

The Leicester Graduate Network

Museum Studies Connect

Issue 10 · Feb 2019

Unexpected Encounters: How museums nurture living and ageing well

A New Publication from the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) at the University of Leicester considers the question - as the world population ages, how can museums nurture living and ageing well?

Perceptions of older age can focus on decline, frailty, illness and dependence, linked to a medical model that pathologises and problematises ageing. This model shapes the roles that older people can have in society, the expectations that people have of them, and how organisations, such as museums, respond to their needs.

Instead of seeing ageing as a 'problem', how can museums create more opportunities for people in the later stages of life to live in the moment, be actively engaged, have meaning and purpose and feel connected to their communities and the wider world? How can museums support older people to live and age well?

This publication emerges from the research project *Encountering the Unexpected*, an innovative two-year action research project that set out to challenge the (unconscious) assumptions that museums make about older people



Encountering the unexpected © RCMG, 2017. Luke Blazejewski

and find new approaches to engaging them with natural heritage collections.

Initiated by the RCMG) and funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund, *Encountering the Unexpected* worked with six museums from the North West Natural History Museums Partnership, specialists in ageing, the environment and nature connectedness, and 100 older people to develop the *Unexpected Encounters* Framework that can support museums to nurture older people to live and age well, reconnect with the natural world and encourage meaningful engagement in the present.

Unexpected Encounters is designed to raise questions and start conversations, to stimulate museum thinking and practice but most of all to engage with older people rights - a pressing social justice issue. We hope the publication and website will prompt more conversation and action.

The publication is available online here:
<https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/rcmg/publications/UnexpectedEncounters.pdf>



Graduate Profile: Yu-Chun Kao: Digital Media at the National Palace Museum, Taiwan

I am currently working at the National Palace Museum in Taiwan as an assistant in the Department of Education, Exhibition and Information Services. I've been working in the Museum since I graduated from the Museum Studies in Leicester University in 2016.

The main work of my team is in extending the Museum's engagement outside the museum through digital technologies through the on-line collections, rural education, digital installation development, and touring exhibition. In the past two years I have been devoted to four touring exhibitions and a new media art installation. A recent exhibition at the museum re-interpreted precious artefacts from the collection using multi-media installations and virtual reality technology. This display intended to open up dialogue between the public and museum artworks. This exhibition won the Silver MUSE Award from the AAM Media & Technology Network and Gold Award from the WorldFest Houston.

Recently, we have worked with the City University in Hong Kong for an exhibition named "ANIMAL- Art, Science, Nature, Society", with ancient artifact replica, creative media and contemporary art. My role is primarily a project manager. While

I have an administrative role most of time, I am encouraged to be creative and imaginative in site design and learning activity. As I act as a bridge between the researcher, IT engineer and artist, and work with people from different backgrounds and different cultures this brings me a new perspective of museum work and stimulates me to re-examine how exhibitions relate to diversity.

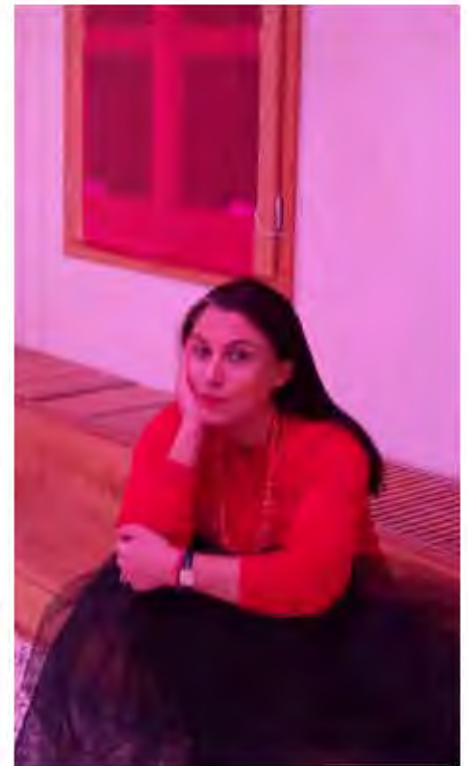
For another project, my team developed an immersive interactive installation for the exhibition 'Floral Art for Pleasure – Appreciation of Flower Vessels and Lifestyle' which focused on floral containers and antiquities. With the help of the researcher, we interpreted the code of the vessels' shape, colour and patterns into digital art. The interactive installation acted as a 'fortune teller' - visitors drew on the touch screen, and the moon revealed a lucky word indicating which museum antiquity you are. The installation attracted lots of people. We noticed that children were very interested in the original artifact following the revelation.

