



CASEBOOK

Designing for Audience Engagement
in Museums and Cultural Institutions

Giulia Gerosa, Elena Montanari, Lola Ottolini, Gennaro Postiglione



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Open Atelier Casebook.
Designing for Audience Engagement
in Museums and Cultural Institutions

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Preface

This book is a “case” full of best practices, and was conceived as a tool through which museums and cultural institutions can capture inspiration and ideas for the development of innovative user-centred practices fostering interactions and audience engagement.

The volume was realized in the framework of Open Atelier, a project funded by the European Commission within the Creative Europe program (CREA-CULT-2021-COOP-2), based on a cross-sectoral network of four European House Museums – Art Museums of Skagen (Denmark), Millesgården (Sweden), Einar Jónsson Museum (Iceland) and Plečnik House at Museum and Galleries of Ljubljana (Slovenia). These institutions are partnering with one creative performance organisation (Associazione Marchigiana Attività Teatrali, Italy) and a University (Politecnico di Milano, Italy) to develop innovative modalities to engage visitors and stakeholders in the way cultural heritage is explored, interpreted, and used.

The Casebook was realized by the Team at Politecnico di Milano in the preliminary phase of the project, to explore the state of the art in the development of participatory programs in museums and cultural institutions, with the aim to support the Open Atelier partners in the design of their experimental actions. This mapping was meant to explore innovative solutions for the engagement of the public, to investigate new and relevant approaches, formats, and methodologies for co-creation and interdisciplinary collaborations within the heritage sector, as well as to identify possible experts in the field that could be consulted along the development of the project.

The outcomes of this activity are reported in this publication, where a selection of one hundred significant practices is analyzed by surveying the participatory strategies applied in each specific context, and by evaluating their results and reflecting on their effectiveness and transferability.

The release of this booklet is meant to share this operative tool with other museums and cultural institutions that aim at enhancing audience engagement, by disseminating best practices and opportunities which could nurture this process.

The analysis of case studies has been organized according to the seminal work published by Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (2010), which generated a transformative impact on museums, and contributed to make them more inclusive, democratic, compelling, entertaining, and even therapeutic spaces.

In this volume, the comparative study of best practices was developed according to the categories outlined by Nina Simon, who arranged participatory practices into four types:

(1) CONTRIBUTORY projects, where the audience engagement is specifically focused on consultations (through workshops, interviews, mapping, etc.) or contributions (e.g. lending or donating a creation, a story, or a treasured object to be included in an exhibition curated by the museum); in this type of programs, the public has no decision-making capacity, and the engagement is limited (in time and scope).

(2) COLLABORATIVE projects, where people participate as active partners in processes that are ultimately controlled by the museum, which sets the parameters for the public's participation, makes the critical decisions, and remains in overall control; collaborative participants usually are involved in some parts of the decision-making processes, and in the sharing of opinions or contents.

(3) CO-CREATIVE projects, where the audience defines the goals and/or the theme from outset, working together with the museum to co-design and co-produce it: in these experiences, the primary function of the institution is to provide the tools and logistical support for the creation of the product, and to assess and verify qualitative and quantitative parameters.

(4) HOSTED projects, where the museum hands over a space, a program, or various resources to a target audience or to community partners, in order to implement and accommodate their own work.

The analysis of selected best practices was also categorized according to other parameters:

FORMAT = the type of activity exemplified by the case study (e.g. exhibition, workshop, public event, performance, installation, digital tool, competition);

DURATION = the relationship with time; the survey included practices characterized by different time spans (ranging from one or few days to several months or years, but also encompassing recurring initiatives, e.g. annual events);

SITUATION = the relationship with place; most practices are carried out “inside” (the museum or other venues involved in the experience), but some are also performed “outside” (in the public space) or “online” (on digital platforms and virtual spaces).

The latter parameters are presented through graphic diagrams (situated on the lower part of the right page), that situate the experience in a specific type of time span and spatial condition.

The textual description of each project is based on a synthetic presentation of the activity (“what”), the process (“how”), and its objectives and outcomes (“why”).

Each case is assigned with one or more #tag (i.e. a keyword). The tag index at the end of the volume is designed to facilitate the exploration and use of the contents.

The survey is complemented by a conclusive text, offering a critical insight into the research carried out within the Open Atelier project.

This publication is indeed meant to share the results and tools produced within this operative context, with the aim to disseminate and foster the growing culture of participation that is playing a crucial role in enhancing the role of museums for contemporary societies.

Subsidized Times

Vietnam Museum
of Ethnology
Hanoi, Vietnam

where

curated by artist
Wendy Erd

when

2006-07

general public

target

**contributory
exhibition**

format



inside



what

For the “Subsidized Time” exhibition, artist Wendy Erd realized **two documentaries** together with videographers, curators and researchers from the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology, and a group of **citizens from Hanoi**, with the aim to show the authentic personal stories of the population from the era under the strict post-war rationing policy, that lasted from 1975 to 1986. People also collaborated in collecting objects and artifacts related to those times, which became part of the exhibition itself.

how

The collaboration between museum professionals and Hanoi’s residents included **interviews and video-recordings, documenting memories and information**, as well as the involvement into the definition of the exhibition’s concept and structure. After the launch of the show, participants were also invited to the museum to give a feedback about the inauguration, the visit experience, and the editing of the video documentation.

why

The involvement of the inhabitants into the exploration of this chapter of the local history, in the role of storytellers, allowed the museum to show authentic insights on facts and events. Participants gained ownership and pride for their work, and the community could become more aware of their past and sense of belonging.

#local-history #local-identity #identity #storytelling #sharing-personal-stories #donating-personal-items

MappaMi

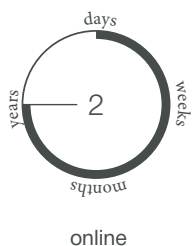
EUMM Ecomuseo Urbano
Metropolitano Milano Nord
Milan, Italy

with the collaboration of
Politecnico di Milano
/DASU
within the project
Mappiamo Milano Nord

2007-09

general public

**contributory
digital tool
(map)**



where

when

format target



what

“MappaMi” is a **participatory geographic mapping** of the area North of Milan, promoted by EUMM (the ecomuseum managing the heritage of the Niguarda district). Initially, it was developed in the form of a 2D map that combined infographics and storytelling, realized through the collaboration of the community, and summarizing highlights from the past and present of the neighborhood. Later, the map became a web geo-blog that could be modified and updated by more users.

how

EUMM and Politecnico di Milano coordinated a teamwork to reflect and discuss with the local community on the significant cultural values of the Niguarda area. This collaborative activity laid the ground for the creation of the 2D map, and later for the design of the digital tool. A website was activated to allow all the members of the community to upload personal contributions (such as **stories, photos, commentaries, and ideas**), and to geo-tag them in specific places on the map. The uploaded materials were verified and moderated by EUMM before being posted, although a curatorial skimming of the contents was not included.

why

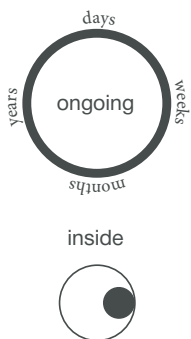
The objective of “MappaMi” was to promote the active and participated protection of the local heritage, and make people more aware of their environment and its values. Moreover, it contributed to enhance the socio-historical knowledge related to the area, by adding the daily experience of local communities into the narration.

#mapping #digital-map #geo-blog #local-history #local-identity
#storytelling #sharing-personal-stories #sharing-personal-photos

Jumping in Art Museums

blog
since 2008
general public
**contributory
(art project)
exhibition**

format target when where



what

“Jumping in Art Museums” is a **participatory art project, carried out in the form of a trend, based on the sharing of photos and videos** depicting people jumping for joy in front of artworks in a museal space. The initiative was conceived and launched by Allison Reimus, a former student at American University, with the aim break away from the traditional, often perceived solemnity of art museums and encourage visitors to interact with art in a more active and joyful way.

how

Allison Reimus launched a campaign, soliciting people to visit museum spaces and take photos or videos of them jumping in front of their favorite artwork, and inviting them to share these materials on the blog she created, available at <https://jumpinginartmuseums.blogspot.com>. By **creating and disseminating the visual records of these unique interactions**, this projects showcases **unconventional and creative interactions with art**, that can contribute to make museums more accessible and engaging, particularly for those who might find traditional visits intimidating or boring. It can also foster a sense of playfulness and encourage viewers to think about art in new ways. To participate in the project, the curator asks people to send her via e-mail a photo or a video, and some basic information (name, location, and name of the artwork and artist to who the jump is dedicated). All the submitted entries are posted in the blog on a regular basis.

why

This project exemplifies a way to allow people to engage with art in a dynamic and playful manner, creating visually expressive moments and potentially fostering a sense of freedom and creativity. It also exemplifies an effective way to combine physical and digital interactions in museums: digital tools enable the sharing of the images on a global scale, the possibility for everyone to participate, and the construction of an online community, but the production of contents relies on the physical interaction with artworks and exhibition spaces, and thus solicits the visit to museums and other cultural institutions.

#art #art-based-participatory-project #communication-campaign #playful-interactions #worldwide #sharing-personal-photos #online-community

Talking Skulls

Rijksmuseum
Amsterdam,
The Netherlands

where

in collaboration
with Damien Hirst
and SkipIntro

1 November
- 15 December 2008

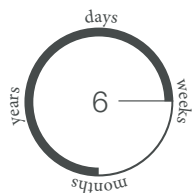
when

general public

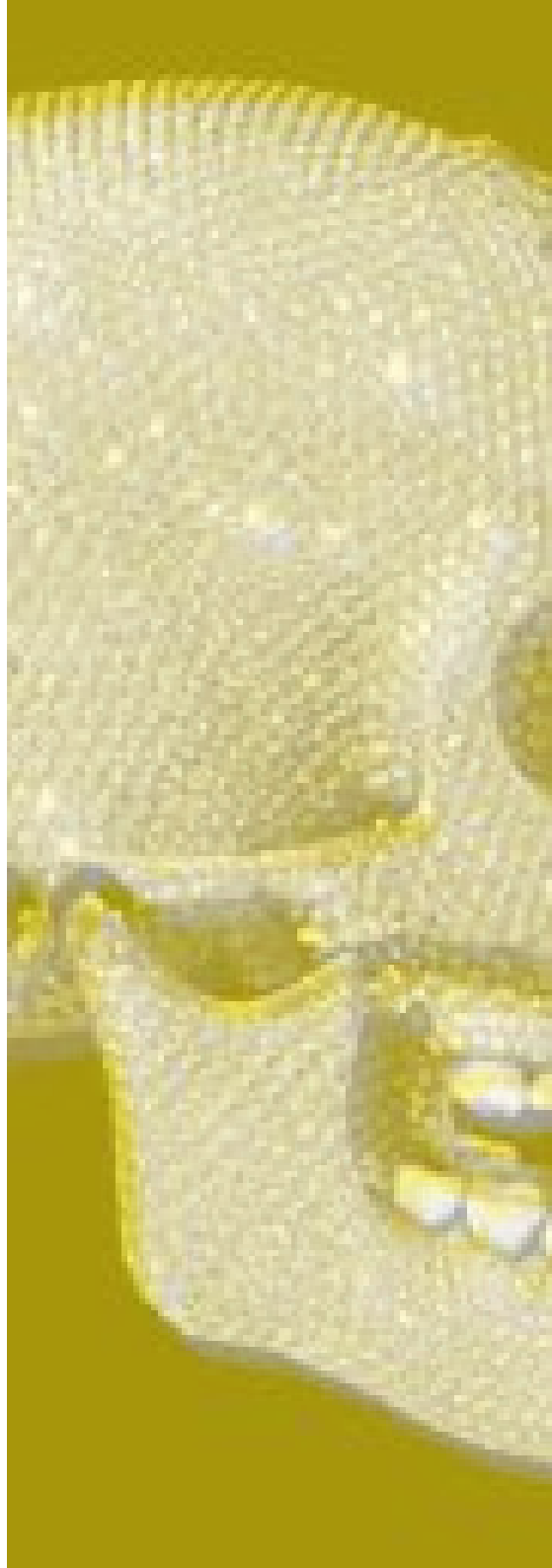
target

**contributory
exhibition**

format



inside/online



what

The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam exhibited one of the most controversial pieces of art in history, “For the Love of God”, a skull set with 8.601 diamonds that was created by Damien Hirst. The controversy and discussion evoked by the artwork (especially referred to its extreme price) were exploited by the museum to promote and extend the show. The strategy was based on the engagement of the audience (and on the use of this engagement’s outcomes), **both onsite and online**.

how

On the one hand, the public visiting the exhibition was invited to express and **leave their opinion about the artwork through an interactive confession booth**, that used a green screen technology to turn the heads of people into “talking skulls”. The live content of “talking skulls” (i.e. visitors’ comments on the artwork) was automatically uploaded from the booth to a **virtual “universe of opinions”** placed in a website created by SkipIntro. The videos were chromakeyed, so that each contributor appeared as a floating head, which created an appealing visual consistency; the heads drifted around an image of the skull, and spectators could sort the videos by Country of origin, gender, age, and some key concepts (such as love it / hate it, or think it’s art / think it’s hype). **Visitors’ thoughts and insights were thus integrated as part of the exhibition experience.**

why

The “For the Love of God” website transformed the videos contributed by the public into an interactive online experience, that was used to enhance the presentation of the artwork and to multiply the perspectives around it. At the same time, the visitors that decided to engage in this contributory project had the possibility to develop a special relationship with the artwork, to dedicate some time to the elaboration of their intellectual and emotional reactions, and to see their voice heard by the museum and its audience.

#art-based-participatory-project #sharing-opinions #playfull interactions
#phygital-experience #engaging-technolog #exhibition-intervention

Other People's Photographs

Folkestone,
United Kingdom

where

promoted and funded
by Bride Hall,
Interreg III and
Shepway District Council

2008-10

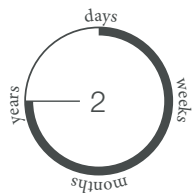
when

local community

target

**contributory
exhibition**

format



inside/outside



what

The Strange Cargo Arts Company produced an artist-led participatory intervention bringing together citizens' collective memories by means of an **exhibition of personal photographs** taken in public spaces, with the aim to conserve and promote the historic identity of Folkestone's urban landscape, that has been massively altered by the replacement of old buildings.

how

Over two years, a collection was made of more than 1.500 photographs of people, taken over 125 years in the city's public space and in those of the adjoining municipalities of Cheriton and Sandgate. Strange Cargo worked for many months in **direct public consultation**, and used a variety of approaches to inform the local population about the call for photographs. A selection of 540 was made in such a way that each place was represented by only one image. Each among the selected photographs was **reproduced on a metal support, and hung in the space where it was taken**. The **voice of the owner or of the photographer was recorded**, telling the story that goes with it. Pictures show children on bicycles, people proudly posing with a new car, street festivities, and a whole series of everyday scenes personally experienced in public space. Two tactile screens installed in Bouverie Place enabled people to look at all the photographs, listen to the explanations, and situate them on a digital map of the city. The photographs that were not selected to be exhibited in the street could also be viewed on the screens.

why

The exhibition transformed the open space into an exhibition gallery, where **photos and places were intertwined to convey personal and collective memories** and values.

#urban-space #local-history #sharing-personal-photos #mapping #geo-blog #digital-map #public-call #diffused-exhibition #collective-memory

Top 40

Worcester City
Art Gallery and Museum
Worcester,
United Kingdom

where

curated by the museum's
Collections Manager,
Philippa Tinsley

2009

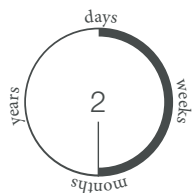
when

general public

target

**contributory
exhibition**

format



inside/online



what

The format of the exhibition was conceived to experiment with the participation of the public in the selection of the contents displayed, and to **start a critical reflection on the impact of audience reception on curatorial work.**

how

Fourty “star” paintings from Worcester City Museum’s collection were hung in a visually pleasing layout, with no reference to date nor theme. Written interpretation about the pictures was kept to a minimum (although family-oriented workstations relating to five individual paintings were included). In the centre of the exhibition, curators set up a **ballot box and voting sheets**, to encourage visitors to vote for their favourite picture and, if they wanted, to describe the motivations of this choice. Each Monday morning, curators counted up the votes cast during the previous week and, on Wednesday, the museum released a new **Top 40 chart**. A fairly large label with the week’s chart position was placed next to each artwork. Curators also sent out a weekly press release about the new countdown, and announced the new number one on Twitter.

why

Beside facilitating engagement with the artworks, the initiative aimed to stimulate a dialogue between the museum and the visitors, but also to foster a reflection on artistic and cultural values. In particular, it encouraged the community to take part in the museum’s programs and to visit on a regular basis, hence building up the public’s loyalty and interest.

#art #voting #public-consultation #collection-in-action #social-media
#sharing-opinions #participated-decision-making #culturally-involved-
people #public-call #exhibition-intervention #in-progress-exhibition

Scapes

DeCordova Sculpture
Park and Museum
Lincoln, USA

curated by sound artist
Halsey Burgund

2010

general public

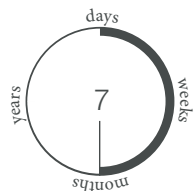
**contributory
digital tool
(mobile app)**

where

when

target

format



inside/outside



what

The sound artist Halsey Burgund created an interactive experience connecting a museum's space, people, and sound. This project allows participants to walk around the sculpture park of the DeCordova Museum by **listening to a mixture of a musical composition and voice commentaries recorded by previous participants**, all filtered and influenced by the physical location.

how

The experience is based on the development of a digital tool that allows, first of all, to record sounds, thoughts, and responses to the landscape that visitors may want to share while navigating the museum and its sculpture park. The registration requires the **download of a mobile app** (but the public can also borrow mobile phones from the museum, in which the app is already installed). Once recorded, these audio **contributions are immediately incorporated into a collective sound-piece** through a system of **algorithms that is constantly creating new music**, so that loops never happen. The resulting sound installation can be enjoyed everywhere – and especially at the museum, where it can enhance the visit experience and unfold new perspectives on the museum's objects and places.

why

Burgund's artwork challenges people in interacting with the museum scape and, by capturing the sound produced by this passage, **it creates an oral history of the visit experiences** that take place in the museum, and makes it accessible to the public at large.

#sculpture #gardens #mobile-app #sound #storytelling #new-voices
#collecting-voices #open-source-collection

The Wall

Museum of Copenhagen
Copenhagen, Denmark

where

curated by director
Jette Sandhal

2010-17

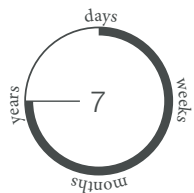
when

general public

target

**contributory
digital tool**

format



outside



what

This interactive phygital tool was designed to enhance the city museum's outreach tasks. Initially installed on Dantes Plads, in 2010, throughout the years it was moved in various neighborhoods to engage with different communities. From 2015 to 2017, when the institution remained closed during a major renovation, this device allowed the public to **access some of its important collections of maps and historic images.**

how

The Wall is a 10 by 2 metre **digital, interactive, multi-user, multi-touch screen**, composed of four high definition plasma screens, mounted into a customised container, run by 30 dedicated softwares drawing on a database; one side of the box lifts up and out to form a canopy. The screen is navigated through simple intuitive hand movements (tapping, pushing, pulling, flicking); the grammar is similar to that of an i-phone, but with larger dimensions. Contents are organized by geographical urban districts, as Copenhageners tend to identify themselves by specific local neighborhoods. Around 10.000 historic images from the museum's collections have gone into the database and appear on The Wall in the form of a multi-layered cityscape, and partly as a traditional database, that can be searched through keywords. People can interact with the device on their own terms. Users can drift, observe, and enjoy the cityscape, but they can also open and explore individual elements or thematic albums, as well as **upload their own images, comments, and stories.** The database structure is non-hierarchical, and **anyone can invent and add their own factual and poetic tags** as their personal experience, emotional realities, secret and sacred places fit into the urban landscape.

why

The Wall created unexpected relationships and facilitated the dialogue between museum and citizens (especially non-museum-goers). Through the years, participation and uploads have grown significantly, hence contributing to strengthen the museum's collections in relation to the contemporary urban context and social history.

#urban-space #sense-of-place #local-identity #open-source-collection
#phygital-experience #multiple-perspectives #sharing-personal-stories
#sharing-personal-photos #interactive-device #mobile-museum

Exquisite Things

Haffenreffer Museum
Providence, USA

where

curated by Ian Russell
in collaboration
with Brown University

January - June 2011

when

university students

target

**contributory
(co-curated)
exhibition**

format



inside



what

This exhibition “of things” aimed at exploring the ways we connect to them and the ways we create meaning by making connections between things. The objects included in the project were chosen from the Haffenreffer Museum’s collection, using a variation of the game “exquisite corpse”.

how

The **game “exquisite corpse”** was invented by the Surrealists in the 1920s; in its original form, it was played by multiple individuals who, by building on each other’s work in turn, created a new collective work that no one would have imagined on their own. The activity was traditionally played with words, and later adapted to images; players would write a text, conceal the majority of it, and pass it to the next player who would continue to write from where the previous had left off. In **its application to the curatorial practice**, the game was developed as follows: nine people (the museum’s curator and eight students) each selected one object from Haffenreffer Museum’s collection, in sequence, one after another; rather than following a specific theme, each person chose an object based on how they thought it connected to the object chosen just before them. The result was not only **a collection of objects from the museum, but also a collection of relational spaces between things** – exploring how connections are created and how we perceive meaning through those connections.

why

The aim of the project was to increase awareness about the identity of and the relationship with things, especially when objects are part of a museum’s collection. Through the website, the public can still view the exhibition as well as contribute to its development; everyone is invited to “encounter” the displayed objects, to leave a comment about the selection procedure, and to add further connections (and thus to join the game).

#material-culture #creative-intervention #exhibition-intervention
#co-curation #exclusive-meetings-with-objects #collection-in-action

Split Second: Indian Paintings

Brooklyn Museum
New York, USA

where

organized by
Shelley Bernstein,
Chief of Technology

July 2011 - January 2012

when

general public

target

**contributory
exhibition**

format



inside



what

The “Split Second” initiative invited Brooklyn Museum’s **online community** to participate in a project aimed to result in a **small installation of Indian paintings** from the institution’s permanent collection.

how

The initiative began with a **three-steps activity** that explored the museum’s collection of Indian paintings; participation was open to anyone with an Internet connection. The first stage explored split-second reactions; in a timed trial, participants were asked to select which painting they prefer from a randomly generated pair of images. Next, participants were asked to write in their own words about a painting before rating its appeal on a scale. In the third phase, participants were asked to rate a work of art after being given unlimited time to view it alongside a typical interpretive text. Each part of the exercise aimed to examine how a different type of information (or a lack thereof) might affect a person’s reaction to a work of art. The initiative culminated with an installation on the museum’s second floor. Visitors were able to view a small selection of the paintings that generated the most controversial and dynamic responses during the evaluation process, accompanied by a visualization and analysis of the data collected.

why

Taking its inspiration from the critically acclaimed book “Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking” by Malcolm Gladwell, this online experiment (and the resulting installation) intended to **explore how our initial reaction to a work of art is affected by what we know, what we’re asked, and what we’re told** about the object in question. Furthermore, it offered a rare opportunity to see the Brooklyn Museum’s collection of Indian paintings in person, many of which have not been on view for several years (owing to their light sensitivity), and to consider them in a new light.

#art #hidden-heritage #public-consultation #digital-engagement
#creative-intervention #online-community #collection-in-action

Harvest the Knowledge

Ceredigion Museum
Aberystwyth,
United Kingdom

where

within The Happy
Museum project (2011-16)
in collaboration
with the charity Tircoed

2012

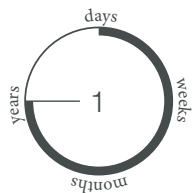
when

woodland and rural
communities of the area

target

**contributory
(artisanal) workshop
+ public event
(fair/sale)**

format



inside/outside



what

Ceredigion's bi-lingual project was carried out in partnership with Tircoed, a charity led by woodland and rural communities, which supported the museum in **training five young people with craft and enterprise skills, to make a range of kitchen crafts to be displayed and sold in the museum's shop.** The new objects were inspired by and related to items included in the collection. The project also invested in proper branding for the products with marketing support from an intern, sourced through Aberystwyth University. The initiative created an **enduring partnership** with Tircoed and, by working outdoors, at the charity's woodland, workshops showed the museum in a new light.

why

The project was about expanding the perception of the museum, showing that it is not just a building in town, and rather breaking down barriers and allowing it to outreach the local communities and to construct mutually fruitful exchanges.

#collection-in-action #material-culture #craft #young-adults #training
#artisanal-skills #entrepreneurial-skills #fair #learning-by-doing

Your Museum

Museo della Storia
di Bologna, Italy

since 2012

general public

**contributory
exhibition
+ installation**

where

when

target

format



inside



what

The city museum of Bologna has a diffused structure, based on the networking of the most relevant cultural institutions of the urban area. Its core was set up in Palazzo Pepoli, where several opportunities are provided to **integrate the voices of the citizens and insights of their everyday life into the main narration.**

how

“Your Museum” is a section of the exhibition at Palazzo Pepoli, located in the last three rooms included in visitors’ path. It was conceived as a participatory space, that is used to host the temporary installation of personal collections that some citizens may want to share. These **short-term displays** are integrated into the main exhibition and operate as additional and everchanging insights; they are meant to enrich the representation of the history and the identity of the city through the personal memories of the “donors”. A specific session, “Percorsi emotivi/ Sentimental Journeys”, is organized around **a computer terminal that allows visitors to access a geo-tagged blog**, in which people can express a thought or an idea, provide a suggestion, or share a memory connected to the places they love the most in the city. These contributions are meant to be transcribed and then embedded inside a purposely designed map of Bologna.

why

These spaces and devices allow the museum to include the citizens’ and tourists’ personal contribution to the narration of the history and identity of the city.

#geo-blog #collecting-voices #contemporary-city #sharing-opinions
#sharing-personal-stories #participatory-space #identity

American Stories

The Smithsonian
National Museum
of American History
Washington D.C., USA

curated by
Bill Yeingst and Bonnie
Campbell Lilienfeld

April 2012 - January 2020

local community

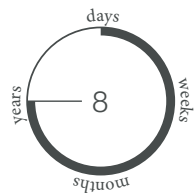
**contributory
exhibition**

where

when

target

format



inside/online



what

The exhibition “American Stories” is structured in three levels: a physical display exploiting interactive devices, an online exhibit featuring the same objects and narrative, and a digital tool (**an app**) that gives visitors the possibility to have a voice on the topic. The contents showed by the app are based on the contributions of the public, that is **invited to describe their own interpretation of the objects on display, and their experience during the (physical and/or online) visit of the exhibition.**

how

In the production of the contents displayed through the app, visitors become protagonists. This platform **collects people’s impressions, comments, and witnesses** about the objects exhibited and about the visit experience. Everyone can freely access it, and upload documents or leave vocal messages. It is also possible to rate other people’s contributions

why

The app works as a virtual layer to be added to the fruition of the (physical and/or online) exhibition. The initiative is meant to integrate people’s voice in the narration of the museum’s contents.

#mobile-app #sharing-opinions #sharing-personal-stories #collection-in-action #multiple-perspectives #exhibition-intervention

Gif It Up

promoted by Europeana
in collaboration with
the Digital Public
Library of America,
Trove and DigitalNZ

since 2013

creative people

**contributory
competition**

where

when

target

format



outside/online



what

“Gif It Up” is an annual digital art competition organized by Europeana, in collaboration with other major open-access digital libraries such as the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA), DigitalNZ, and Trope Japan. The project invites artists, creatives, and the general public from around the world to create original animated GIFs using openly licensed cultural heritage materials from these platforms. The initiative merges digital creativity with historical archives, bringing new life and visibility to public domain and open-access cultural content.

how

The project is structured as a month-long competition, typically held every October. **Participants browse the vast collections of images, artworks, photographs, and documents available** through Europeana and its partner platforms, selecting materials that inspire them. Using digital tools or animation software, they **transform these historical resources into engaging, modern GIFs**. Participants upload their GIFs to the competition platform, providing information about the source material used. Entries are evaluated by a panel of experts and the public, with prizes awarded in various categories (e.g., creativity, technique, reuse of material). Europeana and partners often organize online workshops, tutorials, and promotional events to encourage participation and educate about copyright, reuse, and digital heritage. Selected entries are featured on the Europeana website, in blog posts, on social media, and sometimes in physical or virtual exhibitions.

why

“Gif It Up” aims to raise awareness about the richness and accessibility of digital cultural heritage. Its main goal is to foster creative reuse of heritage: **by encouraging users to reinterpret historical materials, the project highlights the relevance of the past in contemporary creative expression**. The initiative also contributes to build a sense of shared cultural identity, and promotes public domain content, by advocating for the use of openly licensed resources, and helping people understand how they can legally and ethically reuse cultural content.

#creative-expression #user-generated-content #digital-engagement
#photography #visual-language #collection-in-action #worldwide

Young European Heritage Makers

promoted by Council
of Europe and
the European Union

since 2013

children and young
people across Europe

**contributory
competition**

where

when

target

format



outside/online



what

The “Young European Heritage Makers” competition is an educational and participatory initiative that invites **children and young people across Europe to explore, interpret, and share their local cultural heritage**. Organized under the umbrella of the European Heritage Days, a joint action of the Council of Europe and the European Union, the competition empowers **young citizens to become active contributors to cultural life** by discovering and telling the stories of the heritage that matters to them.

how

The competition typically takes place annually, and is open to participants aged 6 to 18, working either individually or in groups, often through schools, youth clubs, or cultural organizations. Participants are asked to **choose a local heritage element** (a place, tradition, story, person, or practice) that they feel connected to or find important, and to **create a short presentation about it** in the form of a video, photo essay, drawing, or story, expressing what it means to them. Entries are submitted at the national level, where each Country selects a number of finalists or winners. Selected projects are shared on the European Heritage Days platform, and winning participants may be invited to take part in an international celebration, including online exchanges or travel opportunities.

why

The competition was conceived as a way to strengthen young people’s sense of belonging, identity, and agency within the broader European cultural landscape. It aims to foster curiosity and appreciation for cultural diversity and heritage from an early age, give young people a voice in shaping how heritage is perceived and valued, encourage active citizenship, creativity, and cross-border dialogue.

#creative-expression #visual-language #learning-by-doing #local-identity
#user-generated-content #sense-of-place #worldwide

The Jewish Resistance Monument Revisited

Jewish Museum
Amsterdam,
The Netherlands

curated by
Gennaro Postiglione,
Mikel van Gelderen,
Marianne Theunissen,
Jeroen Werner,
Jurjen Zeinstra, within
REcall project (2012-14)

2014

general public

**contributory
performance**



inside/outside



where

when

target

format



what

The initiative was carried out in the framework of REcall, a research project funded within the EU-Culture Programme, which promoted interventions on conflict heritage and landscapes to develop innovative ways to overcome traumas and foster new processes and practices around commemorative spaces. One of these interventions was designed to test an active approach to history based on a **performative strategy**, that was experimented at the Jewish Resistance Monument. This was built in 1988, and stands just a few meters away from Amsterdam City Hall and Waterlooplein (which, before WWII, used to be Jewish workers' district).

how

The project was developed in collaboration with historian Loes Gomps. It started from a systematic browsing of Jewish Museum's archives, to survey the documents related to the monument and the personal and collective stories it was meant to celebrate. The selected materials (and especially the audio/video fragments reporting the direct voices of Jewish Resistance fighters) have been transcribed by volunteers and collected in the volume "The Jewish Resistance Monument Transcripts". During an entire week, the book was displayed in front of the monument, and **people passing-by were approached and asked to read one fragment while a camera was recording**, giving voice to the fragment "as if" they were the witnesses of the story. The recordings were edited to realize a **new video-document**, that was first presented in the Gallery Amstel 41 in the occasion of the anniversary of the workers' strike during the Nazi Occupation of Amsterdam (25 February 1941), and later exhibited at the Jewish Museum.

why

The initiative was meant to foster a critical reflection on monuments, to investigate the very notion of memorialization, and to question the role of commemorative forms in contemporary societies. The project actively involved participants in the commemoration process, and turned them from passive audience to the subjects carrying these memories.

