



Wyvern Research Institute

Annual Review
2025

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Chair's Overview

2025 marked the Wyvern Research Institute's first full year of operation, and it has been a pleasure to welcome nearly 500 postgraduate students, scholars, curators, and specialist groups through its doors.

When we established the Institute in September 2024, our ambition was to create an exceptional research resource for the study of the Medieval and Ancient worlds alongside the historic cultures of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas. This deliberately wide remit reflects both the diversity of the Wyvern Collection and a conviction that artistic ideas, materials, and symbolic forms have travelled widely across time and geography, often enduring far beyond their points of origin.

For many millennia, humanity has returned to remarkably consistent themes: the veneration of powerful animals; the making of fertility figures and ancestor memorials; the use of sculpture to express authority; and the universal impulse to adorn the body. These shared values are mirrored in the enduring hierarchies of materials - gold, silver, bronze, precious hardstones such as jade, lapis lazuli, obsidian, and porphyry - each valued for its physical qualities and symbolic resonance.

The last year has demonstrated the vitality of this approach. Research undertaken through our fellowships, lectures, and object-based study sessions explored deep cultural continuities and connections, spanning subjects as varied as Scythian animal art, Asante goldwork, Ethiopian painting traditions, and Roman enamels. It has been particularly encouraging to see scholars working across disciplinary boundaries, bringing together art historical, archaeological, and curatorial perspectives in ways that open new lines of enquiry.

Looking ahead to 2026, the Wyvern Research Institute will continue to support object-focused research and scholarship that investigates the long histories of cultural exchange and shared artistic imagination, and it is well positioned to expand its fellowships, sponsored research, and publications, while deepening its role as a meeting point for scholars working across regions and periods.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to our advisory board, fellows, partners, and visiting scholars, whose enthusiasm, insight, and dedication have made the first year of the Institute so successful, and whose contributions continue to shape its future.

Sir Paul Ruddock, FSA
Chair

Director's Report

The inaugural year of the Wyvern Research Institute has been a period of rapid growth and active engagement, establishing the Institute as a vibrant hub for object-led research.

Our 2025 programme focused on three key priorities: supporting original scholarship, enabling access to the Collection, and fostering collaborative networks. Over the year, fellows, students, and visiting researchers engaged in extended projects and focused encounters with objects, creating a dynamic environment for study and exchange.

A key achievement was the launch of our fellowship programme, which welcomed an international cohort of scholars working across diverse periods and regions. Fellows made significant progress on research projects while contributing to the Institute's wider programme through presentations and discussions, helping to build a vibrant scholarly community around the Collection.

Alongside this, the Institute hosted a full calendar of object-based sessions in collaboration with various institutions including the Courtauld Institute, University College London, and the University of Oxford. These sessions offered students and scholars the chance to examine objects closely, discuss methodologies, and test emerging ideas, providing valuable collaborative opportunities and enriching the Institute's teaching and research environment.

Our programme of lectures, seminars, and workshops further fostered discussion across disciplines, connecting curators, academics, and independent researchers. Topics ranged from archaeological excavations in Mongolia and Southern Iraq to the conservation of Ethiopian wall paintings, reflecting the diversity of the Collection and the global scope of our research agenda.

The Institute also continued to extend its impact through loans and research publications, ensuring that objects from the Wyvern Collection could contribute to ongoing academic and museum projects beyond the Institute itself. Supporting this external engagement remains an important part of our mission and a meaningful way to extend the impact of the Collection.

Looking ahead to 2026, we will focus on strengthening the Institute's core programmes while expanding the scope of our partnerships and research support. Priorities include the continued growth of our fellowship scheme, and the further development of our publication strategy. With strong momentum established in our inaugural year, the Institute is now well placed to deepen its contribution to the field and to continue fostering innovative research shaped by direct encounters with objects.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Trustees of the Ruddock Foundation for the Arts for their continued support, and to our advisory board, visiting fellows, lecturers, institutional partners, and the many scholars and students whose energy and engagement have defined the Institute's first year. Their contributions have set an exceptionally strong foundation, and I look forward to building on it in the year ahead.

