Appendix 7
Reach Out Project Report
Pier Arts Centre, Orkney
1. Title of Project: REACH OUT

The time frame of the project dictated that the main audience for the project would be a local audience. Through the winter months – November to April, Orkney, like many more remote and rural communities that have a large tourist/visitor season through the summer seasons – turns itself inward and activities and events take on a more local and community focus. A further determining factor in developing the project is the Pier Arts Centre’s dual function as gallery and museum. The permanent Collection plays a key role in the project not only as a means of setting a context from which to view contemporary art and the gallery’s temporary programme, but as a more direct interpretative ‘tool’. Approaches to interpretation will include traditional methods and new technology, text, spoken word, practical and contextual workshops and events.

2. Research Question:

‘What interpretation strategies can we develop and adopt that will encourage and maintain interest from a locally-based audience?’

3. Description of project:

Context

‘……scattered rural population and isolated location, but PAC’s attendance figures are very high in percentage population and visitor terms. This underlines the integrated nature of the endeavour and highlights PAC’s responsibility for visual arts and cultural development in a precisely defined geographical area’
Pier Arts Centre Feasibility Study, Peter Davis, Mike Sixsmith, Sutherland Hussey Architects, September 1998

Background

The project is set against the recent refurbishment and extension to the Pier Arts Centre. The Feasibility Study commissioned by the Trustees of the Pier Arts Centre in 1998 (Peter Davis, Mike Sixsmith, Sutherland Hussey Architects) identified many issues that required addressing if the Centre was to continue to care for its Collection and deliver its ambitious temporary exhibition programme into the 21st century. The refurbishment of the Gallery, which re-opened in July 2007, addresses both physical and intellectual access to the gallery’s buildings and exhibitions programme. The issues addressed concur with those highlighted by Heather Lynch’s study Mapping Interpretation Practices in Contemporary Art (May 2006) and identified as ‘barriers’ that exist throughout museums and galleries in Scotland presenting contemporary visual art.

Framing the Research activity

Nearly 30 years experience, supported by visitor’s book/comments, regular visitor surveys and informal & anecdotal reporting from gallery staff, indicate that in general once the visitor is in the gallery their experience is one of ‘surprise’, ‘delight’, ‘informative’ ‘helpfulness and knowledge of staff’. In the main very few visitors complain or comment that gallery interpretation is inadequate, inaccessible or overly laden with art speak. Comments are again
generally very positive about the range and quality of interpretative and supporting material. The knowledge of front of house staff is regularly commented upon. This suggests that the barrier is not necessarily in the gallery itself – but outside, that perceptions, especially with the local audience, are the issue that needs to be addressed.

**Question: What is the gallery about and who is it for?**

Visitor and Marketing surveys identify the following views in the local community:

a) Believe gallery is mainly for tourists
b) Only one visit (accompanying a tourist/visitor) is necessary
c) Unsure of the relevance of the ‘Collection’ with concentration of St Ives artists
d) Perception that contemporary art is ‘difficult’ and not for them

Given that the focus audience would be a locally based one, interpretation therefore had to extend beyond the confines of the gallery and the area that the action research should concentrate on needed to include audience development, marketing and outreach.

The starting point to establish where action research would most usefully and purposefully be directed was based on examining existing interpretation strategies/methods and re-examining Heather Lynch’s report.

**Extract from Interpretations: Stage 2 Application**

Referring to Mapping Interpretation Practices in Contemporary Art, Section 5.2 Moving Forward – key areas for further research, we believe that when fully developed our project will at some level have addressed the five key issues identified. Within the areas of Interactivity, Audience-generated artwork and Language there is potential to explore these in relation to the specific issues of Space and Partnership.

**Space** – The recent refurbishment of the Pier Arts Centre offers considerable scope, both in its concept and design, to explore and experiment with the range of environments experienced by the visitor.

**Partnership** – The re-generated Pier Arts Centre has been a key instrument in the Stromness re-development planning process. This project would aim to continue our involvement with the organisations that form the Stromness Redevelopment Forum, whose main aims are to promote business and community activities for the betterment of Stromness and surrounding areas, as well as provide facilities and services for the benefit of its members.

