

**GEM**

CELEBRATING  
75 YEARS

Art Fund\_

# Case Studies

**Reimagining Engagement**

Vol.32 2024





# Editorial

**Welcome to the 32nd edition of the GEM Case Studies. The theme of this issue – Reimagining Engagement – is inspired by Art Fund’s Reimagine programme, designed to reflect current issues, inspire creativity, increase diversity and stability in the sector.**

This edition features a selection of brilliant case studies from cultural organisations that implemented impactful and creative learning programmes to create access for communities, diversify audiences, and provide engaging learning opportunities for all.

The case study by **Chiswick House & Gardens Trust** draws out stories connected to Black history and shows how they deepened engagement with local audiences, ensuring that these stories were visible to all those who visit the site. **Judges’ Lodgings** have run a project involving the museum, community group, and two universities to raise awareness of Lancaster’s slave trading history. **National Museums Liverpool** developed a great initiative with the aim for the sector to review, interrogate, and develop the ways that museums handle the legacies of slavery within their organisations.

**Golden Thread Gallery** in Belfast sought to create inclusive and welcoming learning environments for marginalised communities, including refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants. **Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art** launched a unique initiative inviting to collaborate 560 artists from underrepresented backgrounds. **Wolverhampton Arts and Culture, Bold Tendencies,** and **UNDEREXPOSED ARTS** reimagined their approach to audience engagement to increase accessibility, support local communities, and expand the demographics of their audiences.

**The Auckland Project, Turner Contemporary, and Culture Heritage and Arts Assembly Argyll & Isles (CHARTS)** came up with meaningful projects focused on developing young audiences and supporting young people through creative learning, co-creation, and career events.

**Royal Albert Memorial & Art Gallery** addressed the issue of mental health through a unique listening project allowing visitors to combine a cultural visit with improving overall wellbeing. **Holburne Museum** and **Bath Spa University** used digital technologies to reimagine their online collection and broaden their learning offer. The use of digital technology has enabled **The Vindolanda Trust** to develop a new educational resource for engaging the new generation of archaeologists through video games.

**The Royal Shakespeare Company** reimagined their permanent collection in close partnership with local communities. **Worcester City Art Gallery, Touchstone Rochdale,** and **Open Eye Gallery** worked closely with local communities to increase the sense of ownership over the cultural spaces and enable high-quality learning for those who can’t visit the sites.

This edition of the **GEM Case Studies** is supported by Art Fund, and we are extremely excited to release this partnership issue full of creative examples, insightful lessons learned, and new ideas to inspire the sector.

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**Katya Provornaya**

Case Studies Editor

GEM Communications &  
Participation Manager



# Introduction

**Art Fund's Reimagine programme supports organisations to develop or refresh their work in response to their current situation. The grants are designed to inspire creativity and increase stability in the sector.**

In 2020, we set up the Respond and Reimagine programme to provide emergency funding during the Covid-19 pandemic. There was an exceptional reaction to the initiative and by the end of the year, we had awarded 67 grants and allocated £2.25 million to the sector. Due to this response, and the evident continuing need, we reconfigured the programme, offering Reimagine grants to support organisations as they tackled the next phase of recovery. Since the initial round, millions of pounds have been awarded to museums, galleries and historic places across the UK, supporting a huge variety of projects.

In 2022 we refined the programme, focusing on a round of project grants of £10,000 to £50,000 per year. Our key aim with this round was to help organisations reimagine their approach to engagement. This area of focus was designed to help museums re-engage audiences lost during the pandemic, reach new people and deepen relationships between museums and their visitors.

We saw this happen in a variety of projects related to audiences, communities, collections, programming and professional development. The funding provided vital support for the

sector, enabling museums and galleries to reimagine engagement with audiences by improving access, developing expertise and increasing digital capacity.

In our 2022 survey of museum directors, respondents put schools, young people and families among their top priorities in rebuilding audiences post-pandemic. So, it's not surprising that so many Reimagine projects have a strong focus on learning programmes to help connect with these priority audiences. This edition of the GEM Case Studies shows just a few examples of how Reimagine funding can support learning in museums.

We also knew from our recent report, 'It's about handing over power', produced in partnership with Museum X and Culture&, that there remain huge barriers to increasing ethnic diversity in the museum and gallery workforce. This is a priority issue for us at Art Fund and we aim to support meaningful and sustained change in the UK's institutions.

So, the 2023 round of Reimagine invited organisations to reimagine their support for the workforce, by which we meant staff, volunteers and professional networks. We offered support for a range of activities that enabled organisations





to develop, diversify and/or sustain the sector in the face of the most pressing challenges.

As the cultural landscape is constantly changing, the Reimagine programme will continue to support organisations to develop or refresh their work in response to their current situation and support the sector where most needed.

With more funding available in 2024, we hope that many more museums, galleries and historic places across the UK can engage and build a legacy with their local communities through projects like these.

*Art Fund's Reimagine grants programme is made possible thanks to funding from The Headley Trust, The Kirby Laing Foundation and Art Fund's generous members and donors.*

**Katie Lloyd**  
Programme Manager, Art Fund

**Art Fund\_**

**“ As the cultural landscape is constantly changing, the Reimagine programme will continue to support organisations to develop or refresh their work in response to their current situation and support the sector where most needed.**

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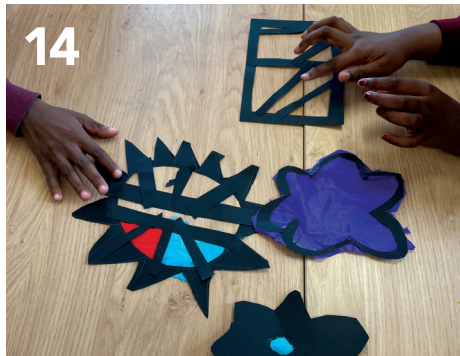
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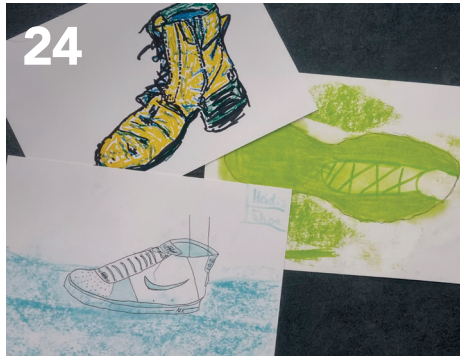




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# Black Chiswick through History: Co-creating Connections in Heritage Spaces

## Summary

Launched in 2021, Black Chiswick through History (BCtH) is an ongoing community research project which aims to look more deeply at our collections and history. The project draws out stories connected to Black history and people of colour and makes these histories visible to all those who visit CHGT. Helping to redefine how we understand our local history through a diversity of voices and perspectives.

In 2023, with funding from the Art Fund, English Heritage and The Linbury Trust, we focused on '300 years of built and natural design'. The topic explores how the global exchange of art, culture, and ideas has shaped the house and gardens we see today.

## Background

The project brings together local youth and community groups to work alongside curators, historians and artists to explore, question and creatively respond to the history at CHGT.

These co-developed creative responses are then displayed in the House. We intended to make these shared histories visible to all those who visit CHGT and enrich our interpretation.



“Heritage spaces need be relevant to local audiences, especially members of the community who are under-represented as visitors and whose stories are less visible within our collections.”

## Challenge

Heritage spaces need be relevant to local audiences, especially members of the community who are under-represented as visitors and whose stories are less visible within our collections. We need to tell a more layered history of CHGT, embedded locally and connected globally.

## Approach

Research into the collections and history was shared with local youth and community groups. Together with artists, they explored and questioned this research by pulling out elements they identified with and had meaning to them. In order to co-create several creative responses, for display throughout the house.

## Obstacles and issues

- Co-created project involves a process of shared decision-making. This collaborative approach meant the speed of the project moved at the pace of the community partners, and schedules/deadlines needed to remain flexible.
- Co-developing creative outputs for display increased the work, time and commitment for all involved, bringing challenges, such as ensuring work is high quality, fits the heritage spaces conditions, interpretation and language is sensitive and inclusive, budgets cover tech, marketing and celebrations.

Displaying outputs is key to the project. It communicates to the community that these diverse histories are important to share, and they and their voices belong in these spaces.

“Connecting the histories of Chiswick House to my heritage makes me feel more welcome and included in the space.” Young participant

### Actual outcomes

The original aims met, including:

- An increased sense of belonging for those who participated in the projects.
- Increased visiting from diverse audiences, better reflecting the cultural diversity of the area.
- Strengthened partnerships with local artists and creatives.

### Actual outputs

A series of co-creative artworks were displayed in the House, exploring how ‘design’ within the house and gardens is inspired by the exchange of ideas, art and culture across the globe. These included:

- a digital interactive exploring the history of silk, a material used throughout the House;
- artworks highlighting elements of North Africa and Arabic design, present in the architecture and decoration of the house;
- a series of poems inspired by the presence of Persian and Arabic floral designs in the House.

These creative responses made CHGT feel relevant and meaningful to our diverse local audiences, celebrating their personal connections to this place, and showing how we are connected throughout history.

“It is important to make links between the past and present. It’s important for the people of the area to see themselves reflected in their environment, especially in a House that may not be thought of as having such strong links to so many other cultures and places in the world.” Project artist



Andre Patten



Andre Patten

### Lessons learned

- Co-developed and co-created projects always need more time than anticipated. Remain as flexible as possible with deadlines to allow shared-decision making to take place.
- Make time for training/briefing museum staff, especially front of house/visitor experience teams to support visitor engagement with outputs.
- Working with diverse local communities to make these heritage spaces more relevant will help to build new audiences and stronger partnerships.

“I really enjoyed the different ways information was imparted, which kept things engaging. I particularly liked the audio guide and the art installations. Heritage is ever being re-interpreted!” Visitor

### Next steps

The co-developed creative outputs will continue to form a key part of our interpretation throughout the house, enriching the visitor experience and making visible both our community engagement and global history.

### Find out more

#### More information about the work

[chiswickhouseandgardens.org.uk/black-chiswick-through-history-project](http://chiswickhouseandgardens.org.uk/black-chiswick-through-history-project)

#### If you have any questions about the project, please email:

[community@chgt.org.uk](mailto:community@chgt.org.uk)

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**Lynda Jackson**

Judges' Lodgings Museum, run by Lancashire County Council,  
Lancaster Black History Group, Institute for Black Atlantic Research at University  
of Central Lancashire, Lancaster University & commissioned artist Lela Harris

Schools,  
Community

# Facing the Past – Exploring Black History with Schools

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**Summary**

Partnership project involving the museum, community group and two universities to raise awareness of Lancaster's slave trading history:

- Commission new portraits of historic Black individuals;
- Run school workshops;
- Produce a children's exhibition.

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**Background**

Judges Lodgings is Lancaster's oldest town house and has the world's largest collection of Gillows furniture. The city was the fourth largest slave trading port in the country in the 18th century. Museum's collections relate to local slaving families or contain furniture made with mahogany cut by enslaved Africans. Lancaster Black History Group was founded in 2020 to challenge racism through education.

