

## PhD Studentship, Netherlandish Networks, Open University and Museum of the Home

The Open University (Milton Keynes) and the Museum of the Home (London), Oct 01, 2025

Application deadline: Apr 7, 2025

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Arts and Humanities Research Council funded PhD Studentship.  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, The Open University.

Project title: Netherlandish networks: Home-making in an age of emerging global capitalism (1565-1799).

Stipend: Approximately £21,380 per annum for four years and tuition fees covered.

Closing Date: 12:00 noon (GMT) on 7th April 2025

Interview date: week commencing : 21st April 2025

We are delighted to invite applications for a PhD Studentship in the Department of Art History at the Open University funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council in partnership with the Museum of the Home (London) and the Centre for the Studies of Home at Queen Mary, University of London. (For further details, see: Arts and Humanities Research Council Collaborative Doctoral Partnership Awards at the Museum of the Home | Museum of the Home.)

Project overview:

Working with the Open University and the Museum of the Home, this project will explore the hidden histories behind a set of early modern objects belonging to the Museum, including a Flemish tapestry, Delftware, Chinese porcelain, japanned furniture and items inlaid with rosewood. These diverse objects all share one quality: a relationship to the Netherlandish maritime trading networks ('Netherlandish' here refers to the profoundly entwined economies and cultures of what is roughly now Belgium and Holland). These Netherlandish networks spanned the globe but at their centre lay the cities of Amsterdam and Antwerp, not least because their Sephardic Jewish communities facilitated otherwise difficult trading connections between Northern Europe and the extensive Spanish and Portuguese Empires. London and the emerging British Empire relied heavily on these Netherlandish networks, especially across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Crucially, these networks allowed for the circulation of religious and other refugees, merchants, skilled craftworkers and enslaved people as well as materials like tropical hardwoods, objects like ceramics, clocks and metalwork and types of design that were then copied locally.

Key research questions to be explored by the project include:

- What are the most efficient ways of mapping the many and complex journeys behind the interior fittings and furnishings that constituted home-making in early modern England as it became part of a global economy that, in turn, rested on colonialism and enslavement?

- How were early modern homes made in and through objects – so visually, spatially and materially – in relation to two overlapping immigrant communities (Sephardic Jews and Netherlanders)?
- To what extent were homes made in temporary lodgings such as boarding-houses or through public spaces such as churches or synagogues? In this process, how were objects mobilised in ritual and less formal behaviour?
- How can objects best be used to instantiate specific social histories about immigration, colonialism and enslavement?
- What broader historical, curatorial and art-historical methodologies may be developed from studying objects with hidden histories?

#### Sources:

As part of the studentship, the successful candidate will be expected to spend significant periods of time with the collections at the Museum of the Home in east London. Research will also be undertaken at relevant archives across London, including the National Archives at Kew, which holds an extensive range of port books recording merchant shipping into most English ports from between 1565 and 1799.

#### Methods and impact:

This study will combine art-historical approaches - including research centred on the material and visual properties of distinct objects - with contextual and archival research into the history of shipping, commerce, craft and immigration. Whilst it is expected that the successful candidate will nominate appropriate theoretical frameworks as part of their approach to the project, it is anticipated that the research will be framed by art-historical, historical and cultural theories revolving around early modern trade and colonialism.

In terms of public impact, the student will have the opportunity to contribute to the redevelopment of several early modern period rooms at the Museum of the Home and increase insights into how colonialism and enslavement can be linked to objects in the Museum's holdings. The project may also involve organising an international academic conference on a relevant topic.

#### Supervision:

The candidate will be co-supervised between the Open University and the Museum of the Home. Professor Clare Taylor and Dr Margit Thøfner, from the Department of Art History will supervise from the Open University, and Ailsa Hendry, Collections Manager and Lara Baclig, Community Producer, will supervise on behalf of the Museum of the Home.

Clare Taylor is a specialist in early modern interiors, material culture and design. She has been lead supervisor for a number of Collaborative Doctoral Awards, including with the National Trust, the National Railway Museum and the Sanderson archive. Margit Thøfner specialises in Netherlandish art, visual and material culture from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Ailsa Hendry's experience stretches across collections care and curation and she has worked on many projects exploring early modern European history. Lara Baclig specialises in community engagement and decolonial practice in collecting and displays.

The successful candidate will have access to all Open University doctoral training opportunities in addition to a range of professional expertise and training opportunities with the partner institution. Additionally, the candidate will have a placement at the Museum of the Home lasting from

three to six months, to allow for extensive object-based research in relation the collections. This will involve curatorial training, for example in cataloguing and object handling.

#### Further details

The normal Open University minimum entrance requirement for AHRC-funded PhD students is that they should hold a Master's degree or similar postgraduate qualification from a recognised higher education institution. This degree or qualification should be relevant to the proposed area of study, therefore for the present project it should be in an appropriate Arts and Humanities subject.

If prospective students apply while still studying for a Master's degree or other postgraduate qualification, they must have met all the course requirements prior to the start date of the studentship. If prospective students do not have experience of formal postgraduate study, their application will only be considered if they can demonstrate evidence of sustained experience beyond undergraduate degree level that is specifically relevant to the proposed research topic, and could be considered equivalent to Master's study.

The Open University is internationally recognised for innovative research across the Arts and Humanities. We host a number of AHRC funded research projects and have a strong commitment to public engagement both nationally and internationally.

#### How to apply:

- Application forms are available via this webpage: <https://university.open.ac.uk/employment/node/10356>

- Completed application forms, together with a Research Proposal (for further details, see below), a short covering letter indicating your suitability and your reasons for applying, along with the supporting documents listed at the bottom of the application form, must all be sent to FASS-PhD-Applications@open.ac.uk.

Please indicate your subject area, so art history, in the heading of your application email (e.g. SURNAME\_Initial\_Art History).

- You are reminded that you must sign the form and should give the names, addresses and institutional email addresses of two academic referees who are willing to comment on your academic achievements to date and on your potential for undertaking research.

(Please check that your referees will be available to be contacted during the application period.)

- For general enquiries relating to doctoral study at the Open University, please contact FASS-PhD-Applications@open.ac.uk

- For general academic enquiries, please contact [margit.thofner@open.ac.uk](mailto:margit.thofner@open.ac.uk)

We recommend that you make contact/apply at the earliest stage so that we can work with you to maximise your potential for a successful application. Please note you are responsible for making sure that all required documents, are submitted before midday 7th April 2025 and meet the University's requirements. If your application is submitted late, and/or it is incomplete, it will not normally be assessed.

Your Research Proposal should (i) respond to the project, by discussing how you understand it and what your particular interests might be in developing it; (ii) indicate how your experience of study and any other relevant professional experience informs your response to the research project; (iii) outline what you identify as the opportunities for your own career development.

ArtHist.net

Equal opportunity is University Policy.

Reference:

STIP: PhD Studentship, Netherlandish Networks, Open University and Museum of the Home. In:  
ArtHist.net, Mar 5, 2025 (accessed Apr 6, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/44102>>.