Arts Council England ANIMATING MUSEUMS WORKING WITH ARTISTS, ENGAGING AUDIENCES

PREPARED FOR ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND BY ANNE MURCH AND GABY PORTER







CONTENTS

1.	Overview Reasons for doing this work Case Studies		3 4
2.			
3.			6
	3.1	An external voice – breaking the rules and challenging assumptions British Museum: <i>Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman</i> – curated by Grayson Perry	6
	3.2	Opening up spaces – working with artists to move people in new ways to and through buildings and spaces: Enlivening the Darwin Centre, a pilot arts events programme at the Natural History Museum curated by Sarah Punshon	7
	3.3	Creating extraordinary effects to bring new life into a space and make people curious: Enchanted Palace at Historic Royal Palaces	11
	3.4	Creating a sense of event and excitement: Jason Singh and <i>Supersonix</i> at the V&A	12
	3.5	Breathing new life into collections: Thresholds at the Cambridge University Museums, curated by Carol Ann Duffy	14
	3.6	Artists and communities as place-makers: Transform, Snibston	16
	3.7	Bringing familiar stories to light: <i>Exchange: 1,000 Good Deeds</i> at the Foundling Museum, by Claire Twomey	19
	3.8	Making cultural connections with communities: Truck art at Luton Culture as part of the Cultural Olympiad Material Response initiative	20

1. OVERVIEW

As a funding agency with new responsibilities for multiple artforms, Arts Council England is keen to stimulate cross artform/cross cultural work.

It's an incredible opportunity to reinvigorate museum practice *and* inspire the arts to do things differently too – to inspire people to do things differently with spaces and collections.

– Hedley Swain, Area Director South East, Arts Council England

Gaby Porter and Anne Murch, consultants, were commissioned by Arts Council England and the British Museum in 2012-13 to consult, research and then lead two symposia to debate how artists are working with museums to increase opportunities for artists, enrich the language of museums, interpretation and engagement, and to engage new audiences in new ways.

The word 'artist' encompasses many different disciplines, practices and processes. Historically, museums, galleries and historic sites have commissioned work from visual artists and makers using their collections as a source of artistic inspiration. An increasing number of high profile and innovative partnerships between artists and museums have involved musicians, dancers, theatre performers, and writers. Artists, in the broadest sense, can bring fresh perspectives as curators, educators and interpreters, often engaging directly with visitors in a direct and informal way. The value and wide-ranging benefits of museums and artists/arts organisations working in partnership were confirmed in the research, symposia discussions and supporting case studies.

Contributors to the research and symposia made the following reflections on their experience:

It is liberating to work with artists – there is a lot to learn from them – they are responsive, lively, fun, not stressed by deadlines. Get on with it! Just do it, try stuff, take small steps. Talk to people, take risks, learn, then try some more.

– Esmé Ward, Head of Learning and Engagement at the Whitworth Art Gallery and Manchester Museum

When you are doing experimental work you are not always sure exactly what its outcome may be, which visitors may come, and how these visitors may react. Creating an environment in which work can develop and adapt, even if this is a tricky and sensitive thing to broker, is important, so that the artists and the staff have a will and a positive arena in which to manoeuvre.

– Joanna Marschner, Senior Curator, Historic Royal Palaces

We are talking about different kinds of work under a very general rubric – there's a huge difference between a visual artist making something in response to a historic collection, and a theatre company creating something with scientists – what's the meaningful connection? I feel that, if there is one, it's not about the art, it's about the visitors – the way visitors feel and behave in those kinds of spaces, something about power and passivity and the possibility of [the right] art to democratise, to make meaningful and equal connections between non-experts and specialist areas...

- Sarah Punshon, director and curator

2. REASONS FOR DOING THIS WORK

For museums, working with artists and arts organisations as creative partners can stimulate visitors' curiosity and interaction, inspire wonder and stimulate creativity. Museums have found new ways to explore and express the spirit and founding purpose of their organisation through working with artists and the new perspectives they bring. Artists often draw on, and draw out, stories, collections and connections previously unseen and unknown to visitors. Bringing in outside thinking and injecting new expertise develops the skills of both museums and artists, empowers and energises staff and can transform organisational culture. During times of austerity, these partnerships enable arts organisations, artists and museums to pool their resources and to attract new support and income streams.