Something I've learned is it is always important to be an all-round person in a museum! I majored in History with a minor in Education for my Bachelor. At

that time I never thought that one day my work would link to digital technologies. Coincidentally, I chose "Digital Media and Curatorship" as my option module in Museum Studies. I can still remember how worried I felt during the first term of the module, because I knew nothing of digital technologies. But things turned better in the end, and I deeply remember "human-centered" and "Design-Thinking" in my mind. Now I am keep applying these two concepts widely, not only on the digital design in the museum, but also on the artefact display within the exhibition.

One of my friends from Museum Studies, had told me "Don't limit yourself!" and I am delighted that I rushed out my comfort zone and joined the University of Leicester.

*Kao, Yu-Chun
Research Assistant, National Palace
Museum, Taiwan
MA Museum Studies 2015-16*



Graduate Profile: Dr Hesperia Lliadou-Suppiej: Curating at the Venice Biennale

I am currently the curator of the Malta National Pavilion at the 2019 Venice Art Biennale. I was absolutely honoured and humbled to be chosen by the Arts Council of Malta, after an international open call, as this is the most prestigious Art event in the world.

The theme, inspired by Odyssey, one of humanity's oldest stories, draws from current conditions, people- displacement across the Mediterranean. Verging between reality and fictitious invention, it provides a contemporary re-interpretation of our timeless need of seeking a haven, most strongly experienced in times of crisis.

The artworks proposed are specially commissioned pieces seeking to engage the audience to complementary semantic enquiries into the notions of homeness/ (un)homeness and challenging identities spreading beyond the predisposed mental notions of assigned tactile borders. Open to diverse readings and drawing on the tri-fold of histories, mythologies and expectations, the exhibit will aim to create socially engaged discourse.

This curatorial project has been from the start profoundly inspired by my studies at the University of Leicester and quite different from my last curatorial projects for

the European Capital of Culture. From the start, here it was obvious to me, that I had a responsibility beyond simply realising an exhibit and making headlines in art journals. This does not only refer to the theme my exhibition addresses but also the way the local community will be engaged. Beyond the pavilion a series of public encounters are planned in different spaces in Venice currently in disuse. My aim here is for a broader audience, to be involved in the discourse, but also for a Biennale Pavilion to spread beyond its elitist boundaries and mobilise unused spaces within the city creating a valuable contribution for the city's residents and not solely for its visitors.

My experience at the Socially Engaged Practice course, has deeply affected both my work as curator but also my research as an academic teacher in Venice, where I lecture at the MA in Curatorial Practice. From new practice methodologies, to inspiring academics, it has driven me into focusing on social engagement in my Museology classes and even introducing a Socially Engaged Art elective module. But most importantly it armed me with professional courage drawn from the different case- studies presented during the course. It has profoundly changed my

life, turning me into an inspirational teacher and practitioner, which even gained me the Department's 'favourite lecturer of the year' title.

There is no greater honour and pleasure than being able to inspire young people, that each one of us is capable of making a great big difference; you only have to believe!

*Dr Hesperia Lliadou- Suppiej
Curator, Malta National Pavilion at the
2019 Venice Art Biennale*

*Lecturer, MA Curatorial Practice- IED
Venice, Italy
Socially Engaged Practice in Museums
& Galleries 2017-18*



Professor Richard Sandell collaborated with historian and singer-songwriter David McAlmont (above) on this project

Outside and beyond: Girl. Boy. Child: a poignant queer tale for our times

The idea for Girl Boy Child was first conceived over 2 years ago. I was working with the National Trust on their LGBTQ national public programme, Prejudice and Pride, and I pitched to the team there, a very sketchy outline for a different kind of performance – one that would be shaped by new research across the Trust's sites and would give visibility to lesser known queer/LGBTQ lives. The idea was ill formed but I had a very clear idea of the person who could potentially make it happen – performer, singer and art historian, David McAlmont.

