

Brief for a Subject-specialist Consultant to research the Japanese collections, Laing Art Gallery, North East Museums

North East Museums (formerly Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums) is a regional museum, art gallery and archives service. We manage twelve museums and galleries across North East England and the Archives for Tyne and Wear. You can find out more about North East Museums, its governance, mission, and goals here: <https://www.northeastmuseums.org.uk>

The Laing Art Gallery was founded in 1901 and is the North East's leading civic art gallery. It is home to a designated collection of over 20,000 works of art. It holds regularly changing exhibitions of historic, modern and contemporary art and has an extensive learning and engagement programme. You can find out more about the Laing Art Gallery here: [Laing Art Gallery - World-class art](#)

We are seeking to engage a subject-specialist in Japanese art/history to research the Laing Art Gallery's Japanese collections. This is part of a wider strategy to assess and unlock our permanent collections, a vital step in making our future displays and exhibitions more sustainable. The consultant will be required to produce an object-focussed research report that assesses both the significance and display potential of the Laing's Japanese holdings.

Context

Comprising over 1,500 objects, the collections include ukiyo-e (Japanese woodblock) prints, arms and armour, bronzes, ivories and lacquer work. The majority of the collection was acquired by Newcastle spirits merchant and pub owner Albert H. Higginbottom (1850-1930) with the advice of the Laing's first curator Charles Bernard Stevenson (1874-1957) and was exhibited at the Laing in 1913 and then given to the gallery in 1919. Building upon the existing academic research that has been carried out both into the 1913 exhibition and the wider context of the relationship between Japan and the North East of England in this period, the consultant will be required to produce an object-focussed research report. We therefore require a consultant who has both the relevant academic expertise and who has experience working with museum objects.

Responsibilities of the Consultant and Outcomes of the Project

The primary outcome of the project will be a research report. Although there is flexibility regarding the structure of the report we would expect the following areas to be covered.

- A summary of the significance of the Laing Art Gallery's Japanese collections
- Detailed analysis/historical information about approximately 80 of the most significant objects in the collection – e.g. where and how they were made, for what purpose/market, how typical they are of objects in British collections
- Information about the collecting context of the North East, focussing particularly on the collector Albert H. Higginbottom and his peers
- Information about how these collections relate to wider trade/cultural exchange between the North East and Japan
- How/if such objects have influenced British art and design
- Display strategies for the collection and advice about how we should interpret it for the public including language, terminology and the key themes we could address both in our displays and learning resources.
- Approx. five example interpretation panels and labels.

The consultant will also be expected to deliver at least one training session on the collection for the Art Galleries curatorial and learning team.

Location: Home and venue based. While much of the background research and compilation of the report will need to be carried out off-site, the consultant is expected to arrange enough visits (exact number to be discussed following appointment) to the Laing Art Gallery to study the objects and must be comfortable working in the collections stores and handling museum objects. The consultant must be able to travel to the Laing Art Gallery as required.

Fee: Up to £10,000 including VAT and travel. This work is offered as a freelance contract, for a fixed fee including VAT and all expenses. The appointed individual will be responsible for all tax, national insurance etc. This equates to approximately 20 days' work.

The fee will be paid in three equal instalments linked to key milestones:

Start of the project

Mid-point project review

End of the project (following submission of the research report)

Status: The contract is with North East Museums/Newcastle City Council as a freelance supplier.

Duration: Timeline to be discussed on appointment. The research report needs to be completed by **1st September 2026**

Experience

We are seeking a flexible and highly motivated researcher to work with us and who has:

- An academic specialism, or equivalent museum experience, in an aspect of Japanese art or history
- Experience of carrying out object-focussed research
- Experience of working in collections stores and handling museum objects
- An effective communicator, able to work independently but communicate regularly with the Art Galleries team
- Good organisational skills and a proven ability to work to deadlines
- Clear, structured and concise reporting skills
- An understanding of the role of museums and galleries including good practice in gallery interpretation

How to Apply

Applicants are asked to submit their CV and covering statement in response to the brief. The statement should include:

- An outline of the proposed method of approach for this work
- Overview of previous experience of delivering similar research reports
- Demonstration of suitability for the role, including the experience and competencies outlined above
- Availability for the proposed consultancy period

- Names and contact details of two referees who have knowledge or personal experience of the applicant's work

For an informal discussion please contact Dr Esmé Whittaker, Keeper of Art, North East Museums

Deadline for submission: 17th August 2025

Shortlisted applicants will be invited to interview – date TBC

Please send applications by email to Esme Whittaker: esme.whittaker@northeastmuseums.org.uk