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**Challenge**

There was little in the museum to acknowledge the provenance of the collection relating to slavery. Gillows are a celebrated cabinet-making firm which invested in a slave ship in the 1750s and whose customers were often involved in the slave and West Indies trades. The fine art collection features local merchant slaving or West Indies families such as the Rawlinsons.

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**Approach**

The plan was to highlight Black presence in Lancaster through commissioning new portraits of historic individuals and working with local schools.

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**Intended outcomes**

(The aim/s of the project)

- Highlight slavery connections within the museum collection;
- Challenge local attitudes to slavery and the slave trade;
- Attract new audiences to the museum.

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**Intended outputs**

- Commission four new portraits of enslaved Africans living in Lancaster in the 18th century, based on the historic record.
- School art and history workshops with Primary School teacher/ Co-Founder of Lancaster Black History Group Geraldine Onek and an artist for two local primary schools at the museum.
- Produce a display of children's artwork from the workshops at the museum.

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**Obstacles and issues**

The topic is a challenging one and the Museum team should have reviewed existing collections on display prior to starting the project to consider how slavery, racism and other difficult histories were already interpreted.

There were four partner organisations including one community group plus two funders, one artist and three schools so meetings were often outside 9–5. Pressure on small part-time museum team delivering the project alongside the day job and another major gallery refurb.

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**Actual outcomes**

- The project has influenced museum's other public programming;
- Black history revealed in new permanent gallery too;
- Black portraits are integrated into the period room displays and visitors talk about individuals rather than statistics;





- Increase in number of Black visitors at the museum;
- 62% Increase in visitor figures in 2023–24;
- Local children have been encouraged to think about the wealth behind Lancaster’s buildings, monuments and street names;
- Staff experienced at commissioning artist;
- Good relationships with the artist, community group, schools and other academic partners.

### Actual outputs

Artist Lela Harris and Primary School teacher/Co-Founder of Lancaster Black History Group Geraldine Onek delivered art and history workshops for three (not two) local primary schools at the museum.

- Children’s exhibition in three rooms of the museum showing portraits of Afamefuna – African teenager escaped slavery in Lancashire in 1700s.

- Lela Harris produced six (not four) portraits of enslaved Africans and an extra exhibition of sketches. New portraits are on display in the period rooms alongside those who benefitted from slavery. Four have been accessioned and it is hoped the other two will come into the collection in the future.
- Events programme including secondary school workshops with the artist, symposium, Lit Fest, tours, evening events, catalogue launch and major digital light installation for Light Up Lancaster festival.
- Training for all staff and volunteers about slave trade and project by working with other museums within the city.

### Lessons learned

Take the risk! Lela Harris was a relatively new artist, but she really understood the brief. Her artwork has transformed the museum and emotionally moved visitors.

This project has developed a legacy that could not have been imagined at the start. Test out new ideas and work with new partner organisations to try something different.

Be prepared for the time things take and remember if you’re working with a community group that they are giving their time for free. We ensured we paid for all workshop delivery but had to use contingency to pay for extra workshops.

Ensure you already have a good contact with schools. Primary school teacher Geraldine Onek’s connections were key to getting the schools involved.

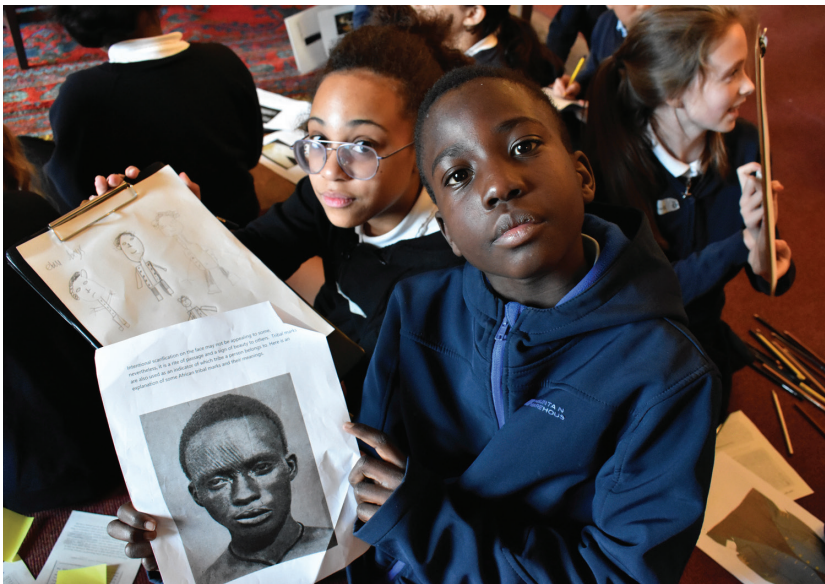
We had brilliant partners who worked hard to make the project happen, but there was no partnership agreement, which is something to consider in the future.

### Next steps

We would like to develop a permanent learning offer about the slave trade, but this is a capacity and resources challenge.

The Museum team are committed to ensuring colonial trade stories and hidden histories are told in future wherever relevant.

**“ This project has developed a legacy that could not have been imagined at the start. Test out new ideas and work with new partner organisations to try something different.**



### Find out more

**Funded by Art Fund and Association of Independent Museums.**

#### Video by AIM

[aim-museums.co.uk/case-studies/new-stories-new-audiences-lancaster-judges-lodgings](https://aim-museums.co.uk/case-studies/new-stories-new-audiences-lancaster-judges-lodgings)

[Websitelancashire.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/museums/judges-lodgings](https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/museums/judges-lodgings)

**Lynda Jackson, Museum Manager**  
[lynda.jackson@lancashire.gov.uk](mailto:lynda.jackson@lancashire.gov.uk)

**Hope Leslie**

National Museums Liverpool in partnership with Museum of London, Wilberforce House (Hull Museums and Galleries), Bristol Museums, Glasgow Life and Black Cultural Archives.

Decolonisation

# Transatlantic Slavery and Legacies in Museum Forum



## Approach

Our approach was to build a network that facilitates these conversations and fosters a continuing dialogue. To create a space to share best practice and facilitate a discourse encapsulated by an ethos that allows us to sit in discomfort and continue learning.

## Intended outcomes

Our overarching aims were to be recognised (nationally and internationally) as a central point for support and exchange on approaches to inclusive narratives, participation and co-production relating to transatlantic slavery and its legacies. To build an inclusive, diverse, and collaborative network that is constantly developing its own discourse and practice.

## Intended outputs

We aimed to develop through 3 workshops per annum with following reports and one annual online sharing event. We wanted to create a continual body of digital resources as well as develop a programme of support and exchange.

## Obstacles and issues

We encountered external obstacles of planning in person events during Covid, this put a significant pause on the momentum of the forum's programming. Whilst online workshops continued to be a possibility, the value of the in-person workshop is the best way to fulfil our

## Summary

Launched in 2021, the Transatlantic Slavery and legacies in Museums forum is a professional network led by National Museums Liverpool in partnership with Museum of London, Black Cultural Archives, Bristol Culture, Hull Museums and Glasgow Museums. The forum was established as a pressing initiative, with the aim for the sector to review, interrogate and develop the ways that museums handle the legacies of slavery within their organisations. This project sits within a wider demand of the sector to interrogate and take active steps in the dismantling of institutional racism.

## Background

The forum was established as a pressing initiative, with the aim for the sector to review, interrogate and develop the ways that museums handle the legacies of slavery within their organisations.

## Challenge

To execute this, we sought to address the need for support for colleagues on framing practices and the need for a safe space to discuss difficult issues, have uncomfortable conversations, to listen and learn from each other.





“ This project sits within a wider demand of the sector to interrogate and take active steps in the dismantling of institutional racism.



essential aim of fostering a safe space for complex and nuanced discussion.

### Actual outcomes

Once programming was able to restart, we have been able to produce a series of workshops and consecutive reports with varying thematic focuses varying from 'Approaching Sensitive Engagement in Schools' to 'Creating a Safe Space in Co-production'. We found that there was interest from across the UK from heritage organisations, individual freelancers and museums of all sizes. We had over 150 subscribers to our mailing list, and now have over 300 subscribers.

### Actual outputs

A challenge we faced, and continue to face, was the task of keeping a dialogue animated following the workshops and the production of reports. As a forum we never want to report that a conversation is concluded or a question has been answered, but the issue follows of how we keep an open dialogue, particularly through sharing online resources. One way we are trying to

keep our dialogues open is through sharing a quarterly newsletter to our mailing list to keep the network connected and highlight activity across the forum. We are also using our annual online sharing event to reflect on our yearly activity and look to further areas of exploration.

### Lessons learned

Our most imperative learning point from the project is the importance of including community voices within our conversations. To ensure our dialogue is continuous and ever evolving, we must ensure that museum dialogues around co-production and community work are highly interrogated for equity and power sharing. Our forum's aim of sharing best practice must always include community partnership.

Through developing the forum, we have learnt that the need for a network is imperative to ensure that individual projects are empowered by one another and productively contribute to a wider mission of decolonising the sector.

### Next steps

We are continuing to develop the forum by continuing our programme of workshops across different locations in the UK. We are working on growing our digital resources for members. We are slowly developing our international relationships with the hopes to expand our dialogue on the legacies of transatlantic slavery to an international context. We are also aiming to develop a programme of knowledge exchange which will give people the opportunity to gain valuable insights and gain experience that may support their own project goals.

### Find out more

[liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/tslforum#section--event-resources](https://liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/tslforum#section--event-resources)

**For further information on the forum, you can visit our website, where you can enquire into signing up to our mailing list and check out our reports and online resources.**



# Integrating New Communities to Belfast: Working with Educators, Parents and Children at Fane Street Primary School

## Summary

Our Art Fund Reimagine Grant supports us to improve engagement with audiences in marginalised communities. Through free art workshops led by an artist facilitator, we work to create connection, build confidence and enhance wellbeing among communities in need, many of whom are refugees, migrants and new arrivals to Northern Ireland.

## Background

One key partner is Fane Street Primary School in Belfast. Over 86% of its pupils are from outside Northern Ireland. The school runs excellent projects to support children and their families to feel welcomed to Belfast, and to address the marginalisation that many experience here. Our values and goals aligned and, working closely with the school's community facilitator, this is the second year we've delivered art sessions both for children and their parents in the school.

## Challenge

Marginalised communities are those who could potentially benefit most from engaging with arts, but there are challenges related to creating access for these audiences. Minority communities face particular challenges integrating into Northern Ireland's traditionally insular, white, sectarian population.

## Approach

Working collaboratively over months with the school, their community facilitator, teachers, children and parents. Beginning with simple creative activities, we took time to build the trust and relationships to get to know this community's needs and wants. Later sessions were co-created, making art pieces that have a special meaning (tealight holders), use in the home (pot stands) or celebrate a holiday.

## Intended outcomes

- Reach marginalised communities with free, accessible art activities ;
- Offer resources and space for creativity and enjoyment;
- Enhance confidence and well-being through creative expression and connection;
- Build long-term, lasting relationships.

## Intended outputs

- Bi-weekly classroom art sessions for P4 children (7–8);
- Alternate bi-weekly art sessions for parents;
- Building language skills, with parents assisting each other to translate from English to Arabic, Farsi, French;
- Providing fun creative social space for families, including refugee/asylum-seeking parents living in temporary hotel accommodation.