We explore some of the reasons and benefits below. Each is illustrated by a case study. We hope these will inspire you and give you the confidence to develop or extend your work with new creative partners to animate museums and engage audiences.

- 1. An external voice breaking the rules and challenging assumptions British Museum: Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman, curated by Grayson Perry.
- 2. Opening up spaces working with artists to move people in new ways to and through buildings and spaces that may be unexplored Enlivening the Darwin Centre – a pilot arts events programme at the Natural History Museum, curated by Sarah Punshon – various artists.

- 3. Creating extraordinary effects and creating a sense of event and excitement to embellish and transform a tired site or gallery *Enchanted Palace, Historic Royal Palaces various artists.*
- 4. Creating a sense of event and excitement.

Supersonix and V&A residency – Jason Singh, sound artist.

- 5. Breathing new life into collections bringing new perspectives, changing cultures and behaviours in relation to collections; creating research opportunities for artists Thresholds at Cambridge University Museums, curated by Carol Ann Duffy.
- 6. Artists and communities as place makers – new languages that enable people to connect at an emotional and personal level *Transform, Snibston Discovery Museum* – *Maurice Maguire, lead artist.*
- 7. Bringing stories to life, artistic interludes that connect past and present; and enable audiences to make imaginative leaps Foundling Museum – Exchange: 1,000 Good Deeds – Clare Twomey.
- 8. Making/bridging cultural connections between communities and museums Luton Culture, as part of Material Response, an MLA Stories of the World/Cultural Olympiad project – various artists.

'MUSEUMS HAVE FOUND NEW WAYS TO EXPLORE AND EXPRESS THE SPIRIT AND FOUNDING PURPOSE OF THEIR ORGANISATION THROUGH WORKING WITH ARTISTS AND THE NEW PERSPECTIVES THEY BRING'

InsideOUT – a sound and light show by Andy McKeown and Peter Walker at Snibston Discovery Museum. Photo: © Geoff Broadway

RETURN TO CONTENTS

ANIMATING MUSEUMS: WORKING WITH ARTISTS, ENGAGING AUDIENCES | 5

3. CASE STUDIES

3.1 An external voice – breaking the rules and challenging assumptions

British Museum: *Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* – curated by Grayson Perry

Artists are known to think the unthinkable and say the unsayable. When working with museums they will often tear up the rule book and encourage visitors to respond to collections in new and tangential ways. An exhibition at the British Museum curated by Grayson Perry in 2012, *Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman*, is an example of this.

Perry made the initial approach to the museum – he wanted to create an imaginary world of his own and over two to three years he rummaged through stores and met curators, selecting objects – largely on an aesthetic and personal level – in order to create the exhibition. In an interview at the time, Perry said: 'We are all a bit mad, and this is me: it's just I'm allowed to go mad in the British Museum.'

For Perry, his purpose was to show uncelebrated objects that were not on display, that excited him and others and that related to his own experience. One was labelled: 'This little Chinese cupboard looks like an art deco wardrobe from when I was a kid'. He selected about 150 objects to illustrate his themes and introduced around 30 pieces that he had made himself. Three of these were subsequently taken into the collection and the rest remained the property of the artist.

The exhibition gave visitors an opportunity to have new insights into the collections. It attracted a very different audience from the norm. Some art audiences responded to it as an art installation, and other people were simply curious and intrigued. Staff described it as 'the noisiest exhibition we have had here, with visitors talking, laughing and speaking to strangers'.

There were challenges. Perry is flamboyant. He wanted minimal labelling. 'Some of the labels are quite bold in their lack of information' said Perry, quoted in a *Guardian* article just before the opening. Staff responded across the whole spectrum although the majority were enthusiastic. The curatorial voice was Perry's and some of the curators said they 'felt silenced'. The exhibition organisers held a meeting early on where staff were encouraged to air opinions. This resulted in open conversation internally – and some people shifted their perspectives.

From a commercial and marketing perspective the exhibition was a massive success - the Board of Trustees was very positive. The British Museum has considerable pulling power and Perry's profile and reputation helped to reposition it in terms of its appeal, at least for the exhibition period. In terms of legacy, however, it is uncertain whether the same visitors have returned. The success of Perry's exhibition built staff confidence in working with artists on other projects. For *Ice Age Art* in 2013, the British Museum drew on the experience and commissioned artists, including filmmakers and wildlife photographers, as part of the interpretive strategy.

