

Friday 13th February 2015, 2-5pm. *Connecting Museums with Refugee and Asylum-Seeker Organisations*, a symposium organised by the Horniman Museum and Gardens in collaboration with Counterpoints Arts.

The event focused on the practical implications of building and maintaining relationships between museums and refugee organisations by sharing challenges and opportunities encountered across the sector. Over 30 professionals attended the symposium, including heritage policy advisers and museum learning, volunteer and curatorial staff.

In the first half of the afternoon, an overview of the work undertaken by museums in Britain in the last 30 years was presented, drawing on well-established initiatives such as Crossing Borders. The discussion was also complemented by an analysis of the current partnerships developed by the Horniman with refugee and asylum seeker organisations.¹

In the second half of the afternoon, four discussion tables were held to engage with some of the issues museums are presented with when working with refugees and asylum seekers. Each table was asked to outline some practical suggestions on how to turn possible challenges into opportunities for best practice. The notes that follow summarise the discussions which took place in each table.

1. Partnerships with refugee and asylum seeker organisations.
2. Cross-cultural aspects of refugee work.
3. Themes in museum's work with refugees.
4. Programming around Asylum.

If you wish to have more information about the event, please contact the Community Learning Team at the Horniman Museum and Gardens

communitylearning@horniman.ac.uk

¹ Crossing Borders is an annual event running since 2004 at the Horniman Museum in collaboration with local refugee and asylum seeker organisations. A full programme of Crossing Borders 2015 can be found in Appendix together with an outline of the partnership currently established.

1. Partnerships with Refugee and Asylum-Seeker Organisations.

This table addressed what issues might arise when formalising a partnership with refugee and asylum-seeker organisations. As a practical task, the group was asked to identify the key areas that should be included in a partnership agreement.

- *Managing expectations* is very important. A museum professional reported how in one case the refugee organisation they partnered with thought they would get some money out of the project, which was not the case. In other circumstances, the museum expected that the same client group would attend all sessions, that the refugee organisation could guarantee numbers and that everyone would arrive at the same time, etc.
- *In-depth project planning* can help solving some practical issues, such as access to spaces and how to accommodate late arrivals. Be upfront about costs on both sides and the resources that both organisations can or can't offer. Think about how the partnership might add staff capacity to both organisations.
- *Partnership building requires time and effort.* It is important to build mutual understanding: examples included asking both organisations "What is your worst fear about the project?". There needs to be goodwill, generosity and trust between organisations and both organisations must want to make the partnership work. Ensure that the project is prioritised in both organisations – this may involve changing staff attitudes.
- *A shared idea of what a successful project looks like.* Organisations involved need to have shared policy goals (inclusion, equality, social justice) and clearly stated outcomes. Mission statements can help to understand where organisations are coming from/leading towards as well as identifying areas of overlap for both organisations.
- *Mutual benefit.* Ensure that the needs of the service users are being met – liaising with them as well as the organisation managers. Evaluate the project together with the partner organisation. Create a collaborative statement which is formalised with a contract. Allow flexibility into the partnership agreement.

1.1 A Partnership Agreement should:

- Identify core values of each organisation (artistic excellence/ inclusion, etc).
- Establish what each organisation can offer and areas of shared responsibility and outline what success looks like for both organisations.
- Include a project timeline.
- Clearly identify the staff working on the project and their roles.
- Include risk assessments for the project (risks to health and safety and risks to successful project completion).
- Clarify who will cover which costs and who will be responsible for finding any further funding.



Kite-making workshop with Ahmadzia, Crossing Borders 2013.

2. Cross-cultural dimensions of working with refugees and asylum seekers.

This group discussed areas of potential cross-cultural tension that could arise when working with refugees. The discussion was concerned with the training that museum staff, artist and volunteers should undergo when engaging with refugee and asylum seekers and to identify relevant themes and approaches.

- *Training should be extended to all members* of the organisation, not only community engagement staff or those directly involved with asylum seekers and refugees. It should be compulsory to front of house and café staff, as they often are the first people encountered. In terms of format, basic training could be delivered in two half-day sessions, as opposed to a full day. The space in-between sessions can be crucial to reflect on relevant issues.
- *Tackle “Myth Busting”* to clarify the legal and social implications of asylum. The training should particularly concentrate on terminology and pitched around tolerance and respect. The training should also address the practicalities involved in organising events or community engagement activities with refugees and asylum seekers. Practitioners underestimate the impact of logistics on the quality, breath and sustainability of projects. Aspects such as arranging an appropriate time and day, transports need more time than an average community engagement project.²

² A resource to consult in such respect is *Engaging Refugees and Asylum Seekers, a Best Practice Guide for Museums and Galleries*, produced by National Museums Liverpool as part of the ERAAS project.

