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Commissioning Editor:
Eric Langham
eric@barkerlangham.co.uk

Production Editor:
Elizabeth Newbery
01865 793360
elizabeth@newberyandengland.com

Copy Editor:
Kathrin Luddecke

Editorial Board:
AHI Marketing and Communications Group

Design:
Neil Morgan Design 07737 551006

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AHI Contact details:
01795 436560
admin@ahi.org.uk

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AHI Discover Heritage Awards 2019

For more information about the Association for Heritage Interpretation [AHI], send an email to admin@ahi.org.uk or write to the Administrator, AHI, 25 Recreation Way, Kemsley, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 2RD. Tel: +44 (0)1795 436560. Individuals can join AHI as Associate or Student Members or can apply to be elected, subject to qualifications and experience, as Full Members or Fellows. Businesses can join as Corporate Members with the same rights as individual members. All members receive *Interpretation Journal*, and other mailings. They can participate in AHI events and (if paid-up) can vote at the Annual General Meeting. Printed in UK © AHI 2019.

Foreword

Risk

From 2016 I have had the honour of being the Commissioning Editor of this Journal. Since then we have explored empathy, excellence, entertainment, provocation, conversation and the impossible. This, my last, journal is about risk.

What is risk?

There are two essential elements that make up risk; firstly the outcome has got to matter and secondly there must be uncertainty about how to reach this outcome.

If risk is essentially the possibility of losing something of value, then do you think we need it? It could be argued that every major advance in human history has been made possible because someone took a risk. So perhaps our definition of risk needs to capture this duality. The Chinese symbol for risk, a combination of danger and opportunity, captures these positive and negative connotations: 危机. This is the definition of risk I think we should follow.

Historically our institutions have not been known for risk taking and the 2016 report *Character Matters* (commissioned by Arts Council England, Museums Galleries Scotland, Museums Association, Association of Independent Museums) surveyed 2,000 people in the English museum workforce and concluded that, on average, the individuals employed in museums were more risk-averse than the wider UK population. Things could be changing now as competition and austerity has necessitated more risk-taking across our sector.

Why should we take risks?

Interpreters are inventors and must go beyond audiences' expectations, beyond what has been done before. Our ideas must be bold and ambitious to be truly memorable. We are also signposts. To paraphrase Steve Jobs: *You can't just ask customers what they want and then give it to them*. Nor can you interpret or create by committee. Such consensus building and designing by committee often leads to safe ideas and results that have been seen before. Interpreters must use their knowledge of audiences to invent, to surprise and to avoid the generic. So lead, be a sign post and not a weather vane. Take risks.

Challenge and fail

To create experiences that visitors can't have or see anywhere else you must challenge the norm. Risk-taking encourages the challenging of assumptions and the reframing of traditional thinking. With risk also comes the possibility of failure as well as the possibility of creating something truly unique. You should view failure as just a normal part of the creative process – one step along the path to invention. The skill is to learn from failure and to rise up better informed.

Farewell

As I bow out I would like to thank a few people. First a huge thank you to all the contributors. You are too numerous to mention but your incredible articles have made my job really stimulating. And from the AHI: Bill Bevan, Jim Mitchell and Philip Ryland – you have steered my thinking and always encouraged me; thank you for trusting me with your Journal.

And finally I'd like to thank three people: Neil Morgan who rose exceptionally to the challenge of revamping the look and feel of the Journal; Rachel Teskey who has contributed to every one of my journals interviewing people from across the industry and beyond – an amazing job; and finally to Elizabeth Newbery who has guided me, supported me and worked alongside me to create each journal; a truly superb and enjoyable partnership.

I leave everyone at AHI with an interpretation toolkit (page 38–39). I developed this as a kind of summary of the things I have learned over the years. I hope it helps you in your planning and thinking.

Best wishes

Eric Langham
Founder, Barker Langham

Website Members' Section

The AHI website has a 'members only' section full of useful resources for the practising heritage interpreter. This is the place where you will find back issues of *Interpretation Journal*, conference archives, best-practice guidelines and a host of other materials relevant to professional development. We are adding more resources all the time and will publicise them in the AHI e-News as well as on the website.

AHI members can access the new online system (if you haven't done so already) by going to the website (https://ahi.org.uk) and selecting the 'Login' button on the home page. If you haven't already set your own individual password, select the 'Lost your password' option. Enter your registered e-mail address – the one that AHI currently uses to communicate with you – and select 'Get New Password'. Check your e-mail for a confirmation link noting that it has probably gone into your Junk folder and follow these instructions.

Congratulations, you are now logged into the new AHI website and can access Member only pages. Why not check out your personalised Membership Dashboard by selecting the 'Member' tab.

News & Views

Welcome to the Spring 2019 issue of Interpretation Journal.

Spring is a great time of year, bursting with life and reasons to be cheerful! Of course we know that alongside this there are many potential risks, uncertainties and concerns affecting the heritage sector and wider society. The past couple of years have definitely seen some big changes, many of which have and will have unknown impacts on the heritage sector. Whilst uncertainty may not go away anytime soon, there are plenty of recent developments which as a profession we are interested in and which give more clarity about the future. For example, the National Lottery Heritage Fund has relaunched with a new name and a major focus on nature, communities and widening access, which I know will have a big impact on projects and interpretation. Even closer to home, there is plenty going on here at AHI on which to update you.

Conversion to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)

This lengthy but important process is now almost complete. Following your instruction at the AGMs in 2017 and 2018 we have now transferred all AHI assets to the new CIO, the recommended type of structure for a membership charity such as AHI. We will be operating the CIO and Association in parallel until the 2019 AGM when we will seek to dissolve the Association through a vote, when this process will be complete. It's great news that trustees and members can now benefit from the extra protection this provides; a big thank you to all involved in this and to the membership for helping make the changes required.

Bedford and Bletchley 2019

This year's conference with the theme of 'truth and interpretation' takes place in Bedford from 9–11 October, and it's hopefully in your diaries already! We are looking forward to engaging conversations and discussions about this topical theme and exploring how heritage can be interpreted in different ways for different reasons.

- How do we deal with issues of truth in our work?
- How does our audience respond to the concept of truth and how might that affect the bottom line?
- How do we as interpreters approach hidden and covered-up stories, how do we decide to balance untold and accepted narratives?

With a conference site visit to Bletchley Park, there will be fertile inspiration for this theme. Booking will open this spring, and we are looking forward to seeing you there.

AHI Discover Heritage Awards 2019

It's awards year! The AHI 2019 Discover Heritage Awards, sponsored by NovaDura Ltd, are now open for entry. Held every two years, the awards are the place to showcase your projects, celebrate excellence and share this across the sector and beyond. The categories are Museums/Historic Properties, Outdoors, Visitor/Interpretation Centre, Volunteer and Community Projects and Events and Activities. So hopefully something for every project you want to shout about. If you know of excellent interpretation that you think should be nominated, then please do encourage applications from others too! The deadline is 30 April and the awards will be presented at the prestigious awards dinner at our conference.

In the Chair

It's a great honour to have been elected Chair of AHI last October in Chester. My first job was to thank Bill Bevan on behalf of AHI for his excellent service as Chair for the last three years, and I would like to do so again here. It's been a busy first six months in the role, and I am hugely grateful to all the trustees, volunteers and of course our administrator Lyn Redknap for all their work and support so far. I am looking forward to meeting AHI members at upcoming events this year and discussing the work of AHI and what's new in the world of interpretation.

Jim Mitchell
Chair, AHI

AHI is currently looking for someone to take on the role of editor for our journal which has developed so successfully under the recent editorship of Eric Langham. The appointed editor would be expected to lead a small team (designer, copy editor and advertising assistant) and would have a specific focus on developing new content, themes and ideas for the journal. The journal is currently published in spring and autumn with peak periods of activity in mid-February and mid-September, coinciding with the deadline for the submission of articles. The time involved in this role is anticipated as being the equivalent of five days per issue.

Remuneration is £1,000.00 per issue (plus any relevant expenses).

If you would like further details about the role, please contact:
Lyn Redknap at the AHI Office
via admin@ahi.org.uk

Reviews

REPORTING RESEARCH

Philip Ryland reviews recent research into attracting young people into museums.

Engagement with a younger audience remains a challenge for some museums even though a range of probable attractants has now been fairly widely identified and discussed. These attractants include activities and events which are tailored specifically to a younger audience and place a strong emphasis on being interactive, hands-on and potentially co-creative. The development of areas of museums' websites tailored specifically to younger people and their families, as well as a greater and more collaborative use of social media generally to attract and then enhance their visit, has also proven to be important. A recent study from Italy provides further evidence of the demands of a younger audience and usefully breaks this down into the differences between small, medium and large museums. This brief paper shares their results.

Historically, the traditional museum 'stereotype' (as reported in Black, 2005:79) has tended to suggest that younger people have often found museums as being 'imposing' and 'dull' places and in consequence aspects of leisure (restaurant, café and shop) as well as focused and imaginative interactions (hands-on exhibits and creative activity packs, tailored guided tours, night-time experiences as well as a range of digital tools) have all typically been identified as being important when creating a 'layout and feel' for a younger audience in a modern museum (Black, 2018; Mason & McCarthy, 2006). Digital media and online social interaction are two tools at the forefront of this modern visitor experience, with digital content in particular offering a personalised opportunity for engagement both before and during the visit as well as potentially continuing after visitors leave, notably by encouraging feedback and reflection, typically through images and text posted online. Amongst the current research literature there appears to be a renewed focus on younger audiences – the nature of their expectations prior to visiting, their engagement with the site and its artefacts on arrival, their overall visit experience and also, and perhaps most importantly, how best to attract them in the first place.

The study highlighted here explored the practices of 4,967 attractions in Italy of which 83.5% were recorded as being 'museums, arts galleries and/or collections' (Manna & Palumbo, 2018:509). The remainder included monuments, historical sites and archaeological areas. The size classification was based on the number of staff employed, such as small (less than four staff), medium (four to 1) and large museums (more than 15 staff) (Manna & Palumbo, 2018). The survey took into account both students on educational visits as well as young people (aged 18–24) on a leisure visit.

Table 1 on page 6 provides a list of the range of variables, grouped into five broad categories identified by the researchers as being worthy of being tested through the study.

Their results are summarised by size of museum but also by the perception of the museum's market share of a younger audience (graded here as low, medium or high).

Small museums

Web-based services and digital tools were important across all small museums, with access to Wi-Fi, dedicated areas on the website and social networking being the most significant attractants. Other significant areas included 'raising awareness of local identity' and offering 'tailored and interactive guided tours'. For those museums with low to medium share, 'online information and tips about the visit' were important, whilst for those with a higher share, 'live shows' and the presence of a bookshop were significant (extracted from Manna & Palumbo, 2018: 513–4).

Table 1. Variables investigated within the study

(adapted from Manna & Palumbo, 2018: 510–11).

Group 1: Inter-institutional partnerships
Variables included: Museum Friends Associations; collaborations; regional networks; extended local links; combined research and associated activities and local/regional campaigns.

Group 2: Web-based services and digital tools
Variables included: presence of Wi-Fi; dedicated website; digital catalogue; virtual tours; other online activities such as bookings and merchandise, online social presence including a newsletter and/or online community.

Group 3: Ancillary services
Variables included: presence of a restaurant or café; bookshop; childcare services; opportunities for guided tours and/or an audio/video guide.

Group 4: Value-added services
Variables included: undertaking scientific research; organisation/hosting of conferences, seminars and/or live shows; scientific publication; space rental for local events and teaching activities for students and young people.

Group 5: Additional spaces and laboratories
Variables included: access to archives, library, document centre and/or video room; access to teaching and restoration laboratories.

Medium-sized museums

Web-based services and digital tools remained important across all medium museums with access to 'social media activity' and 'on-line communities' being the most significant attractants. Other important areas included 'a dedicated area on the website', online merchandise and an online newsletter. 'Inter-organisational relationships' also appeared to positively influence young people with 'local and regional campaigns' as well as 'being part of a regional network' being specifically identified. Published research activities also proved to be attractive. The web-based activities mentioned above were a less significant attractant for those museums with a higher market share than those with a lower share (extracted from Manna & Palumbo, 2018: 514).

Large museums

Interestingly in this study, for larger museums 'web-based services and digital tools' were less important than they were for small and medium-sized museums. Indeed only 'access to Wi-Fi' and 'online booking' were found to be significant.