Anna Bright, the British Museum's former Interpretation Officer, who worked on this exhibition advised: 'Before embarking on a new relationship with an artist, always ask, what is the purpose? What's it for? What's it going to do for us and for our visitors?' Philip Attwood, Keeper of Coins and Medals commented:

One of the main lessons the exhibition taught was that there has to be a match between the artist and the institution. For all sorts of reasons the British Museum and Grayson were a great pairing – unlikely as it might have seemed at first.

3.2 Opening up spaces – working with artists to move people in new ways to and through buildings and spaces:

Enlivening the Darwin Centre, a pilot arts events programme at the Natural History Museum curated by Sarah Punshon

The Natural History Museum hosted Sarah Punshon, director and curator, as a Clore Fellow to explore possibilities for engaging visitors through participation and performance: targeting families; encouraging visitors to circulate more widely, especially at busy times; drawing family audiences into the Darwin Centre; and engaging them with collections in new ways.

Punshon ran a two-day workshop bringing visitor-facing and scientific staff together.

She commissioned artists and theatre companies to introduce innovative ways of working and develop new ideas and approaches. Participants enjoyed creative involvement, playful and engaging learning. They also increased their knowledge and connections across the Natural History Museum: more than half met a colleague for the first time. Comments from participants included: 'I appreciate the effort and expertise of colleagues across the museum far more than I previously did' and 'Working with people with other perspectives is refreshing.'

Punshon was then commissioned by the Natural History Museum to curate three public events in 2012/13, with outcomes for both visitors and staff. For visitors, these were that they would: value the museum as a place for fun, playful, participative activities; understand that natural history is a scientific endeavour, and that scientists work at the museum; and feel that science and natural history are interesting pursuits. For staff, the commission sought to strengthen creative crossdepartmental collaboration and demonstrate its benefits. Punshon worked with an advisory group of staff across the museum, including the head of organisational development.



h

eŋ

Nigel captures a specimen, Curious Collectors at the Natural History Museum. Photo: Sarah Punshon

SPECIMEN

18 FEB 2013

The events were:

- Nature Games Weekend (August 2012), a weekend of live action games and a trail
- *The Campsite* (October 2012), a week-long festival of art, music and natural history in tents, caravans and camper vans
- *Curious Collectors* (February 2013), a weeklong trail of six research stations

Punshon curated each event, working with artists selected by the Natural History Museum. The events themselves were 'playtested': most activities were played at an early stage with small groups of children and families, then adapted and refined, making them much more successful. Evaluation was integrated into events so that visitors experienced it as another activity, not disrupting their experience. An audience advocate on the project team worked closely with Punshon to build on learning.

These events brought hundreds more visitors each day to the Darwin Centre. They enjoyed doing, making and touching (rather than watching or reading) and they particularly enjoyed contributing themselves, eg sound effects or stories. They engaged with science in new ways. They were pleasantly surprised to find 'quirky' and 'interactive' events, and to discover that 'the Natural History Museum has a wacky, silly side'. Staff appreciated taking risks and trying new things and working with people outside the museum and with colleagues.

As the curator, Punshon sought to 'mesh' the differing approaches of artists and museum and to bridge the gap between a very large organisation and very small companies or individuals.

Some artists found the 'instrumental' aim of engaging families with science, and the standard procurement process, off-putting. Punshon sought to make the experience exciting for them while honouring the Natural History Museum's goals. She negotiated a change to a two stage commissioning process, which elicited more responses than straightforward procurement through tendering.

Punshon balanced the Natural History Museum's functions of research institution and visitor attraction, and encouraged staff to see the value in this work. There were sensitivities around brand, reputation and risk: were the performers museum staff or not? How could, and would, they behave? There were practical hurdles too: fire safety; security; budget; and contracts.

Since then, the on-gallery science staff have picked up and used some activities for an Easter events programme and the Natural History Museum is considering how it will continue to actively programme in underused spaces to draw family audiences in and spend quality time there, and will draw on these approaches for other programmes.

