

**Deeper engagements? The role of public participatory contemporary art
installations within heritage sites and collections**

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I confirm that the work submitted is my own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This practice-based research examines the relationship between contemporary participatory art and visitor experience in heritage sites, exploring how such encounters are shaped and negotiated within institutional contexts. This thesis should be read alongside the artistic practice it documents and analyses, with practice operating as method of enquiry and knowledge production. The research combines critical engagement with existing literature with practice-led methods, including iterative making, facilitated participation, reflective documentation, and qualitative analysis. Throughout I utilise my positionality as artist-researcher.

The research is initiated through analysis of my earlier participatory installation, *Change in Attitudes*, where visitors engaged in unexpected and self-directed ways. Reflection on this work and on how visitors chose to participate establishes the research questions and methodological approach.

The central case study is *A Virtuous Woman*, a participatory artwork commissioned for the National Trust property Hardwick Hall. Conceived as an iterative work, it was developed to evolve in response to visitor participation over the research period. As artist and facilitator, I adapted the work in response to emerging forms of engagement, recording and evaluating these iterative changes. Visitors participated in ways that were meaningful to them, and for the most part differing viewpoints were held agonistically alongside one another. However, one polarising position caused significant disruption, prompting a reassessment of the values underpinning the participatory framework and revealing tensions between creative expression, inclusivity, care, and institutional responsibility. This moment became a critical turning point for both the artwork and the research. In May 2025,

protest and subsequent media attention led to the artwork's early removal. A filmed projection replaced the original work, accompanied by new interpretation.

This thesis considers how participatory art in heritage sites can engage polarised opinions and what conditions support such practice. Rather than resolving these tensions, it treats them as productive sites for further enquiry.

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Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis begins from practice. I am an artist who has worked with participatory contemporary art for over a decade, creating my own installations and collaborating on those of others. I work in this way because I am compelled by what happens when people are invited to respond: the multiplicity of voices that emerge, the varied depths of engagement, and the personal connections that surface in unexpected ways. In my practice and experience, participatory practice is not simply a method but a space of dialogue and exchange in which interpretation, emotion and meaning are actively negotiated. This research grew from a desire to understand that dynamic more fully: to examine what is taking place within these exchanges, how such experiences might be recognised and articulated, and how participatory practice might continue to evolve with greater critical awareness. Accordingly, this thesis examines the role of public participatory contemporary art installations within heritage sites and collections and asks three central questions:

- How do participatory contemporary art installations shape visitor experience within heritage contexts?
- How can such interactions be meaningfully recognised, interpreted, and evaluated?
- How are such encounters negotiated within institutional frameworks, particularly when polarised viewpoints emerge?

Initially, this practice-based research sought to investigate whether participatory contemporary art interventions evoke emotional responses in visitors that enable deeper engagement with heritage sites, their collections, and their narratives, and to consider meaningful ways of evaluating such interactions. I proposed to address

this by analysing existing evaluation methodologies, situating the project within precedents in participatory contemporary art and heritage practice, and applying these insights to the creation and installation of a new participatory artwork at the National Trust property Hardwick Hall. The work would be evaluated throughout its participatory period in order to assess forms of visitor engagement. However, the iterative nature of the research, and the unfolding realities of participation in situ, extended and complicated this initial enquiry. As emotional and political responses emerged within the participatory space, new questions became unavoidable: when participatory artworks generate strongly held and polarised opinions, how can the artwork, the artist, and the host institution sustain such expressions? What happens when engagement is reframed as harm, and participation as offence? These developments reframed the project from a study of emotional engagement and evaluation to a broader investigation of the conditions under which participatory art operates within heritage institutions.

Framed as practice-based artistic research, the thesis should be read alongside the artistic practice it documents and analyses, with practice functioning as both method of enquiry and mode of knowledge production. Combining critical engagement with scholarship in heritage studies and contemporary art with iterative making, facilitated participation, reflective documentation, and qualitative analysis, the research draws upon my positionality as artist-researcher. Initiated through reflection on my earlier installation *Change in Attitudes*, where visitors engaged in unexpected and self-directed ways, the project develops through the central case study of *A Virtuous Woman*, created in response to, and sited within Hardwick Hall. Conceived as an evolving participatory work, it adapted in response to visitor contributions over the research period. While many differing viewpoints were

sustained agonistically within the space, one polarising intervention generated institutional tension, public controversy, and the early removal of the artwork. Rather than resolving this disruption, the thesis treats it as a productive site of enquiry, examining the conditions under which participatory art within heritage institutions can sustain, mediate, or falter in the face of polarised public engagement.

My artistic practice

As an artist, my practice is positioned in the liminal space between art for practice and art for purpose. Within my work, my brief is to respond to a site or collection with an artistic intervention that provides an interpretation of the historic narrative, with a directive to engage visitors. In this respect I become an engagement intermediary - as an artist I engage with the narrative/site/collection in order to create an artwork and then invite visitors to engage with my artwork by participating in some way. To avoid the ambiguity that Leila Jancovich sees embedded in the increasing use of the term participation in art, I will clarify my meaning by using my own practice.¹ Both in my own work and for the purposes of this research, I define participation as a direct interaction between a visitor and the artwork, whereby the opportunity is given to take an action of some kind to establish direct engagement with an artwork rather than witnessing a spectacle.²

In this research project I compare and contrast artistic methods, using iterative approaches to inviting participation, interpretation techniques, evaluation methods and audience behaviour at National Trust property Hardwick Hall. This

¹ L. Jancovich and D. Stevenson, *Failures in Cultural Participation* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), pp.2-4.

² Lawrence Bradby and Judith Stewart, 'Drumming up an Audience', *Conjunctions. Transdisciplinary Journal of Cultural Participation*, 7 (2020), pp. 5-6.

builds on my previous installations including the work which prompted this research question, *Change in Attitudes* at the National Trust's Nunnington Hall – a participatory contemporary art installation which resulted in unexpected outcomes from visitor engagement.³ I analyse this project in Chapter Two, in order to demonstrate the potential of iterative participation and introduce my methods and the field of research in which I situate this research.

In the past I have relied on the team within heritage sites to collect and measure visitor responses to my artwork following their established evaluation processes. Before this project, therefore, the evaluations of my own artworks have been limited to comments written in visitor books (which are often not easily found or inviting to use) and statistical data drawn from brief questionnaires using closed questions and Likert scales. This information has been useful in providing quantitative data when the closed questions are clear, but I have often sensed that the simple questions asked may lead visitor responses. My research explores how participatory contemporary art may affect visitor interaction with heritage narratives. To answer these questions, I have selected and trialled methodologies for measuring and evaluating the effects of artistic interventions in heritage collections on visitor experience. Building on experiences from my previous work, I explore new approaches to incorporate evaluation of affect, including investigating how the artworks themselves can be analysed during the moment of visitors' interaction. Recognising visitors' subjectivity, and also my own as both artist and evaluator inevitable in this process, I sought to learn from the analysis and evaluation of the visitor interaction with the artwork I created at Nunnington Hall

³ Layla Khoo, *Change in Attitudes*, 2019, Participatory Installation, Nunnington Hall, North Yorkshire.

(*Change in Attitudes*, 2019) which is analysed in full in Chapter Two. Standard evaluation techniques cannot evaluate the way visitors chose to participate with this work, which is why the question of how I evaluate these interactions has become central to this research. By further developing this through the artwork created for Hardwick Hall, I have been able to employ more sophisticated methods of ongoing evaluation whilst the artworks are being participated with – incorporating how, as the artist, I can know what is happening while it is happening rather than just after it has happened – positioning myself in the role of artist-researcher. By using an iterative approach to create the new artwork, I have explored how participation enabled by art can be evaluated to uncover new ways of knowing the visitor experience. Here I follow the approach and perspective of Sophie Hope in her thesis on participation, where she acknowledges her lack of impartiality as artist researcher.⁴ Throughout her research, Hope occupies multiple roles - artist, evaluator, researcher, and curator - but adopts the broader term practitioner to avoid the fixed expectations of specialised labels.⁵ This choice reflects the tension in this kind of research: while critically examining participatory practice, Hope remains positioned as a funded practitioner who invites others into a research process shaped by institutional power.⁶ Drawing on theorists including Morin, Gray, hooks, and Kantonen, Hope acknowledges that research is always partial - authority, authorship, and public recognition ultimately resting with the researcher or artist regardless of participative collaborations. Rather than attempting to avoid or hide this imbalance, Hope assumes an explicitly interventionist role, embracing

⁴ C.S. Hope, 'Participating in the 'Wrong' Way? Practice Based Research into Cultural Democracy and the Commissioning of Art to Effect Social Change' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, 2011) , p.66.

⁵ Ibid., p.65.

⁶ Ibid., p.65.

subjectivity rather than performing neutrality – ‘I have consciously interfered with the research, polluting it with my own subjectivity as I perform the role of researcher’.⁷

This research question originated from my experience of my participatory artwork at Nunnington Hall being interacted with by visitors in ways which had not been designed or expected. These unexpected outcomes raised a series of questions that I sought to explore further, both to inform my own practice as an artist working with heritage sites, and to share my findings with the wider field of arts and heritage, made possible by working with the National Trust, the largest conservation charity in Europe.⁸ Using an iterative approach in creating participatory art installations that seek to go beyond traditional heritage interpretation methods both in terms of engagement and evaluation while promoting dialogue and agonism, I want to explore new ways of knowing the relationship and intersections between visitor experience, participation, contemporary art and heritage narratives.

This research project was developed in consultation with the National Trust between 2020 and 2023, alongside its ongoing development of the Treasure Houses programme (discussed fully in Chapter Three). It included the creation of a participatory art intervention that offered interpretative responses to Hardwick Hall and its collections, and proceeded iteratively in order to understand and evaluate modes of engagement with participatory contemporary art.⁹ This research utilised

⁷ Ibid., p.66.

⁸ National Trust, 'The History of the National Trust' (2023)
 <<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/who-we-are/about-us/the-history-of-the-national-trust>>
 [accessed 5/5/23].

⁹ Treasure Houses was the term used internally by the National Trust at the beginning of this project. By the time of writing, this term was no longer in use.

the collective expert knowledge and collections of Hardwick Hall and the wider National Trust and sought to impact and inform how heritage sites understand visitor engagement with participatory contemporary art. Creating a participatory contemporary artwork to examine and interpret heritage narratives through the lens of societal issues such as agonism, identity and diversity, and understanding how audiences experience this, provides richer understanding of contemporary art practices in heritage sites while also demonstrating the need for further work in this area.

Scope, Focus, and Constraints

For wider literature and context, in most cases I have specifically drawn on examples from the Global North, and the UK, for the same reasons given by Farley and Pollock, 'the UK has been a prime generator of this kind of work, undoubtedly partly due to its well-established heritage and arts sectors'¹⁰ I cannot overstate the importance of being able to respond iteratively throughout every aspect of the creative practice to what was happening through an autoethnographic approach. This does mean that there was not the scope within this research to fully explore all possible evaluative methodologies, their backgrounds and potential uses. It is also due to my iterative, autoethnographic approach that both case studies in this research are works of my own creative practice – one to reflect on retrospectively and one to record and respond to as the phenomena unfolded. As both of these artworks took place in National Trust sites, this also narrows the scope to experience of working with this particular heritage organisation. However, this also offered significant methodological advantages. The first artwork, *Change in Attitudes*,

¹⁰ Rebecca Farley and Venda Louise Pollock, 'Contemporary Art in Heritage Practice: Mapping Its Intentions, Claims, and Complexities', *Heritage & Society*, (2022), pp.1-18 (p.243).

established an ongoing relationship with the National Trust, enabling me to develop familiarity with the organisation's working practices while allowing staff to develop confidence in my creative practice. As discussed in Maggie's interview, this established relationship was instrumental in facilitating the second artwork's open-ended, iterative methodology, as the organisation was willing to support a creative process whose outcomes could not be fully predetermined.¹¹ Conducting both case studies within the same institutional context also reduced variation arising from differences in organisational culture, governance and operational practice. Additionally, the National Trust's position as Europe's largest conservation charity, caring for more than 500 historic houses, gardens and landscapes, over 250,000 hectares of land and 890 miles of coastline, provided an exceptionally well-established heritage context for this research.¹² Its extensive experience of conservation, interpretation, visitor engagement and research meant that the creative practice was situated within an organisation possessing considerable institutional knowledge and a longstanding commitment to the stewardship and public interpretation of heritage. This provided a robust institutional framework within which the research could be developed, critically reflected upon and contextualised.

Contemporary art in heritage sites

Heritage sites looking for alternative ways to engage and attract new audiences have turned to contemporary art in the hope of achieving this.¹³ My research

¹¹ Interview with "Maggie" on 23/12/2024 via Microsoft Teams. Full transcript available in Appendix 10.

¹² National Trust, 'About the National Trust' ([n.d.]) <<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/who-we-are/about-us/about-the-national-trust-today>> [accessed 24/7/2026].

¹³ Nick Cass, 'Provoking Numinous Experience: Contemporary Art Interventions at the Brontë Parsonage Museum', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 26. 3 (2020), pp.299-316.

examines the relationship between participatory contemporary art and heritage contexts through critical reflection on my own previous portfolio of participatory artworks, with particular emphasis on the historical case study of *Change in Attitudes* (discussed in detail in Chapter Two). Analysis of these earlier artworks provides the conceptual and methodological foundation for the thesis, which are further developed through the creation of a new, site-specific and iterative artwork. The subsequent commission at Hardwick Hall was conceived not as an isolated intervention but as a deliberate extension of this enquiry, designed to interrogate how participatory collaborations between artist, institution, and public operate in practice within a historic country house environment. Developing the project as practice-based research within the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds was central to this aim. The research brings into dialogue scholarly expertise in country house studies with contemporary artistic practice, allowing for research that moves beyond retrospective analysis of completed works. While a growing body of artistic research has involved participatory artworks developed as part of doctoral or institutional research projects, these have rarely been situated within the specific historical, architectural, and governance frameworks of heritage sites and country houses.¹⁴ Conversely, artists have been commissioned to produce research-informed artworks for heritage contexts, including country house environments, however such projects have not typically adopted participatory methodologies.¹⁵ This thesis begins to bridge that divide, addressing a gap in scholarship on participatory contemporary art in UK

¹⁴ Anthony Schrag, 'Agonistic Tendencies: The Role of Conflict within Institutionally Supported Participatory Art Projects' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Newcastle University, 2016) ; Hope, 'Participating in the 'Wrong' Way?'

¹⁵ Niki Black and others, *Mapping Contemporary Art in the Heritage Experience* (Newcastle University, 2020).

country houses, where critical attention has more often focused either on institutional interpretation or on finished artistic outcomes, rather than on the contingent processes through which participatory engagement is produced, managed, and contested in situ.

In James Putnam's paper address to the first symposium of the research project 'Ceramics in the Expanded Field', he stated that working with museums allows the artist to challenge conventional displays. They can disrupt a sense of order and neutrality by introducing personal, selective and subjective perspectives to create a dialogue between past and present. This approach connects historical objects with contemporary creativity, offering an alternative to the museum's conventional chronological interpretations.

Museums benefit from working with artists as it is not only a means of shaking off their 'dusty' image but also an opportunity to discover new meanings and narratives in objects from their exhibited and reserve collections.¹⁶

Richardson prefers the term 'embedded reinterpretation' to 'intervention' when referring to artists working with museum collections to reflect the collaborative nature of commissioning with curatorial staff in his case studies, highlighting the mutual aims of both artist and site.¹⁷ However, this collaboration can also create tension – the artist is not an employee of the site and may wish to act independently of the curatorial or institutional vision. When successful, these juxtapositions of 'past and present, strange and familiar, expert and non-expert

¹⁶ James Putnam, 'Museum, the Artist, and 'Intervention'' (2012) <<https://cream.ac.uk/museum-artist-intervention-james-putnam/>> [accessed 12/10/2025].

¹⁷ Craig Richardson, 'Artists' 'Embedded Reinterpretation' in Museums and Sites of Heritage', *Journal of visual art practice*, 17. 1 (2018), pp.22-40.

views... have the potential to stimulate “conversations” with heritage, rather than dutiful sightseeing’.¹⁸

Historically there have been two related but different strands of artists working with heritage sites in this way. Museums and sites have either asked an established, well-known artist to respond to the collection, either through creating new work, re-curating aspects of the collection or simply lending their existing works to be temporarily featured.¹⁹ An established artist has the potential to bring new visitors in the form of their own fan base to a site, however there can be criticism as to whether the resulting exhibition becomes more about the celebrity status of the artist rather than the museum collection itself – potentially undermining both the collection and the skills and expertise of the curatorial staff. Shales suggests that this happened in the case of Grayson Perry co-curating *Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* at the British Museum.²⁰ Additionally, both reviewers and visitors may also approach established artists with negative preconceived ideas based on what is already known about the artist.²¹ The second strand sees artists at different stages of their careers commissioned not for their celebrity status, but for a range of other reasons: experience in working with heritage collections, experience of working with the public, a particular connection to the site or collection or a

¹⁸ Stephen J. Shaw, Roger Bennett, and Rita Kottasz, 'Making Space for Co-Creation: Heritage Attractions That Host Contemporary Art', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 27. 9 (2021), pp.869-83 (p.879).

¹⁹ 'The Wallace Collection Announces a Major Exhibition by Grayson Perry as Part of Its 2025 Programme', (2024) <<https://www.victoria-miro.com/news/2157>> [accessed 21/10/2025]; Natalie Musteata, 'Defrosting the Icebox: A Contextual Analysis of Andy Warhol's Raid the Icebox 1', *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, 5. 2 (2016), pp.214-37; La redazione di Domus, 'Anish Kapoor's Works on Display at Houghton Hall' (2020) <<https://www.domusweb.it/en/art/gallery/2020/07/21/anish-kapoor-works-on-display-at-houghton-hall.html>> [accessed 21/10/2025].

²⁰ Shaw, Bennett, and Kottasz, 'Making Space for Co-Creation', p.879; Ezra Shales, 'The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman', *The Journal of Modern Craft*, 5. 2 (2012), pp.231-35.

²¹ Tim Adams, 'Mat Collishaw, Tracey Emin and Paula Rego: At the Foundling', *The Guardian*, (31/01/2010), <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2010/jan/31/collishaw-emin-rego-foundling-museum>> .

relevant material connection in their practice.²² For the purposes of this research, I will be focussing on contemporary artworks specifically created to respond to the site or collection, rather than artworks utilising a heritage space as an attractive but unrelated backdrop or exhibition space.²³

Existing research has attempted to understand and quantify the effects of these interventions.²⁴ The most significant research in recent years in this area (restricted to sites within the UK) is summarised in the 'Industry Stakeholders Report, Mapping Contemporary Art in the Heritage Experience' – the result of an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded project led by Newcastle University and the University of Leeds.²⁵ The research team carried out an audit of contemporary art in heritage site projects, and recorded the process of commissioning five new contemporary artworks installed across four heritage sites, and one work performed at the MCAHE conference.²⁶ The project used a mixed method approach to create a framework of findings and recommendations for artists, hosting sites and commissioning organisations in the creation of contemporary artworks in heritage sites. The following table summarises the

²² Clare Twomey, 'Clare Twomey, Projects' (2025) <<http://www.claretwomey.com/projects.html>> [accessed 12/10/2025]; National Trust, 'Four Seasons' (2025) <<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/worcestershire-herefordshire/croome/creative-projects-at-croome>> [accessed 12/10/2025]; Wellcome Collection, 'Jason and the Adventure of 254' (2024) <<https://wellcomecollection.org/exhibitions/jason-and-the-adventure-of-254>> [accessed 21/10/2025]; Mitchell Owens, 'Magdalene Odundo Gives New Life to a Historic British Country House with Her Ceramic Creations', *Architectural Digest*, 02/08/2024.

²³ Jonathan Jones, 'James Turrell at Houghton Hall: A Psychedelic Legal High in the English Countryside', *The Guardian*, (05/06/2015), <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/jun/05/james-turrell-lightscape-houghton-hall-installation-review>> [accessed 12/10/2025]; Mark Brown, 'They Look Sad': Tony Cragg Scraps Audio Guides for Castle Howard Exhibition', *The Guardian*, (02/05/2024), <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2024/may/02/tony-cragg-scraps-audio-guides-for-castle-howard-exhibition>> [accessed 12/10/2025].

²⁴ Divya Praful Tolia-Kelly, Emma Waterton, and Steve Watson, *Heritage, Affect and Emotion : Politics, Practices and Infrastructures* (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017).

²⁵ Black and others, *Mapping Contemporary Art in the Heritage Experience*.

²⁶ 'Https://Www.Mappingcontemporary.Art.', <<https://www.mappingcontemporary.art.>> [accessed 11/10/2025] – map no longer available.

recommendations arising from this research that most directly inform and intersect with my own practice and research interests:

Heritage Sites	• Select sites with suitable physical and organisational capacity. • Involve staff and volunteers early to secure internal support. • Invest in accessible interpretation to help diverse audiences engage meaningfully. • Support artists to reflect broader histories and diverse narratives.
Artists	• Understand the site's history, sensitivities, and visitor expectations early. • Build strong relationships with curators, staff, and volunteers. • Work with sites to shape interpretive materials. • Document process and outcomes for professional development and legacy.
Further Research	• Study how different audiences interpret contemporary art in heritage settings.

These recommendations struck a chord with my experience and allowed me to begin to reframe my own learnings and build on this from the perspective of an artist-researcher, with a specific focus on participatory art. A further outcome of the MCAHE research was Farley and Pollock's article critiquing the last three decades of contemporary art in heritage sites in the UK. Here they summarised the benefits and value of contemporary art in heritage sites as expansion and diversification of the heritage audience, interpretive imperatives and artists' and arts sector development.²⁷ Drawing on data from The Audience Agency, Farley and Pollock pointed to increased engagement with visual arts among the 16–34 demographic

²⁷ Farley and Pollock, 'Contemporary Art in Heritage Practice'.

and a closer ethnic alignment with national population figures compared to other art forms, supporting the view that contemporary art can serve as a tool for making heritage sites feel more relevant and connected to contemporary society.²⁸ However, they also revealed limitations in the development and understanding of this practice. The mapping research cited indicated a lack of critical discourse surrounding contemporary art in heritage contexts. Few projects have received sustained critical attention in established contemporary art forums, due in part to logistical challenges related to locations and media interest. A tension was noted between the expectations of commissioning organisations - often rooted in outreach and engagement goals - and the more autonomous or subversive aims of the artists involved, which can impose constraints that can undermine artistic integrity.²⁹

A significant recent addition to the research and writings on this topic is *Contemporary Art in Heritage Spaces*, an edited book of collected case studies utilising a range of voices and experiences to examine not just the artworks and outcomes, but also the deeper, organisational and institutional issues each raises.³⁰ I utilise some of the outlined measures such as experientiality, social outcomes, inclusivity, evaluative techniques and legacy in my own research practice, to provide a deep consideration of barriers still in place when creating works at the intersection of contemporary art and heritage.³¹ The outcomes of my research practice (as detailed in Chapter Five) reveal these barriers more clearly than I could have imagined – the complexity of working within and through some of these barriers on a live project highlight the work that is still to be done in working in these areas.

²⁸ Ibid., p.251.

²⁹ Ibid., p.252.

³⁰ Nick Cass, Gill Park, and Anna Powell, *Contemporary Art in Heritage Spaces* (Taylor & Francis, 2020).

³¹ Ibid.

Participatory Art

Recent writings and my own experience suggest that the term ‘participatory’ in art, design and research has seen increasing use, and so it is important to clarify where my work sits within ‘participatory practice’.³² I place this research and my practice, within the term ‘participatory art’ – that is, the research considers art which has been designed to be participatory – not participatory action research, or participatory design. Clare Bishop defines participatory art as an artistic practice in which people themselves become the medium and material of the work, holding collective engagement, social interaction and process in higher value than a passive act of viewing.³³ The artist often invites participants to join, collaborate or co-produce the work, and the artwork is both an event and an object for reflection.³⁴ Bishop’s concern that art should engage both participants (those directly involved) and spectators (those with a passive view), is an area which I also concern myself with in regard to static, visual art practice (rather than performance art). This is further echoed by Miller, who argues that the growing popularity of ‘participation’ in contemporary art reflects a shift away from prioritising finished aesthetic objects and towards valuing action, process, and social interaction as integral to the work itself.³⁵ However, he cautions against celebrating participation uncritically, urging closer interrogation of the nature and quality of such engagement.³⁶ However, this is where participatory art becomes complicated and arguably requires its own

³² Zichen Ke, 'Values and Challenges of Participatory Art in Urban and Community Development: A 10-Year Systematic Review', *Frontiers in sociology*, 10 (2025); Peter Wacnik, Shanna R. Daly, and Aditi Verma, 'Participatory Design: A Systematic Review and Insights for Future Practice', *Design Science*, 11 (2025); Flora Cornish and others, 'Participatory Action Research', *Nature Reviews Methods Primers*, 3. 1 (2023), p.34.

³³ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (Verso, 2012).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.2.

³⁵ Jason Miller, 'Activism Vs Antagonism: Socially Engaged Art from Bourriaud to Bishop and Beyond', *Field. A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism*, 1. 3 (2016), pp.165-183.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

framework of critique – one which holds in balance the aesthetics and the impact of the act of participation on those who take part.³⁷ Kester distinguishes between two methods of making participatory art - the “textual” and the “collaborative” modes. In the textual mode, the artist works independently to create a finished artwork that audiences later view and interpret. The collaborative mode in which I would position participatory art, by contrast, focuses on shared experience, process and dialogue. The artist works together with participants, and the artwork develops through these interactions rather than being pre-determined. Kester argues that this approach shifts the artist’s role from a sole author to a facilitator of conversation and potential collaboration.³⁸ The ‘art’ lies as much in the act of participation as in a final product. This, Bishop suggests, represents an important ‘ethical turn’ in art - one that values communication and collective creativity over individual expression or aesthetic outcome.³⁹

With the wide use of the term participation in the arts, there are concerns that this is becoming a catch all term with varying degrees of autonomy and genuine collaboration, leading to a scale which at its worst creates tokenistic engagement, suggesting that a clearer and more nuanced terminology is needed.⁴⁰ This concern about tokenism can lead to participatory art being reduced to social policy, enforced consensus, or art lacking in antagonism and critique.⁴¹

³⁷ Matilde Carrasco-Barranco, 'Artistic Aesthetic Value in Participatory Art', *Philosophies (Basel)*, 10. 2 (2025), p.29.

³⁸ Grant H. Kester, *The One and the Many : Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Duke University Press, 2011), pp.10-11.

³⁹ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, pp.18-26.

⁴⁰ Anthony Schrag, *Socially Engaged Art and Ethics : Power, Politics and Participation* (Routledge, 2026), pp.9-13.

⁴¹ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*.

McNally argues that participatory art should be understood within human geography, as it draws attention to the spatial, political, and public areas of creative collaboration.⁴² Like Kester, he defines participatory art as valuing relationships, human encounters and the process over the production of finished pieces. He highlights how participatory art actively shapes the spaces where it happens, creating places for dialogue, shared creativity and negotiation between different people.⁴³ This definition particularly resonates with participatory art taking place in heritages sites, where there is an opportunity for participants to reshape both the aesthetics and their experience of a place. As participatory art engages audiences in dialogue, expression and creative collaboration, I believe there is the opportunity for an emotional connection and reaction to this active participation. Researchers have explored the impact of emotional engagement within museums.⁴⁴ My research seeks to remedy the insufficient research identified by Sheila Watson on both the emotional reactions of visitors and their impact and expand this to specifically explore how participatory contemporary art affects this experience.⁴⁵ Farley and Black suggest that upon encountering contemporary art in heritage sites, visitors' reactions may depend on whether they were expecting this encounter.

They may act with surprise, even resentment; the reaction may be positive, negative, or none at all. Increasingly, there is recognition of the importance of emotional or affective responses within heritage environments. It may be that the process of engaging with art, as an emotional response, allows for new understandings and responds to a social urge to “find a part in the whole” as Mulder discusses in *Narrative Space*; or to find “Meaning in

⁴² Danny McNally, 'Participatory Art and Geography: Politics, Publics, and Space', *Progress in human geography*, 48. 5 (2024), pp.537-51.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Laurajane Smith, 'Visitor Emotion, Affect and Registers of Engagement at Museums and Heritage Sites', *Conservation Science in Cultural Heritage : Historical Technical Journal*, 14 (2014), pp.125-31.

⁴⁵ Sheila Watson, 'Why Do Emotions Matter in Museums and Heritage Sites?', in *Sensitive Past: Questioning Heritage in Education*, ed. by Sheila Watson, et al. (Berghahn Books, 2016), pp.75-91.