The effect of both 'social networking' and 'web community services' were negligible. The most significant variables for larger museums included the 'use of space for cultural activities' as well as the presence of a restaurant or cafe and a bookshop. The opportunity to visit a restoration lab was also of significance, notably for those with a higher market share (extracted from Manna & Palumbo, 2018: 514–5).

In summary

Some of the key strategic activities which should be considered in order to attract and/or boost a younger audience would include:

- providing dedicated but also interactive areas on the website which attract and build a connection prior to the visit but also encourage a post-visit conversation;
- providing a visitor-centred leisure experience in the museum itself which is welcoming, engaging and also encourages and stimulates an interaction between visitors;
- delivering social networks which encourage a friendly interaction and a co-creating relationship which in turn builds lively and entertaining online content;
- offering interactive and imaginative hands-on activities and events which encourage a sense of belonging and a feeling of being part of a bigger community;
- and for larger museums, ensuring the quality of tailored value-added activities and the availability of appropriate ancillary services (summarised from Black, 2018 and Manna & Palumbo, 2018: 515–6).

Whilst this study may not be entirely generalisable and the summary listed above certainly requires further evaluative work, it is suggested that there are ideas revealed here which would seem relevant to any attraction: the potential and power of an online presence as an attractant; the significance of tailored interactions (both online and on-site); the importance of the added-value experience as well as the ancillary facilities available when in or at the attraction.

Dr Philip Ryland (MAHI) teaches tourism and is also Associate Dean (Student Experience) in the Faculty of Management, Bournemouth University.

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Reviews

EXHIBITION

Beth Wratislaw reviews *Christian Dior: Designer of Dreams* at the V&A and reports that, while the dresses dazzle, the detail disappoints.

Royal Portrait of Princess Margaret on her 21st birthday. Photograph by Cecil Beaton (1904–1980).

Today, Dior is a household name. Modelled on the red carpet, sold in department stores, splashed across billboards, the brand's success is evident in its ubiquity. Following 71 years of trailblazing the industry, Dior is now the subject of the latest blockbuster exhibition at the V&A.

A feast for the eyes but…

The House of Dior is undoubtedly one of the most prestigious fashion labels, designing haute couture that consistently excels, inspires and influences. From the daring New Look in 1947 to the feminist slogans now plastered across the catwalk, fashion statements made by Dior reverberate across the industry. *Christian Dior: Designer of Dreams* is thus a deserved and fitting retrospective at the V&A, the museum's largest fashion exhibition since the record-breaking success of *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*. Focusing on female haute couture from 1947 to the present day, the exhibition explores the life and lasting impact of the couturier, and how the six succeeding creative directors have shaped this international brand.

In this reimagining of *Christian Dior: Couturier du Rêve*, held at the Musée des Arts Decoratifs, Paris in 2017, V&A curator Oriole Cullen has worked with the same set designer Nathalie Crinière to develop the exhibition for the new Sainsbury Gallery. This is a show with impressive ambition: over 200 garments covering a 70-year period are displayed across 11 rooms, telling the story of the foundation, history and continuing inspiration behind the label. The result is a visually stunning, stylish show that at times overwhelms the senses; the interpretation, however, leaves something to be desired.

The man at the helm

The exhibition begins with a fascinating biography of Christian Dior, tracing his social life and interests until his premature death in 1957. A rich display of archival material – photographs, sketches and letters – introduces key relationships that helped mould the brand in its formative years. But Dior's New Look takes centre stage, his iconic 'Bar' suit and its reinterpretation by his successors dominating the space. With rounded shoulders, a cinched waist and sculpted hips, this hourglass silhouette is perhaps his most significant legacy.

Christian Dior's understanding of the female form underpinned his revolutionary approach to women's fashion, from the sinuous shape of the 'Bar' suit to the H-line in 1954. Historical footage adds a fascinating dimension to the displays of his collections, bringing to life the dresses that were taken up with such alacrity by the celebrities of the day. One of his earliest champions, Princess Margaret, epitomises Dior's popularity, and a bespoke gown made for her 21st birthday is a star piece in the show. Displayed in the round, visitors can see the complexity and exquisite embellishment of the handmade dress up close. Cecil Beaton's photography immortalised this frock, increasing Dior's exposure on the international stage.

Royal patronage is symbolic of Dior's personal interest in British culture. A self-professed Anglophile, this unique story is brought to light for the first time in this exhibition, and Dior's creative collaborations, clients and fashion shows in Britain are further elaborated in the accompanying publication.

Successive approaches to design

Dior's interests and influences provide the thematic framework in which each of his successors – Yves Saint Laurent, Marc Bohan, Giancarlo Ferré, John Galliano, Raf Simons and Maria Grazia Chiuri – is considered in the exhibition. Travel, history and horticulture were continuous sources of inspiration for the designers recasting the fashion house under their leadership. Visitors can cultivate a sense of each director's aesthetic through interesting juxtapositions of their designs: Galliano's extravagant silhouettes, Simons' sharp modernist lines and Chiuri's softer ethereal shapes are distinctive within each section.

Despite the varying length of their tenures, the six creative directors are given equal weighting in the show. This ensures a pleasing symmetry across the rooms; yet as a result, none of the designers, their range or their context, is considered in great detail. For instance, Bohan maintained the brand's popularity over three decades with multiple collections – and this is barely acknowledged. His dresses are often eclipsed by his counterparts' more striking designs, none of which are considered in terms of their individual or collective influence. Indeed, the exhibition fails to interrogate the impact of each designer on the House of Dior, its commercial success or its competitors.

Neglected narratives

This shortcoming is symptomatic of a wider tendency to leave certain stories underdeveloped. Production and accessories, aspects of the fashion house that are integral to the haute couture line, are featured towards the end of the exhibition in a rather perfunctory way. In the ateliers section, the efforts of the pattern-cutters, seamstresses and craftspeople behind the handmade garments are only briefly detailed, while the input of other designers is entirely omitted; though the making process is described as 'the heart of Dior', it becomes subordinate and rushed. Similarly, the diorama gallops through the accessories that were intrinsic to the 'total look' envisioned by Dior, not giving much space to dwell on this medley of beautiful hats, shoes, gloves, bags and jewellery, or their designers.

Seductive settings

What the exhibition lacks in depth, however, it largely makes up for in the spectacular set design. Mannequins dressed in stunning couture become actors on stage, their liberation from glass showcases facilitating much more dynamic displays. Each room conjures a particular period, place and mood. From a cabinet of curiosities to a sleek black catwalk, romantic baroque architecture to a vast glittering ballroom, the sets are carefully conceived in relation to the content and theme of each space, enhancing the objects on display. The centrepiece of the exhibition is a canopy of paper flowers by Spanish design studio Wanda Barcelona, a delicate construction that dreamily evokes the inspiration behind the intricate floral designs below.

It is this interplay between dress design and set design that makes the exhibition truly remarkable, immersing visitors in the world of Dior. Though there are few revelatory moments, with some narratives that are disappointingly cursory, the show is a successful visual survey of the fashion house over the years. The final exhibit, a dress entitled *Christian Dior* from Chiuri's spring/summer 2018 collection, encapsulates the founding ethos of the brand, which places femininity at the heart of female haute couture. In Chiuri, Dior's legacy of empowering women through fashion lives on.

Beth Wratislaw is a consultant in the cultural sector.

Opposite:
Christian Dior with model Sylvie, circa 1948.

Courtesy of Christian Dior

Typology

For creative director Peter Karn the key interpretive tool is...

Empathy

Why would anyone care?

It seems like a simple question but as exhibition or experiential designers, this is a question we must constantly ask ourselves, and answering it is not as easy as it sounds.

All too often designers treat their solutions as vanity projects by simply asking 'What would I like this experience to be?' rather than 'What would the visitor like this experience to be?'. It is a trap we designers find very easy to fall into – especially when designing projects in isolation. So how to solve this conundrum?

A common line used by experiential designers is to state 'We are storytellers' or 'It's all about narrative' but this in itself is not an answer to the challenge. How are we telling the story and who decides what story should be told in the first place? I believe that our clients are the storytellers as they have ownership of their subjects. Our role as designers is to connect visitors with those subjects in meaningful ways so that they genuinely want to engage.

Canyon space of the Museo De Ciencias Ambientales.

In today's world, simply creating 'wow' experiences within exhibitions is no longer enough. This is all too accessible by turning on your new 4K LED TV, your PS4 or now your VR or AR headset. The way to get visitors to engage with exhibitions or experiences is to make them care about the subject and the role of the exhibition designer should be to constantly ask the question, 'Why would anyone care'?

Once we have this philosophy as our starting point a variety of approaches and inspirations become available to us.

Reflecting local culture

It seems like an obvious approach but putting any experience within a local context can yield very effective results, especially in creating emotional connections with visitors. Achieving this as an outsider can be very challenging however, so close collaboration with local people is essential. Our Museo De Ciencias Ambientales project in Guadalajara is a good example of this. Our brief was to develop a masterplan and interpretation design for a new public museum educating locals and tourists about the beauty and biodiversity of the region of Western Mexico and the environmental threats it faces. The subject of ecology and sustainability can be a very universal one as it addresses global issues but here it needed to be within the context of the local landscape. Audiences respond to issues on their doorstep, so this was a strategy we adopted within the proposal.

A public piazza space was created at ground level that directly linked the museum to the university campus on one side and the performing arts centre on the other, via a meandering canyon space based around the local landscapes of the region. This space then has a rolling programme of events such as street art, theatrical performances and film screenings, all from the local community, as a celebration of the rich culture and natural beauty of the region. From here visitors can enter the upper levels of the museum to explore the relationship with the city and the natural world via a series of interconnected and interactive gallery spaces. Each space communicates content through local issues such as allowing forums for political debate, displaying living endangered plants alongside aquatic conservation innovations and interactives showing the impact on the local landscape of the everyday items we all possess.

By simply holding a mirror to local culture, strong and lasting connections with subjects can be made.

It seems like an obvious approach but putting any experience within a local context can yield very effective results, especially in creating emotional connections with visitors. Achieving this as an outsider can be very challenging, however, so close collaboration with local people is essential.

Connecting with global culture

It is a fact that in the last two decades the way we all consume information has fundamentally changed. Today content and stories can resonate and connect to audiences globally and instantaneously and this unity is an incredibly powerful force.

Social media is at the forefront as it utilises a universal, global network of information so powerful it is being utilised to target sales, form romantic relationships and even, allegedly, win elections. In January 2019 a new world record was set for a social media post that achieved over 50 million likes on Instagram; the post was simply a picture of a single egg. The relevance here is that globally visitors are more interested in content than ever before and are eager to share this interest. Museums and experiences need to embrace this global culture of information sharing by creating moments and iconography that tap into this behaviour, whilst taking it deeper by connecting to meaningful content.

MET Studio Design's work for the Climate Control exhibition at the Manchester Museum was all about depicting climate change as an issue within our control that is not too late to resolve. Part of the solution was to showcase the Manchester Peppered Moth that was originally white in colour but during the industrial age evolved to become almost black to camouflage itself within the industrial landscape of Manchester to evade predators. The moth now, however, is turning white again as the city reduces its emissions. This is real evidence of the impact of the Anthropocene, humans being the most dominant force on the planet.

The entire exhibition was based around this premise but one feature that truly tapped into the global culture of caring was our spherical Peppered Moth sculpture within the Museum's atrium. It has been widely shared on social media globally and serves as a universal symbol of our story – now whenever I'm asked to discuss environmental issues, wherever I am in the world, I use the story of the Manchester Peppered Moth.

Entrance to the Manchester Museum Climate Control exhibition.

Living exhibits

Good exhibits are fundamental to an experience connecting with its audience but these should not be thought of as detached from the experience itself or simply as tools for learning. All too often they become the last bastion of the data archive or 'for the enthusiasts' as we can't think of interesting enough ways to communicate complex content as an exhibit or interactive. One approach is to design exhibits in a way that allows visitors to explore subjects with more freedom and not only with a single outcome. Complex content should not purely be expressed as data but as themes or subjects that visitors can explore on their own terms and go as deep as they want to. Technology can play a role here but it's the users who play a far more fundamental one.

For our Road Safety Experience developed for Kent Fire & Rescue Service, we were tasked with delivering complex messages about driving safety to a potentially cynical teenage audience. This could have easily been achieved as multiple exhibits that each focussed on an individual aspect of driving safety but with the strong likelihood of not resonating with its audience. Instead we developed an interactive game that consisted of a large responsive floor projection that a group of visitors could interact with simultaneously. As visitors step onto the floor a tracker appears at their feet with a line leading to an objective at another location. All they have to do is walk to that location without colliding with another visitor's tracker; this notion is very simple. However, various human factors change the game; for example, the faster they move the larger their tracker becomes, making it harder to manoeuvre safely. Certain visitors were given blinkers or 'beer goggles' distorting their view, added to which is the fact that you are trying to do this alongside another five people. All these factors add layers of meaning to the game, as what at first seems a straightforward and simple task very quickly becomes an extremely complicated one, much like the act of driving. Ultimately it is people and their behaviours that shape the content.

