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Andrew Bracey is an artist based in Waddington. His practice hovers on the fringes of painting, as it bridges over and expands into installation, curation, sculpture, drawing and animation. Solo exhibitions include Isherwood Gallery, Wigan; Usher Gallery, Lincoln; Nottingham Castle; Manchester Art Gallery; Transition Gallery, London and firstsite, Colchester. He is Program Leader of MA Fine Art and PhD student at The University of Lincoln.

Danica Maier completed an MFA in painting before receiving an MA in Textiles. Her work uses site-specific installations, drawing, and objects to explore expectations, while using subtle slippages to transgress propriety. Exhibition and live events include, Research Pavilion at the 58<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, Venice; The Space at Nottingham Contemporary; National Museum of M.K. Čiurlionis, Kaunas, Lithuania; British Ceramics Biennale, Stoke-on-Trent; The Collection Museum, Lincoln; GEDOK Gallery, Karlsruhe, Germany; Museo del Barro, Asuncion, Paraguay. Maier is an Associate Professor in Fine Art at Nottingham Trent University.

## 'Controlled Rummage as Artistic Strategy: Exposing the Bummock of the Lace Archive'

### ***Abstract:***

This article focuses on the research of three artistic researchers working within the Lace Archive at Nottingham Trent University. The discussion will center around an artist residency, which utilized the Lace Archive as the starting point for the development of new artwork that was exhibited at Backlit Gallery, Nottingham and subsequent tour.

Focus and discussion fall on the development of a new working methodology called the 'controlled rummage'. The article highlights the 'Bummock ethos' that utilizes the strengths within the act of seeking the unknown from a starting point of 'not knowing'.

Also examined is what has been learnt from the project within the Lace Archive towards establishing the framework and methodology for the wider project, *Bummock: New Artistic Responses to Unseen Parts of the Archive*.

**Keywords:** archives, artistic research, Bummock, controlled rummage, fine art, lace, the Lace Archive, not knowing.

### ***Above Sea Level: Overview and Introduction***

This article explores artistic practice, materiality (textile/lace) and the archive by presenting the results of a research residency within the Lace Archive, held at Nottingham Trent University. The project focused on the underexplored parts of the Lace Archive as catalysts for the creation of new artworks by Andrew Bracey, Danica Maier and Lucy Renton. The aims within this text are threefold: to disseminate the research and artwork undertaken as well as uncover what was learnt from the research

residency within the Lace Archive; to explore the ‘controlled rummage’ methodology; and share the wider Bummock project.

Figure 1. Lace draft in the G. W. Price Collection. Image credit Laura Allen. Copyright Nottingham Trent University Lace Archive.

Artistic researchers, Bracey, Maier and Renton, spent two and a half years rummaging, exploring, engaging in dialogue and making. There was an interest in using alternative research methods to unearth underexplored areas of the Lace Archive and to expose new possibilities for working with lace as a subject starting point. The research residency in the Lace Archive was part of a larger ongoing project called *Bummock: New Artistic Responses to Unseen parts of the Archive*. The bummock is the largest part of an iceberg hidden beneath the surface of the sea. This is a metaphor for the project, where the processes used allow underexplored aspects of an archive to be brought into public view; for the ‘bummock’ to become the ‘tip’.

The essence and potential of textiles can be found in the material or object itself when used by artists. The creative possibilities of the peripheral information and items collected in an archive also allow alternative, rich catalysts for new artworks and understandings. The working processes and outcomes of the artists involved all responded to lace as subject, however the artworks did not use traditional lace directly within their outcomes. They looked to the peripheral content surrounding lace found in the archive, namely: factory ledgers (Fig. 2), technical drawings (Fig. 1), uncatalogued samples (Fig 3.) and interior design books. A major factor in the project’s approach is

predicated on the development and use of the controlled rummage methodology, which will be explored in this article.

Figure 2. Ledger from unidentified textiles factory. Image credit Laura Allen. Copyright Nottingham Trent University Lace Archive.

### ***From Bummock to Tip: The Lace Archive***

The Lace Archive is held at Nottingham Trent University and was set up as a teaching collection for students, of the then Nottingham School of Design, to learn from and use. Inherent to the Lace Archive once being a teaching resource is its connection to the history of Nottingham's industrial past. The city was once the heart of the lace industry during the heyday of the British Empire. The archive holds 75,000 items of lace acquired from bequests and is of local, national and international importance. Key items of historical and monetary value are: William H. Pegg's ink drawings of lace, G.W. Price's memorial collection, and Harry Cross's original designs for the Battle of Britain panel. (Briggs-Goode 2018) Given the nature of the Bummock ethos these were items avoided due to their 'known' status.

The Lace Archive itself is found in a bespoke room within the main building of the institution's School of Art and Design. Found amongst other textile related workshops, such as print, dye, and digital print, this is a natural home for it as a teaching resource. The modest sized room has been purpose fitted with rolling archival shelves, making the most of its modest size to allow for all of the items to be stored, while a small study area fills the rest of the room. The items are housed in a combination of

directly accessible and archival boxes, with some items held within their original historical portfolios and receptacles.