## Obstacles and issues

- Teachers and staff at Fane St already under time/workload pressure; some initial reluctance from them as concerned it would add to this.
- Language barriers and initial lack of confidence/conversation in parent sessions;
- Time and error devising art activities at right level of accessibility/ demonstrated without needing much explanation;



- Overcoming our own need for outputs/outcomes to match those we planned or expected e.g., sometimes for the parents, the art activity itself is not the point; instead, a relaxed social space with an undemanding/fun activity creates room for them to share stories of difficult circumstances, worries and even trauma. It's hugely important but cannot be 'planned for'.

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### Actual outcomes

- Strong collaborative working relationship built with school, teachers, and community facilitator;
- Parents and children participated in free, accessible creative activities;
- New co-creative relationships – friendships! – built between GTG and families who participate;
- Many Fane St families now regularly attend our other free workshops in other locations in Belfast.

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### Actual outputs

- 14 free art workshops per school year (7 children, 7 parent): 21 delivered in total so far.
- Approximately 25 children/ 8 parents attend each workshop.
- Feedback and consistent participation of core parents group demonstrate active enjoyment creative expression and connection.
- GTG invited back for 2024–25 school year to continue workshops.
- GTG has also connected with Education Authority through Fane St community facilitator; as a result, we're now gaining access to offer family workshops in hotel accommodation for refugee/ asylum-seekers for the first time.

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### Lessons learned

- Working with schools requires understanding of the demands staff and teachers face; flexibility and patience are important.
- Working collaboratively with groups and individuals over a sustained period of time allows space to really listen to them and be open to their ideas – it's a slow process, and that's ok.



**“ We need to do more to learn about non-Western cultural contexts to enrich our creative offers and ideas.**

- Creating a space that minority communities feel ownership of and responding to their specific needs to be an open, collaborative process.
- Learning is always a two-way street!
- Language barriers also work two-ways.
- We need to do more to learn about non-Western cultural contexts to enrich our creative offers and ideas.

art materials, civic & community space, translated activities.

- September 2024: Third year of Fane St collaboration will commence.

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### Next steps

- Spring/Summer 2024: 350 new edition of 'Welcome to Belfast' art packs will be distributed including Fane St families.
- April 2024: New partnership with Education Authority enabling us to provide workshops to families in their emergency hotel accommodation .
- August 2024: Community hub in new gallery will offer more free activities, play area, free library,

### Find out more

**Contact: Liz Byrne, GTG Development Manager**  
development@goldenthreadgallery.co.uk

**Further Reading**  
belfastlive.co.uk/news/belfast-news/belfast-school-welcoming-children-over-17807020

lawcentreni.org/migration-justice-project

executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/news/attitudes-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-northern-ireland-2022



# Liverpool Biennial: Towards a Biennial for Everybody

## Summary

We proposed to reimagine care and support for d/Deaf, Disabled and Neurodivergent artists and communities at the 12th edition (10 June–17 September 2023).

Liverpool Biennial 2023 was curated by Khanyisile Mbongwa, whose approach to research and programming applied conceptual and practical considerations of care. The edition presented our largest contingent of d/Deaf, Disabled and Neurodivergent artists, and so funds allowed us to deliver new, additional provisions to present them, alongside expanding the boundaries of 'access' within a biennial.

## Background

Liverpool Biennial delivers the UK's leading contemporary visual art biennial. We have worked with over 560 artists who have come from underserved genders, different sexual identities, and the Global Majority, however Disabled artists have been vastly underrepresented.

## Challenge

The high-intensity of Biennials structurally embeds exclusionary practices that traditionally rely on neuro-typical engagement and physical and mental tolerance of intense and fast-paced working models, which has left Disabled artists underrepresented in our programme. Additionally, Biennials are implicated with disused and hidden, inaccessible exhibition spaces.

## Approach

We sought to significantly increase expertise through hiring a dedicated Access role, who could support implementation of new access provisions and liaison and hands-on support with artists.

## Intended outcomes

To reimagine care for d/Deaf, Disabled and Neurodivergent artists within a biennial; to unpack what 'care' looks like in practice; to increase organisational knowledge; and to grow engagement with d/Deaf, Disabled and Neurodivergent artists and audiences long term.

## Intended outputs

- Employ an Access Liaison Officer;
- Provide additional access support for d/Deaf, Disabled and Neurodivergent artists and audiences;
- Increased training;
- Sharing learning across the sector.

## Obstacles and issues

Much of our work was contingent on bringing on additional expertise in the Access Liaison Officer, however this proved difficult, we suspect, due to short-term nature of the contract and lack of clarity over job title terminology. Our appointed candidate was exceptional but started two months later than expected and requested a 0.8 FTE contract.

Delays in their appointment also meant we didn't have sufficient time to embed innovative creative responses to access within all commissions, which was an invitation to artists to respond to access beyond the baseline already offered. However, some artists combatted this through building it in during the exhibition period. For example, Shannon Alonzo was commissioned to produce a drawing on a gallery wall, which would later be erased in a performance. She created an audio element to describe the artwork, which could also outlive the erasure launched during the festival.

## Actual outcomes

Introduction of a dedicated Access role meant care for artists was reimaged through the hands-on support and expertise they could offer, as well as the vast increase of our offer for audiences, from a wayfinding guide, to BSL and Audio Description at events and performances.

## Actual outputs

- The creation of a new, dedicated Access Liaison Officer;
- Reconfigured the visibility of d/Deaf, Disabled and Neurodivergent artists within a largescale international programme;
- Supported organisational research into Disability practices;
- Developed a related research journal;





**“ We have worked with over 560 artists who have come from underserved genders, different sexual identities, and the Global Majority, however Disabled artists have been vastly underrepresented.**

- Offered additional access provisions for artist visits;
- Delivered Disability-focused staff training;
- Accommodated access for audiences at levels never previously offered e.g. introduction of access boxes which housed items to engage people with different cognitive processing, BSL and audio description at events, loud and relaxed hours, and peer support to partners on access.

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#### **Lessons learned**

While we are proud of our provisions for audiences, we appreciate that more time needs to be afforded to promote additional provisions and build trust with d/Deaf, Disabled and Neurodivergent audiences.

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#### **Next steps**

We remain committed to building on the provisions offered at Liverpool Biennial 2023 into 2025. We have a

formed a Critical Friends group which is made of individuals with the lived experience of Disability, who meet quarterly to inform and feedback on our processes and commitment to our processes and commitment to d/Deaf, Disabled and Neurodivergent practices and audiences. This is a paid opportunity and we are in the first year of delivering it.

#### **Find out more**

**Dr Samantha Lackey, Director,  
Liverpool Biennial**  
sam@biennial.com

# Making Space for Everyone

## Summary

The Making Space project was designed to reimagine an exhibition space in Wolverhampton Art Gallery as a welcoming and inclusive space for everyone in the city, to encourage collaboration and creativity surrounded by inspiring collections. We wanted people in Wolverhampton to take the lead in designing a space to meet their needs and creative aspirations that would be distinctive to the art gallery and its unique selling points.

## Background

The Making Space project was granted £40,000 by the Art Fund Reimagine Grant programme in 2022, with the planning and delivery

phase of the project taking place between January and November. The target audiences were outlined to be school groups (primary and secondary), families, young people and community organisations and individuals.

## Challenge

The room had previously been an exhibition space. The rationale behind the change of use was that the art gallery required additional learning and community space. We had also been shifting our way of working to be more focused on our audiences and their needs and attracting people who hadn't previously seen the art gallery as a place they would want to visit.

## Approach

Through creative community consultation, the project sought to reshape Wolverhampton Art Gallery's relationship with local people. A series of interactive workshops, programmes and events, drawing inspiration from the gallery's collections and led by a group of incredible community artists, were designed to capture the thoughts, feelings and desires of a range of different audiences.

## Intended outcomes

The project aimed not only to create a co-designed community learning space but find out how our audiences wanted to fill it and what they wanted for the future approach of the organisation.







“**The project has radically changed our audience demographics to be closely in line with those of the city.**”

#### **Intended outputs**

We hoped to deliver a co-designed space including the equipment, aesthetics and zoning required to function, a programme of ongoing events, an evaluation report outlining the organisational impact, sentiment analysis of the consultation feedback and creative analysis of the various room designs.

#### **Obstacles and issues**

One of the difficulties we faced was that many people in the city had negative perceptions of the art gallery, as a boring, imposing and elitist institution that means little or nothing to them and their lives. We wanted to challenge these perceptions and reach both a large number of people but to also engage deeply, which led to conflicting demands on time and a complicated delivery phase that sometimes overstretched our staff and resources.

It was also challenging managing the hugely disparate outputs of these various types of engagement. For example, some audiences shared specific thoughts and opinions on

what they wanted the space to be, such as the early years parents who asked for a safe space for their young children to play, and the ‘welcome lunch’ adult participants who asked for more opportunities to choose what goes on display. Others, such as the school children, shared their feelings and interests through journey mapping activities, but also created more abstract expressions of what the room should be through drawings and dioramas.

Drawing these creative and consultative outcomes together at the end of the face-to-face delivery stage of the project to create a cohesive and affordable plan for the room design was not easy.

The increased costs of installing a sink and storage area were also challenging. The costs of this tripled from the initial quote to when they were finally installed. This meant that some pieces of equipment had to be left out of the final design.

#### **Actual outcomes**

Since its opening, the space has been regularly scheduled with events and programmes designed to accommodate the various audiences engaged by the project, including family events, early years programming, adult learning, community partnership projects, a changing youth artwork display and an area with play furniture inspired by our Pop Art collection. The youth strand of the project focused on embedding climate education, which has become

a core focus of our programmes. There is also a community curated display of objects which changes every six months.

#### **Lessons learned**

A key learning point from the project was that there was not enough money budgeted for the digital equipment needed. We have only recently been able to install a Wi-Fi booster and projector into the space.

The range of programmes that were proposed during the consultation are beyond our budgets and staff capacity to deliver. We have therefore learnt to work collaboratively with community partners as much as possible to meet our aligned needs, many of whom we partnered with during the project.

The project was overly ambitious in scale, reaching over 1000 people with often conflicting priorities. Some people wanted to share their thoughts in one session. Others wanted a much deeper, ongoing relationship with the gallery. Whilst difficult to manage all at the same time, this has given us some useful models of engagement going forward and a better understanding of the realities of this type of community-focused delivery. It has significantly broadened our partnerships with community organisations around the city.

#### **Next steps**

The project, alongside our wider focus on community engagement and co-production, has radically changed our audience demographics to be closely in line with those of the city. We will continue to embed this approach into our work in the future.

**Find out more**

[www.wolverhamptonart.org.uk](http://www.wolverhamptonart.org.uk)







## “ Our Creative Partnership sought to maintain and deepen engagement with local young people over the summer period.

mental health needs, exhausted services, limited staff capacity and financial precarity.

We were forced to review our planning and infrastructure to increase time for communication with participants and families, and to centre travel expenses and high-quality, healthy food provision in our offer.