Peppered Moth Sculpture at the Manchester Museum Climate Control exhibition.

Adding personality

Caring comes from empathy. If people can associate with a story, person or subject they are far more likely to connect and remember. This can be achieved in many ways. Consider comparing scientific content to our everyday lives, showing ancient artefacts through the eyes of the people who made, owned or used them or even encouraging debate and discussion about more hard-hitting subjects between visitors themselves to have their voices and thoughts form part of the experience.

As experiential designers we must always ensure the experiences we create have strong personalities and these cannot be those of the designers, but truly born out of the subject and its audience.

Once visitors care, genuinely care, they become ambassadors for experiences and subjects, enabling these stories to resonate with wider audiences and at deeper levels. What did our visitor think before? What do they think now? If we set out to change thinking, then the experience worked. As designers creating these experiences we also need to care about achieving this – ultimately, who cares wins.

Peter is Creative Director of MET Studio, an award-winning, international experiential design company.

As visitors step onto the floor a tracker appears at their feet with a line leading to an objective at another location. All they have to do is walk to that location without colliding with another visitor's tracker; this notion is very simple. However, various human factors change the game; for example, the faster they move the larger their tracker becomes, making it harder to manoeuvre safely.

Road Safety Experience, awareness digital floor interactive.

Road Safety Experience, awareness digital floor interactive.

Benchmark Project

The oast with the most

International Garden Photographer of the Year Exhibition — National Trust at Sissinghurst Castle Garden

Curtis McGlinchey outlines the process of how the team at International Garden Photographer of the Year created a bespoke exhibition for a historic oast house, transforming the underused space and helping visitors connect with nature.

Sissinghurst is one of England's most famous gardens with a long and intriguing history. It is a Grade 1 listed property and was gifted to the National Trust in 1967 following the death of its famous previous owner, Vita Sackville-West.

Vita Sackville-West and her husband Harold purchased the property in the early 1930s. The grounds of the current garden were mostly growing vegetables and the majority of the land was committed to agricultural use in the form of orchards and hops. Hops (*Humulus lupulus*) was introduced in England toward the end of the 15th century and first cultivated for brewing in Kent a few decades later. Climate, soil and existing patrons of the craft meant hops became closely associated with the county.

Fast forward a few centuries and drying hops across the county became somewhat of an art form with the appearance of oast houses and round kilns. Many of these can be seen across the Kentish countryside and Sissinghurst's is a fine example.

Utilising underused space

Of course, today the oast house is no longer used for drying hops and instead the need to utilise this space became apparent, particularly during the winter months, when attracting more visitors to the property is key.

International Garden Photographer of the Year (IGPOTY) was therefore approached to see if an exhibition could be held within the old oast house. Because of the age of the building and its listed status, this restricted the typical hanging of picture frames, either by wire or by mirror plate. For the National Trust, if the venue is right, it's really important that we place no restriction on the exhibition. It is never a question of 'if', it is just a question of where and how. Because making the best of an underused space can mean hitting important visitor targets and offering something unique to both regular and new visitors.

We at IGPOTY continue to work closely with Kate Shaw, Programming and Marketing Manager at Sissinghurst, who said: 'We've loved working with Curtis and the IGPOTY team to bring the exhibition to life at Sissinghurst. We host this in an oast house and they responded really well to our challenge of no walls to affix to! They came up with a bespoke display system which suits our space really well and creates a very enjoyable visitor experience. We have found that there continues to be success year on year with IGPOTY, with many visitors making return visits, not just every year but within the same run of the exhibition, some even every week! We found the flexibility of being able to dress the room in our own style as somewhere famed for a garden (the garden is predominately closed in winter) has been key to create a more immersive and tranquil space. We use dried flower displays created by our team and external designers to stand as artwork in their own right.'

Tailor-made

The IGPOTY team therefore took some key measurements and designed a new indoor wooden structure measuring 1.8m high and 1.2m across. The measurements for the height were particularly important as there are low hanging beams throughout the buildings and the average height of a person when the oast was constructed was somewhat shorter than it is today.

The exhibition at Sissinghurst has 19 of these wooden panels, each with padded felt feet to prevent scratching the surface underneath and finished in white. For ease of installation we decided to make detachable foot supports which can be transported separately from the panels themselves and attached on site during installation. In the roundel area, upon consultation with the team at Sissinghurst, we opted for easels to display our biggest framed prints. This created a real centre-piece for the exhibition and worked perfectly running around the circular wall, framed by a beautiful hanging display of dried flowers.

The content of the exhibition includes 28 framed prints on these 19 panels, which cover the main area of the oast house. The roundel with easels contains six of the largest framed prints. The two biggest measure 44 x 32 inches, providing an impactful display upon entry. These are flanked by four smaller images measuring 30 x 24 and 36 x 24 inches.

From a curatorial perspective there were a few important things to bear in mind. We have nine to eleven main categories and photo projects to think about while laying out an exhibition. These categories have to naturally flow from one to the other to create a flowing, logical journey.

Six of the panels are double-sided so this required a little more thought, particularly when hanging a portfolio of six images. For the latest exhibition we chose the following layout upon entry: Trees, Woods & Forests, Beautiful Gardens, Wildflower Landscapes, Wildlife in the Garden, The Bountiful Earth, Portfolios, The Beauty of Plants, Macro Art, Abstract Views, Still Life and Black & White. The winner of Breathing Spaces, a category dedicated to green spaces promoting wellbeing, was chosen as one of the centre pieces in the roundel.

A love of nature

We share many things in common with our clients across the world. Fundamentally we're bound together by a passion for nature and encouraging people from all walks of life to engage with the natural world. In the case of International Garden Photographer of the Year we do this through photography, in a creative way that everyone can be involved with. We find this message resonates with the mission of National Trust properties and we're proud to be working with Sissinghurst to provide this added sense of natural connectivity.

For visitors the exhibition encourages a broadening of understanding toward the natural world and our relationship within it. From reassessing local and familiar places to seeing far-away plants and landscapes for the first time. With the powerful natural and national heritage of National Trust properties our exhibition not only helps bring life and engagement back to buildings of the past, but also delivers on reinforcing deep connections between people and place. After all, properties with long and intriguing pasts also need long and intriguing futures.

Curtis McGlinchey is Communications and General Manager at International Garden Photographer of the Year.

Benchmark Project

The RHS Bird Hide project

Andrew Cochrane and David Uzzell describe how the new way of thinking that the RHS adopted for the Bird Hide project connects threads and scales that normally operate in isolation.

For over two hundred years, The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) has inspired passion and excellence in the science, art and practice of horticulture. As a visitor-facing charity, its objectives include transforming communities through gardening, and helping to positively influence how people see and think about nature. There is a synergy between the four guiding principles which govern the RHS: to inspire, involve, inform and improve – and the goals of interpretation.

Visitors to Wisley

At around 200 acres, Wisley is the flagship garden of the RHS. Adjacent to the M25 motorway and in a densely populated catchment area, RHS Wisley attracts over a million visitors each year. The principal visitor groups are: RHS members (80% of the visitor total); families with young children; and mature people wishing to enjoy plants and wildlife in a quiet and peaceful setting. RHS Garden Wisley aims to appeal to the expert gardener as well as the novice and those who simply enjoy close access to a wide range of flora. One elderly couple we interviewed as part of a formative evaluation study said that they regarded Wisley as an extension of their back garden, and that they didn't come specifically to learn, but if they do that's good. The average duration of a visit to the garden is 3.5 hours and the average group size is 2.2 visitors per group.

Visitor motivation

RHS Wisley has been studying visitor motivation, behaviour and learning outcomes since 2016 and uses an adaptation of Falk's model[1] to classify visitor motivation type into five categories. The following results were derived from responses representing over 4,700 visitor views and are linked to a GPS tracking study that correlates motivation, behaviour with learning outcome and intention to act. Further information about this study will be the subject of future papers.

1. **Explorers:** 39% had a general interest in gardens and gardening and wanted to explore unique aspects of RHS Wisley.

2. **Facilitators:** 17% came to show or meet others at Wisley.

3. **Rechargers:** 27% came to soak up the atmosphere and recharge. They tended to come for more contemplative or restorative type of experiences and often saw the gardens as a refuge from their daily life.

4. **Experience seekers:** 11% came because it's the RHS; they tend to see RHS Wisley as an important destination and satisfaction comes from being able to say '*been there, done that*'.

5. **Hobbyist/learners:** 3% felt a close tie between RHS Wisley and their professional or hobbyist passion. They wanted to explore or learn about a specific aspect of gardens or gardening.

The visitors to the Bird Hide all fall within all these categories.

Investing in Wisley

In 2015, a commitment to invest in capital infrastructure to meet the varying needs of visitors was established and in 2019, the new Welcome Building, Plant Centre and Shop will be opened. The next focus for Wisley will be the creation of the National Centre for Horticultural Science and Learning, opening in late 2020. This will comprise three purpose-built laboratories supporting: diagnostics, molecular research and environmental research; a new herbarium and digitisation suite; two new learning studios with teaching gardens; a new library and archive. This building is designed to house scientists, educationalists, but is aimed at engaging visitors, and gardeners. It will be the home of gardening science for the nation. It is designed to enable visitors to see the work of the RHS scientists and their collections for the first time.

Associated with this structure will be three major demonstration gardens aimed at the public and schools, which will be living translations of how science and horticulture can protect the future of plants, people and the planet.

1. Falk, J.H. 2009. *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience*. New York: Routledge.

Life-sized silhouettes in wood plus binoculars for use.

The Wellbeing Garden will encourage visitors to explore how gardens can provide physical exercise, relaxation and a therapeutic experience. The World Food Garden, using innovative approaches to interpretation and education, will encourage the visitors to grow their own food. Finally, the Wildlife Garden will demonstrate the importance of plant and ecosystem diversity for encouraging wildlife, and the role plants can play in mitigating and adapting to climate change. Inevitably, these will be major interpretive developments in their own right, and the plans for interpreting these are still in the early stages of development. Our work with the Bird Hide was an experimental precursor.

The Bird Hide project

For the Bird Hide project, we adopted a new way of thinking, one that connected threads and scales that normally operate in isolation. For us, a driving challenge was to see if we could link together the small with the gigantic, the individual interpretation panel with broader approaches to how the staff at Wisley do things. We want the visitor to experience things in a joined-up manner. At one end of the scale we have a major capital project, and at the other end we have the Bird Hide.

We established a number of criteria that needed to be met:

1. The research, design and implementation of the project should be undertaken in-house given the time and resources.

2. We are a small team possessing strengths in design and manufacturing which is an invaluable resource for the RHS. In recent years, most of our work has concentrated on directional signage for garden events. This was an opportunity to extend our creativity and skills, and demonstrate our ability to curate high-quality visitor experiences.

3. To be value for money – and less expensive than commissioning an external agency.

4. To inspire other visitor attractions and gardens in the RHS family.

5. To be future-proof. The project needed to integrate into interpretation in forthcoming features, such as the Wellbeing Garden, the World Food Garden and the Wildlife Garden.

An important endpoint to re-formatting ourdesign processes and the interpretation in the Bird Hide was to provoke a change in visitor behaviour so that visitors would connect more with birds and plants and in new ways. It has successfully been demonstrated in zoos in the United States that well-designed interpretation increases attraction and holding power, resulting in visitors more likely to stop and learn.[2]

A quiet corner

Wisley has a number of different areas such as the Trials Field, the Arboretum, the Glasshouse, the fruit collection and orchard, the mixed borders, the Bowes-Lyon rose garden and the alpine meadow. There is some interpretation in each of these areas, principally interpretive panels written over many years by a range of staff. These seek to convey the uniqueness, significance and use of the different plantings and trees.

The Bird Hide, donated to the RHS in 2010, is situated in Howard's Field in one of the quieter corners of Wisley in terms of visitor presence, activities and busyness. It was fitted out with benches behind large glass windows to afford a clear view of the adjacent wooded wetland area that is part of an oxbow lake formed from the River Wey. This area offers abundant shelter and nesting sites and attracts a variety of birds, the most noteworthy being the kingfisher. The Bird Hide formerly housed limited interpretation panels with photos of the more common birds visitors were likely to see. The interpretative approach was very limited and arguably very uninspiring – a presentation of a few facts, such as bird names. Unusually, the Hide comprises two floor levels. The upper floor is most used as it is at garden ground level, positioned opposite a bird feeder.