Chaos”, as Robinson explores in his reimagining of the rise in cultural heritage tourism.⁴⁶

Thesis Structure

Against this wider background I have structured my thesis as follows: Chapter Two departs from the conventional thesis model of a literature review in order to reflect the hybrid nature of this practice-based research. Because the research and practice are embedded within institutional heritage practice and informed by my own participatory art practice, it is necessary to situate the research within three interlocking contexts: scholarly literature, my own artistic practice and institutional cultural policy. This chapter first considers key debates at the intersection of heritage studies, contemporary art, and participation, with particular attention to questions of agonism. It examines how artists and heritage institutions engage with questions of history, material culture, and storytelling, particularly through participatory and socially engaged practices. This review establishes the conceptual framework and critical dimensions of this research that I did not have access to during the creation of my previous artworks. The chapter then turns to my earlier participatory artworks, with an in-depth analysis of my 2019 installation *Change in Attitudes* which was the catalyst for this research. Analysis of visitor engagement with this work - particularly instances of unexpected and self-directed participation - generated the core research questions and informed the methodological approach adopted in this thesis. Finally, the chapter examines the policy frameworks and governance structures that shape these kinds of artworks. Institution-based participatory artworks do not operate independently of the sites that host them -

⁴⁶ Niki Black and Rebecca Farley, 'Mapping Contemporary Art in the Heritage Experience', in *Contemporary Art in Heritage Spaces*, ed. by Nick Cass, Gill Park, and Anna Powell (Routledge, 2020), pp. 15-31 (p.25).

they are structurally, ideologically and often financially embedded within institutional priorities, governance structures, and risk management strategies. By analysing these frameworks alongside artistic and theoretical debates, the chapter demonstrates how participatory art is co-produced through negotiation between artist, institution, and public.

Chapter Three describes the research methodology and defines the forms of data generated and analysed. Positioned as practice-based artistic research, the methodology combines iterative making with qualitative analysis. It incorporates elements of autoethnography, drawing on my reflective research journal and positionality as artist-researcher and facilitator, and embedded ethnography, developed through temporary immersion within Hardwick Hall and sustained observation of staff, volunteer and visitor interactions. The chapter begins with a review of existing visitor evaluation methods within heritage and participatory art contexts. In order to refine an appropriate evaluative framework, a visitor evaluation trial was conducted at Temple Newsam, testing selected techniques against existing contemporary art interventions. The findings of this trial informed the elements of the methodological design later implemented at Hardwick Hall. The final section of this chapter details the developmental phase of the Hardwick Hall artwork, *A Virtuous Woman*. This defines the data gathering methods including recorded visitor comments (documented by myself and trained volunteers), behavioural observation, institutional correspondence and meeting records, and my own reflective research journal. It provides a narrative account of the negotiation between institutional aims and research objectives, outlining the initial agreements established between artist and site. This section clarifies how research questions were realised and negotiated within institutional parameters, demonstrating from

the outset the collaborative relationship required between artistic intention and organisational intention and clarifying how the participatory framework was established prior to public launch.

Chapter Four is delivered as a first-person narrative account of the conception, production, and facilitation of *A Virtuous Woman*, the central case study and practice element of the research. Written from the perspective of an embedded artist-researcher / facilitator-evaluator, the chapter maps the creative and participative evolution of the work across the research period. The chapter begins by outlining the artistic rationale for responding to the Noblewomen embroideries at Hardwick Hall, examining the historical and symbolic significance of these textiles and the context of their owner, commissioner and creative director, the Countess of Shrewsbury (widely known as Bess of Hardwick) in the context of Elizabethan England.⁴⁷ This preliminary research stage is a key element to my artistic practice when working with heritage sites and is fundamental not only to the making of the work, but also to the interpretive framing through which participants encounter and participate with it. The chapter goes on to document the collaborative elements of the project, including the involvement of National Trust staff and volunteers at multiple levels of seniority, recording processes of communication, training, workshop delivery, embedded evaluation, and the establishment of agreed frameworks and operational boundaries. Detailed description is provided of the material and logistical conditions of production of the artwork and the space in which participation was facilitated: the physical configuration of the exhibition space, invigilation and facilitation strategies,

⁴⁷ Mary S. Lovell, *Bess of Hardwick: First Lady of Chatsworth, 1527-1608* (Abacus, 2006), p.xiii.

material sourcing, interpretive materials, and the constraints imposed by installing within the historic site. Central to this chapter is analysis of participation as it unfolded in practice. The work was conceived as iterative, evolving in response to how visitors wanted to participate with the artwork. I examine how participant behaviour informed successive adaptations, observe participant choices and behaviour and record how differing viewpoints were negotiated within the space.

Chapter Five analyses the critical turning point in the research: the emergence of polarised participation and the subsequent institutional, media and public response. As participation expanded, tensions surrounding offence, harm, marginalised voices, moderation, and reputational risk intensified. A particular form of participant intervention - the inclusion and subsequent crossing out of JK Rowling's name within the artwork - became a flashpoint. Initially permitted within the participatory framework, this action prompted internal debate concerning censorship, authority, and institutional responsibility, especially where staff participation blurred distinctions between institutional voice and individual agency. The chapter traces the sequence of events that followed: informal discussions, a formal complaint, a temporary pause in the project, its reopening under revised conditions, and a second complaint that generated protest, activist responses and widespread media attention. By analysing these developments, the chapter interrogates the limits of institutional tolerance within participatory practice and the risks inherent in inviting public intervention within heritage spaces. In June 2025, the artwork was removed from display and subsequently replaced with a filmed projection accompanied by new interpretation. Drawing on visitor data, institutional documentation, staff interviews, media coverage, and reflective analysis, this chapter considers how participatory art within heritage sites can

engage polarised opinion, and what institutional conditions and risk aversion support or inhibit such engagement. Rather than resolving these tensions, the chapter treats them as productive and potential avenues of enquiry, revealing the fragile balance between creative expression, inclusivity, care, and governance.

Finally, Chapter Six consolidates the theoretical, methodological, and practical insights generated through the practice-based research. It reflects on how the project evolved beyond its initial framing, identifying points at which the research questions expanded or shifted in response to practice, participation and institutional dynamics. The chapter concludes by proposing recommendations for future research into participatory contemporary art within heritage contexts, particularly in relation to media risk in a time of cancel culture, institutional governance, and the politics of potentially polarised public engagement.

Chapter Two: Contextual Framework: Literature, Practice and Policy

Reflecting the practice-based nature of this research, this chapter takes a hybrid approach to the literature review where scholarly literature, critical theory, artistic practice, and institutional contexts intersect. Participatory art is an increasingly prominent feature of contemporary artistic and cultural practice, accompanied by ongoing and at times polarised critical discourse around questions of agency, aesthetics, ethics, power, and conflict. This research conceptualises these three areas as concentric circles of practice and knowledge, reflecting the way the research developed through creative practice, critical reflection, and engagement with wider theoretical and institutional contexts. The broadest circle comprises contemporary art interventions within heritage and museum contexts, which provides the institutional and disciplinary framework within which this research is situated. Within this sits participatory art, reflecting the specific artistic approach that initially formed the central focus of my research. However, as the practice research developed, and through closer reflection on the encounters and responses generated through the artworks, it became increasingly apparent that agonism and the potential emotional responses this evokes were the key to understanding the phenomena unfolding within the practice. These therefore form the central circle of the research framework, representing the primary concern through which the participatory encounters explored in this thesis are examined. Together, these concentric fields reveal the unresolved tensions and gaps that emerge when questions of participation, agonism, emotional response, and heritage contexts are considered collectively.

Although these areas each have substantial bodies of scholarship in their own right, they rarely appear together as a unified area of enquiry. This chapter

therefore examines each field individually, moving through the concentric circles of the research framework before considering the relationships and tensions that emerge between them. While the literature is explored through these distinct areas, the practice and research presented here are located within the relationship between all three, bringing together questions of heritage, participation, agonism, and emotional response. Together, these perspectives reveal not only the diversity of participatory practice, but also the unresolved tensions and gaps that this PhD seeks to address through practice-based research.

The chapter begins by examining key debates around contemporary art within heritage and museum contexts, before moving through participatory art and agonism to establish the conceptual framework for the research. It then turns to the policy and governance structures that shape institution-based participatory artworks, demonstrating how these projects are co-produced through ongoing negotiation between artist, institution, and public, and how they remain embedded within broader structural, ideological, and financial contexts. Finally, the chapter considers my own artistic practice within these fields, with particular focus on my 2019 installation *Change in Attitudes*, whose moments of unexpected and self-directed visitor engagement generated the core research questions and shaped the methodological approach.

Art in Heritage Sites

Beginning with the wider institutional context in which this research is situated, this section examines the development of contemporary art interventions within heritage and museum contexts.

Lowenthal argues that for professional historians, the past appears increasingly alien, yet most people prefer to reshape it in familiar terms - visitors and audiences often project contemporary goals, values, and assumptions onto historical figures, praising them when their beliefs align with today's and criticising them when they do not.⁴⁸ In media, museums, and heritage sites, this can result in history being presented as if human nature is unchanging, or stories are structured to connect past events directly to the present. According to Lowenthal, this produces a 'safe', simplified past that feels familiar rather than truly different. However, my observations at Hardwick Hall suggest the opposite: visitors engage deeply because they recognise the strangeness and difference of the past. The celebration of Bess of Hardwick's achievements through embroidered works exemplifies this interest - visitors understood why Bess's accomplishments were exceptional in her own historical context. This recognition of historical difference underpinned the decision to reimagine her works in contemporary terms, rather than attempt facsimiles. The goal was to create new artworks reflecting present-day values while allowing Bess's originals to retain their historical authority.

Recent work by Nick Cass, Gill Park and Anna Powell maps how contemporary art functions within heritage environments.⁴⁹ Their case studies illustrate how artistic interventions can both illuminate and challenge historical narratives. Black and Farley examine the motivations of those commissioning artworks in heritage sites. The way visitors are now using heritage sites as a leisure and social activity means that artworks could allow these sites to become 'the new

⁴⁸ David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country - Revisited* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), p.595.

⁴⁹ Cass, Park, and Powell, *Contemporary Art in Heritage Spaces*.

town square for informed exchange of ideas'.⁵⁰ They go on to highlight a growing recognition within heritage organisations of the importance of involving staff and volunteers more fully in the development and presentation of contemporary art with increasing demand across the arts and heritage sectors to share expertise among commissioners and creative producers working in this area. The need to evaluate such practices - considering both audience reach and depth of engagement - suggests that future research should extend beyond visitors to include staff and volunteers, in order to better understand the field and establish a stronger foundation for future projects.⁵¹ In alignment with this growing recognition, my research adopted a working method that actively involved site staff and volunteers from the outset, building on sector calls for more inclusive and collaborative approaches to contemporary art in heritage contexts.

Participatory artwork within heritage takes spaces two very different forms in Laura Breen's chapter '*Making Cities*' examining case studies of artists working with post-industrial cities of Middlesbrough and Stoke on Trent, positioning the cities as heritage sites.⁵² While in Middlesbrough, Emily Hesse created a making centred exercise, inviting community members to take part as participants, Brownsword's participants in Stoke on Trent were more akin to performers – performing their ceramic factory skills to audiences as a commentary on the downfall of ceramic production in the town.⁵³ While both of these approaches reflect on lost industries, Hesse's community making suggests a hopeful look to the future (in line with her and Beighton's aims to create a 'New Linthorpe') while

⁵⁰ Black and Farley, *Mapping Contemporary Art in the Heritage Experience*.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.27.

⁵² Laura Breen, 'Making Cities: Place, Production, and (Im)Material Heritage', in *Contemporary Art in Heritage Spaces*, ed. by Nick Cass, Gill Park, and Anna Powell (Taylor & Francis, 2020), pp.32-48.

⁵³ Ibid.

Brownsword's work feels more like a melancholic reflection on something the city has lost. However, the work of the British Ceramics Biennial and artists like Brownsword appear to have revitalised Stoke on Trent, not through its historic ceramics industry, but as a growing tourist destination for contemporary ceramics with a historic backdrop.⁵⁴

Hope utilised her thesis to research the complexity of participation without concern for funders or commissioners, because 'evaluation reports of publicly funded art commissions [...] can often read as advocacy documents that emphasise how well the project has met its aims and objectives'.⁵⁵ This sentiment has been echoed by Jancovich and Stevenson who agree that the cultural sectors struggle to openly acknowledge failure due to a 'culture of fear and blame avoidance'.⁵⁶ This lack of honest reflection prevents shared learning and systemic change, causing a repetition of ineffective past projects and policies. The authors argue that there is a moral obligation to confront and learn from failures - not to assign blame, but to enable genuine progress.⁵⁷ This reluctance to acknowledge structural shortcomings echoes Walsh's argument that heritage provision increasingly operates according to economic imperatives rather than principles of public service.⁵⁸ He argues that when cultural institutions become dependent on tourism revenue, their primary

⁵⁴ 'Stoke-on-Trent City Council Launches Ambitious Visitor Economy and Cultural Strategies', (2022) <<https://www.stoke.gov.uk/news/article/1138/stoke-on-trent-city-council-launches-ambitious-visitor-economy-and-cultural-strategies?.com>> [accessed 20/2/2026].

⁵⁵ Hope, 'Participating in the 'Wrong' Way?' p.10.

⁵⁶ Jancovich and Stevenson, *Failures in Cultural Participation*, p.151.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Kevin Walsh, *The Representation of the Past : Museums and Heritage in the Post-Modern World* (Taylor & Francis, 2002) p.144.

accountability shifts away from communities and toward financial sustainability, often reinforcing existing inequalities rather than challenging them.⁵⁹

Farley and Pollock highlight some of the issues faced by the National Trust's *Prejudice and Pride* programme of events.⁶⁰ 'Inevitably, some of this work proved controversial, attracting adverse media coverage and negative feedback from some heritage visitors, who felt that projects like "Prejudice and Pride" went well beyond the remit of the National Trust'.⁶¹ This illustrates the ongoing tension organisations face between diversifying audiences and avoiding the alienation of existing members, particularly given the overriding need to secure income. Their research indicates that this tension remains central to practice and is often managed by individual art curators and advocates for contemporary art within the organisation.⁶²

Tunbridge and Ashworth describe heritage as inherently dissonant, arguing that conflict arises from the ways in which different groups lay claim to incompatible or competing pasts.⁶³ For them, discordance is not an anomaly but a structural condition of heritage itself. This position is further developed by Smith, whose critique of Authorised Heritage Discourse reframes dissonance as inseparable from power and argues that heritage is produced through dominant institutional narratives that privilege particular histories, values, and forms of

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.144.

⁶⁰ Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG), 'Prejudice & Pride: Exploring LGBTQ Lives at the National Trust' <<https://le.ac.uk/rcmg/research-archive/prejudice-and-pride#:~:text=This%20research%20project%20%E2%80%93%20a%20collaboration,engage%20audiences%20around%20challenging%20histories?>> [accessed 10/02/2026].

⁶¹ Farley and Pollock, 'Contemporary Art in Heritage Practice' p.252.

⁶² Ibid., p.252.

⁶³ J. E. Tunbridge and G. J. Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict* (J. Wiley, 1996), pp.20-21.

expertise while marginalising or silencing others.⁶⁴ In her more recent work on emotional heritage, Smith revisits the theme of dissonance as an integral condition of heritage practice, aligning it with Mouffe's conception of democratic politics as inherently agonistic and suggesting that productive conflict rather than consensus is central to how heritage is experienced, felt, and contested.⁶⁵ Together, these frameworks position heritage sites not as neutral custodians of the past, but as active arenas in which meaning is continually negotiated and contested. More recent scholarship continues to explore these dynamics in practice, examining contested World Heritage nominations, memorial landscapes, and visitor engagement with difficult histories, and emphasising that dissonance often intensifies when marginalised voices demand visibility within institutional settings.⁶⁶ Yet despite extensive theoretical development, the heritage sector continues to grapple with the practical implications of this condition. Such framing makes heritage sites particularly resonant contexts for participatory art practices that invite multiple voices into dialogue with collections, histories, and institutional authority. If heritage is inherently dissonant, the question shifts from whether conflict exists to how it is made visible, mediated, or managed, and what risks accompany its public articulation. It is within this terrain that my participatory artwork is situated, while initially conceived as a means of deepening emotional engagement with heritage narratives, the project became a lived instance of the very

⁶⁴ Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (Taylor & Francis, 2006), pp.80-84.

⁶⁵ Laurajane Smith, *Emotional Heritage : Visitor Engagement at Museums and Heritage Sites* (Routledge, 2021), p.59.

⁶⁶ Patrizia Battilani and others, *Dissonant Heritage: Concepts, Critiques, Cases* (University of Bologna, 2024), p.192; Joelle Soulard and Zachary Russell, 'Visitors' Cognitive Vaccines: Self-Reflection on Dissonant Narratives after Heritage Tourism Experiences', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 112 (2025); Anne-Marie Broudehoux, 'Memorial Agency, Heritage Dissonance, and the Politics of Memory in the Preservation of Rio De Janeiro's Valongo Slave Wharf', *Built Heritage*, 8. 1 (2024), p.19.

dissonance described by Tunbridge, Ashworth, and Smith.⁶⁷ As divergent and polarised responses emerged within the participatory space, the artwork did not simply interpret heritage, it activated the underlying tensions embedded within it. Rather than resolving these tensions, the participatory process created opportunities for visitors to explore and negotiate them collectively. This is discussed in further detail in Chapter Four, where moments of disagreement frequently became points of dialogue through which participants reflected not only on one another's contemporary contributions, but also on the contested histories and values embodied within Hardwick Hall itself.

Lowenthal also feels that heritage is not neutral, warning that applying modern values to the past risks rewriting history according to present-day expectations, positioning heritage professionals as arbiters of meaning.⁶⁸ This is reflected in the *Guardian* article viewing the Tate rehang, in which Jones argued that it is neither fair nor appropriate to apply modern standards to older works of art.⁶⁹ My practice acknowledges this risk while embracing the opportunity to allow historical and contemporary narratives to coexist, respecting the past's difference while generating meaningful engagement in the present. Even clearly contemporary reimaginings can be misread; while working on *A Virtuous Woman* at Hardwick Hall, I was regularly asked if I was restoring original textiles, despite efforts to signal their modernity. This was possibly due to the frequency with which visitors can now expect to see this sort of restoration work being done as a spectator event.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Tunbridge and Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage*; Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, Smith, *Emotional Heritage*.

⁶⁸ Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, pp.498-584.

⁶⁹ Jonathan Jones, 'Tate Britain Rehang Review – This Is Now the Museum Where Art Goes to Sleep', *The Guardian*, 23/5/2023.

⁷⁰ National Trust, 'C:Up Lanhydrock Long Gallery Ceiling Conservation Project' (2025) <<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/cornwall/lanhydrock/lanhydrock-ceiling-conservation-project>> [accessed 22/2/2026].

This highlights the challenge and potential misunderstandings of working with audiences conditioned to expect restoration as a mode of engagement despite this very much not trying to make a facsimile or copy in the manner described by Lowenthal.⁷¹

Ashton's Chapter, *A Room of One's Own, Strategies of feminist arts interventions* explores reflections from National Trust's 'Women and Power' programme in 2018 (part of their Challenging Histories programme) from her perspective as a feminist, scholar-activist, curator and artist.⁷² 'Affect and emotion are "essential constitutive elements of heritage making" and can be understood as driving the comments and criticisms against the new socially aware programme'.⁷³ She writes that it is noteworthy that the word feminist is missing from all marketing from this period. Ashton observes that throughout the Challenging Histories programme, artists have been utilised to bring new voices and tell new versions of stories to explore these histories, and that the responsibility for engaging with contentious issues became the artists' responsibility. 'The ethics of responsibility falling to artists to carry a programme also requires some unpacking, and whether the infrastructure and support are in place to manage this effectively'.⁷⁴ She calls on the Trust to empower artists to effect change on an institutional level, while pointing out the importance of finding ways to record, evidence and continue to share the work of artists as legacy. Rather than only creating short term interventions, artists should be embedded, not temporary or outsiders. In regards to visitor responses to these artist

⁷¹ Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, pp.448-463.

⁷² Jenna C Ashton, 'A Room of One's Own: Strategies of Feminist Arts Interventions', in *Contemporary Art in Heritage Spaces*, ed. by Nick Cass, Gill Park, and Anna Powell (Taylor & Francis, 2020), pp. 83-96.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.94.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.92.

interventions, she acknowledges ‘A critique of the quality of technique or craft of the creative output is frequently missing, in favour of visitors expressing either encouragement or disapproval of ‘the act’ of the artwork being in place’.⁷⁵ In line with Bishop’s analysis, this critique departs from a focus on social intention over aesthetic or artistic quality and instead considers the implications of the work’s siting as the viewer’s primary concern. Ashton’s observations raise broader questions about where responsibility for contentious narratives ultimately sits, and how institutions may distance themselves from the political implications of the work they commission.

Joanne Williams summarises and applies Anthony Downey’s politics of exceptionalism arguments to the work at the Imperial War Museum – critiquing how contemporary art can be used in ways that ignore the real power structures behind social issues. She argues that art takes on the role of raising awareness or making a statement, but institutions do not have to take real action.⁷⁶ In the context of art being used to create meaningful interpretations and provoke thought on difficult and complex histories, we should not expect them to fully solve or critically engage with complex social issues.⁷⁷ Furthermore, Robins’ acknowledgment of the risk undertaken by the artist, and the notion that the person (artist) doing the speaking cannot be uncoupled from what is being ‘spoken’ by the artwork, also raise issues of institutional power and responsibility. The museum can, to some extent, create a distance between itself and the critical dialogue constructed by the artwork through explicitly assigning to it the voice of the artist, thus obscuring the

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.92.

⁷⁶ Joanne Williams, ‘Contemporary Interventions and Conflict: The Possibilities of ‘Critical Historical Consciousness’ as a Mode of Heritage Production’, in *Contemporary Art in Heritage Spaces*, ed. by Nick Cass, Gill Park, and Anna Powell (Taylor & Francis, 2020), pp. 98-115.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

wider institutional politics and decision- making which enabled it to be present in the space.⁷⁸

These dynamics have direct consequences for artists working within institutional frameworks, particularly in relation to freedom, precarity, and the conditions of commissioned labour. This resonates with my later experiences with *A Virtuous Woman* at Hardwick Hall, whereby the National Trust felt like an anonymous wall the staff could stand behind, while my name was being used throughout the public domain in the critique of what took place.

Hope writes about the difficulty of freedom when working on a paid commission 'of the service-industry style contract for artists who are able to use their skills in facilitation and creativity to entertain'.⁷⁹ Like most paid artists, she is aware that in acting against the discourse of your employer, you risk not being employed in the future.⁸⁰ Hope's participatory artwork *FUNding FACTORY* was ironically unfunded by the hosting institution, with only her time covered through PhD funding - mirroring my own experience with Hardwick Hall.⁸¹ This situation underscores the broader challenges of creating meaningful art when institutional support is limited, forcing artists to rely on scarce funding just to cover materials and basic resources.

Hope's *Performative Interviews* artwork during her PhD thesis initially provided anonymity in order to allow participants freedom in sharing information which carried a very real risk to their careers, but evolved into a method using

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.105.

⁷⁹ Hope, 'Participating in the 'Wrong' Way?' p.41.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.41.

⁸¹ Ibid. p.131.

disguise, role-play, and performance.⁸² This enabled participants to speak more openly and use playful, metaphorical strategies to critically examine commissioning culture. By balancing absurdity with seriousness, the method highlighted issues without letting performance overshadow content. Interviews addressed failures, cancellations, and censorship in commissioned artworks, exploring compromise in the artist–commissioner relationship and revealing miscommunications and lack of dialogue.⁸³

Graham suggests that a lack of clarity has led to a cycle of participatory invitations followed by institutional delegitimisation, where participants are dismissed as unrepresentative or results deemed inaccessible or ‘not the right story’.⁸⁴ This rings true in my own experiences of how institutions have avoided direct censorship by being selective about what results of participation they are willing to show, as in the work at the Brontë Parsonage Museum discussed later in this chapter.

The limits of this freedom become especially visible in moments of censorship or editorial intervention, where institutional values and public mandates directly shape what can be expressed. In my previous work with institutions I have had to accept that their responsibilities and authority will ultimately override my artistic ideals, potentially resulting in censorship I would not have undertaken myself. This is similar to the experiences of Schrag’s *Atelier #2*.⁸⁵ During *Change in Attitudes*, the team had to cover graffiti on the gallery walls that included swearing or abusive and insulting language. Staff noted that much of this editing was

⁸² Ibid., pp.119-127.

⁸³ Ibid., pp.119-127.

⁸⁴ Helen Graham, *Deconstituting Museums : Participation's Affective Work* (UCL Press, 2025), p.163.

⁸⁵ Schrag, 'Agonistic Tendencies', pp.116-117.

necessary because the gallery is a public space that attracts a wide range of visitors, including children and school groups, and therefore the appropriateness of the works needed to be considered, mirroring the institutional intervention made in Schrag's *Atelier #2*. The choices regarding materials, language, and the editing of the exhibition collectively produces a 'state aesthetic' that ensures publicly funded, participatory projects do not cause offence.⁸⁶ In other words, a participatory project supported by the state - or, in this case, by the Local Authority, and in my case by the National Trust - must operate within conceptual and aesthetic boundaries because of its public mandate, defining what counts as acceptable expression. Consequently, publicly funded or sited participatory works are often limited to a single mode - typically, a child-friendly and convivial format.⁸⁷ This approach restricts the democratic potential of such projects by excluding difference, conflict and alternative forms of cultural authority.

Andrew Burton, in *Mapping Contemporary Art in the Heritage Experience*, discusses the challenges involved in situating contemporary artworks within heritage sites. He emphasises the need to balance multiple, often competing considerations, including the protection of the landscape and built environment, adherence to conservation principles, and sensitivity to the expectations and emotional attachments of visitors.⁸⁸ Burton highlights that curatorial decisions must be made with an ongoing awareness of the potential for contemporary interventions

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp.116-117.

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp.115-122.

⁸⁸ Andrew Burton, 'Mapping Contemporary Art in the Heritage Experience: Mary Eleanor Bowes and the Orangery Urns', in *Contemporary Art in Heritage Spaces*, ed. by Nick Cass, Gill Park, and Anna Powell (Taylor & Francis, 2020), pp. 116-30.

to disrupt or be perceived as intrusive within valued and familiar aspects of the heritage experience.⁸⁹

Participation

Moving from the broader institutional setting towards the specific artistic practices at the heart of this research, this section examines participatory art and its associated debates around agency, authorship, and engagement.

Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* is a key text that defines art in terms of social interactions.⁹⁰ He describes artworks as 'interstices' - spaces where people can come together, build relationships, and create small, utopian moments of connection. While his ideas have been influential, critics including Claire Bishop have argued that Bourriaud relies on an idealised assumption that all interactions are positive and overlooks questions of power, exclusion, and conflict.⁹¹ In contrast, Grant Kester proposes a "dialogical aesthetics," emphasising mutuality, sustained conversation, and ethical collaboration.⁹² While both Bourriaud and Kester foreground social interaction, Kester places far greater emphasis on long-term, community-based processes. These approaches form the basis for contemporary debates on whether participatory art should promote consensus (Kester) or confront antagonism (Bishop), highlighting the imbalance between idealised connection and the realities of social engagement with real people in art.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Les presses du réel, 2002).

⁹¹ Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October*, 110 (2004), pp.51-79; Bishop, *Artificial Hells*.

⁹² Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces : Community and Communication in Modern Art* (University of California Press, 2013), pp. 82-123.

The Bishop-Kester debate is central to participatory art theory. Bishop critiques the “ethical turn” for prioritising good intentions over artistic complexity and political depth.⁹³ In *Artificial Hells*, she argues that participatory art must be judged aesthetically and politically, not merely ethically or socially.⁹⁴ Kester’s arguments counter those of Bishop, suggesting hers represent an overemphasis on conflict at the expense of the collaborative ethics that underpin much community-based practice.⁹⁵ This debate demonstrates a fundamental difference between what different critics and practitioners aim to achieve and facilitate in creating participatory art, illustrating that participatory artworks are not neutral, they are sites where ethical, political, and aesthetic considerations intersect.

An applied example of dialogical aesthetics can be found in Peter Peters and Ties van de Werff’s ‘The People’s Salon: A Pragmatist Approach to Audience Participation in Symphonic Music’ – here the participants get a say in how the evening goes and how the space is arranged but the key is that participants share their stories associated with the music, and the sharing of the story impacts others listening to the music and how it makes them feel.⁹⁶ This relates strongly to the stories visitors shared in *A Virtuous Woman*, demonstrating how shared storytelling functions as an emotional touchstone, discussed extensively in Chapter Four. I feel that while this approach is more readily facilitated within small groups, it raises questions about how such intimacy might be sustained at scale, particularly within institutional frameworks in which participation is measured primarily through

⁹³ Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', pp.18-26.

⁹⁴ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*.