**PLANNING**

Having identified that the key aspect was ‘threshold’ – how do we encourage audience over the doorstep? – a series of activities and events, were planned, supported by publicity and follow-up local media coverage. The activities and events took as their focus three main strands, the PAC permanent Collection, the temporary exhibitions programme and the recently redeveloped gallery buildings. We also maximised the opportunity to work with other partners, especially non-arts organisations.

The programme of activities and events would allow reassessment of existing methods of gallery interpretation with new audience groups and identify gaps and need for new approaches to be adopted.

**Extract from Interpretations: Stage 2 Application**
A minimum of 8 workshops with differing remits would take place, each aimed at
different sectors of the local audience, designed for different age groups and levels of
interest and experience, for example

- **Pier Group** (our on-going programme for 16-18 years)
- **Artist Support & Mentoring Group** (working with professional artists)
- **Community groups** (eg partnership with local library)

A minimum of 8 talks/events with differing emphasis would take place delivered by
PAC Staff and invited speakers, for example, the principal architect of the
redevelopment project.

**Other areas for investigation:**

Since re-opening, gallery spaces have been used as meeting venue for a variety of
outside, non-arts organisations

- Revision of Recognition Scheme application papers for possible publication and
research
- Visitor survey of local organisations and individuals, Youth clubs, Day Care Centres,
Orkney’s Care Homes, SWRI

**RESEARCH ACTIVITY**

A programme of talks, activities and workshops was developed that encompassed
aspects of both the Collection and Temporary programme. It covered a wide range of
ages with both targeted groups and open events.

**REACH OUT EVENTS & ACTIVITIES**

**PAC Collection**

**Margaret Tait Film Archive**

*Nature of activity/event:* A series of workshops that take as their start point
the Margaret Tait Film Archive. Through working with locally-based filmmaker
and Education Officer the group will create individual short films.

*Targeted Group/ Open/Public Event:* Pier Group (16-18 years)
*Partner:* Orkney Library & Archive
*Outcome:* Audience generated artwork, Interpretative resource
*Date:* (to date 5 workshops) Nov-April
*No of participants/audience:* 8
*Interpretation material produced** NB: This project is still on-going

**LOOK**

*Nature of activity/event:*
A series of gallery and school based workshops for Class 1 Dounby School
that looked in detail at the PAC Collection and the work of the gallery staff,
culminating in a gallery event for parents and extended family.

*Targeted Group/Open/Public Event:* Young parents and extended families
living out with Stromness area.
*Partner:* OIC Education Department and Dounby School
*Outcome:* Audience generated interpretation and artwork.

- A series of interpretative materials were produced to accompany the
exhibition of pupils work.
- Working over several months, pupils built up knowledge, experience and
enthusiasm for the project, this was supported by parents comments at
the event and by the number of visitors returning specifically to see the
project.
- A schools resource is in the process of being developed for other schools
to carry out a similar project.
**Date:** 3 workshops, 1 gallery event March 2008  
**No of participants/audience:** Class 1 - 19 pupils, Event – 73  
**Interpretation materials produced:** Wall panel, catalogue, video display, hands-on activity corner, guided tours  
**COMMENT:** This project had a number of aims  
- a) audience development  
- b) working with OIC Education Department  
- c) develop resources for the ‘Curriculum for Excellence’  
- d) provide project for SAC funded Education Traineeship  
- e) develop a range of interpretation materials with the children

**Storyquest**  
**Nature of activity/event:** Storytelling Event with professional storyteller, who used artworks from both the Collection and the temporary exhibition as a means of introduction to and backdrop to traditional stories.  
**Targeted Group:** Open/Public Event: Families  
**Partner:** Orkney Library and Archive  
**Outcome:** A refreshing approach and new insight to the artworks that could be developed for future gallery tours by staff  
**Date:** 3 November 2007  
**No of participants:** 21

**Art in St Ives from Turner to the Modernists**  
**Nature of activity/event:** Illustrated Talk by Susan Daniel McElroy, former director Tate St Ives, and former Head of Visual Arts, SAC at early stage of PAC re-launch project.  
**Targeted Group:** Open/Public Event:  
**Partner:** N/A  
**Outcome:** Providing insight into St Ives artists and drawing out parallels with Orkney.  
**Date:** 5 June 2008  
**No of participants/audience:** 26