Working together in the Lace Archive the three artistic researchers, along with art historian Dr. Sian Vaughan, trialed the controlled rummage methodology. This methodology is a vital part of the accessing of the archive and underpins the ethos of the Bummock project. Importantly it was through spending time in the archive with the physical items, observing and noticing through the act of 'doing', as opposed to going in with predetermined and enforced structures, that allowed the concept of the controlled rummage to evolve from the proposed structure. Amanda Briggs-Goode, who has headed up the Lace Archive for a number of years, was central to this approach as she trusted the artists to work responsibly in the archive and understood the benefits of the methodology they were utilizing in relation to the ethos of the project. The process saw the artistic researchers come together for intensive research and studio time, as well as working independently. It is key to the project that the artistic researchers had 'time together in' the archive: looking, rummaging, and discussing; as well as 'time together away' from the archive, in the studio and other art residencies: making, experimenting and discussing.

Figure 3. Still to be accessioned box of Fryma samples. Image credit Laura Allen.

Copyright Nottingham Trent University Lace Archive.

Lucy Renton, like all three artists, initially conducted a thorough sweep of the archive in order to ascertain what was there, what was of interest and what was to be discarded. Renton has acknowledged that she approached the archive from her previous

experience of working with historic textile patterns and techniques as sources for her artwork, and that she worked from her “personal and tactile interaction with the items, so experience took precedence over information.” (Renton 2018, p115) This approach led her to find a box of yet to be catalogued synthetic knitted samples at the back of the archive, alongside a collection of interior design and decoration advice collated in *The Period Guide*. Renton describes choosing *The Period Guide* as being within the spirit of the bummock metaphor as it was the “most anomalous item I could find.” (Renton 2018, p112) She chose to contrast these two types of object as their difference provided fertile ground for the process of making work, and permitted her to raise questions for the viewer around concerns such as properness, discrimination and social class.

The box of uncatalogued items was a collection of bright, brash sixties and seventies samples from the now-defunct Nottingham based, Fryma fabric company (Fig. 3). Renton recognized how the impact of new synthetic materials in the sixties, combined with psychedelic patterns and intense colors synonymous with the era, disrupted the safe and tasteful promotion of ‘authentic’ domestic arrangements. By contrast Renton’s second selection, *The Period Guide*, sets out to provide the amateur homebuilder with a menu of historically ‘correct’ combinations of period items for suburban living rooms. This staging of ‘authenticity’, which invokes questions of class, aspiration, and the production of ‘taste’ through furnishings, was at the core of her enquiry.

Figure 4. Lucy Renton, ‘Modern Adaptation’ (installation detail) at Backlit Gallery, 2018, Image credit Ellen Brady.

Renton's work explores the contradictions of these objects through a layered and repeated reconfiguration of contemporary domestic decoration (Fig. 4). She uses appropriated motifs and materials to test the boundaries of taste, vulgarity, restraint and excess. Renton's approach is firmly fixed in pursuing avenues that are available for the artist, but may be unlikely in other researchers, and this is seen in her focus on materiality, tactility and decoration. As she states, she did not "dig down in scholarly work around the archive. I took my role as an artist to present an alternative and possibly fictive account of the articles I had chosen." (Renton 2018, p117) This approach was common to each of the three artists working in the *Bummock: The Lace Archive* project; an importance was placed on letting the archive lead the way, over established procedures or patterns of individual practices.

Figure 5. Andrew Bracey, 'WV1723' (drawings), 2018, Image credit Ellen Brady

From hundreds of possible choices within the lace archive, Andrew Bracey focused on just one page of a technical ledger (Fig. 2). This was found within the center of the archive within a group of ledgers all from the same factory. He liberated the precise information recorded on the ledger, such as notes of the correct materials, quantities and prices that were used in the mechanical manufacture of lace. Over five hundred individual drawings were made of details of the single ledger page, with different degrees of magnification, abstraction and decipherability (Fig. 5). Bracey's choice of the technical ledger page re-imag(in)ed and animated the perfect penmanship and sample fabric cutting found on the page. Recreated in various scales with black Indian ink on white cartridge paper the boundaries of the text and fabric sample become blurred, seeing them both become painterly or calligraphic-esque marks on paper.

The drawings have been collated in the order of their production in an artist's book (Fig. 6) and an animation that recalls, in its repetition of movement, the machines used in the factories to manufacture lace. Musicians and composers collaborated with Bracey to create ten different soundtracks for the animation (Fig 13). This allowed for a different experience of the animation and drawings for the viewer depending on which soundtrack was playing on their visit, due to changes in tempo, style, volume and intensity. This individuality within repetition reflects the human quality that initially drew Bracey to the calligraphic distinctiveness in the ledgers.

Figure 6. Andrew Bracey, installation image of 'WV1723' (Artist Book), 2018, Image credit Ellen Brady

Bracey's approach to the archive was, unlike Renton and Maier, from the position of a textile's non-specialist. Initially, this meant the experience of entering the archive was a daunting one for the artist and fostered uncertainty over whether anything of use for further investigation would be found. The artist has admitted that even after the completion of work that he is "...still struggling to find an overt link between my practice and the archive, though the following all relate in some way: repetition, color, handmade/mass-produced, choice, collections, original/reproduction." (Bracey 2018, p99) Despite, and arguably because of, this lack of prior knowledge and interest in textiles, Bracey's artistic response to the Lace Archive was both imaginative and original. The choice of the ledger as an administrative, rather than materially based, aspect of lace is something that Bracey used in order to allow the archive to guide the direction of his work. By using his non-specialist status as a strength as opposed to a



pitfall, Bracey was able to explore under-researched aspects of the archive for a productive and generative artistic investigation.