2. Price, A.M.; Monahan, J.C; Bergren, R. 2018. Can interpretive graphics influence visitor behavior in an exhibit space? *Journal of Interpretation Research* 23 (1), 47–56.

The new development programme provided an opportunity to refurbish the Bird Hide and think about how it might elaborate upon and reinforce the key interpretive themes in the new National Centre for Horticultural Science and Learning Gardens. It also offered a quick win in terms of demonstrating to visitors that things are changing at Wisley, not just the shiny new headline developments but out in the gardens.

A new interpretation

The Bird Hide has been designed as a space for all; the two principal visitor groups are dedicated birdwatchers and families. So far we have not experienced a conflict of interests, and as the Bird Hide is on two floors we have the option of separating groups in the future. The act of walking into the Bird Hide creates an immersive experience – its rigid architecture is juxtaposed with the softer lines of the surrounding heather garden, grasses and trees. The birds here are not shy as humans are seen as food deliverers. We capitalised upon the feeling of spatial transition by employing unexpected colours on the walls, floors and ceiling. It previously gave the impression of being an unloved drab wooden shell. The new colours are: clay greens, contemporary greys and eggshell blues. The experience of being in the Bird Hide is far from passive.

How to make your own bird box.

The interpretation combines a variety of approaches, from interactive installations to exhibits and panels; all were designed to enhance the visitors' learning and pleasure whilst appealing to all ages. We wanted to demonstrate the richness in birdlife that can be found in the garden, and how visitors can encourage this diversity in their own gardens. While identification is not necessarily interpretation, many visitors *do* want to learn how to recognise different types of birds; they experience joy and a sense of achievement from acquiring new skills. For this reason, we produced life-size silhouettes in wood of all the main bird species visitors are likely to see flying overhead. The display 'Look to the sky' replicates scale wooden silhouettes of birds, and illustrates how they are best identified by their differing tails (we are telling tails) and wing span. Here, we provide an unique opportunity to compare the size difference of a variety of birds at the same scale. This is supplemented with a shelf in front of the windows on which there is interpretive text, hand-painted illustrations of the birds and pairs of binoculars (see photo on p.17).

Make your own bird box

Visitors are encouraged to engage with their surroundings in new ways – we want to heighten their awareness. With the 'Make a house a home' installation, we use 3D objects and templates to teach visitors how to make their own bird boxes; we show that different types of boxes attract different types of birds. We highlight what a good bird box should look like and what a deconstructed one looks like. This work complemented the 'Birds behind the scenes' interpretation, which brought together a gallery style display case of replica to-scale bird eggs and constructed bird boxes, with lids that invite you to lift them and reveal handmade nests (by us) with clutches of replica eggs within (see photo to the right). We combined (and learnt) a variety of skills including: screen-printing, illustration, laser cutting, nest-building (some of us are now half-bird!), painting, joinery and graphic design. With such media, we wanted to encourage people to take home ideas regarding what birds want and how to help them, and once at home to think in new ways about the environment.[3]

While one target for the interpretation narrative is the visitor, another audience for the medium rather than the message is other departments within the RHS. This was a chance for us to demonstrate not only the writing, design and manufacturing skills that we have,

3. We are also following the seven principles of: ICOMOS ICIP. 2008. *The ICOMOS Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites*. Available at: http://icip.icomos.org/downloads/ICOMOS_Interpretation_Charter_ENG_04_10_08.pdf

Eggs, nests and boxes.

but also to get other departments at Wisley to think wider about communicating with our visitors. For example, the refresh of the Bird Hide has inspired the horticulturalists to think in new ways about the planting around the Hide which will attract new wildlife. They have enjoyed the challenge. As Mark Tuson (Horticultural Team Leader) wrote:

'The Bird Hide… has now become this great idea of linking in bird-friendly plants, informing visitors of what birds eat in the wild, inspiring others to encourage more wildlife into their gardens, while involving the garden team… We [the garden team] have become so much more aware of plants we should be planting, from pollinators to wildlife-friendly…and we hope that we can create a naturalistic way of ornamental planting throughout.'

By stimulating the visitors, we hoped to inspire their imaginations to new possibilities. It is only when we can imagine another world that we can begin to improve this one. We see interpretation in the Bird Hide as an opportunity not only to interpret the rich wildlife story of Wisley and how wildlife is a crucial part of gardens and gardening, but also to give visitors practical advice as to what they can do to support wildlife in their own gardens. We want to effect a change in behaviour for all.

Evaluations and next steps

We conducted informal front-end evaluations with our visitors, to determine why people visited the Bird Hide. This fed into how we flavoured the interpretation (e.g. less text and a more engaging design). Since the completion of the project, our evaluations have been internally focused on the RHS, e.g., what has the Society learnt from the involvement of the interpretation team? The interpretation in the Bird Hide created a chance for us to encourage visitors to act and think differently with nature. Next, we will undertake summative evaluations to find out what our visitors think of

The display 'Look to the sky' replicates scale wooden silhouettes of birds, and illustrates how they are best identified by their differing tails (we are telling tails) and wing span.

The big reveal.

the new Bird Hide and what lessons we can learn. We are keen to determine how the new Bird Hide influenced our five motivational type categories. For example, did we make it feel like a unique experience for the Explorers? Did Rechargers feel better by being at the new Bird Hide? Have we increased the overall percentage of Hobbyist/Learners at RHS Wisley? The results of this experiment will feed into future interpretation ensuring that our installations, like our birds, nest well together.

Acknowledgments

The lead designers and illustrators on the Bird Hide project were Abi Charge-Thornton and Josh Bailey; Lee Hugill was the lead technician. The project was supported by the rest of the Interpretation Team: Rachel Burgess, Sara Draycott, Kathryn Peel and Sinh Tao. Special thanks also to the Facilities, Curatorial and Science Departments for their help and advice.

Dr Andrew Cochrane is the Interpretation Development Manager for the RHS; David Uzzell is Professor (Emeritus) of Environmental Psychology at the University of Surrey.

Digital Update

LET'S HEAR IT FOR BINAURAL SOUND

Maria Garcia-Abadillo explains how binaural sound is now challenging the traditional role of audio guides.

Even though the first attempts to record three-dimensional (3D) sound date back to the 19th century, it was only recently that this technology started to be implemented in museum galleries. At a time when exhibitions are evolving into immersive experiences, the importance of creating hyper-realistic sound environments is undeniable, as is the use of binaural sound.

What makes the difference

Binaural recording is a sophisticated 3D audio recording method, whose purpose is to pick up the sound as closely as possible to the human ear. To achieve this, binaural recordings require very specific equipment and surrounding conditions.

The way our external ears are shaped, and also the distance between them, determine how humans perceive sounds. Therefore, the microphones used to record binaural sound are built inside human ear replicas attached to a dummy head of an average human size.

This dummy head can 'hear' almost like a human being, that is, it can recognise not only if the sound comes from the right, the left, up or down, but also if it comes from near or from afar. The configuration and characteristics of the space that surrounds the dummy head will also have their impact in the recording. The echo of a voice in an empty room would be stronger than in an excessively furnished one, the same way that a background sound like a bird singing outside an open window would be quieter than if it was in a cage inside the room.

Neumann.com

Packaged Neumann KU100 Dummy Head.

All these conditions are accurately registered by the dummy head, allowing a great deal of possibilities when it comes to creating the setting of a story.

A bit of background

The origins of 3D sound can be traced to an invention by French engineer Clément Ader in 1881: the 'Théatrophone'. Ader developed a telephonic transmission system that allowed sound broadcasting from the stage of the Paris Opera to the World Exhibition, situated more than two kilometres away. Eighty telephone transmitters were arranged across the front stage to create the effect of stereophonic sound, and the visitors of the exhibition could listen to the performances by using two headphones, one for each ear.

It was not until the 1960s, almost a hundred years later, that the dummy head was invented, its first applications in fields as diverse as assessment of noise in traffic, documentation of wildlife sounds or radio drama productions, among others. In 2016, an updated version of this first dummy head microphone, commercialised by the German audio technology giant Neumann, was the first one used to record an exhibition audio guide. It was called the KU100.

Put into (curatorial) practice

Even if the use of dummy heads in the museum context is very recent, there are 3D sound precedents worth mentioning. The three major ones are the result of a collaboration between another German firm, Sennheiser, and the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London.

The first exhibition where 3D sound was incorporated, *David Bowie is* (V&A 2013), was ground-breaking technologically speaking, not only because of Bowie's footage delivered in 3D sound, but also the implementation of 'guidePORT', a location awareness system, built within the audio guides, that allowed these to automatically provide the soundtracks when visitors approached the exhibits. Needless to say, when the aim is to make the experience as immersive as possible, the application of visitor location awareness is fundamental in the audio guide design process. *You Say You Want a Revolution? Records & Rebels 1966–1970* (V&A 2016) and *Pink Floyd: Their Mortal*

> *The way our external ears are shaped, and also the distance between them, determine how humans perceive sounds. Therefore, the microphones used to record binaural sound are built inside human ear replicas attached to a dummy head of an average human size.*

Remains (V&A 2017) are two other examples of the successful combination of 3D sound and location awareness technologies.

Back to the dummy head, the first exhibition to incorporate this technology was the one dedicated to Louis XIV, hosted in 2016 by The Getty Museum. In this case, a San Francisco-based company, Earprint Immersive, designed a 'binaural walk' through the tapestries that belonged to the Sun King's court. They used a Neumann KU100 to record in the Getty's galleries, including pre-recorded sounds of fire, music, dancers, clocks…that were played in the gallery in relation to the visitor's (the dummy head's) location. This technique of recording pre-recorded sounds to achieve a hyper-realistic effect is known as 'worldising'.

Two years later the MET, in collaboration with the UK firm Aurelia Soundworks, used the dummy head again for the audio tour of the exhibition *Visitors to Versailles*, bringing to life the accounts of those who visited the palace (Fig.2). The 'worldising' method was also used to create the atmospheric landscapes that surrounded the stories.

Here to stay?

Despite the promising perspectives of binaural sound, especially in industries like gaming and Virtual Reality (VR), there are still some limitations that need to be addressed. To get the quality audio required with such a sophisticated recording technique, users need to wear a headset. Common daily-use earphones would not achieve the same effect as if the listener was wearing first-rate headphones, expected to be provided by the institution. However, even if equipped with the best headphones on the market, there is still another problem of rather a physical nature: since the morphology of our ears and head vary from one person to the other, this technology is still not 100% accurate.

© Nina Diamond, Managing Editor and Producer at MET's Digital Department.

Dummy Head used for the binaural recording for the Visitors to Versailles *exhibition at the MET (2018).*

Other issues to take into account are visitors' attitudes. Traditional audio guides are still appreciated by many museum regulars, who are used to curator-constructed narratives, and may feel distracted by the addition of sounds and voices coming from, literally, everywhere. There is still a long way to go until this new technology is fully well received by all types of museum audiences.

Lastly, the exhibition content will always dictate what is necessary for its interpretation. In cases like *Visitors to Versailles*, based on direct accounts of people, the audio will undoubtedly be a core part of the exhibition. But there will be other cases where an audio-immersive experience won't be needed to tell the story in a better way, in which case the complexity of binaural sound recordings will become too much of an effort to take in, both for the institutions that would invest in this technology, and for their public. In my opinion, the future of binaural sound in museums is very promising, especially if we think of it as a way to give permanent collections a new interpretative dimension. Outdated audio tours could be replaced by exciting experiences in order to bring to life rarely visited collections before they fall into oblivion.

Maria Garcia-Abadillo a freelance content manager, specialising in the development of digital experiences within the cultural sector.

Debate

Bringing (a little) order to delightfully creative chaos

Kate Martar argues that to some cultural practitioners 'project management' may seem an unnecessary complication. While others may argue that interpretation should be developed purely by experts and creatives, and not sullied with a level of 'managerialism' best left to the corporate world. However, in the development of present-day cultural projects we are often dealing with tightening budgets and timelines, together with an ever more discerning audience who have countless edutainment options competing for their time and attention. It is precisely within this environment that the skills of a cultural project manager can add immense value.

