



The Leicester Graduate Network

Museum Studies *connect*



50th Anniversary Conference – Museums in the Global Contemporary: Debating the Museum of Now

During April, we were delighted to host over 250 artists, musicians, scholars, practitioners, tutors and students from around the world for our three-day conference 'Museums in the Global Contemporary: Debating the Museum of Now'. For this conference, a key part of our School's 50th anniversary celebrations, our 'call for papers' encouraged a range of different session types, including workshops and performances. Our speakers did not disappoint, and shared their research and practice in innovative ways, helping us to debate some of the most pressing questions facing museums, galleries and heritage organisations today around race, social justice, education, migration, health, and cultural participation. Many of these issues also featured in the conference's Exhibition of Research which displayed poster papers and short films. Our keynotes Joan Anim-Addo, Conal McCarthy, Andrea Witcomb, Wayne Modest, Matt Smith, and Viviane Gosselin, together with our own Richard

Sandell, offered inspirational provocations, many of which questioned current museum approaches in a still unequal society.

The wonderful staff at Haley Sharpe Design, our sponsors of the conference, brought the conference to life with a range of events, including an evening tour at their Leicester-based design studio, a design clinic for delegates to get some advice on their current projects, and a hugely entertaining after dinner talk with Bill Haley on the early days of museum design.

Suzanne MacLeod, Ceri Jones and Sheila Watson kicked off the week with their pre-conference trips to explore Richard III, Shakespeare, and the sculpture of graffiti artist KAWS at Yorkshire Sculpture Park. We were also lucky to welcome the exciting work of Mel Jordan, Dave Beech and Andrew Hewitt of the Free Art Collective, who worked with our PhD students on a participatory art work in the conference

coffee space, which sought to explore how performance art can be a collaborative venture between curators and audiences. Additionally, artist Jane Williams brought us her hugely witty and inventive touring exhibition 'Debating the Nottrowe' from her 'Leasingstede Museum', which featured among other curiosities the world's oldest museum studies textbook! The conference wouldn't have been complete without a delicious Indian lunch on the Golden Mile, and a local Ceilidh band which had several of us dancing into the night!

Celebrating the School's 50th anniversary among such a warm and generous group of friends, graduates, colleagues, and long-time acquaintances felt very special indeed. We were delighted that so much of the event was shared on social media, with so many delegates working hard to share the event with those unable to attend in person. Here's to the next 50 years!!

Countries of Culture inquiry – Dr Lisanne Gibson defends funding to the regions

Early in May, the School's Dr Lisanne Gibson appeared before the Parliamentary Select Committee for Culture Media & Sport to offer expert insight into some of the key issues facing the cultural industries.

Commenting on the Government's Culture White Paper 2016, Lisanne and co-investigator Dr Abigail Gilmore referenced the emerging findings from their work on the AHRC project 'Understanding everyday participation – articulating cultural values'. They identified key issues, such as an imbalance of governmental funding allocated to the cultural sector at a regional level, with London receiving more funding than the rest of the UK combined, and funding disparities resulting in the

wealthiest and most educated benefitting most from subsidised cultural activities.

Lisanne said "The Government's Culture White Paper (2016) while laudable in its focus on participation is disappointing in that it remains focused on the status quo, that is, supporting culture that is already (and has always been) funded rather than focusing on funding innovation in cultural practice designing to support what a larger majority of people actually want to do in their spare time."

The academics recommended that in order to redress this imbalance, the government should introduce a cultural strategy which focuses on local communities and enable local stakeholders to influence policy.

Furthermore introducing a tourism tax on hotel stays in London would help to fund broader regional cultural enterprises, and charging entrance fees for international tourists to London museums and cultural events would help to subsidise regional cultural activities.

The researchers also identified a number of other challenges facing the cultural sector, including: a decline in British students in the UK studying to become culture and heritage practitioners, a lack of jobs in the UK cultural sector broadly, and a lack of diversity in the cultural and creative industry workforce, made worse by the frequent entry level requirement to volunteer or work for free.

Photo Credit: The Arches. Photograph: Delyth Edwards



Photo Credit: The People's Republic Gallery, Museum of Liverpool. © Mark McNulty

Launch of Socially Engaged Practice – our new flexible learning programme

The School is delighted to be launching its newest flexible learning programme, which will take its first intake of students in October. **Socially Engaged Practice in Museums and Galleries** comprises a suite of short courses that will bring together the latest research and practice to explore how museums can have a positive impact on individuals, communities and society. Led by Professor Richard Sandell and including new knowledge and insights into practice from the School's Research Centre for Museums and Galleries, this new programme will explore how museums and galleries can work in the fields of health and wellbeing, social justice, and deliver socially purposeful learning programmes for diverse audiences.

