

ICOM UK Bursary Report

London, 07 July 2025

Event Attended: IIIF Annual Conference and Showcase 2025, Leeds, UK

Dates: 2–5 June 2025

Location and organisers: UK, IIIF Consortium, and University of Leeds, UK

Attendee: Sandra Santos

Job Title: Digital Collections Manager

Organisation: The Courtauld Gallery, The Courtauld Institute of Art



1. IIIF Annual Conference 2025. © IIIF Consortium, University of Leeds.

Overview

The IIIF Annual Conference 2025, hosted by the University of Leeds and the IIIF Consortium, brought together a global community of professionals working with digital heritage collections. It featured a rich program of plenary talks, workshops, and Birds of a Feather sessions, with a strong focus on interoperability and innovation in working with digital collections. The event also marked the 10th anniversary of the [IIIF Consortium](#), and was attended by ca. 250 people from 24 countries.



2. Keynote, Martin Kalfatovic, Managing Director of the IIIF Consortium (2024 - present). © IIIF Consortium, University of Leeds.

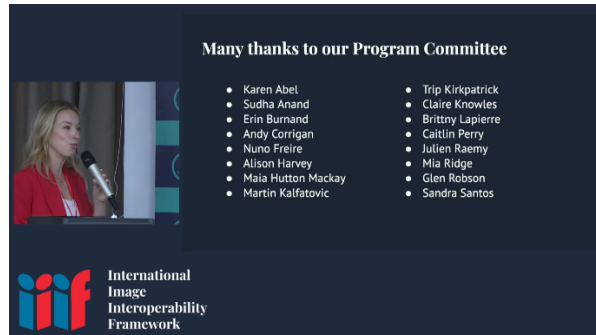
As a member of the conference program committee, I was actively involved in shaping and participating in the event and presented one of the panels on day 1 (having also designed the tote bag distributed to delegates).

My attendance, generously supported by the ICOM UK Bursary, enabled me to engage with national and international peers, explore cutting-edge developments, learn about new

interesting and inspiring IIF-based projects and implementations, and bring back valuable insights to my organisation and the GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums) sector.



3. Tote bag, IIF Annual Conference 2025. Caitlin Perry (IIF Consortium) keynote. © IIF Consortium. Design: Sandra Santos.



4. Caitlin Perry (IIF Consortium) keynote. © IIF Consortium.

On June 2nd, it was lovely to meet the other three co-chairs of the IIF Museums Community Group (from the Getty, Los Angeles; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and Cogapp, Brighton) for dinner, taking use of the fact that we were all attending the conference this year. It was incredibly pleasant to meet in person after spending so much time collaborating virtually.

Following two full days of discussions (July 3–4), I participated in the "Introduction to Leeds University Library Galleries & Public Art Walking Tour" on the last day. I also concluded the day by attending the workshop "Getting started with [Allmaps](#)", a IIF-compliant used extensively in digital arts and humanities work.



5. Quentin Bell, *Levitating Figure, Known as 'The Dreamer'*, 1982, Fiberglass with internal steel armature. Leeds University Public Art collection. Gift of Stanley Burton, 1982. © University of Leeds. Photo: Sandra Santos.

Personal Reflections and highlights

Attending the IIF Annual Conference 2025 was a deeply rewarding experience, both professionally and personally. As someone who has been involved with IIF for several years, since completing a 5-day training delivered by the IIF Consortium, attending this conference felt like home—an opportunity to (re)connect with a vibrant, international community that shares a passion for open access, innovation, and collaboration in the cultural heritage sector. That sense of community is one of the cornerstones of IIF, and it was evident throughout.

One of the most powerful aspects of the event was the sense of a shared purpose and avid curiosity, demonstrated by highly engaging Q&A following each panel and the wider conversations that extended from the conference room throughout lunches and animated pub evenings and organised dine-around gatherings round evenings. Both in formal sessions and informal conversations, there was a palpable energy around the idea that we are collectively shaping the future of digital collections.

