



# Sharing the impact of New Expressions 2

Unlocking the creative potential of collections and spaces in South West England



new expressions

June 2012

## About New Expressions

New Expressions aims to build a culture of collaboration between museums and historic properties and contemporary artists.



New Expressions sets out to unlock the creative potential of collections and spaces and produce powerful experiences for visitors, staff and volunteers.

At the centre of New Expressions is a series of contemporary artist commissions and integrated audience development projects; fundamentally helping museums and properties to achieve ambitions for collections, sites and audiences.

Successful collaboration takes effort, ambition and a taste for adventure. From national field visits to mentoring and networking, the programme creates a supportive partnership framework among organisations embarking on collaborative journeys.

At its heart, New Expressions is about raising the game. This is reflected in the commitment and imagination of our museum partners large and small, the quality of the artists we work with, the art they make and the impact of the projects on organisations and people.

'Exploring Solitude: An Antarctic Commission' (2012) Neville and Joan Gable. Commissioned by Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum for New Expressions 2

## Sustaining the legacy



Works by Antony Penrose & Andrew Lanyon (2012).  
Commissioned by Falmouth Art Gallery for  
New Expressions 2

When Museums, Libraries and Archives South West closed in 2009, there was a desire to invest remaining funds in something exciting for museums, for the future. With additional support from the National Lottery through Grants for the Arts, New Expressions 1 delivered 10 contemporary commissions in 10 museums in the South West region.

In 2011, collaboration with artists was written into the forward plans of Renaissance in the South West, leading to the development and delivery of New Expressions 2 between 2011 and 2012, with support from the Museum Development Fund, Renaissance South West and the National Lottery through Grants for the Arts.

## Participating museums and lead artists, 2011-2012

- Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives – Andy Council and Acerone
- Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum – Neville Gabie and Joan Gabie
- Falmouth Art Gallery – Andrew Lanyon and Antony Penrose
- Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon – Jeremy Millar
- Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery – Clare Twomey
- Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery (RAMM), Exeter – Blast Theory

## Key statistics for New Expressions 2

- Six museums took part, large and small, in six towns and cities across the South West
- Nine lead artists created 36 new works – see back page
- More than 800,000 people visited the six museums between September 2011 and September 2012
- More than 4700 people took part in activities and opportunities for learning
- 2500 people visited the New Expressions website
- 368 museum staff, artists, volunteers, curators and others took part in field visits, workshops and network events
- 26 curators, artists and specialists have provided expert advice and knowledge-sharing.

## Unlocking historic collections and sites

Collaborations with artists refreshed and re-invigorated understanding of collections and spaces for museum staff, volunteers and visitors alike.

6 out of 7 museum staff interviewed said that their New Expressions 2 project has affected the way they might present and interpret collections in the future.



### What museum staff and artists said:

*'Because of the discussions we've had with the artist, we're re-thinking the importance of securing and retaining collections knowledge. Objects don't just inspire artists'.*

Alison Mills, Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon

*'We've realised that interpretation can be more open-ended. It doesn't have to be just the facts. It can be loose and spring from the collections – taking something dry and factual and making it open, creative and emotional'.*

Rick Lawrence, Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery, Exeter

*'I've appreciated how much archives are used for research, it's re-awakened my understanding of how an archive can be used'.*

Neville Gabie, artist, worked with Cheltenham Museum and Art Gallery



### What the audience said:

**42%** said that experiencing the New Expressions 2 commission affected the way they felt about the museum and its collection<sup>1</sup>.

*'It makes a bigger link between people and objects'.*

Participant, Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery

*'We used collections I didn't know the museum had'.*

Participant, Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum

*'It's given me a new view of the collections and food for thought'.*

Visitor, Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon

*'It allowed me to experience the museum in a new light – both the physical space and the actual exhibits'.*

Visitor, Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery, Exeter

*'It helps me to see the museum and its collections as something dynamic that I can interact with. A kind of conversation really'.*

Visitor, Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery, Exeter

Far left: 'Ghostwriter' (2010) Blast Theory. Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery, Exeter

Left: 'Cadeau – present #1' (2012) Antony Penrose. Falmouth Art Gallery

## Supporting artistic excellence

New Expressions aims to provide stretching and challenging opportunities for artists. By investing in expert mentors, presenting case studies and arranging field visits to the best examples of collaborative working, regionally and nationally, the programme has encouraged museums to develop exciting, imaginative projects.

8 out of 9 New Expressions 2 artists said that the project stretched them artistically. The ninth said that it focused him.