This programme will be our most flexible ever. It is structured so that you can study a single module (as a stand-alone course) and build up to a qualification if you wish to. It will also be possible to take extended study breaks, giving you a longer time to achieve the award of postgraduate certificate (2 modules), postgraduate diploma (4

modules) or Master's degree in Socially Engaged Practice in Museums and Galleries (4 modules plus a dissertation).

Four modules will be on offer, the first three of which can be taken as stand-alone courses:

- Exploring Socially Engaged Practice in Museums and Galleries
- Engaging Audiences: Education, Learning and Participation
- Research and Evaluation for Socially Engaged Museum and Gallery Practice
- Project in Practice: Developing Socially Engaged Practice in Museums and Galleries

Our innovative 'Project in Practice' module will provide students with a creative, structured, and well-supported opportunity to develop, undertake and critically reflect upon a project of their own choosing in a museum or gallery context they are familiar with. It enables students to develop expertise in one particular area of socially engaged practice through work-

based learning and with the support of a practitioner as a mentor from a leading national museum service.

All modules will be delivered on an online platform. This new system is compatible with desktop and laptop computers, smartphones and tablets, meaning students will be able to work from almost anywhere. Video and audio lectures, slideshows and online activities will form the core of this new programme. In-line discussions will enable students to connect with each other and learn together.

Please do pass this opportunity on to those you work with and do consider joining us for a module or two. The 'Project in Practice' module in particular offers an exceptional opportunity to develop your thinking and practice in socially engaged work with the support of a leading edge practitioner.

More information on the programme can be found on our website and applications are open for students wishing to start in October.



Encountering the Unexpected

Connecting people, museums and nature to encourage successful ageing

The UK's population is ageing and it is increasingly recognised that how we age matters. To age successfully, older people need to remain actively engaged with the world, be socially connected and retain a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. How can museums build on the powerful work they do around memory and empower older people to engage with, not disconnect from, the contemporary social, political and natural world through encounters with the unfamiliar, the extraordinary and the unexpected?

Encountering the Unexpected is a two-year project developed by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) that will initiate a series of bold museum experiments with natural heritage collections to develop a framework, or set of principles, that will activate, and interrogate, the potential of these collections to support successful ageing. Funded by the Museum Association's Esmée Fairburn Collections Fund, the project is a partnership between RCMG,

the North West Natural History Museums Partnership, and strategic partners including The Eden Project, Age UK and Equal Arts.

Natural heritage collections are packed with millions of wonders that can intrigue, surprise, and fascinate. How might these treasures be unlocked to support older people to age successfully, re-connect them with the natural world and encourage them to have a stake in the present and future? Older people are an untapped audience for natural heritage collections, which are strongly associated with children and their families, making it a challenge for museums to raise awareness of the importance of these collections across the whole of the life course. Also, having a connection to nature and positive wellbeing are inextricably linked – evidence suggests that connecting with nature can help restore physical energy, reduce stress, generate a positive mood and improve general outlook on life. However, evidence from Natural England suggests that older people are often disconnected from the natural world

and less likely to have regular contact with nature. Museums in the North West are keen to use their collections in new and imaginative ways, and *Encountering the Unexpected* will provide a lens through which to explore and revitalise natural heritage collections for a new audience.

Encountering the Unexpected combines RCMG's interests in active ageing and the potential to use collections in new ways and the need of the Museums Partnership to better understand how they can use their natural heritage collections to enrich lives and ensure that staff working with these collections have the skills and confidence to use them effectively. At the heart of the project will be rich, stimulating and meaningful encounters with natural heritage collections.

For more information contact:

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Left photo: From left to right, Ching-yueh Hsieh, Ryan Nutting, Stephanie Bowry and Petrina Foti presenting at the 2016 American Alliance of Museums Annual Meeting. Photo by Michelle Delaney.



Right photo: The atrium of the conference venue, the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. Photo by Ching-yueh Hsieh.

