



Irish Museums Association Annual Conference 2010

Abstracts

IMA Member's Papers – 12:00-13:15 Friday 26 February

The Exhibition as Life-raft: surviving the next two years by means of a new exhibition

Helen O'Carroll, Kerry County Museum, Tralee

The plan is to mount a large-scale exhibition of photographs selected from the Kennelly Archive in Kerry County Museum in 2010, which will run for two years. The Kennelly Archive is a collection of photographs documenting every aspect of life in Kerry between 1953 and 1973. The exhibition will illustrate what a resource the Archive is, depicting a society in the midst of transformation. The paper will cover the reasons for choosing this topic at this time, and how it will play a crucial role in guiding us through the next two difficult years.

The Role of Documentation in Exhibition Development

Rebecca O'Neill, DMG Group/National Museum of Ireland

The role of institutional and staff knowledge in the developmental stages of an exhibition is arguably the most important. Documentation staff, by the nature of their work, can encounter sources of information and links between collections in a unique way. In their work they may link objects to donors/collectors or other collections, links that may have not been noticed or exploited in the past. In a time when staffing may decrease significantly the need to share staff knowledge of collections in an efficient manner will become more pertinent. Allowing information to be utilised in a meaningful and coherent way will allow for more comprehensive exhibitions to be staged based on years of the institutions accumulated wisdom. Through integration of databases and staff communication these previously untapped sources of information can lead to new and more exciting ways of presenting museum collections to the public.

Altered Images. An interactive and inclusive touring exhibition from the collections of IMMA, South Tipperary and Mayo County Councils

Johanne Mullan, National Programmer, Irish Museum of Modern Art

Accessible, interactive and inclusive in ethos, Altered Images aims to stimulate engagement with the visual arts for the general public and particularly for people with disabilities. Each art work is accompanied by a three dimensional interpretation and audio description in order to provide meaningful access. The large-print exhibition catalogue is also available in Braille and on audio CD.

Altered Images is the result of a partnership initiative of the IMMA National Programme, Mayo County Council Arts Office and South Tipperary Arts Service. The works were selected from the collections of each partner organisation and all make reference to classical or art historical sources either in the method of depiction or their subject matter. The exhibition took two years to plan and had to work in three very different exhibition spaces. Altered Images includes work in a variety of media by artists Thomas Brezing, David Creedon, Alice Maher, Caroline McCarthy and Abigail O'Brien, with especially commissioned works by Amanda Coogan and Daphne Wright. An accessible website for the project can be found at www.alteredimages.ie

Museum or historic house? - Applying the principles of exhibition interpretation to the historic interiors of the Pearse Museum

Brian Crowley, Curator, Pearse Museum, Dublin

Traditionally historic houses have displayed their collections with the aim of either preserving a pre-existing historical arrangement, or recreating a layout which is sympathetic to the building's history and architecture. Museum exhibitions on the other hand, generally use historic material to illustrate and communicate a particular narrative within the context of a variety of interpretative devices such as text panels, audiovisuals, labels etc. Using the recent re-display of the historic interiors of the Pearse Museum as a case study, this paper will examine how some of the principles of interpretation used in the design of historical exhibitions can be applied within the context of an historic house.

The Pearse Museum is located in the former home and school of Patrick Pearse, the leader of the 1916 Rising. The challenge for the re-display of the museum was to both accurately reflect the house's original use while also communicating the story of the Pearse brothers in an effective and engaging way.

Organising a loan exhibition: *Edvard Munch: Prints*

Anne Hodge, Curator of Prints and Drawings, National Gallery of Ireland

The exhibition *Edvard Munch: Prints* was held at the National Gallery of Ireland 18 September – 6 December 2009. As host curator of the show the talk addresses the issues involved in coordinating the exhibition in Dublin and liaising with the curator from the Hunterian Museum & Art Gallery, Glasgow who created the exhibition. The practicalities of transferring a show from another venue, including designing the layout and lighting and amending signage and labels will also be discussed briefly.