I was particularly moved by the openness with which institutions shared not only their successes but also their failures and limitations, lessons learnt from projects that didn't go as planned. These honest reflections were incredibly valuable and reminded me of the importance of experimentation and resilience in digital work (and the cultural sector as a whole).

The unveiling of the 3D IIF specification work to date was part of the keynote opening and a standout and much anticipated moment. Seeing the potential for museums to present 3D objects in an interoperable, accessible way was inspiring and challenging at the same time. It sparked ideas for how we could use this at The Courtauld, especially to produce and share rich, three-dimensional reproductions of our collections of sculpture and decorative arts in the public domain. The featured examples used by the 3D community group to construct some of the first object reproductions developed under the 3D Technical Specification (IIF Presentation API 4.0 draft) included a recently created 3D scan of a marriage chest from The Courtauld Gallery Collection.



6. Keynote from the IIF 3D Community Group introducing the current work toward the IIF Presentation API 4.0. © IIF 3D Community Group, IIF Consortium.

For me, the application of IIF in teaching and research in contexts related to art and heritage was among the most pertinent subjects. Case studies showed how IIF is being used to enhance scholarly research, teaching, and learning in museum and academic settings. This is particularly relevant to The Courtauld's dual role as a museum and an academic institution where curation, research, and teaching are key.

In this context, I particularly highlight the talks on the first day: '[Houses of Card: Ephemeral by Design](#)' by Christopher James Gilman (UCLA and co-chair of the IIF in Education Community Group) and '[IIF and Art Research](#)' by Annalise Welte (University of New York). Both focused on IIF from the perspective of end-users and prompted a wider conversation about promoting the dialogue between the technical and non-technical sides of IIF and the importance of facilitating access to these resources.



7. Annalise Welte (Institute of Fine Arts, New York University) presenting 'IIF and Art Research', at the IIF Annual Conference 2025. © Annalise Welte. Photo: Sandra Santos.

Another example of end-user focused work was the [IIIF as SaaS: How the University Library of Bern supports researchers with an easy-to-use institutional IIIF “Software as a Service”](#) presented by Ursula Loosli and Mattia Pedrazzi from the University of Bern, Switzerland, demonstrating an example of researchers intensively and seamlessly making use of IIIF without ever looking at code; again highlighting the importance of making IIIF accessible to non-technical users.

Tom Crane (Digirati) and Claire Knowles (University of Leeds) touched on the important topic of [Digital preservation of IIIF material](#). This is a very important pioneering initiative that can encourage developers and museums to collaborate in order to provide long-term access to IIIF assets and future-proof them while also taking digital environmental sustainability principles into account. The duality ‘Digital Preservation - Digital sustainability’ is an essential matter to continue to address.

Especially relevant for our future plans at The Courtauld, and, in my opinion, for exploring the narrative potential of IIIF as a whole, was the presentation of ‘[A new ecosystem for ‘IIIF-first’ exhibition building and storytelling](#)’ [[Exhibition Viewer](#)] presented by Daphne Van Wijngaarden, TU Delft, The Netherlands, and Paul Mollahan, Digirati, United Kingdom. Similarly, the [IIIF Timeline viewer](#) bet was [featured by the British Library](#) as an innovative tool to present IIIF collections chronologically.



8. James Misson (British Library) presenting Viewing collections chronologically with IIIF Timeline. © James Misson. Photo: Sandra Santos.

Finally, and highly noteworthy were the useful reflections on copyright and practical talk on ensuring that IIIF material has stable and accurate identifiers, as well as the fundamental piece that allows organisations to pull digital resources from other collections potential and challenges of integrating AI and reusing them with confidence. In my view, part of the positive environmental impact of IIIF is the ability to access and reuse digital materials that may be

across the street or across the planet, without the need to create, process and store new copies.

The examples given above represent the top topics that I personally found most relevant and timely. Nonetheless, the overall programme was much more comprehensive and can be found on the event's webpages for future reference.

The setting of the University of Leeds provided a welcoming and intellectually stimulating environment. The organisers did a fantastic job of creating space for both structured learning and spontaneous exchange. I left the conference feeling reenergised, inspired, and increasingly connected to the global GLAM and the IIF communities.