#difficult-heritage #local-history #sharing-personal-stories #performative
#collecting-voices #collective-memory #meeting-point #urban-space

Wedding Fashion

Victoria & Albert Museum
London, United Kingdom

3 May 2014
- 15 March 2015

general public

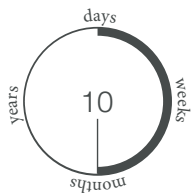
**contributory
exhibition**

where

when

target

format



inside/online



what

The exhibition “Wedding Dresses 1775-2014” was conceived to trace the development of the fashionable white wedding dress. The display was mainly built upon key fashion designers’ documentation. Nevertheless, alongside core materials, curators included the **photos collected through an open-source public call**, illustrating the development of wedding fashion through the personal photographic stories of common people. The **integration of personal memories and experiences** ensued from the specific curatorial approach implemented in the exhibition’s construction, that was based on the narration of the histories of the dresses, revealing fascinating details about the lives of the wearers and offering intimate insights into their circumstances and fashion choices.

how

An open call was circulated to invite all those that were interested to upload their pictures to deposit them into a section of the museum’s website, that was specifically dedicated to this initiative.

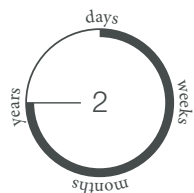
why

The integration of the personal experiences that people shared by donating their wedding photos allowed curators to add different perspectives and a multivocal representation of the topic.

#fashion #collection-in-action #open-source-collection #public-call
#sharing-personal-photos #sharing-personal-stories

Make Your Own Masterpiece!

Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, The Netherlands	where
2014-15	when
general public	target
contributory competition	format



inside/outside/online



what

In anticipation of its reopening on April 2013, in 2012 the Rijksmuseum launched “Rijksstudio” (an online presentation of ultra high-resolution images of 125.000 works in the collection), and invited famous artists as well as all members of the public to create their own masterpieces by **downloading images of artworks** (or details of artworks), and using them in a creative way (for example, by designing furniture pieces or wallpaper, decorating a car or an iPad cover, etc.).

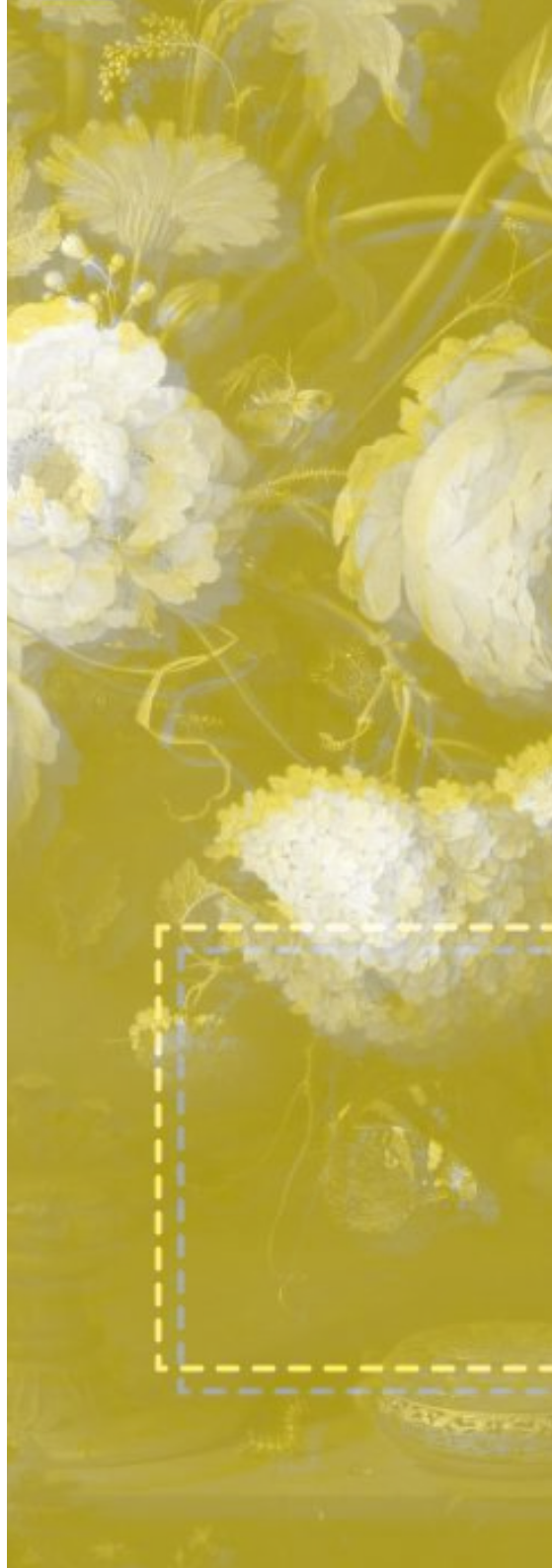
how

After the launch of the “Rijksstudio”, in 2014 the Rijksmuseum started the “Rijksstudio Award”, with the call-to-action “Make Your Own Masterpiece!”. This is an annual design competition where the general public is invited to use the collection to produce **new creative designs that reinterpret and disseminate the museum’s contents**. Every conceivable form of art is allowed (design, fine art, applied art, photography, video, etc.). The winner of the “Rijksstudio Award”, who receives a 10.000 Euro prize, is selected by a jury of renowned designers and curators, aimed at establishing who among the creators was best inspired by the Rijksmuseum’s collection.

why

The initiative was widely promoted, and fostered interest in the reopening of the museum. The format proposed, based on the release of free-to-use images depicting the collection and their manipulation, proved particularly valid in triggering a direct and creative engagement with the institution and its assets.

#user-generated-content #collection-in-action #design #public-call
#digital-engagement #creative-expression



La Science: Une Histoire d'Humour

Espace des Sciences
Pierre-Gilles de Gennes
Paris, France

where

developed by
ESPGG Science-culture,
with ESPCI Paristech
and PSL University

3-6 June 2015

when

researchers
(engaged with
digital technologies)
+ general public

target

**contributory
(crowd source)
exhibition**

format



inside/online



what

“La Science: Une Histoire d'Humour” was a 100% **crowd-sourced exhibition** about science and humour; all the displayed contents were provided by the visitors.

how

The exhibition opened as an empty space without contents nor objects. At first, researchers were asked to **bring jokes and drawings** hanging on the doors of their labs, and share them with the public. This collected material was then shared with a wider audience, through an open exhibition. All the related events were advertised with the claim “Come with your joke!”. The exhibition **continued to grow until the final day**, when the public were asked to take home the jokes, and leave the exhibition empty again.

why

Both in its contents and its production process, the project engaged with a mixed public, including professionally driven communities.

#user-generated-content #sharing-personal-stories #public-call
#in-progress-exhibition

Het Taalmuseum

Museum of Language
Leiden, The Netherlands

managed by
Fresco Sam-Sin

since 2016

general public

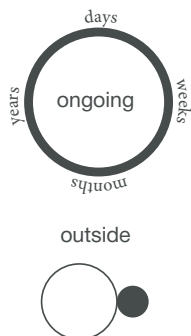
**contributory
exhibition**

where

when

target

format



what

Het Taalmuseum is a network organisation that brings together diverse parties around the theme of “language” in an original way. The museum is an initiative of Leiden University, and is supported by the Municipality of Leiden. In particular, it is meant to allow visitors to experience all that language is – showing, with a scientific basis, how languages sometimes differ, the way gestures and speech work together, and how this is related to not only the development of languages but of cultures as well. The museum is not set up in its own building (although it is managed in the offices of the Centre for Linguistics at Leiden University); it organizes its activities in the public space, through the set up of **temporary devices and installations**. Furthermore, the project does not have a curator: this role is performed by all the people interested in contributing.

how

The museum makes the interested audiences participate in different ways. For example, after its launch, the **public was asked to contribute new words that do not exist officially** but are used anyway; people were encouraged to think about this **with postcards**, and invited to send contributions via **idea boxes** distributed on various locations in Leiden and online. In total, 1.000 new words were contributed. The museum analyzed and categorized them to create a **game of quartets**. Each card comes with a definition; designer Robin Stam made an illustration for each word. In the manual of the game, the museum explains how new words find their place in a language, and how they are typically developed and adopted. The game makes the audience part of the complex and typically opaque development of language.

why

The experience situates the audience at the core of the existence of the museum, by involving them in the activities and in the set up that enable it.

#museum-without-walls #urban-space #public-call #language

Idea Lounge

Penn Museum
Philadelphia, USA

since 2016

general public

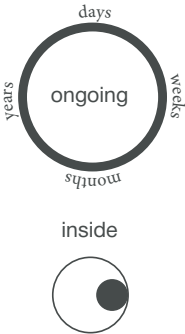
**contributory
exhibition (space)**

where

when

target

format



what

The “Idea Lounge” is a **special display gallery** set up at Penn Museum. It is a place where staff members share (among them, and with the public) what is happening in the institution, and **get inputs about upcoming shows as well as feedback on prototypes for future exhibitions.**

how

Exhibit prototypes, temporary signs, test cases, or in-progress displays are all items that can be inserted in this dialogic space, positioned in-between the museum and the public. These exhibitions are purposefully unfinished, and rotate throughout the year as new elements are developed and improvements are made. In the room, visitors find **forms to allow them to participate in surveys or provide a feedback.** Staff or volunteers are in the space from time to time, to speak with the public in person and to debate about their ideas.

why

This innovative type of room is meant to provide a physical location to enable the exchanges and the collaboration between the museum’s workers and the public.

#participatory-space #in-progress-exhibition #sharing-opinions

Chatbot Game

House Museums'
Network of Milan
(Museo Poldi Pezzoli,
Museo Bagatti Valsecchi,
Villa Necchi Campiglio
Casa-Museo Boschi
Di Stefano)
Milan, Italy

where

curated by InvisibleStudio

since 2017

when

general public

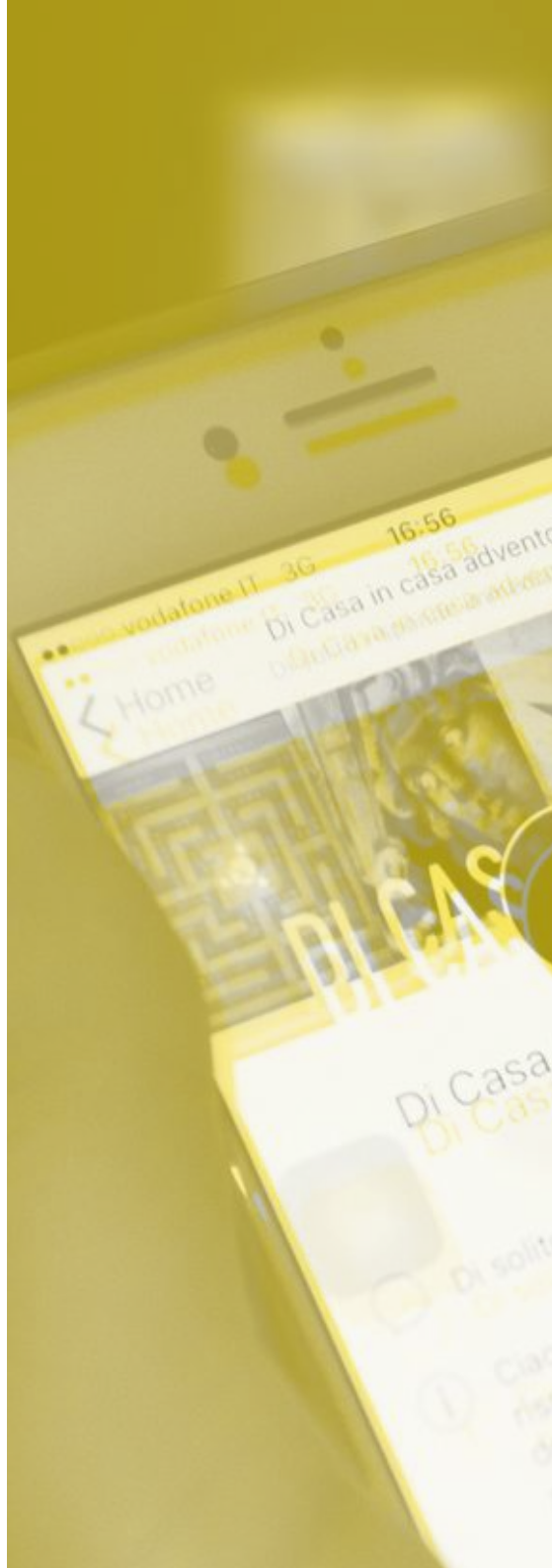
target

**contributory
digital tool
(mobile app)**

format



inside/online



what

The tool was developed within the program “Di Casa In Casa” (From House to House) promoted by Fondazione Cariplo to enhance the capability of the House Museums’ Network of Milan in attracting new visitors. In this framework, InvisibleStudio was commissioned to imagine an innovative digital project to engage younger audiences.

how

Chatbots are **automated virtual characters** that can **interact with users, by sending and receiving messages**, using popular chatting software like Facebook, Messenger, or Telegram. This technology was used to develop an interactive game creating itineraries through the four museums. In particular, in the game a virtual character guides users through the exploration of **unusual details hidden in the house-museums’ rich collections**. Although many institutions have developed smartphone-based games, they usually require users to download an additional software and learn how to use it; this chatbot game is different as users can chat with the virtual character in the same way they are used to interact with real people on software they use every day.

why

The tool enables an **interactive storytelling**, designed to push visitors to explore unexpected details of the collections, and to tour all the four museums of the network. The characters’ interaction with the artworks opens the way for a personal engagement with the users.

#art #local-history #collection-in-action #storytelling #social-media
#digital-engagement #interactive-device #online-interactions
#playful-interactions #engaging-technology

The GIFT App

Brighton Museum
& Art Gallery
Brighton, United Kingdom

where

designed by artist
Blast Theory
within the GIFT Project
(2017-21)

2017-19

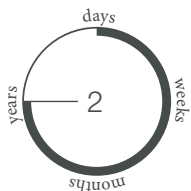
when

general public
(especially youngsters)

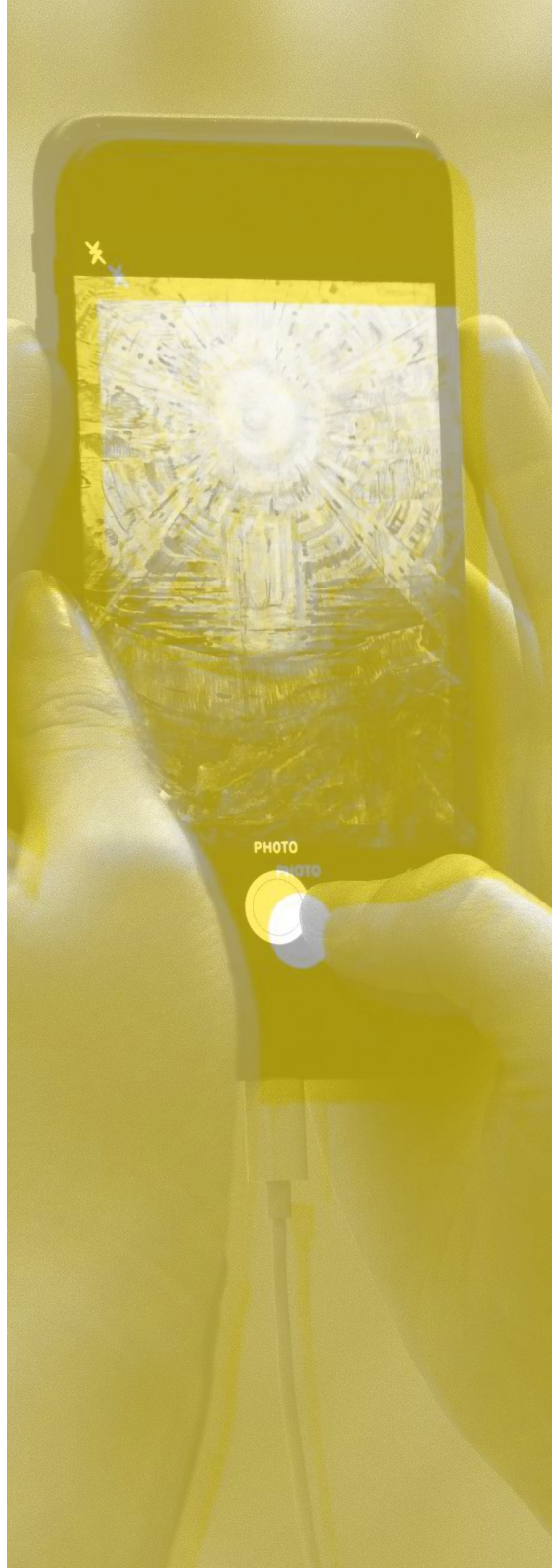
target

**contributory
digital tool**

format



inside/online



what

The mobile app allows visitors to use their smartphones to create a “**digital gift**” for someone they care about, by developing a personal curatorial journey through the museum’s collections.

how

The designer developed a **mobile app**, to be easily downloaded and activated through a link, that visitors can use to construct a personal guided tour of a selection of artworks, through the **recording of messages or uploading of music**, that are associated to the selected pieces and dedicated to a specific person. When the participant has completed the recording, the app wraps up all the contents and sends them to the recipient, digitally. The app was first experimented in Brighton, but it can be used by various institutions: every museum can access the software, and allow visitors to download the app. The platform is open-source, and available to be used and extended for free or with support from artist Blast Theory.

why

The app draws on the practice of gifting as a way to facilitate **personalization and social sharing in museums**; it allows visitors to define their own journey through a collection by encouraging them to create a bespoke tour for a friend. The production of the “digital gift” engages both the donor (who develops personal relationships with some items from the museum collection, by curating a tailored presentation and associating to it personal messages) and the recipient (who is offered a completely new and personalized visit of the museum, that was designed to specifically address his/her interests and memories).

#art-based-participatory-project #specially-mediated-visits #collection-in-action #phygital-experience #mobile-app #music #engaging-technology₅₁

Museum of Us

London, United Kingdom

where

piloted in the Old Kent Road area on behalf of Southwark Council, developed by Fieldwork Facility in collaboration with New London Architecture

since 2019
(repetitive)

when

local community

target

contributory exhibition

format



inside/outside



what

The “Museum of Us” is a campaign, an exhibition, a project space, and a programme of events, designed to bring together members of the local community (residents, industry, community groups, and action groups) and to **reimagine community consultation**. The epicentre of the project was a **refurbished shop** on Old Kent Road, which Fieldwork Facility and New London Architecture transformed into a positive and democratic space, aimed to enable conversations and engagement on the long-term plans for the area. The space was a platform for local people to share their ideas and opinions on what is truly important in their community.

how

The new space housed **an exhibition and a series of workshops and events led by locals**. A large proportion of the exhibition was left open for visitors to respond to a set of revolving provocations around what they value in the area and what they would like to see changed. To achieve further objectives, a travelling mini-exhibition was set up and placed in barbershops and salons, where locals already gathered and discussed collective issues. The campaign was also flypostered; it featured **portraits of local people** photographed by Suki Dhanda around Old Kent Road, and it manifested its identity with a simple **sticker**, that was used to make communications feel like a celebration of inclusivity. Furthermore, all residents in the area received a maildrop, and posters were distributed to local shops and libraries. Revolving provocations also asked visitors to get involved by simply placing stickers (that were used as a nudge for participation) where they live, work, and where they enjoy spending their time.

why

The project was designed to get residents talking with local businesses, community organisations, and action groups, to engage under-represented voices in the area, to enhance the sense of place (and the community’s sense of belonging), and to foster a collective debate about the future of the Old Kent Road.

#urban-space #meeting-point #participatory-space #sharing-opinions
#multiple-perspectives #local-identity #sense-of-place

Do I? Scivola

Opificio 31, Tortona
Milan, Italy

where

curated by Giulia Gerosa,
Barbara Camocini,
Marta Melucci,
Francesca Telli
at the School of Design
of Politecnico di Milano
with the participation of
Kindi and Rotellando

2018

when

general public

target

**contributory
performance**

format



outside



what

The performance is part of a repertoire of strategies and tools tested in the framework of “Scivola”, a project arising from the need to make places aimed at accommodating temporary public events more accessible. The objective of the project was to develop and test a participatory design-led approach, by planning and implementing temporary micro-interventions. These were realized during the Milan Design Week in Zona Tortona, and specifically in the exhibition spaces distributed in this area (in particular in the former industrial area called Opificio 31). The experience generated three main outputs: the creation of a map of accessibility, the realization of an exhibition illustrating a series of good practices through the analysis of international case studies, and the realization of an artistic performance, “Do I?”, conceived by Schuko Company and realized by a group of students of the School of Design of Politecnico di Milano.

how

The process of creating the performance included work **sessions, organized in the form of movement workshops**, aimed at the creation of characters. Students were asked to perform various exercises on the perception of space while listening to themselves in their own movement. Specifically, they **experienced the condition** of moving with closed eyes, guided by the touch of another person, being covered by a noisy material, moving following verbal indications, moving in symbiosis with others, sharing a feeling of mutual imbalance, moving in space while walking at the back, and looking for the trajectory through a mirror, or even moving by carrying weights anchored to various parts of the body. The project was presented during the Milan Design Week, where visitors could interact with the performers, who moved around the neighbourhood, arousing curiosity.

why

The initiative was aimed at identifying, testing, and sharing easily replicable micro-interventions, both tangible and intangible, which could contribute to reduce physical and cultural barriers, as well as improve the accessibility of temporary events, and the usability of the contemporary city.

#accessibility #learning-by-doing #design #theatre-language
#performative #young-adults

#scenedaun patrimonio

on the project's website

promoted by ICCD
(Istituto Centrale per
il Catalogo e
la Documentazione)
and the Italian
Ministry of Culture

since 2020

general public

**contributory
digital tool**

where

when

target

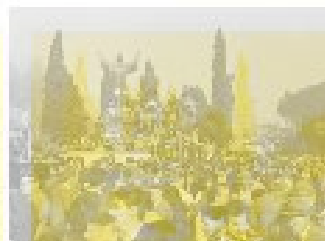
format



di classe
e di classe



parte
del paese



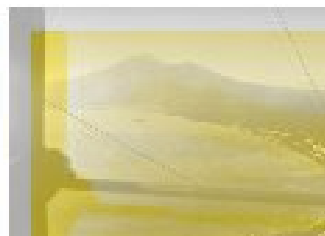
Una piazza a...
del paese di...



vista
dalla città



Bordo mare
dalla città



what

This project aims to develop a strategy to conserve the heritage that resides in the **private collections of photos** that people use to fix their personal memories – but that are meant to disappear. Through an accessible and user-friendly platform (a website), people are asked to **share their family albums through an open-source conservation process**, that merges the personal and institutional mission of preservation, and participates in the enhancement of Italian cultural as well as **photographic heritage**.

how

The process of sharing personal photo collections on the website was designed to be very simple. People have to sign in (by creating an account), choose the **thematic collection** to which they intend to contribute, and upload the pictures. The thematic collections are subdivided into folders (Abitare; Album San Lorenzo; Il paese nel pallone; Una storia di classe; Una piazza a...; Devozione; Souvenir; Bordo mare). These themes make also the navigation of the online resources easy.

why

Drawing on the strategic link that photography establishes between people, places, stories, and immaterial values, the collection work enhanced the diffused and multivocal documentation of Italian cultural heritage, hence contributing to its conservation and providing **new opportunities for its study, interpretation, and representation**. At the same time, the experience participated in the highlighting of the importance of photography as a specific type of heritage, to be acknowledged and protected.

#photography #sharing-personal-photos #open-source-collection
#online-exhibition #identity

Zensation

Fitzwilliam Museum
Cambridge,
United Kingdom

curated by Education
Officer Sarah-Cate Blake

2020

university students

**contributory
workshop**

where

when

target

format



inside



what

The project was conceived to support university students through **creative wellbeing sessions**, aimed at helping them to build the intellectual and emotional tools to bear the huge amount of stimuli they receive from new environments, work studies, social excitement, or the lack thereof. The Fitzwilliam Museum provided this opportunity through **social after-hours events**. Its Education Department organized a series of workshops, during which students were accompanied in the examination of the University of Cambridge Museums' collections **through talks, making, and peer sharing**.

how

The "Zensation" programme aimed to offer and hold a safe space for playful creative wellbeing. It invited students to join Fitzwilliam Museum's educators and a freelance artist to enjoy a gallery or a special exhibition tour, followed by time for creativity. These activities were held at the Museum Studio, where students simply enjoy the **physical proprioception** (a mindful awareness of your body in space and time), that is produced by "making" (for example, by creating artworks based on the elaboration of what they saw during the visit to the museum's spaces and collections), while they **synchronize brain and body to the specific activity**. This state is often called "flow" (sometimes experienced during a hobby, craft, sport, or leisure activity), and it is a way of resetting the mental tangles induced by anxiety which can over stimulate physiological responses. During flow activities we drop into our parasympathetic nervous system – and this can be observed in "Zensation" sessions: chat lightens, facial expressions ease, we see yawns or sighs, hear tummy grumbles, and notice a quieting of mood. Students' energy settles as they engage with the "task", and then re-energize towards the end, usually 45 minutes in.

why

The initiative enhanced the social role of the museum and diversified the use of its collections. Furthermore, it contributed to the construction of connections and exchanges with a group of young citizens.

#collection-in-action #creative-expression #mental-health #wellbeing
#young-adults #museum-as-social-agent

Made in Polimi

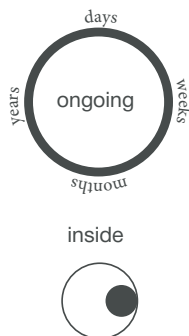
Politecnico di Milano,
Città Studi, Milan, Italy

curated by Federico Bucci,
Claudio Camponogara,
Alessandro Colleoni,
Laura D'Ambros, Vincenzo
Ficco, Luisa Lualdi
Simona Olgiati, Chiara
Pesenti, Mascia Sgarlata,
and Lola Ottolini

2020 (permanent)

Politecnico community
and guests

**contributory
exhibition**



where

when

target

format



what

“Made in Polimi: Tales from Politecnico di Milano” is a **permanent exhibition space** that tells the story of Politecnico di Milano. Displaying a collection of documents, images, and objects that span through architecture, design, and engineering, it employs physical and digital instruments to describe innovations and projects developed by graduates and professors in over a century. It represents the central space of a widespread system of polytechnical collections, housed in the departments and laboratories of the university.

how

The exhibition space becomes **an inclusive instrument to engage the broader public** in discovering rather than witnessing the materials. It constructs a thematic open archive that wishes to **create an interactive dialogue with the visitor**, prompted to touch materials, listen to interviews, flip through drawings, open drawers, actively involving him/her in the collection and transforming the exhibition from a place of authority to one of transfer of knowledge and cultural agency. Involvement takes place on two levels. On the one hand, the construction of contents was carried out through the involvement of the whole **Politecnico community**: departments, laboratories, and research groups were asked to propose stories to be told and collect material to be exhibited. On the other hand, the public enjoys the proposed content so that each visitor can build their path by freely choosing what to watch and explore.

why

In recent years, universities have increasingly chosen to express their identity by conceiving and setting up university museums. Politecnico di Milano is a technical-scientific institution for the development of engineering, architecture, and design: established in 1863, it represents the significant case study of a university with a rich history and multifaceted contemporary practices to represent.

#in-progress-exhibition #collaborative-design #collective-memory
#education #culturally-involved-people #identity

Beyond the Uniform

MoMA
Museum of Modern Art
New York, USA

curated by
Chemi Rosado-Seijo

1 March
- 30 December 2020

the staff of MoMA's
Department of Security

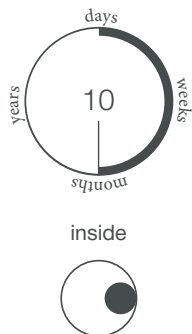
**contributory
digital tool**

where

when

target

format



what

Artist Chemi Rosado-Seijo's project allowed visitors to look "beyond the uniform", and get to know the artists and experts who work at MoMA's Department of Security. The experience led to the **production of an audio playlist featuring personal meaningful stories about works of art from the officers** who protect them every day.

how

Rosado-Seijo is an artist who uses collective processes to work with specific communities. When he was invited to collaborate with MoMA's Department of Education, as part of the Catalyst Program, he set out to tell visitors stories from voices they don't typically hear. This audio playlist is the result of a collective effort driven by the nine officers involved in the project. Rosado-Seijo allowed them to operate as artists themselves, and to give voice to their creative practices that produced unique perspectives on the institution and its collections. The audio contributions allow the public – when they are at the museum or in other contexts – to hear about how a modernist sculpture inspires graffiti, how being in uniform makes you feel invisible, finding self-love through daily visits to one painting, and other accounts from the front lines of the museum. To listen to "Beyond the Uniform", the public need to download an app provided by MoMA (at moma.org/audio), or use a location guide allowing for the search of the audio stops around the museum.

why

The audio contribution enables the addition of another layer to the visit experience, by unfolding the personal stories and insights of some of the people that spend most time in the museum spaces and with the collections. This tool allows visitors to access unheard perspectives of the museum's contents through an interactive storytelling, designed to push the public to explore unexpected details of the collections, and to tour all the four museums of the network. The characters' interaction with the artworks opens the way for a **personal engagement** with the users.

#security-staff #specially-mediated-visits #sharing-personal-stories
#collecting-voices #multiple-perspectives #exhibition-intervention

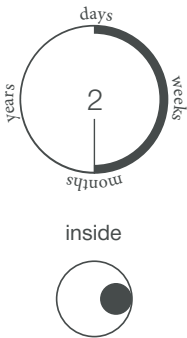
Hostile Terrain 94

94 pop-up installations simultaneously around the globe in several locations, including Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, Detroit, Seattle, Miami, Mexico City, San Pedro Sula and Lampedusa

fall of 2020 (leading up to the American presidential election)

general public

contributory (pop-up) exhibition



where

when

target

format



what

The pop-up exhibition “Hostile Terrain 94” ensues from a **participatory art project** organized by the Undocumented Migration Project, a non-profit research-art-education-media collective, directed by anthropologist Jason De León. The installation is composed of over 3.400 handwritten toe tags that represent migrants who have died trying to cross the Sonoran Desert of Arizona between the mid-1990s and 2022. These tags are geolocated on a 20-foot-long map of the desert along the Arizona-Mexico border, outlined on a wall, showing the exact locations where remains were found. Each map came with an introductory text explaining the project, which also featured an augmented reality experience to accompany the map, that can be accessed for free using a mobile app.

how

The toe tags were filled out by **teams of volunteers from the different venues** where the exhibition was installed. Volunteers that helped assemble the project included members of local museums’ or universities’ community, but also the general public was engaged. The identification tags were filled by writing a name (if known), case number, age, sex, date (in which the body was located), condition of the body, cause of death, and the coordinates of where remains were found. Exhibit coordinators then placed the tags on the map in their respective coordinates, creating a visual depiction of just how many people died seeking a new life in the United States.

why

Beside raising awareness about migrants’ realities and globally memorializing the victims, the installation aimed to construct an affordable, accessible, and democratized exhibition that drew in community participation across a range of national and international locations. The most powerful participatory element involved was the time and effort required of volunteers to meticulously fill out the 3.400 individual toe tag. In addition, each host location created locally relevant programming to coincide with the event (lectures, performances, film screenings) that connected that community to global and local immigration issues.