⁹⁵ Grant H. Kester, 'Another Turn: A Response to Claire Bishop', *Artforum International*, May 2006, pp.22-23.

⁹⁶ Peter Peters, Ties van de Werff, and Imogen Eve, 'The People's Salon: A Pragmatist Approach to Audience Participation in Symphonic Music', in *Participatory Practices in Art and Cultural Heritage : Learning through and from Collaboration*, ed. by Christoph Rausch, et al. (Springer, 2022), pp.71-86.

numerical audience metrics, suggesting that scale itself becomes a key indicator of value.⁹⁷ Listening, spectating and sharing as a participatory experience supports the perspective of Rancière, who disrupts assumptions about participation by questioning the hierarchical distinction between active participants and passive spectators. In *The Emancipated Spectator*, he proposes that spectators are already active interpreters.⁹⁸ The themes identified here are carried forward in the later chapters on the visitors to Hardwick Hall who participated by observing and discussing the physical interactions of others. This thinking is seen in debates around relational and dialogical aesthetics by challenging the notion that participation is only meaningful when formally structured and directed as a physical interaction, instead recognising the agency of those engaging with artworks on their own terms.

In defining participation, Graham emphasises that participation is not a solution to political problems created by representation, but rather a different ontology and form of governance, shifting away from ideas of ‘all affected’, rivalry, unquestioned normative values, and ‘on behalf of’ decision-making. She asserts that ‘participation is not engagement: participation is governance.’⁹⁹ While this may be an ideal to work towards, in terms of labelling practice I disagree with framing participation purely as governance. Graham goes on to argue that participation must be tied to its ‘political genealogy’ and ‘logics of legitimacy’, so it is not mistaken for mere engagement or ‘taking part’.¹⁰⁰ I disagree with the prescriptive framing that seeks to define what counts as legitimate participation. In my view,

⁹⁷ Department for Culture Media and Sport, Taking Part Survey 2022/23: Adult Participation in DCMS Sectors (DCMS, 2023), Arts Council England, Let’s Create: Strategy 2020–2030 (2020)

⁹⁸ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (Verso, 2014), pp.12-14.

⁹⁹ Graham, *Deconstituting Museums*, p.144.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.163.

participation is not something that can be gatekept: if someone has actively engaged, they have participated. The scale, context, or institutional approval cannot retroactively determine whether participation has occurred. While political genealogy is important for understanding the stakes and ethics of participatory practice, it should not be used to exclude or devalue the experiences of actual participants.

Cartiere, a theorist and curator of public art and creative placemaking, and Schrag, an artist-researcher working in participatory and socially engaged practice, have both contributed significantly to contemporary discourse on collaboration and public art. In their edited volume *The Failures of Public Art and Participation*, they bring together a range of international scholars and practitioners to critically examine the limitations and challenges of participatory and public art. Of the six major approaches to participatory art outlined by Schrag in his chapter *The Failure of Participation: The Demos Is in the Detail* I would position my practice most closely with ‘Dialogic Art’, and it includes elements of ‘Sited Public Art’ and ‘Critical Approaches’.¹⁰¹ The authorship of the artwork is mostly my own – heritage visitor participants are making a choice / physical interaction with a completed artwork. However, the authorship has been governed by a permitting body (in this instance the National Trust) and a funding body (Arts Council England in the case of *Change in Attitudes*, the Frank Parkinson Scholarship in the case of *A Virtuous Woman*) so this could not be said to be entirely my own free artistic expression. Furthermore, while visitors to the site were given instructions on how to participate with the work, the interaction was not closely staffed or facilitated. This freedom allowed

¹⁰¹ Anthony Schrag, 'The Failure of Participation: The Demos Is in the Detail', in *The Failures of Public Art and Participation*, ed. by Cameron Cartiere and Anthony Schrag (Taylor & Francis, 2023), pp. 139-55 (pp.143-145).

participants to make their own decisions about how to respond, which produced the most interesting engagements and encouraged them to take authorship of the final iteration of the artwork. The outcomes of *Change in Attitudes* are discussed in detail in the case study later in this chapter, while the outcomes of *A Virtuous Woman* are explored in greater depth in Chapters Four and Five. This could be attributed to creating an agonistic approach and promoting a “pro-social conflict” in what many visitors perceived to be a moral dilemma and empowering visitors to take ownership of their responses, demonstrating how dialogic and agonistic strategies intersect in practice, showing the complexity of audience participation and the negotiation of authorship.¹⁰²

In Part III of *Deconstituting Museums : Participation's Affective Work*, Graham characterises participation in museums as a generative, world-making activity, arguing that it should be understood not merely as institutional engagement but as a mode of governance.¹⁰³ She suggests that participation proposes distinct ways of acting and making decisions together, and that it has the capacity to change what is present and what is real. Participation, in this framing, is ontologically productive: it produces alternative worlds and new ways of being together. While this conceptualisation is compelling in theory, it risks obscuring the practical realities of participatory work in institutional contexts. In practice, visitor participation rarely entails true collective decision-making - the presence of staff responsibilities, institutional governance, legal frameworks, and media scrutiny inevitably places limits on the scope of participation. Decisions about what participants can do in

¹⁰² Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics : Thinking the World Politically* (Verso, 2013), Cameron Cartiere and Anthony Schrag, *The Failures of Public Art and Participation* (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2023).

¹⁰³ Graham, *Deconstituting Museums*, p.93.

these settings, how they can act, and how the work is represented is almost always likely to be managed by an individual or organisational authority. Claiming that participation is inherently decision-making with visitors risks misleading both audiences and institutions, creating expectations that are unlikely to be realised in practice. Participation can certainly be generative in other ways - socially, emotionally, and experientially - but framing it as world-making or as a form of governance overestimates the degree of agency realistically afforded to participants within museum settings. This would be a wonderful thing to aim towards, but my experiences of working within participatory artworks within institutions tells me that we are not there yet.

While these frameworks help to classify participatory art, a persistent challenge lies in how such work is recorded and communicated. The very essence of participation is often ephemeral, relational, and context-dependent, making it difficult to capture for analysis or for future audiences. Bishop comments on the difficulty of recording the essence of participatory work,

By this I do not mean that the work does not fit established notions of the attractive or the beautiful, even though this is often the case; many social projects photograph very badly, and these images convey very little of the contextual information so crucial to understanding the work.¹⁰⁴

Bishop highlights the difficulty of capturing the contextual nuances of socially engaged projects in photographs or conventional documentation, noting that images often fail to convey the richness of the experience.¹⁰⁵ Schrag extends this argument, acknowledging that documentation or distillation can never replicate the original participatory encounter, though it can still serve as a valuable reference.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p.26.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.38-39.

¹⁰⁶ Schrag, 'Agonistic Tendencies', p.77.

Schrag discussed the difficulty of recording and documenting participatory artwork, acknowledging that the recording or documentation will never be the same as experiencing and participating with the work in the first instance, 'This does not, however, mean that a reference or suitable distillation is impossible, only that it will exist as reference or distillation, not art'.¹⁰⁷ Attempts to address this problem of documentation are evident in projects like the Cartography Project, which aimed to create an online participatory platform to record and interpret decades of participatory art practices from 1960s to present day. The online platform itself was also participatory in nature and a collaboration between University of Exeter, University of Nottingham and Tate.¹⁰⁸ Yet, as the website's disappearance shows, the sustainability of such archival efforts is precarious, raising questions about how participatory practices are preserved and remembered once institutional support ends. The challenges of documenting and preserving participatory practice underscore a crucial point - participation is always context dependent, and its meaning is inseparable from the people engaging with it. This makes understanding the different types of participants - whether self-organising communities, the wider public, or site-specific visitors - essential, as each group experiences and interprets the work differently. Consequently, any attempt to record or evaluate participatory art must account for these distinctions, highlighting the interplay between the artwork, its participants, its time and its place.

Having previously discussed the varying definitions and interpretations of participation within wider contexts and within my own practice, it is necessary here

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.77.

¹⁰⁸ Christoph Rausch and others, *Participatory Practices in Art and Cultural Heritage : Learning through and from Collaboration* (Springer, 2022); Tate, 'Cartography Research Project' <<https://www.tate.org.uk/research/research-centres/tate-research-centre-learning/cartography-research-project>> [accessed 28/12/2025].

to clarify the terms used throughout this practice-based research to describe those for whom participation may become possible. Participation is not a singular or universally defined concept; it exists across a spectrum of relationships, levels of agency, and forms of engagement. Arnstein's influential *Ladder of Citizen Participation* provides one of the most widely recognised attempts to categorise participation, describing a progression from non-participation through forms of tokenism towards degrees of citizen power.¹⁰⁹ However, the framework was developed specifically in relation to civic planning and political decision-making, and therefore does not fully account for the more complex and varied forms of participation that emerge within contemporary art practice. If applied cautiously to my own practice, the relationship between artist, institution, and participants would not align neatly with any single point on Arnstein's ladder. While I retain authorship of the artwork, I do not hold absolute control over its outcomes. As explored further in Chapter Five, the iterative nature of this practice requires negotiation between myself, the hosting institution, and those who encounter or participate in the work. At times this relationship may resemble Arnstein's concept of partnership; however, the distribution of agency within participatory artworks remains more fluid than the model suggests.

The widest term used within this research is the public. Following Schrag's discussion of publics and communities, I use this term not to describe an undifferentiated mass, but as a broad category encompassing those who may potentially encounter the artwork. In relation to my own practice, the public refers to everyone who is not the artist or directly employed by, volunteering within, or

¹⁰⁹ Sherry R. Arnstein, 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation', *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 85. 1 (2019).

professionally connected to the heritage site in which the artwork is situated.¹¹⁰

Members of the public may become visitors, audiences, or participants, but they may also remain unaware of the artwork or the site entirely. The term therefore describes the broad field of potential engagement from which more specific relationships with the artwork may emerge.

Within this wider public, I distinguish between visitors, audiences, and participants. Although the terms visitor and audience are often used interchangeably within the heritage and cultural sectors, they carry different implications within this research. I use audience only when referring to broader discussions of cultural engagement or institutional discourse, as it can imply a relationship based primarily on viewing or reception. Throughout this thesis I instead favour the term visitors and participants, recognising that those who engage with the artwork actively contribute to the experience and, in many cases, influence its unfolding through their actions, choices, discussions, and responses. Participation therefore extends beyond direct physical interaction and includes a range of ways in which individuals choose to engage with the work.

While participants are central to this research, they first encounter the artwork as visitors. Visitors may become participants, but equally they may choose not to engage with the artwork at all. This distinction is particularly important within heritage settings, where the artwork forms only one element of a much broader visitor experience. Visitors to a heritage site such as Hardwick Hall are not all visiting for the same reason. Some come for the history; for others it is a convenient stopping point on a long motorway journey. Many are simply looking

¹¹⁰ Schrag, 'Agonistic Tendencies', p14.

for entertainment for the day; some are local, while others have travelled from across the world. Almost all have paid for entry to the site.¹¹¹ This differentiates visitors because they arrive with an expectation that they will be entertained, and that their day out will be worth the money they have paid, including any contemporary art they encounter. They are therefore more likely to approach the artwork as something provided as part of that wider experience, or as a means of helping them to understand the place they have come to visit. This creates a grey area between a participatory artwork in a heritage site and the increasingly ubiquitous interactive museum display.¹¹²

This increase can be attributed to several heritage sites and museum objectives including learning, engagement, accessibility, and audience expectations. Museums have increasingly embraced active, embodied learning, recognising that visitors often learn more effectively through physical interaction than through passive observation alone.¹¹³ Hands-on exhibits allow visitors to manipulate components, explore cause-and-effect relationships, and construct understanding through direct experience, aligning with constructivist approaches to informal learning. Physically interactive exhibits support social engagement by encouraging collaboration and discussion among visitors. Unlike static displays, hands-on exhibits often invite multiple participants to engage simultaneously, prompting families, school groups, and friends to share interpretations, discuss meaning, and

¹¹¹ Occasionally local or national newspapers offer a voucher for free family pass to National Trust sites. The National Trust also offers free entry during Heritage Open Days.

¹¹² J. Kidd and E Nieto McAvoy, 'Immersive Experiences in Museums, Galleries and Heritage Sites: A Review of Research Findings and Issues', (Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, 2020).

¹¹³ Lama B. Abuhassan and Shatha R. Malhis, 'Modes of Embodiment for an Immersed Experience in Museums: The Royal Tank Museum', *PloS one*, 20. 1 (2025).

learn together.¹¹⁴ This social dimension enhances both enjoyment and understanding, reinforcing the site's role as a shared cultural and educational space as well as a leisure activity to share with friends and family. Physical interactivity also plays an important role in improving accessibility and inclusivity within museums. Hands-on experiences reduce reliance on written text and explanation, making exhibitions more accessible to visitors with varying literacy levels, learning styles, ages, and cognitive or sensory needs.¹¹⁵ By engaging visitors through touch, movement, and sensory exploration, museums are better able to communicate complex ideas in inclusive and intuitive ways. The rise of physically interactive exhibits reflects changing audience expectations within a competitive cultural and leisure environment.¹¹⁶ Visitors increasingly seek participatory experiences that are both enjoyable and educational, rather than traditional, observation-based displays.¹¹⁷ In response, museums have adopted hands-on approaches to remain relevant, attract diverse audiences, and provide memorable experiences that distinguish museum visits from other forms of cultural days out.¹¹⁸ Some museums and heritage sites have taken this a step further - Eureka! The National Children's Museum in Halifax exemplifies this shift. This museum features hundreds of interactive, hands-on exhibits designed so that nothing is behind glass or a rope, and visitors can physically explore concepts such as body science, sound, and

¹¹⁴ Haifa Ebrahim Al Khalifa and Anamika Vishal Jiwane, 'Visitors' Interactions with the Exhibits and Behaviors in Museum Spaces: Insights from the National Museum of Bahrain', *Buildings (Basel)*, 15. 8 (2025).

¹¹⁵ Rebecca Atkinson, 'Spotlight | Designing Accessible Exhibitions' (2025) <<https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/in-practice/2025/01/spotlight-designing-accessible-exhibitions/>> [accessed 28/12/2025]; Alison F. Eardley and Vanessa E. Jones, *The Museum Accessibility Spectrum : Re-Imagining Access and Inclusion* (Taylor and Francis Group, 2025).

¹¹⁶ Al Khalifa and Jiwane, 'Visitors' Interactions with the Exhibits and Behaviors in Museum Spaces'.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (Museum 2.0, 2010).

creative play.¹¹⁹ The National Trust now operates one of their properties entirely with this hands-on approach in mind – the Children’s Country House and Sudbury Hall, where barrier ropes have been removed, objects are available to touch, displays are interactive and reinterpreted entirely for children.¹²⁰

Where museum interactivity emphasises learning through physical and social participation, Hendon and Ruiz highlight how these experiences can be structured as deliberate processes of co-creation. They show that co-creation enables participants to move from concrete actions to abstract understanding, describing it as a dynamic, process-oriented approach to knowledge that is both embodied and emotional. Drawing on Kolb’s experiential learning theory, they argue that students use material artefacts as focal points for observation, reflection, and conversation to support this move in understanding.¹²¹ While hands-on and co-creative participatory experiences engage audiences through play, exploration, and reflective hands-on learning, participation can also be structured to challenge, provoke, or unsettle. Engagement in this sense is not always about enjoyment or ease; conflict and dissensus can be deliberately introduced to encourage deeper reflection, reveal differing perspectives, and expand the potential of participatory encounters. This shift from playful interaction to agonistic engagement opens the way to consider how socially engaged art can use tension and disagreement as productive tools for participation.

¹¹⁹ Eureka!, 'Eureka Home Page' <<https://play.eureka.org.uk/>> [accessed 28/12/2025]

¹²⁰ Geraldine Kendall Adams, 'National Trust Opens First Country House for Children' (2022) <<https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2022/10/national-trust-opens-first-country-house-for-children/>> [accessed 28/12/2025].

¹²¹ Ana Baeza Ruiz and Zoe Hendon, *Displaying Co-Creation: An Enquiry Into Participatory Engagement at the University Museum* (Springer, 2022).

Agonism

Although participatory art initially provided the primary lens for this research, the practice itself revealed a different focus. Through the development of the artwork and reflection on the encounters generated, agonism and its potential emotional responses emerged as the key to understanding the tensions and negotiations unfolding within the practice. Positioned at the centre of this concentric framework, agonism therefore provides the theoretical context through which this research examines and interprets the participatory encounters explored throughout the thesis.

Mouffe's agonistic political theory positions conflict as an essential component of democratic life.¹²² Consensus, she argues, is often a form of hegemonic control that suppresses alternative viewpoints. In her writings on art and democracy, she calls for artistic practices that reveal conflict and challenge dominant power structures.¹²³ Within participatory and socially engaged art, Mouffe's ideas have been particularly influential in reframing conflict not as a failure of participation, but as a necessary condition for democratic engagement.

Graham suggests that some commons might function according to an ethos of being open to anyone, rather than to everyone, framing openness as an ongoing invitation rather than an obligation.¹²⁴ This distinction highlights a practical tension in participatory practice: while institutions often aspire to universal access and inclusion, the reality of participation is always bounded by resources, governance,

¹²² Mouffe, *Agonistics*.

¹²³ Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (Taylor & Francis, 2011).

¹²⁴ Here, Graham uses commons referring to Dardot and Laval's concept to distinguish practical participation from abstract universality: although something may have universal significance, it is governed through the participation of particular people rather than by, or for, an abstract everyone. Graham, *Deconstituting Museums*, p.133.

and institutional priorities. In a heritage context, this resonates with the National Trust's public-facing messaging, which emphasises broad accessibility, seemingly claiming that every possible individual can be accommodated in every project.¹²⁵ Graham's wording reads like a subtle critique of institutional ambitions toward total inclusivity, suggesting that openness is most effectively conceived as an invitation, not a guarantee.

Both Schrag and Hope's practice and writings on the potential benefits of conflict and dissensus in participatory art are among the few existing studies and stand out as particularly strong examples of research in this area. Schrag extends Mouffe's insights into a practice-led methodology.¹²⁶ He argues that conflict within participatory projects is not only inevitable but also productive, revealing structural inequalities and enabling deeper engagement.¹²⁷ Schrag critiques institutions that instrumentalise participation for social harmony, thereby suppressing the transformative possibilities of agonism.¹²⁸ In the recent and timely publication of *Socially Engaged Art and Ethics*, Schrag introduces his edited volume of case studies discussing and debating art practices engaging with the public by referring to Warner's provocation that there is not a single public, rather that there are multiple publics which cannot be organised by institutions, or by an artist.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ The National Trust slogan at the time of writing is "For everyone, for ever" – detractors have pointed out that this is not the case. ITVX, 'National Trust Members Vote to Ban Trail Hunting on Their Land' (2021) <<https://www.itv.com/news/2021-10-30/national-trust-votes-to-ban-trail-hunting-on-their-land>> [accessed 24/2/2026]; Harry Mount, 'The Strange Decline of the National Trust', *The Oldie*, (2023), <<https://www.theoldie.co.uk/blog/the-strange-decline-of-the-national-trust-harry-mount?>> [accessed 24/2/2026].

¹²⁶ Schrag, 'Agonistic Tendencies'; Hope, 'Participating in the 'Wrong' Way?'.

¹²⁷ Schrag, 'Agonistic Tendencies'.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Schrag, *Socially Engaged Art and Ethics*, p.9.

If conflict is, as the theorists above suggest, an ineradicable attribute of human society, and if participatory practices occur within society, working with actor/actor groups who are 'in pursuit of Incompatible Goals', then participatory practices will invariably contain conflict.¹³⁰ Ameliorative and instrumentalised projects that aim to eradicate conflict in favour of a consensual political sphere therefore risk perpetuating dominant hegemonies in an unethical manner. In contrast, conflictual participatory projects, far from obliterating or eradicating conflict, explore the productive elements of conflict within participatory practices.¹³¹

Schrag summarises that because much participatory work happens inside institutions or projects with specific goals, rules, and outcomes, conflict can actually be useful.¹³² It allows different people or groups to share their ideal visions for the world without falling into oppressive agreements or being controlled.¹³³ Instead, conflict can help everyone explore new ways of organising power and society. This idea applies not just to institutions, but also to artists or anyone working directly with people.¹³⁴ This emphasis on the productive role of conflict aligns with broader critiques of consensus-based participation, particularly those that highlight how apparent agreement can mask exclusion or coercion.

Schrag pulls together the thoughts on oppressive consensus of Ranciere, Mouffe and Laclau, summarising that, 'The problem with this authority of consensus is that it denies the possibility of difference; denies opposition; and denies alternative or new subjectivities – all of which are hallmarks of a productive

¹³⁰ Schrag, 'Agonistic Tendencies' pp.51-71.

¹³¹ Ibid., p.71.

¹³² Ibid., p.71.

¹³³ Ibid., p.71.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p.71.

political community'.¹³⁵ He notes Bishop's suggestion that art can propose alternatives and foster critical reflection and engagement, opening space for difference.¹³⁶ Although Schrag, alongside Bishop and Mouffe, positions dissensus as central to participatory and socially engaged practice, this raises a pressing practical challenge: are publics willing to confront a reflection of their own polarised views, and how might practitioners navigate situations in which even minor forms of dissensus prove intolerable? This challenge highlights the tension between the theoretical value of dissensus and the lived realities of participation, particularly within institutional and public-facing contexts. There are ethical stakes in socially engaged practices which seek to unsettle, provoke or court dissent in their participants. In her Epilogue, Hope poses the question 'Can, or should, arts practices skirt around the edges of ethical dilemmas, tickling and teasing people into a response?'; warning that in doing so, artists must accept the risk of being called out on these actions by those who might not agree.¹³⁷ This concern is particularly borne out by the issues that emerged during *A Virtuous Woman*.

Graham notes that museum constitutions justify professional and trustee decision-making "on behalf of" others to ensure fairness, determine quality content, maintain liberal norms, and resolve conflicts.¹³⁸ She suggests that participatory approaches - what she calls participatory worlding - can frame involvement in terms of anyone interested, rather than the abstract all affected. When participants agree, consensus or consent decision-making processes can be used, allowing space for

¹³⁵ Anthony Schrag, 'The Careful Turn, the Problem of Care within Socially Engaged Art', in *Socially Engaged Art and Ethics : Power, Politics and Participation*, ed. by Anthony Schrag (Routledge, 2026), pp. 245-60 .

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 245-260.

¹³⁷ Sophie Hope, 'The Only Way Is Ethics', in *Socially Engaged Art and Ethics : Power, Politics and Participation*, ed. by Anthony Schrag (Routledge, 2026), pp. 261-66 .

¹³⁸ Graham, *Deconstituting Museums*, p.135.

dissent, neutrality, and reflection. Where agreement cannot be reached, restorative processes enable those affected to define harm and facilitate awareness of the impact of actions.¹³⁹ For example, the Kansas City Museum's RestoreKC programme uses restorative practices to support collaborative dialogue around community concerns, while the Denver Museum of Nature and Science has developed participatory approaches that involve community members in institutional decision-making and exhibition development.¹⁴⁰ These examples show how norms and conflict can emerge collaboratively rather than being imposed top-down. However, in my view, institutions have a long way to go before such participatory governance is realistic. It assumes significant time and sustained engagement with participants to reach complex agreements - conditions rarely present when participation is fleeting, as with visitors passing through heritage sites. In these contexts, such intensive consensus-making is often impractical.

Practice and Policy

Having established the three concentric conceptual fields within which the research is situated, this section considers how these ideas operate within the practical and institutional realities of producing participatory artworks.

The Burlington Magazine notes that contemporary art in country houses has historically drawn criticism aimed at the artist rather than the institution.¹⁴¹ More recently, however, institutions themselves have been held accountable for the work

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp.140-141.

¹⁴⁰ Chip Colwell and Stephen E. Nash, *Why We Repatriate - on the Long Arc toward Justice at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science* (Taylor & Francis, 2020); Stephen E. Nash, 'Repatriation: The Arc of Restorative Justice at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science' (2022) <<https://www.aiawestchester.org/events/repatriation-the-arc-of-restorative-justice-at-the-denver-museum-of-nature-science/>> [accessed 25/3/2026]; The Museum of Kansas City, 'Restore Kc' (2020) <<https://museumofkansascity.org/restore-kc/>> [accessed 25/03/2026].

¹⁴¹ 'Country Houses and Contemporary Art', *The Burlington Magazine*, February 2018.

they display, revealing tensions between curatorial intent, public expectation, and social sensitivity. For instance, the National Trust removed an African figure statue at Dunham Massey in 2020 due to the distress it caused some visitors, yet was criticised in the same year for refusing to relocate contested objects to facilitate ongoing dialogue about difficult histories.¹⁴² In 2018, the Trust faced further scrutiny for covering male paintings and statues at Cragside to highlight lack of female representation.¹⁴³ English Heritage experienced backlash from their exhibition in October 2021, celebrating Black British history when it was the target of a racist attack. The show, part of its England's New Lenses project and installed at Wrest Park, featured work by four young photographers exploring ideas of Englishness at historic sites. Two prints were vandalised: the images were gouged with a sharp object and a racial slur was scrawled across the face of a Black model depicted in one of the works. The vandalism occurred against a backdrop of heated online reaction. The organisation had already faced hostile comments on social media, with some critics accusing it of being woke or political and arguing that heritage bodies should remain apolitical and that they would withdraw support.¹⁴⁴

These incidents highlight the precarious position of heritage institutions attempting to display contemporary or socially engaged art. Institutional decisions around display and curation are influenced by multiple pressures: audience expectation, staff welfare, and broader legal and ethical frameworks. Works can be censored,

¹⁴² David Prior, 'Dunham Massey Removes Sundial Statue as National Trust Admits It Causes "Upset and Distress"', *Altrincham Today*, 11/6/2020; Ewan Somerville, 'National Trust Will Keep "Distressing" Colonial Objects on Display to "Encourage Debate" (2020) <https://www.lbc.co.uk/article/national-trust-statues-colonialism-slavery-black-lives-matter-DWyYMQ_2/> [accessed 22/2/2026].

¹⁴³ Josh Halliday, 'National Trust Branded "Ridiculous" for Covering up Paintings of Men', *The Guardian*, 6/11/2018.

¹⁴⁴ Sasha Mistlin, 'Racist Attack on English Heritage Exhibition Celebrating Black Lives', *The Guardian*, 16/10/2021.

removed, or reframed - not always for aesthetic reasons, but in response to social, political, or reputational concerns. For example, in 2024 the Welsh artist David Garner publicly criticised Amgueddfa Cymru (Museum Wales) after his installation *No Cajolery*, created for the exhibition *The Valleys*, was not initially displayed following concerns relating to curatorial decision-making and political impartiality during the UK General Election period.¹⁴⁵ *No Cajolery* exemplifies how shifting institutional priorities and sensitivities can shape both the visibility and interpretation of contemporary artworks.

My practice-led work in heritage contexts has consistently explored participation as a way of activating collections, spaces and civic histories. Working within museums and historically significant sites has required careful negotiation: between reverence and critique, between institutional responsibility and artistic provocation, and between the promise of inclusion and the practical realities of governance. Across these projects, participation has operated not as a seamless process of consensus-building, but as a dynamic and sometimes productive site of negotiation - what can be understood as an agonistic space in which differing values and interpretations coexist without requiring resolution.

¹⁴⁵ Jon Gower, 'Award Winning Artist Accuses National Museum of Censorship' (2024) <<https://nation.cymru/news/award-winning-artist-accuses-national-museum-of-censorship/>> [accessed 23/2/2026].



FIG. 1. *Chronicle of Curiosities* Dining Set, Whitby Museum, 2020.

At Whitby Museum, I worked in direct response to a collection deeply embedded in local identity. Figures such as Captain James Cook and William Scoresby are individuals celebrated locally, but whose legacies are layered and contested, and engaging with them required navigating both curatorial sensitivities and community attachment.¹⁴⁶ The imagined dinner service I produced brought together notable Whitby figures around a single table, using the visual language of Sunderland ware to connect their legacies to contemporary concerns (FIG. 1). By creating two plates per figure, I sought to hold contradiction in material form: celebration alongside critique, history alongside contemporary. The candleholders, referencing the Hand of Glory in the museum's collection, subtly invoked the occulted or uncomfortable

¹⁴⁶ Ben Tracy, 'Captain James Cook and the Controversial Legacy of Western Exploration', *CBS News*, 7/4/2024; Michael Bravo, 'Geographies of Exploration and Improvement: William Scoresby and Arctic Whaling, 1782–1822', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 32. 3 (2006), pp.512–38.

aspects of difficult objects in the museum's collection. Alongside this, the participatory cabinet of curiosities invited visitors to submit personal objects for casting and display with museum-style labels (FIG. 2). This gesture temporarily redistributed curatorial authority, elevating the everyday into the register of heritage. The work simultaneously exposed how value is constructed: through institutional framing, display conventions and narrative control. While the invitation suggested openness, the museum context inevitably shaped which objects felt appropriate to submit and how they were interpreted. Participation here was productive, but not unbounded. It operated within a pre-existing framework, revealing the limits of democratised collecting within established heritage structures.