The former was vital in securing attendance, as well as understanding the context of participants to better support them. The latter was essential for making our work accessible to the widest audience possible and retaining attendance.

For instance, some of the participants required 1:1 engagement due to additional needs. In some cases the team was not fully equipped to support this, due to lack of knowledge or expertise. Once identified, we were able to bring in additional support, such as a trained clinical therapist.

Moreover, we found it difficult to sustain attainment with male participants. A potential reason is that our all-female delivery team, coupled with predominantly female participants, may have contributed to male participants feeling like outsiders to the group.

### Actual outcomes

- A strong collaborative relationship with The Nest;
- Knowledge of a free, safe and social space for local young people;

- Further engagement by young people and their families with Bold Tendencies and its programme;
- Friendships and relationships built between young people attending;
- The foundation of an evolving model for Creative Partnerships.

### Actual outputs

- 7 x sessions delivered to 13 participants;
- 1 x sharing session at the end of the project: a public exhibition at Bold Tendencies co-curated by the young people;
- High-quality evaluation sessions with participants;
- Final report completed by The Nest and Bold Tendencies.

### Lessons learned

- A Partnership Agreement should be prepared to establish clarity on individual and organisational roles, desired aims and outputs.
- To allow more time to design and promote the programme, in collaboration with local schools.
- Increased travel and high-quality, healthy food provision is essential to creating accessible opportunities.
- Established relationships with partner schools, therapists and community gatekeepers is essential to preparing the right support, knowledge and approach.

### Next steps

We are working towards a second Creative Partnership with The Nest in 2024. A Partnership Agreement will be made, covering the structure, aims, outputs and roles.

Planning and preparation will commence 3 months earlier than in 2023 to provide more time to develop and promote the programme. This will include gathering more detailed information on the context of participants.

Individual session length will be expanded, addressing key feedback from participants for more creative time. Travel expenses and fresh, healthy food provision will receive an uplift in our budget.

We are building relationships with local school therapists and connecting with other clinical providers in Southwark to further enrich the knowledge, expertise and opportunity of the project.

Together with the Nest we want to establish a meaningful legacy project for the Partnership that will provide opportunities to re-engage with participants beyond the 18-week programme.

And finally, we want to promote and advocate for the Partnership model throughout Southwark and beyond.

### Find out more

**How We Hold: Rehearsals for Art and Social Change Emergent Strategy – Adrienne Maree Brown Teaching Community – Bell Hooks**

**THE CIVIC ROLE OF ARTS ORGANISATIONS: from Inquiry to Movement. LEARNING REPORT by Calouste Gulbenkian**

**Misty Ingham, Senior Curator & Producer – Creative Learning at Bold Tendencies**  
misty@boldtendencies.com

**Connie Placito, Schools Engagement Team Manager at The Nest**  
connie.Placito@groundwork.org.uk

# Power of Portraiture

## Summary

Workshops curated and developed collaboratively between UA, facilitators, teachers and participants. The sessions were structured to be engaging and interactive, incorporating teaching methods, such as games, group activities and discussions. Workshops included acting, which were designed to introduce students to the screen acting process and encourage imaginative engagement with storytelling. Portraiture workshops, focused on skills and techniques using a variety of mediums, allowing participants to curate and create their own image. Participants are encouraged to share their own inspirational words of wisdom, which accompanies their final piece of work.

## Background

Children and young people, particularly those from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds. We targeted schools and communities in London boroughs which have high levels of child poverty, communities of lower socio-economic backgrounds and young people with lower educational attainment.

## Challenge

Reduced access to creative subjects for children and young people from marginalised backgrounds, and the barriers they often face in accessing art and cultural experiences that are reflective of their own identities and created by artists with whom they can relate.

**WHEN YOU FALL,  
GET UP  
AND TRY AGAIN.**

*Aaliyah*



## Approach

To provide young people with a platform to explore their creative talents and develop a range of skills. Empowering the participants to find their voice, embrace their individuality and celebrate their personal narratives.

## Intended outcomes

To encourage participants to imaginatively engage with storytelling and think in an expansive way about creating and performing a story through portraiture or acting. More importantly, encouraging them to think about positive and authentic representation.

## Intended outputs

To deliver a selection of our portraits and a series of workshops on acting and portraiture. Deliver activity to 5 schools and 2 community centres.

## Obstacles and issues

Insufficient lead times for project delivery, so when we experienced inevitable communication delays, this impacted on the planning and organising of workshops.

During feedback and observation sessions, we realised that the predetermined number of sessions were not sufficient to achieve the expected outcomes and impact. This meant we had to increase the number of sessions in each school and reduce the overall number of schools we engaged with.

This emphasised the need for flexibility and adaptability of session structure to meet the evolving requirements and goals of each school while tailoring to the specific needs of the participants.

The introduction of additional sessions and additional facilitators helped us create more engaging and supportive sessions for the students.





“ Empowering the participants to find their voice, embrace their individuality and celebrate their personal narratives.

### Actual outcomes

Through active participation and hands-on activities, participants gained valuable skills, such as critical thinking, creative thinking and effective communication. The workshops led to enhanced student engagement and motivation, which was evidenced by their enthusiasm, class participation and willingness to understand and explore the subject further.

One of the most significant impacts is the validation of empowerment for the participants. For many of these young individuals, their stories and experiences are often ignored or overlooked. The workshop provided an opportunity for them to share their narratives, but also to be heard and seen. This validation boosted their self-esteem and encouraged them to explore their creativity further.

### Actual outputs

We achieved the key elements of our project. We delivered 50 portraits from our collections and 30 workshops with 64 participants aged 11–16, with 216 audience members to over five schools across London boroughs. During the acting sessions, the participants wrote their own scenes and then acted out the scenes on camera. During Portraiture sessions, the participants curated and created their own interpretation of portraiture. In both sessions students also created their own inspirational words of wisdom to share with others.

### Lessons learned

- Importance of setting clear objectives aligned with the students’ age and curriculum and the impact of well-structured, interactive content and delivery in encouraging creativity, imagination and self-expression.
- Positive impact of experienced and relatable facilitators in creating an inclusive learning environment that caters to diverse student needs and learning styles.
- Validation and empowerment that participants gained from sharing their narratives and being heard and seen, contributing to boosted self-esteem and increased confidence.
- Need for ongoing improvement, including longer lead times for project delivery, a more comprehensive evaluation framework and flexible session structures to adapt to specific school schedules and participant dynamics.
- Transformative experience provided to young people from marginalised communities and diverse backgrounds, empowering them to challenge stereotypes and explore their creative potential.

### Next steps

The future of the project and related initiatives is promising based on the success and impact of the workshops delivered to partnered schools. We will repeat a similar format and

introduce additional art forms such as poetry and dance and work collaboratively with our schools and young people to create engaging activities.

### Find out more

The facilitators were experienced teachers, professional artists, writers, actors, and directors, many of whom have graduated from the UK’s most prestigious schools, such as **The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA)**. This enabled the workshops to offer a wealth of subject knowledge and expertise. The sessions were designed and delivered by facilitators whose lives and backgrounds mirror those of the participants. This deliberate approach ensured an understanding of the unique challenges faced by our participants but also helped foster a sense of trust and relatability.

Experienced, professional facilitators supported and enabled the delivery of multiple sessions, running over a short period of time. The team includes: **Beru Tessema, Daniel Bowerbank, Skye Hallam, Eileen Perrier, Stacy Abalogun, Lara Grace Ilori, Mya Onwugbonu**. They were supported by **UNDEREXPOSED ARTS** founders **Fraser James** and **Franklyn Rodgers**.

# “Reclaiming Narratives: Empowering Youth in the Creative and Cultural Sector Through the Missing Women and With Dinah Project”

## Summary

The Missing Women and With Dinah project, a collaborative effort between The Auckland Project, Creative Youth Opportunities (CYO), and Bishop Auckland Town Hall (BATH), aimed to transform perceptions of the creative sector for young people, especially girls, and those facing barriers. ‘With Dinah’ builds on ‘Missing Women’, introducing new voices and contemporary art into Auckland Project venues, sparking community conversations and embedding future learning.

## Background

Inspired by Francisco de Zurbarán’s series of portraits ‘Jacob and his Twelve Son’s (housed in Auckland Castle), the project engaged with the contemporary relevance of the biblical narratives of the missing women

within the family of Jacob. The project unfolded through a variety of youth engagement activities, including creative workshops, professional portrait creation, exhibitions, walking tours, and celebration events.

## Challenge

Building on the success of ‘Missing Women’, the primary challenge of ‘With Dinah’ was to address the underrepresentation of marginalised voices, particularly women, in historical narratives and art collections and find new ways to integrate contemporary perspectives and experiences into traditional displays, prompting a reassessment of historical interpretations. We sought to make the creative and cultural sector more accessible to young individuals facing barriers to engagement.

## Approach

‘Missing Women’ addressed these challenges through transformative arts engagement sessions with professional artists and facilitators, producing self-portraits and full-size reimaginings of Jacob’s Wives and Daughter for exhibition. Through exhibitions, partnership events, and character walking tours, ‘With Dinah’ integrated the new artworks into The Auckland Project’s venues to showcase contemporary voices. The project provided ‘access all areas’ to participants to transform perceptions of the cultural sector as a viable career option for young people.

## Intended outcomes

To broaden access to the cultural sector, empower underrepresented young women, spark new conversations about historical representation and challenge



“We sought to make the creative and cultural sector more accessible to young individuals facing barriers to engagement.”





traditional narratives in art and history. We wanted to foster collaboration between internal departments and local cultural organisations, creating a model of best practice for future community engagement opportunities.

### Intended outputs

An exhibition of 'Missing Women' portraits coinciding with a high profile 'International Womens' Day event in partnership with CYO and BATH

- Launch of the 'With Dinah' contemporary artwork exhibition showcasing pieces by professional project artists and practitioners;
- A series of 'Pathways into the Arts' youth sessions, with co-curated project exhibition;
- Women Were Here' costumed walking tour;
- Production of a project promo/ docu-video.

### Obstacles and issues

Re-engagement with original participants proved difficult for certain workshops. We faced financial challenges including delayed payment and under-estimation of the real-time cost to create a new exhibition. An environmental-controls-failure impacted the intended exhibition schedule. Inter-organisational collaboration created points of conflict and tension. Our organisation had to face our unconscious bias and become more open and welcoming.

### Actual outcomes

Four exhibitions were held, attracting 11.9k+ visitors. As the first exhibition in Auckland Castle of living and non-male artists in its 900+ year history, the project positively promoted diversity, inclusion and representation within the sector, sparking conversations about contemporary art within heritage settings. Participants reported huge improvements in pride, confidence, creative risk-taking, and skills relating to arts. Some reported interest in pursuing a career in the arts. Team members from all partner organisations developed new skills (from curation to costumed history!) and partner work profiles were elevated due to the high-profile nature of the project.

### Actual outputs

Unplanned outcomes can surprise and delight: due to individual barriers, some 'Missing Women' participants didn't re-engage in the 'Pathway into the Arts' series. Instead, a new crop of young people worked with professional artists, curators and gallery hangers to create an additional layer of response to the project theme and told a new project story through the development of their own exhibition. The costumed 'Women Were Here' walking tours proved so popular that the run was extended, and multiple members of TAP worked with professional historic engager Lucy Ridley to embed the tours into our visitor offer.

