

## **Object-led Wellbeing at Central Saint Martins**

The Museum and Study Collection at Central Saint Martins contains over 20,000 objects and includes the work of students, staff and alumni as well as a substantial collection of historical material including early printed books and manuscripts, Japanese wood engravings, embroideries and textiles.

The Museum has always played an important role in the teaching and research activities of the College. Its current Head, Judy Willcocks, has been able to build upon the Museum's long-established practice of object-based learning to provide object-led wellbeing activities for both students and the wider community.

In 2014, the Museum became part of Museums on Prescription, a three-year research project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council investigating the value of heritage encounters in social prescribing. The twelve participating institutions offered 10-week courses for referred individuals based around museum activities. The project (which used psychologists to measure the impact of the courses) produced evidence that participants benefitted from improved self-esteem and mood.

Following the completion of the project, Judy has continued to deliver object-led wellbeing sessions, working with external partners such as the Claremont Project and Mind/Portugal Prints.

Object-based wellbeing activities are based on the same principles as student-centred learning, which sees learning as a process of partnership and exchange. Workshops typically include the handling of selected objects and a creative activity. Handling objects, such as an old book or photographs, can engage and create enthusiasm amongst participants. Creative activities require openness, tolerance of ambiguity, problem-solving and managed risk – all beneficial to good mental health. Judy tends to avoid setting drawing tasks as people have pre-conceived ideas about their drawing skills; activities such as weaving, collage and printmaking tend to work better.

More recently, Judy has begun to deliver wellbeing sessions to students and is involved in her institution's strategic response to the student wellbeing challenge. However, object-led wellbeing sessions are very resource intensive and are intense for those delivering them. Judy is also keen to stress that while object-led wellbeing work is of therapeutic value it is no substitute for therapy itself, which in many cases will be the more appropriate option for students.

There is an excellent video in which Judy talks in more detail about object-led wellbeing:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=trkxKAdInpo>