2.1 Themes and Approaches to training.

- *External expertise:* Museum practitioners should rely on the expertise of professionals who have a track record of working with refugees and asylum seekers. Whether possible it is a good idea to involve refugees and asylum seekers. An example is the recent partnership established at the Horniman between the museum's Youth Panel and Pan-Intercultural Arts, which works with unaccompanied asylum seekers. The Youth Panel has received relevant training sessions delivered by external experts. In one occasion the training was delivered by a young refugee from Praxis Community Projects, an organisation committed to working with vulnerable migrants.
- *Go to the core of cross-cultural tensions,* getting staff to think about how we approach cultural identity and define ourselves in relation to others. It is important to make examples on how certain behaviours are acceptable in some cultures more than others. Integration is a two-way process where both parties should adapt to each other. We should therefore be open to challenge our own assumptions on how we do things.
- *Conflict is inevitable* in cross-cultural dynamics, so we should never consider to repress it but rather to work creatively through it. We need to make staff aware of how quickly we formulate cultural stereotypes and how we can minimise their impact in our practice.
- *Impact of non-verbal communication* in the work with refugees and asylum seekers, due to people's developing English language abilities. This means being aware of the use of the body in the process of communication: movement of the body in space and gestures are very important. When verbal language is employed, simple language should be used, being aware of the importance of repetition and voice projection (tone of voice).
- *Applied Theatre techniques,* Role Play and Forum Theatre can be used as tools to reproduce scenarios where cross-cultural challenges might arise. This can help staff to identify the best course of action.



“The Dress my Mother Wore”.
Crossing Borders 2015

3. Themes in Museum’s Work with Refugees.

The group discussed the themes generally exploited in museums work with refugees, thinking critically about how we can reimagine these. As a practical task the working group drafted a Manifesto for museums work with refugees.

- *Avoid clichés and their imagery.* Roots and trees, suitcases, maps and mapping, storytelling (finding your story through objects). But if these metaphors work and produce valuable and meaningful work, why should we change them? It is possible to use these tropes well. Using artists is a shortcut to original thinking and communication. Although, the choice of artist is important. Using artists from refugee backgrounds can be really exciting.
- *Trauma and Narrative.* ‘Narrative’ based projects are often charged and difficult. They have a place but often only focus on the past. The danger is that these groups can feel that they are only valued by the trauma, or that refugee experience is used by an artist. Projects need to start collaboratively and run openly with mutual terms.
- *Positive Discrimination?* Should we treat refugee groups differently? Refugee groups may not always want to work on projects about their experience, however cultural organisations are great places to raise awareness and offer a space to discuss these issues. How can we acknowledge difference without fetishizing it?
- *Benefits for clients.* As a consequence of cuts to local councils, many museums are taking up services previously provided elsewhere (e.g. social work). Alongside soft skills, should we be offering ‘hard skills’ that will assist people finding employment or settling here (a skill, trade or ESOL). At the same time, many of the soft skills that are developed through

projects are crucial for employment – confidence, presentations etc. Are museums the best placed to deliver these? Should we be taking on this kind of work?

- *Use of the Galleries.* Projects can present an opportunity to create a sense of ownership over objects and space. Presenting work alongside museum objects can help to reimagine the galleries. A good example in this respect is the project developed at the British Museum in response to the Lewes Chessmen. The museum worked with young people with additional needs to create theatrical response to the objects across four galleries.

3.1 A Manifesto for working around asylum

- Learn, learn, learn from other people's projects
- Identify needs – work collaboratively and long term
- Focus on common ground to avoid “trauma tourism”
- Consider developing both hard and soft skills
- Be a learning “Ouroboros” (a symbol of self-reflexivity and cyclicity)
- Be flexible and prepared to take risks – reimagine and reactivate spaces and collections. Use creative practitioners to do this
- Manage expectations



Eritrean Coffee Ceremony with Abeba. Crossing Borders 2014.

