Digital Practice and Pedagogy at UCLDH: Reflections on Collaboration across Boundaries

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Overview

The UCL Digitisation/Imaging Suite

- UCL and MA/MSc in Digital Humanities

- UCL Digitisation Suite/Imaging Lab

- Digitisation teaching

- Digitisation research

- *Argument*: digitisation/imaging lab beyond service space

Teaching Digital Humanities at UCL

1. PhD in Digital Humanities, BSc in Information Society

2. MA/MSc in Digital Humanities (1-year full-time)

3. Core modules:
   - Introduction to Programming and Scripting
   - Digital Industry: Culture and Innovation
   - Digital Humanities Research Methods
   - Internet Technologies
   - Global Digital Humanities

4. Skills taught: data visualisation, network analysis, programming, machine learning, GenAI, digitisation, social media critique

Teaching Digital Humanities at UCL

- We're currently conducting a career destination survey for graduates from UK/Ireland DH programmes and trainings (more to follow at the end of 2025)

- **15 institutions across UK-Ireland:** UCL, King's, SAS, Sheffield, Glasgow, Cambridge, Durham, Lancaster, Leeds, UEA, Canterbury Christ Church University, Exeter, Newcastle, York, University College Cork, University of Galway

- What does 'digital humanities' mean for your career?
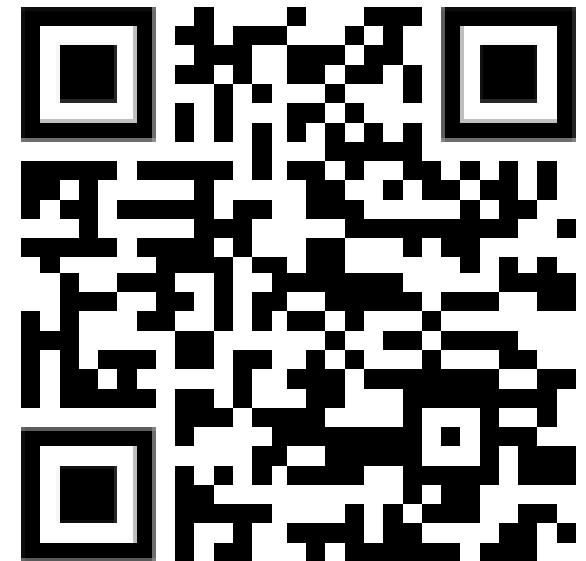
Introduction to Digitisation

UCL Digitisation class – digitising the Bentham catalogue

UCL Digitisation class students doing placements at the V&A Museum

Digitisation/Imaging Lab

- *What role can a **humanities lab** play in transforming traditional academic practices?*

- "DH labs are unique in their ability to combine traditional humanities research with digital tools and methodologies" (Pawlicka-Deger and Thomson, 2023)

- **Important bridge connecting the academic with the industrial, beyond service space**

Types of humanities labs

- Computer based – KDL

- Makerspace – UCL DH

- Visual presentation – Wuhan University

- more …
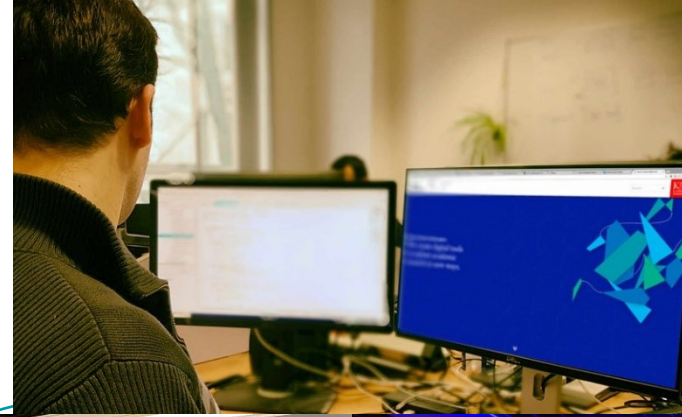
Question

- UCL Digitisation Suite - a Lab in the Humanities Faculty

    - First university digitisation lab in the UK

- Question:

What role can it play in transforming academia and bridging the industry?