In needing to deliver successfully, whilst squeezing every last penny and making the most of every second, an interpretation project simply cannot afford to be without a focused project manager. The Smithsonian Institute, in analysing sound exhibition development, have recognised that 'constrained resources, responsibility to funders, exhibitions under simultaneous development, and a general move in museums towards formalisation of process and accountability have intensified the emphasis on project management'.

Delivering a project to a desired quality

I must confess, I hold no formal project management qualification. Being married to an engineer who manages large-scale, multi-billion-dollar developments I'm very aware of what 'real' project management looks like…and am more than happy to leave the technical jargon and yards of Gantt charts to the big guys. But at its essence, project management is about delivering a project to a desired quality, on time and on budget, and this applies to the development of a cultural programme in just the same way as is needed when constructing a new skyscraper.

Within the cultural sphere our project management approach should be less about countless trackers and complex methodologies, and more about problem-solving and communicating. The British Council recommends a '5 C's' approach to this softer style of cultural project management, focusing on Clarity, Coordination, Common Sense, Creativity and Communication. Our role is to facilitate the creative process, whilst delivering against the project's objectives, and, essentially, to ensure that end-users, communities and audiences are at the heart of all decision-making.

Developing successful interpretation

Not all that long ago, when it came to exhibition development, the curator's word was gospel, and all others delivered against their direction. The Field Museum in Chicago pioneered (or perhaps more accurately were the first to record themselves using) a new team-style of interpretation development. When using this team approach, we inevitably end up with a more interrogated outcome and visitor-centric product. Less than 50 years later it's hard to imagine developing successful interpretation in any other way.

In such projects we bring together a number of disciplines and specialists: curators, researchers, collections experts, writers, educators, designers, producers…with many other stakeholders as part of the project ecosystem: visitor services, marketing and communications, publishing, revenue and sponsorship, and of course the organisation's leadership and funders. Such multidisciplinary viewpoints, whilst essential to creating a successful outcome, can often bring the challenges of opposing priorities, disjointed communications, complex dynamics and conflicting agendas. Here it is the project manager's role to aid communication, work with the team to broker solutions, and assist in determining which priorities take precedence when compromises are necessary, always using the project's objectives as the guiding light for such decision-making.

Within an interpretation project there can be a dichotomy between the creative nature of the tasks, and the need to plan to deliver the project successfully. Project management purists espouse the Benjamin Franklin adage 'If you fail to plan you are planning to fail' but I prefer Winston Churchill's take on it: 'Those who plan do better than those who do not plan…even though they rarely stick to their plan'. Things inevitably change as we move through the development of an interpretation project, and we need to react, revise, adapt and improve accordingly.

In such projects we bring together a number of disciplines and specialists: curators, researchers, collections experts, writers, educators, designers, producers…with many other stakeholders as part of the project ecosystem: visitor services, marketing and communications, publishing, revenue and sponsorship, and of course the organisation's leadership and funders.

Out of chaos…

A team style of working comes with a degree of chaos, and interpretation projects should feel creatively chaotic at times – we are experimenting, being bold, taking risks, pushing boundaries. Such projects are collaborative, they are intuitive, and we are sometimes taking steps backwards rather than forwards as we fine-tune test, and perfect the outcome. If it feels completely smooth and simple, then we probably aren't doing it right. This is where the project manager adds further value as they navigate the team through this process of uncertainty and change, allowing other members to focus on their important tasks at hand. If goals are dreams with deadlines then the project manager keeps their focus on the deadlines, allowing the team members to think and dream big.

Something magical happens when the various players in team-developed interpretation work in synergy, and the ultimate beneficiary of this is the audience. But we don't get to that magic immediately, teams need to form, storm and norm before they perform. A project manager assists here by setting up the multidisciplinary group effectively with clearly defined functions, roles and responsibilities, structure, processes, lines of communication and mutual objectives.

Within many of the interpretation projects I've had the pleasure to be involved in we have faced additional challenges such as language, time zone, geographical and cultural differences. Planning and management can not only help alleviate the negative impact of these challenges, but in some cases they can be turned into huge opportunities. Varying time zones can become ways to allocate tasks across locations and achieve more within a day than we thought possible, cultural differences become a deeper way to understand the varied audiences we may be speaking to, and multiple languages are an opportunity to really scrutinise and improve the clarity of our communications.

Skills for survival

So what skills should we look for in a cultural project manager? The ability to multitask, see problems before they come along, mitigate risk, remain focused on goals, respond efficiently and positively to change, communicate appropriately and clearly, and manage teams and stakeholders are all essential. A good sense of humour, uncrushable optimism and the ability to gently negotiate with anybody and everybody also don't go amiss! Most importantly, the project manager must understand that they are not there to singularly 'lead' the project they are the facilitator, the supporter, the motivator and the champion of the entire project team.

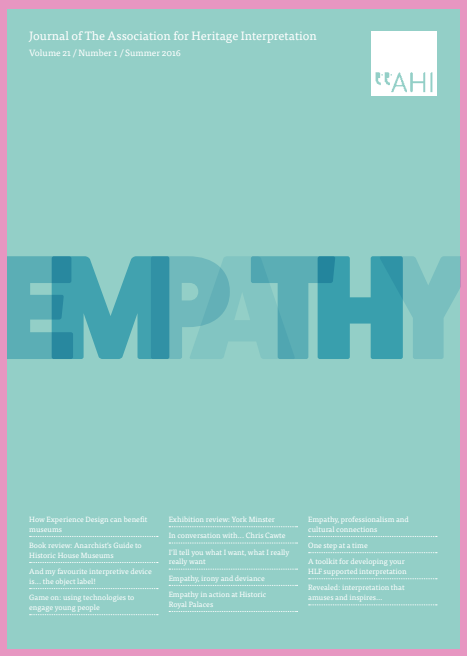
Often the most successful project managers for interpretation projects are multidisciplinary themselves researchers, writers, designers or curators who also show an aptitude for the nuances of bringing in a successful project on time and within budget. These people offer the best of both worlds managers who really 'get' the details of what each specialist in the team brings to the table. The world of cultural project management can be hugely rewarding, and we should be encouraging those who are up for the challenge of this role to flex their skills and explore this path in their careers. Our sector not only needs project managers, we need more of them!

Kate Matar is an arts, culture and heritage project manager.

In conversation with...

ERIC LANGHAM

In his last journal at the helm, we talk to Eric – founder of Barker Langham and outgoing AHI Journal Commissioning Editor – about his approach to the role and his thoughts on the future of the heritage sector.



What was your vision for the AHI Journal *when you took over as editor?*

My aim was to shape a new-look journal, building on the successes of previous years but introducing a new approach to content and a new design. It was important for me that the journal was global and forward-looking, and that it balanced academic and practitioner voices. I wanted to retain a theme for each journal, but felt that themes should be more provocative and emotive than they had been in the past. And I was also keen to introduce regular features offering practical advice, contributions from members, inspirational projects and an occasional irreverent look at the heritage sector.

You've adopted some quite abstract themes for each journal – what was your inspiration for these?

I wanted to choose topics that would cut across our practice – urban, rural, programmes, exhibitions, museums – and would resonate in different ways with our readership. The themes selected were a mixture of ideas that interested me personally and topical concepts. It was important that each theme could be explored from different perspectives so that it could help to inform and improve our practice.

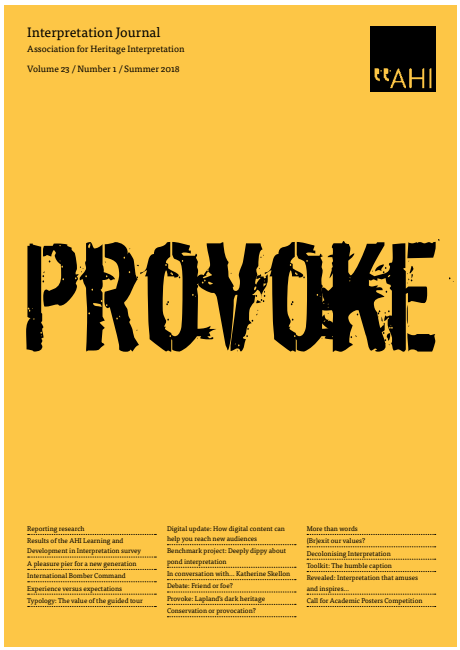
Why was it so key for you to introduce a range of voices from outside the heritage sector?

There are so many parallels between the work of interpreters and those of other disciplines – like writers, film-makers, psychologists, artists, educators – and all these roles have so many skills and so much knowledge that is directly applicable to our practice. As well as including perspectives from outside the profession, I have always been keen to develop our practice by working with and observing curators, interpreters, designers and audiences from all over the world, and I have tried to bring this global outlook to the journal.

What's the most interesting thing you've learned during your time as editor?

I've been really impressed by people's willingness to contribute to the journal and share their knowledge and expertise – it's a real credit to our industry. Learning from our peers is so important and I think the journal has embodied that. I think the interview with film director Peter Webber [1] was very special. He talked about re-creating authentic historical scenes and atmosphere in his films, and

1. Volume 21-2 Winter 2016



his passion for historical detail, alongside forging those emotional links with his audiences, really resonated with me as an interpreter. The process of creating films is one industry that interpreters should be looking closely at.

What are the key challenges facing the heritage sector in the next 10 years?

The world is changing so quickly, and technology, media and communication are transforming the way we live, work and interact. The heritage sector needs to be agile in order to respond to these changes and remain relevant.

> *I wanted to retain a theme for each journal, but felt that themes should be more provocative and emotive than they had been in the past.*

Broadening participation is also essential. There has been a growing movement towards decolonising museums and heritage over recent decades, and towards increasing diversity within the industry – but this needs to improve and increase. With this, sector pay needs to be higher and more equitable. And culture and heritage must be more of a priority for local and national leaders.

What are your aspirations for the heritage sector?

I think, in the future, the social experience of visitors will become more and more important. Social motivations are an increasingly important driver for audiences, and we need to respond by managing our sites and institutions to create more participatory, conversational and social experiences. Interpreters will need to look beyond traditional exhibitions to events, programmes and festivals to deliver key messages and strategic aims. The heritage industry has such potential to be a redemptive force: acting as a catalyst for economic growth and helping to bind communities, combat loneliness and offer a space for debate and activism in an increasingly challenging world.

Rachel Teskey is a writer and interpretation consultant in the cultural heritage sector.

Risk

Take a chance on me

Elizabeth Newbery enjoys writing and producing family-based interpretation. Here, she makes a plea for taking risks on new young illustrators and designers.

We live in an increasingly visual, image-based society: the digital age has bought with it a growing expectation of pictorial instructions, signs, symbols, and images, whether moving or static, seem to support most forms of information and entertainment.

As for heritage and environmental sites, good illustration is a gift: it makes complex ideas easy to understand, provokes emotional reactions and makes us think. With the ever increasing desire to attract and engage new audiences – especially elusive young people – perhaps there is a need to take risks with young blood to grab attention and tap into the visual interest and humour of the moment.

Sophie's illustrations bring humour to the serious message of safety near water in this booklet published by the Canal & River Trust. To date, over 500,000 have been distributed to schools and groups.

> *With the ever increasing desire to attract and engage new audiences – especially elusive young people – perhaps there is a need to take risks with young blood to grab attention and tap into the visual interest and humour of the moment.*

Case study 1

Oxford University Press (OUP) has a custom of inviting newly graduated illustrators into the children's books department. Sophie Foster was one such graduate who was invited but then politely rejected for any work there. But her finely detailed illustrations were precisely what I was looking for where fun, accurate historical figures are surprisingly rare. Since then, Sophie's work has graced many resources particularly for the Canal & River Trust and The Postal Museum.

Sophie explains...

'I was thrilled to be invited to OUP to show my portfolio. During my third year of uni we went on a professional practice trip to New York where we spent a week showing our work to publishers and agencies, so I felt confident that my portfolio was of a good standard and I was used to talking through it. Nothing came of either visit but it did lead to Elizabeth seeing my work and we had a very exciting meeting in a coffee shop in Bath, where I was offered the commission to illustrate a children's guide to the *Mary Rose* in Portsmouth. It was exactly the kind of work I hoped to be doing once graduating. Looking back, my work was still a bit rough around the edges but it gave me great confidence that someone had selected me for a real live commission – and with a realistic budget!

'Sophie's work immediately caught my eye because of the engaging way she captures historical people, objects and scenes for children. Her playful drawing style works perfectly to bring The Postal Museum resources, activities and marketing materials to life.' Sally Sculthorpe, The Postal Museum.