### Lessons learned

- Importance of robust financial planning and budget allocation;
- Need for transparent communication among project partners;
- Flexibility and adaptability in addressing participant vulnerabilities;
- Significance of authentic community involvement and engagement;
- Challenges of coordinating large-scale exhibitions and events;
- Value of interdisciplinary collaboration between arts and heritage organisations;

- Need for proactive recruitment strategies to ensure diverse participation;
- Recognition of robust mental health support as integral to project success.

### Next steps

As an organisation we will focus engagement efforts to reach broader demographics; develop sustainable funding strategies for projects addressing new challenges; foster continued collaboration with local organisations and schools; evaluate, refine, and plan innovative contemporary exhibition concepts based on participant feedback; create and promote online resources to extend project impact; explore opportunities for new national or international partnerships; continue to evidence and showcase the long-term societal impact of arts-based initiatives.

### Find out more

[aucklandproject.org/news/the-stories-of-the-five-missing-zurbaran-women](http://aucklandproject.org/news/the-stories-of-the-five-missing-zurbaran-women)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=2fJg\\_NrHzO4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2fJg_NrHzO4)

[www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tees-64771710](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tees-64771710)

[www.chroniclive.co.uk/whats-on/arts-culture-news/missing-women-bishop-auckland-durham-26417112](http://www.chroniclive.co.uk/whats-on/arts-culture-news/missing-women-bishop-auckland-durham-26417112)

[narc magazine.com/preview-missing-women-bishop-auckland-town-hall-auckland-castle](http://narc magazine.com/preview-missing-women-bishop-auckland-town-hall-auckland-castle)

[visitcountydurham.org/news/celebrating-the-women-of-bishop-auckland](http://visitcountydurham.org/news/celebrating-the-women-of-bishop-auckland)

[thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/23373112.international-womens-day-missing-women-exhibition-opens](http://thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/23373112.international-womens-day-missing-women-exhibition-opens)



# Identity and Belonging



from Sony and BAFTA, exploring pathways for young people accessing the sector.

Celebrating local history and heritage, we hosted an exhibition spotlighting stories of African American and Native American airmen stationed in East Kent during the 1950s. Developed with community members and artists, it aimed to tell previously untold stories.

Recognising the isolation faced by older adults, the gallery introduced "Look Club," a weekly gathering inviting newcomers to explore artwork and forge connections, combating loneliness and fostering a sense of belonging.

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## Summary

We embarked on a journey to redefine our learning programme, focusing on themes of identity and belonging. Collaborating with diverse local groups including 16–24 year olds, older adults and racially minoritised communities.

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## Background

The gallery is based in the coastal town of Margate, Kent. The area has high levels of deprivation and grapples with challenges of poverty, poor health, high levels of youth unemployment and older people living with loneliness and isolation.

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## Challenge

We wanted to help signpost routes to employment in an area of high local unemployment; help tackle loneliness and isolation in older audiences and support inclusion of Black, Brown and Diaspora communities.

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## Approach

We wanted to embed equity into our planning processes. Inspired by artist Larry Achiampong, the gallery partnered with local community group People Dem Collective to co-create a gaming room at the gallery. We programmed a Careers in Gaming event, featuring industry professionals

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## Intended outcomes

We wanted to help new audiences to feel at home when they came to the gallery. We wanted to strengthen our relationship with key communities and help work towards tackling the barriers and issues they face.

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## Intended outputs

- To co-create a gaming room for teenagers inspired by artist Larry Achiampong and host a gaming careers event for local young people.
- To host an exhibition developed by the community.
- To set-up a weekly session for older adults.



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### Obstacles and issues

We encountered challenges at certain times within the co-creative process. In particular, in how decisions were made between community groups and the gallery team and how compromises would be found. This tested some of the relationships the gallery was trying to build.

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### Actual outcomes

The gallery strengthened connections with groups, such as People Dem Collective, Age UK and BAFTA. As a result of the programming, more than three quarters of visitors said they felt the gallery was a place for them. Look club was a success with older people meeting up independently after the organised sessions had finished.

‘Having just completed the latest Look Club sessions I just wanted to tell you how much I have enjoyed them, I have started on a journey I never thought I would take’ Quote from “Look Club” participant

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### Actual outputs

We delivered the gaming room, careers event, local exhibition and started running regular “Look Clubs”. Through these programmes and others, the gallery doubled the number of 16–24 year olds visiting the gallery and doubled the number of audiences from ethnic minority backgrounds. We increased the number of people who had never visited a gallery before to 6% of our audience.



“ The gallery doubled the number of 16–24 year olds visiting the gallery and doubled the number of audiences from ethnic minority backgrounds.

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### Lessons learned

Our lessons learnt were about the time it takes to co-develop content with the community and how it is vital to be clear on roles and responsibilities between a cultural organisation and a community group. We learnt how important facilitation is and how communication and trust are vital. But ultimately, we learnt how rewarding the process of co-creation is.

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### Next steps

We have continued “Look Clubs” and they now run regularly. The groups meet over 5 weeks and then are encouraged to meet independently. Identity and Belonging are still key themes in our learning programme and equity is more embedded as an approach to planning and programming.

**Find out more**

[turnercontemporary.org](https://turnercontemporary.org)

**Kathleen O'Neill**

The Culture, Heritage and Arts Assembly, Argyll and Isles (CHARTS),  
in partnership with Argyll and Bute Council

Community

# Reviewing a Museum Without Walls – The Argyll Collection, Reconnected

## Summary

The Argyll Collection, Reconnected, explores the cultural significance of a collection of artworks, built from an idea first conceived over 60 years ago. Believed to be unique in the UK for its forward-thinking concept and transient composition, this moveable collection is located throughout Scotland's second largest region, currently in 13 schools and 2 libraries, including four islands and mainland Argyll.

## Background

Enabled by the former local authority, Naomi Mitchison, well known Scottish artist, author and Argyll resident and Jim Tyre, Council Arts Advisor, created the collection in the 1960s to a total of 179 pieces, paintings, ceramics, textiles and sculptures. Astutely sourcing works from artists

in Scotland and Uganda, they made contemporary art accessible to pupils attending Argyll's rural primary and secondary schools. Creating the collection as a tool for learning, they were authorised to spend up to £100 per single purchase.

"Argyll school children have very little chance of visiting art galleries. Even if there is an art exhibition in the few centres of population, only those who live close are likely to see it."

Naomi Mitchison

## Challenge

The collection now contains what is believed to be amongst the best collection of African art in Europe and includes some of Scotland's best-known artists. Therefore, the Reconnected challenge was always multi-fold, to know how best the

collection could be profiled and utilised, while still meeting its original purpose as a tool for educational progression.

## Approach

To address challenges, the culture-support charity CHARTS appointed both a Reconnected project and research manager to simultaneously ascertain both the current and former educational and social life of the artworks.

## Intended outcomes

Aims included to raise the profile of the collection in schools across subject areas, in community contexts, and nationally in the context of museums, galleries and heritage.

## Intended outputs

Intended outputs included to create exhibitions, case studies, assess protection needs and build evidence to enable future resource.

## Obstacles and issues

Essential external funding for infrastructure support ceased for the collection in 1990 and therefore Reconnected became the much-needed catalyst from the outset to inform new collection systems and management processes. Relationship building with schools and others was also a critical project component, as staff sought to understand any ongoing use of the artworks across the curriculum and otherwise. Locating a trail of archival information







“**CHARTS will continue to develop paid training opportunities focused on the Argyll Collection, mindful to maintain the original concept that the collection be ‘owned and of value’ to young Argyll residents.**”

dispersed nationally, became vital for future-proofing the collection.

Collectively this placed additional demands on staff scheduling, compounded by travelling across mainland and islands with poor roads, limited ferries and train services.

**Actual outcomes**

Outcomes have included a new inventory with priority to arrange central storage for works identified as at risk and to offer CPD and online toolkits for teaching staff keen to uptake all the project ‘re-offers’. Global audiences are now possible by the recent merger of the digital springboard Smartify, enabled by support from Highlands and Islands Enterprise Xpo North initiative, including content development support. Exhibitions are being

curated and academic partners are now working with Reconnected to create higher education and in-school learning opportunities. The project was presented at the Scottish Association of Art History fortieth anniversary conference in March 2024.

**Actual outputs**

As an organisation with co-working at the heart of its operational structure CHARTS has enabled its international staff to collaborate on development by visiting Uganda, ‘re-connecting’ with related people, institutions, and place, regenerating the life of the African pieces in the collection. New economic and educational relationships have been built to contribute to exhibitions and presentations and this has included an exhibition research traineeship supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, also assisting to build youth engagement beyond school walls.

**Lessons learned**

Since the inception of the Argyll Collection, cultural-economic and educational circumstances have vastly changed nationwide, leading to the local authority seeking CHARTS support to protect this key asset. Initial partnership quickly revealed far greater potential for Reconnected and demanded more time than anticipated for foundational work.

Reconnected has been vastly assisted with generous in-kind support of St Andrews University’s

School of History (Dr Kate Cowcher) and Glasgow University (museums and conservation). We now better understand how a complex range of stakeholders can be positioned for ongoing development and consider this essential to fully realise the significance of this outstanding collection.

**Next steps**

Next steps include local area discussions with young people and new stakeholders to help inform a codesigned development strategy between CHARTS and the local authority. This will assist to enable future benefits with cross-curricular outcomes and attract resource for ongoing development in both cash and kind.

CHARTS will continue to develop paid training opportunities focused on the Argyll Collection, mindful to maintain the original concept that the collection be ‘owned and of value’ to young Argyll residents. International development will also include Makerere University, in Kampala, fostering opportunities for refreshed interpretation of African works and exchange projects for Argylls artists.

**Find out more**

**CHARTS – The Argyll Collection, Reconnected, Showcase**  
[chartsargyllandisles.org/project-showcase/the-argyll-collection-reconnected](https://chartsargyllandisles.org/project-showcase/the-argyll-collection-reconnected)

**Argyll and Bute Council – The Argyll Collection**  
[www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/argyllcollection/about](http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/argyllcollection/about)

**St Andrews – African Collection**  
[st-andrews.ac.uk/art-history/research/impact/modern-african-art-in-the-argyll-collection](http://st-andrews.ac.uk/art-history/research/impact/modern-african-art-in-the-argyll-collection)

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# Mindful Audio Guide: Easing Stress and Anxiety Through Guided Interaction with Museum Collections and Spaces



## Summary

Working with a local mental health support partner organisation, RAMM explored how guided interaction with museum collections and spaces can ease the stress anxiety and isolation felt in our community after the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Background

Museums are increasingly regarded as community resources, producing valuable social impact. As Exeter's cultural flagship, RAMM has an important role to play in supporting its local community, offering a programme of engagement that supports mental health and wellbeing.

Mindfulness is recognised by health professionals as an effective tool to encourage positive mental health outcomes. Museums can be a safe and inspiring place for people to start their mindfulness journey.