Punshon suggests museum staff should:

- be explicit: what are you seeking to explore, discover, make happen? Make sure both museum and artists 'get it' and agree on it
- articulate what the museum will gain from working with artists, and vice versa
- be open and willing to learn the results may not be what you expect
- invest in building relationships with artists, with staff
- share your findings and experience internally and externally – what worked and what didn't?

Dresses worn by Princess Margaret and Diana, Princess of Wales in the Room of Dancing Princesses, The Enchanted Palace, Kensington Palace. Photo: Richard Lea-Hair, Newsteam © Historic Royal Palaces

> Performers assume the role of Detectors, working with the palace explainers to capture the stories escaping within the palace walls. The Enchanted Palace, Kensington Palace Photo: Richard Lea-Hair, Newsteam © Historic Royal Palaces

3.3 Creating extraordinary effects to bring new life into a space and make people curious:

Enchanted Palace at Historic Royal Palaces

Historic Royal Palaces enables people to 'explore the stories of how monarchs and people have shaped society in some of the greatest palaces ever built', across their six sites. Since 2004 they have been experimenting with multiple ways of engaging the widest possible audience – using different interventions to draw out meaning. Working with artists and other creative partners has become a significant part of their work and offer.

In 2010–12, Kensington Palace embarked on a major two-year development programme during which two thirds of the palace would be closed. Historic Royal Palaces wanted to create a project that would enable them to keep the palace open and to experiment with new approaches to interpretation at the same time. They also wanted to bring the average age of the visitor down. Joanna Marschner, Senior Curator at Kensington Palace, explained the rationale behind *Enchanted Palace*, an artistic collaboration between Historic Royal Palaces, the theatre company WildWorks and leading designers – combining fashion, theatre and spectacle:

It was a shared creative process to generate the integrated world of Enchanted Palace. The concept of 'palaceness' speaks to solemnity, beauty and preciousness – all wonderful things - but which were off-putting for some of the audiences that we wanted to attract. Changing perceptions of the place and how visitors experienced it was part of the plan. For example, WildWorks challenged us to identify the things we believed to be sacred. We then made a long list of what not to do in a palace, and set about trying to achieve as many of these as they could... Initially the fashion designers gave us some starry names to lure in the press – and they came in their droves, but then they saw

the work our artist partners had drawn from our communities, and this is when a new hip, 'cool rejector' audience was coaxed in.

The whole Kensington Palace team worked with the artists from the start and *Enchanted Palace* resulted in radical cultural change very early on, some of which was unexpected. As part of the development, front of house staff were encouraged by WildWorks to tell their best stories – Marschner described how the performers gave them the confidence to do this:

They helped the staff to see that they were already story tellers and their stories had to be heard. The big transformation came in unlocking interests and enthusiasms, and gently crafting ways in which all of this could contribute to the piece.

For some artists, developing their sensitivity to the historic environment – not to use a soldering iron in the state apartments for example – was hard. As with many Historic Royal Palaces initiatives, *Enchanted Palace* required visitors to participate, and time and flexibility were needed to get this right. Some of their creative partners found it easier to adapt than others. Ruth Gill, former Head of Interpretation for Historic Royal Palaces, offered some advice:

We worked to a principle that artists' work should never need additional interpretation – its meaning needs to be intrinsic. Sometimes this worked less well and we misjudged it, and our visitors were not able to readily understand our intentions. From these experiences I think we learned to understand when to step closer and when to stand back from the artistic process. Finding the interpretive balance between truly creative original artwork whilst ensuring the best visitor outcomes, made everyone more confident.

The learning and experience from *Enchanted Palace* then informed the re-presentation of the palace which reopened in April 2012. When Gill left Historic Royal Palaces to join the National Museum of Scotland, the organisation created a new post,

Jason Singh performing at Music Day, Kensington Gardens, June 2012. Photo: Justyna Sanko

Head of Creative Programming, and appointed a former Associate Director from the Royal Shakespeare Company, to increase the range of live programming and extend their work with creative partners. This is consistent with Historic Royal Palaces' cause – one of its five guiding principles is 'showmanship' – and is central to the long and sustained programme of change that has been taking place within the organisation.