**Temporary Programme**  
**His Angry Ghost**  
**Nature of activity/event:** A series events focusing on the temporary exhibition ‘His Angry Ghost’, new work by Colin Johnstone  
- Artist talks:  
- Leading Light: Children’s workshop  
- Media coverage  

**Targeted Group:** Open/Public Event: Talks 3 x targeted groups (HE Students, 16-18 years, 5-11 years. 2 x public talks.  
Workshops 3 x targeted group (5-11 years)  
**Partner:** N/A  
**Outcome:** Material and resources suitable for coverage in local press and radio  
**Date:** 8 February-4 April 2008  
**No of participants/audience:** 61  
**Interpretation material produced:** Wall text, Leading Lights gallery guide, Notice board with press coverage and HE student essays.  
**COMMENT:** An exhibition of work that could be seen as being ‘difficult’ ‘challenging’ – the artist also had misconceptions about interpretation and had anxieties about what form it might take.

**Lead Astray**  
**Nature of activity/event:**
- Artists Walk and Talk: Lead Astray shared sculpture by Bill Woodrow and Richard Deacon
- Schools workshop: Contextual and practical workshop Primary 7 pupils Papdale school
  
  **Open/Public Event & Targeted Group**
  
  **Partner:** N/A
  
  **Outcome:** Return visits to exhibition
  
  **Date:** 18 April 2008, 29 May 2008
  
  **No of participants/audience:** Talk 34, Workshop 11
  
  **Interpretation materials:** Wall text, catalogue, pupils work/photographs

**Non-Arts Partnerships**

**Treasured Places**

*Nature of activity/event:* Part of a national series of workshops celebrating the centenary of the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historical Monuments for Scotland

  **Targeted Group:** Open/Public Event
  
  **Partner:** RCAHMS
  
  **Outcome:** non-arts organisation making use of gallery facilities and PAC experience of managing projects of this type.
  
  **Date:** 12-16 November 2007, 3x workshops, 1 public event
  
  **No of participants:** Workshops-12, Public event-32

**Orkney Retired Teachers**

*Nature of activity/event:* Venue for twice-yearly meeting of local branch of Retired Teachers Association. Gallery tour

  **Targeted Group:** Open/Public Event
  
  **Partner:** 
  
  **Outcome:** Increased awareness of gallery’s activity to large and respected section of local community
  
  **Date:** 21 May 2008
  
  **No of participants:** 42

**Starting Well/Playing Well**

*Nature of activity/event:* Providing a range of art-based activities at a one-day event organised by Childcare Partnership to highlight the benefits of play to young parents

  **Targeted Group:** Open/Public Event: Open event for young parents
  
  **Partner:** Childcare Partnership
  
  **Outcome:** Profile for gallery and opportunity to increase awareness of gallery’s activity to young parents.
  
  **Date:** 27 October 2008
  
  **No of participants:** 65

*In addition to these specific events the gallery’s on-going programme of Family days, visits from and by schools and community groups contributed valuable information and feedback to the action research.*

**During the period of the project**

**Activities and events:** 70

**Participants:** 1174

**PAC Refurbishment and New Buildings**

**Gallery Reception and Retail**

Layout of shop and reception: Street presence was an issue that the Feasibility Study identified as something that the redevelopment should address. A new frontage has been created that allows a view through to the gallery’s pier where a large Barbara Hepworth sculpture is located. The new
frontage doubles the street presence of the gallery with a large glazed entrance giving visitors a clear message of what’s inside.

Reception: Dedicated and informed front of house staff greet visitors with a range of information that can be distributed to visitors. Front of House staff, through their induction and training, are quick to ascertaining the level of interest of any gallery visitor and are skilled in attending to individual need.

Merchandising: A range of exclusive products has been commissioned by the Pier from local artists and craft industry along with a number of PAC branded products.

Refurbished galleries
The addition of new galleries and the refurbishment of existing galleries has increased and extended the potential and flexibility for exhibition programming. The design and architecture of the buildings create a set of visual relationships that extend the visitor experience beyond the artwork itself and allow routes and viewpoints that can act as ‘interpretation’.