## Challenge

The pandemic had a profound effect on all aspects of society; psychological and social effects were widespread, with data revealing that (at its peak) over half (53.1%) of British people reported that it had affected their wellbeing.

With increased feelings of stress, anxiety and isolation being

experienced by many, the role that museums can play is more important than ever, working in partnership with local organisations to support their communities when they need it most.

## Approach

To meet this need, RAMM collaborated with Devon Recovery Learning Community (DRLC), a local non-clinical service of Devon Partnership NHS Trust, to co-create a new mindful audio resource for the museum. By practising mindfulness techniques, a person can learn to slow their thoughts. It helps people to be calm and connect with the moment. It can be beneficial for mental health and help to ease stress.

Through a series of guided sessions with mental health practitioners and people who had lived experience of mental health difficulties, content was produced for the guide that was inspired by RAMM's spaces and collections.

## Intended outcomes

The co-creation model allowed RAMM to work in a new way with those experiencing mental health difficulties. It helped RAMM to develop a closer partnership with DRLC with mutual benefit to both organisations. It has and will continue to help RAMM develop our approach to content creation, to be more inclusive and collaborative, incorporating plural perspectives.



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### Intended outputs

This work resulted in a new mindful museum audio guide accessible to RAMM's visitors to open up a new way of viewing RAMM's spaces.

The resource is available to access here <https://bit.ly/MindfulMuseumRAMM>

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### Obstacles and issues

At project inception we anticipated that the guide would form a trail around the building and would relate to specific objects and areas of the museum. However, through discussions with mental health practitioners and through activities explored with participants in sessions, we found that individuals were very strongly influenced (either negatively or positively) by different objects and types of spaces.

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### Actual outcomes

As a result of these findings, we revised our approach to create a resource which was more open and allowed the listener to make choices to adjust their experience.

We discussed with the group other elements that might influence their experience and incorporated these into the final output. For e.g: building in time to acknowledge how they were feeling on a particular day, creating a section on grounding themselves in the museum space, and also in preparing them to leave the space.

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### Actual outputs

The resulting audio guide takes the listener on a journey through a variety of mindfulness exercises which can be completed in sequence, or as one-off activities depending on how they feel that day. The listener is given agency regarding their experience through their selection of the physical area in which they carry out activities, choice of a voice to guide them through activities and the time that they spend on each section.

"Very relaxing. Enjoyed the museum in a different way from usual. Slowed down and looked more closely at exhibits rather than read the info." Feedback from a listener

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### Lessons learned

- Working closely with our project partners and taking time to try out approaches in collaboration with people experiencing mental health challenges allowed us to create a resource that was tailored to be as supportive and useful as possible. It was vital to go through this process.
  - The project encountered some time delays due to the personal circumstances of the project team and participants, we therefore had to be adaptable and consider alternative ways to progress, or pause the project, reflecting the culture of sensitivity towards others that we developed over the course of the project.
  - The whole process was a learning journey for all partners. We came into the process with open minds willing to be led by the reactions and preferences of the students, without knowing what the final outcomes would be.
- 

### Next steps

RAMM and DRLC have continued to work together.

The following programmes have also developed as a result of this work or happened in parallel to it:

Ways of Seeing – guided mindfulness sessions in the museum in collaboration with DRLC Mindfulness in the museum – RAMM ([rammuseum.org.uk](http://rammuseum.org.uk))

Frame of Mind – supporting young people's mental health in collaboration with Youth Arts and Health Trust Dartmoor Frame of Mind – RAMM ([rammuseum.org.uk](http://rammuseum.org.uk))

Sound Journey – audio guide developed in collaboration with people with disabilities and artist Gemma Nash Sound Journey – RAMM ([rammuseum.org.uk](http://rammuseum.org.uk))

**“We revised our approach to create a resource which was more open and allowed the listener to make choices to adjust their experience.”**



### Find out more

**Ellie Coleman (RAMM Engagement Officer)**

[Eleanor.coleman@exeter.gov.uk](mailto:Eleanor.coleman@exeter.gov.uk)

# Reimagining the Collection

## Summary

In 2021, The Holburne received funding from Art Fund to 'reimagine' their collection online, with the intention of enabling audiences, especially those who do not access the museum, to engage with the collection virtually.

Our online collection was very one-dimensional and academic, with limited search capability. We knew from our web stats that these pages received very few hits, and that users did not stay on the pages for more than one minute.

The project was intended to provide an opportunity to explore themes of storytelling, interactive and immersive content, and AI, to animate the online collection, thus allowing users a much richer, playful and active engagement.

This would provide audiences with easy access to information, provoke their thoughts and invite them to participate, entice them to explore deeper content and encourage them to visit the Holburne.

Working with the Head of Creative Computing at Bath Spa University as the Creative Technologist, we proposed to hold several focus groups that were targeted at audiences in the most deprived areas of Bath; members of Pathways (our creative workshops for adults and young people with lived experience of mental health issues) and our volunteers. These focus groups would help form the strategy around potential content for the project.

Once the micro-site was built, we held a weekend of drop-in events

for the public to test the site and for feedback.

## Background

The Holburne is one of the UK's leading museums and the principal visual arts organisation in Bath. Our vision is Changing Lives through Art and Creativity, recognising the positive impact both have on health, wellbeing and community cohesion. We deliver our mission with ambition and innovation, ensuring we always do so in ways that are inclusive, of the highest quality, relevant and sustainable.

## Challenge

Without core public subsidy, the Museum is entirely dependent on earned and fundraised income, normally on a ratio of 55% earned, 45% raised. As a regional museum, our exhibition programme punches above our weight, consistently presenting leading artists and securing 5\* reviews. Our digital presence lets us down however – without resource to develop this area strategically, we have fallen behind our peers. Our 10 year old website has outdated design, poor mobile functionality and 'shallow' content that fails to engage visitors. The section on our Collection is particularly limited; only 6% of users visit these pages.

User testing on the current site confirmed initial perceptions as 'historic', 'old fashioned', 'privileged', 'very text heavy' and 'not visually appealing'.





We saw the Art Fund investment as the first step in overhauling our digital assets, with the long-term ambition to develop a new website which better positions the Holburne as an ambitious contemporary museum. One which showcases our world-class exhibitions; and puts the Collection back at the heart of the museum.

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### Approach

We wanted to work with specific groups to help inform the content of the new immersive collection micro-site. We were lucky to have the Head of Creative Computing from Bath Spa University seconded to the project as our Creative Technologist, who was responsible for building the micro-site, and who had worked on similar projects with other museums.

An evaluation framework was developed from the original funding application as well as discussions largely with Project Lead (and COO at The Holburne) Emma Morris and Project Manager. The framework defined specific demographics to be targeted, and what the museum and the participants would hopefully get out of the engagement and co-creation process.

The evaluation framework was then referred to in the creation of the initial consultation survey, feedback questions, and interview questions with staff members.

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### Intended outcomes

The project was intended to provide an opportunity to explore themes of storytelling, interactive and immersive content, and AI by creating content experiences in consultation with local communities, and through this to raise awareness of The Holburne's collection.

The outcome of the project would be new digital interfaces for the collection allowing museum attendees to engage in a new way and enabling a much broader demographic to connect with the collection.

The project aimed to reach specific demographics including a broad range of ages, Pathways Participants and Holburne volunteers. The project intended to work with

people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and less affluent areas of Bath, specifically from Twerton and Peasedown.

Additionally the project was intended as an opportunity for staff to develop their digital skills and to deepen the partnership between The Holburne Museum and Bath Spa University, building capacity to deliver this and similar projects in the future.

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### Intended outputs

Micro-site for the collection with engaging and immersive content.

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### Obstacles and issues

- Integration with the wider museum team (especially curation and learning and engagement).
- A key factor that came out across team member interviews, the project relied on the long-standing networks of the museum's learning and engagement team. However, the capacity of this team was very limited, and, in the end, their involvement was far less than anticipated.
- Recruitment from target audiences. The lack of involvement from the Learning and Engagement team contributed to a lack of recruitment for the labs, especially from target postcodes and from people who don't attend museums, as mentioned in the evaluation framework. This was made up for by attendees made up of museum volunteers and in the case of one of the lab's university students from Bath Spa who were being taught by the Creative Technologist. This enabled feedback to be gathered, and participants reported they benefited from and enjoyed the labs, but this was made up of a differing demographic to that hoped for.

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### Actual outcomes

The challenges with the engagement process filtered down into the digital production as it was meant to be developed from the findings of the process. The Creative Technologist was able to develop something that was interesting and well received by the public at the open weekend,

**“ We want to appeal to younger and more diverse audiences, providing different routes for engagement with our content and collection displays.**

however it didn't incorporate much in the way of learning from the target audiences as many of them hadn't been engaged effectively.

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### Actual outputs

The Creative Technologist built an engaging and immersive micro-site: [www.reimaginedcollections.com](http://www.reimaginedcollections.com)

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### Lessons learned

Post Covid, the whole of the team was stretched and there was limited capacity for the key teams to be involved in the project as much as anticipated, and, in truth, needed.

We have learnt that before we make any funding applications of this nature, we need to ensure that the teams are fully on board with the project and have the capacity to deliver against the desired outputs.

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### Next steps

We want to appeal to younger and more diverse audiences, providing different routes for engagement with our content and collection displays, and to enhance interpretation for on-site visitors, while broadening our reach online.

### Find out more

**Emma Morris, Chief Operating Officer, Holburne Museum**  
[e.morris@holburne.org](mailto:e.morris@holburne.org)

**Coral Manton, Head of Creative Computing, Bath Spa University**  
[c.manton@bathspa.ac.uk](mailto:c.manton@bathspa.ac.uk)

# Digital Biographies: The Creation of the Vindolanda Adventure Online Game

## Summary

The Vindolanda Trust has developed a new educational resource for budding video gamers and archaeologists set at Roman Vindolanda. The online game brings to life two people from the site.

## Background

'Vindolanda Adventure' is the result of a collaboration between development studio Creative Assembly, Newcastle University, and the Vindolanda Trust. Combining the worlds of computer science, gaming, and archaeology, players journey back to Hadrian's Wall.

## Challenge

Our challenge was to engage children aged 7–11 with the ancient world in a fun and informative way.

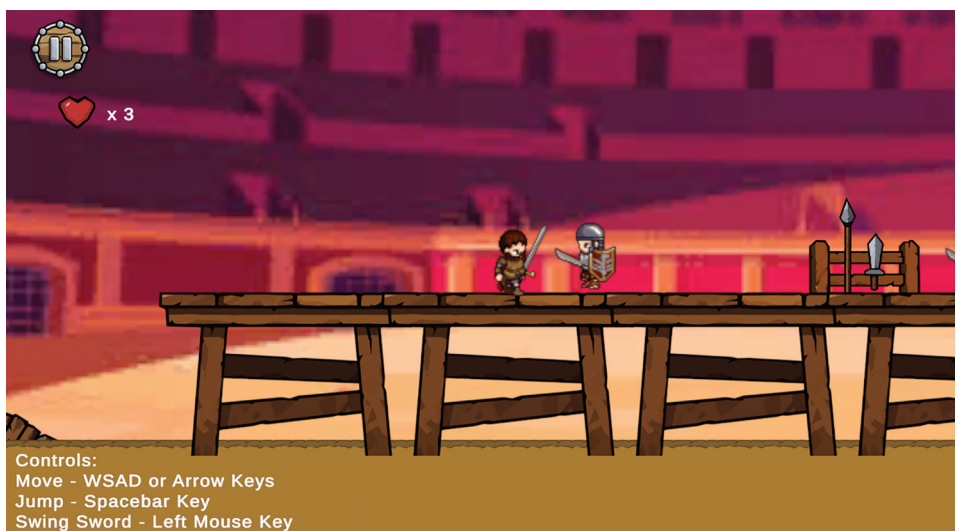
## Approach

We worked with our partners and hired a Masters student to develop the game, who received mentoring and experience in games development.