#art-based-participatory-project #collaborative-construction #worldwide #migration #pop-up-exhibition #diffused-exhibition #mobile-app

Street Museum

organised by ArchTwist

November 2021
- April 2022

students and young
professionals from
creative fields

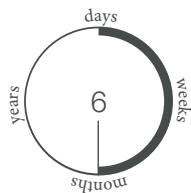
**contributory
competition**

where

when

target

format



inside/outside



what

The competition engaged participants in the **design of a space on the street where people see their spatial and social environments as a playground of knowledge** – a place to see, touch, feel, taste, listen to, socialize with, and learn from, a place where they view the world very differently and where they develop different experiences and intangible relationships with other people and the street.

how

The scale of the intervention, the program to be developed, and the site (where to situate the experimentation) were **freely decided by participants**. They were only asked, while designing, to keep in mind that Architecture is a “discourse of events” as much as a “discourse of spaces”. The judging was based on such parameters as aesthetics, creative approach in idea, contextuality of the proposal, connection between the concept, city, and people, impact on performative art and artists. To participate, individuals and/or groups were asked to submit one landscape sheet in .jpg/.png format (online, via the competition website).

why

The competition’s brief built upon the emergence of a paradigm shift in the thinking behind museums, based on the ongoing profound transformation of their conventional roles and tools, and in particular on the evolution of the learning function and practices they deliver – that were traditionally accomplished through inert observation and hearing, rather than active participation. The initiative aims at enhancing the exploration of the possibility to conceive, design, and use the street as a performative museum, in which the tasks and instruments of this institution can be efficiently enabled. Streets are indeed the lifelines of any city. One can experience this with tea stalls and street food carts, or even with street artists’ works and graffiti, which have made streets one of the crucial city elements that signify the public life of a place.

#public-call #creative-expression #design #museum-renovation
#prototyping #urban-space #contemporary-city

@mygirl withapearl

Mauritshuis Museum
Den Haag,
The Netherlands

2021-23

general public

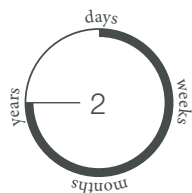
**contributory
competition
+ exhibition
(intervention)**

where

when

target

format



inside/online



what

“The Girl with a Pearl Earring” is an iconic painting made in 1665 by Dutch Golden Age painter Johannes Vermeer; it has been in the collection of the Mauritshuis Museum in The Hague since 1902. For years, the museum has been receiving drawings, self-portraits, and other creative responses to the inspirational artwork, that evolved into a painting icon and a symbol of beauty. From early February to June 2023, Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam hosted a major exhibition dedicated to Vermeer’s work, and thus Mauritshuis had to take down the famous artwork for some months. In order not to leave the spot empty, since April 2021 the museum has run the @mygirlwithapearl **Instagram account, asking the public to recreate the famed oil painting.** The initiative aimed at filling the empty wall, where the Girl usually hangs, with a digital frame, where **selected creative works** have been on display during her absence.

how

Mauritshuis Museum asked the public to develop their imagination and create their own version of the famed figure. Art enthusiasts, creatives, or even ordinary people without an artsy background have entered the campaign with bizarre, fancy, or unconventional interpretations. No particular rule was set on the type of materials and techniques allowed. Participants were asked to submit their entry as a photograph (photo as a .jpg, .png or .pdf, no bigger than 5 MB; gifs or videos weren’t allowed), shared via an online form. Selected creations were displayed at the museums, in the digital frame that was hung where the original painting is normally on view. Entries are also available for viewing in the Instagram account @mygirlwithapearl and on the Mauritshuis website.

why

The experience allowed, on the one hand, not to leave an empty wall where the Girl usually is on sight. On the other, the thousands of participants have produced unconventional reinterpretations, and developed a personal and creative relationship with the artwork and the museum.

#art #art-based-participatory-project #creative-expression #public-call
#open-source-collection #online-intractions #social-media

The Water We Want

The Global Network
of Water Museums
Venice, Italy

where

since 2022 (repetitive)

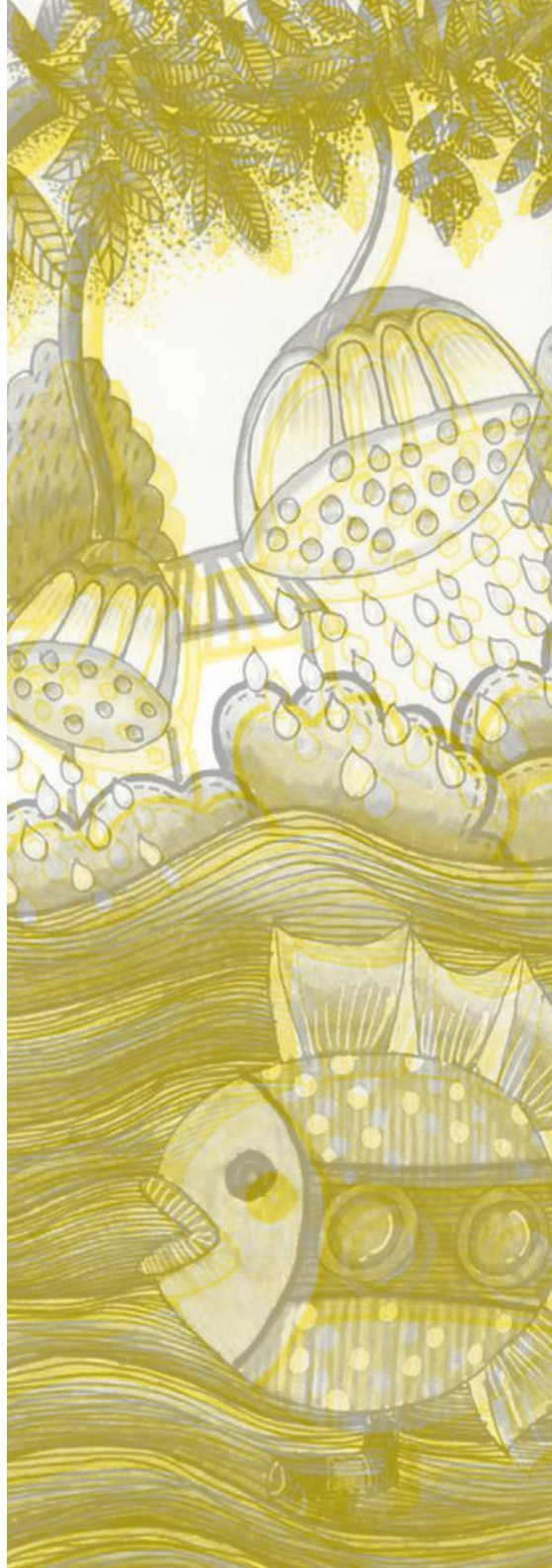
when

students from primary
and secondary schools

target

**contributory
competition**

format



what

The youth prize contest aims at **engaging young people as narrators of the multifaceted water heritage** and as storytellers of more sustainable water futures.

how

The initiative is promoted by the institutions affiliated to the Global Network of Water Museums. The contest is addressed to schools, learning institutions, and civil society organizations worldwide, with entries being submitted by young participants (aged 6-18, from primary and secondary schools). The eligible types of work include **drawings, pictures, videos, and other media**. Every year, among all received entries, six final winners are selected by the Jury and awarded online on a specific event organized by the Network.

why

This contest uses young generations' visions of water heritage to change the mindset of people, and inspire new behaviors and attitudes to foster the respect of nature and the promotion of awareness of all water uses.

#sustainability #public-call #creative-expression #visual-language

Plural Stories

Museo Guatelli
Ozzano sul Taro,
Parma, Italy

where

within the MAPforID
project (2007-09)

2008-09

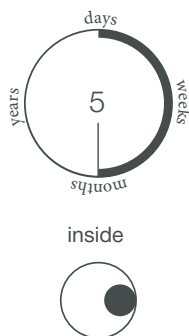
when

representatives of
immigrant groups
living in the area

target

**collaborative
performance**

format



what

The project was designed to initiate intercultural dynamics in an inner area of Parma, that was experiencing problems in the integration of immigrant groups. The **transcultural power of Museo Guatelli's collection**, displaying “everyday culture”, was used to promote literacy and heritage awareness in the “new citizens” outside formal learning contexts, through the “opening” of the site to an often excluded audience.

how

The participants (ten women, two of whom were born in Italy) worked together for five months, with weekly meetings of three hours each. Most of these were held at Museo Guatelli, and were aimed at putting **theatre workshop activities** and intercultural issues into context, collecting expertise and **knowledge related to domestic and professional life**, and identifying the objects and stories which later were used within the theatre workshop run by FestinaLente Teatro. This phase of the project, based on lessons about theater practices, was primarily aimed at **recovering stories** through the interaction between the displayed objects and the participants, who offered their personal interpretation of the museum collections through the exchange of narratives connected with their own contexts of origin. Theatre language overcomes the barriers of verbal communication, hence it enabled a strong interaction between the women involved, who shared gestures and life stories triggered by the museum displays. The past embodied in objects was conceived and explored as a “foreign country”, which helped define a “third space” where participants could share the development of new knowledge, skills, and experiences. The project ended with a **performance**, “Plural Stories: From Hand to Hand”, in which participants gave life to their stories through spoken and body language inside the museum's space.

why

The show exhibited the transcultural message to the community at large, and also encouraged the active involvement of the audience, hence soliciting a new interpretation of the museum's collection.

#museum-as-social-agent #intercultural-connections #material-culture
#migration #collection-in-action #theatre-language #performative
#autobiographical-work #training #creative-intervention

Whispering Shells

Fondazione Musei Torino
Turin, Italy

where

curated by Palazzo
Madama, GAM, Borgo
Medievale in collaboration
with local schools
within the MAPforID
project (2007-09)

September 2008
- September 2009

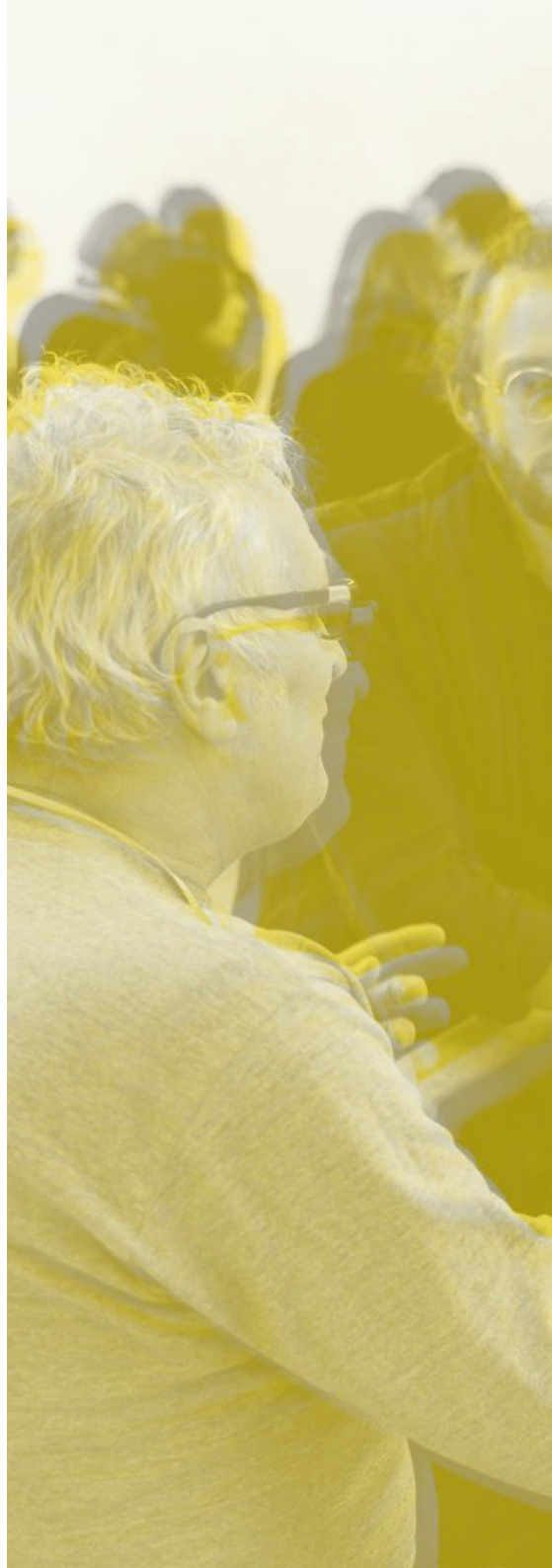
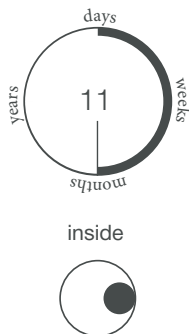
when

individuals with
an immigrant background
attending local schools

target

**collaborative
workshop + exhibition**

format



what

The project aimed to develop innovative ways to use the city museums' collections to experiment with intercultural trails and activities engaging immigrant communities. This experience addressed adult individuals attending local CTPs and secondary school students, forming six heterogeneous groups, made of 123 people from 20 Countries.

how

The initiative ensued from a training course, "Intercultural dialogue and city collections of ancient and modern art", organized by the Education Department of GAM and Palazzo Madama to support museum operators, teachers of primary and secondary schools, and CTP educators to experiment with intercultural trails to involve migrant communities. The project drew inspiration from the **shells represented throughout the city collections**: from Palazzo Madama's Baroque decoration, to Filippo De Pisis's artworks displayed at GAM, to the coat of arms placed on the façade of the Pilgrims' Hostel in the Medieval Village. Around this theme, the project team developed ad hoc guided tours and workshops, and started a reflection on the personal memories of participants. This action was led through the **exchange of the personal stories triggered by these figures through oral and written storytelling, participatory games, and music listening**. Workshops focused on the direct or interpersonal relationship between people and artworks, and included **photographic compositions** inspired by the still life genre and the creation of polychrome paintings. These materials, together with the contributions documenting the process (43 meetings, illustrated through 1.500 pictures and 10 hours of video recordings) were then merged into a collective **spiral-shaped installation**, that was presented during the closing event of the project at Palazzo Madama.

why

The most significant benefits for participants were the discovery of the local heritage, and the opportunity for self-expression and creative cooperation. Through the interaction with a highly diverse audience, museum educators could experiment with new strategies for cultural mediation.

#migration #intercultural-connections #creative-expression #training
#collection-in-action #cultural-mediators #autobiographical-work

Tongue to Tongue

Museum of Anthropology
and Ethnography
of the University of Turin
Turin, Italy

where

within the MAPforID
project (2007-09)

September 2008
- January 2009

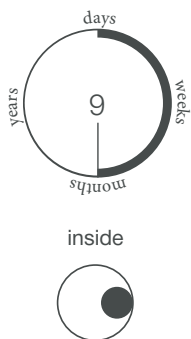
when

cultural mediators from
Italy, Chad, Morocco,
Congo, Romania
and Senegal

target

**collaborative
exhibition**

format



what

The initiative, titled after a song by Radiodervish, involved a group of cultural mediators in a **training course dedicated to the planning and mounting of an exhibition**. The “tongue” of the museum (institutional, scientific, didactic) engaged in a dialogue with the mediators’ “tongue” (autobiographical, evocative, emotional).

how

The training course addressed specific issues related to the participatory planning of the exhibition. Modules addressed intercultural mediation of heritages (comparing perspectives and experiences), storytelling as a heritage mediation tool, effective communication modalities, and skills related to the mounting of the exhibition. Each mediator freely selected one or more objects from the collection, and designed the intercultural narration in close cooperation with the museum staff. Finally, objects were displayed in showcases alongside the “subjective heritage” of mediators (souvenirs, pictures, books, and clothes), thereby creating a wealthy range of **“autobiographical installations”**. The visit to the exhibition consisted in dialogical “narrative trails”, resulting from the interaction and **exchange of knowledge** between a museum educator and a mediator; the former gave an account of the “journeys” through storytelling, while the latter helped the educator and the audience putting the objects in context, by highlighting their history, functions, interpretations, and ideological use. Preparatory activities were planned for secondary schools, during which the mediators introduced students to their professional and migratory experience, explained the project, and acted as facilitators in brainstorming sessions around key words “assigned” to their respective “narrative trails”. The outcomes of these sessions were reported on posters, which were placed at the bottom of the showcases becoming an integral part of the display both conceptually and physically.

why

The project was meant to experiment with innovative, intercultural, and multivocal curatorial practices, based on participatory planning.

#intercultural-connections #autobiographical-work #training
#cultural-mediators #museum-as-social-agent

There's a Garden in Every Story

Botanical Garden
Turin, Italy

where

in collaboration with local
high schools and Gardens
of the Royal Palace
of Venaria, within the
MAPforID project (2007-09)

September 2008
- June 2009

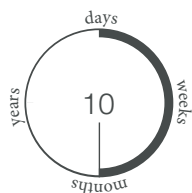
when

a multi-cultural group
of students and users
of the Association of
Intercultural Animation

target

**collaborative
workshop**

format



inside/outside



what

The initiative developed as a spin off of “A Heritage for All” (2005-2007), a programme of the City of Turin’s Department of Cultural Heritage Education aimed at promoting the participation of “new citizens” by **experimenting with storytelling and other forms of active involvement to engage immigrant communities in structuring museum** visits and interpreting collections. The Botanical Garden joined the project and became the ideal space for implementing new activities fostering mutual understanding and positive personal relationships with “other” people, cultures, and heritages.

how

The experience was organised in 5 phases. (1) Presentation of the project, based on the metaphor of migrants who, like trees, adapt to a new environment by striking roots in new grounds far away from home. (2) Four meetings held at the venues of the partners involved, during which participants were led through collective **readings of extracts from famous authors as well as autobiographical stories** written by some members of the project team, a **tea ceremony**, and a brainstorming revolving around the gardens’ themes. These activities triggered a debate, and nurtured the production of **creative writing, pictures, graphic and audiovisual materials**. (3) Specially mediated visits to the Gardens of the Royal Palace of Venaria, centred around histories and anecdotes on plants; participants were provided with disposable cameras and asked to take pictures of what they found most fascinating. (4) Final event at the Botanical Garden, dedicated to the display of the materials produced by participants (pictures, videos, and short stories); in this occasion, a small tree was planted in the “Grove” as a symbolis token of the experience.

why

The project allowed participants not only to develop a thorough knowledge of the Botanical Garden but also to elaborate and share their past emotions and experiences, and create a connection between their “new home” and their original cultural background.

#gardens #collection-in-action #authobiographical-work #storytelling
#education #multicultural-communities #cultural-mediators

City Telling

Museum of Modern Art
Bologna, Italy

where

within the MAPforID
project (2007-09)

October 2008 - June 2009

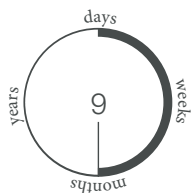
when

a group of young Italians
and immigrants (aged
between 16 and 23)
from Katun and
San Donato neighborhood

target

**collaborative
workshop
digital tool (platform)**

format



inside/outside



what

The project exploited museum spaces and collections to support a multi-cultural group of young participants in the exploration of urban space and in the creation of “**geo-emotional maps**”, intended to investigate the relationship between individual and territory, private identity and public space.

how

The preliminary phase involved several meetings between potential participants and operators from social, youth, and educational services in the San Donato neighborhood. Once participants were identified, **visits and workshops** were held at the museum to promote an approach to contemporary art languages. These were considered as initial pretexts for an educational experience whose key elements would be personal creativity and a **renewed vision of the surrounding world**. This phase also included walking tours of the neighbourhood; these enabled participants to identify places which held particular significance for them (including schools, sport facilities, parks, urban installations, and meeting venues), and to share personal insights and stories. These were collected in a journal comprising **photographs, videos, and sounds**. The final phase of the project consisted of the implementation of an **interactive platform** in cooperation with the Sandretto Re Rebaudengo Foundation and the National Museum of Cinema in Turin. By integrating Google Earth, the public interface of this platform visualises the mapped city spaces; this tool was used both to present the project's results and to share the ensuing good practice with other working groups and cultural institutions.

why

The objectives set for the project include the promotion of creative encounters between youngsters and contemporary art and its languages (that were exploited to facilitate participants' critical understanding of communication codes and the surrounding reality), the interaction between individuals with different backgrounds (thereby encouraging new and shared experiences), and the acknowledgment of the museum as a space for dialogue, using cultural heritage as a source of intercultural exchange.

#geo-blog #digital-map #mapping #urban-space #education #local-identity #multicultural-communities #museum-as-social-agent

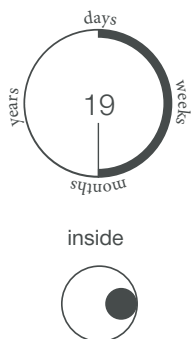
Mothers

Musei Civici
Reggio Emilia, Italy

September 2008
- April 2010

40 adult women
with different
cultural and linguistic
backgrounds, contacted
by the museum staff
and through the partners
of the MAPforID project

**collaborative
workshop
+ exhibition**



where

when

target

format



what

Participants were involved in a **series of activities revolving around the theme** of maternity; this is well represented throughout the collections of the museums involved, and has a highly “generative” potential and a universal nature. The overall aim was to develop a new approach to heritage education, especially dedicated to a “new public” (i.e. immigrants living in Reggio Emilia, who are the “new citizens”), through a co-creative use of the museums’ objects and contents, that proved capable to allow for the representation and exploration of the multicultural reality of the city.

how

In the initial phase of the project, items from the city museums’ collections representing the theme of maternity (from prehistory to present time) were selected as the evidence of human talent, rather than the mere expression of a local culture. The chosen objects were presented to participants during some visit to the museums, where **individual stories** on the experience of being a mother **emerged through interviews and storytelling sessions**. These were **collected in a final video**, that was presented during several public events and shown in a **temporary exhibition**. This document shows the project, but also throws light on the resonance between the contemporary voices of women and museum objects, providing evidence of their intercultural power as expressions of universal feelings. The curators promoted the active involvement of women by listening to their requests and welcoming their suggestions so as to adjust the project structure in a way that best responded to their needs, and by inviting them to speak in their mother tongue, in order to fully express their experience through the support of cultural mediators.

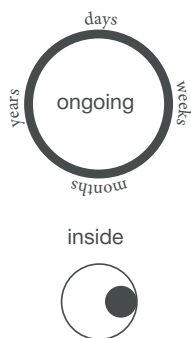
why

The project was designed to connote the city museums as a public service, and to solicit “new citizens” in developing a sense of ownership and perceive these institutions as the shared heritage of a multiethnic community; at the same time, it contributed to create a common identity platform, by helping migrant communities to see their lives and experiences reflected in the material and immaterial evidence of the local past.

#collection-in-action #training #storytelling #multicultural-communities
#cultural-mediators #museum-as-social-agent

E-Straordinario

Fondazione Ermanno Casoli Fabriano (Ancona), Italy	where
since 2008 (repetitive)	when
specific programs were developed for different groups	target
collaborative workshop	format



what	Since 2008, this initiative has facilitated innovative connections between contemporary art and the business sector , and it has experimented with an educational and methodological tool for company trainings.
how	Through a cycle of workshops , international artists developed a collaboration with different target groups to create a co-designed artwork . Artists were aided by a managerial trainer and a contemporary art curator, who supported them in leading the co-creative process, and in sharing skills (many of which were focused on the assemblage of industrial components in a way that recalled the tradition of the ready-made). Some experiences were targeted to children, some others involved the company's employees. The artworks produced during these training activities were displayed in all the companies that have collaborated with Fondazione Ermanno Casoli throughout the years; this exhibition produced a sort of "diffused museum" in the sites included in this network.
why	Workshops were an opportunity to investigate the art world through a practical approach. In particular, the initiative focused on the need for a contamination between contemporary art and the business world as an element fostering education and growth.

50/50

Walker Art Center
Minneapolis, USA

where

curated by
Darsie Alexander
promoted by Macy's
et Bush Foundation

December 2010
- July 2011

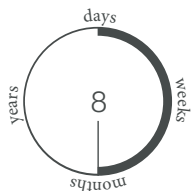
when

general public

target

**collaborative
(crowd-curated)
exhibition**

format



inside/online



what

The idea behind the exhibition “50/50: Audience and Experts Curate the Paper Collection” is based on the redefinition of the role of both curator and audience. In this case, **the curator was responsible for curating 50% of the show, and the audience could be responsible for the other half**, through the selection of their favourite pieces in the Walker’s collection of works on paper.

how

The public was invited to view and rate a selection of 183 artworks, using **both a physical and a digital method**. A kiosk was set up inside one of the museum’s galleries; at the same time, an online survey was activated in the dedicated website (walkerart.org), with the aim to allow people to vote on whether each artwork should “definitely” or “maybe not” be included in the exhibition. The evaluation was managed using a **“hot or not” style voting system**. Meanwhile, chief curator Darsie Alexander was considering artists who have been collected in depth and, inevitably, bringing an element of personal preference to the process of organizing the “expert” half of the exhibition. Each of the two sections (the one curated by Alexander and the one curated by the public) was set up to fill half the gallery space

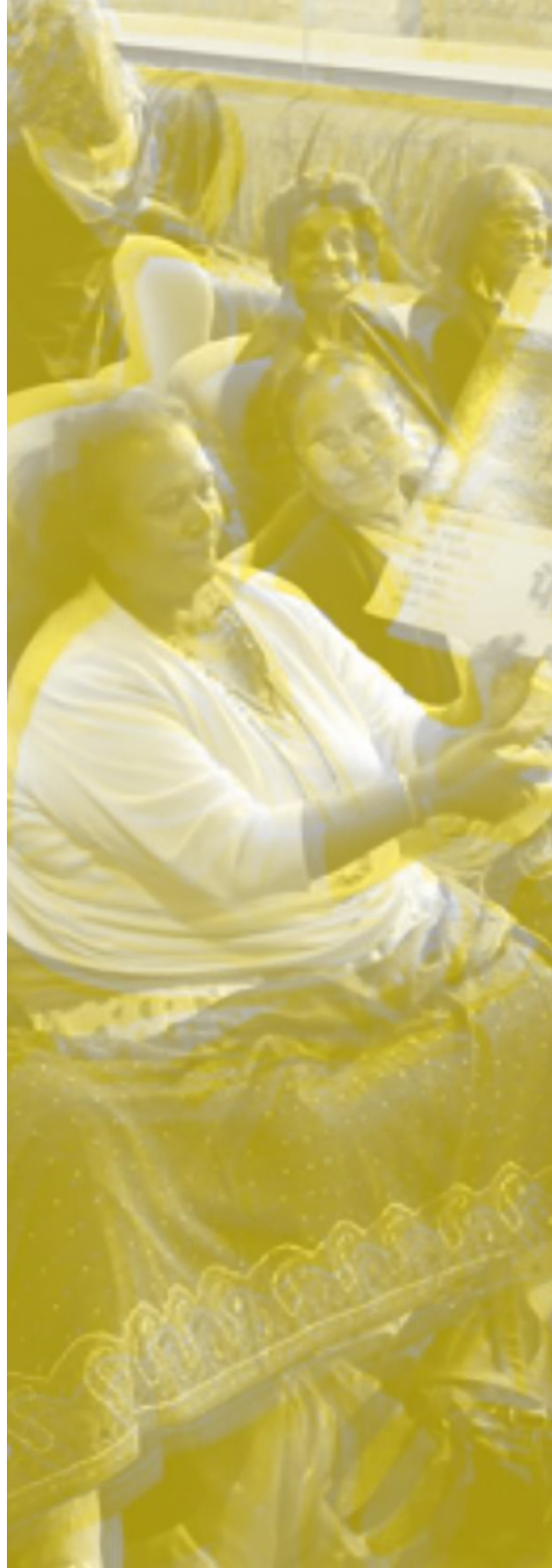
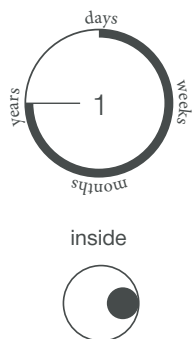
why

The “50/50” exhibition was at once an experiment in crowd curation and an exploration of the Walker’s collection. This shared exchange sparked a range of questions about the dynamics between the “audience” and the “expert”, or between curatorial practice and the so-called “mass taste”. The initiative also touched on a broader contrast between the act of making aesthetic judgments in an online context and the experience of looking at and thinking about art up close, without time constraints.

#art #art-based-participatory-project #self-reflexive-curatorial-practices
#co-curation #collection-in-action #voting #in-progress-exhibition

The Cinema Museum

The Cinema Museum London, United Kingdom	where
within The Happy Museum project (2011-16)	
2011	when
general public	target
collaborative workshop	format



what	The Cinema Museum used a small project focused on community wellbeing to reimagine itself as a provider of innovative programmes designed to support local residents, service providers, schools, universities, GPs and other local charities and organisations.
how	The museum used the funding to recruit and support a project manager, a researcher and an assistant . The project manager took a wellbeing training course with mental health specialists at South London and Maudsley Hospital (SLaM), and the project assistant attended leadership training at the NCVO conference. A group of eight community curators (including one mental health trust referral) were also recruited onto the programme. The team worked together to explore the Museum's collection of cinema memorabilia and to produce a new interpretation of the contents.
why	The project enhanced the museum's strategy, by fostering the renovation of its contents and leading to the creation of 12 wellbeing projects serving as opportunities for local residents, service providers, schools, universities, GPs and other local charities and organisations. The participation in The Happy Museum events, and being part of the resulting community of practice, allowed the museum to establish a number of positive partnerships with other museums and healthcare providers.

#collection-in-action #community-enhancement #cultural-mediators
#elderly #training #mental-health #wellbeing

Hidden Histories

Reading Museum
Reading, United Kingdom

where

within The Happy Museum
project (2011-16)

2011

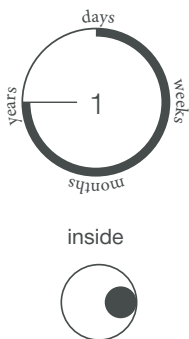
when

vulnerable communities
(of deprived areas)

target

**collaborative
exhibition**

format



what

This case study refers to an initiative promoted by Reading Museum, which used a **community history project** to focus on some parts of the town that scored poorly on national indices of deprivation and had a reputation for crime and antisocial behavior. The objective was to challenge the negative perception of these sites (Oxford Road, Norcot and Newtown), to explore their **hidden heritage**, to instill a more **positive sense of place**, and to pilot a new approach to engaging with communities.

how

The development of Reading’s “Hidden Histories” project led to the set up of a series of **temporary pop-up museums**. These outputs resulted from the engagement of around 60 members of the communities involved, who worked with the local NAGs, the museum staff and local historians to research and document past lives of the different areas. The temporary pop-up exhibitions were set up in the neighborhoods, and colourful **“pocket history” pamphlets** were created and distributed in schools, libraries, doctors’ surgeries, local retailers and public spaces. The project was positively reported by local newspapers, radio and TV channels. Throughout its development, a participatory evaluation approach was used to see if the attitudes of the 60 participants had changed towards the areas they live in. The data showed a slight increase in the number of positive words they used to describe their neighborhood; anecdotal evidence also highlighted that, through new friendships, their wellbeing increased through the enhancement of fun and the involvement in a group activity.