Figure 7. Danica Maier, 'Gape', 2018, Image credit Ellen Brady.

In her controlled rummage in the Lace Archive, Danica Maier was immediately attracted to the lace drafts (Fig 1.) used as technical diagrams to set up the industrial lace machines. To further her understanding of these colorful hand drawn diagrams, Maier visited the Cité de la Dentelle et de la Mode (Calais Lace Museum) as Nottingham does not have a comparable resource. 'The story of lace in Calais started in around 1817 with the arrival of a group of English pioneers.' (Unknown 2020) The museum houses and has live demonstrations of the Leavers loom, invented by John Levers in Nottingham in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. This gave Maier further insight into the process of Nottingham Lace making techniques and the role that the lace drafts formed within the industrial lace making process.

The drawn lines found within the historical drafts are instructions as well as two-dimensional representations of the thread line that creates the lace. Through dissection and redrawing, Maier examined details of the lace pattern, its method of creation and the superb imperfections that the drawn line achieves. This examination of the historical lace drafts through redrawing, led to better understanding of the lines within and the path they took. Maier dissected fragments from different diagrams developing large-scale wall drawings created from an original draft, which are combined with smaller pencil drawings (Fig. 7 & 8). These works invite the viewer to come in for a closer look, examining the 'thread' line found within the drawings, to then discover this line is a

letter and the letters form a word. Each iteration of the installation, sees a newly developed wall drawing for the small pencil drawing to sit with; while the pencil drawing is 'static' or unchanging the larger wall drawing is unique to each new location.

Figure 8. Danica Maier, 'Manhole', 2018, Image credit Ellen Brady.

As Maier worked with the historical lace drafts, she increasingly began to view them as possible musical scores. She therefore began experimenting with translating them into a music score through collaborative discussion with composer Dr. Martin Scheuregger. Transposing the lines found within the drafts into a music score, Maier developed sound(s) following a similar process to the production of machine-made lace, where the pattern is transferred from the draft onto punch cards for the industrial lace machine to follow. In this case, Maier translated the original vertically overlapping drawn lines into a single long horizontal line, punched out on a music box punch card. This created a 25-meter punch card that was played through mechanical hand cranked music boxes. The resulting piece entitled *Score* (Fig. 9a & 9b) became both sculpture and sound work; played once daily on either a thirty note or twenty note music box.

Figure 9a. Danica Maier, 'Score' 2018, Image credit Ellen Brady.

Figure 9b. Danica Maier, 'Score' (detail) at Backlit Gallery, Nottingham, 2018, Image credit Ellen Brady.

Scheuregger's contribution *Mechanical Asynchronicity I* was shown alongside Maier's work and a large three-panel print of the referenced lace draft. His piece picked up on key themes of repetition and glitch exploring the inherent line within music

combined with an overlapping composition. These fruitful discussions between Maier and Scheuregger have subsequently developed into an independent Arts Council Funded project titled *Score: Mechanical Asynchronicity* which still holds the historical lace draft as the central starting point.

In the initial exhibition at Backlit Gallery the key archival objects that prompted each artistic researcher's creations were shown alongside the artworks. It was important to bring out these historical items, placing them in dialogue with the artworks created, as well as offering them for the audience's examination. The curation saw key parts of *The Period Guide* and selected Fryma fabric samples shown precisely alongside each other, housed securely within a vitrine and in conversation with one of Renton's wall-based artworks. Within a carpeted darkened room, Bracey's projected animation filled the large back wall. In the corner, shown under a delicate spotlight, sat the original ledger as an intrinsic part of the installation. (Fig. 13) Due to their fragile nature a small selection from the multitude of lace drafts were selected and reproduced to scale and shown as part of the larger exhibition installation. These were found near, but not part of, the wall-based installation drawings of Maier's work; except for the large wallpaper-esque print as part of the *Score* installation. Their placement allowed viewers to visually draw connections, understandings and insight between the drafts and Maier's artwork.

*Bummock: The Lace Archive* subsequently toured to the Ruskin Gallery, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge (January-February 2019) and the Constance Howard Gallery, Goldsmiths College, London (November-December 2019). This tour enabled the exhibition to evolve and change through necessity, as the archival objects could not tour from Nottingham, and by desire, allowing the reception and display of work to

change; this is indicative of the role of the laboratory ethos within the 'exhibition-laboratory'. Each venue had a different inflection and approach.

At the Ruskin Gallery, only the contemporary artworks were shown, with no archival objects present. This allowed the contemporary artworks to be judged on their own merits and to further establish relationships between the works of the three artists, without their initial archival catalysts. There was also a major development in the collaboration between Maier and Scheuregger, who each produced new scores derived from a single lace draft. Their individual 'scores' were shown as part of the exhibition as drawings alongside sound works played of each score by, flute, clarinet, cello and violin. On the opening night a live installation within the exhibition included a live quartet performing in tandem with each other and four recorded tracks on vinyl (Maier and Scheuregger 2019) (Fig 10).

Figure 10. Danica Maier & Martin Scheuregger, still from moving image of 'Score: Mechanical Asynchronicity' at Ruskin Gallery, Cambridge, 2019, Image credit Martin Scheuregger.