Usefulness and Impact

Attending the IIF Annual Conference 2025 has significantly enhanced my understanding of current trends and best practices in digital collections in IIF contexts. The knowledge gained will directly inform The Courtauld's digital collections strategy, particularly in the following areas:

Internal knowledge sharing

The IIF Annual Conference coincided with the launch of a set of new IIF features on [The Courtauld Gallery Collection Online](#). Prompted by the learning brought from the conference coupled with our IIF implementation milestone, I delivered a workshop for The Courtauld Gallery team, explaining what IIF, what it can do for us, and what we can do with it. Colleagues from the Commercial and Visitor Engagement and the Marketing and Communications teams also joined the session.

In this session, I highlighted the role of IIF the APIs to minimise the carbon foot print of our digital collection, in their essence by allowing users to fetch parts of a high-resolution image as they need them, which significantly reduces the computing processing needed. In addition, publicly delivering high resolution images enriched with up-to-date descriptive metadata through IIF, allows others to view and reuse our materials seamlessly while pulling all the data directly from our servers (as opposed to creating digital surrogates), anywhere in the planet through an internet connection. At a time when Digital environmental sustainability is increasingly important, multiple and consistent small steps can go a long way to minimise the carbon footprint.

Public Engagement

Learnings will be incorporated into our online content, including updates to our ["What is IIF"](#) page on the Collection Online platform

Sector-wide dissemination

I will contribute a written piece for The Courtauld's website and share findings through the IIF Museums Community Group, benefiting the wider GLAM. As part of the public announcement of the Gallery's efforts to foster open access to images of works in the public domain in the

collection, (planned for the fall of 2025), a blog post will also reflect on the meaning and usefulness of making IIIF materials accessible and highlight the latest accomplishments and developments relevant to Museums and academic institutions.

Impact on digital roadmap and follow-ups

Since the conference I have followed up with two of the presenters about developing new capabilities that are aligned with our digital collection goals: creating digital storytelling/exhibitions/narratives (Namely 'Exhibition Viewer'); and introducing annotation platforms to researchers and curators (Namely 'Glycerine Workbench').

Extended engagement and advocacy within the IIIF community and beyond

We are including some people and projects that we met at the conference to feature in our future calls for the wider IIIF museum community and anyone else interested.

I also participated in a follow-up call organised by the IIIF education Community group dedicated to key takeaways and actions especially related to access and training for end-users. The goal is to expand on what is already a very collaborative group of technical and non-technical professionals to optimise and widen the use of IIIF in a concerted and sustainable manner.



Conclusion

The IIIF Annual Conference 2025 was a valuable opportunity to engage with international peers, deepen my expertise, and bring back actionable insights for The Courtauld and the broader museum sector.

I am dedicated to sharing the information I have received with other peers and organisations that want to learn more and gain more from IIIF, both inside my own organisation and in the giving spirit that defines the IIIF community. These discussions reaffirmed the value of community-led development, the necessity of continuing to promote inclusive, user-friendly tools, and the need of fostering communication between suppliers putting IIIF into practice locally, those developing technical specifications, and end users and their organisations.



I am hugely grateful to ICOM UK for supporting my attendance and look forward to continuing to share knowledge and foster innovation in digital collections and across the cultural sector in an

informative, engaging, and responsible manner.


**Sandra Santos** • You
Digital Collections Manager at The Courtauld ...
1w • Edited • 

As ever, such a rewarding, insightful, and enriching experience to participate in the 2025 IIIF Annual Conference in Leeds!

Very thankful to the [#ICOM](#) UK Bursary Scheme (<https://lnkd.in/eHtEVkRh>) for supporting my attendance!

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If you couldn't be with us in Leeds for the 2025 [#IIIF](#) Annual Conference, recordings of the proceedings are now available on the IIIF YouTube channel: <https://lnkd.in/gKDvrTeu>

**2025 IIIF Annual Conference**
[youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)

9. *iiif_annual_conference_present_Linkedin*. © Sandra Santos. © IIIF Consortium.