## Intended outcomes

Our intended outcomes and outputs:

- Created an online exhibition/game using the Vindolanda Trust's and Creative Assembly's content.
- Work with MA students in the Newcastle University's computer science programme.
- Student mentorships were made available from Creative Assembly.



“ It expanded our knowledge on working within the digital world as well as our understanding of development of strong partnerships and collaborative working.





- One student was hired to develop the online web-based exhibition.
- Creative Assembly delivered a gaming session for the public on site at Vindolanda.
- An academic conference was held at Vindolanda to share our experience with Newcastle University, representatives from industry and from the international heritage sector.
- We worked throughout to evaluate and received feedback from our target audiences through focus school and community groups.

### Obstacles and issues

There were some challenges that changed this project. Our launch date, onsite games session and international workshop were set for mid-September 2022, which corresponded with the mourning period for HRH Queen Elizabeth. All dates had to be postponed. In hindsight, we were able to turn this to our advantage, although we did have to extend the date of finishing of the overall project. The website still went live on September 11th. We were able to have the Vindolanda

Trust's first YouTube premier for our Making of Vindolanda Adventure on 21 October followed closely by the onsite gaming sessions on 29 and 30 October 2022. Given the international speakers for the workshop, we had to delay the date for that until April 2023. In the end, this was better for the project as some of the lessons learned could be featured and we were able to have a broader attendance from our speakers and audience.

### Actual outcomes

This largely digital project created 'Vindolanda Adventure' but also, worked with the Vindolanda collection as well as helping to break down geographic and learning barriers by its users. It expanded our knowledge on working within the digital world as well as our understanding of development of strong partnerships and collaborative working.

### Actual outputs

The project not only produced the online game but also a gaming and heritage workshop with international academic colleagues and an onsite gaming weekend at Vindolanda.

### Lessons learned

The game was developed for KS2 (7–11 year olds) in the UK. About 50% of our users are from the UK. We were surprised to find that our reach has been further afield including the United States, France, Germany, Netherlands, Italy, Australia, China, United Arab Emirates and Slovakia, to name but a few. This has opened up new avenues for digital engagement and helped the Vindolanda Trust and partners to consider digital projects differently.

### Next steps

We are continuing to develop ideas for digital projects both gaming and interpretive when funding can be secured. The Vindolanda Trust is committed to finding new and dynamic ways to engage with its audiences.

### Find out more

**Visit the game website**  
vindolandaadventure.com

**Making of Vindolanda Adventure YouTube**

youtube.com/  
watch?v=tm50KaIKwx4

**Roman Vindolanda**  
vindolanda.com

# Co-curating Collections: The Royal Shakespeare Company's *The Play's the Thing* Exhibition

## Summary

*The Play's the Thing* is a permanent collections-based exhibition in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. In 2022, we completed a 6-month project piloting co-curation with hyper-local community partners to develop an exhibition celebrating the communities of Stratford, history of costume making in the town, and the Royal Shakespeare Company's (RSC) collection.

## Background

Our partners included:

- Welcome Here: a support charity for refugees in the UK;
- Goodwill and Growth for Africa (GAGA): a charity supporting vulnerable people in marginalised Africa;
- Stratford-upon-Avon College: second year fashion and make-up students.

## Challenge

- Find new and effective ways of encouraging audiences to return to our spaces after the covid-19 pandemic and build relationships with our community.
- As a National Portfolio Organisation, respond to Art's Council England's Let's Create strategy by committing to developing co-curated work.

## Approach

Make *The Play's the Thing* exhibition free to access and use the space as a catalyst to unlock creative placemaking, collections and community opportunities.

The process used curation workshops structured using LUMA's Look, Understand and Make approach.

## Intended outcomes

- Reimagine our activities following the pandemic.
- Build expertise and best practice within our organisation to share with the wider sector.
- Increase wellbeing, community cohesion and cultural pride, through working together to create an exhibition for all.

## Intended outputs

- The Play's the Thing exhibition is co-created with community partners;
- 3 community partners take part in 2 half-day curation workshops each;
- New co-creation interpretation strategy for the organisation;
- Celebration event to launch the exhibition with community partners.

## Obstacles and issues

- Building trust with community groups, so that authentic discussion and representation could be had.
- Ensuring accessible routes throughout the project, including workshops and tours.







## Building trust with community groups, so that authentic discussion and representation could be had.

- Date changes: working with community groups led to date changes when members could not attend.
- Language barriers: conducting sessions with interpreters and finding alternative ways to communicate (i.e., voting for objects with claps or using more visual aids).
- Managing expectations and limitations: working in co-creation with existing exhibition infrastructure limits the scope of what is possible to change.

### Actual outcomes

Reimagine our activities following the pandemic: The exhibition considered participants lived experience of war, displacement, women's rights and fast fashion, providing a different lens on the RSC's work, helping to diversify the story and audience. 50 people from underserved communities in Stratford-upon-Avon took part.

Build expertise and best practice within our organisation to share with the wider sector: The team utilised this pilot as research to develop a new

interpretation strategy, embedding collections co-curation for the future.

Increase wellbeing, community cohesion and cultural pride, through working together to create an exhibition for all: 100% of participants felt a sense of belonging, pride and felt more connected to each other and their community because of the project.

### Actual outputs

*The Play's the Thing* exhibition is co-created with community partners: *The Play's the Thing* opened on 22 April 2023 with 45k+ visitors in a year. Representing an increase of over 2000% in our visitor numbers from previous years.

3 community partners take part in 1 curation workshops each. Due to group commitments, each group completed 1 longer curation workshop with us instead of 2 which were originally planned.

New co-creation interpretation strategy for the organisation. 1 organisational interpretation strategy created and shared with relevant sector contacts.

Celebration event to launch the exhibition with community partners. 1500 people came to celebrate the opening of the exhibition.

### Lessons learned

Structure of workshops (Look, Understand, Make):

- Works for us and now forms the basis of our co-creation strategy.

### Onboarding:

- Set out what is meant by co-creation with partners early in the process so there isn't any confusion further down the line.
- Consider a memorandum of understanding with the groups.

### Communication:

- Work through established community groups and group leaders.

### Approach:

- Be brave and remain open to change, especially in relation to alternative collections access.
- Be ready the answer to 'what is next?'

### Next steps

Re-open *The Play's the Thing* exhibition in April 2024 with 3 new community groups:

- ILEAP: A local charity providing fun and friendship opportunities for people with Additional Needs.
- The Fred Winter Centre: A community hub supporting local people in Stratford-upon-Avon, with a focus on those experiencing homelessness and hardship.
- Warwickshire Pride: A charity for the organisation of LGBT+ services and events in Warwickshire.

Host a celebration event to launch the new exhibition display in April 2024.

Continue to add to and update the new RSC co-creation interpretation strategy.

### Find out more

The Play's the Thing

Welcome Here

GAGA Yarnbombers

Stratford-upon-Avon College

ILEAP

The Fred Winter Centre

Warwickshire Pride

LUMA

# Canaletto: A Venetian's View New Learning at Worcester City Art Gallery and Museum

## Summary

The main aim for this project was to bring high quality art to people's doorsteps. This exhibition happened at our Worcester City Art Gallery and Museum venue.

We were given a unique opportunity to borrow a hugely significant collection of Canaletto paintings, which we used to explore Canaletto's artistic practice and influence. We worked with a range of partners, including Woburn Abbey, Compton Verney, Tate and Birmingham Museums Trust.

## Background

Worcester City Art Gallery and Museum was founded in 1833

by the Worcestershire Natural History Society and now showcases collections and exhibitions in temporary and permanent spaces.

## Challenge

Part of the learning process was to establish a new model for learning programmes we could put in place alongside our most significant exhibitions to achieve maximum impact.

## Approach

We used this exhibition to investigate taking the site from a locally focused museum, to one with a significantly wider audience, profile and ambition.

## Intended outcomes

- Providing international art experiences for children and young people who may not access this experience otherwise.
- Evaluation during the pandemic showed some loss of core audience (over 65s), but gain of new audiences (families and young adults). The exhibition and activities aimed to encourage the former to return and retain the latter.

## Intended outputs

- Curate an exhibition celebrating the work of Canaletto.
- Create educational visits, a visit to Venice for disadvantaged students, accessibility for community groups, and a family trail to encourage multi-generational discussion and shared experience.
- Pilot a small charge of £3–5, with an accessible charging structure which included free entry for schools.
- Upskill internal staff.

## Obstacles and issues

- Staff changes;
- Our usual engagements activities were not suitable due to the artwork in the exhibition. One example being that we could not use pencils, so no drawing or writing could take place in the exhibition.
- Engaging with schools and education groups during a cost-of-





“The main aim for this project was to bring high quality art to people’s doorsteps.



living crisis. Although we would not charge for visits, there may have been an added expense of transport that schools could not afford.

#### Actual outcomes

As a result of the exhibition, we saw a strong upsurge in visitor figures when compared to the same period in the 2 years prior. Our figures for the October were the best in 10 years and in December the best ever.

#### Actual outputs

- Self-led formal learning visits, with activities provided to the teachers including a sensory table.
- Schools with high pupil premium or home education groups taking up 12 or more – over half of the free slots offered.
- Follow up loan boxes.
- 200 completed informal family trails.
- University partnership (University students had a successful trip to Venice – the bursary winners have been reporting back how valuable this experience is and will be to their future practice).
- Improvement in wellbeing following evaluated formal and informal learning experiences using the UCL wellbeing matrix.
- We have succeeded in attracting back our audiences to above pre-Pandemic rates in the months that the exhibition was installed.

#### Lessons learned

The take up on the loan boxes was poor, but in future we recognise that stronger links to the Curriculum are needed and offering them as an option rather than as part of a visit.

We had a low take up from schools in. We had dedicated 2 x slots per week for schools, but only 3 schools and 1 university group booked in, so we opened the booking for other groups. Through discussion with teachers, we now know that it is better to be more flexible with session timings to better fit in with schools’ prior commitments.

The groups that came gave excellent feedback:

One teacher commented: “It was great that the children could come and see the actual paintings by such a well-known artist rather than just images of them. They’ve all had a great time and it links in with their art topic.”

Home educator parent/carers commented that their visits really benefited from their children having the exhibition exclusively to themselves for the hour due to the additional needs.

