbolism of hand gestures evident in paintings hanging in the reading room by Godfrey Kneller (1646-1723), Brass Art sought further visual clues from the collection. Of note was the lack of female presence in the collection. Literary influences during the research and development phase included William Hogarth's (1697-1764) prints; William Cowper's (1666-1709) life-sized anatomy book *The Anatomy
of Humane Bodies (1698); and Althansius Kircher’s (1602-1680) Mundus Subterraneous (1665) which refocused Brass Art’s attention on matter and opened up an undert current of instability and volatility at the heart of the collection, also influencing the artwork Solaris (2017). Kircher’s diagrams of projected light, Steganographic Mirror (1645) and pre-cinematic spectacle, Lucerna Magica (1671), presented references synonymous with Brass Art’s engagement with the double and ‘familiar strangers’ and provide cues for the development of specific artworks, including Pepper’s Ghost (2017).

1. Organisations and museums that focus upon Art situated in heritage settings include: MCAHE (Mapping Contemporary Art in the Heritage Experience) based at Newcastle University, Arts & Heritage Meeting Point commissions, Freud Museum, London, Bronte Parsonage, Haworth.

2. Artists and researchers have tended to focus on the legacy of Marx and Engels, for example Pavel Büchler, Red Flag (1997).


The role of intuition is pivotal in Brass Art’s approach to artistic research in a methodology embracing assertion and hint. Their working methods, sensing bodies, and performative approaches enable a concern with liminality and the uncanny, enhancing the affective dimension of surprise in the construction and reception of the work.¹

Working with Chetham’s Library they explored its site as a space in which to insert themselves, and eventually the artworks as substitutes for their presence. Archival research formed a visual encyclopaedia of gestures: pointing, cupping, pinching, rubbing, grasping and entreating. The presence of the artists’ hands, posed in symbolic gestures arising from the collection, afforded Brass Art a place amongst the male patrons and writers, pointing towards other narrative possibilities and trajectories within the Library. Replicating the archival gestures at different scales to mimic, multiply, pinch, cradle, caress and direct, the artists worked with experts in their respective fields to develop bespoke sculptural techniques.

¹ Image from Kircher’s magnum opus on light, projections, and astronomy, Ars Magna Lucis Et Umbrae (trans. the Great Art of Light and Shadows).

Earth (unfolded), from Althansius Kircher’s Mundus Subterraneus (Amsterdam: Jansson, 1678).

The Four Stages of Cruelty: Cruelty in Perfection 1 (detail) February 1751.

Image from Kircher’s magnum opus on light, projections, and astronomy. Ars Magna Lucis Et Umbrae (trans. the Great Art of Light and Shadows).

Brass Art selected gestures from the series of Hogarth prints, including Marriage A la Mode.

Hogarth prints gesture, A Harlot’s Progress that resonated with contemporary debate.
They sought the expertise of Dr. Keith Winwood and Dr. Fraser Walker in the field of Maxillofacial casting for capturing dynamic gestures, testing state-of-the-art 3D scanning technologies at the highest resolution. The final objects were then re-scaled to enhance the uncanny dimension of the gestures, and 3D printed in different resins.

Alchemy can be understood as a slow process of transformation - of materials but also of the individual - through intense durational experiments, a process evidenced in Brass Art’s embodied response to the sense of wonder in the encounter with Chetham’s building and collection. Brass Art discovered that early efforts to produce gold ore produced surprising discoveries including the creation of ruby glass, later refined by alchemist and glass maker Johannes Kunckel (1637–1703). The introduction of gold flakes dispersed the light and unexpectedly produced a deep red colour that, ‘no doubt resembles fine rubies but perhaps resembles nothing so much as blood’ (Peter Dear, 2008).
The specialist assistance of Ingrid Phillips and Dan Nuttall was employed in an unusual application of hot glass. Using their hand casts as moulds, Brass Art iteratively tested the possibilities for pushing molten, coloured glass into arrested gestures to create a sense of touch. One of the resulting artworks, Solaris (2017), appears to contain red glass swirling in a state of flux.

In Marriage A la Mode (after Hogarth) (2017), a giant hand – resting on a boxed set of Hogarth prints – pinches a gold ring held aloft by a delicate gold chain, simultaneously evoking the social contract of marriage, the ambitions of alchemy and the Midas touch. In Pepper’s Ghost (2017) a felt-lined display case houses a blown glass globe, and theatrical illusion is employed to create a double that hovers, held in place by two 3D-printed, white hands, evoking Kircher’s diagrams of projected light.