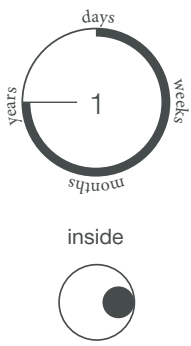
why

The project intended to respond to the museum’s need to engage with Reading’s vulnerable groups and to promote community cohesion. Furthermore, it contributed to change the perception about several disadvantaged areas of the city, enhance the institution’s approach to community engagement, and foster the development of new links with many community organisations and service providers.

#urban-space #pop-up-exhibition #local-history #local-identity #public-call #hidden-heritage #community-enhancement #sense-of-place

Renovating Object-handling Methods

Imperial War Museum North Manchester, United Kingdom	where
within The Happy Museum project (2011-16)	
2011	when
general public	target
collaborative workshop	format



what	The Happy Museum work at Imperial War Museum North was an integral part of the development process that the institution was undertaking in the 2010s. The project was a piece of action research, testing six approaches to object handling to explore their impact on wellbeing and civic engagement . The six approaches included: the handling of large objects, the access to a mystery object trolley, the use of veterans to support object handling in the museum’s TimeStacks, art sessions run by a mental health charity, and group sessions organised with Veterans North. The objects used ranged from a First World War Field Gun to a soldier’s prayer beads or last letter home.
how	Through a program of participated workshops , the museum tested and evaluated different approaches to visitor object handling. The ones which proved most successful within this experimentation were later adopted by the institution. The project contributed to enhance the new focus of the museum onto wellbeing and sustainability , whose implementation started to be seen as a measurable outcome.
why	The project aimed to promote civic engagement through experimental object handling, enabling people to connect around issues of life and death, how war shapes lives and what, in the future, we might need to be fighting for. An unplanned outcome was the raised awareness on environmental sustainability, both in members of the public and in the senior management team.

#object-handling-methods #collection-in-action #museum-renovation
#workshop #sustainability #wellbeing

Our Londinium

Museum of London
London, United Kingdom

2011-12

a group of young adults

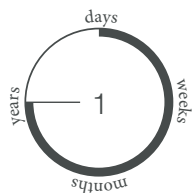
**collaborative
(co-curated
remodelling of)
exhibition**

where

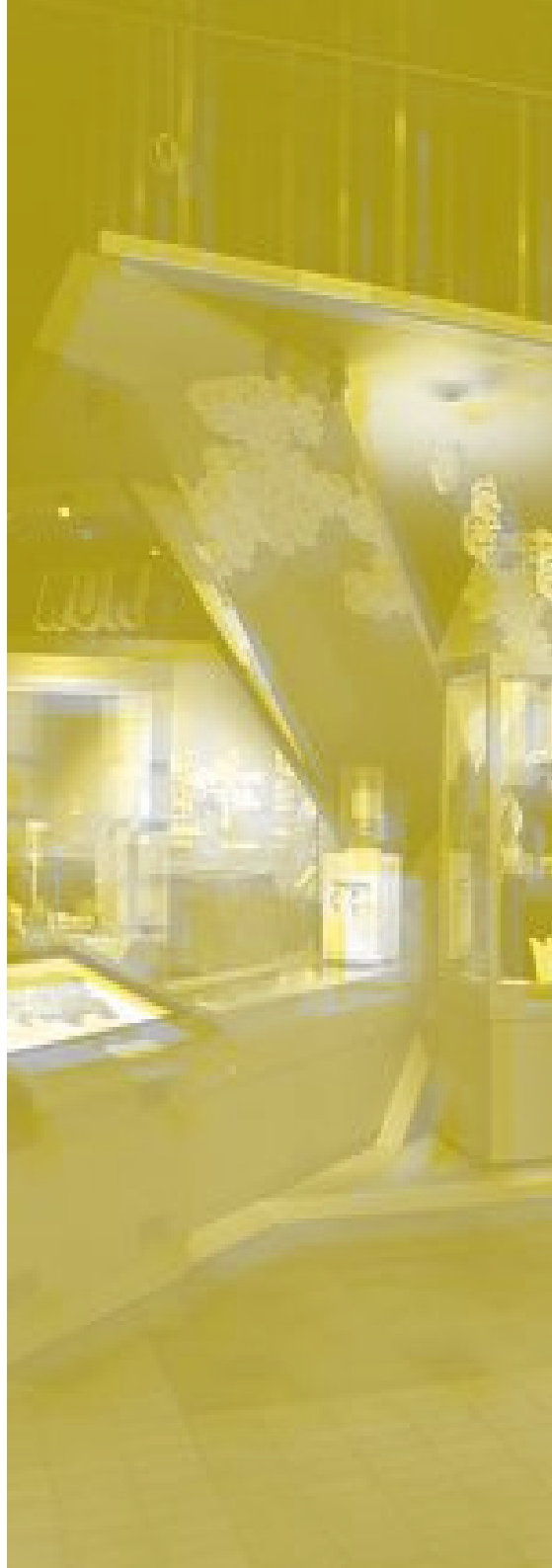
when

target

format



inside



what

“Our Londinium” is one of the galleries included in the museum’s path, aimed at drawing parallels between life in Roman London and the contemporary city. Opened in 1994, the section was remodelled for the first time during the major update which the institution went through in 2012. Funded by the Arts Council England, the redevelopment was part of the Cultural Olympiad Programme “Stories of the World” and included new installation-based displays, audio-visual tools and interactive touchscreen maps. The project was **co-curated by the museum’s youth panel** (“Junction”, comprising 50 individuals aged 16-21), and involved almost 150 young people overall, including young offenders, adolescent mental health groups, pupil referral units and young unemployed, contacted through community outreach projects.

how

The collaborative work included various types of engagements. Participants were not only **included in contents’ definition and decision making processes**, but they were also **responsible for the collection of new materials**. For example, in the occasion of anti-cuts march in 2011, art students from Goldsmiths College set up a stall in Hyde Park to collect memorabilia to nurture the section “Britain’s Rich Heritage of Protests” (such as placards, posters and costumes that were asked to the protesters and donated to be included in the exhibition).

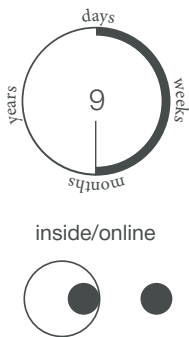
why

The collaborative approach to the remodelling of the exhibition, and in particular the engagement with young representatives of the local population, aimed at enhancing the **interest of participants in London’s history**. Furthermore, the collaboration of young people contributed to enhance the representation of the city’s diverse identity, hence making this exhibition (which merged past and present topics) more consistent with the multivocal socio-cultural context it depicts.

#collection-in-action #local-history #new-voices #multiple-perspectives
#identity #museum-renovation #young-adults

Public Property

Walters Art Museum Baltimore, USA	where
December 2011 - August 2012	when
general public	target
collaborative exhibition	format



what	The exhibition “Public Property” was collectively created by the public, drawing on the principle on which the museum was founded in 1931, when Henry Walters bequeathed the core collection of his family to the City of Baltimore “for the benefit of the public”. From December 2011 to March 2012, the public was involved in a series of choices . When the show was on view, from June to August 2012, the audience could continue to contribute and progressively change the exhibition.
how	In the first stage of the planning process, the public used the Walters’ works of art on the museum’s website to curate a selection of items and tag them with keywords . The museum’s exhibition team analyzed collection tags to determine some popular themes that emerged from the online collections, including adornment, military, creatures and death. A vote was held, both online and at the museum , to determine the exhibition theme. “Creatures” was the theme that received the most votes, ultimately becoming the publically determined theme for the exhibition. The team then selected a large group of artworks for the audience to vote on related to “creatures”. The public selected a total of 106 artworks to be part of the exhibition. Due to conservation concerns about the fragility of certain objects, some artworks (including manuscripts and three-dimensional objects) were featured on a “wall of fame”, a gallery to display images of the artworks along with labels and information about their popularity. Once the exhibition was open, several interactive elements to invite visitors’ participation. For example, a computer kiosk provided a voting mechanism to allow visitors to vote and view how their decisions affect results in real time, as well as up-to-the-minute trends. Visitors’ choices were later considered in the following decision making processes related to the museum’s programs.
why	Beside experimenting with a strategy to boost audience’s engagement, the project explored the tension between experts and non-experts and the overall concept of museums as instruments nurturing democracy.

#art #art-based-participatory-project #in-progress-exhibition #collection-in-action #voting #co-curation #public-call #public-consultation

“What if?” Machine

Derby Silk Mill
Museum of Making
Derby, United Kingdom

curated by
Dominic Morrow

since 2012

general public

**collaborative
installation**

where

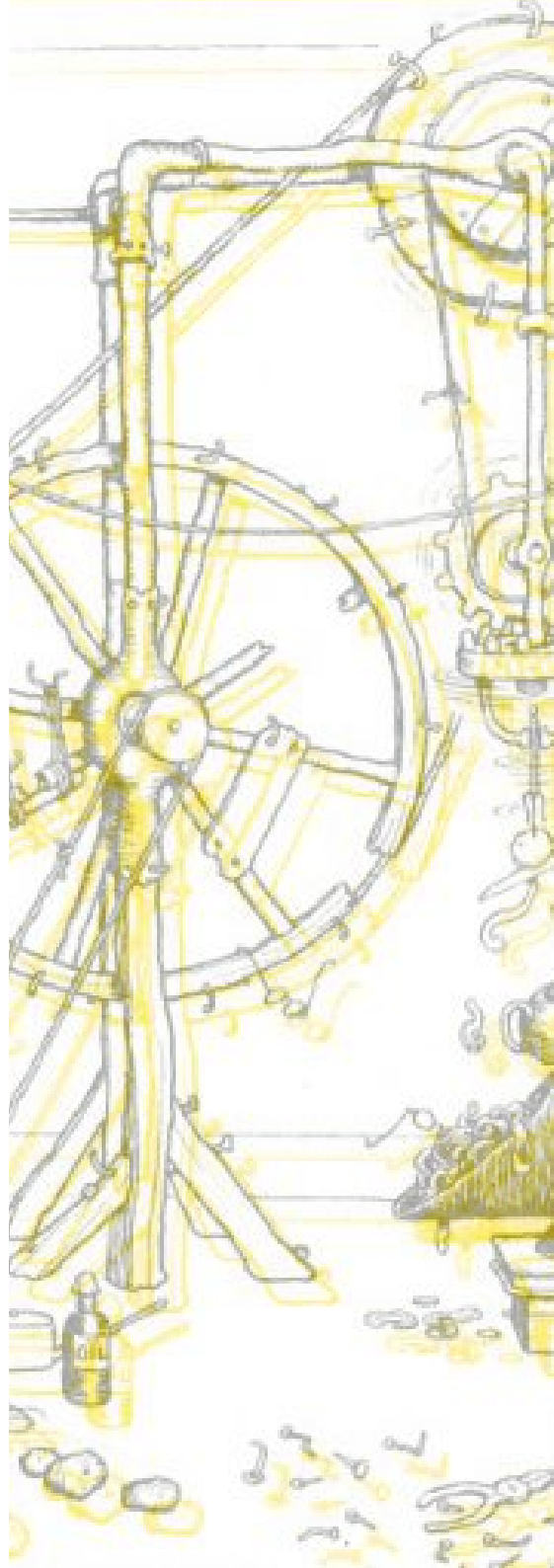
when

target

format



inside



what

The first installation was set up during an open weekend held at the Derby Silk Mill Museum, on 14 and 15 February 2012, to celebrate William Heath-Robinson’s work – the famed eccentric and illustrator known for his “**impossible machines**”, that accomplished simple tasks with over-engineered solutions, and went on to inspire works by the likes of Rowland Emmett and Rube Goldberg. Eversince, the institution **repeats the installation each year, as an occasion to involve the local community into a co-created construction** process.

how

The event draws on the collaboration between the museum staff (and in particular by Dominic Morrow, who coordinates the process) and all the people who register to take part in the design and construction, including family teams, local hobbyists, and various members of the community. Registrations are managed through an online system. The first machine incorporated several Kitronik’s products into the builds; creations that featured these items included an aquarium pump to pump water down a long spout, setting off a croquet mallet, which then hit a tennis ball into a mousetrap. Another example of the machines created on the day was a miniature Strandbeest kit; powered by an extractor fan, to knock a block onto a switch, tripping a solenoid, and releasing a helium balloon on completion.

why

The construction of these machines facilitates the activation or enhancement of relationships between the museum and the local communities.

#collaborative-construction #collaborative-design #learning-by-doing
#audience-as-makers#playful-interactions

A Jewish Story

Venice, Italy

curated by Isabel Lima,
Rune Normann,
Martin Andersen
and Gennaro Postiglione
within the REcall Project
(2012-14)

9-13 September 2012

general public

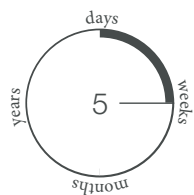
**collaborative
installation**

where

when

target

format



outside



what

The project was meant to explore **innovative forms of commemoration** of the lost life of the Jews of Venice deported in the internment camps during WWII. In particular, it addressed the stories related to the “**camera de custodia**”, a chamber in the main city Hospital where sick and elder people about to be deported were imprisoned – a collective memory that had gone lost. Surveys had indeed highlighted that no documentation nor testimony could be found about the chamber, which started to be referred to as a “missing room”. The initiative was conceived to recall the memory of these historical facts and to promote its conservation by turning people into “new witnesses”. This goal was achieved by triggering inter-personal interactions between the participants and the private stories of the Jews people that were the protagonists of the events.

how

Curators designed a **special tool aimed to ignite these interactions**. It consisted of a **yellow box made in paper**; inside, people would find the individual story of one of the Jews held in captivity in the hospital and consequently deported (written on the interior side of the box), as well as a “Jewish Biscuit”. The box stood for the “missing room”; yellow represents the symbolic colour that Jews were enforced to wear in order to be distinguished by other people; the biscuit embodied the idea of something that was destined to vanish. The tool was used to **“disseminate” the memory** of this events and to engage with citizens and tourists. To do so, a number of yellow boxes were displayed in front of the city’s Hospital, and enabled the curators to ignite one-to-one interactions with the people.

why

The experience triggered a public engagement and charged the participants of the responsibility to conserve and disseminate this memory. The use of an object in the passing of oral communication proved as a strategic element, enabling emulation and repetition.

#local-history #hidden-heritage #difficult-heritage #performative
#sharing-personal-stories #urban-space #diffused-exhibition

Cognizant Maker Space

New York Hall of Science
New York, USA

since 2012

general public

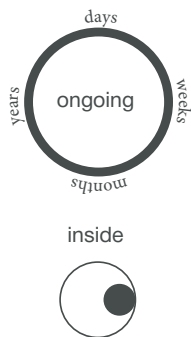
**collaborative
space**

where

when

target

format



what

The “Cognizant Maker Space” is **a permanent, open studio** inside New York Hall of Science, where families, students, educators, and aspiring makers can **explore physical and digital fabrication, hands-on electronics, crafting, and creative experimentation in a collaborative setting** aligning with the museum’s Design Make Play philosophy.

how

This project seeks to inspire young learners to pursue science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) by creating fun, hands-on learning opportunities. The spaces is managed by the institution’s Creative Making & Learning Department, that programs and coordinates the collaborations with guest artists, educators, and developers, to prototype and schedule activities tailored to diverse audiences, especially families and school groups. This “maker space” hosts a dynamic blend of digital fabrication, traditional craft, and design-based learning, including for example electronic and digital tools, textiles and wearable tech, and inquiry-based teen initiatives. Its architecture, designed by Situ Studio, is characterized by a 3 pin-arch plywood structure featuring modular acoustical panels, display shelving, storage, and movable furniture. This flexible layout enables a variety of small- and large-scale project setups.

why

This “maker space” was made possible by an investment by Cognizant through its Making the Future education initiative, which aims to inspire STEM interest and develop innovation skills in youth across the USA. By making advanced tools and collaborative learning opportunities accessible to schools, families, and youth across New York City, especially underserved communities, this space broadens participation in making and innovation culture.

#participatory-space #learning-by-doing #playfull interactions

The Paper Apothecary

Beane House of Art
and Knowledge
Canterbury,
United Kingdom

where

coordinated by Animate
Arts Company
within The Happy Museum
project (2011-16)

2012-13

when

children (5-10)
from local schools

target

**collaborative
exhibition**

format



inside



what

This case study focuses on a **participatory temporary exhibition** that was co-created with members of the local community. The initiative was part of the process started by Beane House in Canterbury to re-launch itself and to pilot an effective approach to engaging audiences.

how

The Beane House commissioned Animate Arts Company to work with local people and museum staff to co-create a cultural apothecary – a **full-size antiquated apothecary's shop made out of card and other recycled materials**, staffed by performers who dispensed “**cultural happiness prescriptions**” to some 6.700 visitors over a two week period. The 200 different prescriptions were created by a group of 109 children aged 5 to 10 from four local schools and by over 100 members of the public. These external “happiness investigators” took part in a **series of workshops**, alongside staff and other professionals, to make use of the museum’s collections, library, and heritage. Visitors to the “Paper Apothecary” described how they were feeling to the apothecary’s resident chemists, and were given an appropriate prescription – a cultural activity suited to their needs. Prescriptions ranged from the playful (e.g. roar at the statue of the lion) to the poetic (e.g. imagine rose petals blowing in the wind).

why

The “Paper Apothecary” received a lot of attention in the local press and social media. Afterwards, almost immediately the museum staff was approached by different community groups who asked to be involved in the institution’s activities, proving the effectiveness of a well-designed initiative in activating new contacts and collaborations with local stakeholders.

#museum-renovation #wellbeing #serendipity #collection-in-action
#workshop #creative-intervention #playfull-interactions

In Someone Else's Shoes

Museum of Natural History and Archaeology
Montebelluna, Italy

where

within the MAPforID
project (2007-09)

September 2012
- May 2013

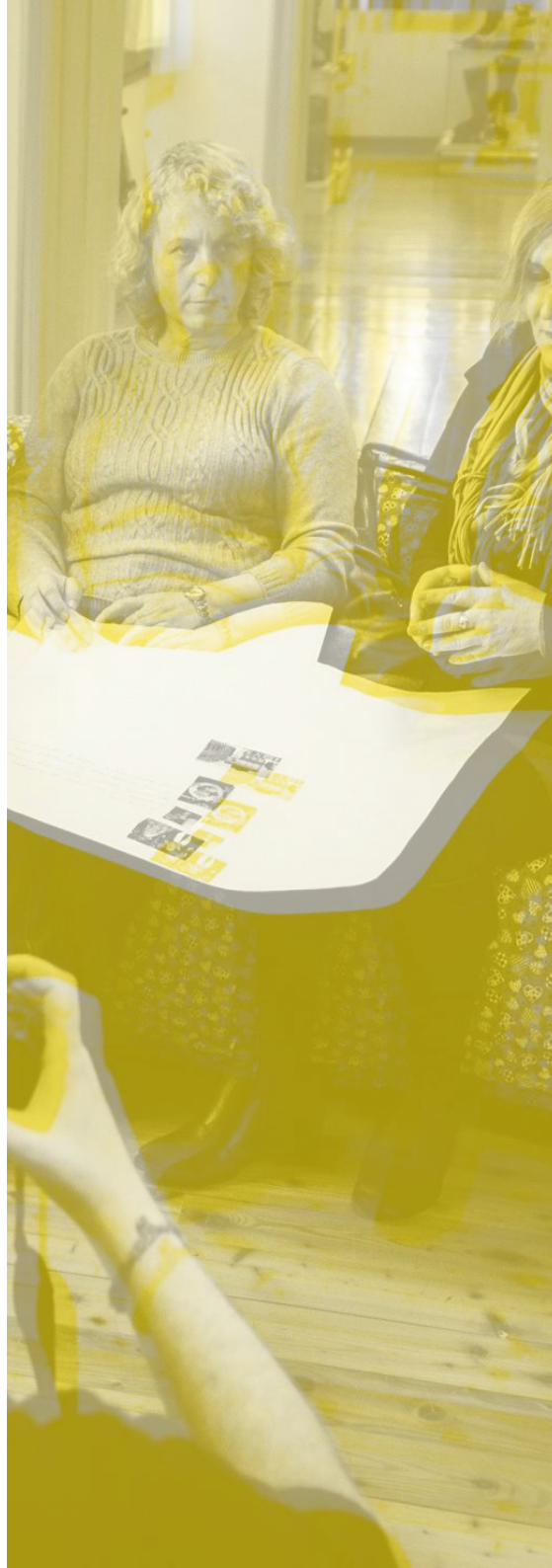
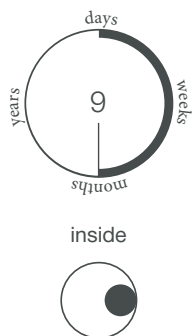
when

students from local
middle and high schools,
and a group of migrant
women living
in Montebelluna

target

**collaborative
workshop**

format



what

The project was meant to guide participants in the discovery of the museum as an opportunity to become acquainted with the local material culture underpinning the socio-economic reality in which they live. By engaging with immigrant members of the community, the **collections were used as a vehicle to encourage cultural participation, mutual respect, and sense of belonging.**

how

The project was organised in four working phases. (1) The workshop “A journey in time when we were migrants”: it involved **reading or listening to the stories of Italian migrants** (letters, audio interviews, and folk music) between the late 19th century and WWII; school and CTP teachers actively took part in the preparation of materials and in the re-elaboration of personal and cultural resonances triggered by the workshop, through group discussions and the production of written texts. (2) Some **group-specific guided visits** to the museum: by promoting the exploration of the local heritage, participants were put in contact with the traditional craftsmanship at the roots of the economic development of Montebelluna’s region. (3) A **storytelling workshop**: participants were guided by the educators of partner organisations in a “third journey”, using the collage technique to initiate the narration and foster the sharing of personal stories. (4) The **presentation of the project’s outcomes**: new life was breathed into every participant’s journey when it was shared through words, images, or music; presentations were initially managed within small groups, and later with the local community at large, on the occasion of the International Museum Day.

why

The experience aimed to foster the social integration of “new” citizens (and particularly of youngsters and women) with diverse cultural backgrounds, by exploiting the potential of the museum’s collections as a vehicle to encourage inter-cultural dialogue.

#migration #intercultural-connections #collection-in-action #storytelling
#music #workshop #cultural-mediators #museum-as-social-agent

Landscape of the Mind

The Lightbox Gallery
and Museum
Woking, United Kingdom

where

within The Happy Museum
project (2011-16)

2012-13

when

a group of 9 people with
mental health issues

target

**collaborative
(co-curated)
exhibition**

format



inside



what

The project involved nine participants with mental health issues. The purpose was to **increase the shared ownership and decision making between museum staff and participants** as a model to be used to enhance the way the institution operates. The project also sought to **challenge perceptions about mental health issues** and to strengthen the social role of the museum.

how

Participants were asked to **select inspirational artworks** from the museum's Ingram Collection of Modern British Art, and worked with artists to create their own works; this process was documented by a video artist. **An exhibition** displaying both bodies of work was co-curated by participants and the staff. The project finished with the organization of **a conference** on "the art of wellbeing". These activities generated other collaborative projects through which the museum started working with adults with learning difficulties, older people, and the Muslim community.

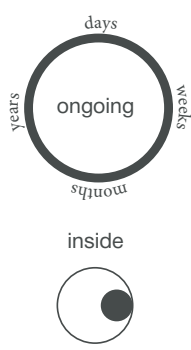
why

Highlights of the project included the training of the staff to promote participatory processes as well as the integration of health issues in the museum's programs. The main challenges referred to the possibility to embed an approach which builds participants into genuinely equal partners.

#art-based-participatory-project #collection-in-action #mental-health
#wellbeing #museums-as-social-agents

Bla Bla MART

MART Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea Rovereto, Italy	where
since 2013 (repetitive, one meeting per month)	when
a group of young people (aged 14)	target
collaborative workshop	format



what	Since 2013, MART has proposed a series of activities regarding the interplay between art and language. One of these consists of one meeting per month (one per each specific language involved: English, German, Spanish, and Japanese). The workshops, that take place inside the museum spaces and are led by native speakers , are dedicated to a specific theme and draw on the dialogue with selected works of art on display in the museum galleries.
how	The proposed activities consist of a series of exercises aimed at enhancing language learning through the engagement with visual language, during which participants are asked to develop some tasks aimed to allow them to create their own opinion about specific artworks from the museum's collection and to build critical thinking. For example, participants are invited to describe the emotions they feel in front of a painting, to sketch their favorite item, to find similarities among different works, or to create something that connects them (e.g. by writing a dialogue between themselves and the work of art).
why	Speaking, writing, reading, and drawing are used to enhance the engagement with the museum's collections and, at the same time, to deepen the use of English, German, Spanish, and Japanese languages. Artworks are used as the trigger for innovative education paths, intertwining linguistic skills and museum-based culture.

Multiple Choice

Spelman College
Museum of Fine Art
Atlanta, USA

curated by Anne
Collins Smith

February - May 2013

general public

**collaborative
exhibition**

where

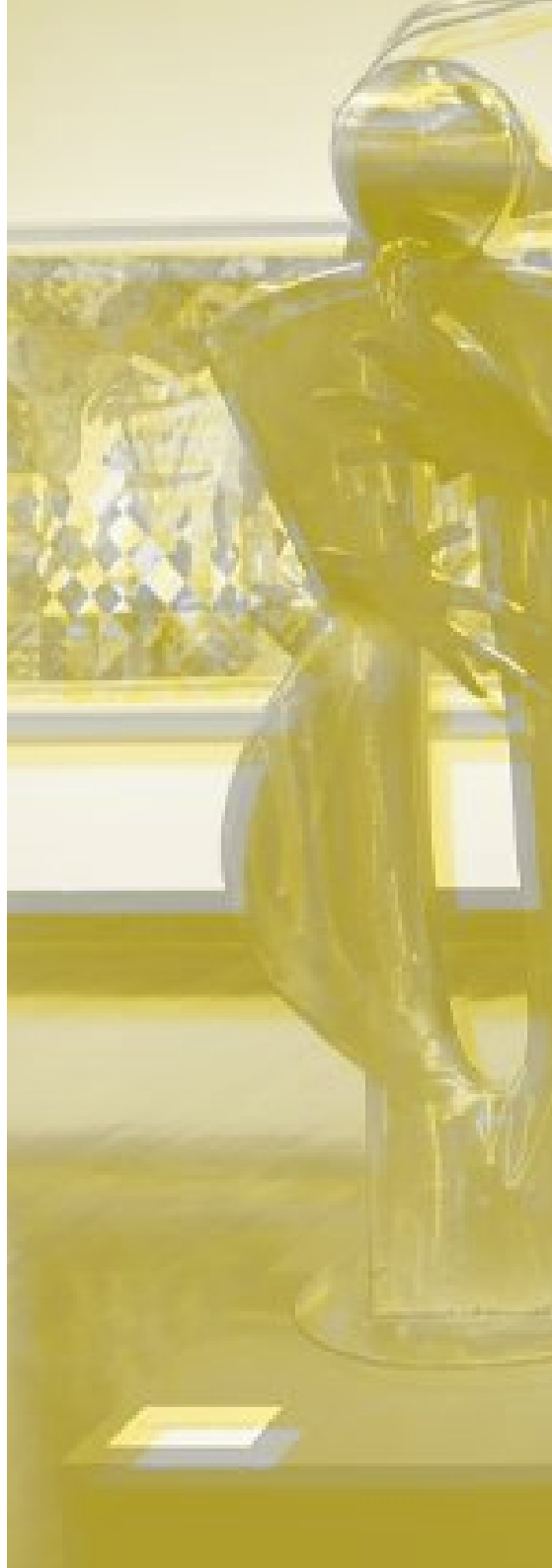
when

target

format



inside/online



what

The Spelman College Museum of Fine Art invited students, faculty, staff, Friends of the Museum, alumnae, and other stakeholders to help select the objects to be featured in the exhibition “Multiple Choice: Perspectives on the Spelman College Collection”.

how

This project allowed 50 participants to **select, engage with, and discuss specific works from the College’s permanent collection**. They were then asked to select the object that had compelled them most, and document the reasons for their engagement. Participants’ **video segments, musical responses, poems, first-person narratives, and experimental writing** breathed new life into the museum’s permanent holdings. All of the chosen works, along with the written and recorded responses, were featured in the exhibition.

why

“Multiple Choice” was inspired by the premise that viewing art is an interactive experience. As in multiple choice texts, the answer to those questions unfolded by an artwork is more often than not “all of the above”. This initiative encouraged visitors to participate in the process of **responding to works of art and put the process on display**.

#art #art-based-participatory-project #self-reflexive-curatorial-practices
#collection-in-action #multiple-perspectives

Outings Project

in collaboration with
various museums
in several cities
all around the world

where

conceived and initiated
by French artist
Julien de Casabianca

since 2014 (repetitive)

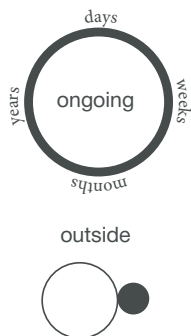
when

general public

target

**collaborative
exhibition**

format



what

This **worldwide participative event**, initiated by French artist and filmmaker Julien de Casabianca, involves people around the globe in the **installation of “obscure” figures seen in historical paintings into urban spaces**. These subjects now occupy bricks and concrete – rather than carefully-prepared canvases. They live among graffitied walls and gaze at passersby, bringing beauty to unexpected places.

how

This initiative make artworks move from the walls of museums to the walls of the streets. It began after Casabianca visited the Louvre and discovered a bored-looking girl in the corner of a painting. He started to want to “free” her and give her a second life, so he snapped a picture on his phone, printed it out, and pasted it on a building in Paris. After that, his friends started to do the same thing, and the project grew from there. Anyone can participate in “Outings”. On the project’s website, **Casabianca offers detailed instructions** on how to get involved. In some cases, he even provides small grants for those who can’t afford the cost of printing. People in 18 different cities have since set unknown figures on the urban scape. Drawing on the recognition of the potential in pasting collections in the streets, the “Outing” team is **also hired by museums to do workshops with community, children and teenager**. In this way, museums and people can collaborate throughout the whole working process: encountering and choosing the art pieces, taking phone pictures, selecting the photos, managing the printing process, cutting and preparing of the samples, organizing outdoor installations on authorized walls.

why

The project offers every cultural-involved-people the possibility to discover classical art, to watch it actively, and to reappropriate it.