3.4 Creating a sense of event and excitement:

Jason Singh and Supersonix at the V&A

Through its Residency programme, the V&A aims to create a learning environment for resident artists, the public and the museum itself. Encouraged to use the museum's collections for research and to create new work that interprets them, residents develop and run sessions for families and schools, young people, adults, students and community groups, and contribute to 'Friday Lates'. Jason Singh was one of three resident sonic practitioners commissioned as part of the Exhibition Road Cultural Group's partnership project, *Supersonix*, in 2012, which he called 'an international celebration of the art and science of sound in all its complexity'. Selected from 150 artists responding to an international open call, Singh spent six months at the V&A, working closely with Dr Moya Carey, Iran Heritage Foundation Curator of the museum's collections.

Singh was inspired by the blessings, Sufi poetry and ghazals on jugs, rugs, paintings, cups and vessels in the collections. He was fascinated by the vessels themselves as architecture and sound chambers, and by 'the notion of people as vessels and the "spirit" contained within them'. He created new work using vocal sculpting, human beatboxing, poetry and bespoke audio software.

For Singh,

...the residency provided a huge opportunity... it was gold dust! To be in London; in the space for six months, with everything set up. I could try new stuff out; collaborate with new musicians; explore fresh ideas... just invite people in and work with them. [I worked with] an amazing curator, who was really, really open to exploring stuff. 95 per cent of what I wanted to do, I did.

As well as weekly 'Open Studios' sessions and a 'Friday Late' performance in the Jameel Gallery to celebrate Persian New Year, Singh worked with school groups and sound production students. He brought a breakdance crew and another group of young people to the museum to create music and movement inspired by the collections – they now visit often and perform as the 'V&A Crew'. Singh also worked with the V&A's ceramics resident, and with the resident sound artist at the Science Museum.

'FIND WAYS OF SAYING YES. LET THE ARTIST TAKE THE LEAD AND WORK CLOSELY TOGETHER'

Singh animated the collections in new ways: 'bringing objects to life and making them sing'. He stimulated discussions among staff about the different meanings of objects for different people. Dr Carey welcomed his contemporary interpretations of historical works, which has changed how she thinks about and works with objects:

There is writing on objects which invites you to speak, talk – but there is [rarely] sound in exhibitions and *never* in art history... A conservator always taps a metal object to see how sound it is; metalworkers make lots of noise while they are making metal objects... Now, when I handle objects, I have another sense with which to evaluate them... When I talk about objects now ... sound is always part of my conversation.

Singh knew that he 'wanted to make this my working life' so he spent time cultivating the relationships which made his work possible: talking, negotiating and tackling challenges such as interruptions in recording sessions and the lack of a soundproof space. He also welcomed being 'kept in check' by Ruth





Lloyd, former Residency Co-ordinator. She in turn mediated between colleagues and residents: arranging induction; agreeing public programmes which artists could achieve; and encouraging the organisation to be more flexible, nimble and responsive.

Lloyd offers these tips for museums:

- work with emerging or midcareer artists

 this may be more productive than with
 'established' artists
- go for the best and most creative artists. Support them in areas such as education
- keep things as open as possible: artists break rules and challenge the system.
 Encourage and enable some fluidity as the work develops; don't demand specific outcomes, or you will limit the potential benefits
- find ways of saying yes. Let the artist take the lead and work closely together
- involve curators and colleagues who are open to working together and willing to commit time and energy. Involve them early

 in the recruitment and selection process – and all the way through.

http://vimeo.com/m/57409105

'THRESHOLDS HAD MANY UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES. FOR EXAMPLE, THREE POETS WERE INSPIRED TO WRITE COLLECTIONS'

3.5 Breathing new life into collections:

Thresholds at the Cambridge University Museums, curated by Carol Ann Duffy

Thresholds was a residency matching 10 leading poets with 10 of Cambridge University's museums and collections in 2013, curated by Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy and supported by Arts Council England.

Poets spent two weeks with their host museum, meeting staff and researchers and exploring the collections. Each wrote at least one poem based on objects in the collections, such as Gillian Clarke's poem, *Archaeopteryx*, about the world's oldest bird in the Museum of Zoology, and Don Paterson's poem A Pocket Horizon, based on an object in the Whipple Museum of the History of Science. The poets led events and worked with children and young people. 860 people attended 12 readings and events, some producing and reading their own work. Poets and audiences captured their experiences in a blog on the project website, www.thresholds.org.uk, where all the commissioned poems are published.