Working with scientific glass blower David Marshall, Brass Art created hand-made alchemical vessels reproduced from historical images of apparatus in the collection. Some of these were used as lenses to film and magnify video works as part of the Gestured series reflecting external views around Chetham’s (Transfixed Man, 2017) and magnifying individual gestures gathered from contemporary sources. For example, in the video Mooch and Maitlis (2017), using projection and blown-glass, Brass Art magnified and diffracted the exchange in a TV interview, by turn aggressive and placatory, between Anthony Scaramucci and Emily Maitlis. The work invites the audience to trace the gestural interaction as Scaramucci transgresses the space of the interview to directly touch Maitlis, silently pointing to the #MeToo movement.

Brass Art’s cast and assembled hands, in black and white resin and pale Herculite, mimicked the posed hands of ‘men of consequence’, hands of criminal corpses from anatomical plates, Dee’s manicules, theatrical indexes of gesture, religious blessings and classical orators, their mute communication and presence pointing to the potential for new lines of thought or confluence between the writers, and to the spectral silence of the missing female voices in the canon.

1. Chetham’s Library offered Brass Art the opportunity to bring their ‘sensing bodies’ (the term ‘sensing’ is deliberately used to foreground movement and the body’s encounter with the political (Erin Manning, 2007, pp. xxii–83) to engage with both a resonant space and extensive archive.
Brass Art Red Gall (collage) 2017

Brass Art Cradle (collage) 2017

Brass Art visual research for Click (after Hogarth) 2017


Red glowing hand (test) 2017

The project culminated in an exhibition entitled Gestured (2017). This was the first commissioned exhibition of contemporary art within Chetham’s Library. Gestured consisted of fourteen artworks that were the fruit of both archival research, and material testing. These works provided the focus for a series of public events which re- animated the museum site and its archive for new audiences.

The work in the exhibition developed Brass Art’s use of medical processes and of 3D scanners and 3D printers. Scanned 3D models of the artists’ hands, reproduced with unexpected shifts in scale, provided the centre piece of each sculptural installation. For Gestured, Brass Art combined stark disembodied copies of their hands, posed in precise attitudes, with hot blown glass, lenses and gold. The aim was to capture an uncanny and vital quality by juxtaposing suggestions of heat, and breath with the expressive presence of the sculptured hands.

Marginal drawings by the alchemist John Dee provided the inspiration for these installations. The exhibition gave Dee’s manucules and other representations of gesturing hands a haunting 21st century presence which supplemented and echoed their erratic appearances within the 17th century library’s collection. Brass Art’s work conjured Dee’s idiosyncratic interventions in the books he read into peculiarly contemporary curios. The installations of sculptured hands were displayed alongside video works which offered slow arresting movements or emphatic gestures and unsolicited touch. By embodying marginalia and prints as eerie objects, the carefully curated exhibition made the variety of gesturing hands depicted in the library’s collection become dynamically present within the physical space of the library itself.

Artefacts from Gestured featured in further exhibitions; that-which-is-not (2018) and A Track of the Light (2019). The chapter ‘Brass Art: Gestured’ was peer reviewed for ‘Intersecting Practices: Contemporary Art in Heritage Spaces’ (Routledge, 2020) and consolidated the implications of the work as a seminal intervention in a heritage setting with International reach.

A constellation of fourteen experimental artefacts (sculpture and video) were placed within Chetham’s Library as an installation, alongside a display case of iterative experiments and key archival texts. Accompanying the exhibition Gestured were a series of public events, including some additional objects that were inserted into the spaces of the library, an exhibition catalogue and essay, and a gilded ledger for public engagement titled Gestured. The total number of international visitors to the exhibition between 16 October - 08 December was in excess of 5600.
Marriage À la Mode (after Hogarth) 2017. 3D SLS print, gold ring, gold chain. 800 x 400 x 300mm; 4800 mm gold chain. Photo credit Jonathan Turner.
Pepper’s Ghost 2017. 3D printed polyresin, pink glass globe, light, map box. 150 x 250 x 150mm; 250 x 250mm; 600 x 250 x 800mm. Photo credit Brass Art.

Solaris 2017. 3D printed polyresin, blown glass, light. 26cm x 16cm x 06cm. Photo credit Jonathan Turner.
Dowsing (2017) video, 5mins
Video Still Brass Art.

Photo credit Jonathon Turner.

