How we Theatrically Re-imagined our Collections

Muso
Impropera & UCL Museums and Collections

Muso is an experimental new project by improvising opera troupe, Impropera, which invites audiences into our museums and galleries after dark. Here they hunt for buried artefacts, share what they’ve found, hear from an expert and then enjoy musical performances made up on the spot about their discoveries. It is a first of its kind of performance; an explosive collaboration between opera, academia, art and science.

Our first trial of Muso was in collaboration with the UCL’s Grant Museum of Zoology, and Dr Chiara Ambrosio, Lecturer in History and Philosophy of Science. We spent a period of research and development, funded by ACE, exploring ways to re-frame the bank of knowledge held in the Grant museum, in order to engage visitors to take a moment to look more closely at exhibits. We are now co-hosting Theatrically Re-imagining Collections: a seminar day and planning to tour Muso to museums and galleries up and down the country and internationally from Autumn 2016.

David Pearl
Artistic Director
Impropera

Tonya Nelson
Head of Museums
UCL Public and Cultural Engagement

Dr Chiara Ambrosio
Lecturer in History and Philosophy of Science
UCL

“I think theatre ought to be theatrical, shuffling the pack in different ways, there’s always some kind of ambush involved in the experience. You’re being ambushed by an unexpected word, or by an elephant falling out of the cupboard.”

Tom Stoppard

www.impropera.co.uk
www.ucl.ac.uk/museums
#MuseumsReimagined
Shakespeare: staging the world
Royal Shakespeare Company & British Museum

Shakespeare: staging the world ran between July and November 2012 and was developed by the British Museum in collaboration with the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) as part of the World Shakespeare Festival for the London 2012 Festival. The exhibition explored Shakespeare’s world through objects from the period and extracts from his plays focussed on issues that resonated with his contemporary audiences.

The RSC contributed to the exhibition’s design and RSC actors featured in short films throughout the exhibition performing extracts from the plays. Additionally, a series of contemporary pieces were commissioned and performed in the exhibition as part of the public programme. This session will draw on formative and summative evaluation to explore audiences’ responses to the exhibition.

Stuart Frost
Head of Interpretation & Volunteers
British Museum

Against Captain’s Orders
Punchdrunk & The National Maritime Museum

Against Captain’s Orders was an exhibition like no other that took families on the adventure of a lifetime through the National Maritime Museum’s incredible wealth of maritime history and artefacts. Aimed at 6-12 year olds, audiences donned lifejackets,
joined the crew of the HMS Adventure and stepped into the heart of the action. Led by two Museum curators, audiences took on seafaring roles of Ships Watch, Navigation, Midshipmen and Salvage. As the exhibition went awry, the crew was called on to find a way in (and out) of the mystical Museum stores...

With so much history secured in one museum, so many doorways to other times and other worlds, Against Captain’s Orders was exciting, enlightening, and perhaps just a tiny bit dangerous. Created by Punchdrunk Enrichment in association with the National Maritime Museum, Against Captain’s Orders took place from 28 March – 31 August 2015.

Alex Rowse
Producer
Punchdrunk

Sarah Lockwood
Head of Learning and Participation
National Maritime Museum, Royal Museums Greenwich

The Wunderkammer
Do Not Adjust Your Stage
The Wunderkammer is an improvised comedy show inspired by TED-style talks, created and performed by improv comedy troupe Do Not Adjust Your Stage. The show began at the Nursery Theatre in 2014, and now since January 2015 has been in residence at the Natural History Museum (NHM). The Wunderkammer presents natural history like never before, scientists, research staff and curators from the NHM present some of the amazing stories behind specimens at the NHM. Using these as jumping off points Do Not Adjust Your Stage create scenes and stories on the spot, giving the collections and science a brand new interpretation. Do Not Adjust Your Stage take The Wunderkammer to the Edinburgh Fringe in August.

Nick Oram
Do Not Adjust Your Stage
Dancing in Museums
Katie Green Company & Ipswich Museums

Dancing in Museums is designed for an audience of children and families, the project aims to provide a new way of thinking about museums and heritage sites, and the artefacts found within those sites, through dance activity. It consists of promenade performances of The Imagination Museum and creative dance workshops aimed primarily at children aged 7+.

We have been developing the Dancing in Museums project since March 2013 with support from Arts Council England and a range of other partners and Ipswich Museum was a key partner in the project’s development. To date we have given 48 performances of The Imagination Museum for a total audience of just under 3000 people and by the end of 2016 we will have collaborated with 29 museums and heritage sites across the UK, from Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery to the University of Aberdeen’s Zoology Museum.

Katie Green
Director
Made By Katie Green

Jayne Austin
Ipswich Museums Manager
Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service

Alfred Russell Wallace and the evolving performance
Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales & Theatre na nÔg
Based on the life and work of evolutionary biologist Alfred Russell Wallace, Amgueddfa
Cymru National Museum Wales (AC-NMW) co-created a bilingual production with Our journey with Theatr Na nÓg. The following year AC-NMW held a temporary exhibition of Wallace’s life, incorporating video of the production and silhouette projection of the actor. The exhibition design then informed the set design for what became a touring play that used AC-NMW collections in a touring exhibition. Wallace returned to AC-NMW Cardiff as a vehicle for engaging teenagers with science, with the actor ‘ambushing’ students on fieldwork with Museum scientists, and will be performed again this summer alongside an Open Air Laboratories citizen science project. Wallace has toured all over Britain and Internationally to Singapore and Brazil, taking our collections to new audiences. It has led to further collaborations on interpretation in Science exhibitions (most recently telling the story of the geologist William Smith), enlivening our collections and enriching the stories that Theatr na nÓg weaves.

Heather Jackson
Learning, Participation and Interpretation Officer
Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales

Sara Lewis
Theatre Project Officer
Theatr na nÓg

Creative Museums
Battersea Arts Centre & Gaby Porter
Creative Museums is a programme designed to improve the longer term resilience of six small UK museums. The programme centres on the leaders in these museums exploring and using Battersea Arts Centre’s ‘Scratch’ process, to enable them to become more collaborative, both internally and externally in their approach to programming, community engagement and organisational management. Each museum leader has a one-to-one partnership with a BAC producer,
as well as development workshops, ‘bespoke’ sessions tailored to particular priorities for their organisations, individual coaching, master classes, inspirational visits and talks and artist engagement. Museum partners will be working with their BAC producer partners to scratch ideas with community groups, partners, artists and architects to create mini-festivals, one-off events, pop-ups and participatory installations. The museums involved in the programme are a mix of voluntary run, Trust and Local Authority. They are Brent Museum and Archives, Manchester Jewish Museum, Swindon Museum and Art Gallery, Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery, Scarborough Museums Trust and Leominster Museum. Funded by Arts Council England, the Creative Museums is a partnership between Battersea Arts Centre and independent consultant Gaby Porter.

Gaby Porter
Independent Consultant
Gaby Porter & Associates

Sarah Golding
Associate Artistic Director
Battersea Arts Centre