

Curating for the Future Conference 2008

RENAISSANCE NORTH WEST
museums for changing lives



The University of Manchester 8 & 9 September 2008

Relevance

Meaning

Responsibility

The Curating for the Future Conference is for everyone – not just curators – working in museums and galleries

Welcome. Renaissance North West, in partnership with The University of Manchester and North West Federation of Museums & Art Galleries, has organised the second annual Curating for the Future conference. The conference is hosted jointly by The Whitworth Art Gallery and The Manchester Museum and it explores three themes: Relevance, Meaning and Responsibility.

Over the next two days inspirational keynote speakers address each thematic strand by examining do museums have a global responsibility, how to advocate to stakeholders and who decides the relevance and tells the story. There is also an open discussion where panel members and delegates examine who is responsible for advocating for our museums and galleries and how it can be done in an innovative and effective way.

You have the opportunity to participate in breakout sessions that explore broad sector-wide challenges such as organisational change, diversity, how long we keep collections for and how we use them, building relationships with our visitors and different types of cultural knowledge.

Dr Jennifer Harris Deputy Director, The Whitworth Art Gallery

Professor Piotr Bienkowski Deputy Director,
The Manchester Museum

Virginia Tandy Director of Culture: Manchester City Council
and Leader of the North West Regional Museums Hub

Programme

Monday 8 September 2008
The Whitworth Art Gallery

11:30
Welcome

Dr Maria Balshaw Director, The Whitworth Art Gallery



11:45
Keynote

Sandy Nairne Director, National Portrait Gallery

Sandy Nairne is Director of the National Portrait Gallery. He was Director: Programmes at Tate for eight years working alongside Nicholas Serota in the building of Tate Modern and the Centenary Development at Tate Britain. He was also directly responsible for the development of international and digital programmes, the Tate Partnership Scheme and the co-ordination of Tate public programmes as a whole. He worked previously as Assistant Director, Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, Director of Exhibitions at the ICA and Director of Visual Arts for the Arts Council of Great Britain. In 1993 he was awarded a Senior Research Fellowship by the J. Paul Getty Trust.

He has worked as a curator and writer and is well known for his innovative television series and book *State of the Art*, and co-edited anthology *Thinking about Exhibitions*. He has curated and co-curated exhibitions which include *Objects and Sculpture*; *Leon Golub*; *British Sculpture in the 20th Century*; *Jeff Wall*; *The Impossible Self*; *American Realities* and the first retrospective for Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs. Sandy Nairne's most recent book is *The Portrait Now* and he is currently Vice President of the Museums Association.

Global accountability – Who do we answer to?

This talk will consider how the work of each of us can contribute to positive change within the shifting field of public museums and galleries, particularly in an increasingly globalised world where natural resources are more and more precious.

The role of the curator has changed over the past twenty five years – from a concern with the object and its provenance, to a concern with how it is utilised and who else might gain from encountering it.

During this period of change the question of who the curator is responsible to has become increasingly important. On one hand this can imply the bureaucratic hand of audit, while on the other the active engagement of local communities and communities of interest, as well as complex questions of patronage and sponsorship. Issues of professional integrity and responsibility take great prominence in order to respond to these changes.



12:30 – 1:45

Lunch – South Gallery

1:00

Lunchtime talks and tours

Location: The Manchester Museum

A talk and tour of Lindow Man: a bog body mystery. This session is an introduction to the consultation process, the thinking behind the exhibition, and the nature of the public feedback.

Meet in the Exhibition

Alchemy is The Manchester Museum's Arts Council funded project working with artists who 'interrogate' the collections, the staff and the museum's processes. Find out what artists expect from museums, and how they can work together effectively. Two Alchemy artists will lead this session.

Meet in the Kanaris Theatre



Afternoon workshops

1:45 – 3:15
Concurrent
Sessions

Bringing museums closer to visitors

Andrew McIntyre Director, Morris Hargreaves McIntyre

Location: The Whitworth Art Gallery, South Gallery

Morris Hargreaves McIntyre specialises in developing insight into museum audiences. Using an arsenal of techniques they explore, understand and measure everything from profile, receptivity and attractors to motivation, level of engagement, outcomes and impacts, thus providing their clients with a 360°, inside-out perspective on their audiences.

Many of the techniques MHM use are very low cost and can be implemented by museum staff, volunteers or interns. In this session, Andrew will take participants through a number of very practical and unobtrusive observation and tracking techniques that cast invaluable light on the ways audiences engage, and the effectiveness and 'stickiness' of displays. These techniques can be applied to the entire gallery, specific galleries, exhibitions or individual displays.