Mooch and Maitlis (2017) brought found footage of contemporary politicised gesture and touch into dialogue with the 17th century collection. An excerpt is available https://vimeo.com/360212225

Felt (after Cowper) 2017. 3D printed polyresin, blown glass. Installation dimensions variable.
Photo credit Brass Art.
Cradle (2017) oversized pink satin glove, 3D printed polyresin
Transfixed Man (2017) video, 1min 39 sec
View video: https://www.soanywaymagazine.org/issue-six

1. Solaris (2017)
   3D printed polyresin, blown glass, light
2. Sensus (after Kircher) (2017)
   cast arm, scientific lens, red cellophane
   3D printed polyresin, gold ring and chain
4. Red Gall (2017)
   3D printed polyresin, red blown glass forms, blue velvet cushion
5. Pepper’s Ghost (after Chetham) (2017)
   3D printed polyresin, pink glass globe, light, map box
   3D printed polyresin, pink glass globe
   3D printed polyresin, blown glass
   video, 5mins
   video, 1min 39 sec
    video, 5mins
    video, 4min 47sec
    3D printed polyresin, red blown glass
    oversized pink satin glove, 3D printed polyresin
    cast arm, draped fabric and book

Full list of Gestured works:
15. Manicule (2017)
    3D printed polyresin
    3D printed polyresin
17. Gestured (2017)
    Display Case: Chetham’s Library
    cast hand, miniature version of Marx’s manifesto
    hot and cold worked clear glass instruments and forms
    Stone head, 3D printed polyresin
    three-part fabric screen
22. Stretched (2017)
    3D printed polyresin, glass

The other assembled pieces:
23. Display Case: Chetham’s Library
27. Stretched (2017)
Selected Exhibitions: 2018 that-which-is-not Bury Sculpture Centre | Bury Art Museum, Manchester

2017 GESTURED Chetham’s Library, Manchester

Group Exhibitions: 2019 A Trick of the Light: Magic, Mystery and Illusion Grundy Gallery, Blackpool

Commissions: 2018 Click (after Hogarth), two part argon sign, Bury Sculpture Centre | Bury Art Museum, Manchester.

2017 GESTURED Meeting Point2 Arts & Heritage ACE Commission, Chetham’s Library, Manchester


Selected Essays: 2019 Ferris, N. Sleight of Hand

2018 Kivland, S. LA PAGODE

2017 Bailey, R. Ways of Reading Gestured


Arts & Heritage: Contemporary Arts Practice in Heritage Sites, Manchester Metropolitan University. (23 February 2018) Supported by ACE.


2018 that-which-is-not review - Beth Dawson - Corridor8 - 16th April http://www.corridor8.co.uk/article/brass-art-that-which-is-not-at-bury-art-museum-and-sculpture-centre/

2017 GESTURED review - Catriona McAra - Corridor8 - 12th Dec http://corridor8.co.uk/article/brass-art-gestured/

xCoAx review - Victoria Bradbury - Neural - issue 58 / Autumn 2017


2018 Macdonald, A.I., that-which-is-not trailer: https://vimeo.com/267371994

2017 Gestured, Edinburgh College of Art, The University of Edinburgh https://www.eca.ed.ac.uk/research/gestured

Elizabethan alchemist’s notebook inspires magical artwork at Chetham’s Library, Manchester Metropolitan University: https://www2.mmu.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/story/6427/elizabethan-alchemists-notebook-inspires-magical-artwork-at-chethams-library/

Elizabethan alchemist’s notebook inspires magical artwork at Chetham’s Library: http://aboutmanchester.co.uk/elizabethan-alchemists-notebook-inspires-magical-artwork-at-chethams-library/

The Brass Art collective reworked the drawings of Queen Elizabeth I’s alchemist and magician John Dee: https://www.hud.ac.uk/news/2017/november/elizabethanalchemistsnotebookinspiresartworkatchethamslibrary/
The Gestured exhibition 14 October – 08 December 2017 included a series of bespoke events designed to engage new audiences. The Torch-lit tour on Saturday 28 October 2017 was conceived to accompany the International Art Fair Manchester Contemporary and was sponsored by the Alchemist. 400 people (capacity) toured through the exhibition by torchlight. In total more than 5600 visitors saw the Gestured exhibition.
Artefacts from Gestured (2017) were exhibited in that-which-is-not, a solo exhibition by Brass Art curated by Kat Au in Bury Sculpture Centre, 17 February - 2 June 2018. Brass Art received a £7000 production award to research and generate new neon artworks as part of the Gestured series. An essay: La Pagode by Sharon Kivland accompanied the exhibition.
Trick of the Light: Magic, Mystery and Illusion, Grundy Art Gallery, Blackpool.
28 September – 14 December 2019
Curated by Paulette Terry Brien, Trick of the Light featured International artists Brass Art, Mat Collishaw, Rachel Goodyear, Helen Maurer, Tim Noble and Sue Webster alongside selected items on loan from The Bill Douglas Cinema Museum, University of Exeter.