Dr Susannah Kingwill
Director

Research Fellows

2025

Dr Hanna Vertienko, University of Oxford Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies Academic Visitor; A.Yu. Krymskiy Institute of Oriental Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine.

April - June 2025, Scythian objects in the collection.

Hanna is a specialist in Iranian studies and Scythology. Her main research topics are the study of spiritual and material culture of the Iranophone nomads of the Eurasian steppe. She has studied Scythian objects in a number of Ukrainian museums, among them Treasury of the National Museum of History of Ukraine. Hanna is the Editor-in-chief of the Academic journal "The Oriental Studies" ("Shodoznavstvo") published by the A. Yu. Krymskiy Institute of Oriental Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Kyiv.

Dr Jeffrey Spier, Emeritus Senior Curator of Antiquities, J. Paul Getty Museum
May 2025, late Roman, Byzantine, and Gothic rings.

Dr. Spier was trained as a classical archaeologist, receiving his D.Phil. from Merton College, Oxford, in 1988. He has published widely on Greek, Roman, and Byzantine art, including catalogues of the gems and rings at the J. Paul Getty Museum and the Gulbenkian Museum in Lisbon, studies of Early Christian gems and Byzantine rings, and exhibition catalogues. He served as Senior Curator of the Getty Villa, which houses the Getty Museum's collection of antiquities, for nearly two decades.

Prof. Raymond Silverman, Professor Emeritus History of Art, African Studies and Museum Studies, University of Michigan.

November - December 2025, the Asante metalwork in the collection.

Raymond Silverman is Professor Emeritus in the Department of History of Art and the Department of Afro-American and African Studies. Silverman is a historian of the visual cultures of Africa. Most of his research writing has been undertaken in Ghana and Ethiopia, where he has explored a range of subjects dealing with historical and social dimensions of metallurgy and the visual culture of religion, specifically of Islam and indigenous religions in Ghana, and the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia.

2024

Dr Patryk Skupniewicz, Independent Academic.

October - November 2024, objects produced in the Sasanian Empire and Tubo Kingdom.

Patryk received his PhD from Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities, Poland, in 2022. He is the author of several studies on Sasanian armaments and art as well as the aspects of the remnants of Hellenistic art in Asia. He studies the transfer of visual structures and military technology between the cultures of the Eurasian landmass. His research was most recently published in Brill's Companion to War in the Ancient Iranian Empires edited by John Hyland and Khodadad Rezakhani (2024).

Lectures

11 November 2024 Dr Patryk Skupniewicz, independent researcher: ‘The gold and silver gilt repousse plaques from the Tubo Empire in the Wyvern Collection – and investigation of the iconography and its funerary implications’

Dr Patryk Skupniewicz presented a work in progress paper using research from his Visiting Research Fellowship on the Wyvern Collection repoussé plaques dating to the Tubo Empire (7th–9th century AD). He explored their iconography, manufacture, and possible original contexts, situating them within wider Eurasian artistic exchange.

12 February 2025 James Robinson, Keeper of Decorative Art and Sculpture the Victoria and Albert Museum, London: ‘De Opere Lemovicino: A dialogue between two chalices’
James Robinson delivered the inaugural Wyvern Research Institute Lecture, comparing a Limoges enamel bowl in the Wyvern Collection with the Rusper Chalice in the British Museum. The talk considered the relationship between scientific analysis and connoisseurship, and how technical study can reshape historical judgement. The lecture was followed by an in-conversation with Sir Paul Ruddock, Chair of the Institute.

15 April 2025 Dr St John Simpson, Senior Curator and Archaeologist, department of the Middle East, British Museum, London: ‘New archaeological discoveries at Kobeba in Southern Iraq’

Dr St John Simpson presented new archaeological discoveries from excavations at Kobeba in southern Iraq. His lecture highlighted recent findings and their significance for understanding settlement history and material culture in the region.