Stromness Redevelopment Consultation
The experience of its own redevelopment has placed the Pier Arts Centre as a key leader in the wider process of addressing the future of Stromness as a whole. The gallery director has been involved in this strategic consultation process which has a number of local partners – in the commercial, business and residential sectors
The Pier Group were involved in a workshop session to specifically consult on the views of young people regarding the future of the town from their perspective.

RESEARCH TEAM

The lead for the project was undertaken by the Pier Arts Centre Education Officer, but involved all staff at the gallery

_The Curatorial Team_ - The Director, Exhibitions Officer and Education Officer are responsible for preparing gallery interpretation.

_Marketing and Publicity Team_ – The Director, Exhibitions Officer, Marketing and Retail Officer are responsible for Press Releases and promotion of Exhibitions and Gallery.

The Education Officer and Marketing and Retail Officer are responsible for _Audience Development._

_Front of House_ is responsibility of Marketing and Retail Officer, along with Retail Assistant and Seasonal staff.

Participants and partner organisations are listed with each of the projects above.

4. Description of research:

**WHAT DID THE RESEARCH TELL US?**

- Established what barriers existed and where our focus of attention should be concentrated for our local audience.
- Provided a framework for the kind of activities and events that appeal to a local audience and the impact that the material generated can have on interpretation for the wider audience.
- It established the range of level of interest from non-arts users of the gallery, its facilities and services and whether there are opportunities that can be utilised for non-arts user groups. Particular kinds of interpretation? How this can inform the Collection and exhibitions programme.

**WHAT DID WE FIND OUT?**
That in addressing the local audience there is a strong relationship between audience development, marketing and interpretation.

That providing a range of voices – young people, such as the Leading Lights, the informed voice of the artist, and front of house/gallery staff, not just those of the curatorial team gives the audience a wider breadth of views and experiences that they can identify with.

That a combination of targeting specific groups and public open events encouraged people to make return visits

That audiences are not looking for information/paper based overload

That audiences enjoy speaking to well-informed front-of-house staff and gallery guides

That with a flexible approach it is possible to respond quickly to local requests at short notice, either for events or exhibition space

Artists talks are popular, especially with local audience

Many of the events developed from casual conversations and were about offering a voice other than that of the curatorial team (see HL pg47)

5. Outcomes:

Interpretation Material
The Pier Arts Centre has a very clear policy on gallery interpretation and is the responsibility of the Education Officer, but is considered by the full Curatorial team.

As stated earlier, our existing approach does not receive much adverse comment, which would indicate that while we are far from complacent, that the content and the language that is used in presenting information provides levels of suitable access for the wide range of our audiences.

The following material has been produced as part of this project:

Wall based texts
Extended labels
Artist’s Talks
Interviews for local BBC Radio
In-house publications
Catalogues
Artworks
Preparation of material suitable for web-based presence (still to be activated see Challenges)
Locally commissioned products based on PAC Collection for retail area – with interpretation

Describe the effect of the project on interpretation practice.

Although many issues surrounding access both physical and intellectually have been resolved by the redevelopment project, REACH OUT has provided the opportunity to assess and reassess our interpretation strategies with particular reference to our local audience.

The development of a number of partnerships with local organisations, many non-arts based – both formal and informal has greatly increased awareness of the Pier Arts Centre and that what we do can be relevant in a local context.

The increased use of gallery as a venue for non-arts use, provides the opportunity to engage audience who might not otherwise visit the gallery.

6. Reflection on this experience:
Describe what was valuable to you personally
- the opportunity to meet with colleagues and share good practice
- to assess current methods
- develop a strategy for documenting and evaluating

**to your organisation**
- Finding ways to develop better monitoring and evaluation of visitor response and reaction to interpretation that is useful and meaningful
- the extent and range of 'interpretation'
- Raising of profile of gallery locally, though media coverage of exhibitions, events and activities.