FIG. 2. Contemporary Cabinet of Curiosities, Whitby Museum, 2020.

In *#payartists*, the participatory mechanism was more overtly confrontational. Visitors were offered porcelain bottles cast from a Victorian poison bottle embossed with the words “not to be taken” (FIG. 3). They could acquire one either by paying its financial cost or by offering exposure, with suggested actions to

make that exposure equivalent in value. The work exposed the normalisation of unpaid artistic labour, a critique compounded by the fact that the installation itself was unpaid within the hosting event. The work foregrounded the economics of cultural production, but it also opened candid dialogue about value - artistic, financial and relational. Many participants engaged thoughtfully with the provocation, reflecting on their own assumptions about creative labour. This provoked reflection on the often invisible social and financial labour expected of artists, situating the audience in an active ethical position and echoing Sophie Hope's experience with *FUNding FACTORY*.¹⁴⁷ The installation generated moments of discomfort, but these moments were often accompanied by generosity and conversation. Rather than closing down dialogue, the tension became a catalyst for awareness.



FIG. 3. *#payartists*, Art&, 2018.

Contemplating Hope, developed in response to Anne and Emily Brontë's diary papers, extended these concerns into questions of voice, temporality and institutional mediation at the Brontë Parsonage Museum. Visitors were invited to

¹⁴⁷ Hope, 'Participating in the 'Wrong' Way?', pp.131-144.

write reflections on their present and hopes for the future, placing them within ceramic vessels to be opened four years later and exhibited alongside the Brontës' writings (FIG. 4). This temporal structure created a shared ritual across time, connecting contemporary voices with the Brontës' own acts of hopeful documentation. The project opened a space for introspection within the museum, encouraging visitors to situate themselves within a longer historical arc. While the project offered a poetic framework for dialogue with the site, it also revealed institutional anxieties and had to be carefully balanced against the numinous qualities described by Cass.¹⁴⁸ Museum staff retained responsibility for selecting which visitor diary entries were displayed, introducing questions of censorship and value alignment and acknowledging the layered responsibilities of institutional partnership where visitor participation is always co-produced. The extended duration of the project, spanning multiple curatorial changes, altered priorities and interpretative frameworks, further revealed how participatory works must adapt within evolving institutional ecologies. This required flexibility and trust and underscored the importance of relationship-building as an integral component of practice.

¹⁴⁸ Nicholas Cass, 'Contemporary Art and Heritage: Interventions at the Brontë Parsonage Museum' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 2015) .



FIG. 4. *Contemplating Hope*, Brontë Parsonage Museum, 2021.

In *On Belonging*, developed with Lancaster Arts, participation primarily centred on migrants, refugees and asylum seekers reflecting on dual identity and home (FIG. 5). The ceramic cup sets symbolised encounter: two distinct vessels resting on a shared saucer, materially enacting difference and connection. Workshops and conversations revealed that belonging was less about fixed identity and more about relational encounter: the sense of recognition that emerges when stories are shared and heard. Yet this project foregrounded the emotional and ethical labour of participatory practice. Conversations were often traumatic, yet also generated moments of profound connection; however, neither participants nor

I were structurally supported beyond the workshop and interview space, raising ethical issues experienced by other practitioners working with vulnerable communities.¹⁴⁹ Institutional expectations that the work produce something publicly visible sat uneasily alongside the ethical inappropriateness of recording or publicising sensitive testimonies. Here, the tension was not only aesthetic but pastoral: how to hold participants' stories responsibly within systems that prioritise documentation, evaluation and display. The decision to gift the cup sets to participants at the project's conclusion shifted the emphasis from display to ongoing lived experience, extending the artwork beyond the gallery and into everyday life.



FIG. 5. *On Belonging*, Lancaster Arts, 2021.

The Exchange in Middlesbrough further developed participation as reciprocal action. Inspired by the town's industrial and philanthropic histories, the project invited individuals to exchange a day of voluntary labour for one of 365 limited

¹⁴⁹ Urša Valič, 'Lessons Learned from Applied Participatory Practices in Museums and Inclusion of People from Vulnerable Social Groups', *Glasnik Etnografskog instituta SANU*, 71. 1 (2023), pp.181-202.

edition gilded porcelain sculptures (FIG. 6). The work sought to transform symbolic engagement into tangible civic contribution, linking contemporary participants to longer traditions of collective investment. Many embraced the invitation enthusiastically, forming new relationships with local voluntary organisations and experiencing the artwork as a catalyst for action.

Practical challenges emerged in coordinating communication between participants and organisations, navigating safeguarding requirements, and managing expectations. Some voluntary organisations lacked capacity to follow up with participants; one women-only streetwatch group's safeguarding policies generated disappointment and frustration among some who felt excluded, and as the artist I bore responsibility for mediating between institutional ambition and lived complexity. The conceptual elegance of "exchange" encountered the uneven realities of administration, safeguarding and expectation. Participation here was not abstract but embedded in lived systems and ambitiously designed to live beyond the project, with varying degrees of success. The project demonstrated that heritage sites can function not only as spaces of reflection but as platforms for contemporary exchange and community-building.



FIG. 6. *The Exchange*, Middlesbrough, 2022.

The projects demonstrated that visitor engagement is not always comfortable or capable of achieving consensus. While some participants embraced the opportunity to negotiate meaning and authorship, others resisted or expressed discomfort - reflecting the very real limitations Graham identifies in claims of participation as collective decision-making.¹⁵⁰ These experiences underscore the importance of designing participatory frameworks that anticipate dissent, allow for voluntary involvement, and provide mechanisms for reflection and resolution.

¹⁵⁰ Graham, *Deconstituting Museums*, pp.99-114.

Across these works, participation has operated as both invitation and negotiation - as a harmonious coming-together and as a site of friction. Heritage institutions often frame themselves as spaces of shared memory and collective belonging, yet participatory artworks within them expose contested values, unequal power relations and structural limitations. Dissensus emerged not as failure but as revelation - making visible the tensions between inclusion and control, generosity and extraction, care and bureaucracy. At times, the agonism was subtle: a curatorial decision about which voices to display. At other moments, it was explicit: participants challenging institutional rules, or artworks implicating audiences in economic critique. These cumulative experiences led me to question whether participatory art in heritage contexts can genuinely redistribute power, or whether it risks rehearsing symbolic inclusion within unchanged institutional frameworks. They exposed a recurring pattern: the invitation to participate was often sincere, yet circumscribed by governance structures, reputational risk management, funding models and safeguarding procedures. It is from within these repeated negotiations - between aspiration and constraint, openness and boundary - that my current research question emerges. It was in *Change in Attitudes* that these tensions became particularly pronounced. Visitor engagement revealed agonism, dissensus, and unexpected levels of participation that challenged institutional assumptions and created situations where authority and control were contested. Observing these responses demonstrated that participation is not always linear or consensual; it can be disruptive, generative, and politically charged.

Case Study: *Change in Attitudes*

The case study that follows provides an opportunity to examine how the three concentric fields explored in this chapter layered together within a specific example

of creative practice. The experience of *Change in Attitudes* became the catalyst for this PhD research. Existing frameworks for participatory practice did not fully account for the complexities I was witnessing in situ: the ways visitors asserted agency, navigated moral dilemmas, and engaged in forms of social negotiation that exceeded institutional intentions. These insights directly informed the creation of *A Virtuous Woman*, designed as a practice-based inquiry to explore these gaps, investigating how agonism, dissensus, and participant-led engagement operate within heritage contexts, and how such encounters can be ethically, practically, and creatively managed.

In 2019, I developed the participatory artwork *Change in Attitudes* for the National Trust property Nunnington Hall. Visitors were invited to interact with the work in ways that were both guided and open-ended, generating responses that were often unexpected and self-directed. This case study examines these interactions in depth, revealing the complexities and nuances of visitor participation. These insights directly informed the development of the subsequent research and shaped the methodological approaches adopted throughout this thesis.



FIG. 7. Nunnington Hall.

Nunnington Hall is a Tudor house (FIG. 7) in the small village of Nunnington in North Yorkshire, England, bequeathed to the National Trust in 1952 by owner Margaret Fife. She had inherited the Hall in 1920 and subsequently renovated and resided there with her husband Col Ronald Fife and their two adopted daughters, Susan and Rosalind.¹⁵¹ The Hall averages 72,000 visitors per year, 81% of whom are National Trust members. Nunnington Hall now has an active programme of arts events; however, this was the first artwork to have been commissioned as a creative response to the house and collection in approximately eight years.

The commission for *Change in Attitudes* was initiated by me as the artist, driven by a desire to work iteratively and respond to a site and its narratives in a more open-ended way than many open calls would allow for.¹⁵² I was seeking opportunities where I could spend time researching the collection before developing a concept, rather than being constrained by pre-defined outcomes. Platforms such as CuratorSpace offered limited possibilities, so I took a proactive approach, identifying sites that aligned with my interests and where I could have a degree of creative freedom.¹⁵³ Nunnington Hall was a natural choice because of my familiarity with the site and its collection due to living locally. I approached the Nunnington Hall team to propose creating an artwork in response to the collection, offering to source independent funding rather than rely on the site's limited

¹⁵¹ National Trust, 'The Hall at Nunnington Hall' <<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/yorkshire/nunnington-hall/the-hall-at-nunnington>> [accessed 6/3/2025].

¹⁵² An artist open call is a public invitation from institutions like galleries, museums, festivals, or arts organisations encouraging artists to submit work or proposals for consideration in exhibitions, residencies, grants, or public projects. It serves as a competitive and time-consuming process for artists to apply for limited work opportunities.

¹⁵³ CuratorSpace is a popular subscription-based online arts platform primarily aimed at UK artists and organisations, advertising exhibition, competition and job opportunities from curators, organisers and galleries to artists. 'Curatorspace - About Us' <<https://www.curatorspace.com/about>> [accessed 15/2/2026].

resources. The team were already receptive to collaborating with artists having recently applied to the Arts&Heritage programme, for funding, commissioning, and project management support.¹⁵⁴

With the support of the Visitor Experience Manager and the Curator, I applied to Arts Council England for an individual project grant to fund an open-ended project with no fixed final outcome specified, only examples of potential approaches were provided.¹⁵⁵ A small amount of match funding was pledged from Nunnington Hall's limited budget, alongside in-kind support such as staff time and marketing for the artwork. The first application was refused, requiring significant adjustments before it was accepted on the second submission. This period of delay and uncertainty highlights a broader challenge in working with heritage sites who often plan programming well in advance. As the artist, I had to ask the site to reserve space in their schedule for an unknown project, with an unknown time schedule, risking both time and financial precarity should funding not materialise. These challenges mirror those identified by Hope in discussions of funding structures for institutional artworks, where large-scale projects demand significant time and resources from both artist and site and highlight the importance of fair compensation.¹⁵⁶ At the time, Trust New Art represented a major commissioning initiative across the National Trust. However, Nunnington Hall, as a smaller property, was unable to access either the programme's funding or institutional

¹⁵⁴ Arts&Heritage delivers contemporary art programmes across the UK, specifically working with the museum and heritage sector Arts&Heritage, 'Arts&Heritage - About Us' <<https://www.artsandheritage.org.uk/about-us/>> [accessed 15/2/2026].

¹⁵⁵ Arts Council England is a national development agency for art and culture responsible for investing public money from the UK government and the National Lottery to support culture and arts organisations and individuals. National Lottery Project Grants are a fund for between £1000 and £100,000 which arts and culture organisations and individuals can apply for to fund projects they have devised. Arts Council England, 'Arts Council England - About Us' <<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/>> [accessed 15/2/2026].

¹⁵⁶ Hope, 'Participating in the 'Wrong' Way?', pp.131-132.

support, further emphasising the necessity of securing independent resources.¹⁵⁷

Through this process, the site and I agreed that the focus of the project would be the big game hunting selection, providing a clear starting point for developing the participatory work and framing the questions explored in the following sections.



FIG. 8. Mounted taxidermy heads in the Stone Hall, Nunnington Hall.

This would be located in the Stone Hall, the main entrance to the house decorated primarily with the taxidermy ‘trophy’ of animals hunted by Col. Fife, including leopard and tiger skins, elephant tusks and heads of a variety of smaller animals such as antelope, deer, boar, goat, impala and antelope (FIG. 8). My brief was to create a piece of work which not only responded to the collection but also opened a dialogue with visitors. The Stone Hall and the taxidermy collection had proved unpopular with visitors who either did not want to look at it at all or objected to the remains being displayed by the National Trust (anecdotally it was referred to in conversations with staff as ‘the room of death’). The team at

¹⁵⁷ National Trust, 'Trust New Art' <<https://www.youtube.com/@TrustNewArt/videos>> [accessed 15/2/2026].

Nunnington Hall was about to send the big cat skins (FIG. 9) away for conservation work and wanted to take the opportunity to engage visitors in a conversation about these unpopular objects in the collection.



FIG. 9. Mounted tiger, lion and leopard skins in Stone Hall with interpretation panels, Nunnington Hall.

They wished to create a safe space for this to take place and for visitors to make up their own minds as to how they felt about these objects both in a historical and contemporary context. The installation of the artwork could take any form I chose, as long as it could not be perceived as imposing either my opinion, or what could be interpreted as the National Trust's opinion on the topic of hunting. I was also advised not to incorporate issues around fox hunting or current countryside game hunting (such as pheasant shooting) into the artwork as many of the hall

volunteers and residents local to the hall are supporters of both hunting practices, and to include this into the dialogue would risk alienating staff and visitors and moving the conversation away from the collection. This was two years before the National Trust members voted to ask the trustees to ban trail hunting on National Trust land and was a contentious issue in this area of the country. After a period of research into both the collection and the memoirs of Col. Fife the individual responsible for hunting all of the displayed taxidermy, the final installation was inspired by the black rhino horn (FIG. 10).¹⁵⁸ The horn is the only piece in the taxidermy collection which is no longer on public display – not because the object is contentious, but rather due to the substantial risk of theft owing to its high value on the black market. We had initially intended to show the horn as part of the installation, but ongoing security concerns around potential theft would not allow this.



FIG. 10. Black Rhino Horn, Nunnington Hall.

¹⁵⁸ Lieut. Colonel Ronald D'Arcy Fife, *Mosaic of Memories* (Heath Cranton, 1943).

A central element to this artwork was to encourage visitors to consider and discuss the collection, and to be able to express their opinions on the hunting trophies, both in a historical context and in light of current societal issues and norms. With this in mind I felt that by creating an artwork which would allow participation through choice making, the artwork would be able to facilitate contemplation and discussion rather than imposing a singular point of view.

I created an installation of 5,000 black porcelain models of rhino horns to represent the 5,000 black rhinos estimated to be left in the world. The horns were displayed on the walls of a purpose built 'room' structure to sit within the Stone Hall amongst the taxidermy collection (FIGS. 11 and 12). The circular structure measured two metres in height and 2.5 metres in diameter. Five hundred of the model horns were mounted on the outside of the structure, the remaining 4,500 could only be seen by entering the 'room' via a small doorway.



FIG. 11. *Change in Attitudes* installation.



FIG. 12. *Change in Attitudes* installation, close up of mounted porcelain rhino horns.

Visitors were invited to make a choice – they could take a horn and keep it as a token of their visit, but in doing so they were told that it would not be replaced and thus, this would leave less for others to see. If they made this choice visitors were instructed to write their name and the date in the place of the horn to take ownership for this choice. Permanent marker pens were available for visitors to help themselves and there was no requirement for visitors to interact with staff to take a horn or record their choice – instructions / an invitation on how to participate was clearly displayed on the walls of the structure. Alternatively, they could leave the installation intact for others to see. The horns were mounted on the structure using Velcro, so visitors were encouraged to touch the pieces, and could remove a piece and return it without causing any damage. By inviting visitors to consider collecting, scarcity, and historical social norms in light of current views by making a participatory choice, I hoped that the taxidermy would be more actively engaged with and that visitors would be able to consider whether attitudes to these issues

had truly significantly changed.¹⁵⁹ This viewing through a contemporary lens was not, as Lowenthal warns against, to judge the collection against modern standards.¹⁶⁰ Rather, this was specifically to encourage visitors to acknowledge the differences between then and now, and to consider how this makes them feel about the historic collection. By giving them a moral dilemma as to whether they should take something for themselves, I hoped that this would add further depth and possible connection to the very human urge across time to collect and keep things - even when we are aware of potential scarcity.



FIG. 13. *Change in Attitudes* installation.

¹⁵⁹ Shaun Kingsley Malarney, 'Defining the True Hunter: Big Game Hunting, Moral Distinction, and Virtuosity in French Colonial Indochina', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 62. 3 (2020), pp.651-80; Cyril Zenda, 'Inside South Africa's Brutal Trophy Hunting Tug-of-War', *Down To Earth*, (2026), <<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/africa/inside-south-africas-brutal-trophy-hunting-tug-of-war>> [accessed 25/2/2026]. In the early 1900s when most of the taxidermy collection at Nunnington Hall was amassed, this kind of big game hunting was an acceptable and relatively common practice for men of Col. Fife's social position. However, societal views on current big game hunting are divided and changed, and the hunting of black rhinos was at the time of the exhibition severely restricted and subsequently banned.

¹⁶⁰ Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, pp.498-584.

Additional context to the historical narratives and contemporary issues around endangered species was provided with further exhibits. A trio of mirrors were etched with quotes relating to Col. Fife addressing his military, hunting and family life, asking which version of himself he might have seen looking back at him. A trio of wall panels mounted with tiles impressed with the footprints of black rhinos, tigers and lions were also displayed (FIG. 13). The prints were taken from the enclosures of all three animals at Flamingo Land, a nearby zoo which had recently successfully bred a black rhino calf that was destined to be returned to a reserve in Tanzania. Finally, a “behind the scenes” room was created showing the tools and moulds used, the plaster imprints of the footprints and a short video with interviews of myself talking about the artwork and the zoo manager Ross Snipp discussing current conservation issues and efforts with endangered species in captivity.

Visitor Interaction

The first unexpected outcome to the installation came before the official opening, on the first day members of the public entered the Stone Hall. The fixing mechanism (Velcro dots) had proved sufficient in testing to be strong enough to hold the weight of the porcelain models, and a walkway of two metres had been left between the edge of the installation and the wall of the room to allow sufficient space for people to pass. However, we had not considered how visitors would move in the space now that there was a reason for them to look at the taxidermy. Prior to the installation, dwell time was very short in the hall and most visitors would pass straight through to the next room.¹⁶¹ We observed that visitors now looked up at the

¹⁶¹ Laura Kennedy (Visitor Experience Manager), conversation with author, 12 April 2019.

walls to see the taxidermy and tended to walk backwards while doing so, often brushing their coats and backpacks against the structure of the installation and the model rhino horns – the Velcro dots were not robust enough to withstand this kind of contact and the horns would fall to the floor. In the following 48 hours prior to the official opening event, all 5,000 horns had to be removed from the structure, a new fixing mechanism introduced, tested, and used as a replacement (industrial strength Velcro) and all horns reattached to the structure. This marked an important learning moment within the project, one that continues to inform the participatory artworks I produce, including *A Virtuous Woman*. Introducing a participatory artwork into a site does more than shape modes of engagement; it can alter how visitors physically behave and move through the space. While certain shifts can be anticipated, the ways in which visitors will inhabit the work cannot be fully known until they enter it. For this reason, such works should, wherever possible, remain iterative, enabling the artist to respond to observed behaviours as they emerge.

I had anticipated that the concept would encourage conversation and discussion around the issues raised by the work and the collection, however, I had not foreseen the intensity of the emotional responses it generated. These responses were directed not only at the artwork and the taxidermy collection, but also at other visitors and the choices they made when engaging with the piece. Increasingly, visitors expressed frustration that others had acted differently from them.¹⁶² As a result, volunteer room guides undertook additional training with the Visitor Experience team and me. This focused on how to respond to visitors' questions and how to avoid becoming drawn into emotionally-charged debates.¹⁶³ This experience

¹⁶² Iain Kelly (Curator), conversation with author, 4 October 2019.

¹⁶³ Additional training with Nunnington Hall volunteer room guides, 5 October 2019.

directly informed my approach to the creation and facilitation of *A Virtuous Woman* within this research. With *A Virtuous Woman* I ensured that volunteers, staff and room guides were fully briefed on the potential for disagreement between visitors. We developed strategies to reframe questions and moments of conflict, redirecting discussion towards the heritage narratives underpinning the work. Differences of opinion were treated not as disruptions, but as opportunities to revisit the issues raised in the original embroideries, and to invite visitors to contribute their own perspectives through participation. In training sessions at Hardwick Hall, I used images and examples from *Change in Attitudes* to illustrate these dynamics.

Visitors to *Change in Attitudes* also contacted me via email and social media to ask whether I was upset that people had begun to remove the horns. Through this, I became more aware of my position in the minds of some visitors as both author and artist - they recognised my authorship and expressed concern about how I might feel in response to others' actions. A comment in the visitor book echoed the anecdotal reports from room guides: 'Thought-provoking installation and response to the collection. SHAME ON THOSE WHO REMOVED A TROPHY'.¹⁶⁴ The limitations and benefits of relying on visitor book evaluations are discussed in greater depth in Chapter Three. However, in *Change in Attitudes*, the anecdotal richness of information shared by room guides contrasted sharply with the comparatively flattened feedback recorded in the visitor book. This disparity formed the basis for the embedded evaluation model I later developed for *A Virtuous Woman*.

¹⁶⁴ Nunnington Hall Visitor Book.

The interaction with the installation was paused when Nunnington Hall and the rest of the country closed for the first Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020. When the Hall reopened, the Visitor Experience team worked hard to ensure that visitors would be allowed to physically interact with and touch the installation again.

It is important to acknowledge the potential impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the behaviours described in the following section. Social distancing measures meant that visitors were accustomed to maintaining physical space, which may have afforded greater privacy in participatory actions. At the same time, the wider cultural sector - particularly theatres - reported notable shifts in audience behaviour following the pandemic.¹⁶⁵ Cultural sites, including country houses and art galleries, also documented instances of challenging visitor conduct in response to pandemic-related restrictions.¹⁶⁶ Such reports suggest a broader shift in attitudes towards institutional guidance, with some audiences demonstrating increased resistance to being directed or regulated within cultural spaces.¹⁶⁷

In February 2021 I was contacted by the team at Nunnington Hall and asked to visit the site to advise on what actions should be taken now visitors had begun interacting with the installation in a new way. Over the previous week, visitors had begun using the permanent markers (provided for names and dates to be noted

¹⁶⁵ Alice Saville, 'Trouble in the Stalls: When Audience Drama Upstages the Show', *The Guardian*, 5/3/2022; Bectu, 'Brawls, Vandalism, Racial Abuse: Bectu Survey Reveals Extreme Audience Behaviour in UK Theatres' (2023) <<https://bectu.org.uk/news/brawls-vandalism-racial-abuse-bectu-survey-reveals-extreme-audience-behaviour-in-uk-theatres>> [accessed 25/2/2026].

¹⁶⁶ Ecclesiastical and Heritage World, 'Visitors Behaving Badly: 91% of Heritage Attractions Suffer Challenging Behaviour During Covid-19' (2020) <<https://ecclesiasticalandheritageworld.co.uk/news/1615-visitors-behaving-badly-91-of-heritage-attractions-suffer-challenging-behaviour-during-covid-19>> [accessed 25/2/2026].

¹⁶⁷ Bethany Minelle, 'Audiences Behaving Badly: An Epidemic of Anti-Social Behaviour in Theatres, Concerts and Gigs' (2023) <<https://news.sky.com/story/audiences-behaving-badly-an-epidemic-of-anti-social-behaviour-in-theatres-concerts-and-gigs-12952497>> [accessed 25/2/2026].

upon removing a horn) to write their own comments on the structure of the installation (FIG. 14).

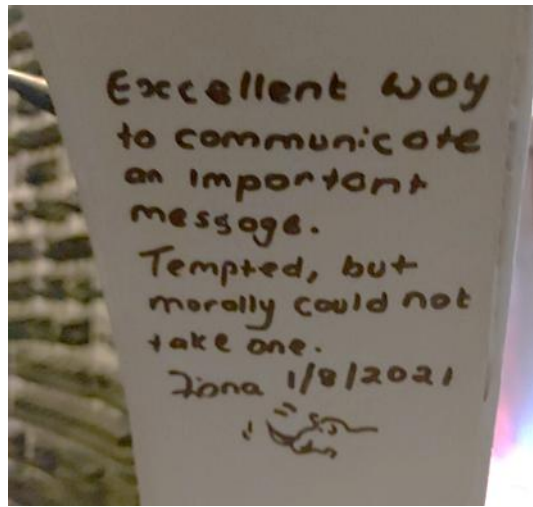


FIG. 14. *Change in Attitudes* installation, Visitor Writing.

These first comments were written on the side of the installation hidden from the view of the room guide, suggesting that visitors knew that what they were doing was not ‘allowed’ and did not wish to be observed doing so. Upon seeing one comment written on the structure in this way, others presumably felt emboldened to do the same – but again, out of sight of the room guide. My first reaction to seeing these comments was a mixture of excitement and curiosity. This participation had not been expected or designed into the project, but I interpreted this as an enhanced level of visitor engagement. I had not previously experienced such a complete departure from the prescribed method of participation, nor seen sustained rule-breaking in this way. Importantly, it seemed directly proportionate to the emotive nature of the artwork - visitors were responding with investment and care, rather than engaging in mindless or deliberate acts of vandalism. Visitors were so emotionally invested in both the artwork and the narrative that they were now challenging the usual boundaries of museum etiquette by contributing their own

responses onto the structure. Visitors already had the right to reply by means of a Visitor Book, as well as feedback questionnaires – so why did they then wish to comment in such a public and unauthorised way? Decisions about how to respond were made on site in a meeting between myself, the Visitor Experience Manager, and curatorial staff, who were authorised to act on behalf of the site. No contact with the national team was required, which meant these decisions could be made quickly. I expressed that I would like visitors to be allowed to continue adding their comments to see what happened, and the National Trust staff agreed, with the understanding that access would need to be restricted if visitors began using the pens on other objects. They also explained the need to censor any comments deemed offensive - a process that mirrored the institutional censorship observed in Schrag's *Atelier 2* - which I fully understood and accepted given the nature of the site.¹⁶⁸ These decisions were communicated to the volunteer team through regular staff briefings, allowing a rapid and responsive approach to visitor participation. I agreed with the Nunnington team that we would leave the first few comments to see what happened next. At no point would visitors be encouraged or given permission to write on the structure in this way, but they would not be prevented from doing so either. Within two weeks the comments written on the walls had multiplied and were now being made in full view of the room guide. This original experience subsequently informed my decisions explored in Chapters 4 and 5 at Hardwick Hall with *A Virtuous Woman*, where I deliberately gave visitors the scope to participate in ways that felt meaningful to them, without rigidly prescribing the forms their participation should take.

¹⁶⁸ Schrag, 'Agonistic Tendencies', pp.116-117.

Volunteers at the house had mixed responses to this new and unexpected development. Some were fascinated by what people had written, some were frustrated by the inconvenience of having to check the comments each day for those which had to be painted over. Others were appalled by the behaviour of visitors who were in essence scrawling graffiti on a work of art in a stately home. The comments fell into the following themes: direct feedback, moral dilemma, justification, dialogue, saying and slogans, outrage and judgement, drawings, and inappropriate comments subsequently censored. All transcriptions retain original spellings and grammar.

Direct feedback

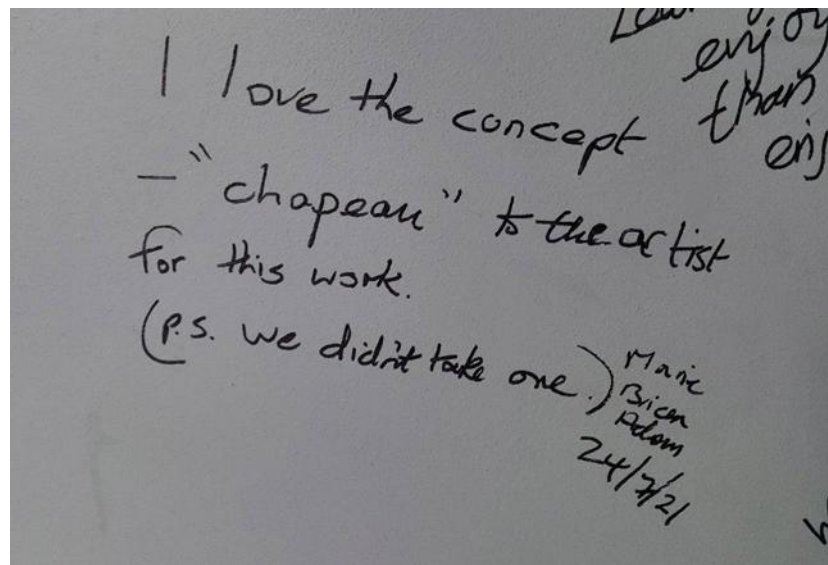


FIG. 15. *Change in Attitudes* installation, Visitor Writing.