I had been a fan of David's music and writing for many years and felt his extraordinary capacity to tell rich stories and to move audiences was perfect for the project. It was only when I got the go ahead from the National Trust that I reached out to David and not without considerable trepidation. I think he was initially bemused by this seemingly random approach from a museum studies professor but, amazingly, he agreed to meet and soon agreed to collaborate. We began to research, visiting Trust properties with LGBTQ connections and were inspired by the sites, collections, staff and volunteers at three places in particular - Kingston Lacy in Dorset, Smallhythe in Kent and Plas Newydd on Anglesey

Following our visits, David immersed himself in the British Library, sourcing

rich material about the lives and times of three queer pioneers we had encountered on our visits and who became the focus for Girl Boy Child. As the unusual performance took shape, we brought in artist Julie Howell to research images and create a stunning visual accompaniment and graphic designer Anna Lincoln to develop a compelling visual identity.

The final show that emerged is quite difficult to describe – an unconventional blend of poetry, song, historical research and image. It tells the story of three extraordinary individuals. Christopher St John – a writer and suffragist who lived at Smallhythe in a lesbian ménage a trois with Edy Craig and Tony Atwood. William John Banks - traveller, collector and talented draughtsman – who fled England in 1841 after being caught with a soldier in what was termed 'an indecent act'. This was the second time William had been caught and to avoid the very real possibility of execution by hanging – a fate at least 51 other men had suffered during William John's lifetime – he went into Exile. Finally, the enigmatic Henry Cyril Paget, 5th Marquess of Anglesey - who lived at Plas Newydd in North Wales devising, performing and touring numerous plays. Henry married a beautiful young woman but his apparently unconsummated marriage was dissolved in 1900. We don't know if he had affairs with men - the family papers were

destroyed - but he was once described as 'a notorious homosexual' because of his theatricality and his love of dressing-up and cross-dressing.

Girl Boy Child took shape during a period when we've seen a bright spotlight on queer histories, unprecedented in scale. 2017 saw more museums, galleries and heritage organisations explore LGBTQ themes than ever before. But in that same period we also saw a fierce backlash against this increased visibility. We saw a rise in homophobic hate crime and an unleashing of vitriol against transgender people which continues today - reminding us that celebrating difference in the present day — is an undeniably political act.

Girl Boy Child is our collective attempt to push back against the forces – the prejudice and stigma that have actively obscured, suppressed and silenced queer lives not only in museums, galleries and heritage sites but more broadly in the public realm - and which continue to do so. If you are interested to learn more, visit the RCMG website - <https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/rcmg/projects/prejudice-and-pride-1/girl-boy-child>

Professor Richard Sandell



Connecting with alumni in Shanghai

During the first half of 2018, I had the pleasure of taking my study leave in China so that I could challenge my thinking on museum ethics through engaging with wider international contexts. Funded in part through a Senior Research Fellowship at Fudan University (kindly facilitated by School of Museum Studies MA/PhD graduate Dr. Linda Kong, now a Lecturer at Fudan), I conducted research interviews with 20 museum educators across the country to explore how social inclusion programmes there are currently being defined and developed.

This field work gave me the opportunity to reconnect with dozens of former students. These accomplished alumni generously opened doors for me at the amazing museums where they work, providing introductions to senior staff and helping to translate conversations.

They also helped me to arrange informal reunion meals with larger groups of alums so that I could learn about their current employment and future goals.

These fascinating discussions with alumni prompted me to organise last April, with support from the School, an SMS alumni weekend in Shanghai, co-hosted by Fudan University. My purpose was to explore how the School could support the development of a structured China/Hong Kong alumni group to meet graduates needs and interests. Some 30 graduates gathered for the event which included peer-to-peer mentoring training, a study visit to Rockbund Museum (led by dynamic Deputy Director and one of our first alums from China Liu Yingjiu) and lots of informal exchanges around delicious meals. Some great ideas emerged and new initiatives are being planning as a result. Stay tuned!

Could you be a placement host?

If you work in an institution that could host one of our wonderful Masters students then please do get in touch.