**Notes, Points and Questions raised and considered:**
Regular gallery visitor - added value
- Why would you come back on regular basis?
  - Becoming more informed
  - Stimulate and provoke interest

Having established a strategy that has a number of different approaches that have been tried and tested the question arises as to the purpose and reasoning behind encouraging repeat visits – what is the added value

What is the potential of the Collection to provide a deeper and more insightful engagement with the work –
- setting a context/frame of reference from which the contemporary programme
- provides a sound basis from which to view and consider the more challenging aspects of the contemporary programme.
- Establishing connections and parallels
- Creating a range of experiences and opportunities

**Challenges**
Although other members of staff were involved in the project the responsibility for the development and delivery of the action research lay with the Education Officer.
- With an already extensive programme of gallery and outreach activity the challenge was to ‘fit’ the research to existing programme.
- The greatest challenge was in evaluating the different aspects of the project.
  - It was not always appropriate
    - As sole deliverer it was difficult to document some events
- Timescale for overall evaluation of REACH OUT project too soon to properly see any significant changes in local audience response.
- Staff resources limit the number of staff who can be based in galleries as guides
- Getting material from project onto web – we currently have no dedicated IT staff/expertise.

**Conclusions**
The Pier Arts Centre was selected to participate in the project partly because of its dual function as a gallery and museum, housing an important permanent Collection of 20th century British Modernist art. The Collection has recently been extended through participation in the National Collecting Scheme for Scotland including works by Sean Scully, Callum Innes, Olafur Eliason and Garry Fabian Millar which add a contemporary perspective to the Collection.

It seems early to assess the impact of REACH OUT. The project developed and changed throughout its course – highlighting the advantage of action research.
There is certainly a greater awareness within the gallery of the impact that events and activity can have on a local audience and how in turn that they can be involved more directly in generating interpretative material.

An aspect of REACH OUT that could be further explored is the juxtaposition of the Collection and a local audience – two elements with a permanent base in Orkney. The Collection serves as an important inroad to contemporary art, not just in giving historical context but also in being utilised more directly (or indirectly) as an interpretation aid when considering the temporary programme.

Participation in the project prompted a wide range of questions with the continual assessment and evaluation of events and projects creating a greater awareness of the position that interpretation should and can take in the gallery. The scope of possibility.

Carol Dunbar, Education Officer
15 August 2008
Appendix 6a
Reach Out Contemporary Art Context

Note

The review material contained within this appendix does not necessarily reflect the thoughts or position of the Pier Art Centre. The material is included to offer the reader additional perspective on the art works that contextualises the Reach Out project.
The Pier Arts Centre, Orkney

Exhibitions

(11 February - 5 April 2008)

His Angry Ghost

Colin Johnstone

Colin Johnstone was born in Motherwell in 1960 and has lived in Orkney for over twenty years.

He graduated from Glasgow School of Art in 1982 and is part of a generation of artists who re-focussed and re-invigorated interest in Scottish art.

As the title of the exhibition suggests the artist is interested in past occurrences, events or stories that re-emerge or are re-interpreted to influence the present.

Collected objects and texts provide a wellspring for the artworks. Through subtle and skilful re-forming these materials and ideas are re-invented to create richly-layered narratives and relationships.

Throughout, meaning is revealed and obscured. Ideas are paired and set against one another: absence and presence; visual and literary; narrative and illustration.

This discipline extends to the crafting of the work itself the routine of thinking, painting, cutting and sticking belies the painstaking and meticulous processes undertaken.

Colin Johnstone has shown regularly at the Pier Arts Centre and in exhibitions across Orkney the UK and abroad.

*The exhibition is kindly sponsored by Inver House Distillers Ltd*
MORAG MACINNES enjoys the physicality of these sculptural collaborations, but is dubious about the implied profundity.

THIS EXHIBITION, or bits of it, has been touring since 2004; it’s been to Lisbon, Dieppe, and, more prosaically perhaps, Plymouth. But it hasn’t been shown on an island till now. Interesting, because it’s all about islands, apparently. The erudite and reverential intro to the catalogue tells us an island is ‘a bounded region which can isolate but also insulate its inhabitants.’

So – can we expect a Donne like metaphorical meditation on our common humanity? Ooh! Then – ‘all of the titles refer to British and Irish islands (although one is actually a peninsula)’. Wot? It’s not an island then, is it? And then – ‘Woodrow and Deacon never intended to associate the sculptures with these particular places: the titles were designated en route after they were made.’