#art #street-art #urban-space #diffused-exhibition #collection-in-action
#artistic-intervention #workshop #worldwide

Granbacalac (Réflexion Ville)

Libraries
of the Grand-Parc,
Lac-Bacalan districts
Bordeaux, France

where

in collaboration
with Arc en Rêve
Centre d'Architecture

January
- September 2014

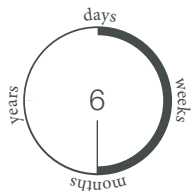
when

primary schools

target

**contributory
+ collaborative
workshop
exhibition**

format



inside/outside



what

In 2013 and 2014 the libraries of the Grand-Parc, Lac, and Bacalan districts in Bordeaux developed a participatory program focused on the architectural and urban transformations taking place around them. Through the collaboration of the association Arc en Rêve, they carried out a project engaging pupils from the primary schools located in the three districts with **workshops, neighborhood surveys, and a final exhibition.**

how

The project consisted of four actions. Act 1, **“ligne de mire”**, was an artistic intervention, in which an artist/architect duo (tout le monde) created ephemeral installations placed in the public spaces near the libraries, highlighting their significant transformations. Act 2, **“construire une ville imaginaire”**, consisted in a workshop engaging the classes in the manner of a photomontage; in the libraries, pupils superimposed various images of architecture and landscapes onto the pictures of the existing city, shaping a new imaginary urban scape. Act 3, **“découvrir la ville en marchant”**, was based on walking tours along which pupils were accompanied in a specially mediated visit of the places in-between the three libraries; along the walk, they were asked to (1) look near, far, up, down, left, right, shapes, details, colours..., to (2) look close, far, up, down, left, right, shapes, details, colours..., to (3) spot the particular signs (e.g. building, tree, panel, lamp post, sign, crane, fence, inhabitant...), to (4) mark on the ground what caught their attention, to (5) photograph the chosen viewpoints, and to (6) select the most significant images to make a portrait of the neighbourhood. Act 4, **“trésors de vie”**, implied the pupils to collect small souvenirs to be added to the collective fresco illustrating the dreamed and the inhabited neighbourhood. These acts led to the set up of an exhibition, aimed at disseminating the project's results.

why

The experience intertwined **participatory practices and architecture-based education strategies** to allow young citizens to develop a new understanding of their environment and its transformations.

#urban-space #local-identity #contemporary-city #education

Re:Make the Museum

Derby Silk Mill
Museum of Making
Derby, United Kingdom

2014-15

local communities

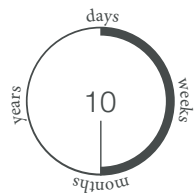
**collaborative
(design + construction)
workshop**

where

when

target

format



inside/online



what

The “Re:Make” project aims at developing an innovative approach to museum redevelopment processes, based on the engagement of visitors and volunteers. These subjects are invited to **become citizen curators, designers, and makers, through the learning and/or application of specific skills.**

how

The experience was focused on the redevelopment of Derby’s Silk Mill. Over a 10-month period, people from local communities who volunteered to take part in the action were involved in **conceptualizing, designing, and making furniture pieces and displays fittings** for the ground floor prototype of the Museum of Making. Citizens worked with the museum’s in-house design team, some makers-in-residence (Studio TILT, Paul Matosic, and Seiko Kinoshita), product designers, and artists, through co-production and human-centred design thinking approaches. In particular, they attended fully-fitted workshops, and contributed thousands of volunteer hours. This open process also formed the public programme for visitors.

why

Audiences became co-producers and makers, co-designing and manufacturing fixtures and fittings onsite to make a prototype Museum of Making.

#museum-renovation #collaborative-design #collaborative-construction
#design #prototyping #training

The People's Choice

James A. Michener
Art Museum
Doylestown, USA

11 February
- 10 August 2014

general public

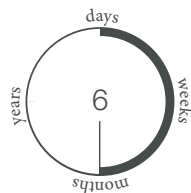
**collaborative
exhibition**

where

when

target

format



inside/online



rating Michener's Top 25



what

how

why

The project consisted of a community-curated exhibition, conceived to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the museum and its rich collection of permanent holdings.

The collaboration was carried out through a **poll**. Votes were recorded based on a selection of 125 key objects; the 25 works which received the most votes were included in the interactive exhibition. The selection ranged among contemporary, modernist, impressionist works and sculptures. Voting took place for seven months, both online and in the museum. Over 10.000 online votes and 1.400 **paper ballots** were received. Through voting ballots and an installation, the Michener Memory Wall, comments were collected to document visitors' memories and experiences with the museums; these feedbacks were incorporated into the display.

The initiative enhanced the personal engagement of the public with the single artworks, and allowed visitors to **take part in the decision-making process that defined the contents of the exhibition**.

#art #art-based-participatory-project #voting #public-consultation
#collection-in-action #culturally-involved-people

Mix Match Museum Project

Amsterdam Museum,
Groninger Museum,
Kröller-Müller Museum,
Museum Boerhaave,
Museum TwentseWelle,
Van Abbemuseum
The Netherlands

with the support of
the DOEN Foundation

October 2014
- September 2015

general public

**collaborative
(co-curated)
exhibition**



inside/online



where

when

target

format

what

how

why

The project was promoted through the collaboration of six leading Dutch museums, that invited the public to co-curate an exhibition aimed at **mixing and matching items** from the different collections and thus at **producing innovative perspectives** around them.

Through an open call, the public was invited to create an **online exhibition** to be displayed in one of the six museums of their choice. Anyone could participate by **selecting 3 to 12 objects among the 50 proposed by the each of the involved institutions**, and by **defining a curatorial project**. This was meant to be developed by using and mixing well-known and lesser-known artworks to unfold original perspectives on the collections, based on personal impressions, thematic insights, and new narratives. Each museum selected the best ones among the received proposals. These were developed and turned them into “physical exhibitions”, later displayed in the museums’ spaces during the Museum Week (18-24 April 2015). As part of the “Mix Match Museum” initiative, some of the involved institutions have also created an **online blog**, where the public could have an exclusive look behind the scenes of the project.

The experience aimed at enabling the interconnection among different collections, at enhancing the personal engagement of culturally-involved-people (of any age: one of curators was a 11-year-old boy), and at giving a voice to original and personal interpretations, hence widening the perspectives on the contents they preserve and exhibit.

#art-based-participatory-project #collection-in-action #online-exhibition
#public-consultation #culturally-involved-people

The Museum as Neighbourhood Living Room

Metropolia University
of Applied Sciences
Helsinki, Finland

where

within The People's
Smart Sculpture
project (2015-18)

2015-17

when

a group of residents in
the Arabianranta district
(from children
to elderly people)

target

**collaborative
workshops
+ (sound) installation
+ exhibition**

format



inside/outside



what

This three-year project was carried out at the Museum of Technology of Finland in collaboration with the Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences (with students mainly from arts and technology programmes) and The Neighbourhood Residential Association Artova. It studied innovative ways to turn the museum into a living room for citizens by dynamically **engaging audiences with applied arts, community theatre, applied music education, social media, mobile technology, and cultural production methods**. These art based methods worked as a tool for **challenging the attitudes and perceptions of the people** involved and promoting communal spirit.

how

The strategy adopted drew on the possibility to **take the museum's activities outside its walls**. First, the target group was reached with the help of social media and Artova's direct contacts to citizens. By combining Metropolia's culture production, IT-skills, and facilitation expertise on audience education, curators engaged the community members through participatory art methods and workshops. Artistic experiences brought residents to meet each other, helped them to explore different phenomena, share their stories, and discuss about their dreams and hopes in building a common living room. The second phase focused on the visualization and sharing of ideas; it involved media artists to work with residents in making their ideas visible and audible. During this phase, new soundscapes were created to produce a relaxed atmosphere in some public spaces, and visualize how the "neighborhood living room" should look like in order to make people feel at home. At the same time, a "virtual living room" opened the door in the social media, so that people who didn't participate could express their ideas. The third phase illustrated the results through an exhibition set up by the museum, with the aim to disseminate new skills for enhancing audience engagement.

why

The project looked at how a museum can build a more dynamic and participatory relationship with the public, and become an integrated part of the community, a place where they can feel seen and safe.

#urban-space #local-identity #elderly #community-enhancement

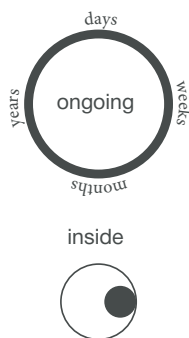
Multaka

Museum of Islamic Art
Berlin, Museum of
the Ancient Near East,
Bode Museum, German
Historical Museum
Berlin, Germany

since 2015

with and for Arabic-
and Persian-speaking
migrants and refugees

**collaborative
workshop
+ exhibition
+ public event**



where

when

target

format



what

“Multaka” (the Arabic word for “meeting point”) is a cultural and integration project that brings together people with migrant and refugee backgrounds and cultural institutions such as museums. Initially launched in Berlin in 2015, it has since inspired similar initiatives in other cities. The **project enables newcomers, especially from Syria, Iraq, and other conflict-affected regions, to become active participants in cultural heritage by serving as museum guides, mediators, and cultural interpreters.**

how

“Multaka” operates through a collaborative model involving refugees, museum professionals, educators, and partner organizations. The main components of its approach include **training programs** (participants receive training in museum education, interpretation, and intercultural communication), **peer-led tours** (trained guides lead museum tours in Arabic, German, and other languages, sharing their personal and cultural insights, often drawing connections between artifacts from Middle Eastern heritage and objects in European collections), and **community engagement** (exchange between newcomers and local communities are fostered through workshops, public events, and co-curated exhibitions).

why

“Multaka” was created in response to the refugee crisis and broader challenges of social integration and representation in cultural institutions. Its objectives include promoting social inclusion, by engaging refugees as cultural actors, hence empowering them to participate in and shape public discourse, fostering mutual understanding, and enhancing the role of museums as dynamic spaces for intercultural dialogue, where diverse perspectives are acknowledged and valued.

#migration #multicultural-communities #collection-in-action #training
#language #multiple-perspectives #cultural-mediators #community-
enhancement #museum-as-social-agent

Object Journeys

British Museum
London, United Kingdom

where

part of the Activity Plan
of the World
Conservation and
Exhibition Centre

since 2016 (repetitive)

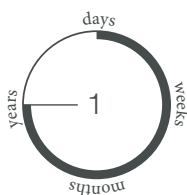
when

members of some ethnic
groups living in the city

target

**collaborative
workshop
+ exhibition
+ public event**

format



inside



what

“Object Journeys” is a community collaboration project promoted at the British Museum, involving various partner museums to support communities (and in particular representatives of immigrant groups) to **research and explore ethnographic collections and to work together with the staff to produce co-created displays, events, and digital contents**. Within the first experience, the British Museum developed a partnership with a core group of ten London-based Somali adults, with whom the staff worked for an year. The group met frequently to research the museum’s Somali collection of objects and to produce a new display case and a programme of events around its exploration. The “Somali Object Journeys” project culminated with a display and a set of public events at the British Museum.

how

Throughout the project, the core group worked collaboratively to investigate the Somali collection and photography archives. In addition to conducting research about the objects and the contexts in which they were collected, participants joined effort with various teams within the museum’s departments to develop and design a new display case. Installed in October 2016, the display “Objects of Survival: The Beauty of Somali Craftwork” can still be seen in Room 24 of the British Museum. Important to the project was working with wider members of the London Somali community. The group used these sessions as places to gather further insights about the objects but also as opportunities to speak with their own community. Together with the museum’s public engagement team, a heterogenous programme of events was planned to bring music and poetry performances by Somali artists into the galleries; talks conducted by the project partners and objects handling sessions were also organized. Furthermore, families were encouraged to take part in Somali themed craft workshops and storytelling sessions.

why

The project aimed to produce a co-created object-based display and a related programme of co-produced events and digital contents, to enhance information and knowledge about the collections.

#multicultural-communities #collection-in-action #training

Museums Are Not Neutral

various cities
co-curated by La Tanya S.
Autry and Mike Murawski

since 2017

general public

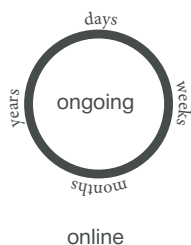
**collaborative
digital tool
+ public event**

where

when

target

format



what

“Museums Are Not Neutral” is a **global advocacy initiative** co-produced by La Tanya S. Autry and Mike Murawski **to expose the myth of museum neutrality and demand ethics-based transformation** across institutions. The claim is: “Expose the myth of museum neutrality and demand ethics-based transformation across institutions. Museums can be agents of social change in our communities, and it’s up to us to make this happen together.”

how

The initiative began in August 2017 through an online t-shirt campaign, exploiting the social media hashtag #MuseumsAreNotNeutral. During its first 3 years, the initiative sold more than 3.000 shirts to people around the entire world, raised more than \$20.000 for social justice organizations and relief funds supporting museum workers, and engaged more than one million people across social media platforms. This movement continues to grow, bringing people together, and forstering critical thinking and change.

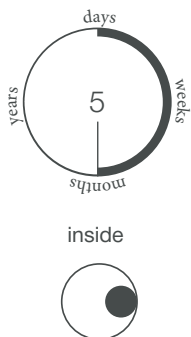
why

The initiative was conceived to improve the museum field and highlight actions for change, by triggering a global engagement on a topic of collective interest. The strategies and tools used in the campaign can be easily activated and replicated in other contexts and around other themes.

#fashion #communication-campaign #worldwide

Field Ambassadors

The Field Museum Chicago, USA	where
since 2017 (30 hours distributed along 5 months)	when
primary school teachers	target
collaborative workshop	format



what	“Field Ambassador” program is a professional learning community through which Chicago educators receive on-going professional development on Field Museum’s resources and best practices (concerning exhibitions, collections, educational programs), in order to use them to support students’ learning.
how	Since its inaugural year, the program has built relationships with more than 400 educators. To become a “Field Ambassador”, they must participate in 30 hours of training (six sessions, usually organised twice in the fall semester and three times in the spring semester). These draw on contents that are relevant to the Field Museum’s areas of study as well as on best practices in object-based learning. Later, they have to complete a year-long practitioner action research project designed to inform an area of their practice that connects with the museum’s contents. After completing the initial training, “Field Ambassadors” become members of the Academy, and thus continue to be invited to participate in professional development days, join the museum for special learning opportunities and events, and develop school-wide initiatives designed to integrate the institution’s resources on a larger scale.
why	“Field Ambassadors” serve as a liaison between the Field Museum and local school communities. Through this program, educators promote exhibitions and new resources for peers, students and their families. Furthermore, they dedicate themselves to lifelong learning within a professional community, and improve their ability to teach and learn through collections . The initiative enriches the museum’s opportunities to reach out to teachers and students, while gaining new collaborations and training new people with diverse cultural background and skills.

#collection-in-action #education #training #meeting-point

Participatory Street Art

Lyon, France

where

designed by
Fernando Volken Togni
and produced by
TETRO agency

2018

when

citizens of Lyon

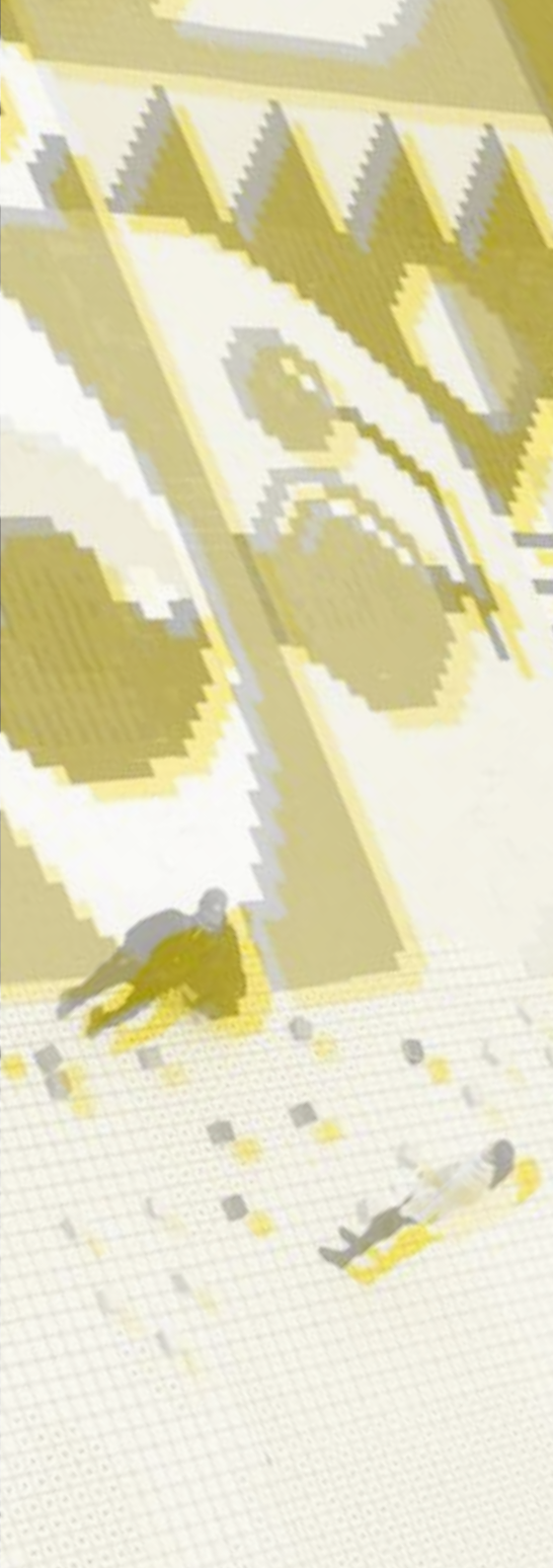
target

**collaborative
installation**

format



outside



what

The initiative was promoted by French-based art agency TETRO to experiment with the activation of a street as a space for co-creative expression and collaboration. The project consisted in a participatory art experience, that engaged the citizens of Lyon in the development of **a new layout for a public space.**

how

TETRO invited Brazilian illustrator Fernando Volken Togni to create **a giant participatory street art fresco, elaborated and realized by the project team together with the local community.** Over 20.000 colored tiles have been used to turn the street into an artwork, characterised by geometrical shapes and intricate compositions with bold elements and colors. This fresco transformed a new pedestrian street into a vibrant, interactive art installation.

why

The event aimed to celebrate the street and all of the people who walk through downtown every day. The project also meant to bring attention to Lyon's brand-new pedestrian area, and to enrich its landscape. Through the active participation of citizens in reconfiguring the visual identity of this space, the initiative also served to improve attention, foster sense of belonging, and infuse pride to the urban community.

#urban-space #street-art #art-based-participatory-project #community-enhancement #participatory-space #creative-expression #artistic-intervention

Artist-led Walks

Queens Museum
New York, USA

where

curated by Lisa Hirmer
and Magali Duzant

October -
December 2018

when

general public

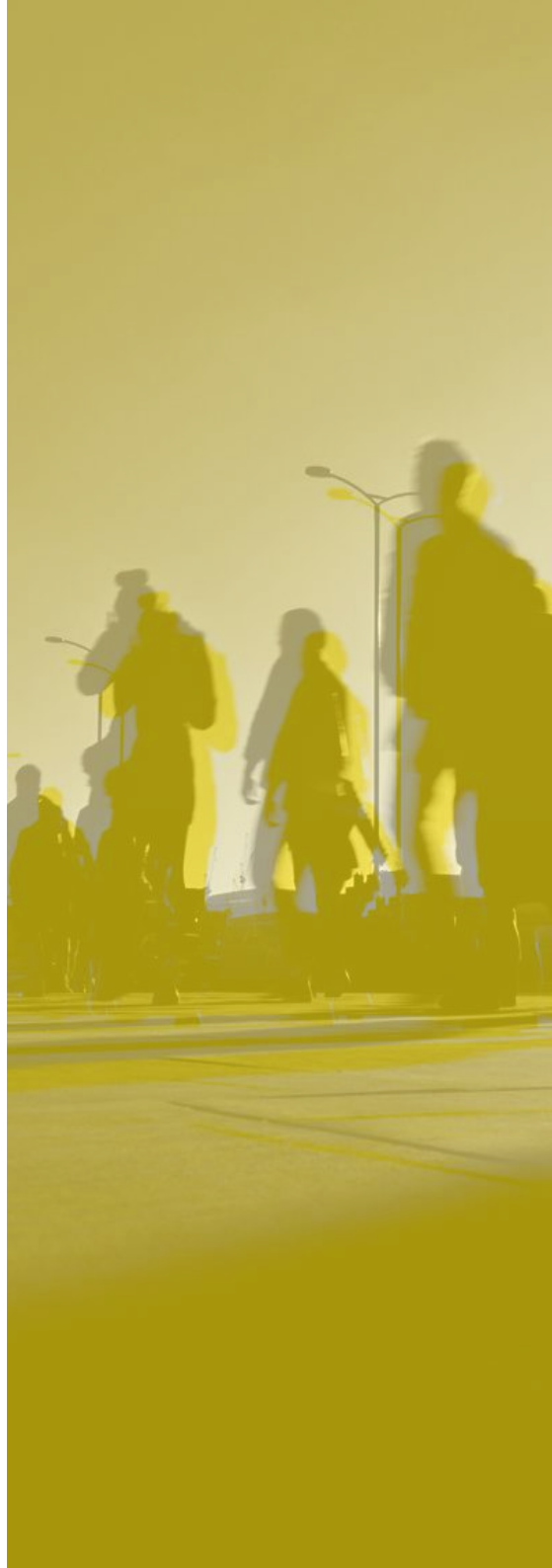
target

**collaborative
public event**

format



outside



what

Participatory artist-led walks are free activities promoted by museums to explore **innovative perspectives on the relationship between their collections, the city (or some specific site), and their people and practices.**

how

The Queens Museum organized its first series of artist-led walks as part of the program of events promoting the show “Saunter Trek Escort Parade... (S.T.E.P)”. These initiatives were aimed at mobilizing the visitors of the exhibition throughout New York, and included two thematic walk-based experiences. The walk “Trees of Forests Not Yet Here” was organized by Lisa Hirmer in the Queens Botanical Garden, to explore human-tree relationships through simple guided exercises that solicit the public to pay attention to the arboreal exchanges and remind of the ways that a human body is permeable to the world. The walk “On Love: A Crystalization” was organized by Magali Duzant to explore Stendhal’s theories of love in a contemporary context through a journey around Queens, a borough known for its diverse population and constant movement; the walk aimed at reflecting the stages of love as described by Stendhal, and at detecting the subtle gestures and quiet aspects of love that pervade the urban contexts (from the naming of street corners, to the establishment of homes, etc.).

why

Walk-based experiences embrace **walking as a creative act** that can challenge the traditional notion of cultural experience and turn it into a moment of dialogue and exchange. The artist-led visit throughout specific places can also trigger open conversations around complex and controversial topics, such as visibility, gender, labor, counter-mapping, colonialism, feminism, motherhood, contesting borders, community building, street harassment, etc.

#urban-space #art-based-participatory-project #contemporary-city
#sense-of-place #storytelling

My Correr

Museo Correr
Venice, Italy

promoted by Fondazione
Musei Civici di Venezia,
in the framework of
Art Clicks intercultural
training and planning
workshop

April 2018 - May 2019

representatives of
immigrant groups

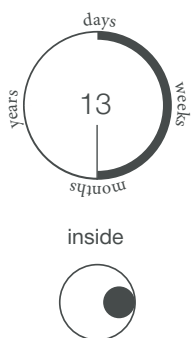
**collaborative
workshop**

where

when

target

format



what

The project took place in the prestigious Correr Museum in Piazza San Marco, at the heart of the historic centre of Venice, which was considered an ideal place to start the experimentation of the first intercultural project promoted by Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia. The initiative was based on the **engagement of “new citizens” in the development of new narrative trails around some of the artworks** included in the collection.

how

The initiative implied meetings among immigrant communities’ members, the museum staff, and “gatekeepers”, and included explorations of the historic landmarks of the city and museum visits. Participants were asked to select some **artworks with which they felt a special emotional connection** and, through **autobiographical storytelling workshops** in the Correr Museum, they were led in the production of new narrative trails, documented through a video. The outcomes were evaluated by considering the acquisition of knowledge and skills, the change of attitudes and values, enjoyment, inspiration, creativity, behaviour and progression. The new narrative trails were later presented to families, local residents, and the public at large, offering new perspectives on the museum’s collection.

why

The experience aimed to experiment with the use of heritage to promote a dialogue between people with different cultural backgrounds living in Venice, to enhance cultural access and the creative participation of “new citizens” in the museum space, and to promote culture as an important factor for the enhancement of social cohesion and a new sense of belonging to the city.

#art #art-based-participatory-project #collection-in-action #workshop
#creative-expression #autobiographical-work #intercultural-connections
#multicultural-communities #museum-as-social-agent

DIY Rabbits Road

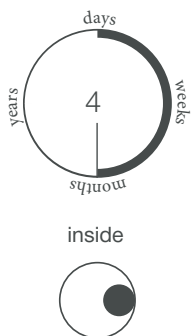
Rabbits Road Press
in collaboration with V&A
Research Institute (VARI)
London, United Kingdom

curated by artist
Acqui Thami

October 2018
- January 2019

a group of young
women involved in
the Rabbits Road Press

**collaborative
artist in residence
program**



where

when

target

format



what

As part of her residency, Mumbai-based artist, activist, and academic Acqui Thami developed a collaborative art project with a group of young women working at Rabbits Road Press. This is a community Risograph print studio and a small-scale publishing press based at Old Manor Park Library in London and run by artist collective One of My Kind, which provides services for the community, and promotes programs aimed at exploring a contemporary model for community publishing by bringing together artists, designers, writers, and local people.

how

The artist – whose work is based on a multidisciplinary practice inspired by the culture of DIY – intended to explore V&A's rich **political posters collection**, with a special focus on handmade posters for public walls and city spaces, and with the view to engaging local communities in East London in her own **artistic practices using the Risograph printer at the Rabbits Road Press**. She began this outreach process by running a **zine-making workshop** in a local school in Dagenham and launching a collaborative art project, "DIY Rabbits Road", engaging young women aged 16 plus in Manor Park. The collaboration was developed through workshops, **meetings, site visits, discussions, and art-making practices**, that led participants in the exploration and celebration of the collective identities in the Manor Park neighborhood. The experience nurtured the **realization of a participatory artwork**, developed in form of posters and risograph printed works, that reflected and communicated the concepts that are often left unsaid or unheard.

why

Through her socially engaged practice, the artist was able to actively engage the group of young woman in the co-creative exploration of local identities and in the celebration of the power of local communities.

#art-based-participatory-project #creative-expression #visual-language
#learning-by-doing #training

Speed Dating (With the Museum Collection)

Polar Museum
Tromsø, Norway

July 2019

general public

**collaborative
(speed-dating)
workshop**

where

when

target

format



inside/online



what

Several museums are organizing speed dating with their objects. This is a creative and participatory outreach or education format that encourages **playful, personal, and reflective engagement with museum objects**, and it is also used to **involve visitors in decision-making processes**.

how

This kind of program invites participants to encounter a series of objects (either physically in the gallery or through facilitated sessions using replicas or images), spending a brief but focused amount of time with each. Sessions are usually facilitated by a curator, who spend a specific amount of time (e.g. three minutes) with individuals or a small group of people to encourage them to reflect on their first impressions, emotional responses, and possible stories or associations linked to each item. This playful framing not only demystifies collections and foster open interpretations, but also aligns with constructivist learning theories that prioritize personal meaning-making and emotional engagement

why

By transforming traditional object-viewing into an active, dialogic, and often humorous experience, speed dating with the collection supports broader institutional goals around access, inclusivity, and fostering a sense of ownership and intimacy with cultural heritage. It can also serve as a valuable tool for outreach, taking museum content into schools, libraries, or community centers, as well as for evaluation, offering insights into how people connect with different aspects of the collection. Sometimes these sessions are also **part of a consultation process** through which the museum shapes future development or renovation projects. For example, at the Polar Museum, the staff used speed dating together with social media to allow the public to vote for their favourite object from the collection; the objects with the most votes were made into in-depth films by a professional filmmaker aimed to expand the permanent displays.

#exclusive-meetings-with-objects #playful-interactions #object-handling-methods #participated-decision-making

The Alternative School of Economics

Gaswork
London, United Kingdom

where

curated by Ruth Beale
and Amy Feneck
within the Gasworks
Participatory Artists'
Residency Programme

September 2019
- August 2020

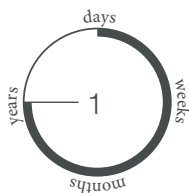
when

general public

target

**collaborative
artist in residence
program**

format



inside/outside



what

“The Alternative School of Economics”, run by artists Ruth Beale and Amy Feneck, is an artistic project that used the **practice of self-education to study economics, hence creating a framework for investigating political, social, and cultural issues**. Over their 8-month residency, the artists developed an experience aimed to explore feminist economics with a range of groups and individuals (archives professionals, campaign groups, academics, and individuals identifying as women interested in these ideas and actively involved in feminist economic projects), contacted through the Henry Fawcett Children’s Centre Parents Group and the Indo-American Refugee and Migrant Organisation.

how

Conceptually, “The Alternative School of Economics” is a statement – that people who are not economists can set up an alternative school to reclaim economics as a means to discuss the complexities of history, inequality, and political change. In their residency at Gasworks, in collaboration with Social Broadcasts, artists have produced a podcast series, “True Currency: About Feminist Economics”, featuring women’s voices that ask questions, make connections, and share ideas.

why

As an “alternative school”, Beale and Feneck set out to learn together, collaboratively, in a **non-hierarchical way**. This is a social practice and a form of pedagogical critique, questioning ideas through conversations and relationships. They use diverse and creative methodologies, and collaborate with experts from a **variety of disciplines, from sociologists to writers**. By studying economics through the lens of day-to-day reality and personal experience, they tackle one of those that are often perceived as difficult subjects. In another case, “The Story of Money”, a project with young people and families exploring philosophical questions about money and its history, the group built a temporary sculpture of a bank which they then collectively destroyed, and giant cardboard coins which raced across the gallery space.

#education #art-based-participatory-project #entrepreneurial-skills

The People's Studio

MoMA
New York, USA

where

since 2020

when

general public

target

**collaborative
space**

format



inside/outside



what

“The People’s Studio” is a **participatory and temporary space** within MoMA, created to bridge the gap between artistic practice and visitor experience. Hosted in the museum’s Creativity Lab, it aims to **transform visits into collaborative and creative encounters**. Each edition centers on a curatorial theme (past versions include “Collective Imagination” and “Items: Is Fashion Modern?”), and invites audiences to experiment with artworks’ ideas, contribute to communal projects, and engage in artist-led discussions and creative prompts.

how

Within this space, MoMA commissions artists, designers, writers, and creative thinkers to lead projects and public programs themed around the exhibitions on view in a specific moment. Typically, these collaborations produce weekly workshops, drop-in art activities, facilitated conversations, readings, collective weaving or postcard making stations, and special events. Through these experiences, visitors are invited to engage with art and ideas in new and different ways. The area operates during regular museum hours; it is free, and open to all ages (with supervision for minors).

why

This space is complementing the visit to exhibition galleries, transforming museumgoing into active learning and engagement. Rather than just observe, visitors become co-creators, experimenting with artistic ideas and processes in an open and playful environment. Workshops and installations encourage reflection on collaboration and cultural exchange, and foster deeper connections between visitors, exhibitions, and broader cultural contexts.

#participatory-space #art-based-participatory-project #workshop

Museo Futuro

MADRE Museo d'Arte
Contemporanea
Donnaregina
Naples, Italy

curated by
Jeffrey Schnapp
and Laura Valente

December 2020
- June 2021

a group of 25 people
(aged 21-40) working
in the creative sector

**collaborative
workshop**



inside/online



where

when

target

format



what

“MuseoFuturo” (Future Museum) is **an experiment in museum-based education**. It was meant to reach out not to museum professionals but rather to young practitioners engaged in a range of creative and technical fields, inviting them to participate in the **development of nine alternate visions of the museum of the future**, while bringing the MADRE’s own permanent collection into public conversation.

how

“Museo Futuro” was conceived not only as a form of museological experimentation but also as a training ground for future museological professions, intended to merge education with the performative work (the one that is based on learning by making, in the pursuit of impact, connections, and site-specific visibility). After **ten seminar meetings, followed by ten exercises in curatorial making**, the program was concluded with a marathon event, a day during which a catalogue was collaboratively produced by the participants and immediately printed. An **exhibition, made up of nine nodes distributed within the MADRE’s spaces**, illustrated the collectively elaborated curatorial interventions and turned them into an innovative experience for the visitors.

why

The outcomes of this experience provided new theoretical and practical insights into the future of the museum, generating food for thoughts about the evolution of its institutional identity, tasks, tools, and spaces.