Current and Former Museum Studies PhD Students Present Papers at AAM

An international panel of current and former PhD students from the School of Museum Studies co-led a session on their doctoral research projects at the 2016 American Alliance of Museums (AAM) Annual Meeting & Museum Expo in Washington, D.C., on 28 May. Two current PhD students, Ching-yueh Hsieh and Ryan Nutting, and two recent graduates, Dr Stephanie Bowry and Dr Petrina Foti, presented on the subject of *Ghosts of Power in the Past, Present and Future Museum*. The panel used a conversational format to explore the use of power in four museum worlds: the sixteenth-century cabinet of Albrecht V (Munich), a late nineteenth-century collection of Asian objects in the Horniman Free Museum (London), digital technology objects at the Smithsonian in the late twentieth century and twenty-first-century exhibitions on indigenous peoples in Taiwan. Rather than presenting a chronology, the group considered the common themes which

connected their research, including representational strategies, authority issues and consequences, and invited the audience to contribute to the discussion. The presentation emerged from an initial idea by Petrina Foti and was developed in collaboration with Luke Leyh of the United States Holocaust Museum. A version of the final paper was also presented at a lunchtime colloquium to staff of the National Museum of American History.

It was the first time three of the presenters had attended AAM, which is the largest gathering of museum professionals in the world. The group also attended some fascinating sessions and workshops, including a presentation by NASA astronaut Dr Mae C. Jemison, as well as social events including the Global Leadership Reception and exhibition at the Renwick Gallery and 'The Party', a spectacular closing event hosted by the National Museum of Natural History. The group made good

use of their time in D.C., enjoying the stunning architecture of the US capital, and visiting the many museums, galleries and monuments located on the Mall. This year's AAM was also attended by Dr Janet Marstine, Academic Director, who represented the School's campus and distance learning programmes at the *Marketplace of Ideas* event, supported by Ryan, Stephanie, Ching and Petrina.

AAM proved to be a fantastic opportunity to showcase our work, catch up with former colleagues and network with established and emerging museum professionals. It was also a valuable learning experience for the group, who learned so much from their colleagues' research projects, and gained a richer understanding of our own.

Stephanie Bowry
Honorary Research Fellow,
School of Museum Studies



Campus Based MA Graduate Destinations

Gender Rights and the Women's Museum of Ireland

Holly Furlong – MA Museum Studies Class of 2014

In October 2014 I completed the full time MA in Museum Studies. For my placement, I worked in the Learning and Programmes department of Bath and North East Somerset County Council. The placement in Bath gave me the opportunity to be involved in learning programmes at a variety of sites, including working at the Roman Baths, the Fashion Museum and the Victoria Art Gallery.

As I was coming to the end of the placement, the MA and my time in England, I began the job hunt. My wish list was a museum education/outreach job preferably at home in Ireland. I was lucky to have an interview and be successful for the Learning Team Assistant role at Titanic Belfast while still on placement.

Titanic Belfast is a visitor attraction based in Belfast, beside the slipways where the iconic ship was built and launched in 1912. Titanic Belfast was another world from museums I had encountered previously, and offered me the opportunity to work within a private organisation; providing a good insight into the business driven environment. I was also delighted that during my time at Titanic Belfast I oversaw our successful application for the Sandford Award for Excellence in Education.

In summer 2015, I was delighted then to be offered a role as Education Assistant at the National Museum of Ireland, Decorative Arts and History, allowing a move back to my hometown, Dublin. This current role has offered me the opportunity to contribute to Ireland's 'Decade of Centenaries', especially significant during this pinnacle year which marks 100 years since the 1916 Easter Rising. I have been part of the development of the Museum's public programmes and engagement projects throughout the year, developing events and educational programmes to correspond with our new exhibition *Proclaiming A Republic: The 1916 Rising*.

Concurrently, I have continued my involvement with the Women's Museum of Ireland. A year prior to my starting in Leicester I had, along with three women been involved in the establishment of the Women's Museum of Ireland. This launched in March 2013 with a pop-up exhibition *Monsters of Creation: Snapshots of Women in Higher Education*. At Leicester I had focused my dissertation around the roles Womens' Museums might play in gender rights. The research was fascinating within the academic framework of my dissertation, but it also served a very

practical purpose. It was great to talk to these women about what they've achieved with their museums and the moves they have been taking to promote gender rights in their museums and exhibitions.

The Women's Museum of Ireland is an entirely virtual museum, profiling key Irish women from history. We have collaborated with a variety of groups to run events and pop-up exhibitions. We continually receive requests to visit our museum so last August we launched an ambitious plan to claim Dublin city centre as a museum and create a map locating areas of significance to Irish Women's History. We sourced information from the public inviting them to send on their suggestions for who should be included. We had a huge response, being profiled in a number of national newspapers, but most of our support was garnered through social media using #womenofdublin. We have recently finished the difficult task of narrowing down these names and have teamed up with an illustrator to help us put these women back on the map and will soon be launching a crowdfunding campaign. I was very pleased to be able to present at paper on this work at the School's Global Contemporary conference in April.