Working as part of a team with an author and designer was a new experience for me and since then has become my preferred way to work – having the support and guidance of a tight group to bounce ideas around is really useful. I remember it was more work than I expected and I struggled to paint some of the fine details – I worked a bit too small so ended up having to paint lots of features at a very small scale! My main memory is just really enjoying it and feeling very grateful for a break. Elizabeth and I have worked together for 10 years now and her support has been a key factor in my being able to build a career as a freelance illustrator.'

Case study 2

The Gloucester Trow is a wooden trading boat designed to survive shifting sandbanks, rocky shallows and the unpredictable currents of the River Severn. In 2017, a new exhibition was installed in the National Waterways Museum, Gloucester, which included a full-size recreation of a Gloucester trow, constructed entirely of rope. The only label was a magnificent one-liner 'Designed by the River' but it required visitors to know about the river in order to make sense of it.

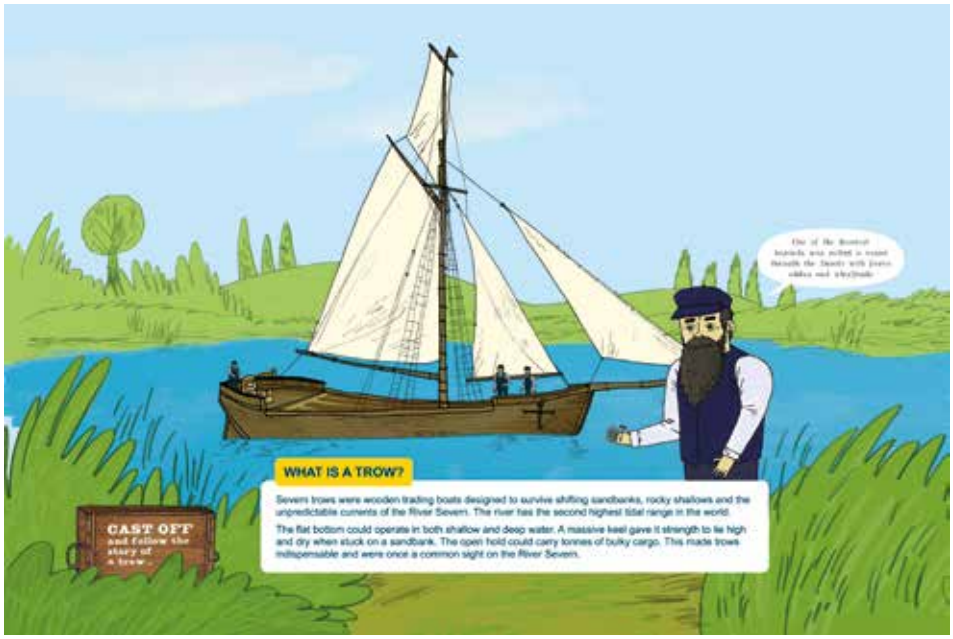
Helen Evans, Education Officer at the Canal & River Trust, commissioned a simple table top panel with objects for handling in drawers underneath to help put 'Designed by the River' in context. Recently graduated James Hunter undertook the challenge to design and illustrate the panel on a very limited budget.

The Gloucester Trow recreated in rope.

James reflects...

'After graduating from Falmouth with an illustration degree, I struggled for a while to work out in which direction I wanted to take my career. For a while, I tried to build up a client base for freelance illustration, but found it incredibly hard to know where to start, or where to find contacts. After working in a lovely village pub for a year, I managed to get a job at OUP as a junior designer. Previous work running a (very) small web design company during my studies helped me with the design side. But my knowledge of illustration was what got me the job, as I would work with hundreds of illustrators from around the world while working in the Primary Education Department for three and a half years.

I'd always harboured the dream of going freelance one day, and a trip to the Bologna Book Fair really gave me the kick to take the plunge – the amount of amazing work out there was incredibly inspiring. Having now gained a huge amount of experience working across design in children's publishing, I had much more confidence in taking on varied jobs – and managed to get a semi-regular job working in corporate strategy as a 'live' illustrator, as well as a few branding jobs, to keep me going.



'The information on the table is easy to read so no prior knowledge is needed. Personally, I enjoy the fact that about 80% of our visitors interact with it. Even adults like to have a bit of a play.' Elaine Clay-Thompson, front of house staff, National Waterways Museum, Gloucester.

My real break – and the moment when I realised that maybe I could make the freelance dream work – was when a mutual contact at OUP put me in touch with Elizabeth as she needed an illustrator for a particular job. The project, the Gloucester Trow, was my first big illustration assignment. It was a challenge as it was a very large artwork, which needed to tell a story of the trow 'from birth to death' alongside an exhibit – not the kind of thing I had much experience in! But I was able to draw on my experience working with graphic novels to create the image in a format that led the viewer around the table-top to read the artwork as a you would read a comic.'

'After graduating from Falmouth with an illustration degree, I struggled for a while to work out in which direction I wanted to take my career. For a while, I tried to build up a client base for freelance illustration, but found it incredibly hard to know where to start, or where to find contacts.

'Looking back now, this was the project that got my freelance career off to a really positive start, and having faith in me to do the project was so important. I'm sure it was a bit of a challenge to choose a designer with no direct experience in the field of museum interpretation, but having someone to work alongside was amazing and I learned so much, very, very quickly!'

Where to go to find bright new talent?

The UK has some of best art schools in the world and their end-of-year shows display fresh ways of looking at familiar subjects, great innovation and new techniques. All art schools have end-of-year shows, usually in June. Some of the best are:

- University of the Arts London
- Bournemouth University
- Brighton University
- University of Edinburgh
- Falmouth University
- Kingston University
- University of Leeds
- Loughborough University
- University of South Wales
- Swansea College of Art
- University of the West of England Bristol

Elizabeth Newbery newberyandengland.com; Sophie Foster sophiefoster.co.uk; James Hunter jameswhunterdesign@gmail.com

Risk

A risky journey

Peter Crane describes the difficult journey to the Snow Roads Scenic Route project, encountering multiple partners, community buy-in, artists, new young architects and a magnificent landscape along the way.

Creating the Snow Roads Scenic Route has taken eight years and has been the most involving, challenging and rewarding project I've ever worked on. It's had everything from sleepless nights, public fall outs, bursting budgets and national awards and now at last, brilliant public and private partner support.

The Watchers.

A slow start

In October 2010, Scottish Government expanded the Cairngorms National Park to include 700 sq km of Highland Perthshire. My first six months of change were taken up with moving one of the old granite entry point markers, installing four new ones and supporting the refurbishing of a ranger base and visitor centre at the new southern entrance at Blair Atholl.

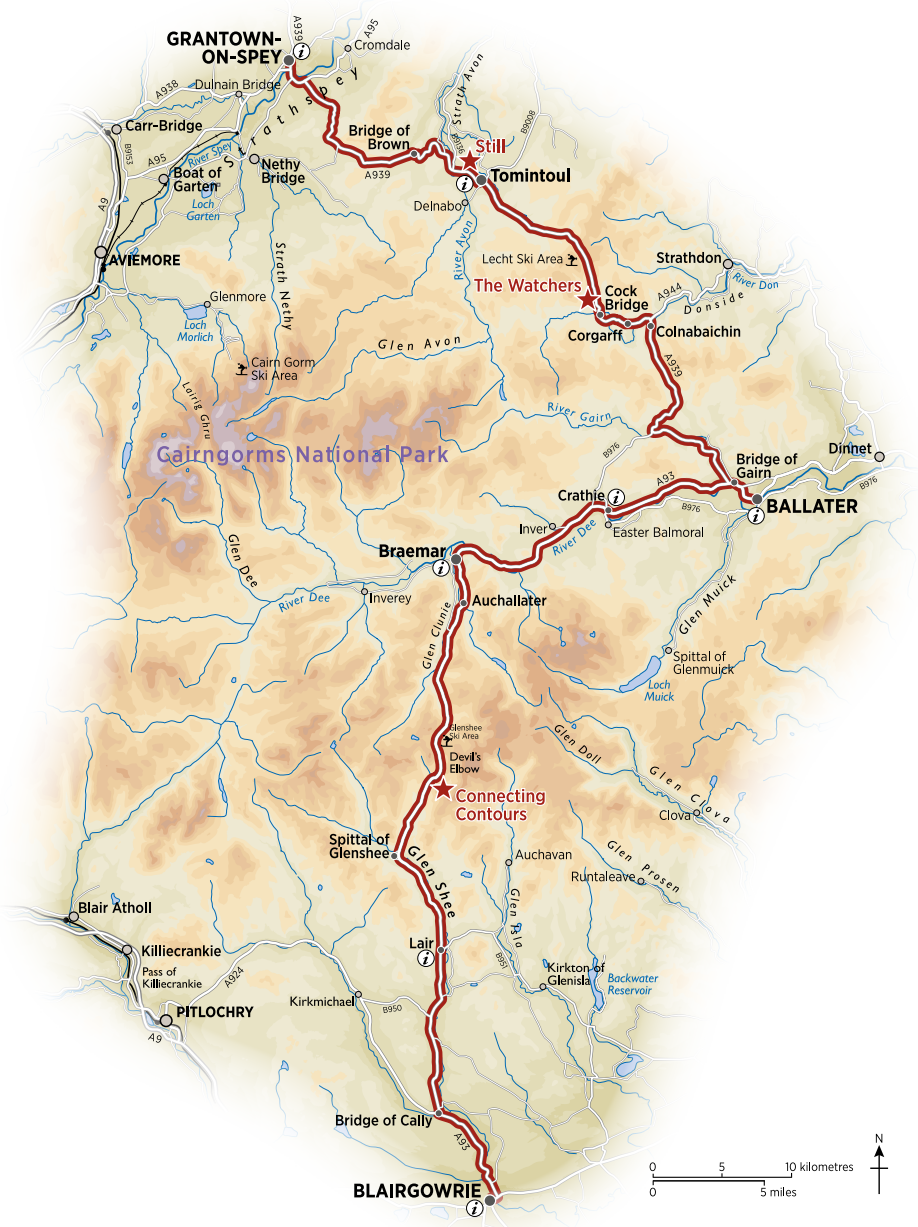
Just as things were settling in the spring of 2011, I was invited to Glenshee by a local tourism group to look at the new entrance road where we clearly had two viewpoint lay-bys that weren't fit for a National Park. This coincided with the Tomintoul community looking at their visitor offering that also included two unwelcoming viewpoints at either end of the village. If that wasn't enough, between the two areas was an artistic standing stone installation that had seen better days.

The next two years were a struggle to make progress but I managed to secure funding to redesign the southern entrance to Tomintoul. The plantation trees were felled and replanted with native woodland, the path to the village rebuilt, the lay-by landscaped and new creative village entrance signs installed. One down, four to go.

The Norway model

Then in May 2013, Scottish Government announced a three-year scenic routes project to trial routes similar to those developed in Norway. The Norwegian Scenic Routes initiative sets out to combine nature, architecture and design into something greater than the sum of its parts. Their 18 routes included resting areas, parking lots and viewpoints with cleared vegetation to make already picturesque roads the best drives in Norway. Several renowned Norwegian architects and designers contributed to their project. In Scotland the trial was initiated to include new architectural talent. A working group of 10 public bodies including both Scottish National Parks was formed to drive the project forward.

The four run-down viewpoints I was still working on were on the A939 and A93 between Grantown-on-Spey and Blairgowrie. This 90 mile journey links the three other highland villages of Tomintioul, Ballater and Braemar and includes the highest public road in Britain at Glenshee Ski Centre, and the first to close with snow – the Cockbridge to Tomintoul section. So the 'Snow Roads' were born. That first summer two of the Scottish Government team drove the route



The Scenic Route.

with me and clearly saw the potential that this route (with everything from Munro mountain climbing to castles, royalty and whisky as well as five highland villages) would be an excellent trial for the Scenic Routes project.

A complicated route

The Government project agreed to take forward new scenic route designs for three of the four viewpoints. The next stage was to get land owner agreement because all three sites were in private ownership. Each site was also alongside the roads of three different local authorities so their input was needed as was that of the three local communities and tourism businesses. This rapidly became not one but three intricate, integrated and challenging projects.

While I was trying to engage local and land-owner support, the Government team were promoting national competitions open to newly qualified architects and landscape architects to design the viewpoints. The national competitions attracted 20 to 30 entrants for each of the three sites. I was part of the team that narrowed these down to four finalists for each site but the winning designs were chosen by a national team of judges that included only one of our local board members in the group of seven. The three winning teams comprised five newly qualified architects.