#museum-renovation #training #design #collaborative-design

Serendipity Prototype

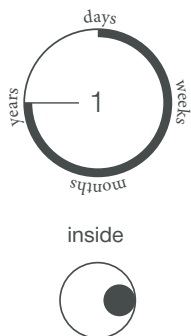
Victoria & Albert Museum
London, United Kingdom

promoted by
V&A Research Institute

2020-21

staff of the V&A
+ external participants
(including students from
local art schools and
members of the public)

**collaborative
digital tool**

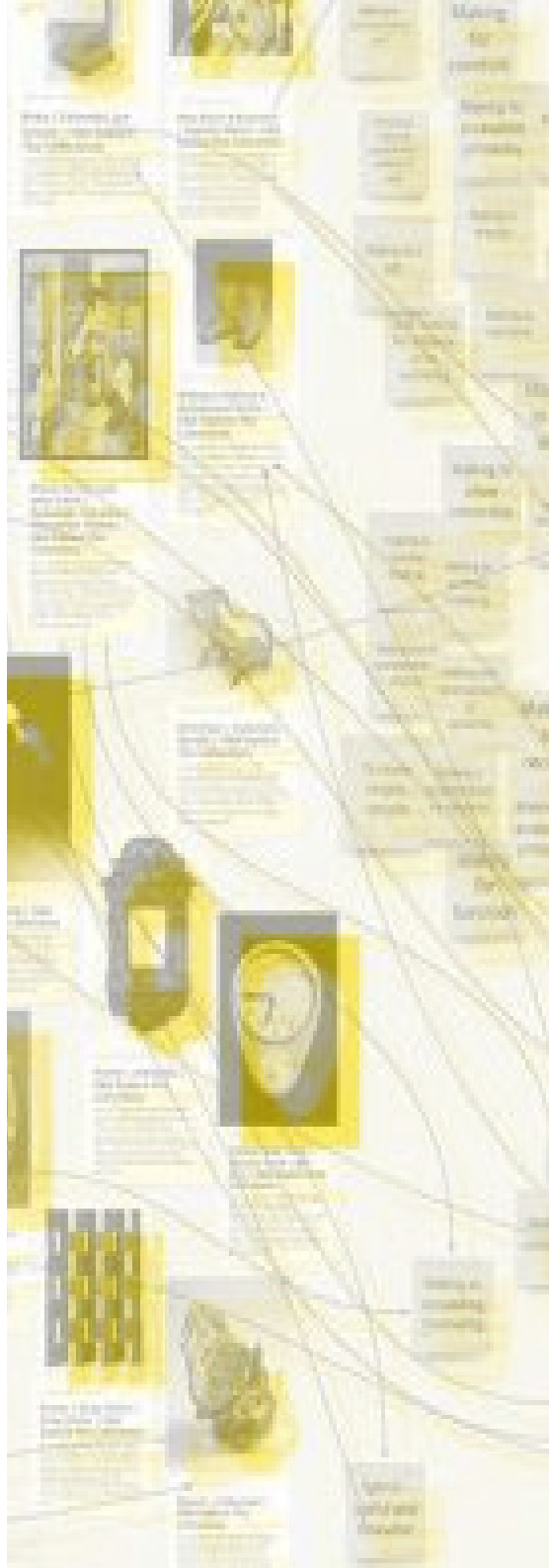


where

when

target

format



what

The “Serendipity Prototype” is a digital, participatory tool created as part of the V&A Research Institute’s “Show + Tell + Share” project, funded by the Mellon Foundation. Designed **to evoke the chance discoveries that occur in museum storerooms, it allows users to create, explore, and share unexpected connections between objects, based on personal insights** and thematic prompts.

how

The term “serendipity” was produced by 18th century writer Horace Walpole, who used it to describe how the heroes of the Persian fairytale were always making discoveries, by accidents and sagacity, of things they were not in quest of. Today, we use it to explain a happy accident mixed with insight or meaning. Researchers have highlighted how museums and archives can encourage such unexpected discoveries. The project’s curators started to **experiment with the concept of serendipity and the possibility to engineer it in the museum**, specifically through the design of tools that could replicate aspects of experiencing the discovery of objects in storages (especially with the new V&A East Storehouse in mind). This research resulted in the design of a digital tool, the “Serendipity Prototype”, which collects and displays user-generated connections between the V&A’s objects. The prototype’s construction started through a participated process, involving various members of V&A staff, as well as students and members of the public. Early experiments with the process dedicated to the construction of links between objects (e.g. by material, shape, color, pattern, or theme) engaged also students from the Royal College of Art, who produced connections based on their own research. A second step included a **set of online Serendipity Workshops**, aimed to build further links in a more facilitated way. The workshops created a space enabling a constant flux of objects and original perspectives on the museum’s collections.

why

By embracing uncertainty, emotion, and collective insight, the project explored how audiences engage with collections, making surprising connections and individual meaning integral to the museum experience.

#collection-in-action #serendipity #workshop #prototyping

InnerSwell

Gaswork
London, United Kingdom

where

curated by Laima Layton
and Lexy Morvaridi
within the Gasworks
Participatory Artists'
Residency Programme

April - October 2021

when

local community

target

**collaborative
artist in residence
program
+ installation**

format



inside/outside



what

The experience consisted in a series of collaborations between two artists and people living in the area of Gasworks (a non-profit, contemporary art organisation near The Oval cricket ground in Kennington, South East London). It **explored memory and sound using Pauline Oliveros' concept of Deep Listening** (i.e. a process of “listening to learn”).

how

As part of the residency, the artists worked with a group of participants to document sonically a range of local spaces and to evaluate their importance as assets to the community as well as places of political agency and empowerment. The **artists encouraged people to share stories, memories, ideas, and thoughts through provocations through the medium of sound**. The operative sessions were organized in the Fertile Dome, an accessible physical space in which InnerSwell provided the tools allowing participants to create their sound-based narrations. The outcomes of the project were merged into specific **sound installations**. One of the experiences grew out of the collaboration between the artists and the Latin American Youth Forum, a youth-led group dedicated to young people recently migrated to the UK from Latin America or Southern Europe. These people experience difficulties in communicating in English, getting a place in school or college, and making friends; hence they are often left behind in their education, struggle to develop a social network, and lose confidence in their abilities and potential. This group of youngsters was involved in a series of workshops to develop a live re-scoring of the films included in Bassam Al-Sabah's exhibition, “I am error”, held at Gasworks. Participants produced sounds inspired by the “provocations” induced by the artists, ensuing from a self-reflexive work based on their own identities and interpretations of the film. The installation illustrating the outcomes of this experience was a public performance, presented by the youngsters from the Forum.

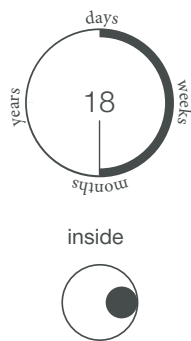
why

The project aimed to amplify localised community work, using the artists in residence as means to trigger co-creative processes and empower people to reinterpret and share their memories, values, and ideas.

#sound #creative-intervention #collective-memory #participatory-space

Have Your Say in New Digital Labels

Leicester Museum & Art Gallery Leicester, United Kingdom	where
2021-22	when
visitors	target
collaborative exhibition	format



what “Have Your Say in New Digital Labels” is an audience engagement project aimed to enhance how visitors interact with the museum’s collections. By **using digital e ink labels, the initiative invites members of the public to contribute personal interpretations, reflections, and stories in response to specific exhibited objects.** Visitors’ contributions are then displayed alongside the museum’s traditional labels, creating a more inclusive and participatory interpretive experience of the galleries.

how The project was piloted in October 2021 and formally launched in January 2022, with the support of Arts Council England. It involved the installation of **touch-sensitive digital labels** – low-energy e ink screens that visually mimic paper labels but can be updated remotely via an online dashboard. The museum initially selected ten key objects from its permanent collection, including a model of the extinct Dodo, Degas’s sculpture “Danseuse en Arabesque”, a film about the Battle of Bosworth, and Ancient Egyptian relics. Visitors were invited to submit **short texts** (up to 100 words) expressing personal thoughts, emotions, or memories related to these objects. These texts were then curated and published on the digital labels, becoming visible to other museumgoers. Community partners (e.g. Nupur Arts) also helped gather contributions, especially from underrepresented groups in Leicester.

why The project was designed to diversify the narratives presented in the museum by **including visitors’ voices alongside curatorial perspectives**, hence making the proposed interpretation more inclusive, dynamic, and dialogic, particularly for underrepresented communities. The activity also proved effective in promoting community ownership and engagement with cultural heritage, encouraging emotional connection and personal relevance, and making the museum experience more meaningful for diverse audiences.

#collection-in-action #multiple-perspectives #engaging-technology
#sharing-opinions #sharing-personal-stories

English Classes

Gaswork
London, United Kingdom

where

curated by Bryan Giuseppe
Rodriguez Cambana
within the Gasworks
Participatory Artists'
Residency Programme

2022

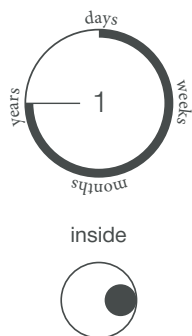
when

a group of youngsters
(1st and 2nd generation
Afro-indigenous migrants
from Latin America
living in London)

target

**collaborative
artist in residence**

format



what

By means of video installations, films, and performances, Rodriguez Cambana explores the “theatre” of interpreting, processing, and tracing lived experiences as a strategy to decipher Afro-diasporic histories. Through his work, he proposes personal narratives that serve as a confessional language, which are then situated within actions or natural and fabricated environments. Within the Gasworks Participatory Artists’ Residency Programme, he has delivered a participatory project, engaging local communities through a series of workshops and events.

how

For his Residency at Gasworks, the artist aimed to **create a physical and academic learning space in which 1st and 2nd generation Afro-indigenous migrants** from Latin America living in Lambeth and Southwark **could interact politically and socially through the actions of learning and teaching**. Through a series of English classes, teacher and students engaged in creative writing exercises together with the artist. The writings have then been discussed collectively and used to develop an environment informed by the student’s joint descriptive texts on “home”, in relation to their own spatial and emotional imagery of the diasporic universes in which they are ethnically and culturally rooted. This process led to a month-long public programme that framed the world fabricated by participants within the context of **a film, a video installation, and the performative gesture of “world-building”**.

why

Considering the different ways 2nd generation “Latinx” people view their identity (as opposed to “newcomers”), the artist hoped to probe the uncertain space between the romance of memory and the romanticizing of a place one has not been to – i.e. the “other” place, in this case shaped by a geographical mediated distance. The artist questioned how this “other” place exists materially through language, age, fantasy, and lived-experience. This participated experience contributed to nurture his work, based on the tracing and archiving the ways in which these groups contribute to London and UK’s diasporic collective identity.

#education #language #theatre-language #multicultural-communities
#museum-as-social-agent

Jeden Tag im Museum

Staatliche Museen
zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie,
Altes Museum, Museum
Europäischer Kulturen,
Neues Museum,
Pergamonmuseum,
Schloss Köpenick
Berlin, Germany

17 June 2022
- 08 January 2023

the museum's
security staff

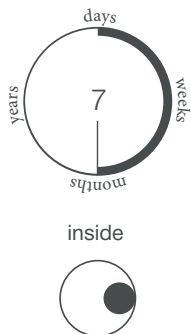
**collaborative
exhibition
(intervention)**

where

when

target

format



what

“Jeden Tag im Museum” (Every Day in the Museum) is a **curatorial intervention engaging museum guards (Aufsichten)**. Day in and day out, these people spend much time with the objects at the mu-seums and protect them, hence they develop quite individual relationships with the collections. Coming from the most diverse backgrounds and with a wide range of interests and experiences, each of them has his/her own emotional, everyday view of the works. These views open multiple perspectives, which are shared with the public through this experience.

how

A group of guards from several museums in Berlin were invited to select their personal favorite works from across multiple collections. Selected pieces were marked or highlighted in the galleries as part of the intervention. Guards were then asked to prepare a presentation of these works. This initiative turned them into guides and narrators, sharing unique viewpoints and stories, and **offering visitors an alternative perspective rooted in daily presence and informal engagement**.

why

This experience elevated the perspectives of frontline museum staff, who work daily in the spaces but are rarely part of official narratives. Although they did not become curators, the sharing of their diverse viewpoints contributed to diversifying interpretive voices and disrupting traditional hierarchies. Since security personnel often represent varied backgrounds, the integration of their perspectives has also fostered narrative pluralism and promoted inclusion.

#security-staff #collection-in-action #storytelling #multiple-perspectives
#specially-mediated-visits #new-voices

Things Matter

Trapholt
Museum for Modern
Art and Design
Kolding, Denmark

2022-2024

278 citizens
from across Denmark

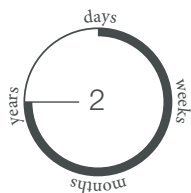
**collaborative
exhibition**

where

when

target

format



inside/outside



what

“Things Matter” is a large-scale participatory art project and textile installation developed by artist Randi Samsonsen and presented by Trapholt Museum of Modern Art, Craft and Design. The project explores the role and representation of public monuments by inviting 278 citizens from across Denmark to reinterpret existing sculptures using knitting.

how

Participants were invited through an open call and received material kits and guidance from the artist. They were asked to **select a public sculpture meaningful to them and reflect on its form, context, and cultural relevance**. Each participant **recreated a miniature version** of the selected artwork (approx. 30x30x30 cm), using blue yarn for the reproduction of the structure and then adding a purple yarn element to express reinterpretation or a personal commentary, or to propose alternative visions or a transformation of the original. The project included in-person and online gatherings, called “**craft salons**”, where participants could discuss their choices, share experiences, and reflect on the power and symbolism of monuments. These sessions fostered a sense of community and critical dialogue. All the contributions were assembled into a monumental installation (nearly five meters tall), bringing together all 278 miniature sculptures on a rotating plinth set up in the museum. Each piece was accompanied by the creator’s narrative and was geolocated to the site of the original artwork through an interactive map. The work challenged traditional hierarchies in public art and museum practices, becoming a part of Trapholt’s permanent collection.

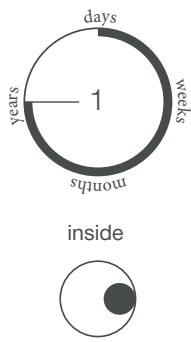
why

“Things Matter” is part of a broader research initiative called “CraftWorks”, led by Trapholt in collaboration with Aarhus University. The project investigates **how participatory crafts can transform museum practices and promote democratic cultural spaces**. Traditionally seen as a domestic or feminine activity, knitting becomes a political and artistic tool, used to challenge dominant narratives and propose inclusive alternatives. The project is a model for how museums can operate as open, relational, and polyphonic institutions.

#craft #creative-expression #user-generated-content #sculpture

Open Conservation Labs

Peggy Guggenheim Collection Venice, Italy	where
2025	when
general public	target
collaborative space	format



what	“Open Conservation Labs” are preservation and restoration facilities which often employ participatory practices to offer a unique approach to the presentation of museum collections by involving the public in the process.
how	A paradigmatic exemplification of this model is the new “Conservation Lab” at Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, that was conceived not only as a center of scientific excellence dedicated to the study, restoration, and protection of the works held in the collection, but also as a place for open dialogue between the public, art, and research. This innovative space merges three functions: an operational restoration lab, open storage for sculptural works not on display, and a platform for public education and transparency in conservation practice.
why	This spaces offers visitors a unique opportunity to get a close-up view of the rigorous and delicate conservation work performed daily, allowing real-time learning through observation of painting analysis, cleaning, consolidation, and scientific examination. At the same time, it also displays sculptures that are currently not on view in the exhibition galleries, making them accessible in a context merging research, conservation, and communication. By opening up the conservation processes and engaging visitors in a more active and meaningful way, museums can foster transparency, enhance public understanding of conservation, and create a sense of ownership and appreciation for cultural heritage.

#collection-in-action #esclusive-meetings-with-objects #meeting-point
#culturally-involved-people #training

Hyperlink

Tate Modern
London, United Kingdom

where

curated by Tate
Collective London,
in collaboration with
Paul Hamlyn Foundation
within the Circuit
research program

26-28 April 2013

when

young adults

target

**co-creative
public event**

format



inside



what

“Hyperlink” was **a major three-day festival conceived, designed, and organized by a group of young people** at Tate Modern, and arranged in the Tanks and the Turbine Hall. It promoted a **dense program of installations, performances, and workshops, realized through the collaboration with visual artists, designers, gastronomists, and musicians.**

how

The initiative was curated by a planning committee of young creatives from Tate Collective London, Tate’s youth network. This group of people aged 15-25 years is engaged by the institution to produce dynamic projects for young audiences across Tate Modern and Tate Britain. “Hyperlink” was designed to explore the theme of “six degrees of separation” through a co-created program including live music performances by critically acclaimed musicians (such as Akala, George the Poet, Sway and Angel), a new interactive installation in the Turbine Hall (that was transformed with a cascading flotilla of handmade boats), and artist-run workshops (e.g. the graphic workshop promoted by It’s Nice That was meant to teach young people how to create their own zines).

why

The young organizers had the possibility to curate the festival and to gain a knowledge and awareness about the organization of public events. Young participants had the opportunity to work directly with artists and professionals and to have fun and to learn by taking part in creative skill-building workshops and contributing to a mass participation artwork.

#co-curation #young-adults #training #fair/festival #music #workshop
#craft #learning-by-doing #performative #artistic-intervention

Clark Remix

Sterling and Francine
Clark Institute
Williamstown, USA

curated by Samantha
Jones, Giselle Ciulla
and Ashley Smith

2013

general public

co-creative
digital tool

where

when

target

format



what

In the framework of the exhibition “Clark Remix”, the Sterling and Francine Clark Institute introduced two interactive, digital programs, “uExplore” and “uCurate”. Visitors can use them on their own personal smartphones, or on the devices provided by the museum (the touch-screens and kiosks distributed throughout the gallery, or the iPads and tablets that can be borrowed at the reception). These programs enable the thorough exploration of the Clark’s collection but also the **construction of one’s own exhibition**.

how

“uExplore” allows the visitor to learn more about the Clark’s collection in a visually stimulating, highly organized, and digitally oriented way: it groups items into categories, it adds audio and video clips in their presentation, and it allows the user to navigate with ease through the extensive collection and to select a more detailed image of the desired object. **“uCurate” gives visitors the opportunity to participate in the curatorial process**. As the name implies (YOU, aka the visitor), it allows the user to plan and design a 3D virtual exhibition with the Clark’s collection. The **participant makes all decisions**, from what to include and how to arrange the objects, to wall color selection and wall text. Users of the program have the option to submit their designs for consideration by Clark’s curatorial team and to share their proposals through social media channels (hence promoting the museum and its digital programs). The **best proposals are selected by the curators and transformed into actual exhibitions**, displayed at the museum.

why

The programs developed within “Clark Remix” engage audiences in exciting ways. They enable innovative presentations of the collection, and interact with visitors in an intriguing way.

#art-based-participatory-project #collection-in-action #interactive-device
#engaging-technology #digital-engagement #phygital-experience

Side by Side: Living in Cazenove

Hackney Museum
London, United Kingdom

curated by Campbell Works
within the Our Museum
program, founded by
Paul Hamlyn Foundation

January - May 2014

local community

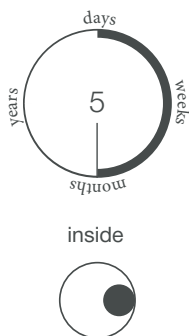
**co-creative
exhibition**

where

when

target

format



what

“Side by Side: Living in Cazenove” was a community-centered exhibition developed by Hackney Museum, celebrating the everyday lives of residents in the Cazenove ward, one of Hackney’s most diverse and mul-ticultural areas. The project explored what it means to live “side by side” in a small urban neighborhood where different cultures, languages, religions, and life stories coexist within a shared physical space.

how

The project was co-produced with local residents, artists, schools, and community groups as part of Hackney Museum’s participation in the national “Our Museum” programme, funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. This approach prioritized collaboration and community authorship over traditional curatorial methods. The aim project’s outcome was exhibition **presenting personal testimonies, artworks, and participatory activities, with the aim to highlight both the unique identities and the common threads that bind the Cazenove community.** The promoted activities included “Sounds of Cazenove” (an interactive walking tour combining local voices, poetry, and soundscapes recorded along Cazenove Road), “Working Portraits of Cazenove” (photographic and audio profiles of residents describing their work, daily life, and connection to the area, offering insight into the social fabric of the community), and “Purim on Cazenove” (a short film created in collaboration with members of the local Jewish community, documenting the celebration of Purim and its place within the broader multicultural context of the ward).

why

The project was promoted to foster inclusion and representation, and in particular to ensure that diverse local voices were considered and valued, especially those not typically heard in museum contexts. The promoted activities contributed to reflect Hackney’s evolving identity, encourage social cohesion, and inspire further engagement in the museum’s projects.

#multicultural-communities #local-identity #workshop #sharing-personal-stories #community-enhancement #contemporary-city

Museo per un Giorno

Garibaldi neighborhood,
Milan, Italy

where

curated by MAY
cultural association
(Lula Ferrari, Monica
Guerra, Lola Ottolini)
in collaboration with
Festival Garibaldi Kult

10 May 2014
(one day, repetitive)

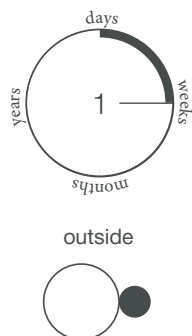
when

inhabitants of Garibaldi
district (and passers-by)

target

**co-creative
exhibition**

format



what

“Museo per un giorno” (Museum for one day) was realized in the occasion of “Festival del Quartiere Garibaldi”, **a public event aimed at celebrating the creative identity of the historic Garibaldi neighborhood**, in the centre of Milan. The initiative was held in the central Piazza San Simpliciano, where **a long yellow platform was set up**; the twenty-eight metre long device was made with scaffolding boards, and arranged on the ground. Residents and passers-by were invited to look carefully through the streets, houses, and shops of the neighborhood, and search for abandoned, intriguing, or unusual objects, and eventually to give them a story and to display them in the short-term open-air museum set up on the yellow platform.

how

The people who decided to participate were given these **simple instructions**: (1) search for an abandoned, forgotten, or intriguing object; (2) transform it into an item to be included in the “museum for one day”; (3) give it a name, write it on the label and, if you want, tell its story. In few hours, the platform was filled by countless objects, described with a caption written by the “troubadour” and displayed in their best perspective. The more objects arrived, the more curious people stopped and contributed with the search for new finds, getting in touch with others, commenting, and sharing ideas and stories.

why

The objectives of the project revolved around the idea to lead people in seeing beyond the official history of a place, normally based on the philological reconstruction of sources and archive materials, and to leave the narration to common objects, that are usually forgotten or even considered waste. Ultimately, the action was meant to invite inhabitants to cultivate a more careful look into their environment and to give new meaning to things. The format can be applied in various contexts following the same principle, but adapting it according to different and specific subjects that are waiting to be told.

#urban-space #donating-personal-items #sharing-personal-stories
#pop-up-exhibition #local-identity #participatory-space

The Heritage Jam

promoted by the
University of York

since 2014

a group
of creative people

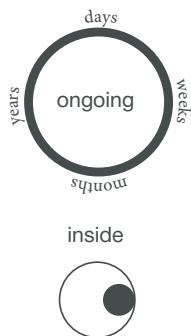
**co-creative
event + hackathon**

where

when

target

format



what

The “Heritage Jam” is a **co-creative event aimed to bring people together to design and create forward-thinking pieces of heritage visualization** in a short space of time, through rapid prototyping methods. It is promoted by the Centre for Digital Heritage and the Department of Archaeology at the University of York, with the aim to foster innovation in the way past and heritage are conceptualized and presented (graphically, acoustically, haptically, olfactorily, vocally, and in other performative capacities).

how

The initiative brings together artists, animators, game designers, programmers, archaeologists, historians, conservators, museum professionals, heritage practitioners, and any member of the public interested to join forces and collaborate. Participants are divided into small teams to spark quick, creative prototyping in a “jam” format. The jam was a variation on the jamming sessions common in the gaming industry, where ad hoc groups congregate for intensive periods of time to produce game prototypes. This format is here applied to put a spotlight on the many different media that comprise the portfolio of heritage interpretation – from illustration and art, to moving-imagery and animation, to photography and design, to sound and tactile interventions. Collaborations are organized through live in-person sessions, but also allow for remote and online interactions. Outcomes range from apps and interactive games to installations and visual exhibits. Projects are often showcased at conferences or public exhibitions, not only to promote the results among the public but also to intercept the trajectory of heritage study and practice, by engaging researchers and policy-makers.

why

By fostering experimentation with **new bridges between heritage and digital media**, the initiative challenges conventions, promotes co-creative cross-disciplinary and inclusive collaborations, and enables innovation in public heritage engagement by making the public part of the act of creation.

#digital-engagement #engaging-technology #prototyping

Agrégation #1

L'imaginaire

Dans la

Temporalité

Musée Sainte-Croix
Poitiers, France

coordinated by Solange
Vernois and Nathan Réra

16 January - 22 May 2016

young adults

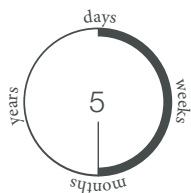
**co-creative
exhibition**

where

when

target

format



inside



what

The project turned a group of art history students from the Université de Poitiers into the curators of an exhibition intended to unfold innovative perspectives around the **intertwinement of contemporary art and archaeology**.

how

Students were led into the **selection of meaningful works** among the collection of FRAC (Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain) Poitou-Charentes, focused on contemporary artistic and creative expressions, and later at integrating them into the archaeological collections of the Sainte-Croix Museum. Participants were engaged in the definition of themes and materials, and in the preparation of the texts orienting and accompanying the visit, as well as in the delivery of the guided tours of the exhibition they co-curated.

why

The involved students became acquainted of the standards, processes, and skills of the cultural work, and developed a special knowledge about the collection of the museum. The co-curated exhibition allowed for fresh perspectives on the collection to be unfolded and presented to the public at large.

#art #art-based-participatory-project #collection-in-action #co-curation
#creative-expression #creative-intervention

Anything Goes Museum

National Museum
Warsaw, Poland

where

28 February - 8 May 2016

when

a group of young people
(aged 6-14)

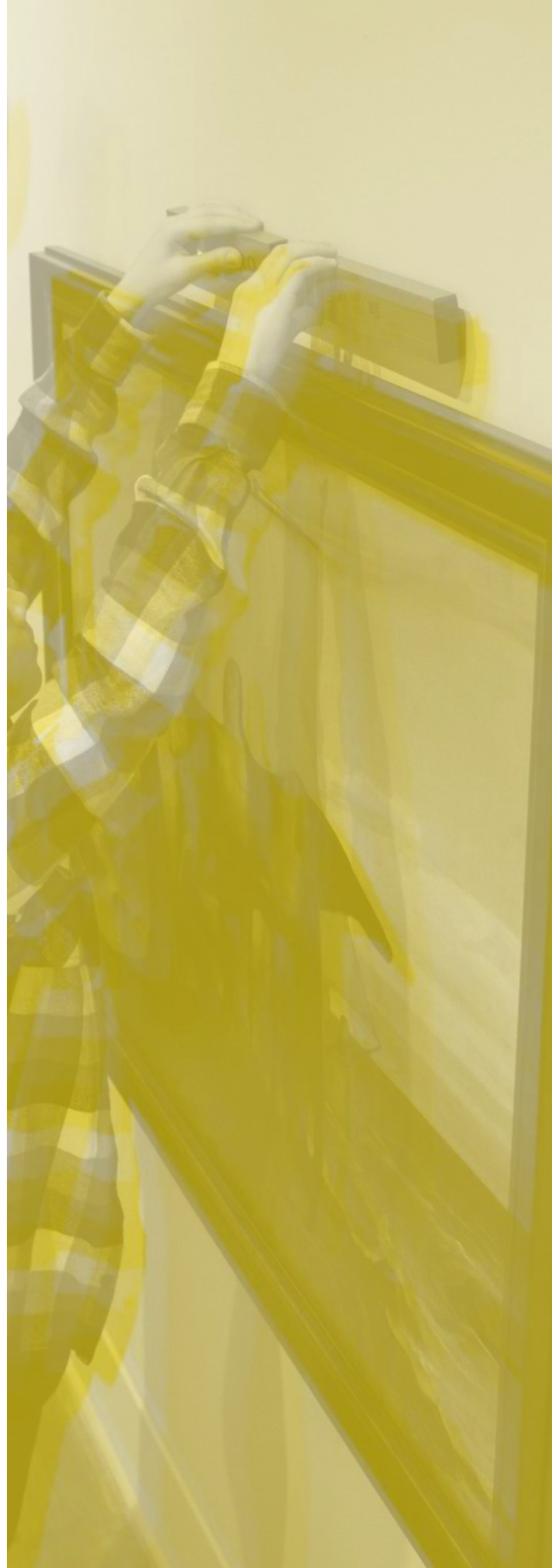
target

**co-creative
exhibition**

format



inside



what

The “Anything Goes Museum” is an exhibition organized at the National Museum in Warsaw, and a museological and educational experiment in which young people became responsible for designing and realizing a temporary exhibition in the institution’s venue.

how

A group of 69 young people (aged 6-14) was divided into **six curatorial teams**. Over six months, participants got to know the museum and worked on the exhibition during weekly 4-hour meetings. The teams of junior-curators **prepared the scripts and selected almost 300 works** to be displayed. They also **provided ideas for multimedia presentations** and exhibition design, they **designed educational leaflets**, they **recorded audio guides**, they **prepared captions and selected the works** that were to be used for promotional purposes. The young curators got to know the entire museum team. In particular, curators and conservators shared their knowledge about the selected works; the Education Department coordinated the weekly meetings; the Communication and Marketing Departments shared their know-how concerning the promotional campaign; the Publishing Department supported the junior-curators in the preparation of texts accompanying the exhibition. A book, written mainly by youngsters, was also published to summarize the activities surrounding the exhibition.

why

The project aimed to disrupt traditional museum hierarchies by giving youngsters curatorial authority, from concept to execution. The initiative encouraged participants to interpret, cooperate, and creatively curate across museum departments as equals to professional staff, hence offering a particularly meaningful skill-building experience. By unleashing young curators’ curiosity, the project surfaced nearly 300 objects, many previously in storage, that were re-contextualized in surprising juxtapositions across eras and cultures, hence making the museum’s experience more rich, engaging, and stimulating.

#exhibition-intervention #training #education #young-adults #co-curation
#creative-expression #collection-in-action

Design Museum Dharavi

Dharavi suburb
Mumbai, India

curated by
Amanda Pinatih
and Jorge Mañes Rubio

since 2016

local inhabitants
and tourist

**co-creative
exhibition**

where

when

target

format



inside/outside



what

This project draws on a “**museum on wheels**”, a this small mobile cultural institution celebrates the creative potential of Dharavi, that is a homegrown neighbourhood located in the heart of Mumbai. Despite the tough conditions, people living in the area are capable of creating, designing, manufacturing, and commercializing many kinds of goods. The museum opened its doors February 2016, offering the inhabitants a platform to display and promote the products of the makers that live in the neighborhood, so they can be recognized by the local community (as well as by the rest of the city and of the world).

how

The “Design Museum Dharavi” is a mobile structure, **easy to tow using a small car or a bike**. Travelling from place to place throughout the informal settlement, the museum **attracts the community (and tourists) through workshops, lectures, meetings, screenings, exhibitions**, and other cultural events. The organization of **cyclic thematic exhibitions** engages with different people and with different objects and topics. Since 2016 the project produced several co-created displays, focusing for example on local pottery, broom making, embroidery, carpentry, and more. The latest exhibition, “The Waterproof Project”, drew on the collaboration with the leather workers of Dharavi (who are famous for recreating some of the latest runway designs in leather), but replacing the leather with the blue tarpaulin spread across homes and shanties of Dharavi to waterproof them.