At Constance Howard Gallery the contemporary artworks were re-joined with archival objects, however this time from the Goldsmiths Textile Collection. New connections were created by both the artistic researchers and by visitors, between notions of the archive, textiles as an area of study, and contemporary art. Bracey, Maier and Renton challenged staff and volunteers at the Goldsmiths Textile Collection to select objects that related to keywords generated by the artistic researchers in relation to their artwork, core themes and the bummock ethos. They then spent time together

making final selections from a vast variety of pre-selected objects for the final exhibition. These were shown in a somewhat playful manner in two large wall-vitrines just outside the gallery. (Fig. 12) Additionally, in a more coherent curated manner in the gallery, Bracey connected the collection's items to his nearby ink drawings (Fig 14). Renton was also given the opportunity to develop a piece on a more ambitious scale and with a distinctly different installation than previously seen. (Fig. 11) This dynamic of allowing the artworks to evolve, new connections to be made, and possibilities for the relationship between the archival object, contemporary artworks and textiles, is indicative of the ongoing nature of this research project.

Figure 11. Lucy Renton, 'The Decorator' at the Constance Howard Gallery, 2019, Image credit Andrew Moller.

### ***Exploring the Berg: The controlled rummage***

The controlled rummage is a method of approaching research within an archive or collection taking direct engagement with the material as the primary access point. The Lace Archive was a perfect place to form the project's approach to accessing archives, as while there is a database in place of a catalogue it is not a readily available or easily accessible for users. These restrictions on usual ways of accessing archival content through a digital database meant that all three artists naturally engaged directly with the physical items. The approach worked well, leading to items of potential or currently unrecognized value being unearthed. Through consciously observing and taking note of the three artists' intuitive methodologies of working in the archive, the controlled rummage methodology was formalized.

Rather than entering an archive with a predetermined area of research and knowledge, this methodology seeks to identify gaps and the 'unknown unknowns'. Former USA Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld's infamous words are pertinent here:

...there are known knowns; these are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns; that is to say, there are things that we know we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns -- the ones we don't know we don't know. (Rumsfeld 2002)

These words become apt if applied to an artistic research approach, and specifically the Bummock project. An archive contains a multitude of material, but does not contain everything there is on its subject; as archivist Anna McNally has pointed out: "An archive can never be complete, but to say it is lacking items is also to miss the point. An archive is what it is: it is what is left, no more and no less. (McNally 2013, p99) Accessing the content of an archive is usually, and arguably necessarily, governed by structures and procedures for users to follow.

The catalogue is the usual point of entry for a user of the archive and the archivist plays an important role in decision making in the cataloguing process. Archivist and historian Irmgard Christa Becker has noted that:

"In an archive there are certain rules which define the open access to the material. The rules have to be described. The archivist transfers material from the administration to the archive and assesses what is preserved. It is the main task of

the archivists to decide what is preserved, this can be seen as appraisal.” (Becker 2016, p61)

This approach has huge benefits, but also has flaws, especially if what you are searching for sits outside of the content or information that has been made available. The archivist will most likely be an expert in archives and/or the subject of the archive, yet there will also be subjectivity, doubt, and an overwhelming amount of material and workload at play in an archive and on the part of any archivist; knowledge can never totally be complete, but rather a partial contribution to accuracy and truth. There is also an inability to capture all the information about an archival object for all potential users in the cataloguing process. How can the researcher find the item that is uncatalogued, outside of keyword descriptors or the archivists’ readily available knowledge? One way is to work directly with the archive and to enter without specific predetermined expectations of what is to be found, to embrace the unknown instead of being fearful of it. Writer-artist Emma Cocker puts forward the value of knowingly entering into a position of the ‘unknown unknown’ as a strategy for the artist, stating that:

For the artist, to prepare for the unexpected has a dual function. It is the gesture of developing readiness (for anything), a state of being at the cusp of action, mind and body poised. It is also an act of scarifying the ground, an attempt to create the germinal conditions within which something unanticipated might arise. Artistic practice recognises the value of not knowing, less as the preliminary state (of ignorance) preceding knowledge, but as a field of desirable indeterminacy within which to work. Not knowing is an active space within

practice, wherein an artist hopes for an encounter with something new or unfamiliar, unrecognisable or unknown. (Cocker 2013, p127)

If this is applied to the specifics of the controlled rummage, the analogy of scarifying the ground is apt. The rummage is not a blind, chaotic one, but a focused enquiry to identify the undervalued, unanticipated and underexplored parts of an archive as holding potential value.

The term 'rummage' has its etymological roots from the 16<sup>th</sup> century in nautical vocabulary; meaning to (re)arrange or a thorough but unsystematic search of a ships hold. By the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was also used to describe a sale at the docks of unclaimed goods, still known today as the rummage sale. Rummage as a verb commonly means: root about; rifle; poke around; delve in; scour; ransack; to forage; a thorough untidy search; and to find, retrieve or collect by searching. Most pertinently to the Bummock project and to the 'controlled' element of the rummage, the Oxford English Dictionary additionally defines rummage as to: scrutinize, examine minutely, and investigate.

The controlled rummage works best through bypassing the catalogue and engaging directly with the space of the archive and the materiality of the items held within. This approach also uses the specialist knowledge of the archivist, to help identify what is the bummock of the individual archive. There is a perceived risk by many archivists and collection management professionals in allowing alternative and direct access to archives and collections (facilitating non-traditional modes of enquiry). Normal research routes are usually based upon certainty, and using the 'known,



knows'; it is usual for the researcher's specialist area of interest to identify specific items for research in an archive.