1:45 – 3:15
Concurrent
Sessions

What is forever? Collections care v. access

Irit Narkiss Conservator of Objects & Access and
Helena Tomlin Curator of Learning, The Manchester Museum

Location: The Manchester Museum, Kanaris Theatre

Helena and Irit have been collaborating at The Manchester Museum, negotiating and developing the use of objects in learning programmes. In this workshop they will share their findings and practice, initiating a discussion on the use and preservation of museum objects.

Participants will discuss what 'the future' means for museum objects and learn about the value of a multi-sensory approach to exploring objects.

3:45 – 5:00

Concurrent
Sessions

Rethinking diversity

Roshi Naidoo Freelance Research & Education Consultant and
Janice Cheedie Researcher, Writer, Consultant

Location: The Whitworth Art Gallery, South Gallery

Have current diversity theories, policies and practices in the heritage sector been successful in mainstreaming such issues? How is diversity simultaneously understood as being of value and as a problem? Why is this work located with learning and outreach, rather than interpretation, collections and staff development? How can we meet the challenges presented by current changes in the population? Most importantly, how does this relate to the shifting global and ethical responsibilities of the cultural sector?

This session will help delegates reconceptualise what diversity means and help them explore how easy it is to develop strategies which move us forward.

3:45 – 5:00

Concurrent
Sessions

From curator to senior manager: The role of senior managers in 21st century museums

Paulette Francis-Green Consultant, Birmingham City Council

Location: The Manchester Museum, Kanaris Theatre

How do the skills of a senior manager differ from those required of other museum staff? How are these skills acquired and developed? How does a senior manager manage change and the new curatorship?

Have you wondered how you can make the transition from curator to senior manager? Through a number of activities, this session will help identify the skills and competencies needed to become a manager. Delegates will learn practical ways of developing management skills and ways to manage change both as an individual and within an organisation.

5:30

Evening reception – Whitworth Art Gallery

6:00
Keynote

Andrea Nixon Executive Director, Tate Liverpool

Andrea has been Executive Director at Tate Liverpool since 2006, and is responsible for all business, marketing and operational activities at the Gallery. Prior to that she was Director of Development for Tate in London, and led all fundraising, including donations, public sector funding, corporate sponsorship and a wide variety of membership schemes. In the 1990s she worked as Sponsorship Manager at the Design Council in London.

Andrea is a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and a Trustee of Theatre for A Change and CASE Europe. She is a member of the Regional Council for Arts Council North West and sits on the board of Renaissance North West, the North West committee for the Royal Society of Arts and the Tourism panel for the North West Development Agency as well as chairing a number of initiatives for the Liverpool Arts Regeneration Consortium.

Advocating to stakeholders

How does advocacy differ depending on the stakeholder? If we acknowledge that local government is under financial difficulty, what can museums do in terms of advocacy that is effective? Who else has an advocacy role? In terms of local and national advocacy – what is out there, what works and what doesn't?

Evening tours at The Whitworth Art Gallery:

Art and Labour's Cause is One: Walter Crane and Manchester 1880-1900

The redisplayed Watercolour Gallery

Flights of Fancy: decorative wallpaper schemes from the 1920s and 1930s

Evening reception continues until 7:30

Tuesday 9 September 2008
The Whitworth Art Gallery

10:00
Welcome

Jo Jones

President, North West Federation of Museums & Art Galleries



10:15
Keynote

Keith Khan

Head of Culture, 2012 Olympics & Paralympic Games

Keith is responsible for the shaping and implementation of the Cultural Olympiad which began following the closing ceremonies of the Beijing Games. The Cultural Olympiad will include UK-wide activities and initiatives from a wide cultural remit. Keith is an artist and co-founder of Motiroti, whose projects include Alladeen – a performance project about outsourcing in India, and winner of a New York OBIE.

His career has been eclectic, engaging with diverse audiences and practices which involved working with communities and technology. Consistently using the energy of popular culture, Keith's work is large scale and celebratory. A member of Arts Council England's National Council, Keith began his career producing costumes for the Notting Hill Carnival and Trinidad Carnival.

Keith was part of the creative team that produced the Millennium Dome's opening ceremony before going on to be Director of Design Ceremonies at the Commonwealth Games in Manchester in 2002. Keith was Artistic Director for the Queen's Golden Jubilee Commonwealth celebrations and Chief Executive of Rich Mix, a publicly funded, international cultural and heritage centre which opened in the East End of London in 2006.

Who decides the relevance and who tells the story?