4. Programming around Asylum

The group discussed the implications of organising events with/about refugees and asylum seekers. The group also developed some guideline to programme Refugee Week 2015.

- *Target local groups* and be aware of local demographics. Research and evaluation are the first steps to understand needs and demands. Groups should be targeted from within the local areas. E.g. Museum of Branding has large local Afro/Caribbean population but also attracts lots of tourists – whose needs should they tailor events to? National Army Museum – links with local Sikh community: one key item – such as first Sikh Commander’s sword- can be enough to make community feel their history is valued?
- *Raise awareness among staff?* Red Cross organised an internal event to raise awareness amongst their own staff, activities included invited speakers, a historical walk and a display produced by museum staff. This helped to raise awareness amongst staff who hadn’t encountered refugee communities before and recognise the positive contribution they make to UK.
- *Highlight hidden communities & histories.* Communities are constantly changing but some communities are considered more part of a local history. Opportunity to analyse different cycles of immigration, perhaps through oral history projects.

4.1 Programming for Refugee Week

- *Accessibility.* Paying for transport for refugees to attend events, make performances free of charge. However, not all museums/cultural organisations have resources i.e. space and money for projects, how can this be overcome? Perhaps events could be volunteer-led or we should develop more partnership projects to use resources collectively. This could also enable smaller organisations to benefit from expertise of larger organisations.
- *Approach sponsors in advance.* Is there shared knowledge of particular corporate organisations who want to work with refugee/migrant communities and would fund projects? Lebara Mobile are trying to become known as the migrant phone network so could be thought of as pro-migrant brand – are there others?
- *Development of activities.* Resources available from Counterpoint Arts. <http://counterpointsarts.org.uk/>. It is a good idea to research case studies from other organisations. Develop several different events that appeal to different audiences. Weekends usually attract a more diverse audience.

Appendix:

Crossing Borders 2015, Programme of Activities

What's
On

Crossing Borders 2015

Saturday 7th February 11-4pm.

11 – 1
&
1.40 – 2.50

The Dress My Mother Wore, Arts and Crafts Activity

Create your own paper dress designs with Streatham Women's Sewing Group CIC; display your creations alongside the Big Dress and take them home with you at the end of the day!

Gallery Square. Suitable for all ages.

11.40 – 12.20
&
2.10 – 2.50

The Stories behind the Pictures, Interactive Storytelling

Join storyteller Sally Pomme Clayton and members of the Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers as they tell stories from around the world, inspired by photographs people have taken, also exhibited in the room.

Hands on Base. Suitable for age 5+. Limited capacity. First come first served.

1.10 – 1.40
&
3 – 3.30

"I Was a Child Somewhere Else", Physical Theatre Performance

Join The Paper Project at the Oval House Theatre in a live art, physical theatre piece exploring the journey between childhood and adulthood.

Gallery Square. Suitable for all ages.

11 – 11.35
&
12.25 – 1

Seeking Refuge, Animation Film Screening

Five short animation films created by Mosaics Films for the BBC explore the experiences of young people who fled their home countries and sought asylum in the UK.

Hands On Base. Suitable for all ages. Limited capacity. First come first served.

3.45 – 4

Fairbeats! Song Sharing Performance

After having rehearsed throughout the afternoon, families from Action for Refugees in Lewisham working with Fairbeats! share what they have been up to with the public.

Gallery Square. Suitable for all ages.

All Day

Exhibitions

Look out for the bunting made by the Horniman Youth Panel and new arrivals at Pan-Intercultural Arts and spot the shopping bags created by families of the Indoamerican Refugee Migrant Organisation in collaboration with our family learning team.

Throughout the Museum. Suitable for all ages.

All Day

Library Open Day

To celebrate National Libraries Day 2015, our library will be open to all museum visitors. See some of the library treasures which relate to cultures from all around the world!



Children must be accompanied by an adult in all sessions. Spaces are limited and queuing may be necessary. Please note that our children's and family activities can accommodate family groups only. Playschemes should see the adjacent poster for activities more suited to their needs.