Oh. Imagined islands, then. Names shoved on after. Made of lead, timber – some of it Tudor - and glass. I’m glad I headed, instinctively, to the beautiful open gallery where the sea feels as if it’s inside the room. The steady natural Orkney light bathes the sculptures, and makes it a pleasure to pick out details and textures.

‘Rough Island’ has a battle-scarred look, and the colour and weight of the lead doesn’t lend itself to levity. I find myself smiling, though – there’s a thing like a canoe with feet and great big paddles; above that a sail/flower object, mounted on what looks either like a gun casing or a tom tom. It makes me think of Easter Island, and ‘50s filmic renditions of happy native peoples in grass skirts.

I recall the long explanation of the importance of lead to medieval folk, the directions towards Primo Levi, Bartholomaeus Anglicus’ De Proprietatibus Rerum, Mandeville’s Travels and other such worthy tomes, in Dr Stacy Boldrick’s catalogue notes, and think – no , Stacy. These guys are havin’ a laugh.

Three works called (en route!) Isle of Man are, honestly, sweet. The old wood supports lead stories on wobbly legs, sometimes hooved with bark. There’s a clear medieval theme – masons’ marks etched in the wood, figures caught in a calendar of activities, like ‘Les Tres Riche Heures’ – a couple in mid-saw cut, a hammer about to fall, a wine press twisting.

‘Man 11’ has a holed and punctured lead wood with deer and a dead man; his murderer still had the sword raised. I’m reminded of the Britains’ lead animals I had as a child, and I love the suspended morality tale being told. ‘Man 111’ is a simple memento mori – a wood cutter on one side, his skeleton cut down on the other. The medieval preoccupation with death was really grim acceptance of the ‘skull beneath the skin’ and in this sculpture there’s a suggestion that, whatever happens to man, the wood , the tree survives.

That’s medieval too, as you can see in any cathedral – that lingering sense, cut into stone or choir, of something magical and pagan, to do with oak and ash and rowan, flowering and seeding. In The
*Hidden Landscape*, Simon Schama describes the persistence of Europe’s relationship with woodland, and the Green men, the naturals and innocents who inhabit it. There are echoes of all that here, and the exhibition began in Wiltshire, home to many a Druidical musing.

So far so nice. Islands certainly – and a fine play on words – Isle of Man. ‘Bait Island’ and ‘Ash Island’ investigate eels – another iconic symbol, best deployed by Gunther Grass in his meditations on German history and myth – resonating in Orcadian folk myth as the Stoorie Worm, a dragon-demon. There’s something annoying about how real and yet lumpish these lead eels look, and the netting draped about looks tricksy. Maybe this is because, on a real island, real eels and real nets are not obliging and do not inhabit the world of myth.

It’s the next room and I’m flagging. There’s a whole series of islands sitting on three lead legs. They look like camera tripods, or those monsters out of *The War of the Worlds*, and they’ve all got minotaurs on them pointing up to constellations of lead pocked through wood, sometimes in cruciform shape. How did the Greeks get in here?

There’s also a telescope theme going on – ‘Brownsea Island’ has one with a frog on it; and, of course, a compass. ‘Black Isle’, which is mounted on a tom tom with a bit of twine round it, and a lot of very visible caulking material (this would give the folk on the Black Isle a jolt), has a skull looking through one. The glass distorts the image in a clever way; illusion and reality, Gods and no Gods, perhaps. But it’s getting a bit samey.

The physicality of sculpture is always the great thing, and this exhibition doesn’t disappoint. The wood is marked and pencilled and grooved by time, ‘Amber Glass’ is a smooth shock after the coruscated leadwork. Lead itself forms plasticine shapes I’d never thought of, and had made me think in a whole new way about flashing.

The collaboration was a fruitful exercise for these two vastly experiences makers. I did come out, though, thinking that there’s too much grand seriousness about the art world; maybe, like the story of the Emperor’s Clothes, so aptly summed up by Danny Kaye as ‘the King is in his altogether…’ Woodrow and Deacon are having us all on.

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Links

Pier Arts Centre [http://www.pierartscentre.com](http://www.pierartscentre.com)

extracted from


last accessed on 31 July 2008