Photo Credit: Chronology and Archive of the Big Tail Elephants. Photo by Times Museum

Three Years after Graduation, I Found My Way Home

Tan Yue – MA Art Museum and Gallery Studies 2013

The role of local art institutions in China has always been my interest throughout my research and practice since the very beginning. In the past decade, Chinese museums have been going through a very dramatic period of growth. Many art museums grow with support from private capital and the policies of local government. Some generous collectors are willing to share their private collections with the public by establishing a new museum or art centre. This has become a new trend in the past three years. Long Museum and Yuz Museum in Shanghai, Sifang Art Museum in Nanjing and M Woods in Beijing are all built on private collections. Collaborating with Victoria and Albert Museum, the first design museum, Design Society has just launched it's brand in Shenzhen, and in 2017 is planning the largest ever V&A collections show outside the UK.

Some institutions do not confine themselves to expansion within China, but broaden their scope to the wider world. For example, K11 has opened 4 art centers in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Chongqing and Guangzhou, and also successfully hosted a series of exhibitions to promote China's young contemporary artists in Europe (eg Palais de Tokyo, Paris and ICA London). They also support some major biennials throughout the world. The varieties of museums not only offer possibilities and opportunities but also challenges. In the context of this enormous expansion, can a museum still create meaning, benefit society and work with the local community? Opinion has become increasingly critical. Arriving home in

this climate, I was faced with a dilemma. How should I find my own way in these circumstances? Should I join one of these newly built large scale museums? I think I've found my answer.

After I graduated from AMAGS and finished my five-month internship in Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art in Manchester, I came back to my city and started my career as a curatorial assistant at Guangdong Times Museum, a leading non-profit institution in South China, founded in 2010. I work closely with the curatorial team in exhibition planning, research and project organization. The exhibitions at Guangdong Times Museum are mainly research-based; experimenting with exhibition concepts and models to respond to the contexts of community, region and institution. They provide a discursive and productive exhibition platform, enabling emerging and mid-career artists, experts and scholars to explore artistic themes at once regional and farsighted, promoting and encouraging the production of contemporary art in China. The development of contemporary art in the Pearl River Delta is one major research direction; considering its history in terms of the social, economic and cultural context, and presenting local artistic practices against the backdrop of globalization. Our current major exhibition *Operation PRD – Big Tail Elephants: One Hour, No Room, Five Shows*, is the first comprehensive retrospective of 'Big Tail Elephants', one of the most important contemporary artists' group in Guangzhou. In an introductory panel, Hou Hanru, the co-curator asserts that "...the artistic culture of the Pearl

River Delta Region has become not only a vital part of the Chinese and international landscape, but also an 'alternate history' that has revealed new vantage points from which to view culture and art."

Recently, I started to curate a series of projects called *Banyan Commune*. Banyan trees have a particular meaning within traditional civil Canton (Pearl River Delta) culture. They act as temporary stopping places in the streets and alleys, open courtyards and community centers. The contents and models of *Banyan Commune's* exhibition reflect the recognition of the role such places play in Chinese society, and demonstrate art's social relevance in the public sphere. The exhibition is visible just inside the street-facing glass wall at the main entrance to the museum. This space witnesses the seasonal and daily shifts of the surrounding neighborhood while serving as a window to connect the museum to the public. The community surrounding Guangdong Times Museum is a microcosm of the types of residential communities throughout China. Participation and openness are two major foci to the project. At present two exhibitions have been hosted successfully. The artists created two stunning projects based on their research on the neighborhood and social intervention. I always say I am so lucky to have joined Times Museum's team and I enjoy working with a group of people of such enthusiasm and intelligence. They gave me the chance to understand my city on a different level and the passion to continue my career based in the region and local community.





Researching the São Paulo Biennial

Isobel Whitelegg, Lecturer and Co Programme-Director of our MA Art Museum & Gallery Studies programme, has just returned from a research trip to São Paulo, Brazil. With support from Santander and the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Isobel spent two weeks in one of her favourite places, the archives of the São Paulo Biennial. In collaboration with art historian and curator Vinicius Spricigo (Federal University of São Paulo), Isobel organised a seminar with a group of Brazilian scholars – each of whom is researching a different aspect of this biennial's complex history. Founded in 1951, São Paulo's biennial was the second to come into existence, and the first to take place in Latin America.

It has had a powerful effect on the history of art and the innovation of the biennial model. Having survived even the most repressive years of Brazil's military dictatorship (1964-1985), it also remains a vital public space – housed within the fluid open space of an Oscar Niemeyer designed pavilion, and located within the city's much-loved Ibirapuera Park.



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All information in this document was correct at the time of going to print. However, changes and developments are part of the life of the University, and alterations may occur to the programmes and services described in this newsletter.