'Excellent way to communicate an important message'

'I love the concept – 'chapeau' to the artist for this work' (FIG.15)

'Excellent! Very Thought Provoking!'¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Transcript of visitor writing on *Change in Attitudes*, Appendix 1.

I did not have a definitive answer to why people felt compelled to leave feedback in this way. A Visitor Book and visitor feedback questionnaires were both available, so visitors already had avenues to communicate their feelings. It is possible that visitors felt that their feedback was more direct when communicating directly with the artwork, or that they do not feel a visitor book is relevant to them or this kind of artwork. It is also possible some visitors were not aware of the other feedback options available if they were not in the immediate vicinity of the artwork.

Moral Dilemma

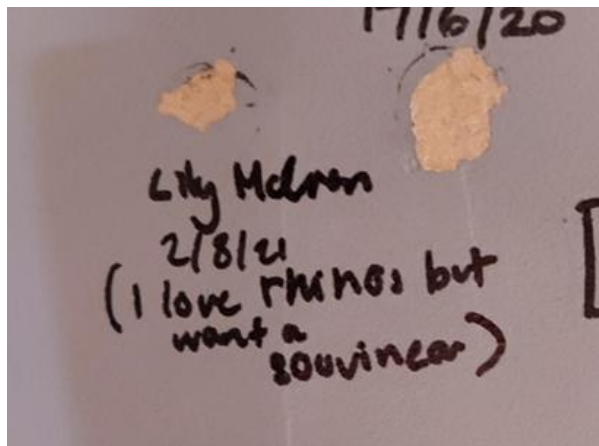


FIG. 16. *Change in Attitudes* installation, Visitor Writing.

‘To kill or not to kill, that is the question’

‘I love rhinos but want a souvenir’ (FIG. 16)

‘Although a free rino horn would be really Dope, I chose not too, There like cool unicorns! I might need one when I rule the world’¹⁷⁰

These types of comments seem to want to acknowledge this was not an easy choice to make – either that they were tempted but resisted that temptation, or that they understood they had made what they perceived to be the ‘wrong’ choice and wanted to explain. These reactions were regularly reported anecdotally by the room

¹⁷⁰ Transcript of visitor writing on *Change in Attitudes*, Appendix 1.

guides in the space – that in fact many visitors changed their mind during the course of the visit – either returning the horn they had taken before they left or coming back to take one after all.

Justification (of the choice to take a horn)

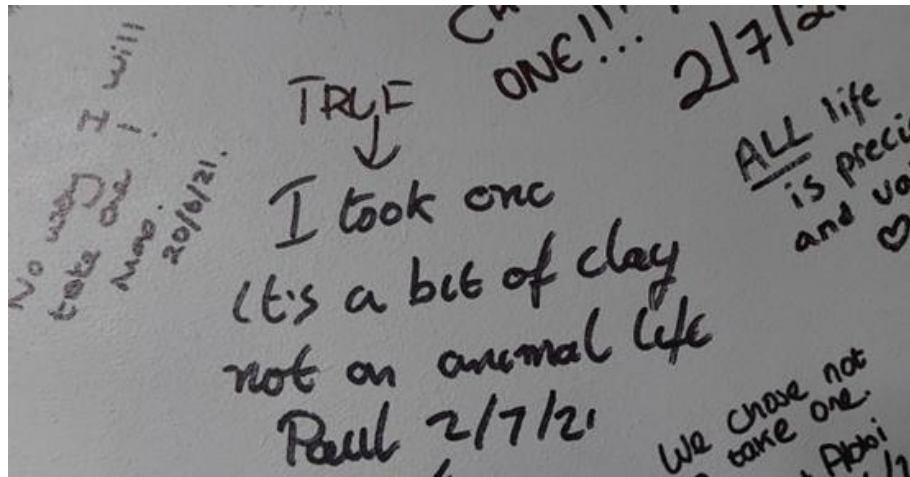


FIG. 17. *Change in Attitudes* installation, Visitor Writing.

‘I took one it’s a bit of clay not on animal life’ ‘True’ (FIG. 17)

‘It’s just a piece of plastic’

‘Great coat hook’

‘I hate rhino they should die’¹⁷¹

Most of the visitor comments written on the artwork itself explaining why a horn had been taken were flippant in nature. Other visitors felt the need to justify their choice more seriously – by speaking to the house staff team or contacting me directly via email or social media. These justifications were completely unnecessary to me, the site or the artwork – and yet visitors felt the need to let somebody know that they had not taken something for themselves, that it was to spread awareness such as talking to schools about the project.

¹⁷¹ Transcript of visitor writing on *Change in Attitudes*, Appendix 1.

Dialogue

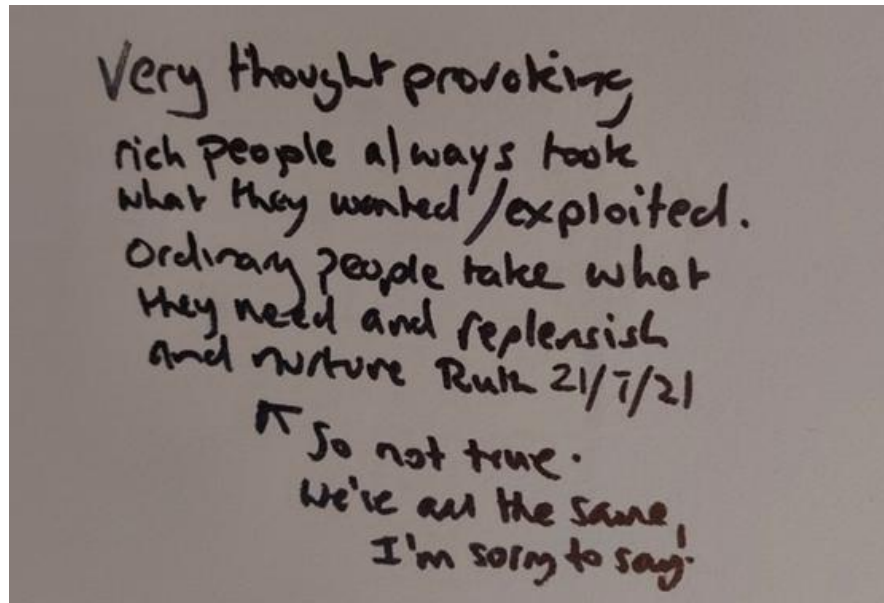


FIG. 18. *Change in Attitudes* installation, Visitor Writing.

‘Why leave less for others to enjoy’ answered by ‘This should not be about human enjoyment!’

‘I’m 19... I want to see rhino’s when I’m 90’ answered by ‘Good bloody point!’

‘Very thought provoking rich people always took what they wanted / exploited. Ordinary people take what they need and replenish and nurture’ answered by ‘So not true, we’re all the same I’m sorry to say’ (FIG. 18)

‘I took one it’s a bit of clay not an animal life’ answered both by ‘TRUE’ and ‘But the principle is the same’¹⁷²

I found the dialogue between visitors fascinating – the original author would be unlikely to return to see the answer, so whether agreeing or disagreeing, why write in this way? It may be that visitors are used to being able to reply to strangers’ comments on social media sites and so applied this thinking to their written comments here. The final image in this section appeared to show dialogue with themselves - a commentator who appeared to return to add further remarks to their initial thoughts, which would infer that the visitor wanted to ensure that anybody

¹⁷² Transcript of visitor writing on *Change in Attitudes*, Appendix 1.

reading this was fully informed as to who they were, what they meant and what their choice was.

‘The idea that this exhibit is presented to us shows it is not about individual choice but commercialism and the transnational corporations that trust the human race and each individual to save our planet’ > ‘From a 15 year old worried about the future of our planet’ > ‘I haven’t decided if I’m going to take one yet’ > ‘kind of mean about all resources in general’ (FIG. 19)¹⁷³

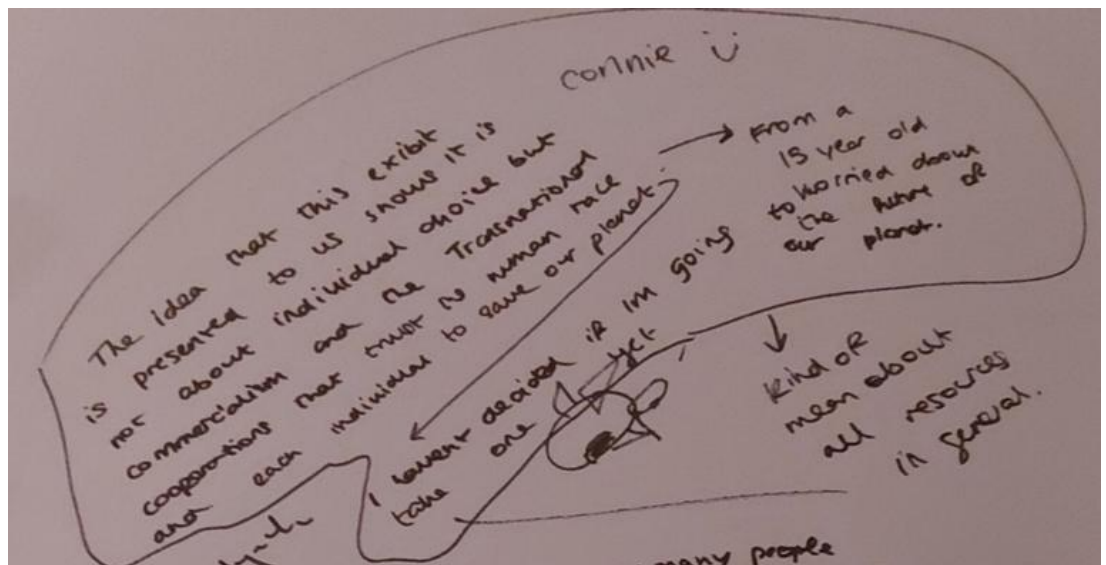


FIG. 19. *Change in Attitudes* installation, Visitor Writing.

Again, this confirmed what room guides were telling us about visitor interactions – in some cases visitors would speak to one another about the decisions each other had made, but more often they would express their irritation / bewilderment with staff who were seen as independent observers. It seems that by commenting on each other’s comments visitors were able to debate without direct confrontation.

¹⁷³ Transcript of visitor writing on *Change in Attitudes*, Appendix 1.

Sayings / Slogans

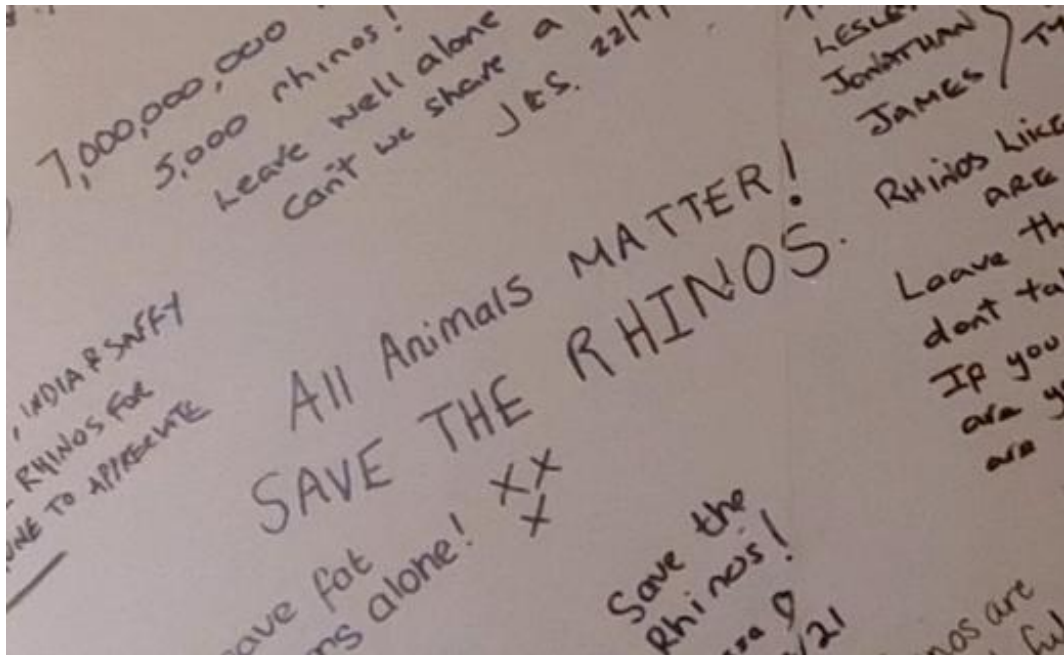


FIG. 20. *Change in Attitudes* installation, Visitor Writing.

'Horns should be worn on, The ones they were born on'

'leave no trace'¹⁷⁴

'All Animals Matter! Save the Rhinos' (FIG. 20)

'One Planet, One Chance'¹⁷⁵

These comments seemed to be 'adding' to the artwork, their contribution being something which furthers the message they believe the piece should be sending.

During the period of this installation, the 'Black Lives Matter' protests were taking place, along with the rebuttal 'All Lives Matter'. This gives a possible context to the comment "All animals matter" written here.

¹⁷⁴ Whilst, ironically, leaving a trace.

¹⁷⁵ Transcript of visitor writing on *Change in Attitudes*, Appendix 1.

Outrage / Judgement (of choices made by others)

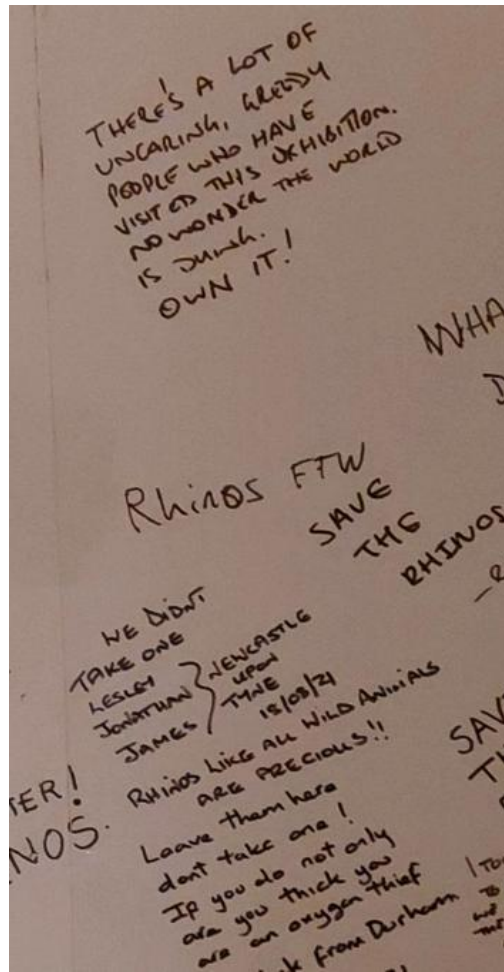


FIG. 21. *Change in Attitudes* installation, Visitor Writing.

‘Horried by the number taken! We are running out of time to save, not just rhinos, but many, many species’

‘IT’S EXACTLY BECAUSE FAR TOO MANY PEOPLE CHOOSE TO ‘TAKE’ THAT THE PLANET FACES SO MANY CHALLENGES TODAY. I WON’T BE TAKING ONE’

‘What if it was your child or parent? Please let live’

‘There’s a lot of uncaring, greedy people who have visited this exhibition. No wonder the world is dying. Own it!’

‘Leave them here don’t take one! If you do not only are you thick you are on oxygen thief’ (FIG. 21)

‘You’re not meant to take one! (You numptys!) The more we take away... the less beauty there is for others to see’¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Transcript of visitor writing on *Change in Attitudes*, Appendix 1.

Second only to visitors simply signing and dating stating that they had not taken a horn (in total opposition to the instruction to sign and date if they did take one), these ‘moral outrage’ comments were the most common type of comments left. Visitors commented assuming they knew (and could tell others) what they were ‘meant’ to do – the wish to condemn the behaviours of others, while making clear that they had made the morally superior choice. This raised a particular interest for me in seeing if the audience monitoring, policing and judging itself is a theme which will be repeated in future participatory artworks.

Drawings

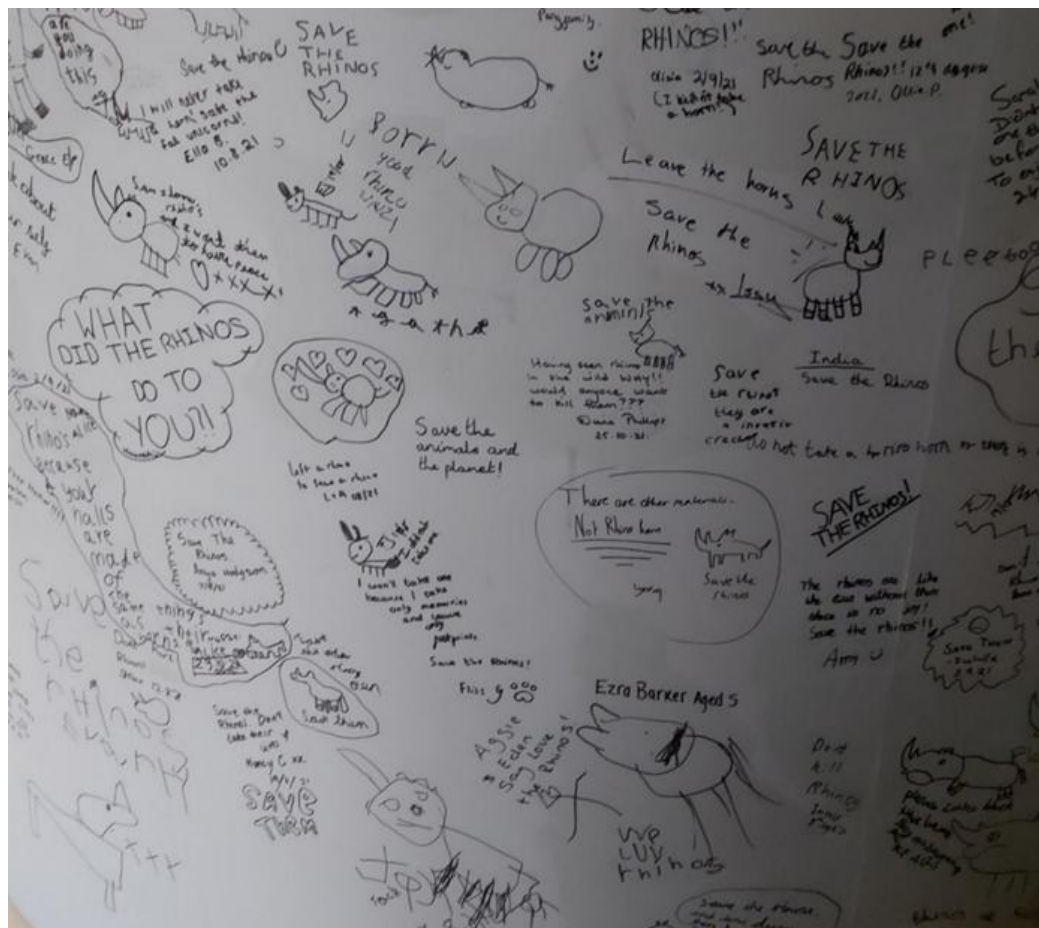


FIG. 22. *Change in Attitudes* installation, Visitor Writing.

Drawings were mostly of rhinos, and these often appeared to have been drawn by children (Fig. 22). There were also drawings of people, some faces appeared to express emotions, some were stick people, some appeared to be an avatar of sorts.

Inappropriate (as designated by Nunnington Hall)

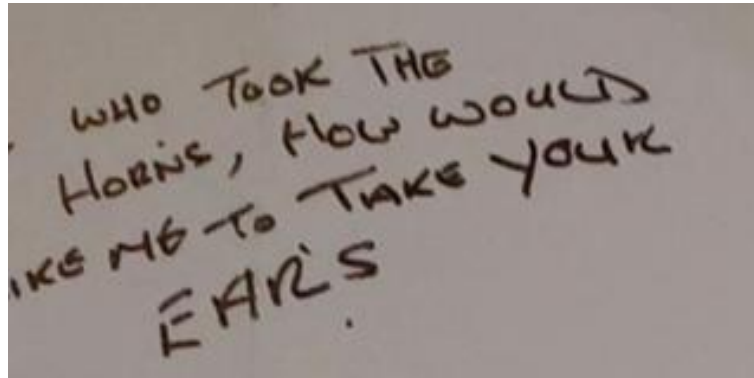


FIG. 23. *Change in Attitudes* installation, Visitor Writing.

‘SS [heart] DD’

‘Who took the horns how would you like me to take your ears’ (FIG. 23)

‘Shoot the hunters not the rhinos’¹⁷⁷

I supplied the hall staff with paint to allow them to cover over any comments they deemed inappropriate – the censored comments fell in to three categories: swearing (the property is a family site, and so any language unsuitable for children had to be removed), aggressive (the aim was to create a ‘safe space’ for open discussion on what we knew to be a contentious subject – the team felt people would not make a free choice when faced with aggressive comments about the choices others had made) and irrelevant (social media handles, political slogans irrelevant to the issues of the artwork and house, declarations of love between initials ‘BB 4 DP 4EVA’ – toilet door graffiti). The censorship job became more difficult as the installation

¹⁷⁷ Transcript of visitor writing on *Change in Attitudes*, Appendix 1.

became more heavily interacted with, requiring staff members to inspect the entire installation every few days to identify any comments which they wanted to erase. This raises difficult questions about how we wish visitors to participate, and who holds the final authority in deciding what type of participation is unacceptable and is discussed in more depth in Chapter Five when these questions arose again in *A Virtuous Woman*.

Embedding evaluation

The interim report from Nunnington Hall stated that visitors agreed the installation gave them better insight into the life of Colonel Fife (87%), the installation made them think about the historic taxidermy in terms of present day hunting (86%), the installation gave them a better understanding of why the National Trust conserves and displays the skins (88%), and they found the installation ‘engaging’ (89%).¹⁷⁸ This and the positive comments in the Visitor’s Book were encouraging, but the nature of the short surveys and limited closed questions highlighted the need for a more meaningful way of understanding visitor responses.¹⁷⁹

Additionally, these statistics are taken from only 142 respondents. By the end of the installation period 2,012 porcelain horns had been taken by visitors and more than 1,000 comments had been written on the installation – the installation was now covered in visitor feedback (FIG. 24). Only after the installation ended, was there time to reflect on the way visitors interacted with this artwork. Identifying missed opportunities in evaluating these unexpected interactions as they were happening formed the beginnings of the framework for where further evaluation

¹⁷⁸ Nunnington Hall Feedback Questionnaires, January 2021.

¹⁷⁹ Nunnington Hall Visitor Book Transcript.

was needed and when. This highlights the need to consider integrating evaluation of engagement through the ways in which visitors participate to consider ways of knowing which are not available to standard evaluation methods and to consider how we evidence and/or witness affect, as detailed in Knell and Whitaker's 'Participatory Metrics Report' that some organisations felt that integrating the metrics into the participatory experience enables a better participant experience and a higher quality response.¹⁸⁰

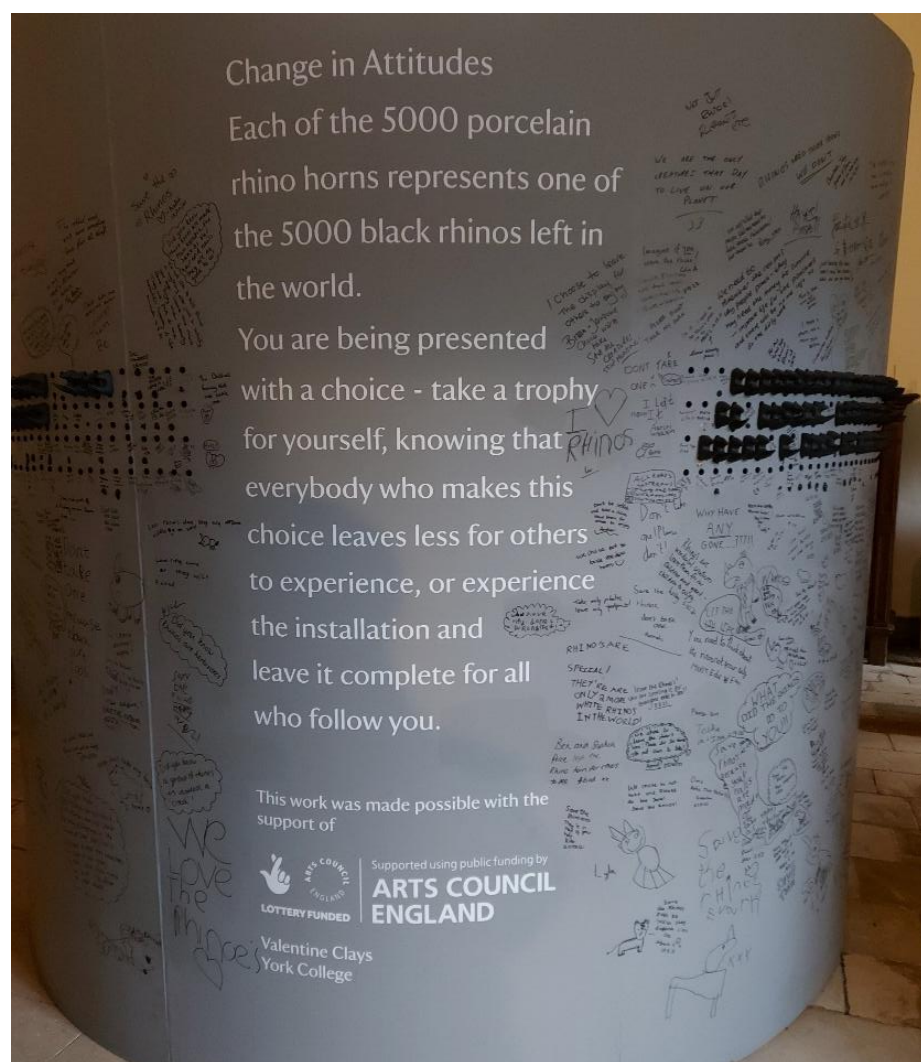


FIG. 24. *Change in Attitudes* installation, End of Installation

¹⁸⁰ John Knell and Alison Whitaker, Participatory Metrics Report, Quality Metrics National Test (Arts Council England, 2016).

Conclusion and next steps

A change in perspective that does make a difference is one that focuses on all the rules of the game and not simply on the possibility of joining in the game: it focuses on the power to define what is visible. It is about entering into the contentious territory of what can be seen or said.¹⁸¹

Sternfeld's argument that true participation involves the power to influence the system and question the rules is echoed in Graham's reflections on what does and does not constitute participation.¹⁸² While I am reluctant to define rigid boundaries of what counts as participation, I find that Sternfeld's perspective speaks more to intention and a spectrum of engagement. Even the ability to question the rules can be seen as a step toward fuller participation - an idea that was clearly reflected in both *Change in Attitudes* and, subsequently, *A Virtuous Woman*.

Visitors choosing for themselves how they participated with *Change In Attitudes* as an entirely unexpected outcome goes one step further than the ubiquitous "post it" wall of feedback in museum spaces. As this was not what visitors were invited to do, this was a decision taken by a few which was then followed by many.¹⁸³ Visitors participated in the way that was most meaningful to them – and in doing so changed the artwork entirely. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the difficulties experienced by heritage sites during this time (in terms of restricting visitor numbers, managing routes through houses and staffing issues), responding to this change in participation with enhanced observations and evaluation was not at the forefront of our minds.¹⁸⁴ Unfortunately,

¹⁸¹ Nora Sternfeld, 'Playing by the Rules of the Game: Participation in the Post-Representative Museum', *CuMMA Papers*, 1 (2013), pp.1-7 (p.4).

¹⁸² Ibid., pp.3-4; Graham, *Deconstituting Museums*, p.163.

¹⁸³ Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, pp.107-111.

¹⁸⁴ Mihai Surdu, '73% of Heritage Workers Afraid to Return to Work as Museums Reopen, Research Suggests' (2021) <<https://museumsandheritage.com/advisor/posts/73-heritage-workers-afraid-return-work-museums-reopen-research-suggests/>> [accessed 25/2/2026]; Museums and Heritage Advisor, '91% of Heritage Attractions Suffer Challenging Behaviour During Covid-19' (2021) <<https://museumsandheritage.com/advisor/posts/91-heritage-attractions-suffer-challenging->

neither participant observation nor open ended interviews were conducted by the site during the exhibition of *Change in Attitudes*. This lost opportunity to evaluate visitor participation more closely highlighted the requirement within my practice to work more collaboratively with host sites on embedding evaluation within and throughout participation with the artwork.