While on placement students work on projects where they are able to use and expand their skills and knowledge and develop their practical expertise. Many of you will have experienced the placement yourselves and will know first-hand what a valuable experience this can be and many of our hosts report that they have achieved outcomes that wouldn't have been possible without the input and work of the placement student.

Placements are for 8 weeks, full time, July to September. Students can work relatively independently, but require weekly supervision, and professional context. Please contact Sarah and Ginny at msplacement@leicester.ac.uk if you would like to find out more about hosting a student in the future.

We imagine this work with alumni in China and Hong Kong as a model which we can adapt to other contexts in future. I am now leading our alumni strategy so if you have suggestions, wherever you are in the world, do get in touch.

Jm423@le.ac.uk



Reconnect 2019

We hope to see lots of graduates of the School of Museum Studies at this summer's Reconnect event. Please save Thursday 13th June in your diaries - we will be sending out details of how to register soon.

This year's event will take place here at the school and we will be visiting New Walk Museum to see their recent re-display of the Egyptian gallery and to find out about the design and education elements of this project.

There will also be the opportunity to take part in a workshop, peer to peer mentoring and to catch up with staff and fellow graduates from the school.

School Profile: Dr Hannah Turner



I come to Leicester from Vancouver, BC, where I was a Postdoctoral Fellow at Simon Fraser University in the School of Interactive Arts and Technology. Prior to that, I finished my doctorate at the University of Toronto in the Information Studies program.

I study how different technologies produce different knowledges through time. I have examined systems of classification and categorization in museum ethnographic collections, and I look at the development of bureaucratic record-keeping in museums where I trace how objects become both specimens and data in the history of anthropology. I am also interested in how new digital technologies are used to represent tangible and intangible cultural heritage, particularly of Indigenous peoples belongings. With the 3D digitization of museum objects for example, I question how objects are actively shaped by those who create and manipulate their digital representations, and how the practice of digitization is a negotiation between community, museum, and technological infrastructure. I continue to do research in British Columbia, but I also will be working in Cape Town later this year, organizing community visits to the Iziko museum.

This year, I'll teach about Objects and Collections in the Museum Studies Program, as well as in the Art Gallery and Museum Studies Program on Documentation and Managing Art Collections. I'll also be co-running (with Yunci Cai), the specialism on Global Museologies in the Spring.

School Profile: Ginny Copley



Ginny Copley has joined the School as a Museum Liaison and Employability Officer

Before coming to work in the School of Museum Studies I worked in education and in a range of museums and galleries both in the UK and overseas.

I was a teacher in Further Education and Secondary settings for many years in the UK, the Philippines and Dubai. I have also worked with young people with Special Educational Needs and as a Mental Health Promotion Specialist for the NHS. I was the Education Manager for the National Gallery of the Cayman Islands for 2 years and previous to that I was part of the Education team for Leicester's museums and galleries.

Working in the Cayman Islands I became familiar with the art and heritage of the region and particularly enjoyed getting to know the art of contemporary Caymanian artists and of Jamaican master painters. I managed both the formal and informal education programmes at the gallery and created a range of learning sessions for schools.

In Leicester I was part of the exhibition team for both Picasso Ceramics and German Expressionism, this was a real joy as these are such wonderful collections. They are still on display at New Walk Museum in Leicester and I would certainly recommend a visit. Museums and galleries enhance people's lives and I believe that one of the roles education can play is to make the museum accessible. School learning sessions should be enjoyable and fun as well as educational; crucially they should open the door for children to continue to enjoy galleries and museums throughout their lives.

Along with Sarah Allard, my job share partner, I am responsible for administering the Campus based Practice module and supporting students in relation to employability, work placements, ELTU and AccessAbility. I'm very happy to be here and excited to work with such a great range of museums and galleries in providing valuable work placement opportunities. I'm looking forward to meeting some of the School's alumni in person and hope to see some of you at our summer Re-connect event.