A catalogue's ordering of items is not necessarily linked to the physical order of the archive, whereby the pragmatics of storing objects in a space create a different order system than that which appears in a catalogue. For example, connected items are stored apart in the archive due to their size or type as opposed to the order within which they appear in the catalogue. As archivist Victoria Lane states in *The Artist in the Archive*, "items with no other similarity than their size might get placed on the same shelf." (Lane 2013, p92) These juxtapositions are made highly visible through the controlled rummage, generating the potential for new research opportunities, which may not otherwise occur by searching and accessing through the usual catalogue route. By using the controlled rummage methodology there is a high probability of the researcher identifying new insights and areas of original research. For example, researching items not studied by anyone before as they are not listed within a catalogue or creating new links between items / objects. Whilst there is always respect of the archives and archivists, Bracey and Maier are also conscious of a pitfall identified by literary scholar Ernst van Alphen who warns that "uncritical belief in the archive is ultimately blinding because it closes off certain perspectives, it discourages the asking of certain questions." (van Alphen 2008, p82) An example of this approach as a precedent in artistic activity is that taken by Bob and Roberta Smith in his eighteen-month long residency in the Epstein Archive at the New Art Gallery, Walsall, in 2009-10, which challenged the authority of the archive.

Smith is an artist of international renown but had never previously worked with an archive. Archivist Neil Lebeter worked closely with Smith for this project in his role as the archivist and notes how Smith's lack of experience in archives meant that "he came with no preconceived notion of what artists 'should' produce in archive and collection projects. Both gallery and artist would begin with a clean slate." (Lebeter and Smith 2013, p7) The ethos of starting without preconceived ideas of what is to come, specifically in both the approach to accessing the archive and its contents, and in the final output is something that is vital to the Bummock ethos and the approach taken in the Lace Archive by the artistic researchers. The belief that artists can energize an archive by bringing a different approach was at the heart of Smith's residency at Walsall. Lebeter relates an anecdote in the project's book of a how "an archivist in attendance (at a conference) who took umbrage with the idea of allowing an artist across the threshold of an archive, where god only knows what could happen." (Lebeter and Smith 2013, p130) Lebeter goes on to discuss the importance of mutual trust between artists and archivists, but also to say how to keep relevant is to do more than just digitize the collection. A way of engaging (new) audiences with archives is through projects such as Smith's, as well as Bummock, which help to open up archives to the public.

In 1998, artist Andrea Fraser's installation *Information Room* at Bern Kunsthalle moved the entire museum's archive (one that is usually invisible) into the exhibition rooms for the public to rummage through at will. This soon resulted in chaos and mess, through the activity of the visitors. The installation was subsequently changed, adopting a position akin to the controlled rummage, as opposed to uncontrolled rummage alone. Fraser moved the reordered material to shelving in the gallery similar to that in the archive, with a particular exception: each of the spines of the books and archive boxes

were turned to the walls. Thereby, each visitor had access to all the material, but without visible clues to the content. Fraser has said of the project that she wanted to create “a Cageian information room where all information would be available but access to it would be rendered arbitrary, accidental.” (Spieker 2008, p181) Here an approach akin to the controlled rummage in itself, becomes the artistic outcome.

Within the Lace Archive, this methodology allowed each of the three artistic researchers to identify the areas of focus for their individual research, but importantly without an initial preconceived idea of what this would be. This process reveals the starting point for research, rather than the more usual other way around. Cultural historian Celeste Olalquiaga’s observation is relevant here:

“Rummaging through piles of dead stock, either fetishised as the objects of collections, formalised in the documents of archives, or scattered in those residues of experience that recall memories. Reconstituting them provides us with the enormous pleasure of getting in touch with something that we thought forever lost, or even non-existent, but that was there all along.” (Olalquiaga 2008, p43)

The reconstituting in this instance not only allowed something to be ascertained through the controlled rummage, but furthermore to be transformative through the production of new artworks. Following is an overview of the specifics of each artist's approach to give a taste of the possibilities of the methodology within the Lace Archive.

Maier's prior knowledge of the archive inevitably suggested she might be predisposed to working with particular types of objects. She consciously ensured that there was rigor in her choices through full engagement with the entirety of the archive in order to confirm her selection. In this instance, Maier's controlled rummage was one of full scrutiny of the archive to enable a return to a starting point. Bracey's initial uncertainty over whether he would be able to respond to anything in the archive based on the subject sitting outside of his research specialism was quickly dispelled as soon as he started to "rifle through the archive." (Lebeter and Smith 2013) This suggests that the controlled rummage approach is a good method to extend beyond research specialisms and to find genuine routes for new insights through the use of uncatalogued and previously unexplored items. Bracey states of his exploration of the archive:

'In the first instance, I browsed the shelves, opening boxes, files and folders almost at random. I instinctively made a yes or no decision of whether it was of interest. I scoured the shelves of the archive in this manner in several sweeps. I found the ledgers I chose to focus on reasonably early on and the rest of the process of accessing the archive was spent making sure that this was the right choice for me and that there was not something else of more interest.' (Bracey 2018, 92)

Meanwhile, Renton focused on what for her was the closest fitting items in the Lace Archive to the bummock ethos; found on the last bottom shelf of the archive, uncatalogued and randomly placed together. Her decision to use the Fryma fragments was 'because of [her] interest in samples and swatches. [She] love[s] them for their potential, their edgeless-ness and provisionally.' She goes on to state, 'These brashly

colored swatches, unlike the virginal white or cream of most of the rest of [the] archive, speak cheerfully of vulgarity, rather than purity and taste.’ (Renton 2018, p112)