These unexpected outcomes prompted this practice-led research. I aimed to explore these issues further through the creation of *A Virtuous Woman*. This artwork invited staff and visitors to consider, interpret, respond to, and engage with the Noblewomen Embroideries in Hardwick Hall's collection, reflecting on the question of female virtue. The project aimed to extend beyond conventional heritage interpretation by rethinking modes of engagement and approaches to evaluation, while foregrounding dialogue and agonism, thereby addressing questions raised by *Change in Attitudes* and deepening understanding of the intersections between visitor experience, participatory practice, contemporary art, and heritage narratives.

Heritage participatory models remain largely consensus-driven, despite theoretical recognition that heritage is inherently conflictual.¹⁸⁵ Participatory art theory highlights tensions between relationality, dialogue, ethics, antagonism, and dissensus, and these tensions are intensified within heritage contexts, where narratives are contested and institutional authority is strong. Current heritage

behaviour-covid-19> [accessed 25/2/2026]; Ziwen Liu and others, 'Measuring the Impact of Covid-19 on Heritage Sites in the UK Using Social Media Data', *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 10. 1 (2023), p.537; Historic Houses, DCMS Inquiry: Promoting Britain Abroad Historic Houses Submission of Evidence (2022), pp.1-8.

¹⁸⁵ Tunbridge and Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage*, pp.20-21; Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, pp.80-84.

practice frequently prioritises consensus, which constrains opportunities for conflict-aware or agonistic approaches.

Several gaps in knowledge open up the potential for this PhD's contribution to the discourse. First, there is a lack of framework for conflict-aware participation in heritage contexts, with few studies examining how artistic processes can hold space for disagreement or challenge dominant narratives. Second, institutional constraints often sanitise or instrumentalise participation, limiting its political and transformative potential. Third, research on participants' experiences of participatory arts within heritage sites is limited to traditional evaluation methods, leaving questions about how audience experience of these interventions is largely unexplored. Finally, there is limited practice-based research that unites participatory art, agonism, and heritage, and few methodologies demonstrate how artists can ethically embed and work with conflict in heritage-based projects.

This PhD addresses these potential gaps through a practice-based inquiry that investigates how participatory art can meaningfully engage with the inherent public conflict in heritage sites. By contextualising autoethnographic reflection, practical experimentation and embedded evaluation within the theories of participation explored here, it aims to offer guidance for both artists and institutions seeking to navigate the ethical, creative, and political complexities of agonistic participation in heritage contexts.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodological Framework

Locating the Methodology

The preceding review of literature, practice, and policy examined critical debates surrounding participation, contemporary art in heritage contexts, and agonistic encounter, alongside reflection on my own artistic trajectory, establishing the conceptual and institutional terrain within which this research operates. This chapter turns from that theoretical and contextual framing to consider how those debates were translated into method. If the thesis begins from practice, the methodology must account for practice not only as subject but as method - this chapter addresses how practice became a structured mode of enquiry. The methodology is positioned that while heritage sites, artworks, and institutional structures exist as material realities, the meanings attached to them are continually negotiated through interaction, participation, and interpretation. Knowledge within this research emerges through creative practice, critical reflection, and dialogue between artist, participants, and institution, rather than through detached observation alone. This position informs the methodological approach taken throughout the project, in which practice operates as a means through which knowledge is generated.

Questions first encountered through *Change in Attitudes* at Nunnington Hall - particularly concerning how visitor responses were recognised, recorded, and interpreted - revealed limitations in the evaluative frameworks within which my work had previously been situated. While the literature review identified participation as dialogic, affective, and potentially agonistic, my earlier experiences demonstrated how institutional evaluation methods often struggled to register that

complexity. This tension prompted a more sustained examination of how participatory contemporary art is evaluated within heritage contexts, and how evaluation practices shape what can be known about visitor engagement. In previous projects, I had largely relied upon host institutions to gather and measure visitor responses according to established procedures.¹⁸⁶ Typically, this consisted of written comments in visitor books, often discreetly placed and unevenly used, alongside statistical data generated through brief questionnaires structured around closed questions and Likert scales.¹⁸⁷ While such methods produced quantifiable evidence of engagement, they also constrained the range and depth of response that could be articulated. The framing of questions risked directing visitors towards predetermined categories of interpretation, reducing complex emotional and interpretative encounters to simplified metrics. In response, this research sought to examine evaluation methodologies within heritage sites more broadly in order to develop a more critically attuned and context-sensitive approach appropriate to participatory artistic practice. Alongside a review of sector practices, I undertook a practical trial at Temple Newsam, where contemporary art interventions were being presented within a historic site.¹⁸⁸ This trial functioned as a methodological testing ground, enabling experimentation with alternative modes of capturing visitor

¹⁸⁶ Layla Khoo, *#Payartists*, 2018, Participatory installation ceramics, Art& York; Layla Khoo, *Chronicle of Curiosities*, 2020, Participatory Installation, ceramics, plaster, Whitby Museum; Layla Khoo, *Contemplating Hope*, 2021, Participatory Installation, Ceramics, Paper, Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth; Layla Khoo, *On Belonging - Duality*, 2021, Participatory Installation - Ceramics, Lancaster Arts; Layla Khoo, *The Exchange*, 2022, Participatory Installation, Ceramics, Exchange Square, Middlesbrough.

¹⁸⁷ A Likert scale is a simple rating system used in questionnaires to measure attitudes, opinions, or perceptions. Susan Jamieson, 'Likert Scale' in *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2026).

¹⁸⁸ Temple Newsam is a Grade I listed Tudor-Jacobean Country House in Leeds, West Yorkshire owned and operated by Leeds City Council Historic Houses, 'Temple Newsam House' <<https://www.historichouses.org/house/temple-newsam-house/visit/>> [accessed 26/2/2026]

response and refining evaluative strategies prior to the development of *A Virtuous Woman* at Hardwick Hall.

Finally, this chapter traces the methodological evolution of the project before the artwork itself was realised. It examines how and why Hardwick Hall sought to commission participatory contemporary art; how initial conversations, institutional priorities, and site-specific considerations shaped the parameters of the work and how decisions were made regarding modes of participation, facilitation, documentation, and evaluation. In doing so, it foregrounds the negotiated and contingent conditions under which *A Virtuous Woman* came into being. While Chapter Four analyses the creation and unfolding of the artwork in depth, the present chapter establishes the methodological foundations - the agreements, assumptions, and strategic choices - that made that practice possible.

Evaluating evaluation

Having situated my study within literature, policy and practice, this first section of the methodology turns to a critical examination of existing approaches to visitor experience evaluation - essentially, evaluating evaluation. Traditional methods, particularly quantitative tools such as Likert scales, are frequently employed to measure visitor satisfaction, engagement, or learning outcomes. While these tools offer the appeal of simplicity and comparability, their use raises several methodological and interpretive concerns. Likert scales, for instance, rely on ordinal data that are often treated as interval for statistical analysis, a practice that can misrepresent the nuances of visitor responses.¹⁸⁹ Respondent interpretation of

¹⁸⁹ Geoffrey Darnton, 'Likert Scales and Questions: Uses and Abuses', *Proceedings of the 22nd European Conference on Research Methodology for Business and Management Studies*, 22. 1 (2023), pp.44-49.

scale points can vary widely, central tendency and social desirability biases may distort results, and the rigid agree–disagree structure rarely captures the complex, affective, and reflective dimensions of visitor experience.¹⁹⁰ Beyond these statistical limitations, such tools risk oversimplifying the richness of engagement, failing to reveal the *why* behind a visitor’s experience, which is often central to understanding the impact of visual arts practices. By critically assessing these approaches, this study foregrounds the need for methodologies that respect the subtlety, multiplicity and emotion inherent in arts-based visitor experiences.

Current evaluation tools often place the onus solely on the hosting or commissioning organisation. Even Arts Council England’s Impact and Insight Toolkit, which is free to use for ACE-funded organisations such as National Portfolio Organisations, Investment Principles Support Organisations, Creative People and Places, and some museums within the Museum Development Network, relies on organisations to collect and share data with the artist.¹⁹¹ The *Change in Attitudes* case study reinforced my view that evaluation could be embedded more collaboratively, in line with McNiff’s provocation that the art itself can serve as the research method.¹⁹²

Museums and heritage sites have long employed a variety of methods to evaluate visitor experience. These include ethnography (observing participant behaviour and taking field notes), grounded theory approaches that generate

¹⁹⁰ Jessica Lo and Jane Ogden, 'How Meaningful Are Data from Likert Scales? An Evaluation of How Ratings Are Made and the Role of the Response Shift in the Socially Disadvantaged', *Journal of Health Psychology*, 17. 3 (2012), pp.350-61; Imam Kusmaryono, Dyana Wijayanti, and Hevy Risqi, 'Number of Response Options, Reliability, Validity, and Potential Bias in the Use of the Likert Scale Education and Social Science Research: A Literature Review', *Başlık*, 8. 4 (2022), pp.625-637.

¹⁹¹ Arts Council England, 'Impact and Insight Toolkit' <<https://impactandinsight.co.uk/>> [accessed 20/04/2024].

¹⁹² Shaun McNiff, *Art as Research, Opportunities and Challenges* (Intellect, 2013).

insights iteratively alongside ongoing data collection, qualitative interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires combining open and closed questions.¹⁹³ Traditional closed-question surveys, including Likert-style items, offer simplicity and comparability but can miss the nuances of engagement discussed in Eric Jensen's revisitation of Bourdieu's seminal research on social exclusion in museums over forty years ago.¹⁹⁴ Bourdieu's work, drawing on over 30,000 questionnaires and semi-structured interviews across Europe, highlighted how visitors from lower socioeconomic and educational backgrounds often felt unprepared to engage meaningfully with artworks.¹⁹⁵ He iteratively adapted his questionnaires to reduce socially desirable responses, demonstrating early recognition of the limitations of standardised evaluation methods. Building on this lineage, Jensen combined ethnographic observation, photography, field notes, and qualitative interviews, coded systematically over multiple visits, rather than relying on a single questionnaire.¹⁹⁶ While more labour-intensive, this approach enabled a deeper understanding of both the setting and visitors, allowing rapport to develop and subtleties in behaviour and interpretation to emerge. Bishop similarly advocates for repeated and embedded evaluation of engagement in participatory art contexts, as initiated by APG.¹⁹⁷

The value of iterative, embedded evaluation is further illustrated by both historical and contemporary museum case studies. In 1987, Marie Hewett detailed how the Strong Museum in New York undertook exploratory steps to develop clear

¹⁹³ Catherine Dawson, *Introduction to Research Methods* Fifth edition. (Robinson, 2019).

¹⁹⁴ Eric A. Jensen, 'Reconsidering the Love of Art: Evaluating the Potential of Art Museum Outreach', *Visitor studies*, 16. 2 (2013), pp.144-59.

¹⁹⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, Alain Darbel, and Dominique Schnapper, *The Love of Art : European Art Museums and Their Public* (Polity Press, 1991).

¹⁹⁶ Jensen, 'Reconsidering the Love of Art'.

¹⁹⁷ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, pp.174-177.

objectives for visitor experience, specifying what they wanted visitors to do, how they wanted them to engage, and the outcomes they hoped to achieve.¹⁹⁸ To assess these objectives, evaluators employed a combination of observation - tracking visitor traffic patterns, dwell time, and how different activities and interpretive materials stimulated conversation within visitor groups - and interviews to determine whether the more abstract concepts the museum sought to convey were being understood.¹⁹⁹ Importantly, they also observed visitor behaviour around feedback opportunities; while adult visitors enjoyed reading comments left by previous visitors in the public visitor book, they were often reluctant to leave their own responses in such a visible format.²⁰⁰ A similar pattern emerged during an experiment at The Whipple Museum, Cambridge, where a 'time clock' system allowed visitors to write feedback on individual cards as they moved through the museum, rather than in a communal book.²⁰¹ Evaluators noted not only an increase in specific, candid comments but also that the act of carrying the card throughout the visit appeared to embed the evaluative process into the experience itself.²⁰² Visitors were reminded to reflect on their engagement at multiple points, and feedback was shaped by the ongoing encounter with the artworks. This approach closely mirrors my practice in *Change in Attitudes*, where iterative, embedded evaluation enabled dynamic responses to visitor experience and unexpected outcomes. It reflects the need to understand not only what visitors report, but how they experience and interpret the artwork in situ. By combining observation,

¹⁹⁸ Marie Hewett, 'Developing Strong Evaluation Efforts', *The Journal of Museum Education*, 12. 1 (1987), pp.18-20.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Niall Caldwell, 'The Whipple 'Time-Clock' experiment: Measurement of Visitor Engagement in a Small Museum', *Proceedings of the 8th International Conference on Arts and Cultural Management*, (AIMAC, 2005).

²⁰² Ibid.

participatory methods, and iterative reflection, evaluation becomes a continuous, context-sensitive process rather than a one-off exercise, revealing subtleties in visitor engagement that standard surveys alone - particularly closed-question Likert-style tools - would likely miss.

Embedding opportunities for visitor feedback directly into the museum or heritage experience can be more appealing to visitors than post-visit questionnaires. This approach was explored at the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, in the autumn of 2015, when visitors were invited to reflect on how the emotional themes in Van Gogh and Edvard Munch's works resonated with their own lives.²⁰³ Over 30,000 visitors contributed written reflections, which became an evolving part of the exhibition.²⁰⁴ Observations showed that visitors engaged not only with their own reflections but also with those of others, occasionally entering into dialogue - a behaviour reminiscent of what I observed in *Change in Attitudes*, although in the Van Gogh Museum this occurred within structured permission. Similarly, at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, visitor books were incorporated into the interpretation information for the exhibition, encouraging a form of collaborative dialogue that transformed feedback into a performative and interpretive component of the exhibition itself.²⁰⁵ Ethnographic approaches at the National Museum of American Jewish History and the Florida Holocaust Museum focused on the performative aspects of publicly displayed and observed written feedback.²⁰⁶ These studies highlighted how observing visitors as they wrote could

²⁰³ A. Blokland, 'Participation at the Van Gogh Museum: A Balancing Act', *International Journal of the Inclusive Museum*, 12. 1 (2019), pp.19-38.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Mary Alexander, 'Do Visitors Get It? A Sweatshop Exhibit and Visitors' Comments', *The Public Historian*, 22. 3 (2000), pp.85-94.

²⁰⁶ Chaim Noy, 'Writing in Museums: Toward a Rhetoric of Participation', *Written Communication*, 32. 2 (2015), pp.195-219.

reveal subtle dimensions of engagement, including social interaction and personal reflection.²⁰⁷ Similar insights were evident in my practice at Nunnington Hall where the very public act of visitors writing comments on the walls for others to see became a performative method of feedback. Room guides' anecdotal observations captured the richness of visitor engagement, noting moments of heightened emotional response and instances where participants bent or challenged unspoken rules during interactive activities.

The Osservatorio in Milan provides a contrasting approach to visitor evaluation; engagement was assessed through questionnaires that measured retention of information following the introduction of Augmented Reality.²⁰⁸ This method underscores that different sites may define and value engagement, learning, and emotional connection in distinct ways. In this case, the museum measured engagement primarily by whether visitors retained information at the end of their visit, rather than by observing how they engaged with and experienced the exhibition in the moment.²⁰⁹ In my work at Hardwick Hall, I collaborated with the partner site to co-define what constituted engagement with the artwork and collection, and used this shared understanding to inform both the creation of the artwork and how it was evaluated. I applied a method of publicly visible expression and participation, informed by these cases, ensuring evaluation reflected the complexity of the experience. When addressing more intangible elements such as emotional engagement, the EMOTIVE 2020 Research and Innovation project offers a model: visitors were asked to indicate “where in your body” they felt

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ E. Spadoni and others, 'Augmented Reality to Engage Visitors of Science Museums through Interactive Experiences', *Heritage*, 5. 3 (2022), pp.1370-94.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

certain emotions, providing a means to communicate feelings that standard verbal responses may fail to capture.²¹⁰ This reinforces the importance of unconventional feedback methods and iterative response, a principle that guided the embedded ethnographic approach in *A Virtuous Woman*. By observing and analysing the ways visitors participate, including the social and performative dimensions of engagement, evaluation becomes a dynamic, context-sensitive process rather than a static collection of responses.

Corbin and Strauss argue that bias in qualitative data analysis must be acknowledged and addressed through robust analytical procedures.²¹¹ Whether it is ever possible to analyse qualitative data entirely without bias remains a significant methodological question for this research. Digital tools can assist in mitigating researcher subjectivity when analysing text-based responses; however, such software may struggle to interpret nuance, including sarcasm, irony, or culturally specific expression.²¹² One of the key aims of this research is not simply to generate reliable data about visitor responses, but to understand the nuanced ways in which participation unfolds in situ - how visitors negotiate meaning, interact socially, respond emotionally, and sometimes disrupt or reshape the parameters of the work itself. It is precisely this subtlety of participation that I seek to examine more deeply. Digital and statistical tools offer one means of managing bias and producing systematic analysis, and they are frequently employed in museum and heritage

²¹⁰ M. Economou, H. Young, and E. Sosnowska, 'Evaluating Emotional Engagement in Digital Stories for Interpreting the Past. The Case of the Hunterian Museum's Antonine Wall Emotive Experiences', *3rd Digital Heritage International Congress (DigitalHERITAGE) / 24th International Conference on Virtual Systems and Multimedia (VSMM)*, (IEEE, 2018).

²¹¹ Juliet M. Corbin and Anselm L. Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research : Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* Fourth edition / Juliet Corbin, Anselm Strauss. (SAGE, 2015).

²¹² Mike Stevens, 'What Is Text Analytics for Research' <<https://www.insightplatforms.com/what-is-text-analytics-for-research/>>.

evaluation.²¹³ Software-assisted coding and natural language processing can help identify patterns across large datasets of visitor comments, while statistical programmes such as SPSS enable complex modelling of questionnaire responses, including those structured around Likert scales.²¹⁴ Such approaches provide clarity, comparability, and methodological distance - yet they are primarily designed to stabilise and categorise responses after the event, rather than to capture the dynamic, relational qualities of engagement as it unfolds. This tendency towards post-hoc categorisation can be seen in a number of recent evaluation studies. Investigators evaluating a digital geolocated cultural heritage game, for instance, combined axial, open, and selective coding with the “TheySay” tool to analyse sentiment expressed in open-ended responses.²¹⁵ Similarly, research into students’ contemplation of Mark Rothko’s *Untitled* (1969) relied on complex statistical analysis of 5-point Likert-scale questionnaires to quantify shifts in perception.²¹⁶ Multi-modal research often necessitates multi-modal analysis: when a new visitor engagement scale was developed at the Kelvingrove Museum in Glasgow, qualitative interviews were verified and reviewed by secondary colleagues, while quantitative data were analysed using Partial Least Squares methodology.²¹⁷ This blended approach enabled researchers to identify measurable engagement drivers such as prior knowledge, multiple motivations, and cultural capital.²¹⁸ These studies

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ IBM, 'Https://Www.Ibm.Com/Products/Spss-Statistics'

<<https://www.ibm.com/products/spss-statistics>> [accessed 21/03/2023].

²¹⁵ C. E. Jones, S. Theodosis, and I. Lykourantzou, 'The Enthusiast, the Interested, the Sceptic, and the Cynic: Understanding User Experience and Perceived Value in Location-Based Cultural Heritage Games through Qualitative and Sentiment Analysis', *Journal on Computing and Cultural Heritage*, 12. 1 (2019), pp.1-26.

²¹⁶ C. Urpi, C. Reparaz, and F. Echarri, 'Measuring the Rothko Experience in School Visitors to Modern Art Museums', *Journal of Educational Research*, 115. 2 (2022), pp.173-86.

²¹⁷ B. Taheri, A. Jafari, and K. O'Gorman, 'Keeping Your Audience: Presenting a Visitor Engagement Scale', *Tourism Management*, 42 (2014), pp.321-29 (pp.323-326).

²¹⁸ Ibid.

demonstrate methodological rigour and the value of mixed-method analysis. However, their emphasis remains on measuring outcomes - retention, attitude change, or identifiable engagement drivers - rather than examining how participation is enacted moment by moment within a specific artistic encounter.

These examples demonstrate how statistical modelling and digital analysis can provide clarity, comparability, and methodological distance. However, the National Trust already holds extensive demographic and motivational data on its audiences.²¹⁹ My research therefore does not seek to further categorise visitor types or quantify motivational drivers. Instead, it asks how engagement is enacted, experienced, and negotiated within participatory artworks. While advanced analytical tools can assist in acknowledging and managing bias, my methodological position follows the model of practice-led research and research-led practice described by Smith and Dean.²²⁰ Within this framework, the artwork itself becomes a mode of inquiry: its creation generates research questions, and its reception produces research outcomes - evaluation is not external to the artistic process but embedded within it.²²¹

As an artist-researcher, I recognise that complete objectivity is neither possible nor necessarily desirable and refer to Hope's acknowledgement of the impartiality of holding this position.²²² My proximity to the work enabled iterative responsiveness: I was able to attend to participation as it happened, observing moments of emotional intensity, disruption, compliance, or rule-breaking in real time rather than only retrospectively through survey data. This form of situated

²¹⁹ National Trust, Audience Evaluation, Interpretation with Insight (2017).

²²⁰ Hazel Smith and R. T. Dean, *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp.5-9.

²²¹ Ibid., pp.5-9.

²²² Hope, 'Participating in the 'Wrong' Way?', p.66.

knowing extends beyond what statistical aggregation of visitor feedback can reveal. I remained mindful of the potentially “intrusive presence” of myself, staff, and volunteers within the research environment and critically examined these dynamics.²²³ Acknowledging both my own subjectivity and that of participants foregrounds engagement as relational and co-constructed. This position aligns with Williams’ critique of “engagement” as a term too often treated as a measurable endpoint rather than an evolving process.²²⁴ Mackney and Young similarly argue, in their study of the Barbican’s participatory project *Unleashed* (2019), that while conventional evaluation methods may satisfy the evidentiary demands of funding bodies, creative and embedded methodologies offer a depth of insight that traditional metrics alone cannot provide.²²⁵

Less conventional methods of gathering and interpreting feedback inevitably complicate analysis. For this reason, my research began with clearly articulated evaluative aims, developed collaboratively with the hosting site, while maintaining an iterative framework that allowed both artwork and evaluation to evolve in response to participation. In this way, evaluation became not a retrospective audit of outcomes, but a reflexive and generative component of the artistic process itself.

Evaluation as Encounter: A Trial at Temple Newsam

If evaluation is to move beyond the stabilisation of visitor responses and instead attend to experience as it unfolds, it must be tested within live contexts. Prior to

²²³ Dawn Mannay, *Visual, Narrative and Creative Research Methods : Application, Reflection and Ethics* (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016); Cass, 'Contemporary Art and Heritage'.

²²⁴ Joanne Williams, 'Contemporary Interventions and Heritage: The Theoretical and Methodological Challenges of 'Knowing Engagement'' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 2017) .

²²⁵ Maia Mackney and Toby Young, 'Embracing the Messiness: A Creative Approach to Participatory Arts Evaluation', *Cultural Trends*, 31. 5 (2022), pp.397-415.

applying such an approach to my own participatory artworks, I examined whether embedded evaluation could operate within a more conventional exhibition setting. The Temple Newsam trial therefore functioned as a methodological experiment. Although the artworks on display were not participatory, the evaluation was conducted during the exhibition period and within the heritage space itself. By situating evaluation alongside the encounter rather than after it, this trial enabled me to refine observational, iterative, and site-responsive methods that would later underpin my participatory research.

Evaluation methods for affect and effect of artworks in visitor experience were trialled in 2023 at Temple Newsam House in Leeds, a historic house museum surrounded by a large expanse of open parkland, owned by the City of Leeds Council (FIG. 25). While the evaluations of the artwork gained from this trial would be useful to the Temple Newsam team, the aim of this trial was not to evaluate the artworks themselves, but rather to assess the effectiveness of the evaluation methods.



FIG. 25. Temple Newsam House.

The curatorial team had identified that whilst the outdoor grounds and parkland area are very popular with visitors (approximately 1.8 million per year), fewer than 25,000 of those visitors ever venture inside the house.²²⁶ To attempt to rectify this disparity, Temple Newsam commissioned three artists to create artistic responses to the house and collection:

- People Powered Press: a collaborative printmaking project developed through workshops with local groups, resulting in a large-scale text-based installation displayed in the Temple Newsam courtyard responding to the inscription around the roof of the house.²²⁷
- Paul Ratcliffe: an immersive sound work created using recordings of local birdsong to reflect the historical use of the long gallery for exercise during inclement weather.²²⁸
- Diana Herrera: *Forever Garden*, an installation of paper bird sculptures in the 'Chinese Room' inspired by the Chinese wallpaper.²²⁹
- Additionally, Leeds Stitch and Textile responded to the site with textile artworks which were shown throughout the West Wing

Together, these works represented a range of artistic approaches, from collaboratively developed participatory practice to more traditional site-responsive

²²⁶ Microsoft Teams Meeting, 9/11/2022, Present: Adam Toole (Curator Temple Newsam), Rathi Tamilselvan (Assistant Community Curator, Temple Newsam), Dr Nick Cass (University of Leeds), Cristina Farreras Collell (Universitat de Lleida) and Layla Khoo (University of Leeds).

²²⁷ People Powered Press, 'Work - Temple Newsam' ([n.d.]) <<https://www.thepeoplepoweredpress.org/work/temple-newsam>> [accessed 25/7/2026].

²²⁸ Leeds Beckett University, 'Temple Newsam Grounds' (15/5/2020) <<https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/blogs/leeds-school-of-arts/2020/05/temple-newsam-grounds/>> [accessed 25/7/2026].

²²⁹ Diana Herrera, 'Forever Garden' (2023) <<https://www.dianabeltranherrera.com/work/forever-garden>> [accessed 25/7/2026].

installations. Presenting these works simultaneously created the opportunity to compare visitor responses and evaluation methods, exploring how different forms of contemporary art influenced engagement with heritage narratives. Temple Newsam curatorial staff welcomed the addition of more in-depth evaluation into visitor engagement, and the testing period provided vital information to consider how my own installation should be evaluated in the next stage of this research. I worked alongside Cristina Farreras Collell who was conducting research on atmosphere and affect.²³⁰

During the trial I utilised mixed methods of measurement (triangulation) and tested the procedural approach of alternating methods suggested by Erin Canning in their proposal of how to close the gap in knowledge of understanding of the impact of affective experiences in art museums.²³¹ As recommended by Dawson, I combined qualitative and quantitative methods to obtain visitor feedback.²³² To compare varied forms of audience and institutional feedback, the study trialled multiple methods: questionnaires combining Likert-scale and open-ended questions to generate private responses; participant observation conducted by Cristina Farreras Collell; a public visitor book; a Padlet site serving as an online visitor book accessible via link or QR code; and staff interviews recording observational perspectives.²³³

²³⁰ International Post Graduate Researcher visiting University of Leeds School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies from University of Lleida, research ethics approval reference FAHC 22-064.

²³¹ E. Canning, 'Evaluating and Documenting Affect in the Art Museum', *Proceedings of the 2018 3rd Digital Heritage International Congress, Digital Heritage 2018 - Held jointly with the 2018 24th International Conference on Virtual Systems and Multimedia, VSMM 2018*, (IEEE, 2018).

²³² Dawson, *Introduction to Research Methods*, p.20.

²³³ Appendices 2-5.

There were multiple opportunities to take part in the evaluation process - in the locations where the artworks were, at convenient quieter resting points throughout the house, at the end of the visit and in the café in order to provide ample opportunity for visitors to participate at the most convenient moment in their visit. Different locations for feedback also allowed some comparisons between the kind of comments visitors leave according to what they perceive in each location, as observed in the ecotourism visitor book analysis at Daida Forest Reserve, Greece.²³⁴ Questionnaires were placed in the Long Gallery (site of Paul Ratcliffe's sound installation), and an open, unstructured visitor book with prompts was placed in a seated window area near the exit to the house route. Tent cards with QR codes and invitation to leave feedback were left on the information desk at the entrance and exit to the house, on windowsills within the house near rest areas, in the toilet area and in the café.

Padlet (digital feedback)²³⁵

The Padlet site was created to give an option to leave feedback digitally. This would allow visitors to enter a dialogue with one another but would also allow for the heritage site and research team to moderate and respond to comments directly which has been shown to be a positive factor in online communications²³⁶ Tent cards for the Padlet site were distributed throughout the house - in rooms where the artworks were sited, on windowsills adjacent to sitting areas, on sinks in toilet spaces, at the entrance and exit desk and in the café. The Padlet site itself contained

²³⁴ Anastasia G. Stamou and Stephanos Paraskevopoulos, 'Images of Nature by Tourism and Environmental Discourses in Visitors Books: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Ecotourism', *Discourse & Society*, 15. 1 (2004), pp.105-29.