News in Brief

'Museum Activism' is a new book which elucidates the largely untapped potential for museums as intellectual and civic resources in addressing inequalities, injustice and environmental challenges

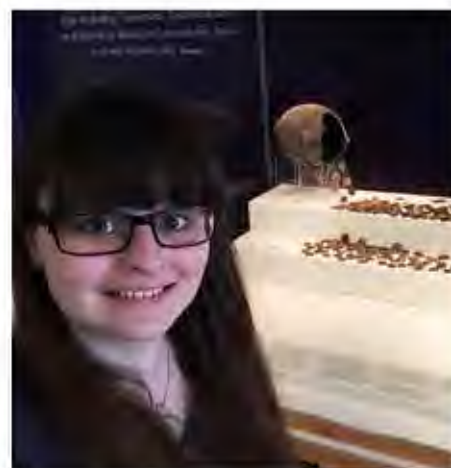
Edited by Prof Richard Sandell and Robert R Janes it documents the extraordinary

range of ways in which museum activism is at work in the 21st century. Published by Routledge, a 20% discount is available to alumni – use code MA230

China Conference – save the date.

There will be a conference collaboration between Shaanxi Normal University in Xi'an

and the University of Leicester, School of Museum Studies between 15th – 20th September 2019. The conference will take place in Xi'an, Shaanxi PRC and is aimed at PhD and MA/MSc students and new researchers. More details to follow.



Some of the Roman objects in the Yorkshire Museum's collection. ©York Museums Trust

Graduate Profile: Emily Tilley: Shedding new light on Roman artefacts

The day after I submitted my final Museum Studies MA assignment I applied for a job as Collections Facilitator for Roman Archaeology at York Museums Trust. To my amazement I was offered the position and I have now been working at the Yorkshire Museum for two years.

The role of Collections Facilitator for Roman Archaeology was created as a temporary position to oversee an Arts Council England funded research project into the Yorkshire Museum's Roman collections. York, the Roman legionary fortress of Eboracum, was founded by the Romans in AD 71 and grew to become the regional capital of the north of Roman Britain. The purpose of the project, entitled the 'Old Collections, New Questions' Roman Research Project, was to investigate how modern research approaches and technologies can shed new light on the Yorkshire Museum's collection of thousands of Roman artefacts, some of which have not been researched since they were excavated in the late nineteenth century.

Working at York Museums Trust has given me incredible opportunities and I learn something new every day. I have audited every Roman object in the museum's collection, organised two events to bring together academics, museum professionals, and members of the public to discuss new research opportunities, and have worked with a network of experts to carry out research using techniques

such as ground penetrating radar, X-Ray fluorescence, and micro-Raman spectroscopy to uncover new insights into our ancient past. My personal highlight was giving an hour-long BBC Radio York interview about the collections and our research as part of this year's BBC Civilisations Festival.

The Collections Facilitator role required a combination of subject specialist knowledge and curatorial skills. My academic background before completing my Museum Studies MA was in Classics, the study of the culture and literature of the Greek and Roman world. But this knowledge alone would not have been enough for the role. Instead, what allowed me to demonstrate my capabilities in my interview was the hands-on experience I had built by volunteering in museums and by studying Museum Studies at Leicester. My dissertation researched how museums promote community engagement with Roman collections and I did my placement module at the Corinium Museum in Cirencester, developing educational resources based on their Roman collections. My MA in Museum Studies allowed me to demonstrate that I had been given the training necessary for a curatorial role and that I could adopt an academic approach to museology.

I use skills I learnt at Leicester on a daily basis and the topics we discussed in lectures and seminars are often debated

in meetings. Studying Museum Studies at Leicester gave me a solid foundation for the start of my career in the heritage sector, giving me the confidence and knowledge that allows me to contribute to my workplace in a practical way.

The 'Old Collections, New Questions' Roman Research Project officially came to an end in May 2018, but it laid the foundation for a long-term strategy to undertake new research into the Yorkshire Museum's Roman collections. If you would like to find out more about the project a research document is publicly available at <https://www.yorkshireromancollections.org.uk/old-collections-new-questions/> and I post regular collections highlights at @YMT_YorkRomans.

I am now the Curatorial Assistant at the Yorkshire Museum and am working with the Portable Antiquities Scheme as the Finds Liaison Assistant for North and East Yorkshire. If you would like to find out more about my work I post updates at @YMT_Emily.

*Emily Tilley.
Curatorial Assistant, York Museums Trust.
MA Museum Studies, 2015-2016.*

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