CG11225- Winter 2015

STREATHAM WOMEN'S SEWING GROUP CIC

'The Dress My Mother Wore' is an artwork which celebrates the passing of narratives, memories and skills from generation to generation of ethnically diverse women who are living in London today. The initiative comes out of a collaboration between artist Fion Gunn and craftswoman Ifrah Odawa who founded the Group. On a personal level it is inspired by the participants' personal memories of how important life occasions were marked by different dresses in the lives of our mothers: the weddings, religious feast days, family birthdays, reunions and homecomings.

Throughout the day the group invited members of the public to create their own paper dress designs which were displayed alongside the dress and were taken back home at the end of the day.

Streatham Women's Sewing Group CIC teaches local women to use sewing machines, hand sew, embroider, do beadwork and collaborate in the making of an annual artwork which can be displayed at public events in London. The aim is to empower all the women who attend the weekly sessions and to promote social inclusion and cohesion.



Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers was set up in 1997 with the aim to assist asylum seekers and refugees in London. The centre seeks to help relieve poverty and distress and to promote health, further education and general well-being. For the past few years, SDCAS has organised Crossing Borders in partnership with the Horniman Museum and Gardens. This year we developed a series of photography workshops. These took place across two day centres in Dulwich and Peckham. Throughout the sessions we looked at aspects of photography, including framing, lighting, point of view and composition which we applied to explore portraiture, still life and architectural photography.

Storyteller Sally Pomme Clayton has worked together with the photographers to explore the stories behind those pictures, shedding light on fragments of people's life experience in the UK. Sally Pomme Clayton is a writer and performance storyteller. She performs nationally and internationally, both solo and as part of collaborations with other artists.



The Paper project is a group of young migrant artists from Ovalhouse.

This performance has been devised by Salih Ahmed, Temor Al Kaisi, Hassan Al Mousaoy, Tamara Brenlla, Tania Cadena, Resa Gashi, Victor Rios, Lana Choufani, Rosa Brook and Stella Barnes.

The Paper Project is dedicated to the 155,000 undocumented children living in the UK who cannot fulfil their dreams of going to university or having a career and who live in fear of deportation.

Following the sell-out success of their first show – a collaboration with award winning artist Mark Storor, The Paper Project bring you their latest performance. *I Was a Child Somewhere Else* is a live-art, physical-theatre piece that explores the journey between childhood and adulthood.



Seeking Refuge is a series of animated documentaries created by Mosaics Films for BBC and exploring the experiences of young refugees living in the UK. Five short films look at the experiences of five young people who had fled their home countries and sought asylum in the UK. Director Andy Glynne says the aims of the films are clear: "At the very least I hope that it increases awareness within children," he says. "It's about showing engagement, empathy and understanding of what it's like for people who are fleeing their own homelands because of persecution."

The Seeking Refugee series is shown throughout the day in the Hands on Base.



Fairbeats! wants to enable children and families from new minority communities to overcome the barriers they face to participating fully in the musical, cultural life and wider society in the UK. The team works at Action for Refugees in Lewisham, as part of the Saturday school 'Rainbow club'.

On the day, families who attend the Saturday club held a workshop and a final song sharing performance, working on songs written by the families over the last month with music leader Abimaro Gunnel.

Exhibitions

The **Horniman Youth Panel** have been regularly meeting with a group of young new arrivals from **PAN Intercultural Arts** to get to know each other, share food and get creative. They recently worked with printmaker Stephanie Hartman to design and make their own colourful bunting. From fish to football, from seahorses to South Sudan; each flag represents a unique individual's interests and collectively reflect the cohesion of a diverse group of young people.



Look out for the bunting in the Gallery Square area!

The Horniman Youth Panel are a group of young people aged 14-19 who meet in the museum every Thursday to plan events, run activities and help the museum become a more youth-friendly place to be.

Pan Intercultural Arts is an organisation that believes in the power of the arts for social change. The Future group are all young new arrivals from all over the world, who meet regularly for support, friendship and creative projects.



The **Indoamerican Refugee Migrant Organisation** is a non-profit organisation that provides advice and support for the Latin American migrant community in London.

In December 2014, families from IRMO's Family Project organised a special Christmas party, each bringing a typical dish from their country. In January 2015, a family workshop at the museum further explored the link between cooking and identity. Each family worked together to create a shopping bag decorated with the ingredients and recipe of one of their favourite and most nostalgic dishes. The room was buzzing with mouthwatering descriptions of ingredients and dishes native to Spain, Colombia, Ecuador and beyond...



The bags are exhibited by the museum main entrance.