²³⁵ Appendix 6.

²³⁶ C. Lazzeretti, "'We Hope You Share Your Thoughts with Us:' the Illusion of Engagement in Museum Blogging', *International Journal of the Inclusive Museum*, 14. 1 (2021), pp.11-28.

three posts to instruct visitors how to take part. By the end of the evaluation period, only one visitor had posted on the Padlet site with an image of a photograph of a teapot sited in the café alongside one of the tent cards.²³⁷ In the absence of specific feedback explaining why interaction has not occurred, I would infer that the reasons may be one or more of the following: lack of mobile signal on site, Padlet being an unfamiliar format not clearly linked to or owned by Temple Newsam, visitors not wanting to engage digitally in a site focussed on tangible heritage, mistrust in QR codes or visitors not knowing how to use the Padlet site.²³⁸ This led me to discount the use of digital feedback or evaluation methods at Hardwick Hall. The site has limited mobile coverage, offered a similarly tangible experience of historic materiality, and attracted a visitor demographic that I believed was more likely to recognise and trust established branded communications than engage with an unfamiliar website.

Questionnaire Data²³⁹

Two paper questionnaires were made available to visitors, both situated in the Long Gallery where Paul Ratcliffe's soundscape could be experienced, chosen for its ample space and the opportunity it provided for visitors to sit and reflect after encountering all of the artworks. In total, 110 questionnaires were completed: 51 for questionnaire one and 59 for questionnaire two.

Visitors showed a strong preference for contextual interpretation, with 97% favouring interpretive material in historic houses and 92% requesting framing for

²³⁷Layla Khoo, 'Temple Newsam - Outside in Evaluation' (2023) <<https://padlet.com/khoolayla/temple-newsam-outside-in-evaluation-3jmhxxsu0gniugc7>> [accessed 26/3/2026].

²³⁸ Joanna Morris, 'Qr Code 'Quishing' Scams up 14-Fold in Five Years', *BBC News*, 11/04/2025.

²³⁹ Appendix 7.

the artworks, reinforcing the need for clear labels and reflective prompts. Age-based differences were evident: younger visitors preferred concise, multimodal and interactive interpretation, while older visitors favoured more detailed, slower-paced information and opportunities for facilitated discussion. The artworks enhanced the visit for 60% of respondents, and 55% felt they improved their understanding of the site's history, with younger visitors reporting stronger gains. Diana Herrera's work generated the strongest sense of historical connection, followed by People Powered Press and Paul Ratcliffe. Qualitative comments were predominantly affective and atmospheric, though a significant proportion called for clearer interpretive information and improved display conditions, and a small minority expressed reservations about contemporary interventions within the historic setting 'Interesting work but ultimately overshadowed by the house. Works aren't strong enough or communicate the social history. Need more info for context'.²⁴⁰

While the data offered insight into visitors' awareness, preferences and interpretive needs, the sample size remained small in relation to overall visitor numbers, limiting the strength of any conclusions drawn. Crucially, completion rates were noticeably higher when I was present in the gallery, speaking with visitors and encouraging participation, or recording their verbal responses myself. Although the questionnaires were available for 152 days (26 May–25 October), 23 of the 110 completed responses were gathered across just two days when I was onsite. Even when positioned beside the artworks and within a space designed for pause and reflection, visitors rarely chose to complete the questionnaires independently. This reliance on interpersonal encouragement - particularly when I was perceived within the space as a member of staff - suggests that facilitation,

²⁴⁰ Visitor comment on Temple Newsam questionnaire.

rather than passive provision, was central to eliciting feedback. This insight directly informed my subsequent decisions at Hardwick Hall, where I placed greater emphasis on conversational and staff-mediated forms of evaluation rather than self-completed written feedback. The pattern also introduces an inherent bias, as those willing to engage in facilitated dialogue may not represent the broader visitor demographic.

Visitor Book²⁴¹

Large A3 sketchbooks were placed on the windowsill beside the seating area near the end of the visitor route. Each open page presented one of four questions, and pencils were left nearby, allowing visitors to respond freely in writing or drawing.²⁴²

The four questions generated substantial engagement (175, 123, 99 and 111 responses respectively), with 112 drawings overall and several contributors identifying themselves as children, indicating strong participation from younger visitors. The most frequently mentioned contemporary work was Diana Herrera's paper birds (twenty mentions), though references to historic objects such as the Pyke organ clock and wine cooler appeared more often overall. While the open format successfully encouraged expressive feedback it also produced recurring confusion, especially around the term "new artworks," with many respondents conflating contemporary installations and historic collection items. This highlighted the interpretive risks of broadly framed written questions and directly informed my

²⁴¹ Appendix 8.

²⁴² The four questions asked were: "What is the most interesting thing you discovered here today?", "How do you feel about the new artworks in Temple Newsam?", "What is your favourite new artwork in Temple Newsam (and why!)" and "three words you would use to describe the artworks in Temple Newsam."

approach at Hardwick Hall, where I prioritised clearer framing and facilitated feedback methods in order to reduce misunderstanding in the evaluation process.

Staff interviews

The interviews explored how contemporary art installations at Temple Newsam were received by visitors, and how front-of-house staff acted as informal mediators of that experience. Speaking from their position as members of the house team, four members of staff reflected on the nature and frequency of visitor conversations prompted by the artworks and on the practicalities of feeding insights back to the institution.²⁴³

Overall, the interviews confirmed what I have suspected from my work with other sites – the room guides, volunteers and staff gather rich and complex feedback every day from visitors without even trying. They are naturally placed to have conversations and hear what visitors think of their visit simply by being present and available to offer information. The interviews highlight the short-lived nature of these insights though: without a mechanism to capture them, much of this evaluative knowledge remains ephemeral and anecdotal, reliant on individual memory and informal passing of information. In her interview Hannah noted that the bird-based soundscape prompted frequent discussion, encouraging interpretive connections with the gallery’s historic purpose, yet visitors rarely completed written feedback forms, preferring spontaneous conversation.²⁴⁴ Harry and Molly reflected on the large-scale, text-based People Powered Press printmaking installation in the courtyard. Developed through workshops with local community groups, the work

²⁴³ Interviews with “Ron”, “Hannah”, “Harry” and “Molly” on 25 October 2023 at Temple Newsam, Leeds. Full transcripts in Appendix 2-5.

²⁴⁴ Interviews “Hannah” on 25 October 2023 at Temple Newsam, Leeds. Full transcript in Appendix 3.

provoked curiosity and debate, sometimes even controversy, yet consistently generated meaningful dialogue about the house, its history, and the interpretation of contemporary artworks.²⁴⁵ Across all interviews, staff emphasised that visitors were often more candid in conversation than on paper, but the lack of a simple recording system meant valuable insights were largely lost. In conversation, Ron described anecdotally how visitors frequently engage him in discussion about the installations.²⁴⁶ When asked to recall a single memorable interaction he found this difficult, explaining that the volume of conversations made individual moments hard to distinguish. This in itself is revealing, as it points to the constancy of visitor engagement throughout the day rather than a lack of meaningful exchange. It also raises a methodological consideration: had Ron known in advance that he would be asked to reflect on specific interactions, he may have been more attuned to moments he perceived as particularly significant, holding them in mind until the end of the day.

These reflections suggest that structured yet flexible methods for capturing everyday visitor–staff interactions could provide a more accurate picture of visitor responses without overburdening staff, whose concerns about additional workload are understandable. While each room guide inevitably selects and reports feedback with some bias, aggregating observations across a diverse group of staff and volunteers allows individual perspectives to balance one another, turning anecdotal insights into a more reliable form of evaluation.²⁴⁷ At the same time, the interviews

²⁴⁵ Interviews with “Harry” and “Molly” on 25 October 2023 at Temple Newsam, Leeds. Full transcripts in Appendix 4-5.

²⁴⁶ Interview with “Ron” on 25 October 2023 at Temple Newsam, Leeds. Full transcripts in Appendix 2.

²⁴⁷ James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds : Why the Many Are Smarter Than the Few* (Abacus, 2005), pp.3-22.

demonstrate that contemporary installations act as catalysts for engagement and dialogue, revealing both the limits of relying solely on written feedback and the value of staff-mediated observation. This understanding directly informed my approach at Hardwick Hall, where I prioritised feedback methods that combined clear framing with opportunities for facilitated conversation, ensuring accessibility, reducing potential for misunderstanding, and capturing insights that might otherwise remain transient and anecdotal.

Shaping Methods in Practice at Hardwick Hall

Hardwick Hall is an Elizabethan country house in Derbyshire (FIG. 26), operated by the National Trust and created in the late sixteenth century through the architectural vision, management, and patronage of Elizabeth, Countess of Shrewsbury, better known as "Bess of Hardwick".²⁴⁸



FIG. 26. Hardwick Hall.

Bess of Hardwick was born around 1527 on the Hardwick estate, on the site where Hardwick Old Hall is now situated.²⁴⁹ The Hardwick Estate passed from Bess's

²⁴⁸ National Trust, 'The History of Hardwick Hall' <<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/peak-district-derbyshire/hardwick/history-of-hardwick-hall>> [accessed 26/2/2026].

²⁴⁹ Hardwick Old Hall and Hardwick Hall are situated next to each other, Harwick Hall operated by the National Trust and Hardwick Old Hall (largely a ruin following a fire in 1793) is operated by English Heritage. English Heritage, 'History of Hardwick Old Hall' <<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/hardwick-old-hall/history/>> [accessed 27/2/2026].

father John, to her infant brother James upon his death, however the estate was placed in a wardship.²⁵⁰ Bess's mother (also Elizabeth) remarried and raised all of the children on the Hardwick Estate.²⁵¹ When James came of age and inherited the estate, he did not manage the finances well and had to borrow money from his now wealthy sister Bess, who secured the loans against the estate.²⁵² James Hardwick died bankrupt and in prison, Bess bought the Hardwick estate back from the Crown after two years of it being held in chancery.²⁵³ Bess built what is now known as Hardwick Old Hall and lived in it from 1592 until the completion of the building which became Hardwick Hall, by approximately 1597.²⁵⁴ Bess was involved in every aspect of Hardwick Hall's design (drawn up by Robert Smythson) and construction, drawing on practical lessons learned at Chatsworth.²⁵⁵ She was also drawing on the painful experience of losing control of property through inheritance and marriage. In the sixteenth century, under the common law doctrine of coverture, a woman's property passed into the control of her husband upon marriage.²⁵⁶ Although Bess held Chatsworth for the duration of her lifetime, it ultimately belonged to Henry Cavendish, the eldest son of William Cavendish.²⁵⁷ By later in life he was possibly her least favoured child, and not one she would likely have chosen as her heir had she possessed the legal authority to decide otherwise.²⁵⁸ Hardwick Hall was constructed to the highest standards, with no expense spared, as by now (after the Queen), Bess was the wealthiest (and most

²⁵⁰ Lovell, *Bess of Hardwick*, p.7.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.10.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p.231.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp.295-304.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.389, 407.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.364, 388, 389-415.

²⁵⁶ Amy Louise Erickson, 'Coverture and Capitalism', *History Workshop Journal*, 59. 1 (2005), pp.1-16.

²⁵⁷ Lovell, *Bess of Hardwick*, p.109.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.372, 423, 454.

powerful) woman in the country.²⁵⁹ Yet throughout both its building and the subsequent management of the household, Bess remained characteristically shrewd, personally checking - and sometimes completing - and signing off the accounts.²⁶⁰ The house was built relatively quickly, with foundations laid in 1590, likely aided by her ownership of foundries, quarries, and glassworks.²⁶¹ The hall and its contents during Bess's lifetime are comprehensively recorded in the 1601 inventory, compiled as an addendum to her will.²⁶² Following her death in 1608, Hardwick passed through successive generations of the Devonshire family until 1956, when the 11th Duke of Devonshire transferred Hardwick Hall and its surrounding agricultural land to the Treasury in lieu of death duties.²⁶³ The formal transfer was completed in 1958, and the house opened to the public under National Trust care in 1959.²⁶⁴

Hardwick Hall is now a National Trust historic house museum, identified by the organisation as one of twenty-eight "Treasure Houses" within their portfolio when this project began.²⁶⁵ The National Trust have an established history of utilising contemporary art in interpreting their heritage narratives, but there is no research into whether participatory contemporary art impacts engagement with heritage narratives.²⁶⁶ During 2024, The National Trust were in the process of redefining how to present their "Treasure House" narrative and evaluating what

²⁵⁹ Ibid., pp.389-415.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., pp.389-415.

²⁶¹ Ibid., pp.373, 397.

²⁶² National Trust. *The History of Hardwick Hall*.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Treasure Houses was the term used internally by the National Trust at the beginning of this project. By the time of writing, this term was no longer in use.

²⁶⁶ Rebecca Farley and Venda Louise Pollock, 'Contemporary Art in Heritage Practice: Mapping Its Intentions, Claims, and Complexities', *Heritage & Society*, (2022), pp.1-18.

their audiences wanted from these properties, and so welcomed this timely research.²⁶⁷

The General Manager, “Helen”, felt that the project aligned closely with existing ambitions at Hardwick to expand participatory practices and introduce contemporary interpretations into the presentation of the site’s history.²⁶⁸ She felt that while Hardwick was successful as a visitor attraction, this success often served a narrow and established audience - hyperlocal communities, particularly those from certain socio-economic backgrounds, remain underrepresented and may find the site intimidating or inaccessible.²⁶⁹ To address this, Hardwick has sought to engage audiences in new ways by telling stories differently and making stronger connections between the site’s history - especially the story of Bess - and contemporary lived experience.²⁷⁰ The research project is seen as one of several strategies aimed at actively demonstrating the relevance of Hardwick to a broader and more diverse audience.²⁷¹ The project was brought to the General Manager by the Experiences and Partnerships Curator, “Maggie”, whose role is within the National Trust’s internal consultancy, working across a portfolio of properties including Hardwick.²⁷² Her work focuses on projects involving external creative or community partnerships, where the outcome is an internal or visitor-facing experience. Acting as an intermediary, she supports property teams by brokering

²⁶⁷ Webex meeting 31/8/2002 Dawn Hoskin (Cultural Heritage Curator, National Trust), Brona Doyle (National Trust Visitor Operations and Experience Manager), Polly Schomberg (Experiences and Partnerships Curator, National Trust), Liz Waring (Property Curator, National Trust) and Layla Khoo (University of Leeds).

²⁶⁸ Interview with “Helen” on 20 December 2024 via Microsoft Teams. Full transcript available in Appendix 9.

²⁶⁹ Interview 20/12/2024.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Webex meeting with Hardwick Hall team, 22/11/2022.

²⁷² Interview with “Maggie” on 23/12/2024 via Microsoft Teams. Full transcript available in Appendix 10.

relationships with external partners, assisting with project development, briefing, and contracting, and helping to manage ongoing partnerships.²⁷³ Maggie became aware of my work through the *Changes in Attitudes* project at Nunnington, which she regarded as one of the most impactful artist-led projects she had encountered during her time at the National Trust, and was particularly drawn to the project's ability to create meaningful intellectual and emotional connections between historic collections, using the past to stimulate reflection on present-day values and behaviour.²⁷⁴ This approach aligned closely with Maggie's interest in heritage work that moves beyond heritage sites as leisure destinations to spaces that foster critical reflection and dialogue.²⁷⁵ When I expressed an interest in bringing this research and artwork to Hardwick, Maggie saw a strong fit with Hardwick's collections and narrative potential.²⁷⁶ The project was developed on the basis of trust in my practice rather than a predetermined outcome, with Maggie working as an intermediary supporting collaboration between me and the property team to provide the opportunity to align the work with existing interpretive priorities, particularly around tapestries and material culture.²⁷⁷ This collaborative and open approach allowed the project to be designed to benefit both the property's visitor experience and my practice-led research, with the hope of generating research insights with wider relevance across National Trust properties.

My initial plan had been to create two artworks in response to the site, collection, and stories at Hardwick Hall – one artwork would be participatory, and one artwork would not. I intended to find ways to measure the difference between

²⁷³ Interview 23/12/2024.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

the visitor experience of these two pieces to begin to determine whether the act of participation with one artwork created a deeper visitor engagement than the visitor experience with the non-participatory artwork. Having considered the in-depth review of my own work at Nunnington Hall and both participation and evaluation in the previous case studies, I then felt it would be more valuable to create both artworks with participation in mind. My final choice was to focus the research on one participatory artwork at Hardwick Hall, participated with over a longer period of time and incorporating and offering a variety of ways to participate. The National Trust team were happy with this focussed approach as this would be easier for staffing, marketing and would keep a clearer narrative with the house programme.

The focus of the practice element of this research was to understand specifically the impact of the participatory element of the artwork on visitor experience. The ambiguity of what is meant by the term 'participation' in the arts has been discussed without clear resolution, so I shall clarify what I mean by visitor participation with my artwork.²⁷⁸ I am framing visitors' participation with my interpretive artworks by positioning the audience as the 'researchers', as identified by Heron and Reason in their values of participatory research.²⁷⁹ With this theory in mind, I wanted to test whether the visitors (researchers) could achieve experimental knowing through transactional experience, by adding a physical transactional experience in the participation with the artwork. This also utilises John Dewey's theories of combining physical interaction with learning within the museum

²⁷⁸ Jancovich and Stevenson, *Failures in Cultural Participation*, pp.2, 59-60, 83-90, 108-112.

²⁷⁹ John Heron and Peter Reason, 'A Participatory Inquiry Paradigm', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3. 3 (1997), pp.274-94 (p.278).

environment to increase the intensity of the visitor experience both at the time and in how it is recalled by the visitor after the visit.²⁸⁰

Evaluation methods of visitor experience with the artworks required an extensive workshop period at Hardwick Hall with staff and volunteers to ensure that the language and questions were clearly understandable by room guides who were being asked to observe visitors, and that their responses could be understood by evaluators. The importance of ensuring clear understanding of the words being used was shown through a case study of the evaluation of Colonial Williamsburg where visitor language was clarified – asking them specifically what they actually meant by words such as ‘relevancy’ and ‘enjoyment’ allowed for iterative evaluation with much clearer understanding of what visitors were trying to say.²⁸¹ In the case of Hardwick Hall, it was imperative to make sure that ‘engagement’, ‘participation’, ‘heritage narratives’ and any emotional descriptors were explained clearly, but that staff would also be free to describe events in their own words. During the initial project planning stages there was opportunity to adapt elements of the evaluation and the artwork by observing how visitors interacted with the existing displays and the space, beginning the iterative nature of this research.²⁸²

I aimed to incorporate evaluative methods directly into the artwork, considering McNiff’s provocation that the art itself can be the research method.²⁸³ In his foreword to McNiff’s book, Ross W. Prior outlines the advantage to utilising

²⁸⁰ George E. Hein, *Learning in the Museum* (Routledge, 1998).

²⁸¹ Conny Graft, 'Listen, Evaluate, Respond! The Colonial Williamsburg Visitor Research Story', *History News*, 62. 2 (2007), pp.12-16.

²⁸² Patricia A. McNamara, 'Visitor Participation in Formative Exhibit Evaluation', *The Journal of Museum Education*, 12. 1 (1987), pp.9-11.

²⁸³ McNiff, *Art as Research*.

the connection between art and artist in Art Based Research (ABR) to deepen understanding:

ABR explores the artistic process and brings forth new differentiations on the levels of intuition, perception, emotion, embodied and craft-based knowledge and intellect. ABR highlights sensory and emotional elements that are crucial to aesthetic working, understanding and being. ABR addresses two key dimensions: the demand for clarity, form and method; and the importance of the source of the creative process that can and should lead to unexpected results in one's own research.²⁸⁴

Stephen K Levine confirms the benefit of undertaking iterative research in this way - that by having no predetermined research path to go down can lead artist researchers to places we had not expected, further affirming what I experienced with the unexpected outcomes of *Change in Attitudes*.²⁸⁵ A further example of embedded evaluation in participation was shown in “Artcasting”, a research project asking how galleries can inventively evaluate visitor interaction with art, held in the Bowes Museum, Durham, and Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh in 2015-16.²⁸⁶ The participatory actions were taken by visitors by digitally ‘casting’ artworks to any place or time in the online map of the world. Where, when, and why participants chose to digitally ‘cast’ their artwork became an evaluative indicator of how they participated in the programme.

In the work at Hardwick, I planned to analyse the ways in which people participated as a method of evaluation – recording and evaluating the choices they made as a result of participating with the artwork through ongoing embedded observations. From the outset it was agreed with the staff team that the work would

²⁸⁴ Ibid., p.x.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., p.131.

²⁸⁶ J. Ross and others, 'Mobilising Connections with Art: Artcasting and the Digital Articulation of Visitor Engagement with Cultural Heritage', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 25. 4 (2019), pp.395-414.

grow organically, both from my own practice of researching the site to find inspiration, and in terms of evaluating as the project grew and being able to respond to those evaluations as they were happening rather than just reflexively. This organic, embedded and iterative way of creating the project in and with the site and staff was positively commented on by the Experiences and Partnerships Curator, who felt some other narrowly defined and tightly specified commissions within the National Trust had felt “dropped in”, lacking authenticity and a relationship with the site. She felt that my practice of growing the project collaboratively over time would result in a work that felt rooted in the site.²⁸⁷

The National Trust were keen to develop the most appropriate way to share research findings as they developed and also to look to share audience evaluation conclusions into wider fields currently underutilised in the arts and heritage sector.²⁸⁸ Suggestions were made by National Trust staff throughout the research that a useful outcome from this learning would be a framework for sites to work within when commissioning participatory artworks.

Conclusion

This critique of conventional evaluation tools highlights both their utility and their limitations, particularly in capturing the layered and subjective dimensions of visitor experience within visual arts contexts and the wide audiences in heritage sites. It underscores the need for approaches that move beyond quantification to instead privilege nuanced, context-sensitive, and reflective forms of inquiry. This perspective aligns with Schrag’s argument that socially-engaged art practices must

²⁸⁷ Interview 23/12/2024.

²⁸⁸ Marianna Adams, 'Museum Evaluation: Where Have We Been? What Has Changed? And Where Do We Need to Go Next?', *The Journal of Museum Education*, 37. 2 (2012), pp.25-35.

be understood ethically and contextually, where power relations, institutional structures, and participatory processes cannot be reduced to quantifiable outcomes but require critically situated inquiry and reflection.²⁸⁹ In response, the methodology adopted in this study integrates practice-based research with qualitative engagement and evaluation strategies, enabling a more holistic exploration of visitor interaction and meaning-making. By combining observational, participatory, and creative feedback methods, the research foregrounds the lived, performative, and interpretive dimensions of engagement that standard evaluation instruments often overlook.

Across my previous projects, a consistent pattern emerged: participatory engagement within heritage settings is shaped by the interplay between institutional frameworks, participant agency, and the unpredictability of social interaction.²⁹⁰ Visitors frequently respond in ways that exceed, resist, or reinterpret the parameters established by the artist or institution, producing what I describe as unplanned participation. These dynamics foreground both the ethical and practical challenges of facilitation, particularly when participation is fleeting, visitor-led, and conditioned by the expectations embedded within the heritage context. These examples illustrate a key tension for contemporary art in heritage sites: participatory and socially engaged works are inherently experimental, but institutions operate under constraints that limit the freedom of both artist and audience. There is a risk that context is lost, audience expectations are mismanaged, or public reactions are intensified by mediation, resulting in censorship or conflict. For practitioners, this underscores the importance of

²⁸⁹ Schrag, *Socially Engaged Art and Ethics*.

²⁹⁰ Khoo, *Change in Attitudes*; Khoo, *#Payartists*; Khoo, *Chronicle of Curiosities*; Khoo, *Contemplating Hope*; Khoo, *On Belonging - Duality*; Khoo, *The Exchange*.

designing interventions that anticipate the fragility of context, the variability of interpretation, and the institutional frameworks that will ultimately govern what is displayed and how it is received.

Drawing on my own experience, the literature examined in this and the preceding chapter, and collaboration with staff at Hardwick Hall, a clear methodological foundation emerged for *A Virtuous Woman*. I developed a single participatory artwork designed to evolve iteratively in response to visitor feedback and to observations made by both myself and facilitating staff. This iterative approach enabled the artwork and its evaluative framework to adapt responsively to visitor feedback and institutional conditions, functioning both as a corrective to extractive evaluation practices and as a means of navigating the constraints of heritage sites. Observations informed ongoing adaptations to modes of participation and the methods used to record and evaluate engagement as it unfolded. Throughout the process, I maintained close communication with the Hardwick Hall management team as decisions were made regarding the artwork, participatory structures, and the practical requirements placed upon staff. This approach positioned participation not as a fixed framework but as a responsive, negotiated process embedded within the lived realities of the site.

Chapter Four: A Virtuous Woman

This chapter offers a first-person account of the practice-based element of this research, positioning me as an embedded artist-researcher and evaluator within Hardwick Hall. Building directly on the methodological framework outlined in the previous chapter, it shifts from planning and reflection to the reality of making *A Virtuous Woman*, presenting a detailed narrative of the project as it unfolded. The story begins with the inspirations behind the artwork, drawing on the aesthetics and history of the house's embroideries. These historic pieces were not only visually compelling but also offered natural points of connection to spark visitor engagement - a critical consideration in my practice as an artist working within heritage sites. A brief history of the embroideries situates them within the house and demonstrates why they became a starting point for creative interpretation. From there, the chapter follows the design process, the practicalities of installing and running a participatory project in a historic space, and the ways visitors were invited to interact with the work. It traces how the artwork evolved in response to participant input and observation, and how evaluation became embedded in the creative process itself. In doing so, the chapter provides a comprehensive timeline of the project, illustrating how theory, practice, and reflective evaluation intertwined to shape both the artwork and the participatory experience.

Threads and ideas

The first stage of my practice when working on any project is to research the site and its collection. During this process, I look for stories or objects that speak strongly to me of the historical narrative, particularly those that I feel can be meaningfully connected to the way we live today. From this starting point, I

explore how to respond artistically, developing approaches that invite others to participate in the work. I am especially interested in creating forms of engagement that allow people to encounter both the artwork and the historical narrative through the lens of contemporary societal issues. While this approach might appear to run counter to Lowenthal's caution against judging the past by modern standards, I do not seek to impose present values onto historical contexts.²⁹¹ Rather, I aim to invite a reciprocal exchange: a two-way lens through which audiences can consider historical issues from a contemporary standpoint while also reflecting on present-day concerns within a longer historical frame. By participating in this manner, audiences are encouraged to form a personal relationship to the project and to the histories it addresses, with the final form of the artwork shaped by the nature of their contributions. Through my own experience of facilitating and observing participants engaging in this way, I have come to believe that such encounters foster deeper reflection and connection.²⁹²

In the case of Hardwick Hall, I was originally asked to consider the Gideon Tapestries as objects to respond to as the property programme was due to focus on these textiles heavily as a celebration of the end of an extensive, expensive and award-winning piece of conservation work.²⁹³ Bess of Hardwick acquired the thirteen-panel Gideon tapestry set in the late sixteenth century from the estate of Sir Christopher Hatton for the substantial sum of £326 15s 9d, deducting £5 to replace Hatton's coat of arms with her own.²⁹⁴ Woven in 1578, the tapestries are a rare and

²⁹¹ Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, pp.498-584.

²⁹² Khoo, *Change in Attitudes*; Khoo, *Chronicle of Curiosities*; Khoo, *Contemplating Hope*; Khoo, *The Exchange*.

²⁹³ National Trust, 'Gideon Tapestry Project at Hardwick Hall' (2023) <<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/peak-district-derbyshire/hardwick/gideon-tapestry-project-at-hardwick-hall>> [accessed 30/12/2025].

²⁹⁴ National Trust, 'The Collection at Hardwick' <<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/peak-district-derbyshire/hardwick/hardwicks-collection>> [accessed 20/1/2026].

internationally significant example of Flemish production and Elizabethan taste and today constitute the largest surviving tapestry set in Britain.²⁹⁵ Each panel stands nearly twenty feet high, with the complete series extending over 230 feet, making it ideally suited to fill Hardwick's 160-foot-long Long Gallery.²⁹⁶ I researched the tapestries and their background and, while I could see that they were historically interesting, important, and impressive, I struggled to find a connection that spoke clearly to me about Bess of Hardwick - who she was and how I, and participants, might relate to her today. Focussing the artwork on a collection area specifically relating to Bess's narrative and values was a priority for me in this work. It resonated with Hardwick Hall's stated intention to re-centre the narrative of the house around Bess herself, restoring visibility to the woman whose vision, wealth, and authority shaped its creation.²⁹⁷ More broadly, it reflects a persistent imbalance within the heritage sector, where women's histories have often been marginalised, softened, or subsumed within dynastic and architectural narratives dominated by male lineage and ownership.²⁹⁸ Reasserting Bess's presence, therefore, is not only interpretive but political: an attempt to foreground female agency within a field that has historically struggled to do so.

