

'Expanded Interiors: Restaged': An alternative exhibition guide

Summary

A group of six young people met online with artists Catrin Huber and Rosie Morris, and then independently produced an alternative exhibition guide for the upcoming exhibition, Expanded Interiors: Restaged at the Hatton Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Background

The young people involved were recruited from, L-INK – a group aged 16-24 working with the Hatton Gallery and Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

The Hatton Gallery is managed by Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums on behalf of Newcastle University. They work closely with students from Newcastle University and exhibit their work on an annual basis.

Challenge

Contemporary installation art can be intimidating. Conventional exhibition guides do not always appeal to younger people, nor do they reflect their specific interests. Partly, this is because gallery resources are often produced by a demographic distinct from the group it seeks to attract.

Could an alternative exhibition guide produced by a group of young people encourage engagement with and understanding of Expanded Interiors?

Approach

After a series of online discussions the group designed the guide based on their personal interpretations of the



exhibition. The guide was designed independently from the artists and gallery staff.

Intended outcomes

- Young people to have a voice in the Hatton exhibition resources and interpretations.
- A collaboration between the artists and young people to generate new understandings of the exhibition.
- Expanded Interiors was a paid project which offered a real-life experience for the group.

Intended outputs

- An alternative exhibition guide (available in an online and paper format) aimed at young people created by a group in the same demographic.

Obstacles and issues

The online nature of the project posed several challenges. First, it was sometimes difficult for the group to visualise how the installation-based exhibition would appear in situ. This obstacle was compounded by the fact that the exhibition comprised a digital element, which was especially confusing to conceptualise in relation to the whole exhibition.

As a remote team, it was also sometimes difficult for the group to work together in a completely integrated fashion and reflect on the artist-led talks. The way the group organised itself was that each member was assigned a different page to complete for the guide, meaning that some opportunities for collaboration were lost.



Actual outcomes

- The group asked the artists questions during the sessions. This developed the artists' understandings of their work and how it could be interpreted. Moreover, Catrin Huber found that texts from the L-INK guide "took on an active role in orchestrating the exhibition or becoming part of artworks themselves".
- The group worked mostly independently from the gallery staff to produce a guide that reflected their own interests and interpretation of the exhibition.
- The perspectives of young people were represented in a way that was unconventional compared to traditional exhibition guides.

Actual outputs

The group produced:

- An alternative exhibition guide printed on card and available online: the guide consists of designs (produced electronically and hand-drawn) and text.
- An accessible version of the exhibition guide.
- Some additional pieces of text for the website (a blog post and mini essay about the exhibition).

Lessons learned

Installation art can be difficult to conceptualise online given the integrity of space to its in-situ experience.

A group-led timeframe designed at the beginning of the project would create the opportunity for the group to plan additional discussion sessions both during and subsequent to the programme of artist-led talks. This will allow more time to reflect on the sessions whilst memories are recent and encourage integration throughout. Perhaps these reflections could be documented in the form of a group blog which would then inform the final guide.

For participants who feel uncomfortable contributing to discussions, there could be an anonymised function to ask questions/contribute thoughts.

Next steps

The alternative exhibition guide is available both as a pdf and in accessible plain-text form online.

The group are invited to contribute either a practical workshop or knowledge-sharing session to a public symposium pertaining to exhibition themes in November 2021.

“The perspectives of young people were represented in a way that was unconventional compared to traditional exhibition guides.”



Find out more

PDF of the alternative exhibition guide:

<https://cutt.ly/eTTb8fY>

Accessible version of the alternative exhibition guide:

<https://cutt.ly/uTTnpsz>

L-INK Group page on Expanded Interiors Re-Staged:

<https://cutt.ly/QTTb5Ww>

Information about the L-INK Group:

<https://cutt.ly/uTTnwxL>

Expanded Interiors:

<https://cutt.ly/FTTnyYN>

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GEM Case Studies 29
Publication:
Spring/Summer
2022

Case Studies is published twice a year by GEM but all opinions expressed remain those of the named authors.

Cover: Natural History Museum
© GEM 2021
Designed by Steers McGillan Eves
01225 465546