My first post-competition task was to reassure myself and colleagues that the winning entries: 'Connecting Contours', 'The Watchers' and 'Still' could deliver, and then convince the land owners and local communities. I was fortunate on two counts; the winning designs looked stunning and I was able to appoint Ian White Associates, Landscape Architects (IWA) to support the competition winners in taking the designs to delivery. I had worked with Nick Bowen of IWA on our granite entry marker project and was confident that together we could deliver.

Testing times

Nevertheless, the next two years presented one challenge after another. We entered into a legal agreement with each of the three landowners to install and maintain the upgraded sites. One simple sentence, but it took over six months of discussion between us, each land-owner and our respective solicitors to reach agreement. During those discussions we were also turning designs into installations and applying for planning consent.

The initial site budgets were £50,000 to deliver each design but it soon became clear that unique designs in a remote 'arctic' landscape had to be tested to withstand both high winds and extreme temperatures: not cheap! Thankfully Scottish Government increased the budget when tenders clearly demonstrated the need.

Nick Bowen, lead landscape architect with Ian White Associates, took the designs, with the winning architects (John Kennedy – The Watchers, Daniel Smith and Philip Zoechbauer – Connecting Contours, and Angus Ritchie and Daniel Tyler – Still) from concept, to trial and finally installation.

Installation and site improvement was undertaken by Hunter Construction, Aberdeen. Specialist sculptural and architectural metalwork company Chris Brammall Ltd was appointed to build two of the installations and there's no doubt that the designs, timescale, landscape and budget tested their mantra to the full: 'every client is treated as an individual and every project as a unique opportunity

Connecting Contours.

> *While I was trying to engage local and land-owner support, the Government team were promoting national competitions open to newly qualified architects and landscape architects to design the viewpoints. The national competitions attracted 20 to 30 entrants for each of the three sites.*

to allow the client's aspirations to be achieved while creating a true sense of place.

Nearly there

As I wrote at the start, it was the most involving and challenging project I've ever worked on – but rewarding? The last of the three installations was finally completed in March 2017 just as our private sector visitor collective, the Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP), secured two-year funding from Scottish Enterprise Tourism Development Fund to make the Snow Roads an authentic visitor experience. We now had a public-private partnership to make the Snow Roads a must-do scenic route.

There was consensus that we all wanted to make the Snow Roads 'slow roads', i.e. a route that is a visitor experience not simply a long drive, and the new strapline '90 miles of…' encouraged us to share with visitors the remarkable opportunities and experience that could be enjoyed along the route. Over the next 18 months the team collected the stories of the Eastern Cairngorms and worked on the best way to share these with visitors in this wild landscape via an app that, once loaded, requires only a GPS signal.

While all this was happening brown tourist signs were installed along the route, colleague Jacquie Barbour developed the on-site interpretation and without fuss the original tourism contacts in Glenshee got together and landscaped the remaining fifth layby, seeding the bare land and installing picnic tables.

We're there!

The route really started to gain national recognition in November 2017. At a sunrise I was standing on 'Still' installation north of Tomintoul being interviewed for BBC Countryfile. At 11.00 am I was with Jen Green of CBP delivering a joint presentation on Snow Roads at Moray Speyside Tourism conference. By 7.00 pm I was in Edinburgh collecting two Scottish Government Planning Awards for Snow Roads, the second one being the 'people's choice' public vote for the best planning project in Scotland that year. If that wasn't enough, this autumn CBP launched the Snow Roads website, app and CD and was awarded the Aberdeen City and Shire 2018 Tourism Award for innovation in tourism.

During the route development others clearly saw the amazing potential in this part of the Cairngorms to better link people with nature and improve the visitor experience. National Trust Scotland worked to designate Mar Lodge Estate a National Nature Reserve, the Victorian Fife Arms Hotel in Braemar was refurbished into a must-do cultural and art experience, a new Braemar Highland Games visitor centre was built, the old station visitor centre at Ballater was rebuilt following fire and in December Tomintoul and Glenlivet were designated the most northerly Dark Skies area in world.

New challenges

We still face challenges: safety concerns that people are encouraged to drive in dangerous snowy conditions, that they will race the route, that it will simply become too busy. We may encounter such occurrences but we are in a really good place to influence positive behaviour with both public and private partners working together and committed to making the Snow Roads hugely enjoyable roads.

Pete Crane is Head of Visitor Services for Cairngorms National Park Authority, managing a team of ten that works with partners to make a visit to Britain's largest National Park an outstanding experience.

Risk

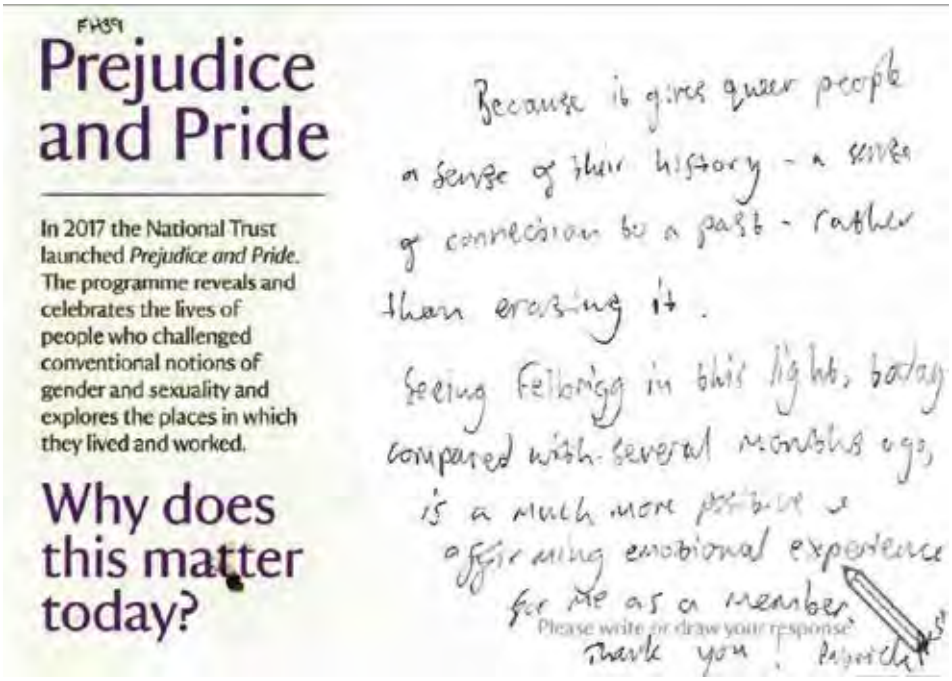
Loud and proud at the National Trust

Tate Greenhalgh describes how in 2017 the National Trust undertook a programme of interpretation marking fifty years since the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality.

Over a year, more than 350,000 people visited LGBTQ+ exhibitions and events at National Trust sites. All five million National Trust members received LGBTQ+ histories in the member magazine. A podcast spotlighting over 2,000 years of queer heritage was downloaded 17,000 times. More than 300 National Trust staff and volunteers of all ages attended 17 Pride festivals in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, distributing tens of thousands of rainbow oak leaf stickers and badges.

Sense and sexuality

Both the subject matter and national coordination were departures from normal practice for the Trust. With programming devolved to individual properties, our interpretation rarely receives national recognition. It is unusual for a charity of our size to remain so coy about its value. By providing coordination around a nationally resonant theme, we aimed to amplify our voice, demonstrating the relevance National Trust places can have in today's society.



Felbrigg: Visitor comment from Felbrigg, Norfolk, during Prejudice and Pride.

Although a significant cohort of culture and heritage organisations, such as the British Museum and Historic England, had related programmes planned, we had to acknowledge some inherent risk in choosing the 50th anniversary of the passing of the Sexual Offenses Act 1967. Despite being officially legitimised fifty years ago, same-sex love and desire remain stigmatised. The ingrained perception that they are somehow wrong and shameful lingers. In 2007, when the Trust opened its places to civil partnership ceremonies for same-sex couples, negative press resulted in membership resignations.

Ten years on, sexuality remained absent from interpretation at nearly all National Trust sites, not because it had no role in their histories, but because it was one of a number of subjects we assumed, rightly or wrongly, audiences in pursuit of a 'nice day out' would still find 'difficult' and 'unwelcome'. How would the membership on whom we depend respond in 2017?

No place for politics?

Early audience research suggested some people felt this subject matter went beyond the appropriate remit of the organisation. A frequent criticism levelled at the National Trust is that we are becoming too political. Opponents of Prejudice and Pride used this argument. This confuses me. No history is untainted by politics. The role of historians and interpreters is to help the public navigate biases, contradictions and absences in

Kingston Lacy: 'Exile' exhibition at Kingston Lacy, Dorset. Each rope represents a man hung for homosexuality in the lifetime of exiled owner William John Bankes (1786–1855).

evidence. In the case of LGBTQ+ histories, we typically fail to do this by ignoring them. Choosing which histories to leave out is as political as choosing which to include. Those critics who complain that inclusion of LGBTQ+ histories is political aren't advocating for neutrality.

Coming from a science background and stepping through the looking glass into the world of cultural heritage interpretation, I'm often left feeling that all of my carefully sealed samples have been tampered with; contaminated by emotion, prejudice and politics. Scientific enquiry constantly questions what has been concluded before. By shaking our knowledge structures, we test they are sound. But the knowledge structures of cultural heritage are inextricably bound up with identity. We are invested in them, making questioning uncomfortable for the mainstream populace.

By not questioning the prevalent narratives, historians and interpreters risk complicity in marginalisation. This brings us to the National Trust's core purpose, not simply 'to look after special places forever', but to do so 'for everyone'. How can we claim to do this if our practice denies some people's heritage?

Therefore, we faced risk whether we chose to interpret LGBTQ+ heritage or not. But our charitable purpose gave us a clear steer.

In deciding to go ahead with Prejudice and Pride, upsetting mainstream identity politics wasn't our only risk. Because we lacked experience interpreting this still stigmatised subject, there was a real risk insensitive handling could harm LGBTQ+ communities. How could we build understanding and tolerance of difference without causing further alienation?

Authenticity and ambiguity

In developing our interpretation, we had to acknowledge where we lacked expertise and seek advice and support through partnerships.

The same-sex desire felt by some of the people from our properties' histories are well known, such as Virgina Woolf at Monk's House. Others, such as William John Bankes at Kingston Lacy, were documented in criminal records prior to 1967. The law against homosexual acts, which in Bankes' time carried the death penalty, made it inevitable that many queer people hid their sexualities, leaving little historical record. References to non-heteronormative feelings were often coded and ambiguous. Evidence therefore poses another hazard for interpretation and cause for objection by opponents. Without definitive evidence, are we speculating unethically about sexuality? Where evidence is available, but was deliberately hidden in the individual's lifetime, is it ethical to 'out' them retrospectively?

To navigate the ethics and ambiguities, we formed a partnership with the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) at the University of Leicester. Academic rigour didn't protect us from criticism, but gave us confidence in our decisions and defence. The most controversial piece of interpretation was a short film produced with RCMG colleagues for Felbrigg Hall, Norfolk. In the film, *The Unfinished Portrait*, we explored little-known aspects of the life of Robert Wyndham Ketton-Cremer, including poetry, biographies of queer subjects and his decision to leave Felbrigg to the National Trust in 1969. Although Ketton-Cremer was discreet about his homosexuality, first-hand accounts and written sources already in the public realm demonstrated it wasn't entirely secret. Therefore we had no

Magazine: National Trust magazine cover Spring 2017 featuring Henry Paget (1875–1905), 'the dancing Marquess' of Plas Newydd, Anglesey. Paget's short-lived marriage and flamboyant theatrical lifestyle caused many to assume he had same-sex relationships, although there is no evidence.

reason to couch his sexuality as uncertain in our interpretation. Initial accusations of 'outing' didn't stand, although objections remained about openly discussing what Ketton-Cremer kept private during his lifetime.

Interpretation or obfuscation?

The principal aim of interpretation is to help the public make sense of heritage. However, in the case of sexuality, 'interpretation' has tended to obfuscate with vague language and innuendo. For example, according to The Vyne's guidebook, former owner John Chute 'was never to marry, but surrounded himself with younger men'. Finding the language and confidence to discuss sexuality clearly and openly is important even when 'facts' are uncertain. We seek to equip visitors to engage more critically with heritage; to explore and form their own understandings. However, opening out from binary definitions of gender and sexuality can become confusingly mercurial.

With guidance from RCMG colleagues, we opted to use the acronym LGBTQ+ to encompass a well-established range of sexualities and gender identities. But these modern descriptors still prove problematic in heritage contexts. As the Q, for queer, shakes off its former stigma, it offers an increasingly popular and helpful phrase for interpreting historical sexuality and gender identity, simply denoting variance from the societal norm as opposed to any definitive label.