The use of the controlled rummage is not about unearthing predetermined areas of research, but rather enables, and is a catalyst for, engagement in yet-to-be-known original research. The essential characteristics and belief in what the unsystematic search will reveal is vital for future success. The precursor approaches of Smith, Fraser and other artists has been essential in the formation and further defining of the concept of the controlled rummage. With no preconceived output in mind at the start of the controlled rummage, objects within the archive can be seen afresh and new readings generated, unweighted by expectations. Its use so far has been combined with a focus on creating new creative outputs, however its process is likely to be usefully transferable to other disciplines’ research in the archive. The objects or items revealed through the controlled rummage are brought out of the archive and into light, the artistic researchers’ engagement with them has been one of learning, responding, building on, and developing. The controlled rummage is so vital as this method identifies the process, approach(es) and direction that a researcher’s output will take.

### ***The Iceberg: The wider project***

The controlled rummage methodology and the Lace Archive project is a major part of the overall research project, *Bummock: New Artistic Approaches to Unseen Parts of the Archive*, led by artistic researchers Bracey from the University of Lincoln and Maier from Nottingham Trent University, with historian Vaughan from Birmingham City University. The project co-leads believe that the methodologies and

ideologies of the project can extend and are useful to archives beyond a textile specialism and this forms the next stages. As with the Lace Archive, the wider project applies investigative research methods with the aim of using unseen parts of archives as catalysts for the creation of new artworks. Artist, writer and curator Janis Jeffries has said that often with an archive the visitor has a selective and managed experience:

“We see only what we are allowed to know. So, the artist can use an archive to unsettle that which has been put into place, catalogued and pristinely kept intact by gloves, archival boxes and labels. Arguably artists have more interest in what can be interfered with than any other aspect of an archive. As new readings and new works emerge into the light, an archive can never be quite the same again.” (Jefferies 2018, p19-20).

Through a series of artists’ residencies within diverse archives, Bracey and Maier work with a different invited artist in each distinct archive. Together these artistic researchers investigate items and documents not regularly brought up for research and public exposure. Each residency leads to an ‘exhibition-laboratory’, which includes exhibiting the archival objects used as starting points, alongside the artworks created. *Bummock: The Lace Archive* was the first iteration of the wider project; Bracey and Maier are currently in residence with a third artist, Sarah Bennett, at the Tennyson Research Centre in Lincoln.

The overall project examines how artists can approach access to archives differently to the methodologies of standard practice. Traditionally the approach to accessing archival materials and information focuses on the specific parts that the

researchers want to explore. Commonly the researcher navigates the archive's catalogue to narrow down and discover the specific material they want to call up for study.

Increasingly the digitized archive, available online, allows research of the archive to happen remotely. This is clearly a time and cost-effective method, allowing increased access to a wider public of users. Nevertheless, there are issues if these approaches are adopted as the only way to gain access to an archive's material. There are alternative ways to access an archive to uncover unseen things that normal routes would not allow. These routes are a key part of *Bummock: New Artistic Approaches to Unseen Parts of the Archive*.

Figure 12. Selected objects from the Constance Howard Research and Resource Centre with Lucy Renton, '2501' at the Constance Howard Gallery, 2019, Image credit Andrew Moller.

An issue at the core of this research is, how many stored items and documents are collected in archives and collections, but remain unseen or even uncatalogued? Bracey and Maier seek to give exposure to unseen and/or unvalued parts of archives. Often it is the conventionally important elements of archives and collections that are made public; which can lead to a subjective view of importance. The interest is in giving a platform to these stored and yet-to-be-appreciated parts, akin to historian Carlo Ginsburg's "euphoria of ignorance", where there is "the sensation of not knowing anything but being on the verge of beginning to learn something." (Ginzburg 2012, p216) The project aims to develop original ways for researchers to explore the archive from this perspective in order to expose new items and build knowledge derived from them, which may otherwise remain latent. Ultimately, the aim is to generate a new

method of access to archives for researchers from fields including and beyond the artistic.

### ***Flipping the Bummock: Making the Previously Unseen Visible***

Through exhibition-laboratories the artistic researchers begin the process of ‘flipping the bummock’ allowing hidden aspects of archives to become a visible ‘tip’ of the metaphorical iceberg. The lesser-known items of the Lace Archive, used as catalysts by the artists, became visible, interrogated and interpreted through being exhibited alongside the artworks made. *Bummock: The Lace Archive* exhibition showed the textile sample ledger as part of a film and sound installation (Fig. 13); the Fryma fabric samples were brought out of their jumbled dusty box and selected ones were shown alongside key examples from *The Period Guide*; and a number of the lace drafts were reproduced to scale, as well as one that filled a gallery wall. The reproduction of these drafts was a necessary move as the originals were too delicate to be taken out of the archive and shown at Backlit Gallery.

