

UPDATE MAY 2016

As New Expressions 3 (NE3) draws to a close* we are writing to all those who have been involved with the programme - as participants, beneficiaries, investors, partners, supporters and interested observers - to thank you for your support so far and to tell you what the future holds.

** 'Instruments of Industry', Hannah Leighton- Boyce's sound based work in response to Touchstones Rochdale's collection of historic hand tools, supported by our New Opportunities Award scheme, runs until 11 June.*

About New Expressions: the story to date

Since its instigation more than eight years ago, New Expressions has enabled artists and museums to work together to open up the creative potential of museum collections, giving historic sites and settings new leases of life and finding imaginative ways to invite audience participation and enhance visitor experience.

It has grown from a regional project with a south-west focus into a commissioning programme with national reach:

- **New Expressions 1 – 2008-9**
MLA South West and ten museums
- **New Expressions 2 – 2010-12**
Renaissance South West Hub Museums with six museums
- **New Expressions 3 - 2014-16**
National Project Board led by Plymouth with fifteen partner museums

The programme's three editions to date have supported 31 new commissions, ranging from time-based installations to long-term interventions and permanent acquisitions, which some 2 million visitors have enjoyed on site. In addition to accessing funds for their own collaborations, New Expressions' partner museums and artists have benefited from a range of central support - including peer-to-peer field events and access to advice and expertise from specialist mentors, experienced in facilitating adventurous collaborations - underpinned by branding and a strong web presence.

Embedded monitoring and evaluation has provided eight years of detailed research and evidence gathering enabling the impact and value of the programme to be tracked and analysed, its strength and credibility to be demonstrated and its learning to be shared and built on.

A copy of our latest report, *Sharing the Impact of New Expressions 3*, is available on the New Expressions website: <http://www.newexpressions.org/Professional-Resources/Documents/>

We have also commissioned three short films to share the experience and learning of New Expressions 3 with colleagues and to showcase some of its achievements: these can be accessed in a newly added section of our website, Professional Resources: <http://www.newexpressions.org/Professional-Resources/>

Our consultation: Museums, Artists and Audiences

In March 2015 New Expressions secured Museum Resilience funding from Arts Council England to explore, among other things, the idea of setting up a Subject Specialist Network (SSN) for *Museums, Artists and Audiences*.

Whereas existing SSNs tend to focus on a single curatorial discipline (for instance social history, geology, ceramics etc), our thinking was to build on our 'practice-based' and inherently inter-disciplinary methodology. Between spring and autumn 2015 New Expressions asked artists, museums and the wider cultural and heritage sector for their views. Our consultation involved:

- Museum Development Officers
- Contemporary Visual Arts Network members
- Subject Specialist Networks
- Artists
- Museums
- Academics
- Independent curators and producers
- Arts and heritage organisations

We found that: -

- Artists are eager to work with museum collections, but often don't know how to make initial contact with museums nor what they can expect from the relationship. They would welcome introduction and brokering services.
- Many academics running heritage education, museum studies and curating courses would welcome opportunities to share and instigate research into this area of practice which they see as significant.
- In the wider heritage and cultural sector, organisations such as the National Trust, the Churches Conservation Trust and the Canal and Rivers Trust are working more and more with contemporary artists.
- Many major visitor attractions are increasingly finding that their audiences expect their offer to include contemporary art works, and are disappointed if this element is missing.
- Good work in museums is happening across the contemporary arts, increasingly embracing dance, drama, music and film as well as the visual arts.

However, by common consent, there is just not enough joining up ... much interesting work is happening below the radar and many opportunities for sharing experience and lessons learnt are being missed, which can lead to repetition of learning

rather than fast-tracking to new points of transition. But, while there is an appetite for collaboration, there are worries about duplication and stretching of scarce resources and concern about the all too many constraints on organisational capacity.

Overall, it became clear during our consultation that knowledge-sharing on its own is not enough – people agreed with us that 'learning by doing' is essential, but this requires project funding.

And, we concluded that, given the current fluid climate across the cultural sector, the practice-based SSN we were considering would not attract the strategic and financial support needed.

What next?

The Board of New Expressions has been refreshed and expanded. We are working with colleagues and associates **to scope the potential and timeline for New Expressions 4: the next edition of the New Expressions programme**. In outline, we are seeking an effective way to work with beacons of excellence to take forward collaborative partnerships between museums, artists and audiences through joined-up active practice. **Our broad vision** is that this will take the form of **active research** over five years, enabling **autonomous projects** to maximise the benefit of thinking and learning underpinned by **an ethos of sharing and generosity of spirit**. There needs to be a focus on **transition and transformation** – organisational and artistic - and an emphasis on engagement and quality.

We are currently planning **a national event for the Autumn**, which will be held in partnership with colleagues and associates and hosted by the Horniman Museum in London. The purpose of the event is to celebrate and build on the wealth of collaborative work and learning achieved across the country to-date and to pioneer joined-up thinking about transformative programming and research to further:

place making

creative risk taking

diversity

talent development for artists, curators and producers

break down barriers between art forms

visitor experience and audience reach and stretch

international working

Meanwhile

We have added a new **PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES** section to our website to make **the range of support materials New Expressions has produced** available to the sector and **to signpost resources produced by colleagues and associates** across the

country. New Expressions 3 projects are showcased on the web site alongside the New Expressions 1 and 2 projects, with links to the Impact Reports for both New Expressions 2 and New Expressions 3 which include numerical outputs as well as qualitative information: the fruit of our longitudinal programme of evaluation.

New Expressions June 2016

The Board of New Expressions comprises representatives from the Major Museum Partners, MDO and CVAN networks and the National Trust.

For further information please follow this link

www.newexpressions.org