Loan exhibitions are an invaluable way of enhancing and diversifying a museum or gallery's exhibition programme. Collaboration and communication are key to success. The various stages involved including initial informal discussion of ideas - networking and developing working relationships with colleagues from other museums both within Ireland and abroad is very important. Early planning is essential as is in-depth discussion with relevant colleagues in-house re: timing, funding, transport, security, lighting, promotion, lecture series and events to ensure a successful exhibition.

Afternoon Sessions – 14:30-17:00 Friday 26 February

Interpretative Exhibitions on a Budget

Facts, Fictions and Hard Nosed Reality

Ann Scroope,
Scroope Design, West Cork

Wendy Williams,
Wendy Williams Design, Dublin



An interactive, educational, hands on and inspiring workshop on the challenges tribulations and exaltations of creating the mother of all exhibitions- that one that we all strive for- the one that is really good, really fast and really cheap. Not to be missed!

You will work through the process of creating the best exhibition you can using the resources you have in the most effective way possible. You will identify the parameters, ambitions and realities of what lies ahead when creating an exhibition. You will know what you need, why you need it and what you can do.

We shall structure the workshop and exercises to address issues most relevant to you. To do this we shall ask participants to outline their own queries, issues and concerns in advance of the workshop. A questionnaire is online at www.irishmuseums.org/annual-conference/ responses should be returned to scroope@eircom.net.

[Coffee/Tea Break 15:50-16:10]



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Morning Papers – 10:00 Saturday 27 February

Getting the message across

Paul Martinovich
Blue Sky Design, Toronto



All museums claim to be in the business of communicating with the visitor; many fail to convey their messages effectively, or worse still, confuse their visitors. From my perspective of 25 years' experience as an interpretative planner developing exhibitions, I will examine the qualities of exhibits that do in fact, get the message across, and suggest an approach to creating such exhibits.

This involves two key principles: identifying intended messages early in the development of an exhibition, and bringing the visitor into the planning process. Ultimately, I believe that to do a better job of communicating, we may have to look at the visitor experience as a whole, rather than as a series of separate elements.

[Coffee/Tea Break 11:00-11:20]

Morning Papers – 11:20-12:40 Saturday 27 February

Shaping exhibitions: looking at museum building

Gemma Tipton
Art and Architecture Writer, Dublin



Can architecture ever be neutral? What are the elements and forces that shape how we view objects and exhibitions, and what impact has the building itself had on visitors before they even come to view the exhibitions within? Through history, patronage and architecture, the museum building may exert a powerful contextualising and editorial influence on how exhibitions are experienced and perceived.

This talk looks at the origins of museums and galleries as we know them today. It discusses the historical accidents and incidents that have given rise to the ‘classic’ museums of the world, and also looks at some new buildings that aim to change or subvert these forms. The talk focuses on understanding how a building’s influences work, externally and internally, taking in examples from around the world. It also discusses how to work with and around these influences, without ignoring their shaping force.

National or Notional Museums: Gaps in the Collection and how this impacts on exhibition design.

Lar Joye
National Museum of Ireland



The exhibition [*Soldiers and Chiefs*](#) traces military history in Ireland by using original artefacts, letters, replicas and interactives to show how soldiering and war have affected the lives of Irish people. When developing the interpretative brief and objects lists for it we found it difficult to represent events where objects were thin due to historical biases and or emphases reflected in collecting and writing (e.g. the victors’ and generals’ history vs. the vanquished and soldiers’ stories). This talk will look at how to address gaps in collections through acquisition and exhibition interpretation and the further challenges and opportunities that our effort created.

Based on our experiences with *Soldiers and Chiefs* I will discuss some of the ways we overcame these challenges and the further questions and issues it has raised for future exhibitions North & South and international collaborations. For instance, we initiated a public appeal for objects and loans from other museums and individuals. This initiative raised further curatorial issues when we encountered owners only willing to loan and not donate.

Afternoon Papers – 13:30-14:50 Saturday 27 February

The Ulster Museum Redevelopment Project 2004-2009

Dr Peter Crowther
Head of Natural Sciences
National Museums Northern Ireland



The £17.2m [Ulster Museum](#) Redevelopment Project has delivered a step change in access and overall visitor experience by transforming the museum's spaces, facilities and character. Representing the first substantial development of the Museum in forty years, it makes a significant contribution to the cultural rejuvenation of 'post-conflict' Northern Ireland.