Still Life No.3 (installation view) 2019. 3D objects in SLA resin, polypropylene, PLA, mixed media, table and light source. Table 2m diameter. Installation dimensions variable.
Photo credit Michael Pollard

A Trick of the Light (installation view).
Image courtesy Grundy Art Gallery, Blackpool © Jonathan Lynch.

Still Life No.3 (detail) 2019.
Photo Credit Michael Pollard
Arts & Heritage website. The Chetham’s Library commission is archived on Arts & Heritage https://www.artsandheritage.org.uk/projects/chethams-library/

Arts & Heritage is an Arts Council England (ACE) National Portfolio Organisation (NPO).

A trailer for Gestured by Arts & Heritage is available: https://vimeo.com/256275645

Dr Catriona McAra (curator at Leeds Arts University) review of ‘Gestured’ in Corridor 8 magazine (online). http://www.corridor8.co.uk/article/brass-art-gestured/

Beth Dawson’s review of the exhibition ‘that-which-is-not’ in Corridor 8 magazine (online). http://www.corridor8.co.uk/article/brass-art-that-which-is-not-at-bury-art-museum-and-sculpture-centre/

Derek Horton’s review of the exhibition ‘A Trick of the Light’ in Corridor 8 magazine (online). https://corridor8.co.uk/article/a-trick-of-the-light/
Brass Art: GESTURED catalogue. Authors: Rowan Bailey ISBN: 978 1 910029 34 3
Design: Jack Hodgson & Brass Art (2017)
Brass Art’s paper ‘Brass Art: The Uncanny Reforming Sculptural Thinking’ was presented in *Sculpture Across Borders* (chair Martina Droth - Deputy Director of Research | Curator of Sculpture, Yale Centre for British Art) at (Re) Forming Sculpture, The Hepworth Wakefield and the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies, University of Leeds (26-27 June 2018). Attendance 120

**Chapter 4**

**Gestured by Brass Art: Gestures, Ambiguity, and Material Transformation at Chetham’s Library**


**Abstract**

This paper explores the sculpture and works of art created by Brass Art, a contemporary art practice that combines sculpture, installation, and performance. The authors discuss the materials and techniques used by Brass Art, as well as the conceptual and thematic underpinnings of their work. The paper examines the role of materiality in contemporary art and the ways in which Brass Art challenges and redefines traditional notions of sculpture.

**Introduction**

Located at the heart of Manchester, in a 19th-century mill next to Victoria Station, was the Chetham’s Library, the other library in the area. In this paper, we will explore how Brass Art’s work is situated in this historical context. The library itself is a fascinating example of Victorian architecture, with its intricate ironwork and stained glass windows. The materials used in the construction of the library were carefully selected to create a sense of durability and longevity. The library was designed to be a symbol of the city’s intellectual and cultural aspirations, and it continues to serve as a testament to the city’s history and legacy.

**Materials and Methods**

Brass Art uses a variety of materials in their work, including brass, steel, and bronze. The use of these materials is not only functional, but also symbolic. Brass is a material that is often associated with wealth and prestige, and it has been used in the creation of many significant works of art throughout history. Steel is a strong and durable material that is commonly used in the construction of sculptures, and it is often associated with industrial and urban environments. Bronze is another important material in contemporary art, as it allows for a high degree of detail and precision in the creation of intricate forms.

**Results**

The authors present case studies of specific works by Brass Art, discussing the materials used and the conceptual ideas behind each piece. They also examine the way in which the works interact with their environment, and how they engage with the viewer. The authors conclude with a discussion of the broader implications of Brass Art’s work for contemporary art practice, and the role of materiality in shaping the future of art.
Bibliography:


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Hogarth W. (1732). The Harlot’s Progress, Four Stages of Cruelty [Cruelty in Perfection] and Marriage A la Mode. [Prints].


Kircher A. (1671) Diagrams of projected light, Steganographic Mirror (1645) and pre-cinematic spectacle, Lucerna Magica.


The Royal College of Physicians (2016). Scholar, courtier, magician: the lost library of John Dee. [Exhibition] Available at: https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/events/scholar-courtier-magician-lost-library-john-dee#

Output Type:
Original artistic works, solo exhibition, curation of exhibitions, creative body of enquiry, chapters in edited books, journal articles