The UCL Digitisation Suite

Teaching digitisation

- Across programmes: MA/MSc in DH, MA in ARM, MA in LIS, BSC

- Hands-on practical of 2D and 3D objects and critical discussions

- Closely working with UCL library and museum, and beyond

Digitisation class practices

Digitisation students at the V&A

Digitisation students at the British Library

Teaching digitisation

- Challenge one – *how do we deliver a good teaching?*

- Boyer's model (1990): discovery, integration, application and teaching

- Student placements – V&A and NHM

- **Key component:** the design of workflow and standard for 4000+ paintings
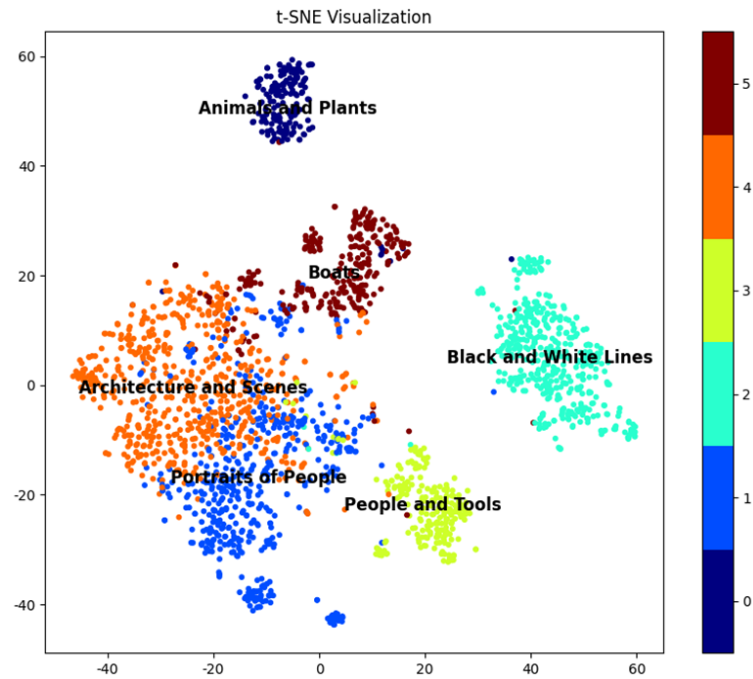

V&A digitisation project

V&A CEW collection

NHM digitisation project

# **Teaching digitisation** – fill in the research gap

The similar paintings example from the V&A's Chinese Export Watercolours, acquired 1871-1990