This all helps to show that what we were doing was very beneficial, but moving forward we can make changes to the planning to make it more accessible for schools and groups. We have learnt that although something is offered for free, it doesn’t mean all schools will still be able to come. The Canaletto exhibition was during the

cost-of-Living crisis, so schools had to prioritise other areas for money to be spent on and not coaches to get to the museum. We also found that if it did not link to what the schools were already learning, then they would not visit us as they could not take that much time out of school time as their curriculum for the year was already planned.

The Canaletto-specific trail did not sell well and was used more by adults, but the general family fun ones did very well, so we know where to focus in the future.

Data collected from schools as using the UCL wellbeing matrix showed wellbeing improvement for the informal and formal learning programme.

#### Next steps

Reimagining the future of Worcester Art Gallery and Museum

Research from Canaletto formal and informal learning project embedded into future planning for Worcester City Art Gallery and Museum.

We have taken on board an lot from the various aspects of this project and plan to use the information to ensure future plans reflect this.

#### Find out more

Learn more about the project:  
[www.museumsworcestershire.org.uk/2022/08/12/canaletto-a-venetians-view](http://www.museumsworcestershire.org.uk/2022/08/12/canaletto-a-venetians-view)

# Free-for-All: Community Engagement Programme



## Intended outcomes

The primary aim of Free-for-All was to nurture the creativity of our diverse community and involve them as equal partners in the programming of our building and spaces.

## Intended outputs

Workshops and consultation were to be held in the community to foster interest and provide support for people's ideas, with the final exhibition to take place over the school summer holidays. There was also an ambition for this to become a regular addition to the Touchstones programme.

## Obstacles and issues

- With the ambition of Free-for-All came many obstacles and challenges. A key challenge was marrying the 'anything goes' exciting proposition being offered to the public with the red tape of health and safety regulations, budget restraints and lack of both human and physical resources.
- The project required a full staff team effort, which meant that other work fell by the wayside and, as a result of the pressure to deliver, there was a negative impact on mental health.
- Decision-making was difficult as there wasn't a defined structure and it wasn't clear who had the final say on the programme – the artist, the organisation or the community.

## Summary

Free-for-All was a six-week long event at Touchstones which saw the gallery spaces opened to the public to programme anything they wanted.

## Background

Touchstones is an art gallery and museum in Rochdale, Greater Manchester, a town with low levels of cultural engagement. The organisation already had a strong programme of community engagement, taking place with groups and individuals in the building's community spaces and in community settings.

## Challenge

The project aimed to break down the sense of disengagement the community feels with civic art galleries like Touchstones and nurture a sense of public ownership over the building, as well as challenging Touchstones itself to take greater risks with community engagement.

## Approach

Created by artist Harry Meadley, the project was inspired by a residency at Jatawangi Art Factory in Indonesia, where art spaces are a way of life and part of the community. Harry's idea was to hand the empty gallery spaces over to the public with an open call for programming, inviting them into a potentially intimidating space and creating a welcoming community centre feel.





- It was difficult to manage conflicting expectations amongst staff. Whilst the artist and creative team recognised the importance of being able to 'fail', teams responsible for reporting on visitor numbers or café/shop income worried about how this would reflect upon them.
- Importantly, there was also a concern about how Free-for-All would change people's expectations of how the building could be used, and how we would manage any confusion or disappointment after the programme finished.

#### Actual outcomes

Our evaluation revealed that giving the opportunity for people to visit the building as part of a group they were already comfortable with helped them see the space as friendly, safe and not elitist. The open exhibition also garnered a sense of pride in artists who had their work presented and added value to the creative activity going on in our communities every day.

#### Actual outputs

New partnerships were forged with community groups and existing relationships were deepened through the community engagement workshops, with 48 separate events and activities taking place over the

“ The project aimed to break down the sense of disengagement the community feels with civic art galleries like Touchstones and nurture a sense of public ownership over the building.

exhibition period. The project has continued with a second iteration – Side-by-Side – set to re-open the building following refurbishment in summer 2025.

- Touchstones also learned that they could combine the best of a community centre's welcoming vibe with the prestige of a civic gallery to create a unique local asset.

#### Lessons learned

- Free-for-All challenged the Touchstones team to take risks and work differently, and saw new events and activities tried out which have been positively embraced by the organisation.
- It was clear that partners, creatives and participants all wanted to see the project develop and become an annual fixture, but the vagueness and lack of clear processes need to be addressed.
- Longer lead in times are needed to help encourage and support new ideas and raise awareness of the programme, and perhaps a rolling open programme wasn't the best use of resources.
- The perceptions of Touchstones in Rochdale are changing and the sense of inclusivity is highly valued amongst people who use the building, but engagement levels were still low, and the original event struggled to reach new people.

#### Next steps

A team of five representatives from the local community have been recruited to help shape the future Touchstones programme through the next iteration of Free-for-All, Side-by-Side, and beyond, with Side-by-Side being the flagship opening event for Touchstones in 2025 following a capital redevelopment project.

#### Find out more

creativecommunities@  
yourtrustrochdale.co.uk

@oldmanmeadley  
(Harry Meadley on Instagram)

Liz Wewiora

Socially Engaged Photography Network – partners Open Eye Gallery, GRAIN, North East Photography Network, Heart of Glass and Foto Now CIC

Community

# Re-Framing Culture

## Summary

“Re-Framing Culture” was a series of six-week training programmes for museum, gallery, library and independent professionals working within programming and curating to explore the potential value and impact of delivering socially engaged photography commissions.

## Background

Re-Framing Culture was delivered by organisational partners Open Eye Gallery, Heart of Glass, GRAIN, NEPN (Northeast Photography Network) and Fotonow CIC as part of the Socially Engaged Photography Network (SEPN).

Open Eye Gallery set up the network in 2019, following a consultation with photography, wider cultural and academic sector, which identified photography as a valuable yet under profiled medium within this field.

The Art Fund grant was an important milestone in the history of SEPN as its first formal national funding opportunity as a network.

## Challenge

Cultural institutions are being asked and challenged to consider their civic roles as public spaces, beyond the work that sits within their gallery walls. This is echoed in the Arts Council England’s 10 year Let’s Create Strategy, which focuses on community focused and collaborative commissioning. Therefore, it is important that our current and next generation of curators and producers are ready for this shift.

## Approach

The programme covered both the theory and artistic practice of socially engaged lens-based media, as well as logistical and ethical considerations to this type of commissioning with their audiences/constituents. It explored how photography from local archives – as well as participant produced images – can animate cultural and library collections.

## Intended outcomes

- Increased knowledge and confidence in commissioning SEP within museum/gallery settings.

- More community led, co-authored work produced between cultural organisations and local audiences.
- More inclusive programming opportunities for audiences to engage in.
- Increased profile of the Socially Engaged Photography Network.
- Diversifying the creative workforce.

## Intended outputs

- 4 x regional training programmes across the North West, North East, Midlands and South West of England training up to 56 professionals in the sector.

“Participants fed back that one of the most productive and rewarding sessions on the Northwest programme was hearing directly from local community participants – more inclusion of this throughout in future programmes.”

Re-Framing Culture - Next Steps - Group 1

- Reading group for SEP - meet 3 times a year
- Safe space to ask questions
- Observing real-life projects
- Develop ways to communicate what we are doing - mailing lists.
- Peer to peer support - partnered with another person? Bounce ideas, reflect. E.g. EOP membership scheme 3/4 times a year.
- Regional reces - view live projects - view diff models.
- Would online discussion group e.g. Discord be useful
- Crits / share work in progress
- Peer Support: Meet in person - physical get together. Perhaps 1 day - sharing, learning.
- Visibility/profile for Reframing Culture participants - e.g. Fast Forward example using social media or other platform
- Deeper interrogation of best practice and methodologies - demystifying
- Live opportunities to test out workshop ideas
- Instagram - reflect the diversity of approaches. Library/e-publication?
- More insight from institutions/commissioners
- Benefits and impacts highlighted and shared as well as honesty about the process

Video call participants: Amanda Ritson, pollybrant, Louise Taylor, Sophie Ingleby





- 1 x final sharing day for reflections and learning for future programmes.
- 2 x writing commissions from a participant on a theme explored through the programme.

### Obstacles and issues

Some regional programmes were delayed in their delivery of the training, resulting in a significant gap between the last session and the invitation for the full sharing day event, which meant some momentum was lost ahead of the last national sharing day.

Some areas struggled to recruit the maximum number of participants on their programmes but some over-recruited, which was down to marketing lead in time.

### Actual outcomes

- 100% of participants' feedback Increased knowledge and confidence in socially engaged lens-based media commissioning within museum and gallery settings.

- More community led and co-authored artwork produced between cultural organisations and local community groups – creating greater buy-in and engagement from local audiences.

- More inclusive programming opportunities for audiences to engage in.
- Increase in profile of and commissioning of socially engaged photographic practice.
- Increased profile of the Socially Engaged Photography Network – our SEPN membership grew by 86 members as a result.

### Actual outputs

4 x regional training programmes across the North West, North East, Midlands and South West of England training up to 52 professionals in the sector.

1 x final sharing day for reflections and learning for future programmes (delivered online instead of in person due to participant availability).

1 x writing commission from a participant on a theme explored.

A new regional group of photographers and curators has emerged from the South West cohort who now want to programme events as 'SEPN South West' group – which was an unexpected but welcome output to the programme.

### Lessons learned

- Greater budget set aside to ensure fully inclusive access to the course (e.g. deaf participant needing BSL support throughout).
- Participants fed back that one of the most productive and rewarding sessions on the Northwest programme was hearing directly from local community participants – more inclusion of this throughout in future programmes.
- Greater lead in time for each region to market the programme and to increase participation.
- Learnt to expand our definition of 'curator' e.g. many participants who applied are photographic artists who also do curatorial and creative producer work so need acknowledge the increase in hybrid artist/producer roles the sector.

### Next steps

All partners are keen to deliver a second iteration or development of the initial Re-Framing Culture programme, but some regions may feel it needs to change its approach or model to fully recruit.

### Find out more

*Micro-writing commission* by Midlands participant Anneka French

[openeye.org.uk/blog/sustainable-collaboration-nonhumans](https://openeye.org.uk/blog/sustainable-collaboration-nonhumans)

[openeye.org.uk/socially-engaged-photography-network](https://openeye.org.uk/socially-engaged-photography-network)

# About GEM

**GEM, the Group for Education in Museums, has been helping anyone who delivers learning in museums to connect and learn together for over 75 years. GEM is an Arts Council Investment Principles Support Organisation. We support sector colleagues in a variety of ways, including training courses, mentoring, publications like the GEM Case Studies, and other professional development opportunities.**

GEM's **VISION** is of a connected and equipped community of people enabling learning across museum, heritage and cultural settings, creating inspiring experiences, relevant for everyone; that promote equality – transform and enrich lives.

Our **MISSION** is to support and empower our community of colleagues to connect and develop their knowledge and skills to deliver learning.

GEM membership is available for individuals and institutions, with discounts available for students, volunteers, job-seekers and small sector organisations.

You can find out more about the benefits of joining GEM here:

**[www.gem.org.uk/join](http://www.gem.org.uk/join)**



**A large print version is available on request. Please contact the GEM office.**

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