Future Museums – Play and Design
A V&A Conference, 19 November 2019
V&A Museum of Childhood is transforming into a world-leading museum of design and creativity for children and families. This exciting capital project provides an historic moment to explore the potential of play in museums to support the best possible outcomes for children, families and young people. Our vision is to build creative confidence in future generations and to be a powerful advocate for creativity and learning through play. This flagship event is an opportunity to hear about one of the most important and playful museum projects of the moment and to understand how architects and designers are responding to the challenge, working with children in a co-design context. We are creating a museum rooted in children’s needs and creativity now and for the future.

As researched in early years development and cogitative psychology, play is the critical foundation for creativity, learning and well-being: play is how we learn to connect with others, it is a mode of creative problem-solving, imagination and experimentation that helps us understand how we can impact the world and affect change. Our brains develop fastest in the first five years of our lives. The more a child is engaged with new ideas, objects, and experiences, the more neural pathways grow and strengthen in their brain. Play offers the foundations of emotional and mental wellbeing for children and through the life-course yet the opportunities for play are dwindling. Given this, how can museums and cultural institutions become seriously play filled spaces? How can we activate collections, design spaces and programme content that will empower our audiences through the power of play across generations and in a fast-changing and uncertain world? How can we support parents to foster play with their children from the very earliest moments? How can museums advocate for play as fundamental to the health and wellbeing of children, families and young people in wider society?

Kicking off with award-winning and field-defining psychologist Professor Kathy Hirsh-Pasek from Philadelphia, this conference brings together play futurists, policy makers, designers, museum professionals and play practitioners to share diverse perspectives and innovative ideas. Architects De Matos Ryan and designers Agents of Change will be showcasing their innovative practice through the live project developing they have been undertaking with local school children for the new V&A Museums of Childhood. Inspired by this project, delegates from the museum industry will come together to engage in talks & workshops throughout the day to explore the potential of play to shape our museum futures and how our sector might be a catalyst for positive change around public policy on the importance of play for children’s wellbeing.
Tuesday 19 November  
Location: Hochhauser Auditorium

09:30    Registration open with tea and coffee

AM:        Why is play so important?

10.00     Welcome:  
           Tristram Hunt, Director V&A

10.10     Opening address and provocation:  
           Future Museums: Play and Design

10.30     Keynote:  
           Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Department of Psychology at Temple University

11.15     Audience Q&A

11.30     Panel session:  
           Propositions on the importance of designing space for play  
           • Dinah Bornatt, ZCD architects  
           • Charlotte Derry, Playful Places and The Happy Museum Project  
           • Jenny Gibson, Lecturer in Psychology and Education

12.15     Audience Q&A

12.30     Lunch break

PM:        How can we foster and design for true play?  
The afternoon will feature various Breakout Sessions.

13.30     Breakout 1 – Design & Space  
           Dinah Bornatt hosts an in conversation with De Matos Ryan and AOC (Agents of Change)

Breakout 2 – Digital Play & Museums  
Professor Jackie Marsh, University of Sheffield will present with Senior Research Fellow, Kate Cowan, UCL Institute of Education on digital play, particularly for early years audiences. They will present on the MAKEY project and Playing the Archive.
Breakout 3 – Early Years: Steiner, Montessori and Froebel
Please join this workshop featuring: Tina Bruce CBE, Froebel, Barbara Issacs, Global Ambassador, Montessori, and Janni Nicol, Senior Advisor, Steiner.

Breakout 4 – Play Futures
Yesim Kunter, Play Futurist, will facilitate a workshop creating an Interactive session to generate ideas on future of play with the future of museums in mind.

Breakout 5 – Making Games in Museums
Matteo Menapace, V&A Game Designer in Residence, will facilitate a workshop exploring the possibilities for game making and game design.

14.30  Tea and coffee break

15.00  Breakout Sessions: Repeat of the above sessions

PM:  What needs to happen next?

16.00  Panel Discussion: “How can museums put play high on the agenda?”
Chair: Helen Charman, V&A Director Learning and National Programmes
- Annie Warburton, Cockpit Arts CEO
- Eleanor Image, Play Development Manager at Play Association Tower Hamlets

16.45  Audience Q&A

17.00  Wrap up

17:15  We invite everyone to a Playful evening reception at V&A Museum of Childhood, Bethnal Green with complimentary drinks.

18:00  Opening Welcome
Gina Koutsika, V&A Museum of Childhood Creative & Skills Director

Followed by talks from De Matos Ryan and AOC (Agents of Change) and games!

20.30  Event close