Artists' perspectives

Collaboration with artists proved a reliable means of offering creative alternative routes into narratives. Through Trust New Art, a programme of contemporary arts inspired by National Trust places, film-makers Simona Piantieri and Michele D'Acosta were selected as artists-in-residence for Prejudice and Pride. At Wightwick Manor, their film was inspired by parallels between their own experiences and those of Wightwick's former Pre-Raphaelite residents whose art exploring the meaning of same-sex love was celebrated, but who were punished for their sexuality. As Piantieri put it: 'It is important to acknowledge the huge contributions that LGBTQ artists have made throughout history and the impact they have had on people's lives. As an artist myself, I cannot separate my private life from my work because my sexuality is part of who I am; and this will necessarily reflect in my art. So how can one study someone's artistic contribution without knowing where he/she comes from?'

Legacy

To ensure meaningful improvement in our interpretive practice, we needed to drive cultural change at the heart of the National Trust. We joined Stonewall's *Diversity Champions* scheme to ensure our practice as an employer was appropriate, and we established a staff and volunteer LGBTQ+ forum. We are embedding learning from Prejudice and Pride to enable ongoing interpretation of diverse sexualities beyond 2017.

The programme has a clear legacy at key properties. Kingston Lacy is an example of a place that cannot be understood without knowledge of the creator's sexuality. To avoid prosecution after twice being caught engaged in 'indecent acts', William John Bankes fled to Europe. He sent works of art and furnishings home to his sister with detailed instructions on how to arrange them in the house. By correspondence alone, he gradually curated a masterpiece that he may never have seen. Brave

London Pride: National Trust staff and volunteers at Pride London 2017.

installations in 2017 addressed this for the first time. Exile drew parallels between Bankes and experiences of modern people forced to leave their homes due to homophobic prejudice. Audience research demonstrated a profound impact on visitors, with emotional expressions of support and some attitudinal change, dispelling any uncertainty among National Trust employees and volunteers that this heritage belongs firmly in our interpretation.

The National Trust did not come through 2017 unscathed. We received bruising press criticism, social media trolling and membership resignations. Our assessment of the risks of Prejudice and Pride was accurate, for the most part enabling effective mitigation. Less publically, but more potently, evaluation of the programme demonstrated tremendous benefit to people who previously felt excluded and membership grew overall. We are doing justice to our charitable purpose. As one visitor put it: 'I feel welcome here now.'

Tate Greenhalgh is National Interpretation Specialist at the National Trust.

Risk

Really risky interpretation

Hassan Asif brings a whole new meaning to 'risk in interpretation' in describing the ideological and legal issues that Pakistani craftsmen face in making and selling forgeries of Buddhist artefacts.

Taxila: a place in between

Taxila city is one of the oldest cities in present-day Pakistan. It was once part of the Gandhara civilisation spreading from the River Indus in the east to the Bamiyan valley in the west. The story of Taxila is one of constant conquest by numerous empires and a perpetual amalgamation of the old with new incoming alien influences. The way the city has been conquered by the Achaemenid Empire, the Mauryan Empire, the Indo-Greeks and eventually razed by the Hephthalites is testament to its place as an important city centre lying on ancient trade routes. Hence, it has always been a city that has persistently been on the move, avoiding any hint of stagnation. But interestingly enough, it is a city that also refuses to let go of its multiple conquests and the various personalities that come into play with those pasts. Taxila's present day importance is reinforced by it being listed as one of the six UNESCO World Heritage sites in Pakistan.

John Hill

Buddha visualized in the Bodhisattva stage before attaining Nirvana made by a local craftsman in Taxila.

The notice reads: BEWARE FAKE SCULPTURES AND COINS ARE SOLD IN PLENTY AROUND HERE.

A tourist destination

A typical visit to Taxila includes tours of the ancient Buddhist sites around the city and the Taxila Museum, an archaeological museum containing about 30,000 Gandharan Buddhist stone artefacts dating back to 1BCE and which also attracts diplomatic delegations, especially from East Asia.

During visits, one will also come across salesmen approaching unwary tourists and speaking in hushed tones trying to sell replicas of the Buddhist artefacts that are on display in the Museum. Pulling out these replicas from under their shalwar kameez makes one wonder about the depth of their pockets! However, for the informed visitor, a mere inquiry into the cost of these items reveals such low prices so that they cannot be anything but forgeries. A deeper inquiry reveals that these Buddhist replicas are made by local Taxila craftsmen.

Undercover tactics

Making and selling these forgeries is an especially risky business both ideologically and legally. First, the majority of people living in Taxila are Muslims. Various traditions within Islam consider anthropomorphic or zoomorphic art as being prohibited or Haraam (the religious term used in vernacular Muslim circles meaning anything forbidden under the edicts of the Islamic faith). There are various narrations from the Islamic Prophet Muhammad's life that Muslims interpret as negative sanctions on art depicting human or animal figures (Elias 2012). Hence, these salesmen try to be as discreet as possible when selling replicas in order to not attract any undue attention.

Second, legal constraints in Pakistan such as the Section 24 of the Antiquity Act 1975 which reads, 'penalty for counterfeiting etc., of antiquity: (1) whoever counterfeits, or commits forgery in respect

Hassan Asif

The feet of the Buddha remain after vandalisation at the Dharmarajika monastery, Taxila.

of any antiquity with intent to commit fraud…shall be punished with a sentence for a term which may extend to six months or with fine, or with both' present a significant risk to these artisans and their salesmen.

With these kinds of ideological and legal constraints in place, Taxila is hardly a place conducive to the selling of Gandharan Buddhist replicas. So why do these salesmen try to risk selling these items at all? And how do they navigate the complicated ideological and legal terrain?

After much asking around during a visit to Taxila in the summer of 2015, I was able to gain access to a few craftsmen who are making these sculptures for an ethnographic project and encountered the various ways in which they 'interpret' the Buddhist sculptures. Operating in the ideologically adverse milieu of Muslim-majority Taxila with a significant risk to themselves, these artisans negotiate their inner and outer lives in a fascinating manner. For instance, one of the artisans said that the Buddha is even mentioned in the Quran (the Islamic Holy text) while alluding to an elusive prophet by the name of Dhul-Kifl. This particular craftsman is religious and a practising Muslim and is respected in his artist networks. However, the same artist, after some consternation, added that Buddhist and similar art is forbidden according to Islam.

Death threats

This paradoxical interpretation of Buddhist heritage in Taxila invites significant personal risk. Many of these artisans have received death threats from the local religious conservatives but they continue making and selling the replicas. In addition, they also sell through intricate smuggling networks to more lucrative markets in the Far East and elsewhere abroad.

The continuation of this craft is also a matter of another particular risky interpretation of this heritage in which artisans claim that the trade is passed down the family through generations and hence needs to be continued and protected. According to these artisans the craft of making Buddhist sculptures was 'revived' during the British colonial period and this is when the forefathers of the current generation of artisans learnt their craft. The speculation of one's forefathers being the ones who revived this trade after the fall of the Gandhara civilisation is not looked upon favourably by Muslims and adds another layer of risk to one's familial circles and can displace their social status as pious Muslims.

The risk between economy and heritage

According to the craftsmen, financial profit is another important concern: they are able to make significant profits if their replicas are successfully passed off as authentic outside the country. At other times they have to make do with the meagre amounts earned through their discreet salesmen at the heritage sites. When the replica of the Buddhist artefact leaves the Muslim stone sculptor's workshop, the artefact is also taking up multiple 'interpretations' involving risk: for the actual buyer of 'antiques' the artefact is called [pr 'presented as'] an antique. But for the police or legal authorities, and for a Muslim who subscribes to the notion that anthropomorphic art is forbidden in Islam, the Buddhist sculpture is termed a 'replica' to minimise the risk run by the craftsman.

Fortuitous preservation?

Despite the legal and ideological constraints, this clandestine market of making Buddhist sculpture replicas thrives in Taxila. As an unintended consequence, this practice also preserves the ancient practice of making these Buddhist sculptures in a country where one of the world's largest stone carvings of the Buddha were dynamited by the Pakistani Taliban in 2007. Preserving this trade or practice of making Buddhist sculptures in Taxila can be looked at as an intertwining of multiple yet conflicting interpretations of this heritage.

It is important to mention that federal and provincial bodies in charge of heritage preservation such as the Punjab Small Industries Corporation (PSIC) avoid indulging in and discussing the anthropomorphic aspect of Gandharan art. PSIC is willing to condone Gandharan art that is not anthropomorphic such as household items made by these artisans. If Taxila were an active Buddhist site and if these artefacts and replicas were used for ritual purposes, the story might be different in terms of interpreting this craft. But since it is not, the risky interpretations that these artisans develop to protect this craft put their social status and economic wellbeing at the mercy of an underground market. For these artisans the replica needs to reach any buyer at all costs, Buddhist or non-Buddhist – no matter the level of risk involved.

Hassan Asif is a heritage management professional based in Pakistan. He has previously worked for UNESCO Pakistan, managing projects in Taxila, Pakistan.

References:

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INTERPRETATION TOOLKIT

Concept by Eric Langham, illustrations by Olivia Boutrou.

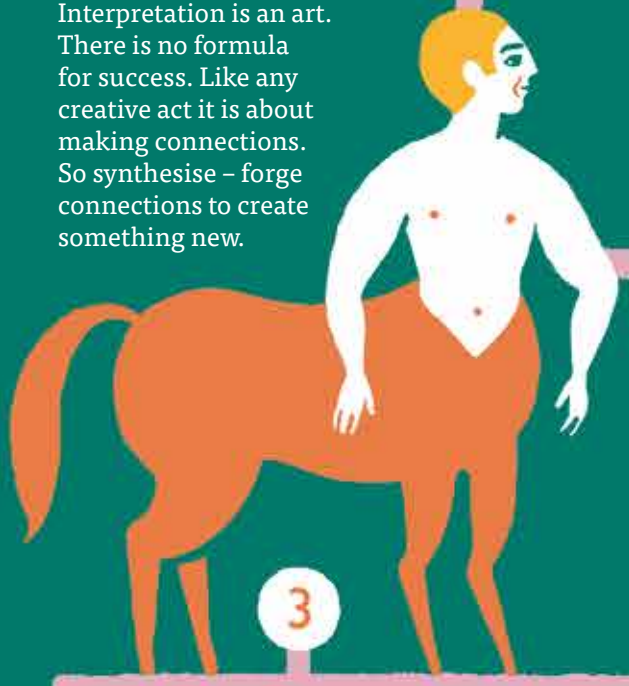
EMPATHY

Like a good storyteller, an interpreter understands the feelings and perspectives of their audiences; creating moments that resonate and inspire.

1

SYNTHESIS

Interpretation is an art. There is no formula for success. Like any creative act it is about making connections. So synthesise – forge connections to create something new.



3

SINGULARITY

The most elegant interpretive solutions are based on one big idea. An idea that distils complexity and that audiences remember – one that resonates with a past and anticipates a future.

2

REMEMBER, INTERPRETATION IS EVERYWHERE

Interpretation permeates everything we do, from the experiential to the commercial, the physical to the conceptual. So take a supra-holistic approach.

4

BE A SIGNPOST

Use your knowledge and understanding of people to point the way – to give people what they need, not what they think they want. Be a signpost, not a weather vane.

5

COMPOSE A SCORE

A fulfilling visitor experience is like a powerful score. It encapsulates a range of emotions: from the thrill and excitement of discovery, to quieter, more contemplative moments.

6

CREATE SOCIAL SPACES

7

Heritage is an evolving practice that is becoming ever more integrated into our everyday lives. In today's hyper-connected world, heritage sites offer an increasingly valued social experience.

TAKE RISKS

Every advance requires risk. Sometimes, the only way to invent new experiences, spark debate, attract hard-to-reach audiences and move the profession forwards is by taking risks.

8

9

DO THE IMPOSSIBLE

Only by reaching for the impossible can we know what lies within the realms of possibility.

PROVOKE

Take a stance. Use your platform to set the agenda and bring untold histories and perspectives to light. Harness debate and controversy to provoke new ways of thinking and effect real change.

10

CHALLENGE

Create challenging experiences. These will absorb and captivate our audience. People are happiest when they are in this state of flow.

11

AT TIMES, DO NOTHING

12

Do not deny the sheer emotional and affective force of our natural and cultural heritage. Consider the idea that places and artefacts have a power beyond human subjectivities.

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