The Project included:

- decanting 800,000 objects to offsite stores
- creating 16 history and natural science galleries, new learning spaces and 3 interactive Discovery Centres
- making our 'difficult' building 97% accessible, using a network of new lifts and ramped walkways
- transforming visitor comfort, retail, commercial and corporate facilities
- developing a comprehensive outreach programme (travelling exhibitions, lectures, reminiscence and handling sessions) to maintain existing and grow new audiences

The talk will focus on how the in-house exhibitions team worked with external designers, base-build and fit-out contractors to achieve the £4.5m, 3,500 m² gallery scheme

Touring Exhibitions – widening the benefits of exhibition practice

Andy Horn
Exhibitions Manager
Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery



The touring of exhibitions serves as a catalyst for the building and strengthening of professional networks across and beyond the museum sector. Exhibitions by their nature are often outward looking, representing the public face of the museum and art gallery, and touring can extend that outward trajectory, encompassing the wider landscape of museums and other cultural organisations, locally, nationally and internationally.

At the core of touring is the practice of exhibition making, but additional to this are required further skills, not only in creating an exhibition that has a capacity to work in potentially very different sets of spaces and to engage with a wide variety of audiences, but also skills in developing and sustaining partnerships and collaborative working. The touring sector is one that is largely friendly, open to opportunities, creative with ideas, and willing to share good practice. It can bring to both individuals and to their organisations, the benefit of a supportive peer network.

This presentation will discuss some of the benefits and challenges of touring and also will suggest some of the resources available of both practical advice and current good practice. Touring fits all sizes – those involved in touring vary from the small-scale local museum to the large nationals. Increasingly we see a wider variety of organisations become involved in touring and a broader definition of the types of models of touring.

In an increasingly constrained financial climate, the benefits of sharing resources are clear, particularly when in many situations exhibition budgets are diminishing and the pressures on staff for the research and development of exhibitions restrict what can be possible. With issues of sustainability frequently on the agenda, how might touring be considered an appropriate response to the investment of resources?

The [Touring Exhibition Group](#), or TEG as it is known, is a membership organisation of some 350 museums, galleries and cultural organisations, mostly in the UK, and committed to the touring and exchange of exhibitions. This year we celebrate 25 years. It is largely run by volunteers and as an organisation it holds the fullest representation of this sector's experience through its research and publications, and through sharing its knowledge through an active series of professional seminars.

[Coffee/Tea Break 14:50-15:10]

Afternoon Papers – 15:10-15:50 Saturday 27 February

The politics of display: imperial tensions in Dublin, 1900-2000

Fintan Cullen
Professor of Art History
University of Nottingham



In 1890, the Dublin Museum of Science and Art opened its doors with Charles Bell Birch's bronze-painted plaster statue of Walter Richard Pollock Hamilton as a prominent feature of the large Central Court. Hamilton is shown battling with an Afghani who is on the ground while the standing European fires his pistol. Irish born and a Victoria Cross

holder, Hamilton had died in battle during the Second Afghan War in 1879; his statue is now in the National Army Museum, London having been seen, after the creation of the Irish Free State in the early 1920s, as inappropriate for an Irish museum.

One of the arguments of this paper focuses on the imperial tensions that surrounded Dublin's display of the statue for at least three decades. These tensions hinge on the conflict between a national culture (Ireland) and imperial concerns. Contemporary sources suggest that the display of the sculpture was supplemented by other objects of imperial violence such as trophies from the Sudan campaign and artefacts from Asian colonies.

After finding disfavour with the post-independence National Museum of Ireland (NMI), Birch's statue of Hamilton graced the foyer of the Royal Dublin Society for some sixty years before being removed to London. Such acts of de-acquisition come back to haunt us when we consider how forceful the Birch ensemble would be if it featured in the current NMI exhibition *Soldiers and Chiefs: the Irish at War at home and abroad, 1550-2001* where such Irish-born imperial heroes as Hamilton is listed if not indeed celebrated.

General Panel Discussion 15:50-16:30