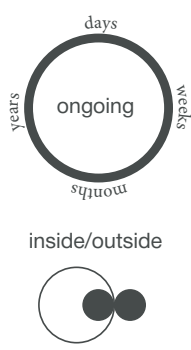
why

The main mission of “Design Museum Dharavi” is to provide a platform enabling local communities’ skills to be “seen”, to employ design as a tool capable to promote social change and innovation, to establish new links between Dharavi and the rest of the city, and to challenge the negative perception of informal settlements around the world.

#urban-space #design #mobile-museum #pop-up-exhibition #museum-without-walls #community-enhancement #creative-expression
#local-identity #artisanal-skills

Museum Booster

MAXXI Roma, Italy	where
since 2017	when
genral public	target
co-creative hackathon	format



what	“Museum Booster” is an hackathon promoted by MAXXI. It is meant to engage developers, programmers, designers, makers, copywriters, data analysts, communication, and marketing experts in a 34-hour non-stop marathon aimed at prototyping ideas, services, and products that can reinvent and improve the museum experience.
how	Participants met at the museum and worked together with a team of experts. The goal was to design innovative digital solutions to improve visitors’ experience, and to make the institution increasingly resonant and accessible. Participation was free and open to individuals or groups (formed before or after the registration, from a minimum of four to a maximum of eight people). The outcomes were evaluated by a jury, according to the quality of the ideas and the innovative strength of the prototypes presented. The winning proposal was developed with the support of the museum, where it was experimented for a year.
why	This initiative aimed at giving participants the opportunity to co-create and realize their own project thanks to the support of mentors, experts, and the collaboration with the museum staff. The hosting institution gained innovative ideas and products, that have the potential to fuel new energy into its programs and spaces.

where

when

target

format



The project approaches cultural diversity as the spectrum of human activity. This is informed by ancestries, social histories, belief systems, languages, etc. Those qualities shape the activities and traditions of particular population groups, but they also interact with other people at a distance and over time. The exhibition project aims to **tell the stories of the different cultures and cultural changes** that have taken place in Lowell through a collaboration with the local community.

The project was realized through **inclusive roundtable discussions and participatory decision making methods**, that enabled local people from various walks of life to share perspectives and co-design the themes and features of the exhibition. During the **pre-design stage** (Fall 2018-Fall 2019), roundtable discussions identified themes, stories, and messaging. In the **planning and design stage** (Fall 2019-Summer 2021), roundtable participants and the institution's staff worked with an outside contractor, Design Minds, to develop specific exhibition choices. The **fabrication stage** (Fall 2021-Fall 2023) led to the construction and installment of the exhibition, which was then inaugurated. The resulting exhibit tells the stories of different immigrant communities, detailing the challenges they faced upon arrival, how they preserved their traditions and how they thrive today. It features photos of different immigrant groups, videos with responses to questions about their experiences, cultural mementos donated by participants. The exhibition includes booths where visitors can share their cultural experiences in Lowell, enriching the installation and enhancing its capability to present and celebrate the history and diversity of the city.

Through this project, the institution provided an updated, multivocal, and more comprehensive presentation about the people of Lowell and the cultural diversity of this multi-cultural community.

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Fuori Castello

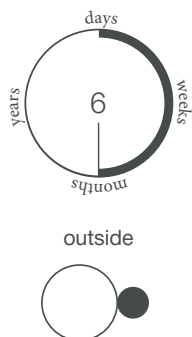
Adriano and Padova
districts
Milan, Italy

curated by Architetti
Senza Frontiere,
Italia Team,
in collaboration with
La Grande Fabbrica
delle Parole,
Castello Sforzesco,
and Fondazione Cariplo

2019

inhabitants of the districts

**co-creative
exhibition**



where

when

target

format



what

The project seeks to bring the central museum of Castello Sforzesco closer to the city's outskirts. The aim is, on the one hand, to make children from Adriano and Padova neighbourhoods feel at home when visiting the museum, and on the other hand, to get the inhabitants of the neighbourhoods closer to the museum experience through the eyes of children.

how

La Grande Fabbrica delle Parole worked directly with the children of the two neighbourhoods (in particular, those that attend the "San Mamete" primary school). The work developed through a **series of workshops**. Children have first experienced, discussed, and re-invented "what a museum is" and "what a collection of remains is". Then some original museum remains have been brought to children at school. Afterwards, children have organised their own "**collection of remains**", made of their most significant everyday objects – called "everyday remains". At the same time, Architetti Senza Frontiere Italia realized the "museum" (i.e. the temporary exhibition device) to host children's "everyday remains". During the event "Adriano Community Days", a **tiny mobile museum** was co-designed and built together with numerous high school students (from "Caravaggio" and "Parini" high schools in Milan) and some inhabitants of Adriano and Padova neighbourhoods. The tiny mobile museum is composed of a hallway covered with children's words which leads to a translucent box filled with pictures of the "everyday remains".

why

The experience aimed to engage the community in a co-created project to challenge the citizens' perception of the museum, to allow children to become acquainted with its collection in an active and compelling way, and to enhance its role for the city.

#urban-space #workshop #mobile-museum #pop-up-exhibition

Timidi Piccoli e Fragili Percorsi Espositivi Domestici

Palazzo Grassi
+ Punta della Dogana
Venice, Italy

where

curated by
Giulio lacchetti

14-19 April 2020

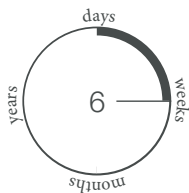
when

general public

target

**co-creative
(self-curated
+ self-realized)
exhibition**

format



inside/online



what

During the first lockdown ensuing the Covid-19 emergency, Palazzo Grassi and Punta della Dogana launched a cycle of digital workshops conceived in collaboration with guests curators working in various fields of contemporary creativity. The public was invited to **take part in the activities from home**, by following simple instructions, that were meant to stimulate unique points of view on their own daily life. Within this cycle, the designer Giulio lacchetti led the workshop “Timidi Piccoli e Fragili Percorsi Espositivi Domestici” (Shy, small and fragile domestic exhibition paths), through which he guided the public in the development of small creative curatorial projects, through which to look at one’s own living space from new perspectives.

how

The designer provided participants with **easy but precise instructions** (hence sharing his know-how in the development of creative processes and curatorial practices); the people involved followed **daily assignments**, which led them to the step-by-step production of their own exhibition – Day 1: Curator’s choice. Day 2: Set-up design. Day 3: Securing your objects. Day 4: Setting up. Day 5: Guided tours. Each week, the activities were published on the Instagram and Facebook accounts of the institutions involved.

why

The experience proposed a role reversal; the challenge was to “Become curators of small domestic exhibitions with materials you can find at home. Easy to set up and dismantle, these micro-exhibitions have a low environmental impact but a high lateral thinking factor”. The single self-curated exhibitions produced a collective effort, highlighting the possibilities to see and narrate the links between everyday life, creative practices, and cultural values.

#user-generated-content #creative-expression #workshop #public-call
#autobiographical-work #social-media

African Fashion

Victoria & Albert Museum
London, United Kingdom

where

curated by the South
Kensington Youth
Collective with
V&A Learning Department
(within the Young
V&A Programme)

April 2021 - April 2023

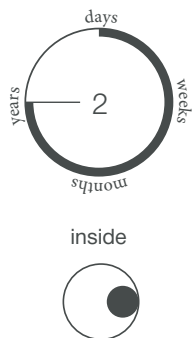
when

14 young people
(between 16-24)
with different ties
to Africa and fashion

target

**co-creative
exhibition**

format



what

This experience was the **V&A's first exhibition co-designed with a group of youngsters**. The show aimed to investigate the bonds between fashion and identity issues, as well as to raise the youth voice within the museum's programme. The participants were fourteen young people between the ages of 16 and 24 with different ties to Africa and fashion – all of whom identified as African or from the African diaspora, and had been working, studying, and running businesses in fashion, tailoring, graphic design, interior design, and television.

how

The realization of the project was divided into two phases: the first (starting in April 2021) focused on the **participatory process to define the contents of the exhibition**, and the second (starting in February 2022) led to the **organization of public events**. In particular, during the first phase, young people led conversations on the themes of the exhibition. Through these conversations, three key research questions were developed (What role does fashion play in the group's own self-expression and identity? How do African fashions on the continent specifically speak to the group? How do the group engage with fashion digitally and online – both in general and more specifically in relation to the African fashion scene?). The elaboration of such questions enabled the definition of the themes of interest around which the exhibition was organized.

why

The project aimed to give space to young people who wanted to contribute to the development of the museum experience by sharing their own experience, and thus to design the exhibition through an inclusive approach, and to demystify the "traditional" approaches and perspectives. At the same time, participants were provided with new skills and opportunities for growth within the cultural realm.

#multicultural-communities #fashion #creative-expression #young-adults
#identity #training #co-curation

Talking Teens: The Statues Speak!

16 statues diffused
in the urban spaces
Parma, Italy

where

curated by the cultural
association ECHO

April 2021
- February 2022

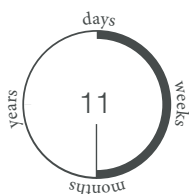
when

a group of young people
(aged 16-20)

target

**co-creative
digital tool**

format



outside



what

By experimenting with a participatory approach, this experience enhanced the idea behind the renown “Talking Statues” project (that was started in Copenhagen in 2013 by documentary filmmaker David Peter Fox and later spread all over world). The initiative led to the development of a digital app aimed to **mediate an itinerary among 16 of the statues located in the squares of Parma**, by giving a “voice” to each among the represented historical characters. When a visitor arrives in front of one of the sites included in the tour (whose position is featured on a map, that is available on the project’s website or by downloading the app), he/she has the possibility to “activate” the statue by dialing the telephone number or scanning the QR code that are printed on the panel near the artwork. In about 2-3 minutes, his/her telephone starts to ring and, if he/she decides to take the call, he/she will then hear the portrayed character’s voice greeting and telling its story. The narration is available both in Italian and English.

how

The “voice” of the statues has been generated through a co-creative process involving the students from several high schools in Parma (especially schools of art and technical institutes). The **youngsters worked with the cultural association ECHO to write the scripts and to record the voices**.

why

This initiative gave the historical characters portrayed in the sculpture the possibility to become more visible and eloquent, and to contribute to promote a fresh and multi-vocal narration of the local history. The youngsters involved in the co-creative experience gained new technical skills as well as a new awareness about the heritage, the places and the identity of their city.

#urban-space #sculpture #mobile-app #young-adults #new-voices

Alberti in Scala

Politecnico di Milano,
Mantova Campus, Italy

curated by
Elena Montanari

December 2021
- May 2022

a group of local
high school students

**co-creative
performance**

where

when

target

format



inside - outside



what

The project was carried out in the framework of a PCTO (Percorsi per le Competenze Trasversali e l'Orientamento), promoted by the Mantova Campus of Politecnico di Milano to introduce high school students to the study, representation, and management of the wealthy heritage of the city, a renown "capital of Renaissance". The initiative focused on the figure of Leon Battista Alberti, on the 550th anniversary of his death. The milestone was celebrated through the restoration of the **1:20 wooden models** documenting his works, that were realized during Joseph Rykwert's exhibition about Alberti, held at Palazzo Te in 1994, and relocated inside the spaces of the Campus. The PCTO involved the students in the co-creative presentation of the new set up.

how

The co-creative path consisted of two subsequent phases. The **"preparation" phase** focused on the sharing of the knowledge and skills students needed to participate in the project; visits, lectures and workshops were held by various professors to introduce the group to the study of Alberti's work, and to the exhibition practice and its communication standards and tools. The **"performance" phase** focused on the application of the acquired knowledge and skills, and led to the co-creative realization of two products: (1) a brochure documenting Alberti's presence in Mantova (texts were prepared by teachers, students produced pictures and drawings); (2) a participated presentation of the models, that was performed during the inauguration day. Participants turned into the **"living captions"** facilitating the visit to the wooden models' exhibition; each building was assigned to a small group, who had the responsibility to give it a "voice".

why

The project's structure engaged students in an active exploration of the local heritage, enhanced their familiarity with it, and gave them a glimpse on the complexity of cultural work. The "living caption" experience assigned them the responsibility to perform their knowledge in front of an audience, which represented a strategic stimulus that fostered the assimilation of the shared knowledge and skills.

#education #training #creative-expression #new-voices #young-adults

Reunion

National Museum
of Singapore,
Republic of Singapore

where

curated by the museum
staff in collaboration with
the Lien Foundation,
RSP Architects, partners
from the health sectors
and local seniors

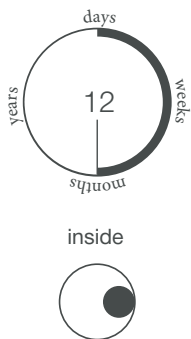
2022-23

a group of elderly

when

format target

**co-creative
design process**



what

In April 2023, the National Museum of Singapore inaugurated “Reunion”, a **purpose-built social space dedicated to the elderly community**, including those living with dementia or mild cognitive impairment. The area comprises a café and an activity space, where the institution organizes various programs aimed at engaging seniors in the exploration of collections as well as in social encounters and tasks that support physical and mental wellbeing.

how

“Reunion” is the result of a **co-creative design process**, based on extensive consultations among the museum staff, the Lien Foundation, an architectural consultant (RSP Architects Planners and Engineers), some partners from the health and social care sectors (DementiaSG, Apex Harmony Lodge, Peacehaven), health care professionals (doctors and occupational therapists) from both the private and public sectors, and a group of local seniors (including some with dementia and their caregivers). The outcome is a warm, welcoming environment, where every element – from the design to the programming – reflects the needs and aspirations of its audience. Specifically it is designed to resemble **a space that feels like home**, through the choice of colours, materials and lights, the incorporation of natural elements, and the selection of furniture pieces, which pay homage to local traditions related to domestic scapes.

why

The set up of this space exemplifies not only the strategic role of co-design in shaping museums’ spaces, but also the significant results of the commitment of these institutions to address cogent challenges (like aging populations and cognitive health) and operate as agents of inclusion and social change.

#design #collaborative-design #wellbeing #mental-health #elderly
#community-enhancement #museums-as-social-agents

Naramore Art Show

Seattle Art Museum
Seattle, USA

since 1985 (annually)

organized by
the Seattle Public Schools

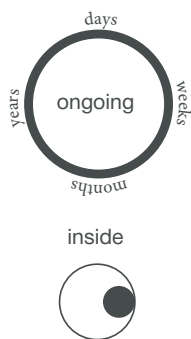
**hosted
exhibition**

where

when

target

format



what

The “Naramore Art Show” is an annual event organized by the Seattle Public Schools since 1985. It is meant **to showcase the artistic creations of the middle and high school students of the city**, across mediums including drawing, painting, sculpture, and more. The initiative is named after Floyd A. Naramore, a visionary architect who invested deeply in his community and in the education system. In the last years, the exhibition was held at the Seattle Art Museum, where the initiative occupies the South Hall between April and May. The project celebrates the success of local arts students, shares their learning with the community, and displays the inspiration and collaboration that occurs in the classrooms. The opening ceremony is a public event, based on a rich program of meetings, music, dance, and art, created by teens for teens.

why

The project gives to emerging young artists the opportunity to make their work visible. Furthermore, by offering its galleries to uplift student perspectives through self-expression, the museum fosters community building and enhances its role as meeting place and cultural forum.

#art #creative-expression #new-voices #education #young-adults
#exhibition-intervention #museums-as-social-agent

White Tunnel

Gallerie di Piedicastello
Trento, Italy

in the network of
Fondazione Museo
Storico del Trentino

since 2007

general public

**hosted
exhibition
(space)**

where

when

target

format



inside



what

Gallerie di Piedicastello is a cultural space founded in 2007 in Trento, operating as part of Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino, the networked institution responsible for the preservation and presentation of the past and present history of the Trentino region and its communities. It is situated in two former highway tunnels, built in the 1970s, which have been later dismissed and transformed into a cultural venue through the contribution of architect Jeffrey Schnapp and Studio Terragni. One of the tunnels, the Black Tunnel, is a 300 metre non-stop, immersive exhibition space, dedicated to the display of the temporary installations promoted by the Foundation. This gallery is counterbalanced by the White Tunnel, that was conceived as **an operative and participatory space**. This site is meant to accommodate short-term temporary exhibitions or events (conferences, presentations or concerts) organized not only by the Foundation and its partners but also by local associations, schools or single citizens who have stories, narrations or artworks to share. To enable this mission, **this space is open, abstract, and highly flexible**; its layout continues to be transformed to welcome the arrangement of many different activities and devices. When a subject is interested in occupying the venue, the Foundation provides not only the space but also the scientific and technical support to foster the realization of the event promoted by the community.

why

The White Tunnel is indeed a laboratorial space, **hosting an “open cultural programme” designed to experiment with innovative forms and languages** for investigating, communicating, and debating the local history and memory, through the participation of the local communities.

#participatory-space #local-identity #museums-as-social-agents

Fitchburg Farmers Market

Fitchburg Art Museum
Fitchburg, USA

since 2012

farmers, artisans, and
community organizations

**hosted
public event
(market)**

where

when

target

format



inside



what

This project is a unique **community-focused initiative that brings together local food, culture, and art in a shared public space**. It draws on the regular set up of the Fitchburg Farmers Market in the Fitchburg Art Museum, where farm-fresh products, handcrafted goods and treats are displayed (and sold) within the collection. In these occasions, the market is developed as a collaborative effort between local farmers, artisans, community organizations, and the museum staff.

how

The Fitchburg Center Farmers was established in 1996, and has become a vibrant community hub, offering a diverse array of Wisconsin-grown produce, promoting local flavor and culture, and often complementing the experience through live music and demonstrations. The event is held every Thursday, from May to October. Although it is normally arranged in a public open space (Agora Fitchburg), on the first Thursday of each month it is set up inside the Fitchburg Art Museum. Through the “Free First Thursdays” program, on these days the institution offers free admission to the community. By opening its galleries during market hours, **the museum encourages cross-pollination between art audiences and marketgoers**. In some occasions, the set up of the market is paired with special tours offered by curators, art-making stations, live music and performances, and even pop-up exhibitions featuring community-submitted objects and narratives.

why

By hosting it at the museum, the traditional farmers market is turned into **a vibrant, inclusive gathering that celebrates everyday life, local creativity**, and the meaningful connection between people, place, and local products and traditions.

#art #artisanal-skills #fair/festival #community-enhancement #meeting-point #museums-as-social-agents

Paris Ass Book Fair

Palais de Tokyo
Paris, France

where

since 2017 (repetitive)

when

unrepresented and
unheard artists, writers,
ziners and publishers

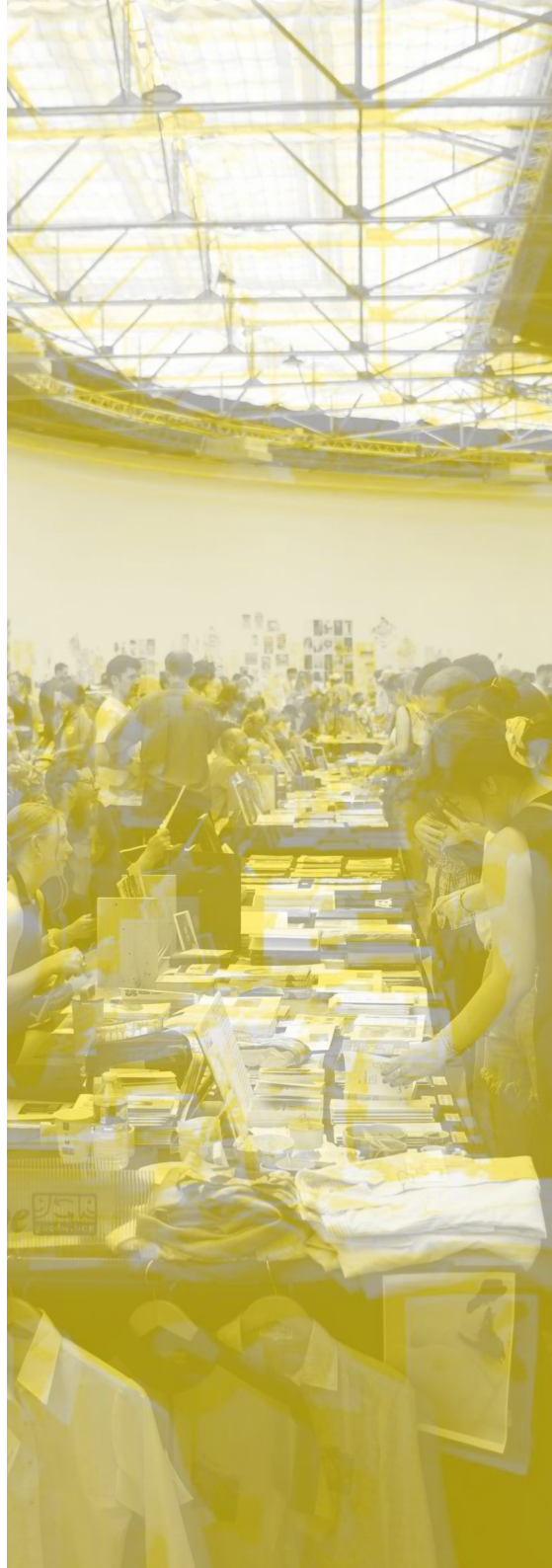
target

**hosted
public event
(fair)**

format



inside/outside



what

The “Paris Ass Book Fair” was born from the desire to give an important place to marginal and untimely sensibilities, desires, and aspirations, and to affirm a **joyful approach to art and publishing**, a taste for provocation, and joy in stimulating minds and bodies. Since 2017, the event has brought together dozens of artists, booksellers, publishers and zinesters around this commitment: to show printed matter as a medium in its own right, a vehicle for creativity, fostering **individual and collective expression**. The publications and projects presented at the fair adopt formats at the crossroads of many fields: fanzines, artists’ books, magazines, clothing, multiples, novels, essays, posters, etc. The event has taken place in various cultural venues in Paris, but it has been frequently arranged at Palais de Tokyo.

why

Every year, the fair gathers international stakeholders and audiences to disseminate the cultural and social potential of print publishing, as a means of making creation accessible to the greatest number. The fair is curated with the constant concern of privileging those who have limited access to the market and whose creations are not found in the usual distribution circuits, as well as those whose voices and desires are often unheard. The “Paris Ass Book Fair” has become an important meeting place for artists, publishers, booksellers and readers that looks to stimulate exchange and creativity in a **spirit of openness, inventiveness, and mutual respect**.

#fair/festival #culturally-involved-people #community-enhancement
#entrepreneurial-skills #meeting-point #creative-expression

Little Fun Place

MAXXI Museo Nazionale
delle Arti del XXI secolo
and OHT (Office
for Human Theatre)
Rome, Italy

curated by
Filippo Andreatta

2019

general public

**hosted
public event
+ workshop**

where

when

target

format



outside



what

In the framework of the inauguration of the exhibition “La Strada”, a **small mobile pavilion** (a caravan) was parked in front of the MAXXI Museum and transformed into an ephemeral place of aggregation that took culture outside the museum. Around this iconic presence, OHT organized a **three-days program of meetings, dialogues, dances, films, picnics, and workshops**, and welcomed every possible form of spontaneous activity facilitated by the public.

how

The event brought together participants that were involved not only in **making the public space around the museum a terrain for socio-cultural actions and exchanges**, but also through the organization of workshops, focused on topics and know-hows related to the exhibition on display inside the MAXXI and facilitated by artists, photographers, architects etc. The results of these co-creative experiences were displayed in a temporary exhibition.

why

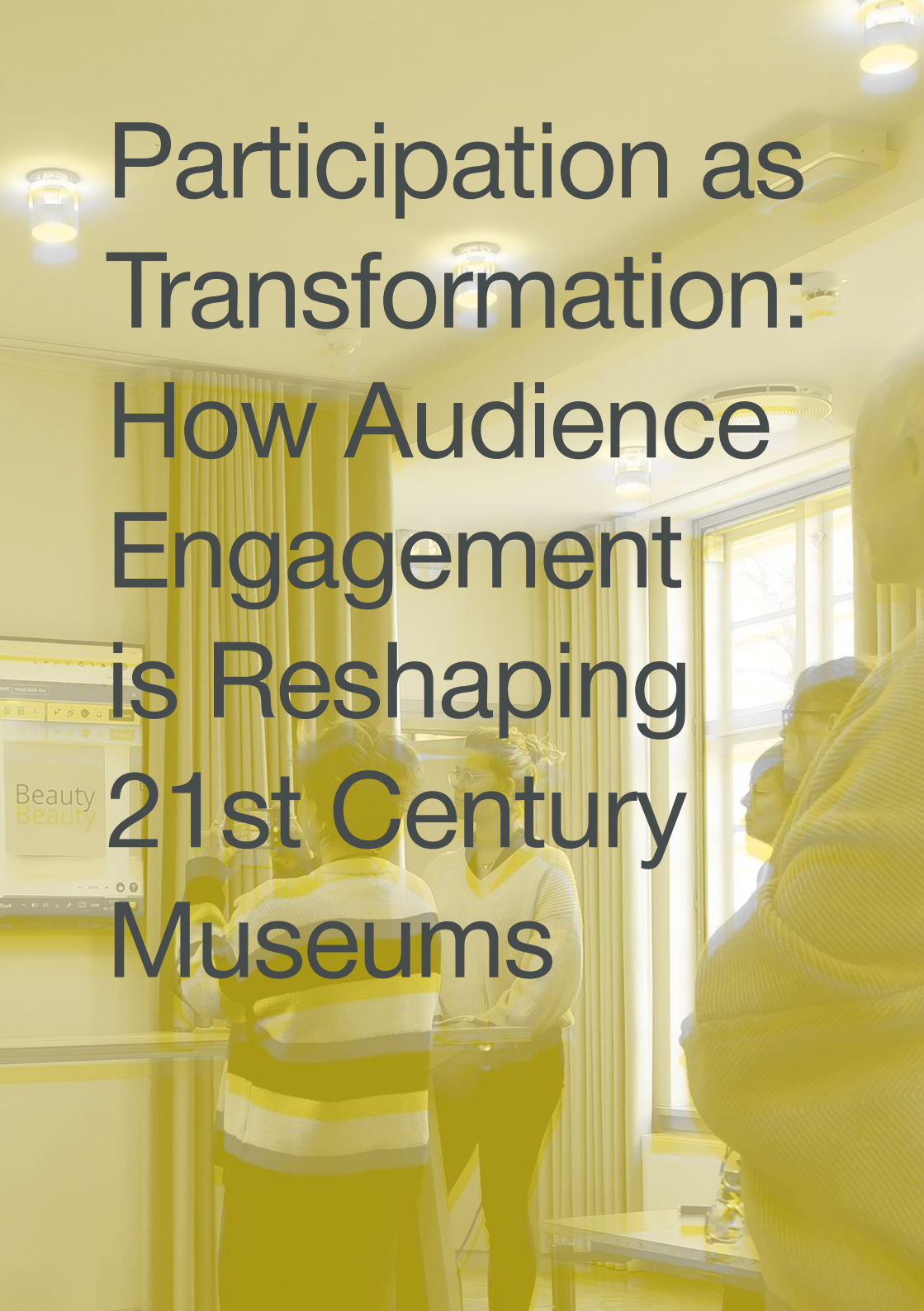
The event was promoted while the show “La Strada” was taking place inside the museum, by fostering critical thinking about the topics it explored. The aim of the initiative was to bring the contents developed by MAXXI’s exhibition to the street and to disseminate them into city life.

#art #urban-space #mobile-museum #meeting-point #community-enhancement

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Participation as Transformation: How Audience Engagement is Reshaping 21st Century Museums

When Nina Simon's seminal book – *The Participatory Museum* – was released in 2010, it had a major role in shifting the conversation about what museums are, who they serve, and how they engage with communities.

The practice of involving visitors, volunteers or other groups in the production, interpretation, or implementation of museums' contents and programs was not a new phenomenon. Its roots can be detected in the historical evolution of the societal and democratizing role of these institutions as agents capable of fostering education and socio-cultural change (Vergo, 1989; Bennett, 1995; Hooper- Greenhill, 1999; Gurian, 2006). For decades, a broad range of aims and innovative strategies have been experimented to rethink museums' relationships with visitors and expand their participation (Hetland, Pierroux and Esborg, 2020). In particular, the understanding of this mission gradually moved from "cultivating impressed spectators" (Benedict, 1983, p. 54) to implementing more and more democratic models of public engagement (Irwin, 1995). This process implied the involvement of audiences in the creation and interpretation of exhibits (Pollock and McLean, 2007), the acknowledgment of the needs and perspectives of visitors in their design (McLean, 1993), and the enhancement and diversification of museum-community relationships (Crooke, 2007), as fundamental tasks to turn these institutions from "monologues of authority" to places for dialogue, collaboration, and exchange (Black, 2005).

Nina Simon's book contributed to the systematization of the theories, the methodologies, and the knowledge ensuing from case studies that at the time were available on the topic. It threw light on the strategic importance of repositioning the visitor as an active subject, and provided a clear and actionable framework for a participatory approach, not only strengthening its theorization but also sharing the tools to implement it. By successfully connecting grassroots museum practice with conceptual thinking in an operational and digestible way, it paved the way for the development of new institutional models based on co-creation. In particular, it helped lay the groundwork for ongoing movements around the challenging of dominant narratives, decolonization and the shifting of powers, activism and social justice, hence contributing to

redefining museums' role in society as places of exchange, community engagement and shared authority. Fifteen years later, participation has become a pillar in the mission of many museums around the world. If the principles and the critique grounding the participatory approach were swiftly adopted by cultural institutions, it took a longer time to register its full implications for practice and to implement it. Today, this transition is at operating speed, as documented by a wealthy body of literature produced around the topic and especially by a growing interest for experimentation with a range of programs and engagement activities. This shift is an inherent part of the path museums are undergoing to respond to those profound changes in the economic, social, and cultural scenarios that are modifying the contexts they serve. Major solicitations ensue from social transformations, enhanced by the impact of rapid technological advancements on societal structures and dynamics, interpersonal relationships, and evolving cultural norms, but also by significant demographic shifts and unprecedented patterns of mobility (in terms of volume, but also in regard to the diversity of new migrants). On the one hand, this scenario has called upon museums to respond to the emerging multicultural and pluralistic realities, and to improve their ability to act as forums for recognition, social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and community empowerment, especially among groups historically excluded from cultural representation (Chynoweth et al., 2020; Murawski, 2021). This request was further solicited by the rise of identity politics and movements for social justice, which has fueled demands for visibility, agency, and recognition in public institutions (Message, 2013; Janes and Sandell, 2019). On the other hand, the digitalization of cultural life has also played a significant role in the transformation of the interaction between museums and their public. Social media, mobile technologies, and digital platforms are evolving people's engagement with heritage, enabling collaborative forms of communication, and providing important tools for experimenting with inclusivity, accessibility, and user-driven content creation (Rérat and Bonnefoit, 2017; Shehade and Stylianou-Lambert, 2021), thereby reinforcing the broader shift toward participatory museology.