Remember: poems are not descriptions of things.

Don't look for 'something to write about'. Let it look for you. Poets don't really write 'about' things – they write with them.

When your object finds you, make a meticulous description of it, so you can remember it. Take a picture on your phone if you can. Make notes on its history, use, inventor – you never know which of these details will spark a great poem.

As we say, 'subject matter is pretext'. That means that despite the fact you *think* you're writing about Newton's prism – it'll often turn out to be an excuse to write about something else. Chances are your object will really be a symbol or a metaphor of some feeling, event, situation, idea, person, buried memory – that will surprise you.

– Matthew Hollis (advice to young poets visiting the Whipple, 2013)

A key aim of the project was to engage hard-toreach individuals and form new connections with people in areas of low cultural engagement. 397 young people took part in workshops run by the poets, including pupils from nearby Manor School; Soham Village College, and Red Balloon in Cambridge – a centre working with vulnerable and bullied youngsters.

For the museums, Helen Taylor, project manager of In Conversation described how the poetin-residence 'asked them to look at the world through the lens of poetry and reading, as well as through their collections and research'. For the poets, the museums provided rich resources. Imtiaz Dharker, resident at Cambridge University Library, found that ...Thresholds was another education. I grew up thinking science was a separate subject from art. What I learned from all my great guides at the library has found its way into my poetry, not just in the project but in many more of the poems I am working on.

Sean Borodale, in the Cast Gallery in the Museum of Classical Archaeology, said he was:

> ...bewildered by the sheer possibility of the room. There is something anarchic about so many postures of the human imagination in one physical space. But each one of the figures is utterly quiet. What I realised, quite steadily over the course of days is, it is light which animates and renders them cinematic; it is a theatre for light.

Thresholds had many unexpected outcomes. For example, three poets were inspired to write collections in addition to their one poem, and these will be published. There were also additional events, including a live event of Jo Shapcott's poetic drama for radio, 'Erebus', described by an audience member as 'a unique mass listening event'; and an environmental writing day at The Polar Museum.

The project team were:

...particularly hearten[ed] to see the way in which the exploratory and creative potential of poetry generated signs of a feeling of 'ownership' of the project among some audiences and young people. Regular visits by a number of pupils... indicate that independent visits to museums have become part of their social routine... and they have begun to attend other events. Members of the audience have continued the conversation and interest beyond the end of the project... Audience members valued being invited into the act of creating, and learning with the poet about museum collections and making connections, finding it rewarding, engaging and demystifying.

3.6 Artists and communities as place-makers:

Transform, Snibston

Transform was a three-year arts programme at Snibston Discovery Museum in 2010–13, supported by Arts Council England and Leicestershire County Council. Snibston's overarching objective was to deliver a series of artistic commissions contributing to the changing face of the museum and engaging existing and new audiences. Crucially, it had a clear artistic vision, developed with multidisciplinary stakeholders, which was central to Snibston's overall masterplan.

Through the commissions, Snibston's site and collections were the creative inspiration for artists to produce new work. In turn, they contributed to the artistic vision for the site and tested approaches for commissioning, programmes, events and curatorial ideas. The programme was led by Carolyn Abel, then Principal Curator, and Maurice Maguire, lead artist, and supported by a steering group with local authority staff and external stakeholders. Transform coincided with significant reductions in local authority services and consequent organisational change, necessitating changes to the planned outputs. Despite this, the team produced a programme with wide-ranging impact, exceeding original targets and generating unexpected positive outcomes. It also provided activity and engagement on the site while other plans were delayed.

Leadership was key to the programme's success. Artists and other stakeholders testified to this:

Carolyn has a clear, strategic and passionate commitment to the value that arts projects can play in interpreting and bringing new meaning to heritage collections. Her lead on the project played a key role in focusing the energy and commitment of the Snibston staff and larger community.

Transform enabled staff and artists to trial and test new approaches for commissioning and creating innovative, high quality works, interpretation and programming. Abel said: 'We need to have the freedom to be able to take risks – we never know what the outcomes will be from the artistic commissions and how it will work or be received... We have had to hold our nerve and push through the "treacle".'