Digitisation research 1

- Challenge two: *how do we bridge? - **match the solution with the question***

- Case study 1: X-ray imaging on Chinese calligraphy

- Test using modern Chinese calligraphy, detect elements, test with multi-layers
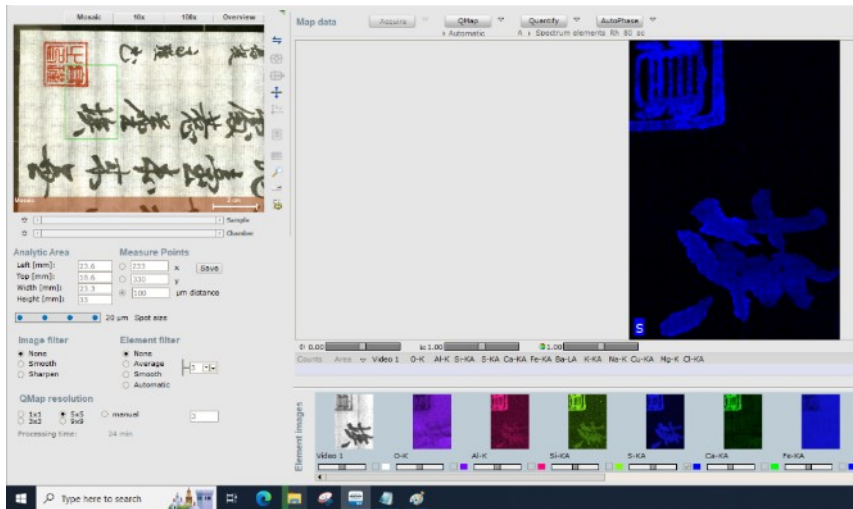
Solution: X-ray on Chinese calligraphy
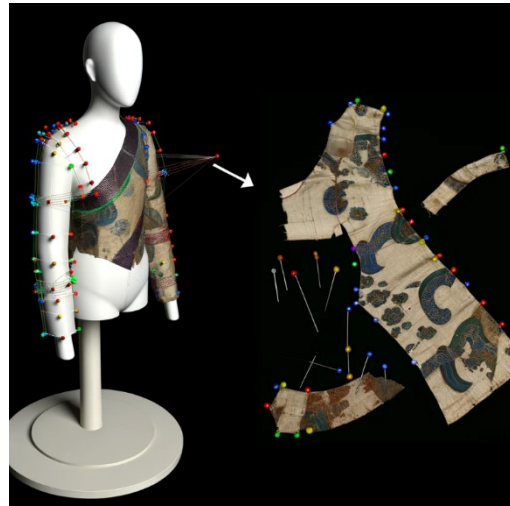
Question: 'Book bricks'

Digitisation research 2

- Case study 2: Textile fragments from V&A Stein Dunhuang collection

- Match image processing and 3D modelling with the fragments

- The Stein Dunhuang textile fragments, 2-9th Century

Solution: Photogrammetry in clothing

Question: Textile fragments from V&A Stein collection

Lab maintenance

- Challenge three: *how do we manage the lab sustainably?*

  - Technical: technologies evolve quickly, data preservation

  - Financial: teaching, research grant, consultancy

  - Maintenance: lab manager recruitment, collaboration across teams

  - Organisational: strategic planning, curriculum and research development

  - Environmental: energy consumption, e-waste management

- Bridging the gap and shaping the future of digitisation
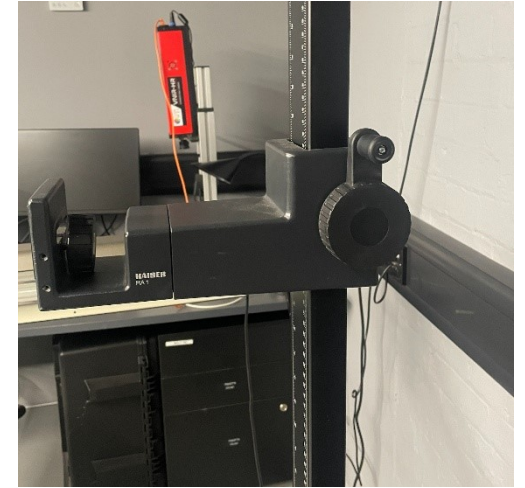
Broken lens and copy stand in the suite

Credits and acknowledgement

- Melissa Terras, the founder of UCL Digitisation module and lab

- V&A colleagues: Hongxing Zhang, Sau Fong Chan, CIT team, Asia Department colleagues, VARI colleagues

- NHM colleagues: Andrea Hart, Jon Nicholls, Rebecca Keddie

- Adam Gibson (2024), *Digitisation Suite Report 2023-2024*

- Simon Mahony (2024), *Non-invasive and Non-destructive Computational Imaging of Ancient Texts*, Dunhuang 2024

- UCL colleagues: Ryan Wang, Xiangchao Meng, Bethany Johnstone, DH teaching team, ARM teaching team, other UCL collaborators, and most importantly, all students!

Thank you!

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