Figure 13. Andrew Bracey, ‘WV1723’ (animation), 2018, Image credit Ellen Brady

Beyond merely showing the historical objects, the exhibition made use of re-contextualizing them as part of the new works, creating fresh narratives for them and the artworks. The exhibition is one form of dissemination of what has been learnt from and produced in each archive’s residency. This also includes a symposium and publication for each project, papers at appropriate academic conferences and a project



website. Crucially these outputs, when combined, recognize that the research is still active and does not finish at the end of each fixed residency timescale. There is an ongoing approach to learning through Bummock's ethos, which is in line with the metaphor of the iceberg constantly turning in the sea as the bummock becomes worn by ocean currents, causing it to flip and become the tip and then in time flip again. The exposure through exhibition is a way of testing the methodology of the project. This is a time when the new artwork created by the three artists is still in a state of being tested, when reflection is still happening, as opposed to the more usual perception of the finality of the exhibition. Importantly the exhibition-laboratories are accompanied by public events including symposiums and workshops, to further disseminate and giving public exposure to the project's findings.

At this time of exposure, the accompanying symposium for Bummock: The Lace Archive, was key to aiding the process of reflection, generating further discussion, and the collecting of new views, questions and thoughts. Speakers with expertise in textiles were able to relate issues fundamental to Bummock: The Lace Archive to a wider context. Writer Pennina Barnett's paper, *Cloth Memories* drew on tokens from the Foundling Museum that had long been passed over for research before being exposed for public view in the exhibition *Threads of Feeling: Textile Tokens 1740 – 1770*, curated by John Styles in 2010.

Briggs-Goode gave an overview of the Lace Archive and spoke of the exhibition, *Lace Unarchived* at Bonington Gallery, Nottingham (2018); which, similarly to *Bummock: The Lace Archive*, saw contemporary artists and designers responding to and making work from Nottingham lace as a starting point. Building on this, curator

Deborah Dean spoke of Nottingham Castle's extensive collection of lace and how this has been used in exhibitions that allowed contemporary artists to make new work in response to the lace, such as *Lace Here Now* (2012-13) and *Lace Unveiled* at Newstead Abbey (2018). These precedents in how artists have worked with archives and collections focused around lace was useful in highlighting commonalities and differences to the Bummock project's approach and ethos.

As textile researcher Katherine Townsend summarized in her overview, the symposium allowed ideas explored in Bummock to be expanded, "...through a program of speakers representing the different roles, responsibilities, and practices of archives, archivists, and artists, in relation to how objects are conserved, accessed, and interpreted." (Townsend 2020, p95) The emphasis in Bummock on the process of working with the archival objects in an ongoing manner, as seen in the exhibition-laboratory, over finitude and the intrinsic use of little-known items from the archive through the controlled rummage methodology, are distinguishing factors for the project.

The publication meanwhile draws together what has been found out and created from the controlled rummage within the Lace Archive as a legacy document that extends the findings beyond the ephemeral nature of the exhibition-laboratories and symposium. The long-term effects will identify if the 'unknown unknowns' found within the archive by the artistic researchers are short-lived 'known unknowns', or if they have further or lasting interest for others. The learning from the different archives will be cumulatively channeled on an ongoing basis to establish the controlled rummage methodology across discipline areas reflected in the different archives.

### ***Bergy Bits and Growlers: Conclusion(s)***

Bergy bits are ‘generally spawned from disintegrating icebergs’ (Unknown 2020) while growlers are the smaller floating ice particles. Similarly, to the breaking up of the iceberg, *Bummock: The Lace Archive* has several concluding thoughts rather than one, including: the use of the Lace Archive; the artworks created; the controlled rummage; the suitability of the controlled rummage and the Bummock ethos for artists’ projects in Textile and other archives; and to consider how other discipline areas could adopt the project’s methodologies for original research.

The Lace Archive’s identity as a teaching archive with an open physical environment, naturally suited the Bummock ethos and the controlled rummage. The lack of official catalogue and unhampered space of the archive room, with objects exposed on the shelf, was highly inducive to the three artistic researchers’ controlled rummages. For example, Bracey’s initial interest in the ledgers came from seeing them sitting exposed on the shelves and not within boxes hidden away. The trust in the artistic researchers by Briggs-Goode to allow access was also pivotal in their approach and development of the controlled rummage.

Within the final works created by Bracey, Maier and Renton, lace as subject of the archive is embedded, inherent and celebrated, however the material of lace was not directly used. While relating to the archive objects used as starting points, the final pieces include a myriad of intersecting thematics, folding in and out of the artistic researchers’ practices, knowledge and interests. This creates a spider’s web-like

connection to references, subjects and stances, with the first tether points of the web being lace as the archive's focus, which then quickly expands out to multiple other tether points.

It has also become clear through this project that the artists do not have to be specialists in the archive's primary subject focus or even have any interest in it. As seen, Bracey's interests and experience are divergent from textiles, thus bringing to the project interesting alternative thoughts, views and approaches. Whereas Maier and Renton have an interest and knowledge within the subject matter, both having worked with and in relation to textiles over a number of years. The investigation of the archive does not depend upon previous specialist interests or subject knowledge, to unearth the undervalued items or to develop outputs.

Whilst the artistic researchers all did an initial wider sweep of the archive, they all quickly found and were excited by the potential of objects that were ultimately worked with. They felt it was of real benefit and a privilege to have been able to have free access and go through the entirety of the archive. Once the key items were identified they spent further time searching the archive in more depth to confirm their initial gut responses. Thereby, intuition on the part of the artistic researchers was objectively confirmed through an in-depth investigation of the archive, including dialogue with the holder of the archive. As Vaughan points out in the publication, *Bummock: The Lace Archive*: "Whilst the rummage is a direct, unmediated and material encounter with the contents of an archive, it is controlled and that it is predicted on an inherent respect for and a conscious seeking to value that which is the metaphorical bummock. It is an ethical approach to rummaging." (Vaughan 2018, p79). This is part

of what extends the principles of the rummage towards the controlled, by objectifying intuition and demanding rigor as part of the process.