In Transform's first phase, the project team brought artists and commissions together, working towards an event in the historic theatre. For the second phase, the whole site became an event space, animating the historic buildings, enhancing audiences' experience and building skills for future events. Audiences and participants explored the site and collections, discovering new connections, perspectives and stories. They expressed enjoyment, greater appreciation of the heritage, and fresh insights, one participant said: 'I am sure I am not the only one whose life was "transformed" yesterday.'

The team used social media to build a unique audience and to grow it over time with a substantial new mailing list, a dedicated newsletter and on-going Twitter feeds.

Artists gained creative inspiration and experience which demonstrated the value of 'place', connected narratives, collections and displays in developing their practice. They had resources, time and room to research and develop strong and memorable ideas, which they translated into events or individual works. They emphasised the enthusiasm and skills of the staff team and others: 'I had the sense of the whole Snibston staff being on the side of the project'. The programme also included CPD for developing and established artists. Transform linked the site, collections and stories with the wider 'landscape', making physical, literary and historic connections. Importantly for Abel:

[Transform] showed that this place is culturally inspired and inspiring for audiences and artists alike. The collections, building and place are central – providing inspiration for artists, and resonance and connection for communities. Transform is changing the face of Snibston and, in doing so, contributing to a new sense of placemaking in this district.

The service has strengthened its focus on cultural events, raised their quality and ambition, increased their relevance to the site and collections, and to neighbours (Snibston is building stronger physical and cultural connections with Coalville town centre). Staff and others are encouraged to offer new ideas and ways of working in programmes and events. Artists are involved in developing interpretation for new galleries and in landscaping. This approach is feeding through into wider service developments.

www.behance.net/transformsnibston

'TRANSFORM ENABLED STAFF AND ARTISTS TO TRIAL AND TEST NEW APPROACHES FOR COMMISSIONING AND CREATING INNOVATIVE, HIGH QUALITY WORKS' Volunteer at the Foundling Museum examines a cup inscribed with a good deed in Clare Twomey's Exchange exhibition

RETURN TO CONTENTS

3.7 Bringing familiar stories to light:

Exchange: 1,000 Good Deeds at the Foundling Museum, by Claire Twomey

When Caro Howell became director of the Foundling Museum in 2011, she asked her colleagues the question: 'What is the Foundling Museum?' Confusingly but not unusually in a museum, each member of staff had a different answer.

She is clear that artists are at the heart of the museum – the original vision of Thomas Coram, Hogarth and Handel is enshrined within its purpose as a place 'where artists and children have inspired each other since 1740'. In enabling today's artists, musicians and writers to work alongside vulnerable young people, the Foundling casts new light on their stories and evokes some very personal and moving responses.

In 2013, Clare Twomey's installation, Exchange, made a powerful connection with the original acts of philanthropy on which the Foundling Hospital was established in the eighteenth century. The museum originally approached Twomey because her work frequently engages with history and involves the public. The work consisted of 1,550 white cups and saucers each inscribed with a good 'deed' – suggested by members of the public, supporters, staff and trustees. Each day 10 visitors, selected randomly, were invited to take part in 'an exchange' which took place at a set time. Howell described the work as a conceptual piece the value of which lay in its ability to effect change. The overall message was 'be generous'.

The deeds inscribed on the cups and saucers were many and various – according to Howell they generated 'an effervescent mixture of excitement and dread' among the 10 people who each day made their selection from the rows of white cups. 'Plant some spring bulbs in a neglected corner of your neighbourhood' and 'Clean your room without being asked' were two of the deeds. One said 'Foster a child': the ultimate expression of the Coram mission. In committing to do the deed, the selectors were able to keep the cup leaving the saucers on the table. The exhibition provides another layer of content and fresh insights for the visitor. Twomey said: 'It depends on how the visitor reacts. The visitor is influenced by what they have experienced in other parts of the museum. I don't know what that will be...' Twomey is determined that the cups and saucers will never be reunited.

Along with visitor responses, the positive impact on staff and trustees, some of whom had been sceptical about contemporary art, affirmed the exhibition's success. This simple and highly complex piece caused people to pause, and take stock of what it must have been like for the many thousands of women who decided to give their children up to the Foundling Hospital's care in exchange for a better life for their son or daughter. For Howell the piece was a public declaration of the museum's commitment to put artists at the core of what they do, validated by support from the Arts Council's Grants for the arts fund. Other support both financial and in kind followed, including a web resource designed to continue the 'good deed exchange' online.