### What artists said:

*'It's challenged my perceptions of authorship. It's challenged what I thought I knew. It's exposed me to the beauty and complexity of working with people who are volunteering to take part'.*

Clare Twomey, artist, worked with Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery

*'It's certainly challenged me to produce one of my best pieces of work to date'.*

Acerone, artist, worked with Andy Council and M Shed, Bristol

*'I wanted to do something different. The fact that it's here opens up possibilities. I'm trying out something that I want to be good, that I want to bring to my practice. It's an unusual situation that allows an artist to explore things'.*

Jeremy Millar, artist, worked with the Museum of Barnstaple & North Devon

*'I don't usually make work that museums collect. My work is normally too big or too ephemeral. This has been a huge thing. And the future potential for dialogue is huge too, because my work will be on show in the museum for a long time'.*

Clare Twomey, artist

## Broadening museum audiences

New Expressions is driven by the belief that museums and historic places are compelling places to experience contemporary art. The programme also aims to introduce a new contemporary art audience to historic material through interaction between artists, objects and sites.

**22%** of those visiting the New Expressions 2 commissions had not been to the museum before<sup>2</sup>.

**37%** of those engaging with the artwork said that the contemporary art commission was the main reason for their visit to the museum. A further 25% said it was one of the reasons.

Of the first time visitors, **43%** came specially to see the contemporary art commission.

While **3%** of visitors to the former South West museum hubs described their ethnic group as other than 'White British'<sup>3</sup>, **10%** of those experiencing the New Expressions 2 commissions described their ethnic group in this way.

More visitors to the New Expressions 2 commissions – **8.6%** – had a self-declared disability, compared to **5%** of visitors recorded to the former South West museum hubs in 2009-2010<sup>4</sup>.

## Broadening the audience for contemporary art

Regional museums are great places for the community, for engaging both young and old and inspiring families. Rich with stories and welcoming discovery, they are perfect places to encounter contemporary visual art for the first time.

Over **30%** of the people encountering the New Expressions 2 commissions had little or no experience of contemporary art. This compares to **19%** of visitors to visual arts venues nationally<sup>5</sup>. Almost half of New Expressions 2 audiences had not expected to see the art work at the museum.

Young people made up almost twice the proportion of New Expressions 2 audiences compared to visual art venue audiences in the region – **13%** of New Expressions 2 audiences were between 16 and 24 years old, compared to **7%** of audiences at visual art venues in the South West<sup>6</sup>.

*'You expect fossils and you're hit with art – it's great'.*

Visitor, Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum at Gardens Gallery



## Inspiring audiences and participants

Audience development, public engagement and participation are central to New Expressions. Each museum received dedicated investment to develop participation programmes as part of their commission – and each created exciting opportunities to take part.

### What audiences said:

*'It made me feel part of Bristol'.*

Visitor, M Shed, Bristol

*'I went with my mum-in-law and my grandson and all four generations loved the work!'*

Visitor, M Shed, Bristol

*'Amazing. Made me stop!'*

Visitor, Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon

### What participants said:

88% of those who took part in activities as part of a New Expressions 2 commission enjoyed them.

*'The whole event was mesmerising'.*

Participant, Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery

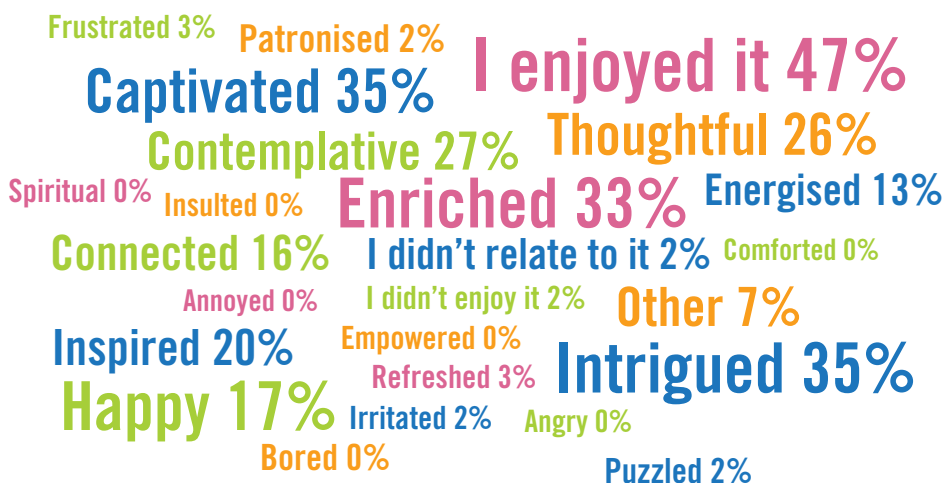
*'Astonishingly good. Brought tears to my eyes. Deeper insight'.*

Participant, Falmouth Art Gallery

*'It was a wonderful, personal experience'.*

Participant, Falmouth Art Gallery

**What participants said:** which three of the following words or phrases best describe your experience of today's activity? How did it make you think or feel?