29 September 2025 Lisa Shekede and Stephen Rickerby: ‘The Painted Churches of Ethiopia: Preserving a fragile heritage’

Stephen Rickerby and Lisa Shekede discussed the painted churches of northern Ethiopia and the conservation challenges facing this fragile heritage. Drawing on the work of the Ethiopian Heritage Fund, the lecture explored documentation, preservation, and threats posed by conflict and environment.

24 November 2025 Prof. Chris Gosden, University of Oxford School of Archaeology:

‘Horsepower: How horses and metal connected first millennium BCE China and Mongolia’

Professor Chris Gosden introduced the ERC-funded Horsepower Project, examining connections between China and Mongolia through horses, metalwork, and ritual culture. The lecture combined archaeological evidence with scientific approaches to explore early mobility and exchange.



Object Sessions for Post Graduate Students

In the past year, we collaborated with a range of institutions to deliver object-handling sessions for postgraduate students studying History of Art, Archaeology, and the Business of Art. Over the course of the year we welcomed groups from:

The Courtauld Institute of Art

University of Amsterdam

University College London

University of Oxford

The Royal Academy of Arts, London, and Maastricht University Executive Masters Programme.

These sessions explored a wide range of objects from the Wyvern Collection, spanning different materials, chronological periods, and geographical areas - from Viking jewellery to medieval ivory mirror backs. A principal ambition of this programme is to provide students with the opportunity to handle and examine closely the objects they are studying: a formative and vital experience that is becoming increasingly rare within academic training. As we move into 2026, we are actively working to extend our partnerships and reach postgraduate student groups across a wider range of institutions and universities.



Workshops & Visits



In May 2025, following the acquisition of a fifteenth-century Aragonese predella decorated with prophets, we invited academics, museum and art market professionals, and conservation specialists to the Institute for a focused morning workshop. The session enabled close examination of the panel and encouraged discussion around its iconography, condition, and future research potential.

Earlier in the year, we also welcomed delegates from two international conferences: the Gothic Ivories Project and ARDS – The Platform for Medieval Sculpture. These visits provided valuable opportunities for specialist exchange and reaffirmed the Institute’s role as a resource for collaborative, object-based research.



Since we open our doors, we have also facilitated visits to see the collection for the following Societies and Museum groups:

ARTES – Iberian & Latin American Visual Culture Group

Athena Art Foundation

Dulwich Picture Gallery

Frieze Masters

ICMA – International Centre of Medieval Art (digital “tour” of the collection)

Minneapolis Institute of Art Trustees

National Gallery Patrons Group

PSSA – Public Statues and Sculpture Association

The Society for the History of Collecting

Soane Museum Patrons Group

Toledo Museum of Art, International Benefactors Group

World Monuments Fund

The Worshipful Company of Arts Scholars

The V&A Sculpture Department



The Collection - Loans

The Wyvern Collection continues to operate an active loan policy for both short term exhibitions and longer-term museum loans. In 2025 these included:

The House of European History, Brussels, *Fake for Real: Touring Exhibition*, February 2024 - November 2026 at the Teloglion Fine Arts Foundation, Thessaloniki, Greece; National Ethnographic Museum, Sofia, Bulgaria; Open Society Archive, Budapest, Hungary; Museum of the Second World War, Gdansk, Poland; Regional Museum Skåne, Kristianstad, Sweden.

Loans: Inv. 613 Reliquary Casket, French, 11th century, grey limestone or marble; Inv. 1570 Tower reliquary, probably south-western central France (possibly Limoges), second half of the 13th century, gilded copper alloy.

The British Museum, London, *Silk Roads*, 26 September 2024- 23 February 2025.

Loan: Inv. 808 Chrismatory, Anglo-Saxon and Carolingian, c.800 and late 9th century, repoussé copper-alloy sheets, gilded, with silver on an oak core.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York and the **National Gallery**, London, *Siena: The Rise of Painting, 1300-1350*, 13 October 2024 – 22 June 2025.