How do we make “culture” accessible to young people – or different people? We often speak in coded forms that act as ciphers between us. These ciphers are often unintelligible to regular people and wider audiences. In order to curate for the future, we have to learn to articulate better, find more dynamic ways to communicate and involve people.

With the Olympic Games now delivered by Beijing, we need to interrogate how we want the world to see our cultures and how these collections might be interpreted. These are exciting and changing times. Many people would never dream of engaging with museums. So, how can we create opportunities beyond the school trip, or the holiday experience that will captivate new audiences? The relevance of new audiences, diverse practices, and dynamic interventions is really the lifeblood of the future.



10:45 – 11:15

Coffee break – South Gallery

11:15

Meaning-making and identity: How museums and galleries combat social exclusion

Andrew Newman Director, International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies, University of Newcastle

Andrew's research interests include the consumption of museums and galleries, particularly identity construction, viewed as a way of understanding how people use cultural property in their everyday lives. Together with colleagues, he has used these ideas to evaluate the impact of arts education activities through a series of major research projects carried out over the last seven years. Andrew is also interested in museum and gallery policy construction and has recently concluded a series of Arts and Humanities Research Council funded workshops on the subject.

The possible use of museums and galleries to resolve problems of social exclusion has become central to the thinking of policy makers and practitioners since at least 1997, when the present administration was elected. There are great difficulties disentangling the rhetoric (what we hope is possible) from the reality (what can be demonstrated). There are also significant problems in attempting to conceptualise how visitors to museums and galleries use cultural property and to what purpose. Andrew will suggest that identity construction, using ideas and language borrowed from sociology, allows us to understand the place of museums and galleries in everyday life and will propose a possible method through which they might assist in resolving social problems.

Bolton Museum & Archive Service – Claire Wood



12:15 – 1:30

Lunch – South Gallery

Keswick Museum & Art Gallery – Adam Naylor, Whalley



1:30 – 2:30
Discussion

Who is responsible for advocacy and how can it be done effectively?

Panel:

Roy Clare Chief Executive, Museums, Libraries and Archives Council

Roy was Director of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich from 2000 – 2007 and was credited with increasing the tempo of the museum, building new audiences and creating wider partnerships. A Companion of Chartered Management Institute, Fellow of the Royal Society for the Arts and Fellow of the Royal Institute of Navigation, he lectures on ways to develop leadership capacities in the cultural sector, participating in a range of seminars including those on behalf of the Clore Leadership Foundation.

Alec Coles Director, Tyne & Wear Museums

Alec has been Director of Tyne & Wear Museums (TWM) since 2002. TWM is one of Britain's largest and most successful regional museums services and runs twelve museums on behalf of eight funding clients, attracting over 1.5 million visits each year. It also leads the North East's Regional Museums Hub. Alec is a member of the Heritage Lottery Fund's National Expert Panel; a board member of MLA North East; and Treasurer of the Museums Association.

Jim Forrester Director, Imperial War Museum North

Jim had an extensive career at National Museums Liverpool which included working with the Maritime Museum's small boats collection, as a Public Programme Officer and as a Project Officer for the Conservation Centre. As General Manager of NML's trading subsidy, Jim ran all the commercial activities before joining the staff of IWM in 2001 to prepare the ground for running the new Imperial War Museum North from its opening in July 2002. Jim is a former President of the North West Federation of Museums & Art Galleries and is a board member of MLA North West.

**Dr Elizabeth Mackenzie Vice-President,
British Association of Friends of Museums**

Elizabeth was a founding member of the Bristol Magpies (Friends of Bristol City Museums & Art Gallery) in 1977 and was their Chairman for ten years. She was elected Chairman of the BAFM in 1998, having served as Vice-Chairman and Regional Representative for the South West. In 2004 she became second Vice-Chairman and BAFM's International Representative. Elizabeth is a member of the Museums & Galleries Month Working Group and she was on the judging panel for the Gulbenkian Museum of the Year Award in 2005-06.

**Sharon MacDonald Professor of Social Anthropology,
The University of Manchester**

Sharon got involved with museums twenty years ago when she spent two years working as an ethnographer observing staff, objects and visitors in the Science Museum, London. Since then, she has not been able to get away from museums and has remained a museum-watcher, theoriser and, when possible, collaborator in museum work. She has also carried out further research on museums, heritage and tourism elsewhere, most recently in Germany.

Chaired by **Professor Piotr Bienkowski**, co-chair of the Collections for the Future Steering Group in the North West.

2:45

Closing remarks

Dr Nick Merriman Director, The Manchester Museum

3:00

Conference ends



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