This trend has been enhanced also by other recent events. For example, in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, many cultural institutions experienced significant reductions in public funding: these economic constraints have further incentivized the adoption of a new approach in museums' relationship with their public (Moldoveanu and Ioan-Franc, 2011). Within this context, participation has been promoted not only as a normative good, but as an instrumental strategy for relevance, resilience, and institutional sustainability. Engaging communities through co-creation and consultation has been shown to increase visitation, attract new publics, and generate broader social value, which are metrics increasingly used to justify cultural expenditure (). Moreover, participatory approaches are often aligned with the discourse of the creative economy, wherein cultural institutions are reframed as laboratories of innovation, social entrepreneurship, and user-driven value creation (Banks and Potts, 2010; Sica et al., 2025). Even Covid-19 pandemic had a role in triggering museums' learning trajectories during the pandemic in terms of audience engagement (Drotner, 2022, p. 98). This event significantly disrupted the operations of cultural institutions worldwide, but it also served as a catalyst for innovation and transformation, and it accelerated some phenomena that enhanced their evolution into more open, accessible, inclusive, and dialogical forums (Cobley et al., 2020). As physical spaces closed and visitor engagement plummeted, museums were compelled to reimagine their relationships with audiences. This shift accelerated the adoption of participatory approaches, both digitally and conceptually, embedding them more deeply into institutional missions. Within this scenario, it is indeed increasingly accurate to state that participation is no longer optional or peripheral, and rather it has become part of the way museums are built, run, and understood. Improved openness, interactions, and inclusiveness toward the public have become mandatory aspects of contemporary institutions' mission (McSweeney and Kavanagh, 2016). This process has been depicted by the latest update of ICOM's museum definition, released in 2022, after years of debate and global consultation. This revision was not just a semantic change: it brought evidence of the ongoing broader shifts

in museological practices, and of the institutional transformation of museums from custodians to socio-cultural facilitators. By championing the development of reflective and responsive institutions, this document explicitly emphasized the pivotal role of inclusive and participatory approaches, which are foregrounded as core principles to guarantee transparency, accessibility, and social relevance.

While the embedding of participatory approaches within the museum's structure continues to progress, this volume was designed to offer an insight into the latest advancements related to this process. The results of this investigation aim to highlight the development of some new phenomena, that are encapsulated in the following set of concepts.

PARTICIPATION IS A COMPLEX, HETEROGENEOUS, EVER-GROWING DOMAIN

While it is easy to concur on the core principles that define participation in museums (i.e. the body of work that is being carried out to connect different users and to position the visitor at the centre of the process, in the role of content creator, distributor, critic, or collaborator), decoding the ways in which this is being implemented is a more complex task. Contemporary participatory practices are indeed a markedly heterogeneous field of work, characterized by a diverse array of forms, modalities, and degrees of engagement.

This heterogeneity is becoming evident not only in the multiplicity of formats, strategies, and tools employed to enhance interaction with the public, but also in the divergent epistemologies, institutional logics, and power dynamics that underpin them. First of all, the types and levels of engagement vary across a wide spectrum. As highlighted by the structure of the book, that recalls Nina Simon's categorization, participation may range from surface-level inclusion – such as comment walls, digital polls, or audience-generated content integrated in temporary exhibitions – to deeply embedded collaborative models, where communities co-curate collections, advise on programming, or co-manage tasks and spaces. At one end of this spectrum are practices in which museum professionals retain curatorial control while allowing minimal input from participants:

although these initiatives may have a limited long-term impact on institutional structures or narratives (Bishop, 2012), they are a means to gather user data and integrate them in the design of new programs, enhance visitors' experience, and fulfill emerging mandates for outreach (Jackson, 2011). In contrast, more collaborative or co-creative approaches engage participants as producers and decision-makers. These forms often refer to partnerships with marginalized or underrepresented communities and involve shared authorship of exhibitions, collaborative interpretation of collections, and dialogic programming (Golding and Modest, 2013). In such cases, participation is not a discrete event but a sustained, negotiated process that challenges institutional norms and requires significant shifts in power and practice (Boast, 2011; Message, 2006).

The classification of participatory practices by degrees related to the types and levels of engagement – from extractive to reciprocal to transformative – does not reflect a scale of values. No modality is better than another, and each has something to offer both to visitors and to the cultural institution. Each of the practices included in this broad spectrum has specific goals and types of impact, implications for authority, ownership, and accountability (Janes and Sandell, 2019), and it is meant to respond to different needs or contexts.

These may for instance refer to temporal scale and spatial configuration, which are other parameters within which participatory practices differ. These factors manifest themselves across a spectrum, ranging from ephemeral interventions (e.g. performances, pop-up labs, and exhibitions) to those that are structurally integrated into the museum's long-term operations (e.g. update of galleries, community advisory boards, artist residencies). Spatially, participation can occur on-site, off-site (in community settings), or online; each situation offers different affordances and limitations. Digital platforms, for instance, allow for broader reach and lower barriers to entry, but they may lack the depth of engagement that is possible to achieve in face-to-face interactions (Drotner and Schröder, 2013). Conversely, hyper-local participatory projects may cultivate deep relationships but struggle with institutional visibility or scalability (Golding and Modest, 2013).

A further enrichment of this framework is being promoted by the growing interest for public spaces. In recent years, museums have increasingly extended participatory initiatives beyond their walls, strategically activating squares, streets, marketplaces, parks, and riverbanks as platforms for engagement, visibility, and community relevance. These interventions allow institutions to expand their reach, to interact with individuals and communities who may feel excluded or disconnected from conventional museum environments, as well as to enhance their position within the public sphere. By situating their activities in accessible and everyday settings, the physical, psychological, and cultural barriers to participation are reduced, and thus greater inclusivity and diversity are achieved. This spatial shift generally supports more spontaneous and dialogic forms of engagement, also because open spaces enable experimentations with more informal and flexible formats, that may be constrained within the formal architecture and protocols of museum buildings (Drotner and Schröder, 2013). Finally, such practices can contribute to the revitalization of public space itself, transforming it into a site of shared meaning-making and democratic interaction, hence aligning museums with broader urban and social agendas around community cohesion, cultural sustainability, and spatial justice (Janes and Sandell, 2019).

Above all, the discussed heterogeneity reflects divergent institutional motivations. While the purposes triggering the interest for participatory practices can be tracked down to some common foundational aims (e.g. to engage new or underserved audiences, and to make their experience more relevant and accessible), the reasons behind their implementation are often multiple and structured around the specific conditions, potentialities, and criticalities of the site. Museums may implement participatory practices for a range of strategic, ethical, and institutional motivations, that often intersect and reinforce one another. Strategically, they help retain or diversify audiences, enhance relevance and resonance with broader segments of the public, and meet funders' demands for inclusion and impact. Ethically, participation supports the democratization of cultural narratives, challenges institutional hierarchies, and fosters social justice and decolonization by involving

marginalized communities. Institutionally, it encourages innovation, reflexivity, and long-term resilience, allowing museums to adapt, learn, and build lasting relationships with their publics.

The fact that participation manifests itself in museums in multiple ways, across a scope of activities of real value to institutions, visitors, and stakeholders, contributes to emphasizing its strategic role. On the one hand, this variety expands its impact and operability; in different contexts, the same participatory format may serve radically different purposes, and similar intentions may be operationalized in vastly different ways. On the other, it foregrounds the idea that participation is not only a tool for engagement but also a catalyst for institutional transformation.

PARTICIPATION IS A PERVASIVE FORCE CATALYZING INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION

The strategic role of participation in enhancing the evolution of museum institutions can be clearly detected in the observation of its propagation and its pervasive integration in the revision of different components of their structure. While it is still correct to state that it “often takes place in isolated, one-off projects, initiated and driven by one or more select staff members” (Cruikshanks and van der Vaart, 2019, p. 3), the heterogeneity of formats, outputs, and themes enabling the participatory approach shows how its core principles are being adopted in the development of several areas and programs.

The incorporation of a participatory approach in curatorial practices has been growing since the late 20th century, and it has increasingly gained prominence, reflecting a broader institutional shift toward democratization, inclusivity, and public engagement. Traditionally, curatorial authority rested within a small group of experts, often privileging canonical narratives and academic frameworks. Today, the curation work is spoken of as a radical undertaking (for example, dismissing the exploitative approach and willing to expose the process of knowledge production to critical examination), or even as an act of “transgression” or provocation, encouraging groundbreaking discussion on academic grounds or for cultural or political reasons (Ferguson, Greenberg and

Nairne 2005; Bertrand, 2021). This shift mirrors the radical change of paradigm that has characterized museum institutions in the last decades (Anderson, 2012): from “temples” intended to educate citizens through suitable narratives built on legitimized and normalized knowledge, they have become civic spaces and agents of social change (Watson, 2007). The gradual integration of participatory methods foregrounding community voices has played a crucial part in enhancing this process, making museums more inclusive and enabling the shift of focus from collections to visitors (Weil, 1999; Coleman, 2018).

Although this process is still ongoing (Villeneuve, 2017), contemporary curatorship has significantly integrated new possibilities to share authorship, by inviting audiences into the practice and enabling different voices. This phenomenon has taken many forms, including co-curated exhibitions with community groups, participatory workshops facilitating contents’ co-production, open calls for crowdsourced outcomes, and audience-generated interpretation. These methods aim to break down hierarchical barriers between institutions and their public, positioning visitors not merely as consumers of knowledge but as collaborators and knowledge producers in their own right.

The outcomes of such approach have been both practical and philosophical. On the one hand, they have led to the design of exhibitions that are more reflective of the lived experiences, concerns, and identities of broader publics – and especially of marginalized or underrepresented communities. On the other, they have prompted museums to rethink their roles, embracing values like transparency, empathy, and responsiveness. This process fostered institutions that once emphasized neutrality to engage directly with contested histories, social justice themes, and community-driven narratives. Moreover, curatorial participatory practices have helped museums cultivate stronger relationships with their audiences, enhancing trust and long-term engagement (Mygind, Hällman and Bentsen, 2015). They encourage dialogue, emotional investment, and a sense of belonging, which can lead to increased visitation, volunteerism, and community support. In many cases, they also challenge and expand what counts as “expertise”, validating personal and local knowledge alongside professional perspectives.

Obviously, further work on the field needs to be done to release the full potential of such shift, and to overcome the challenges related to it. In fact, participatory curation demands more time, resources, and negotiation. It requires sustained commitment, ethical consideration, and often a reconfiguration of power dynamics, and it can surface tensions between institutional priorities and community expectations. Some of the aspects concerning the revolutionary change in curatorship induced by the integration of a participatory approach have also impacted on collection and conservation politics and practices. The shift from traditional top-down process toward more inclusive, dialogic, and socially responsive models can indeed be observed also in the experimentation with new methods and parameters applied in the building, management, and expansion of collections. Historically, these assemblages were often shaped by colonial, nationalist, or elite agendas, with acquisitions reflecting institutional priorities rather than the needs or perspectives of the communities represented. The participatory turn played a fundamental part in challenging this legacy. It led to foregrounding questions of ownership, representation, and authority, and it fostered the engagement of communities in collections’ development. This collaboration can take many forms, such as co-curation, community-led acquisitions, and shared custodianship models (Black, 2005). These practices allow museums to diversify their heritage by including narratives, objects, and knowledge systems that were previously overlooked or excluded (Jagodźińska, 2005). For example, migrant, Indigenous, LGBTQ+, and other marginalized communities are increasingly being invited to contribute their voices to what is collected, and to define how this is interpreted and preserved (Boersma, 2023). This shift also affects what is considered “collectible”. Participatory approaches often emphasize the significance of everyday, ephemeral, or intangible heritage – objects and experiences that might not have been seen as “museum-worthy” under traditional collecting paradigms (Stearn, 2011). Oral histories, personal archives, activist materials, and digital artifacts have gained prominence through co-collecting initiatives, which are challenging conventional hierarchies of value and permanence (Flinn, 2007).

Moreover, participatory approaches push museums to reconsider the ethics of past acquisitions. Involving source communities in discussions about provenance, restitution, and repatriation has prompted many institutions to reassess the legitimacy of their collections (Arvanitis and Tythacott, 2014). These processes are promoting the evolution of contemporary museums from custodians of global heritage to facilitators of dialogue and repair (Peers and Brown, 2003).

These changes are not being implemented without difficulty. Integrating community participation into collection practices can raise complex questions about representation and continuity. It requires museums to develop new methods of governance, long-term relationships with communities, and mechanisms for sharing authority. Nevertheless, these challenges are essential to reckon with if museums are to remain relevant, equitable, and trusted public institutions (Chambers, Macmillan, and Radi 2014). The integration of participatory approaches is indeed reorienting collecting from an extractive, expert-driven process toward a more collaborative, ethical, and inclusive one – transforming not only what is collected but also how and why it is collected.

Participatory approaches are also being considered in collections' conservation. Specifically, this strategy is impacting on the redefinition of whose voices matter in decisions about preservation. Communities are now more frequently involved in determining how objects are cared for and what values are prioritized. This shift challenges the authority of conservation as a purely scientific or technical discipline, and reframes it as a social and ethical practice. For instance, indigenous communities may advocate for methods that align with their cultural or spiritual beliefs, which may differ from conventional Western conservation standards. Some objects may be considered living or sacred and thus require different handling or even deaccessioning. By incorporating these perspectives, museums are rethinking the fixed nature of conservation protocols, recognizing that care extends beyond material stability to include respect for intangible heritage and cultural context.

Participatory conservation also fosters greater transparency and dialogue. Initiatives such as “open conservation labs” invite the public to observe and sometimes participate in conservation processes,

encouraging conversations around authenticity, deterioration, and ethical dilemmas (Golding and Modest, 2013).

These experiences are also related to the upgrade of the educational mission of museums, which is expanding beyond traditional content delivery to encompass community engagement, lifelong learning, and social impact. Evidently, the integration of participatory principles and practices is a central component of this process, which is operationalized in various ways: through co-designed workshops, youth advisory boards, community-led storytelling projects, and dialogic tours that encourage critical reflection and shared interpretation. These activities are grounded in the belief that today education should be developed not as a top-down, one-directional transmission of expert knowledge but rather as a creative, collaborative, and personally relevant practice, that values visitors' skills and cultural perspectives, co-creation, and shared authority (Falk and Dierking, 2018). By integrating participatory methods into their educational frameworks, museums aim to become more inclusive, democratic spaces that not only teach but also listen and evolve in response to their audiences (Falk and Dierking, 2013). This shift aligns with broader institutional missions to serve as civic platforms where diverse communities can explore identity, history, and social change together – positioning participation not as an add-on, but as a foundational strategy for meaningful engagement and transformative learning.

This process also concerns outreach programs, which represent an area that plays an increasingly important role in the shift of museums toward public accountability and community relevance. Once limited to delivering educational content beyond institutional walls, outreach is now reconceptualized as a reciprocal, dialogic process that centers the voices, needs, and knowledges of diverse publics (Crooke, 2007; Scharf et al., 2018). In this framework, participation is operationalized through collaborative programming, pop-up exhibitions in non-traditional venues, mobile museum initiatives, and sustained partnerships with local organizations. These activities aim not only to expand the institution's public, democratize access to its contents, and address historical exclusions, but also to develop co-creating programs “with” rather than

“for” communities, and to empower citizens as active agents in shaping the museum’s role in public life (Golding and Modest, 2013; Janes and Sandell, 2019).

MAKING SPACE(S) FOR PARTICIPATION MATTERS

The pervasive integration of participation principles and practices in different areas of contemporary museums also extends to the evolution of spatial programs.

First of all, this process pertains to the involvement of target groups in the arrangement of spaces and settings. Co design represents a methodology rooted in participatory design theory, in which community members actively collaborate with designers, architects, and curators in the conception and creation processes (Sanders and Stappers, 2008). Today, this practice extends beyond audience research and consultation. It emphasizes shared authorship of physical environments, aligning spatial solutions with the cultural, social, and functional needs of diverse communities.

Co-design processes enable spatial arrangements that integrate community use patterns with curatorial intent. This outcome is usually achieved through participatory workshops and charrettes, in which groups of citizens collaborate in facilitated sessions to reimagine old rooms and gardens, sketch floor plans, map visitor journeys, define functional zones, and set up the features of some areas. The methodologies applied in these activities also include iterative feedback, spatial prototyping, and mock ups, drawing on the use of temporary or scaled environments to test layouts, furniture, colors, lighting, visibility, ergonomics, and accessibility.

The involvement of community members or real users in the design of museums’ spaces and settings generally results in enhanced accessibility and inclusivity, and it often leads to the development of modular configurations and highly flexible multi purpose zones. It also ensures the space is intuitive, and adaptable to a wide range of needs, for example by guaranteeing thoughtful circulation and diverse seating arrangements. Furthermore, co designed spatial solutions are

characterized by cultural authenticity and often reflect local narratives and identities, embedding intangible heritage into the physical environment, hence fostering emotional connections.

Integrating community visions and voices in the arrangement of spaces and settings requires a balancing effort to combine diverse inputs with professional expertise without compromising spatial coherence and efficiency, and it may extend project timelines and use of resources. Notwithstanding, the culturally resonant environments resulting from these processes seem to play a strategic role in moving the contemporary museum toward a model of shared authorship that strengthens both design innovation and social impact.

Audience engagement in the planning of spaces and settings does not only pertain to the involvement of community members into the decision-making phases of design processes: it also refers to the arrangement of new types of rooms and experimental environments aimed at promoting participatory practices. Although many of these activities can be realized inside exhibiting galleries or storage facilities, several museums are integrating their spatial programs with specifically configured and equipped spaces, where staff can meet and engage visitors, volunteers, or target groups. Some ensue from the repurpose of rooms previously dedicated to other functions, some others are being incorporated in the design of new buildings.

The availability of areas purportedly dedicated to accommodate participatory practices is a condition that not only enables but also prompts their implementation.

Such trend includes the activation of an array of new types of spaces. “Community studios”, for instance, are collaborative zones where local groups, organizations, schools, and artists-in-residence are engaged in co creation and shared meaning-making. These environments mirror pedagogical design studios: they are flexible, adaptable, and responsive to evolving creative processes (Vyas, van der Veer and Nijholt, 2013). “Maker spaces” are areas that complement traditional exhibits, by allowing visitors into hands-on or experimental activities enabling the creation, building, and exploration of various projects, and thus fostering creativity, experimentation, and engagement with the museum’s

collections and themes (Wardrip and Brahms, 2020). “Digital labs” offer tools for augmented reality experiences, interactive storytelling, and the production of user-generated content, allowing visitors to become co-authors of the museum’s narrative (Parry, 2007).

This trend also includes the enhancement of flexible gathering areas, aimed to facilitate dialogue and collective reflection (McSweeney and Kavanagh, 2016). These may have been already present, but their consistency and role within contemporary museums’ spatial program is growing, so as the experimentation with new types and levels of flexibility, intended to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse public and to accommodate a more and more heterogeneous range of practices and interactions.

The design of new spaces is also responding to the growing relevance of another important task that is being delegated to museum spaces – the accommodation of activities promoted by local groups and communities. Hosting events organized by citizens and other organizations represents a tangible practice of inclusivity in contemporary cultural institutions (Dalle Nogare and Scuderi, 2020). Ranging from festivals and workshops to performances, exhibitions, storytelling sessions, and public discussions, these projects foster the repositioning of museums as social hubs, where local voices actively shape both content and experience.

This practice has the added benefit of contextualizing collections in living cultures, and reinforcing connections between material heritage and contemporary social realities. Community-hosted events also bridge the gap between institutions and their surrounding publics, creating a sense of ownership and relevance. For instance, neighborhood-based exhibitions, LGBTQ+ film screenings, and Indigenous storytelling events hosted in museum spaces have been shown to increase attendance from nontraditional audiences and foster ongoing engagement (Lynch and Alberti, 2010). In many cases, these activities contribute to boosting the institution’s function as an amplifier for community identity, and provide professional resources, visibility, and a safe and recognized space for marginalized voices (Sandell, 2012; Janes and Sandell, 2019). In the last years, the strategic role of this function led to the development

of more and more complex projects. In general, these environments have to guarantee certain qualities, and in particular they must be open, flexible, and reconfigurable. Openness refers to both visual and physical accessibility, allowing free movement and exploration, and encouraging curiosity and entry. Flexibility is dealt with both spatial design and function; usually, it is addressed through the set-up of large, unobstructed areas that avoid rigid, predefined arrangements, as well as through movable furniture, partitions, and interactive installations that can be easily altered to suit different activities. Reconfigurability is generally achieved through modular layouts that can be quickly transformed for different group sizes or engagement formats, but also by means of adjustable lighting, acoustic, and display systems to set the tone for various activities. The open and adjustable qualities of these spaces not only enable but also reflect the open-ended nature of participatory processes, that hold space for individual meaning-making and pluralistic narratives, hence contributing to make the museum into a “bigger room” (Simon, 2016).

These experimental spaces are not merely architectural add-ons: they serve as platforms for deep, participatory experiences that foster the shift of museums’ role from static containers to responsive, evolving cultural hubs. By offering environments where making, sharing, and questioning are actively encouraged, museums empower diverse audiences to engage more directly with collections, express their own creativity, and even influence curatorial perspectives and institutional priorities (Message, 2006).

WHEN DIGITAL MEETS PARTICIPATION (NEW DYNAMICS UNFOLD)

While the arrangement of spatial programs emerges as a crucial factor in the enhancement of participatory practices, many of the activities involved in this process actually take place in a digital dimension. This development reflects a broader trend toward the integration of new technologies across multiple domains of museum practice.

The embedding of digital media is progressing both onsite – in the management of collections (e.g. archival of digital heritage, 3D scanning,

data management systems, AI-powered analytics), in the operation of visitors' experience (e.g. digital guides, AI-powered tools), and in the design of exhibitions (e.g. touchscreens, interactive kiosks, immersive installations) – as well as online (e.g. through Social Media engagements, virtual tours, games, interactive learning modules, behind-the-scenes contents). As technology continues to evolve, museums are embracing digital transformation not as a replacement for traditional activities and experiences, but as a complement which can enhance the performance of their tasks through the unprecedented efficiency and versatile capabilities of these new tools (Parry, 2007).

This technological turn is playing a crucial part in the development of participatory approaches, enabling an array of innovative ways to transform visitors from passive observers into active subjects. This evolution is evident across multiple aspects, and refers to both onsite and online interactions.

First of all, digital tools embedded in physical museum environments are enabling audiences to participate in meaningful, co creative activities that extend the visit beyond passive observation. These technologies support visitor agency, collective storytelling, and collaborative interpretation, enriching both the experience and institutional narratives. For example, interactive installations and co-creation stations (e.g. digital touch tables, multi-user screens, drawing walls, and sensor-based set-ups) allow the public to interact with artifacts, share their interpretations, or create digital outputs that may become part of the exhibition. AR-enabled devices or apps let individuals or groups explore the hidden layers of a display (e.g. reconstructions, contextual histories, or conservation data) and even manipulate digital layers together. Projection mapping, VR rooms, and immersive theater-style experiences can incorporate audience choices or contributions to dynamically shape the exhibit. Physical-digital hybrid installations (e.g. photo booths linked to social media walls, digital “memory walls”, audio-recorded visitor reflections, participatory mapping displays, or digital archives created in real time) can allow the audience to leave a digital trace of their visit and to contribute to build up a collective narrative. Digital technologies are also enhancing game-based interactions, often using mobile apps,

digital scavenger hunts, or location-based challenges that invite people to participate actively in exploring spaces, contents, and collections. These media strengthen personal as well as collective participation, making the visit experience not just informative but rather co-created and experiential, fostering social learning, integrating people's voices into ongoing curatorial processes or future exhibitions, and thus eventually reflecting broader cultural narratives. The blend of physical and digital interactions in the galleries is also capable of motivating participation from younger and a more diverse public.

In fact, the deployment of digital technologies also serves a critical role in aligning museum experiences with the expectations and engagement patterns of audiences who are progressively more technologically adept. Modern visitors are highly familiar with digital media, interactive interfaces, and online communication, and they demonstrate growing digital literacy and familiarity with technology-mediated forms of cultural participation. By adopting technologies that match these evolving literacies, museums can create experiences that feel intuitive, immersive, and relevant to contemporary modes of learning and interaction.

These tasks are also being performed through the development of online engagement. This is not only enabling participatory practices beyond the physical museum spaces: it is also expanding their reach, by making exhibitions, collections, and dialogues more accessible, and promoting the experimentation with new formats based on the reconfiguration of traditional boundaries of spatial and temporal engagement (Drotner et al., 2018).

One prominent form of digitally enabled participation is crowdsourcing metadata, also including social media campaigns, which invite the public to contribute descriptions, tags, personal stories, or considerations to digitized collections (Giaccardi, 2012; Ridge, 2013). These initiatives can contribute to disrupt conventional curator-visitor hierarchies and to enrich institutional collections while fostering deeper public engagement (Dahlgren and Hansson, 2022). Beyond metadata, digital participatory culture also encompasses online submissions or storytelling platforms, where visitors assume partial curatorial or narrative roles. For example, several projects allow users to create and share personalized guided

tours created from the museum's collection, effectively co-curating the experience.

Immersive and interactive technologies, such as AR, VR, and object detection interfaces, enable new forms of exploration and storytelling that can expand participation. For example, through object detection algorithms, some tools facilitate open ended user exploration of digital art collections, reframing museum content through algorithmically mediated discovery. Other projects integrate AR or crowdsourcing to co design participatory installations or to games, that scaffold visitor creativity in museum contexts.

Taken together, these examples reflect a broader epistemic shift towards networked and distributed knowledge production in digital museology. As scholarly analysis on participatory imaginaries argues, digital culture and collaborative frameworks condition institutions to rethink public engagement in the light of discourses around empowerment, co-creation, and democratization of knowledge (Agostino, 2015; Drotner et al., 2018).

The proliferation of new technologies is profoundly modifying the way audiences engage with culture and heritage, and museums are expected to increase their commitment to the development of digital strategies and tools, to enhance and multiply the interactions with their visitors – and even to diversify their public, as digital participation also opens avenues for reaching marginalized and remote communities.

Nevertheless, many scholars are foregrounding the argument that what makes the use of digital tools particularly effective is not technology as such, but rather the communication project that structures its contents and functioning (Drotner 2022). This reflection is based on the idea that digital tools are a medium, not a message, and they are effective not because of their novelty, but because they are embedded within coherent communicative frameworks. Their utility, in other words, depends less on engineering ingenuity and more on the interpretive and pedagogical projects they serve. This critique aims at challenging techno determinism, which often leads museums to mistake digital affordances for strategic value, and at emphasizing the importance of framing digital experiences within explicit communication goals. Especially digital engagement must

be rooted in curatorial intention and audience understanding (Drotner and Schröder 2013), and on the design of seamless relations between knowledge and communication, integrating interaction and inclusivity alongside the technological aspects.

The extension of participation into a networked and hybrid environment is contributing to highlight the importance of communication framework as a design foundation. This scenario, within which new and complex socio-cultural challenges emerge, requires museums to adopt human-centered design and design thinking (Mason, 2022), that foreground problem framing over technological solutionism, and rather draw on the coalesce of technologies with narrative, pedagogy, and critical engagement.

PARTICIPATION THRIVES BEYOND SCALE

The idea that museums engage audiences not with technology per se, but with the stories, educational aims, dialogues, and curatorial logics that give technology its meaning, contributes to emphasize the crucial role of competences, human talents, and visions as the true drivers of the participatory turn in museum practices.

The value and success of participatory initiatives mostly lie in the intentionality and creativity of their set up, and thus on the strong interpretive skills, cultural sensitivity, and inventive approaches of the professionals involved, channeled through thoughtful design and facilitation. Competent, committed, and passionate people are what transforms these practices from procedural exercises into meaningful cultural experiences (Mygind et al., 2015). The human dimension (of visionary project leaders, empathetic facilitators, and creative educators and communicators) is often the decisive factor in engaging audiences deeply, and make participatory initiatives thrive – even on modest budgets.

Drawing on the idea that participatory impact in museums is basically a human achievement, not an infrastructural one, also small museums and low-budget initiatives can generate extraordinary cultural and social outcomes, when driven by great people and great ideas.

A persistent assumption in museum practice often assumes that institutional scale – whether measured in collection size, visitor and staff numbers, or financial capacity – is a predictor of participatory success. However, many recent experiences demonstrated that the impact of participatory initiatives does not directly correlate with institutional magnitude (Doctors and Carter, 2021). Small museums and local heritage centers, often operating with limited resources, have delivered exemplary projects that rival those of flagship institutions. This discrepancy points to the crucial role of human capital and project design over mere capacity.

Several paradoxes challenge the “big equals better” assumption. Complexity vs. agility: large institutions can face bureaucratic inertia, risk-aversion, and hierarchical decision-making that can slow or dilute participatory innovation (Bollo et al., 2017); small museums, conversely, are often more agile, and they are generally able to experiment rapidly and adapt programs to local community feedback (Dodd and Sandell, 2001). Local relevance vs. global scale: participatory initiatives thrive on meaningful dialogue with specific audiences; smaller institutions are often embedded in local contexts, allowing them to design tailored experiences that resonate deeply with community narratives, fostering stronger emotional and cultural connections (Waterton and Watson, 2013). Resourcefulness vs. resources: effective participation depends less on financial resources than on creative strategies, strong facilitation, and clear communication goals (Simon, 2010; Drotner, 2022), with strategic use of low-cost tools (such as storytelling workshops, participatory labels, or social media co-curation), small museums can achieve high-impact engagement without large investments.

While creativity and talent can compensate for resource limitations, institutional support and recognition of human capital remain essential. This implies a new type of sustainability embedded in museum development. Participatory practices can indeed falter if passionate staff face burnout or lack strategic backing. As participatory museology grows, success increasingly depends on nurturing creative human ecosystems within institutions (Morse, 2020), rather than merely expanding technical capacity or collections.

The acknowledgement of these issues is crucial in orienting the further integration of a participatory approach in contemporary museums, based on interaction-centered thinking. As interaction is substance-driven, not defined by the institution’s holdings, this progressive shift brings with it a strategic imperative: to invest in people, that are the factors that mostly impact on both the process and the product of participation.

CHARTING NEW DIRECTIONS IN RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The growing importance of participatory practices in museums is not a passing trend, but a profound response to evolving cultural expectations, social demands, political imperatives, and economic constraints.

Museums have never been static entities: they are inherently in progress institutions, continuously negotiating and reshaping their purpose and form as their context evolves. The embedding of a participatory, interaction-based approach is one of the root and branch transformation that is orienting the redefinition of their structures in the present moment. These developments are intertwined with broader processes of democratization, identity negotiation, and cultural innovation.

Participation is thus both a tool for engagement and a catalyst for institutional transformation. As museums continue to evolve, it offers a way to redefine their mission, not only as stewards of the past but as co-creators of the future.

The current challenge for museums lies not merely in sustaining but in consolidating and deepening this ongoing transformation, embedding principles of inclusivity, responsiveness, and community-centeredness at the core of institutional practice. To achieve lasting impact, participatory approaches must become structural and programmatic rather than episodic or experimental, shaping not only exhibitions and events but also governance, decision-making, and institutional culture. This reorientation requires museums to embrace a fundamentally reimagined ethos, one that positions audiences as active co creators of cultural value and recognizes community collaboration as integral component to the museum’s mission.

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