



Ancient Egypt and East Asia National Programme

Case Study: The Perth Community Robe Project



Introduction

Welcome to this case study resource which reflects upon the *Perth Community Robe Project* as part of the Ancient Egypt and East Asia National Programme. This resource has been put together to provide an example of a local community project surrounding a temporary exhibition exploring traditional forms of dress and accessories from China, Japan and Korea at Perth Museum and Art Gallery.

We hope you find the resource an inspiring account of the audience development practice which widened access and increased participation from the local community, and that you may use this case study to help develop your own practice.

At a glance

Aim To widen access to a temporary exhibition exploring a selection of East Asian objects; focussing on traditional dress and accessories from China, Japan and Korea through the creation of a community robe.

Budget £1,000

Target audiences Local school pupils and community group audiences

Staffing resources X2 museum learning and programmes staff, X1 freelance artist.

Key outcomes

- Improved participant confidence
- Improved knowledge of East Asian cultures
- Evidence of inspiration, enjoyment and creativity
- Skill development from participants

Key outputs

- A community artwork installation
- >100 direct face-to-face engagements
- 10 workshop sessions
- A community launch event unveiling the robe and celebrating participant's contributions.



The museum and project team

Perth Museum and Art Gallery are part of the Culture Perth and Kinross Charitable Trust (CPK), established in August 2016. CPK are responsible for the delivery of a number of learning, cultural and heritage services for Perth and Kinross, including two full-time and one part-time museum. CPK museums welcome close to 80,000 visitors each year, and run targeted learning and programming opportunities to engage and inspire a diverse variety of audiences in their collections. This activity includes talks/lectures, family and early years events, workshops for children and adults, guided tours, community group activities and experiences and training opportunities for external organisations.

This case study focusses on the community and school engagement work surrounding the 'Dress to Impress' temporary exhibition at Perth Museum and Art Gallery. Available throughout May-October 2018, the exhibition showcases items from Perth's permanent East Asian collection, as well as object loans from National Museums Scotland, including a ceremonial costume worn by Korean court officials, Japanese helmets of war and a two hundred-year-old Chinese Kingfisher Headdress.

Perth Museum and Art Gallery has a dedicated team for delivering learning activities which complement the themes of the permanent and temporary exhibitions, including a Senior Officer for Community Learning and a Heritage Learning Officer. This team lead on the development of the learning and programmes activity surrounding the temporary exhibition.



The project: inspiration and the big idea

Perth Museum and Art Gallery have a strong history of engaging diverse audiences in their collections through creative and innovative practice.

A collections review exploring the breadth and diversity of Perth's East Asian collection identified significant finds, including star objects that had never before been displayed to public audiences. These included incredibly rare ceremonial costumes worn by Korean Court Officials, and Japanese Ainu Robes.

The collections review identified a strong narrative in East Asian dress and accessories, which became the theme of the temporary exhibition. The Perth learning and programmes team drew upon this strong narrative as the basis for their audience development and engagement practice. The team identified potential to integrate a strong local community voice into the exhibition space, and agreed that they wanted to run a collaborative project that would create a community artwork piece that could be displayed alongside the wider collection. The community piece would then form a part of the permanent collection at the museum. The idea to produce a community robe was identified as a strong idea because:

- There was the potential for individual, and well as collaborative creativity to produce the piece. Audiences could work individually as well as in teams, depending on what they were most comfortable with.
- There was potential for the creative sessions to be delivered both in an in-reach capacity at the museum, as well as in an outreach capacity for audiences who it could be challenging to bring to the site. This increased the inclusivity and participatory nature of the project.
- The creation of the different components of the robe could be easily organised in a logical and methodical way. Each session could be dedicated to a different section of the robe and then could all be brought together in a single piece.
- There would be a shared, collaborative output from the project, which could be celebrated and shared across all contributing partners as well as the wider community.
- There were strong links to the themes and content of the exhibition.
- Initial desk-based research identified that the materials required to produce a community robe, inspired by the contents of the exhibition, would be possible within the constraints of the project budget.



Planning and logistics

The team agreed the project outcomes and activities in line with their wider responsibilities and key performance indicators of CPK. In particular, the project sought to encourage and inspire curiosity, debate and reflection on the topic of East Asian identity as well as build participants knowledge of East Asian cultures, as well as their confidence and skills.

The team appointed a local freelance artist to help deliver the project, which included delivering some of the workshop sessions to audiences and bringing together the different components of the robe into a single piece for display.

The opportunity to take part in workshops was advertised to local community groups and schools by the team. The outcome of this process was that ten different organisations expressed an interest in taking part in the project, representing a diverse variety of backgrounds.

The final audience range included local secondary school pupils, additional support needs school pupils, adults from local community organisations, and young people from Her Majesties' Prison Service Young Offenders Institution at Cornton Vale.



Audience development reflections

- Setting up community based project work can require a long lead-in-time. Your delivery window period will need to be discussed and agreed with your community audiences who will have their own meeting dates, programmes and other commitments that you will need to work with. Additionally, your own staffing levels, working patterns and programme commitments can add an additional layer of logistical complexity. Make sure, at the outset of your project, you decide and act together with your community groups on the timings you will deliver experiences. Otherwise, you may find it challenging to work with the audiences you want to.
- A key strength of the project was its ability to appeal to and attract a diverse variety of audiences.
- The delivery flexibility of the project meant that it was able to reach people who were unable to visit the museum. This included young people with complex and long term additional support needs, older people living in care homes, and young people taking part in creative courses at HMP YOI Cornton Vale.
- The time of year presented a challenge to getting school pupils to take part in the project; the project was delivered towards the end of the Scottish schools academic year, when schools are going through timetable changes and students transition into their forthcoming year courses.



Getting creative

In total, ten sessions were delivered in either an in-reach or outreach capacity to audiences across a 3-week period. These sessions had a flexible structure, and were adapted to meet the needs and expectations of each group.

Sessions on site at the museum could last up to 3 hours, and consisted of participants getting time to explore the exhibition and sketching designs and using guiding question sheets to help them form inspiration, before practicing their designs and re-producing them on the robe material using a wide variety of craft supplies.

Outreach sessions were more flexible in approach. For example, participants from a care home activity network completed elements of the robe in their home at their leisure, participants at HMP YOI Cornton Vale took part on a series of sessions on different days to complete their robe component and pupils with additional support needs took part in shorter sessions with materials and concepts which linked into areas of learning they were exploring in other areas of the curriculum.



The grand unveiling

The robe was assembled by the freelance artist and unveiled at a community event which brought the project participants to celebrate their creation. Senior staff from Culture Perth Kinross attended this event to mark the occasion, as did representatives from the local press. The celebration event was very well attended, with more than half of all project participants attending, and many expressed a strong sense of pride in seeing their work on show in the museum. Participants got to meet and discuss the robe and the project together, as well as enjoy a slice of a specially prepared Kimono shaped cake!

Following the closing of the temporary exhibition in October 2018, the community created robe will tour around local community venues throughout the city, including many of the organisations who contributed to its creation. This tour element extends the longevity of the project beyond the exhibition, and takes the project, and the museum, into the local Perth and Kinross community.

Measuring success

The project team sought to evaluate the social impact of the work on participants' health and wellbeing, as well as assess evidence of inspiring engagement, debate and reflection from participants on East Asian collections. An evaluation methodology was developed to capture data relating to each project outcome, with participants actively contributing to the evaluation process both prior to their museum visit, during the session, as well as follow up activity at the launch event and during the robe's tour.





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Funding raised by
The National Lottery
and awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund



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