For museums embarking on working with artists, Howell advises:

- know why you are doing this work, it will succeed only if it connects strongly with your vision and ethos
- get your trustees and staff on board. One of the Foundling's trustees at the time was Jeremy Deller and as an artist/practitioner he was a strong advocate
- choose your artist carefully work with someone who wishes to collaborate and is open but who has a strong and compelling idea that makes a direct connection with your own vision. Ask others about their experience of working with artists and for their suggestions
- be clear about shared goals, limitations and parameters at the outset.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=srYXo9e7IOM



3.8 Making cultural connections with communities:

Truck Art at Luton Culture as part of the Cultural Olympiad Material Response initiative

In 2010, as a partner in the Cultural Olympiad Material Response programme funded by MLA, Luton Culture worked with members of their newly established youth forum, and with artists, to transform a Bedford truck in traditional Pakistani folk art style, and celebrate the strong cultural links between Luton and Pakistan. Through this project, Luton Culture was able to build an international relationship with Pakistan and extend their relationship with artist communities locally, whilst informing and taking forward their priority to involve young people in creating work.

They worked with a range of different artists on Material Response. A Fine Line, creative producers and consultants, initially connected them to artist groups in Asia and made a link with the British Museum contemporary collecting programme in Lahore. Luton Culture found it more challenging to find a local truck artist but following online research they made contact with an agent and broker, Anjum Rana, a truck artist in her own right, who had also supported the development of the truck art communities of Lahore and Karachi. She helped to introduce the people in Luton to these communities. This was followed by an advance research visit to Pakistan. Karen Perkins, Director of Museums and Arts, stressed the importance of building face to face relationships: 'cold calling wouldn't work across the world. We needed to understand and anticipate the challenges of taking six young people to Pakistan and to know that this was doable. It helped us to provide reassurance for their families'. At the same time, using their networks, Luton Culture started to work with Rory Coxhill, an artist who helped them to draw a parallel between decorated trucks in Pakistan, and the Gypsy folk art tradition of Vardo (the painting of Gypsy caravans).

Not only has this programme created an impressive truck for Luton's transport collections and helped to build mutual trust with Luton's Pakistani community, it has led to the reinterpretation of a gallery with the specific aim of attracting new audiences. Luton Culture has subsequently staged two further exhibitions related to truck art and worked as partners on two Heritage Lottery Fund Young Roots projects, Kashmir Voices and Bisu Afrika. Most significantly, they have formed a new partnership with the Muslim community at the Discover Islam Centre via the Hajj exhibition at Stockwood.

The response within Luton Culture was resoundingly positive – people were excited by the project and by the profile that this gave the Trust. It created enormous potential for further working and built confidence. They believe that this subsequently helped them to secure two years of Arts Council England Renaissance Strategic Support funding – to explore co-production as part of a sustainable future for the museum.

Working with artists has become a core offer in the Luton arts and museums team. Perkins observed: This has opened our eyes to the potential benefits of working across the cultural sector and helped us to support staff during the recent merger of the museum and arts services.

She offers the following tips:

- make good use of all your community and professional contacts
- a research and development trip is a very good investment in partnership development
- clearly brief your artists so they understand what you want to achieve, but be open to creative ideas and stay flexible
- be prepared to let go of the control whether to an artist or young people's group It can be scary but is also very invigorating.

Pakistani folk art tradition Truck Art.

Arts Council England The Hive 49 Lever Street Manchester M1 1FN

Email: enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk Phone: 0845 300 6200 Textphone: 020 7973 6564 artscouncil.org.uk @ace_national Facebook.com/artscouncilofengland

Charity registration no 1036733



You can get this publication in Braille, in large print, and on audio CD.

To download this publication, or for the full list of Arts Council England publications, see artscouncil.org.uk

ISBN: 978-0-7287-1556-1

© Arts Council England, April 2015

We are committed to being open and accessible. We welcome all comments on our work. Please send these to: National Director, Advocacy & Communications, at Arts Council England, address above.