Loan: Inv. 442 Reliquary Triptych with the Annunciation, Saint Ansanus and plaques of the Adoration of the Magi and the Crucifixion, painted by Bartolo di Fredi (c.1330-1410), Tuscany (Siena), with French ivory plaques, c.1370 (triptych), c.1350-70 (ivory plaques).

Stuart Lochhead Sculpture, London, *Spiritual Resonance*, 7 October – 7 November 2025.

Loan: Inv. 303A Virgin and Child, Germany (lower Rhine or Westphalia), c.1050-80, wood.

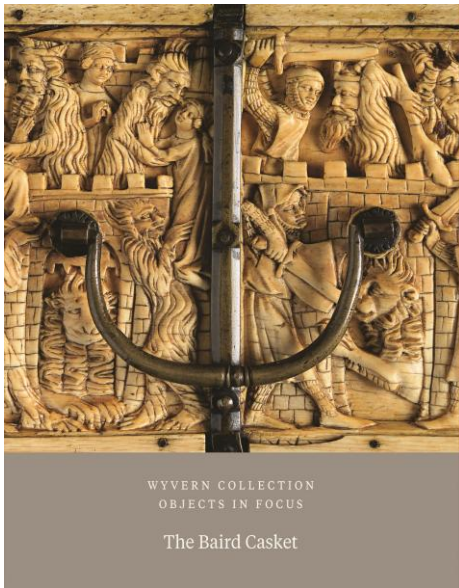
Long term loans:

Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Maine, June 2024 – 2027.

A selection of 58 objects are on loan to the BCMA to enhance the museum's holdings and the education of Bowdoin's students.



Publications



***Wyvern Collection Objects in Focus: The Baird Casket*, Paul Williamson, 2025 (Published by Ad Ilissvm, Paul Holberton Publishing)**

This monograph is the first in a new series produced by the Wyvern Research Institute devoted to a single object, or a small group of objects, in the Wyvern Collection. It presents an in-depth examination of a remarkable ivory box known as the Baird Casket. Its imagery is unique amongst the corpus of surviving ivories, showing scenes of combat with wildmen and their capture alongside enigmatic carvings celebrating chivalry, the Grail legend, and the power of the sword. The casket is an extraordinary survival, unknown to the public until its emergence on the art market in Edinburgh in 2021, and its history within the Baird family can be traced back probably to the seventeenth century. This book includes a careful examination of the casket's provenance, its facture and its subject matter, and concludes with a discussion of the general context of its original ownership.

“constitutes a valuable foundation for further research and serves as an important resource both for newcomers to the study of Gothic ivories and for more advanced scholars in the field ... richly illustrated, with detailed photographs that facilitate close iconographic and stylistic analysis, further enhancing its scholarly value.” - *Journal of Medieval History*

We are extremely grateful to our advisory board for their expertise, advice, and support:

Dr Marco Aimone FSA, Independent Academic and Senior Advisory Curator of Byzantine and Sasanian Objects, the Wyvern Collection UK. Societe Nationale des Antiquaires de France Foreign Fellow, Italian Society of Byzantine Studies Fellow and former Dumbarton Oaks Fellow.

Dr Barbara Drake Boehm, Curator Emerita, The Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, formerly Paul and Jill Ruddock Senior Curator for the Met Cloisters.

Professor Alixe Bovey FSA FRHistS, Professor of Medieval Art History, Courtauld Institute of Art, London, and Editor-in-Chief of British Art Studies.

Kevin Conru, Curator, Researcher and Writer specialising in African and Oceanic Art.

Professor Susie Nash, Deborah Loeb Brice Professor of Renaissance Art at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London.

Professor Stephen Perkinson, Professor of Art History, Bowdoin College, USA, and President of the International Centre of Medieval Art.

Lady Jill Shaw Ruddock CBE, Author and Philanthropist.

Dr Paul Williamson OBE FSA FRHistS, Keeper Emeritus and Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and Honorary Research Fellow at the Courtauld Institute of Art.

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