

## **Artist in Residence reflective session 30.05.14**

**PURPOSE:** To reflect on the recent AiR programme in order to understand the impact of this residency on the individuals involved and on Glasgow Museums as an organisation.

### **Part 1: Sharing stories**

Each person shared their story of working with Artist in Residence, Emma Drye, noting the journey each of them took with her and what the highlights and headlines of this journey were.

#### **Staff A's story**

- Staff A was aware of the development of the AiR position through being part of the Staff Ambassadors Programme. As a result of being an Ambassador, Staff A was also involved in the Open Day for prospective candidates. Emma was actually on the tour that Staff A conducted that day. Being involved at this early stage of the Residency programme was a positive experience for Staff A and she was interested in how the residency would develop once a candidate was selected.
- Her direct connection with Emma started with an “innocent chat” and she felt that, at this time, she really opened up to Emma right away. She felt that through their initial conversations about doing and making, they were on the same wavelength. Staff A saw Emma as something of an ally.
- During this first chat, Staff A and Emma discussed the laws of conservation and this is where the law of thermo-dynamics was first discussed.
- After a short period of time had passed, Staff A received an email from Emma. She was rather surprised to receive it and to see how well Emma had summarised that first initial conversation. She felt that Emma had picked up very well on her thoughts and had even drawn out and made more tangible some of the ideas Staff A thought she had not made clear.
- Staff A was also surprised that from here, a piece of work was to be created.
- Staff A noted that she really enjoyed all of Emma's talks and presentations and the context Emma provided for her work. She said that it was great that Emma had taken the time to provide this context.
- The manifesto created was wonderful. It made Staff A's thoughts tangible and opened doors to new expressions and ways of thinking.
- Staff A felt that one of the key “take-aways” from her time with Emma and hearing the other manifestos is to be reminded that there can be strength in showing emotion. It can allow you to connect in new ways with colleagues.

#### **Staff B's story**

- Like Staff A, Staff B was involved in the set up and interviewing for the AiR position so already had a lot of information about the process before Emma joined the staff.
- Staff B noted that the interview process in itself was a revelation for him – the artist selected was not a visual artist but a participatory artist who did not have any set outcomes in mind.
- At first, Staff B's interactions with Emma were practical. As the venue manager, he set up practical arrangements and also had a cup of tea with Emma on her first day to make her feel welcome, as he would with any new staff member.
- In a subsequent chat, Emma asked about what was, at the time, a very topical issue for GMRC – the shortage of forks in the tea room and they had a discussion around this and his role as the venue manager.
- This discussion and the subsequent email exchange between himself and Emma that resulted ultimately in the Fork Manifesto gave Staff B a chance to reflect on himself and the personal qualities he brings to his work.

- As well as his own manifesto, a further highlight of the residency for Staff B was the 120 Threads installation in the stairwell. He felt this was a lovely and very subtle way of representing the Glasgow Museums team and how each person intersects and connects as part of a complex staff team. This can sometimes be hard to conceive of with so much going on and people working across so many venues and priorities. It was a welcome reminder of our interconnectedness.
- Staff B noted that there was nothing abrasive about Emma's approach –her work was gentle and inviting – in a way, almost “flirtatious”.
- Staff B concluded by noting that the residency reminded him that there is a danger of becoming institutionalised but this can be avoided if you remember you are dealing with people not job titles and place value on human interaction.

### **Staff C's story**

- Staff C showed Emma round GMRC on one of her first days with us. He explained that he was a little bit nervous about doing this because she was “An Artist” and maybe would ask questions that would be demanding and that Staff C might not know how to answer.
- Staff C's fears quickly evaporated as the tour very quickly became a sharing experience where Staff C learnt a little about Emma and her background and she asked about him and his background. This sharing of personal stories put Staff C at ease. The sense of reciprocity, with Emma sharing her own personal experiences as Staff C did his, was particularly noted by Staff C.
- They went immediately to Pod 2 and looked at the butterflies and Emma asked why Staff C liked these so much. His response was that the colours and patterns are attractive, even to “hardened” ex soldiers, who Staff C frequently works with.
- As an ex soldier himself, Staff C explained that for him there was a correlation between the butterflies, with their cocoons, and how a soldier, on returning to civilian life, can cocoon himself/herself away.
- Staff C noted that he did not think, during this exchange, that he was “being targeted for an artwork”! He was surprised to get Emma's email but even then, he still did not quite realise that a piece of work would be created, not just by Emma but by the two of them. He noted Emma's use of the word “we” in her email to him.
- This was wonderful experience and very humbling for Staff C. The experience of having a manifesto created from the original exchange has been very personal – a “magic museum moment” – which Staff C will not forget.
- He also liked the rope drawing of the soldier's helmet that Emma did in the courtyard before his manifesto. Although many people may not have understood what it was, he got it right away and that meant a lot to him. Almost a private exchange between Emma and himself.
- Staff C concluded by saying that Emma was a bit like a pinch – she made him look again at his work, what he does and how he has travelled from the military world to the museum world. The process of working with Emma confirmed Staff C's professional journey for him.