Figure 14. Andrew Bracey, 'WV1723' with selected objects from the Constance Howard Research and Resource Centre including (presumed) Christine Risley, 'untitled' paper with pins and thread at the Constance Howard Gallery, 2019, Image credit Andrew Moller.

Bracey, Maier and Renton each found their focused item(s) through the use of the controlled rummage methodology, however it was the concurrent group discussions that built confidence in the validity of the items for further research and their use as catalysts for art practice. Through Renton's connection between different items, it was found that a useful aspect of the controlled rummage was in the possibility of creating new agendas between different, seemingly unrelated objects, from distinct time periods, subject focuses, and in this case, of different classes and tastes. For her, the Bummock ethos focused on a shelf of uncatalogued items, creating a useful insight into the fact that identifying what has not been previously researched in the archive can be a useful initial strategy towards creating new insights. As Maier had previous experience within the archive her controlled rummage became one of reinforcing an initial gut reaction to the lace drafts. Taking on the rummage definition she scrutinized and examined the entire archive ensuring her final choice was most appropriate for her to work with. The Bummock ethos was utilized by Maier within the approach and exploration of the myriad of other items rather than in the lace drafts themselves. For Bracey, the controlled rummage consisted of a sustained sweep through most of the archive; looking through boxes and folders in search of things of interest to him. The ledgers were

discovered in this unsystematic search early on, meaning that a lot of the controlled rummage's time was spent confirming that this was the right items to use and that there was nothing of greater interest in the archive. The ledgers intuitively felt like an underexplored item in the archive to Bracey, something confirmed by Briggs-Goode in conversation with the artist; no other researcher had used them previously.

Particular interest has been found in the identification of the triangulation between the controlled rummage in the archive, the Bummock ethos and each artistic researchers' practice, and how these three strands come together, overlap or perhaps diverge. Bracey, Maier and Vaughan are confident that the controlled rummage methodology can productively unearth previously underexplored and unseen parts of an archive for further research. The project has now moved on from the Lace Archive to test the Bummock ethos and controlled rummage methodology in archives with diverse focusses and subject areas. The next exhibition-laboratory, *Bummock: Tennyson Research Centre*, is at The Collection and Usher Gallery, Lincoln in Jan/Feb 2021. The aim is to more firmly establish the controlled rummage methodology, Bummock ethos and approach for the benefit of artists, archivists and researchers from varied specialisms.

The project's belief is that there are many metaphorical bummock items waiting to be found beneath the surface in multiple archives. It would be a shame if these were forever hidden gathering dust on shelves. *Bummock: The Lace Archive* reveals that putting focus onto the bummock of an archive's collection has rich potential for original research and the creating of new artworks. The aspiration is that this approach within

the archive and collections will be taken up by other researchers, artists, writers, historians and other users for an ongoing and continuous flipping of the bummock.

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### Figure list

Figure 1. Detail from lace draft in the G. W. Price Collection. Image credit Laura Allen.

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Figure 2. Ledger from unidentified textiles factory. Image credit Laura Allen. Copyright

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Figure 3. Still to be accessioned box of Fryma samples. Image credit Laura Allen.

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Figure 4. Lucy Renton, 'Modern Adaptation' (installation detail) at Backlit Gallery,

Nottingham, 2018, Image credit Ellen Brady.

Figure 5. Andrew Bracey, 'WV1723' (drawings) at Backlit Gallery, Nottingham, 2018,

Image credit Ellen Brady.



Figure 6. Andrew Bracey, installation image of 'WV1723' (Artist Book) at Backlit Gallery, Nottingham, 2018, Image credit Ellen Brady.

Figure 7. Danica Maier, 'Gape' at Backlit Gallery, Nottingham, 2018, Image credit Ellen Brady.

Figure 8. Danica Maier, 'Manhole' at Backlit Gallery, Nottingham, 2018, Image credit Ellen Brady.

Figure 9a. Danica Maier, 'Score' 2018 at Backlit Gallery, Nottingham, Image credit Ellen Brady.

Figure 9b. Danica Maier, 'Score' (detail) at Backlit Gallery, Nottingham, 2018, Image credit Ellen Brady.

Figure 10. Danica Maier & Martin Scheuregger, still from moving image of 'Score: Mechanical Asynchronicity' at Ruskin Gallery, Cambridge, 2019, Image credit Martin Scheuregger.

Figure 11. Lucy Renton, 'The Decorator' at the Constance Howard Gallery, 2019, Image credit Andrew Moller.

Figure 12. Selected objects from the Constance Howard Research and Resource Centre with Lucy Renton, '2501' at the Constance Howard Gallery, 2019, Image credit Andrew Moller.

Figure 13. Andrew Bracey, 'WV1723' (animation), 2018, Image credit Ellen Brady.

Figure 14. Andrew Bracey, 'WV1723' with selected objects from the Goldsmiths Textile Collection including (presumed) Christine Risley, 'untitled' paper with pins and thread at the Constance Howard Gallery, 2019, Image credit Andrew Moller.