Sir Whitworth Wallis Fellowship 2025:
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Final Report
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In applying for the Sir Whitworth Wallis research fellowship with Birmingham Museums Trust, I felt determined to learn the aesthetic principles, material qualities and social histories of the Victorian-era Valentine's card. Within that, as an artist struck by 'heartache' - a term I use to wade through the spectrum of grief - I was eager to see and know how love can be contained in objects.

Setting my sights on Valentines of the late 19th and early 20th century, my journey began by combing through the 'Works on Paper' collection, housed both at BMAG and the MCC. Through a series of scheduled research visits, supported by the Trust's curatorial team, with delicate fingertips I prized open their precious collection. Documenting these works through first-hand photographs and 'Emotional Outbursts', a diaristic research journal, I began to reflect on the commonalities within these intricate works. Those commonalities, I've found, exist beyond the bows, roses and turtle doves.

These works, both astounding in their beauty and maximalist in their application, speak to a culture which amalgamates global influences, and propagates these aesthetics as its own bespoke identity. In handling this material, I was prompted to consider the stickiness of integrating this colonial language into my own artistic practice. With a head full of Valentines and love letters, I self-initiated a visit to the Lettering, Print and Graphic Design Collection (LPGDC) at the University of Reading.

Coinciding this visit with the research fellowship marked a key step change within my work, as I discovered the near-infinite possibilities of print ephemera. Through eager conversation with the collection curator, I realised the importance of fostering a reflective and research-led practice. Where do these materials come from, and why do I desire them?

As I gather the material components to hand-craft my own Valentines now - marrying antique motifs with contemporary prose - I prepare my return to Reading to continue this research. Handling lead type at the Winterbourne Press, I remind myself that all material carries meaning, and within that meaning lies unbridled potential. Above all else, this fellowship has been invaluable for my personal growth and professional experience. I cannot thank the team enough.