### **Staff D's story**

- Emma visited Staff D in her studio. At first, Staff D thought it was going to be a chat about her work as a conservator but it quickly shifted away from just Staff D's job to a broader discussion about her professional and personal journey.
- For Staff D, the entire experience of working with Emma felt quite ‘selfish’ in the context of the many work demands on her & colleagues. It was a chance to self-reflect. Emma was a fantastic listener and Staff D really enjoyed the opportunity to talk to her, particularly given their shared experiences of studying Fine Art and the reflection that comes with arts practice.
- It was a very emotional and cathartic experience for Staff D to be able to look at who she is and to reflect on this through her interactions with Emma.
- Staff D noted that going through the process with Emma was an experience in itself and there was no emphasis on the exchanges leading directly to a final product – although it is great that there is one.
- This final product (Staff D's artworks and manifesto) will have something hidden within it that only she and Emma will know is there. This has come about because of Emma's methodology of

'negotiated practice' and so it involves Emma's work as an artist & Staff D's work as a conservator to reveal it. It is deeply personal and reflects how much of the "process" with Emma was a personal and professional journey of self-reflection for Staff D.

- Conversations with Emma highlighted many aspects of Staff D's job that she loves and also the importance & significance of the 'intangible', the 'mysterious', the 'unspoken', the 'poetry' both in her work & in life. She feels that the organisation is 'process driven' and has lost sight of some of these qualities.
- Staff D echoed Staff A's point that Emma had the ability to draw out the intangibles that can be overlooked (by institutions) – the values and qualities that make Staff D the person and the professional that she is.
- The whole experience was a chance to think differently and creatively, something that Staff D feels she does not get the opportunity for in her work nowadays. The greater requirement is to inform institutional processes.
- She stressed that working with Emma made her feel valued for herself, not just a job title.
- It was 'permission' to behave & think differently for a little while.
- Staff D concluded that "humanity and soul" were two things that should be valued by an organisation so that it can resist being too "institutional" in approach to its staff, its collections and ultimately, its public.

## **Part 2: Key learning**

The group reflected on what it felt were some of the key lessons learnt from working with Emma through the residency.

### **Communication**

- The quality and depth of communication evidenced through the residency and Emma's practice offered chances for us to interact in different ways.
- Emma cut through organisational barriers during her residency – she struck up conversations and got to know people. She didn't "target" them to work with her. Emma demonstrated how much can be achieved through the simple act of reaching out and making a connection with someone and taking the time to get to know them.
- Each of us should make the effort to strike up conversations with colleagues we do not know well as this could lead to new collaborations in the work place. The example given in the session was Staff C and Staff D not knowing each other well and never having had a chance to work together. Staff D is now going to make this a priority!

### **Emotional intelligence**

- Emma's practice showed how to value individuals for who they are, not just as job titles. Important lesson (so easy to forget!) in seeing our colleagues as people not job titles
- The residency has resonances with some of the leadership/management mentoring/training/coaching that is currently being rolled out across Glasgow Life. Some of this training looks at the importance of emotional intelligence in the workplace, which Emma's residency underscored very deeply.
- Empathy is crucial in our interactions and communications within the workplace
- Emma showed a more human way of working to us: the importance of compassion and humanity for a positive working environment
- Emma's practice was empathetic and sensitive. It showed inclusiveness, responsiveness to our community and was participatory. Our museums service needs to be these things for its communities.
- Through working with Emma, there has been a realisation of how much benefit there is in having someone be appreciative (in the broadest sense) of us as individuals and what we bring to the work we do
- I met Emma through conversations in the office, in the staff room, at exhibition openings, and on the train. As well as being very creative and intelligent, she is very thoughtful and empathetic and seemed to have a super-power like insight into how we work here.

### **Active listening as a key skill**

- Emma was almost like a therapist. Her practice showed the importance of listening to understand. Active listening is a real skill and one we all need.
- Real listening and the ability to communicate in a multi-sensory way (as Emma's practice showed) leads to better problem-solving and creative solutions to emerge.

### **Making time**

- We made time to talk with Emma – this should remind us of the importance of making time, not only for self-development but also for nurturing relationships with colleagues.
- The presentations were a refreshing time and space to think about work and colleagues in a different way, and were really enjoyable.

### **Creative thinking**

- One of my aims on the staff ambassadors programme was to think more creatively and Emma definitely helped facilitate this. I see a link between initiatives like the staff photography competition and Emma's influence as well.

### **Opportunity for reflection**

- Emma's practice allowed each of us to reflect on ourselves and examine who we are, what we are doing and where we are. This has been a healthy process which we should all make time for in our work routines.
- It has been very thought provoking to have someone from outside hold a mirror up to us in such a sensitive way.
- It has made us reflect on why we *all* do it [work for GM] and the value of *all* of it- sometimes it becomes difficult to remember that.

### **Additional comments from staff**

- I think having an artist here working with the staff was groundbreaking, I haven't heard about any other museums doing that. I was at the MA conference in Liverpool last year and attended a session about artists in residence and Artist A was talking about doing a residency at the National Gallery in a studio, responding to the collection but we had an artist responding to our people which is totally different.
- I was delighted to be involved in the recruitment process by leading tours of GMRC for some of the artists who applied, and this showed me the importance of a clear brief, which we had given, and who was able to respond to this on the tour.
- Although Emma was based at GMRC, it would have been nice to see more colleagues from other venues (eg.GOMA) at her presentations.
- Very few managers came to the presentations, and some departments and sections didn't attend the ones that I went to, which is a shame.
- Maybe we could have an artist-in-residence on the Burrell project?!