## Involving young people

Each New Expressions 2 museum developed activities specifically for young people as part of their projects. From film-making and kite-flying to visiting other work by the artists and making surrealist books, the activities gave young people the chance to explore the artists' work in more depth.

98% of the children and young people who took part in activities as part of New Expressions 2 enjoyed them, and 85% learnt something new.

### What young people said:

*'Art is amazing'.*

Participant, Falmouth Art Gallery

*'Bristol's about street art, this museum's about Bristol, so we should let more artists do their work here'.*

Visitor, M Shed, Bristol

*'People should visit the museum, because the way I felt, they must feel like that when they go there'.*

Participant, Falmouth Art Gallery

'Window on Bristol' (2011) Andy Council & Acerone  
M Shed, Bristol



## Building skills, sustainability, resilience and innovation

New Expressions is about changing cultures – embedding co-operation between museums, historic spaces and artists; making it part of the way they work, improving how we collaborate and making lasting partnerships.

### What museums said:

All seven of the staff who led New Expressions 2 projects for their museum said the project challenged them as an organisation.

At the end of New Expressions 2, every museum that took part said they felt fully confident about:

- Advocating a contemporary art commission with their colleagues
- How a contemporary art commission might fit into their organisation's objectives
- Incorporating an artist's commission into their day-to-day working
- Taking and managing the risks involved in an artist's commission.

'Plymouth Porcelain: A New Collection' (2012) Clare Twomey  
Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery



*'I'd like to look at smaller, more embedded works throughout the museum next. The visit to Compton Verney opened my eyes to the way artists could re-interpret and respond to objects'.*

Helen Fothergill, Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery

*'Taking part in the New Expressions 2 events and field visits has made me feel more confident. The visit we made to the British Art Show was very good. Having the chance to talk to others makes a lot of difference. I feel like I have my finger on the pulse'.*

Helen Brown, Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum

*'Over a short period of time the work has become part of M Shed, in a way neither we nor the artists envisaged. Designed as ephemeral it's now an iconic element. The museum has made it possible for the audience to see the artist's work as familiar in every connotation of the word'.*

Tim Corum, Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives

*'Over the last 3 to 4 years, the role of the museum in commissioning art has meant that we're now involved in the public art conversations in the city'.*

Helen Fothergill, Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery

*'My confidence has moved on quite a bit. It will have a long-term effect'.*

Helen Brown, Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum

*'The association with New Expressions has helped our profile as a serious, connected, ambitious organization'.*

Louise Connell, Falmouth Art Gallery

Kite-making activity  
Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum



## What artists said:

Eight out of nine New Expressions 2 artists said that the project had had a wider effect on their opportunities as an artist, including new collaborations, new partnerships and exhibition opportunities.

At the end of New Expressions 2, more of the artists felt confident about:

- Working on community engagement and participation with a museum
- Working on interpretation with a museum
- Negotiating differences of professional approach with a museum.

*'This is my first commission for a museum. It's been a steep learning curve – and well worthwhile'.*

Neville Gabie, artist, worked with Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum

*'It's given me a good insight into museum commissions and practice'.*

Antony Penrose, artist, worked with Falmouth Art Gallery

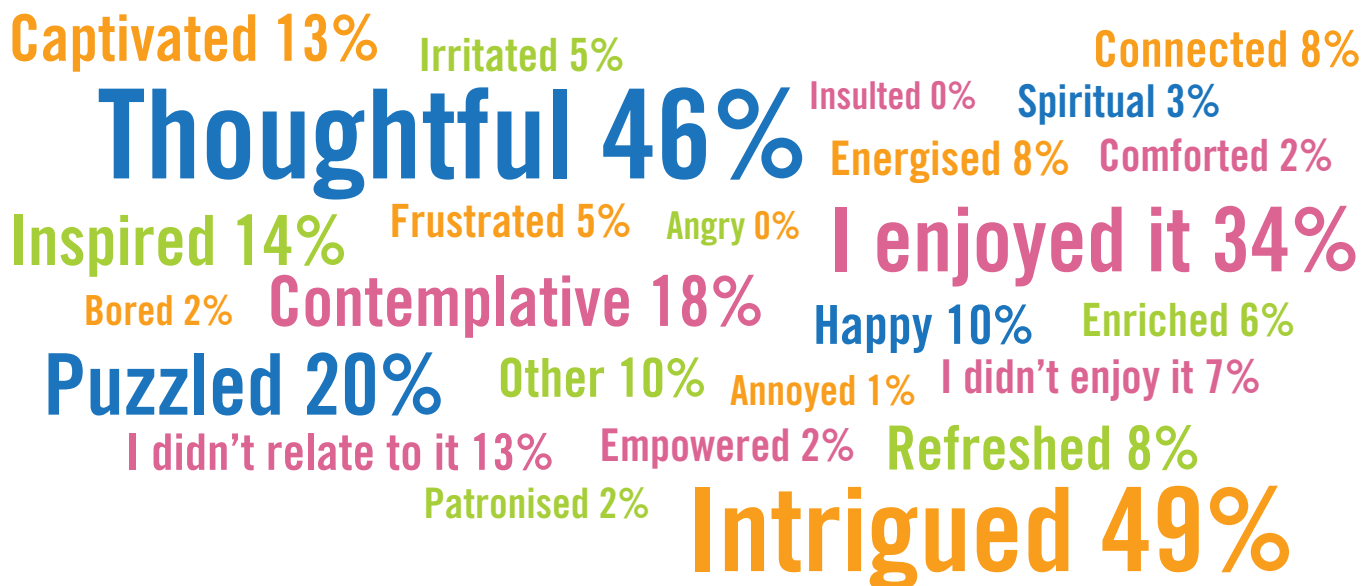
*'It was useful to broaden my awareness of how museums work and how artist-museum collaboration can mutually benefit each other's practice and delivery. It's a huge developmental step for me'.*

Joan Gabie, artist, worked with Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum

*'Ghostwriter, our commission for RAMM, could be a very significant project in our strategic direction. And it's galvanized us to look at museums as places to make and show work'.*  
Matt Adams, Blast Theory artist, worked with RAMM

*'I really hope this programme continues, particularly with current pressures'.*  
Neville Gabie, artist

**What audiences said:** which three of the following words or phrases best describe your experience of today's activity? How did it make you think or feel?



Kite-making activity  
Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum



Victorian Science activity  
Museum of Barnstaple & North Devon



## New art for museums



'Ghostwriter' (2011) Blast Theory  
Commissioned for New Expressions 2  
by Royal Albert Memorial Museum  
and Art Gallery, Exeter

- Three artist's films/videos permanently acquired by Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum
- One artist's performance film installed at Museum of Barnstaple & North Devon
- One large-scale wall painting on long-term temporary display at M Shed, Bristol
- One collaborative artists' book and three original lithographs permanently acquired by Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum
- 25 small sculptures permanently acquired by Falmouth Art Gallery
- One interactive phonecall live at Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery, Exeter throughout 2012
- One installation comprising 51 individual ceramic pieces permanently installed at Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery.

Front cover, clockwise from top left:

'Exploring Solitude: An Antarctic Commission' (2012) Neville and Joan Gabie. Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum at Gardens Gallery

'Plymouth Porcelain: A New Collection' (detail) (2012) Clare Twomey. Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery

'A Scale of Time' (2012) Jeremy Millar. Museum of Barnstaple & North Devon

'Flowering Currant' (2012) Antony Penrose. Falmouth Art Gallery

'Window on Bristol' (2011) Andy Council and Acerone. M Shed, Bristol

'Exploring Solitude: An Antarctic Commission' (2012) Neville and Joan Gabie. Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum at Gardens Gallery

'Plymouth Porcelain: A New Collection' (2012) Clare Twomey. Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery

'Ghostwriter' (2011) Blast Theory. Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery (RAMM), Exeter

All works commissioned as part of New Expressions 2

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New Expressions is a partnership programme led by Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter and Bristol City Museums, Galleries and Archives. Registered address: Plymouth City Council, Plymouth, PL1 2AA.

- 1 New Expressions audience data in this document is taken from surveys and interviews with 246 audience members and 64 adults and 41 children and young people taking part in activities
- 2 Figure excludes visitors to M Shed, a brand new museum which opened in 2011.
- 3 South West Hub Exit Survey (BDRC Consulting, 2010)
- 4 Ibid
- 5 National Visual Arts Benchmarking project (South West data) (Audiences UK, 2012)
- 6 Ibid

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