

Sharing decisions in exhibition-making

The Museum of Liverpool is all about people's stories and hidden histories and telling lots of diverse stories.

Homotopia approached us, they were awarded an HLF grant and they were keen to work with the Museum of Liverpool on a collaborative project about April's life but also the wider trans community in this country.

Homotopia have a very strong relationship with April Ashley herself and she approached them with bin bags of her archive which have never been seen before.

So one of their first tasks was to kind of look through all of these things, decide what might kind of go into the exhibition and then later along the line, we all met and looked at the key objects and between ourselves, we selected the key items which we wanted to display.

They tell a great story, not just about April but her wider campaigning on behalf of the trans community.

Homotopia were involved in lots of decision-making and I suppose the power within the exhibition, the power and the ownership, where we see it can be very different if it's a museum-led exhibition or working with different types of community groups but obviously, Homotopia really wanted a strong say about the look of the exhibition for example and also balancing that story between April and the trans community which, of course, we wanted to achieve also.

There were obviously collaborative decision-making that we needed to discuss.

For example, with the title of the exhibition and we did go back and forth quite a lot but in the end, we did settle on April Ashley: Portrait of a Lady and everyone seemed to be happy with that.

I think we both learnt through trial and error and really kind of negotiation and really coming to compromises on different things because you really have got to kind of pick your battles really, some things are more important than other things and a lot of things that we would normally be quite strict on you've just got to let go and appreciate that you've got to hand over some of the power and the ownership in the exhibitions and that's really how's it got to work.

They had researched, obviously, the history of April. Working with April herself they wrote the text.

I worked very closely with Gary Everett, the artistic director of Homotopia.

So my role was really to edit his text and really make it very accessible to a wider audience. And really kind of advise about best practice and how things work best in an exhibition format really.

Usually our press and marketing team would take the lead on all press and marketing but it was slightly different with Homotopia because they brought their own press person along as well.

So they worked in collaboration a lot to make sure all bases were covered, brought lots of different new and interesting avenues that they brought their expertise along

that our kind of press people might not necessarily have kind of plugged into, so it worked really well.

There were some challenges throughout the development of the exhibition.

They're a very small organisation and we're a national, large museum with lots of different departments across lots of different museums, who are very deadline specific, because there's lots of other projects going on too.

So it was very challenging, but we had to be quite flexible in our approach with Homotopia, a lot more than we could be normally.

When you let go of power, I think it allows a more creative process you maybe do things that you wouldn't normally do in a more traditional museum setting.

So I think it's very beneficial for everyone involved and maybe that the exhibition at the end of the day is more kind of approachable and different and unusual to the rest of the museum, which is really good.