Viewing the wider collection through this lens, I was immediately struck by the Ancient Noblewomen Embroideries, whose intricate narratives and craftsmanship offered a rich point of entry for exploring women's histories with

²⁹⁵ Santina M. Levey, *An Elizabethan Inheritance : The Hardwick Hall Textiles* (National Trust, 1998) p.22.

²⁹⁶ National Trust, 'Great Tapestry in Our Collections' <<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/discover/history/art-collections/great-tapestries-to-see-up-close>> [accessed 28/1/2026].

²⁹⁷ Interview 20/12/2024.

²⁹⁸ Jenna C Ashton, *The Routledge Handbook of Heritage and Gender* (Taylor & Francis, 2025), pp.1-11; Laurajane Smith, 'Heritage, Gender and Identity', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, ed. by Peter Howard and Brian Graham (Routledge, 2008), pp. 159-78 .

specific reference to Bess of Hardwick's values and inspiring my own creative response.



FIG. 27. Lucrecia Ancient Noblewomen Embroidery, Hardwick Hall.

These five wall hangings were created at and for Chatsworth, to Bess of Hardwick's own design, dated approximately 1573.²⁹⁹ While it is unclear whether Bess herself embroidered any of the elements to these hangings (she was an accomplished needlewoman), the pieces were made by her own staff under her instruction.³⁰⁰ Although the embroideries were executed by Bess of Hardwick's household, Dyer's work on eighteenth-century women challenges the binary distinction between women as either 'creators' or 'consumers', arguing that creative authorship extends beyond the physical act of making.³⁰¹ While her discussion relates to a later period,

²⁹⁹ Susan Frye, *Pens and Needles : Women's Textualities in Early Modern England* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p.61.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., pp.60-61.

³⁰¹ Serena Dyer, 'Stitching and Shopping: The Material Literacy of the Consumer', in *Material Literacy in 18th-Century Britain: A Nation of Makers*, ed. by Serena Dyer and Chloe Wigston Smith (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), pp. 99-116.

it is equally useful here because it challenges historiographical assumptions that privilege physical making over other forms of authorship, obscuring women's creative agency.³⁰² Bess of Hardwick shaped the conception, design, symbolism, and intended display of the embroideries, blurring the distinction between creator and consumer through a more distributed form of authorship in which meaning and creative output emerged from the merging of the roles of patron, designer, and maker.

The wall hangings form a series, all following the same design featuring an architectural framework, coats of arms signifying the marriages of her children, her initials intertwined with her final husband's initials (George Talbot, the Earl of Shrewsbury), and three archways each containing the figure of a woman.³⁰³ Each hanging features a noblewoman from the ancient world in the central archway; with the two female virtues she represents depicted in the surrounding archways on either side.³⁰⁴ The architectural features detailed here are more than mere framing devices - they reflect Bess's deep knowledge of and engagement with architecture, demonstrated through her creation of three of Derbyshire's great houses: Chatsworth, Hardwick Old Hall, and Hardwick Hall. The embroidered balustrades on the hangings are later echoed in three-dimensional form in the wooden balustrades of the passage at the rear of Hardwick's Entrance Hall.³⁰⁵

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Santina M. Levey, *The Embroideries at Hardwick Hall : A Catalogue* (National Trust, 2007), p.58.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., p.58.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., p.59.



FIG. 28. Penelope Ancient Noblewomen Embroidery, Hardwick Hall.

The textiles are monumental in scale – all approximately three metres tall and three and a half metres wide. The five hangings depicted Lucretia with Chastity and Liberality (FIG. 27), Penelope with Patience and Perseverance (FIG. 28), Cleopatra with Fortitude and Justice, Zenobia with Magnanimity and Prudence, Artemisia with Constancy and Pietas – through these choices we can see Bess's belief in devotion, marital and family duty, but also an admiration and aspiration to leadership and power.³⁰⁶ The hangings are rich with symbolism, a hallmark of Elizabethan textiles, including those created by Mary Stuart, (also known as Mary Queen of Scots), during her imprisonment under the guardianship of Bess and her husband. In the hours they spent sewing together, Mary wove quiet messages into her textiles - subtle references to her captivity and covert appeals for help.³⁰⁷ The

³⁰⁶ Levey, *An Elizabethan Inheritance*, p.69.

³⁰⁷ Frye, *Pens and Needles*, pp.51-57.

reduction of decorative women's work to a "soft skill" reflects a longstanding historiographical devaluation of feminized labour; in practice, it allowed meaning to pass between maker and observer in a way that was invisible to outsiders, constituting a silent language of resistance and ingenuity.³⁰⁸ As Parker demonstrates in *The Subversive Stitch*, needlework has historically been more than a decorative domestic practice. Its assumed mundanity made it a site where women could inscribe personal meanings and negotiate social constraints in ways that remained largely invisible to dominant cultural narratives. Because embroidery was culturally coded as women's work, women were able to embed subtle symbolic expression within stitched objects - resisting, reframing, or critiquing prescribed roles through the act of making itself.³⁰⁹ In the Noblewomen embroideries, symbols include a swan which mates for life, a snake signifying wisdom, a unicorn to signify virginity, a pelican feeding its young from the blood of its own breast to signify filial piety and a mourning cap reminiscent of one worn in a portrait of Mary Stuart.³¹⁰ The unusual nature of the hangings also lies in their materials, which mark both the period of their creation and Bess's personal history, incorporating reused Catholic vestments.³¹¹ While these vestments are widely reported to have come into her possession via her second husband William Cavendish through his part in the Reformation of the church, they were actually purchased for her by her third husband, Sir William St Loe.³¹² The hangings were originally made for Chatworth but when Bess moved to her new Hardwick Hall she took them with her. Despite argument from her current husband (Earl of Shrewsbury, George Talbot) that he

³⁰⁸ Ibid., pp.51-57.

³⁰⁹ Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch : Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* Revised edn. (Women's Press, 1996)

³¹⁰ Levey, *The Embroideries at Hardwick Hall*, pp.65, 71, 75, 77.

³¹¹ Ibid., p.19.

³¹² Ibid., p.19.

had in fact paid for the valuable textiles, Bess made clear that he had not and were therefore hers to take – and they are later listed in 1601 inventory as hanging in the Withdrawing Chamber.³¹³

Having spent an extensive period of time researching Bess of Hardwick's life through biographies, speaking with curatorial staff, examining objects and reading letters and accounts books in the Chatsworth archive, I felt that these hangings were the objects which spoke to me most clearly about who Bess of Hardwick was. The embroideries were hung in a high-status room so we can deduce she wanted them to be seen.³¹⁴ Through the choices she made in these works, she revealed her wealth, creative skill, education, interest in architecture, and value system; articulating these qualities through a creative form she was deeply passionate about and, remarkably for her time, through the images and narratives of women.³¹⁵ To me this seemed to function as a form of sixteenth-century virtue signalling and was an idea I felt I could easily build on in questions and prompts for participation which could be given to a contemporary audience.

The hangings also present an opportunity through absence - although the series originally comprised five pieces, only four now remain in the collection. The hanging featuring Cleopatra, Fortitudo and Justicia only survives in very few small fragments. The whole tapestry has not survived the centuries, potentially due to its early placement in the State Withdrawing Chamber exposed to direct sunlight and hung round a bend.³¹⁶ I felt this provided an ideal opportunity to engage with these pieces – to create a re-imagining of the missing fifth embroidery. From this point

³¹³ Frye, *Pens and Needles*, p.53.

³¹⁴ Levey, *An Elizabethan Inheritance*, p.35.

³¹⁵ Levey, *The Embroideries at Hardwick Hall*, p.58.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

the project was designed to allow for changes throughout the process, to allow me to develop the ways in which people could participate iteratively, evaluation embedded in the artistic, participative and research process. The Noblewomen Embroideries are not currently hung together, as originally intended. Two (Penelope and Lucretia) are hung together in a dedicated room on the ground floor, part of a series of rooms adjacent to the 'exhibition space' which provides a narrative introduction to the hall and who Bess of Hardwick was. The other two (Zenobia and Artemesia) are hung on the first floor adjacent to the staircase and the chapel, towards the end of the visitor route through the house. There is little information for visitors to connect these two hangings to the earlier two, and they do not appear to form part of the key narrative to the house.³¹⁷

My design for the new hanging was based on the original embroideries, attempting to remain aesthetically and thematically similar in order to encourage visitors to make the direct connection with pieces in the collection. As a "reimagining" of the fifth piece, this would be to the same size and scale of the originals and follow the same design principle of three archways, architectural details, heraldry, a central female figure of a "virtuous woman" and two side arches depicting virtues. This new textile hanging would form the central participatory element of the project. I envisaged a two-stage process. First, I would create a backing canvas from which we could work, establishing a structural foundation. Visitors would then be invited to co-create the textile by cutting and stitching the background according to a template derived from the original embroideries. While the template provided a compositional framework, the manner in which visitors

³¹⁷ Observation of interpretation material adjacent to the embroideries at the time of this project, 2024.

chose to engage would shape how this co-creation unfolded in practice. The second stage would shift towards a more expressive and decision-making form of participation. Visitors would be invited to contribute to choices about the woman or women to be depicted in the textile, and to consider which virtues she might embody. In this way, the project would remain in dialogue with the thematic concerns of Bess's original embroideries, signalling values and virtues through the narrative representation of women, while allowing contemporary participants to reinterpret and rearticulate those qualities for the present.

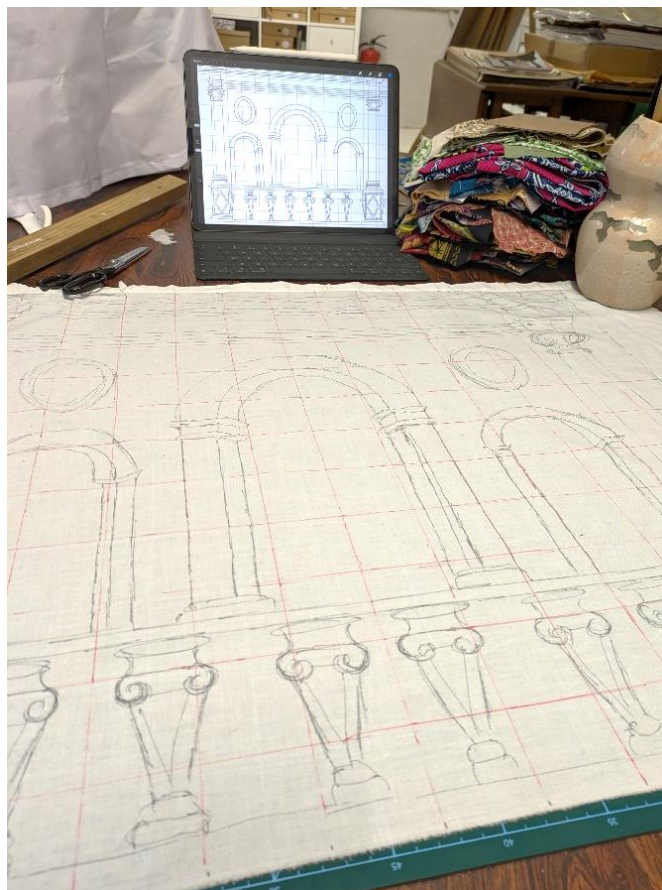


FIG. 29. Scale Drawing for embroidery.

I created a scale image (FIG. 29) of these key aesthetic features which in the first instance was used to create a small (1:10 scale) maquette, a key stage in any project to work through potential issues with the making stages on both a practical

and aesthetic basis before committing to a larger scale piece. The completed maquette provided several important insights. Aesthetically this highlighted areas to be aware of in the choice of fabric for the background blockwork - it would not be sufficient to focus on colour alone; the fabrics must also be tonally consistent. A mixture of lighter and darker blocks creates a visually jarring effect and prevents key architectural elements, such as the arches, from coming forward as intended. Where possible, the same fabric should be used for both columns in order to maintain a sense of symmetry. In more practical making terms, the maquette also showed that the order of assembly would be crucial. The blockwork should be constructed first, with all detailed, edged elements stitched on top. This approach would allow the blockwork to function clearly as a background layer and result in cleaner lines, while also being far more practical than cutting blocks to fit around individual shapes (which would be important if visitors are participating in this task). From this I learnt that the making sequence would be to draw a design on backing fabric, then blockwork, followed by the pillars, balustrade, arches, and coats of arms, with the content of the archways added last. Background areas behind the balustrades should remain relatively plain, and the archways should appear visually solid, ideally made from a single fabric with only subtle or small-scale printed detail. The most accurate method of application was to use bondaweb, followed by overstitching.³¹⁸ Although the use of bondaweb increased costs, it allowed for precise placement prior to stitching and prevents fraying, removing the need for seam allowances. Machine overstitching created clear outlines around individual components, giving the work a drawn or illustrated quality, though this required a substantial amount of thread. Care also needed to be taken with the

³¹⁸ Bondaweb is an iron-on fusible interface which can stick two pieces of fabric together.

thickness of appliqué materials, as the backing fabric was already necessarily heavy, and panel joins added further bulk. These initial design decisions were made by me as the artist, drawing on my experience and professional judgement before participation began. Establishing this framework was essential: without it, the project risked becoming an open-ended workshop rather than a coherent artwork. As Nina Simon argues, participatory experiences require a degree of structure or "scaffolding" to enable meaningful engagement; participation does not necessarily flourish through unlimited choice, but through carefully considered frameworks that support contribution.³¹⁹ While I retained responsibility for the aesthetic integrity and conceptual direction of the piece, my role was to construct a structure within which participation could operate meaningfully and within the institutional confines of the site, positioning this between Schrag's definitions of Relational Aesthetic and Sited Public Art.³²⁰ Participation was therefore invited and shaped, rather than unbounded, allowing contributors agency within a clearly defined artistic framework - an approach that aligns with discussions of authorship and facilitation in socially engaged art practice.³²¹

I now planned to create a participatory artwork in two stages – the initial stage would focus on co-creation. For the first few months of the work I would create this embroidery on site with visitors to the house. This would involve using the backing fabric as a huge stencil to work towards, which is not dissimilar to the methods employed in the making of the original textiles: drawn frameworks and cartoons of the key images followed by individual piecework added to the main

³¹⁹ Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, pp.22-25.

³²⁰ Schrag, *The Failure of Participation*.

³²¹ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*.

backing.³²² Once this main textile was complete, I would then develop a more expressive or choice-making form of participation so that I could evaluate the difference in impact of these differing forms of participating. This second form of participation was not defined from the beginning of the project so that I would be able to develop this iteratively on an ongoing basis, informed by how visitors were responding to the themes of the work. All of the fabric used for the piece would be donated, upcycled fabrics in homage to the original embroideries' reuse of clothing and existing fabrics.³²³ This approach would highlight what is often lost when historic textiles are viewed today - their original vibrancy of colour, print, and pattern - while also creating an early opportunity for participation. By inviting volunteers and staff from Hardwick Hall to donate unwanted clothing and fabric, the literal fabric of the work would come to reflect the site's current custodians. With a rough design for what the piece would look like and themes in place for participation, I was now able to begin workshops with staff and volunteers.

Staff and Volunteers

Learning from my experience at Nunnington Hall, throughout the research, National Trust staff and volunteers at every level of seniority were involved in every stage of the process.³²⁴ The project was initiated by conversations between me and the Experiences and Partnership Curator in 2020, and was finalised through a series of meetings with both site and district based staff, including two General

³²² Levey, *The Embroideries at Hardwick Hall*, p.59.

³²³ With the exception of the large pieces of backing fabrics which for quality and size requirements would need to be purchased in the required quantities. Additionally, many of the haberdashery items were donated to the project by the Cone Exchange – a charitable organisation based in Harrogate which resells sewing, knitting and craft items and donates the proceeds to local causes.

³²⁴ Khoo, *Change in Attitudes*.

Managers.³²⁵ I met with staff members on a regular basis, both in person and online, in order to keep everybody up to date with how the plans for the work were coming on and to ensure I was fitting in with the programme and timetable of the site, relying heavily on staff at these meetings to feed information to other site staff and volunteers who I had no ability to contact directly.³²⁶ Due to the difficulties that arose during this project and the public attention subsequently received, all names used to refer to staff and volunteers are pseudonyms.

From the inception of the project it was important to me both philosophically and practically that staff and volunteers were both informed and consulted on the artwork being installed. My experience on previous installations is that staff and room guides have significant impact on visitor engagement with the installation. My research shows if they have been kept fully informed of the project, understand why it is there and what it hopes to achieve, they feel confident explaining this to visitors. I have also found that the staff and volunteers of the site hold invaluable information, not just on the site and collection, but also experience of how visitors behave in the space, gained through (in some cases decades) of observation and interaction.³²⁷ This sharing of information through a consultation period allowed me to understand visitor behaviour more clearly (including how visitors had responded to previous contemporary art interventions), address practical issues during the installation design stage (how many people can take part, usual visitor route through the house and dwell time) and address questions and

³²⁵ It is not unusual during the period of a long running project for there to be changes in key staff, which can add to communication difficulties.

³²⁶ Including General Manager, Property Curator, Visitor Operations and Experience Manager, Volunteering and Community Manager, Collections and House Manager, Senior Marketing and Communications Officer, Programming and Partnership Officer, Cultural Heritage Curator and Experiences and Partnerships Curator.

³²⁷ Experienced during working on the following projects: Khoo, *Chronicle of Curiosities*, Khoo, *Change in Attitudes*, Khoo, *Contemplating Hope*.

concerns from staff members as and when they arose. Budget restrictions meant that I could not be on site more than twice per week - the travel to Hardwick Hall from my home was both lengthy and costly, and my stipend covered only my working hours. No additional funding was available from either the University or the National Trust to support travel or accommodation, a practical limitation that was echoed in my interview with Maggie, who explained that the National Trust would ordinarily be unable to fund an artist to be on site so frequently, and that they typically looked to participatory projects requiring less on-site time from the artist.³²⁸ These constraints made it impossible for me to act as the sole facilitator of the participatory element of the artwork. Consequently, I needed to create a team of enthusiastic, confident, and well-informed volunteers who could work alongside me and take on facilitation during days I was absent. Because this team understood and supported the aims of the project, they were also able to provide observational evaluation during their facilitation, ensuring continuity of engagement and insight even in my physical absence. I utilised different methods to keep these channels of communication open. In September 2023 I requested a very brief text was sent to all volunteers on site giving a short introduction to me, how I work, my research aims and what I was doing on site.³²⁹ This text was accompanied by my photo so that, while I was spending a lot of time on site researching what the artwork would be, volunteers would recognise me and feel able to talk to me knowing who I was and why I was there. I knew that I would need additional support from room guides, both in evaluating engagement on an ongoing basis, and in being able to run the participatory element on as many days as possible without my needing to be there

³²⁸ Interview 23/12/2024.

³²⁹ Volunteer introduction, Appendix 11.

every day. In previous projects it has sometimes felt that the room guides / volunteers / venue staff have been among the last people to know what is happening, have not understood the project or have not felt part of the process. It was a key element to this project that these lines of communication were kept open from as early as possible, with the hope of not only building a core team of room guides to work directly with the project, but also a wider sense of ownership across the house team who would be enthused and help visitors to understand why this work was taking place in this site.

I visited the site on different days of the week and introduced myself to as many of the staff and volunteers as possible. From November 2023 to January 2024, I held eight group workshops with Hardwick Hall staff and volunteers, over a range of days and times to ensure the maximum number of people would be able to attend. These workshops consisted of:

- A presentation of my previous works (images and objects) to give a sense of how I work and what participation brings to the work
- Information on how the artwork with Hardwick was part of PhD research at University of Leeds
- The beginnings of my ideas for what the artwork at Hardwick Hall was inspired by, what the work might look like and the questions we would be posing to visitors
- An information session from a member of the Hardwick team outlining why the National Trust supported this work and this research

These workshops were invaluable both in terms of keeping a dialogue open between me and the volunteer and staff team, and in being able to pilot the sorts of prompts we would be giving to visitors. Asking staff and volunteers to respond to the prompts of ‘what are our virtues’ and ‘which women do we believe embody them’ (FIG. 30) gave the staff the opportunity to consider how they would answer these questions and the difficulties in making these choices. We discussed the nature of our value systems and how we can compare them to the values Bess had represented. By asking different groups to approach the task in two ways - choosing women first and then identifying the values they represent or selecting values first and then the women who embodied them - I learned that most people found it easier to begin with values. We explored the kinds of women participants might choose to represent those values, including contemporary, historical, and fictional figures, as well as mythical, religious, well-known individuals, or people with personal significance. These discussions led us to consider real, flawed personalities and whether it is possible to separate the qualities we admire in a person from the aspects we may find more difficult. Through this process, we also learned how the phrasing of questions can significantly shape responses. Throughout, we repeatedly returned to the importance of historical and narrative inspiration, as this is what grounds the questions and embeds participation within the specific context of the place.

After the initial information and interactive workshops, volunteer room guides were asked to sign up if they wanted to be part of a regular team working on this project. This was so that they could attend more detailed information sessions about what would be expected of the room guides in the participatory area, explain how the project would work and how we would evaluate and continue a two-way

discussion. This also provided ample opportunity for room guides to raise any potential concerns and make suggestions on how the project would run.

Throughout this period and throughout the participative stage of the project, meetings continued to be held with myself and the Hardwick staff team covering practicalities such as furniture in the room, opening dates, room guide availability, interpretation, press releases and communication (both externally and internally). Within these meetings we agreed the framework under which participation could take place including that participation could only take place when either myself or a room guide was available to facilitate. Management would not allow participation to take place unsupervised due to the potential risks, both to health and safety and to the artwork and collection. As the room the work was sited in was not a regularly invigilated space in the house, this would require additional staffing over and above the normal requirements of the house and so participation would not be possible every day.

Making A Virtuous Woman

The room selected for the installation of the artwork and the facilitation of participation was the School Room, also known as the Nursery, reflecting two of its previous uses. The choice was informed by several interrelated considerations - in recent years it had become something of a “room of requirement”. No longer containing original collection items, it had previously housed a large exhibition case and been used as a flexible space for group activity. This curatorial neutrality made it particularly suitable for a participatory intervention. Because the room contained no original collection items, the window coverings could be removed, allowing natural daylight to flood the space. The rare access to good light in a heritage property (daylight exposure to historic collections is strictly limited) made fine

needlework significantly easier and more accessible for both visitors and staff, reducing barriers to participation and supporting the quality of the making process.³³⁰ The room's position along the visitor route was a key consideration, located towards the beginning of the journey through the house, immediately following rooms that introduce Bess of Hardwick and situate her within a broader historical timeline. Visitors encountered the participatory artwork early enough in their visit to allow time either to participate immediately or to return after completing the house route. The room is located in close proximity to two of the original embroidered hangings that had inspired the new artwork which enabled visitors to make a direct visual and conceptual connection between the historic collection and the contemporary textile they were invited to help create. Contextual dialogue between old and new was therefore embedded within the visitor journey. Accessibility was also a determining factor - situated on the ground floor, the room could be accessed by wheelchair users, ensuring that participation was not restricted by mobility barriers. The scale of the space further supported the project's ambitions: there was sufficient wall space to display a three-metre textile, alongside enough floor area to accommodate furniture and allow multiple visitors to participate simultaneously without disrupting the flow of the house.

The National Trust team made the decision that participation could only take place when room guides were in the room, and that room guides would only be offered / able to sign up for shifts on three days per week – Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The days of the week were chosen because they were the days I would most often be available and able to travel to Hardwick. Only allowing

³³⁰ Museums Galleries Scotland, 'Conservation and Lighting' <<https://www.museumsgalleriescotland.org.uk/advice-article/conservation-and-lighting/>> [accessed 16/2/2026].

three days per week sign-up for room guides (and thereby limiting days available for participation) was out of concern that if sign-up was available seven days per week other areas of the house (which must be invigilated for the full visitor route to be opened) may end up short staffed. I provided a folder of information for room guides to be able to use in my absence, which would also provide a quick guide if the room was being facilitated by staff unfamiliar with the project. Presenting the details in this way would be familiar to National Trust room guides, who were already accustomed to accessing additional materials in the folders provided in each room of the house. The contents of this folder changed and adapted throughout the project, but in total contained the following documents: Volunteer Role Guide Sheet, Beginning and End of Day Checklist, FAQ / Crib Sheet, Handover Sheet / End of Day Notes, Information Sheet for volunteers on use of notes, Site Risk Assessment, Information Sheets for visitors on participation and research (also displayed in the acrylic stands in the room), Key Dates, Flow Chart for Participation and Tool List.³³¹

The callout to staff was made at the end of January 2024 for donations of fabric for the project.³³² All donated fabric had to spend two weeks in the freezers at Hardwick in order to guarantee we would not be introducing moths or any other pests into the historic collection of textiles. Huge volumes of fabric were donated, many with notes from the donor explaining where the fabric had come from and what it meant to them. Of particular note were two donors, Lily and Arthur, who were never on the “core team” of room guides working directly with the project,

³³¹ Appendix 12.

³³² Appendix 13.

but who donated large quantities of materials and took a keen personal interest throughout.

“Lily” had large quantities of fabric left over from a period when she made historical costumes, work she is no longer able to undertake. She donated these materials to the project and checked on its progress each week and was visibly delighted whenever she saw one of her fabrics incorporated into the textile. In stark contrast to many of the other experienced needlewomen who questioned the methods used to construct the work, Lily was fascinated by the use of the sewing machine. As a lifetime seamstress and needlewoman, she was wholly supportive of using machine stitching for both structural and decorative elements, regularly visiting the space simply to watch the automated embroidery in action.

“Arthur” has volunteered at Hardwick Hall for many years and was first persuaded to volunteer by his late wife “Virginia” who loved Hardwick Hall and already volunteered there. Sadly, Virginia died some years ago, but Arthur has continued to volunteer at the house where he still feels a connection to his wife. Arthur spoke to me about the donations he wished to bring in, to explain what he had and what this would mean to him. As well as loving Hardwick Hall, Virginia was a keen needlewoman who loved working with textiles herself and seeing the works of others. He said that Virginia would have loved this project and so wanted to donate a quantity of her clothes, haberdashery items and some sewing equipment. A member of the gardening team offered to further imbue some of the donated fabric with the essence of Hardwick Hall by dying it using Woad from the Hardwick Gardens. We used a piece of Virginia’s clothing for this. Throughout the project Arthur would visit the work, look for evidence of Virginia’s clothes, and make suggestions for words we could incorporate. He became one of the most vocal

champions for the work with visitors to the house, and when names began to be added to the work, he brought his adult daughters in to see what had become of their mother's clothes. They sat together and embroidered their mother's name into the artwork.

The textile would be hung on the wall, but the nature of working with a sixteenth-century National Trust property meant that this was far from simple. I could not attach anything directly to the wall and the size of the textile meant that hanging it on a free-standing frame would be incredibly difficult and costly. Instead, I worked with an existing pipe close to the top of the wall which no longer served any purpose. This had been checked by a structural engineer for its weight bearing capacity as the finished textile was likely to weigh in excess of 20kg and we needed to consider the additional weight if a visitor fell or pulled on it. From this pipe we were able to attach a temporary baton from which we could operate a pulley system.³³³ This would allow the work in progress to be hung on the wall throughout the creation and participatory period, and sections to be taken down to work on. Backing fabric was created in three large panels to allow for practical access to enable me to stitch each panel using a sewing machine where needed. The panels were clipped together while work was in progress so that visitors were able to get an impression of the whole piece in between periods of participation.

³³³ Entire credit for this feat of engineering goes to my incredible and long suffering technician, Pete Bennison, mentioned here because this sort of project simply cannot take place without technical assistance which is often not provided by the hosting site.



FIG. 31. Backing canvas with outline for *A Virtuous Woman*, Hardwick Hall.

A scaled drawing was made on this “backing fabric” of the key design elements – the columns, the balustrades, the archways (FIG. 31). The sewn sketch / maquette was displayed alongside this to give early visitors an idea of where we were going with the artwork.

Colours were chosen for background “block work” first as all other details would lie over the top. This was a pink and red base, as we had a large selection of these in similar fabrics to be able to make up the background. Fabric choices for larger elements of the artwork such as columns and archways were chosen based on which fabric donations we had in large enough sections to create these with limited additional patchwork. Visitors were invited to sort donated fabrics and measure and

cut these pieces to start the project. Visitors were also invited to participate through hand sewing but they were not offered access to the sewing machines. This decision was informed by several practical and safeguarding considerations. Only two machines were available, and there was insufficient staffing to supervise their use safely. As I am not trained as a sewing machine instructor, I would not have felt comfortable managing the associated risks. As the sewing machines are part of my own studio equipment, and costly to repair or replace, I did not make them available for public use, mindful of the practical risks to tools essential to my practice. Allowing machine use would also have limited participation to one visitor at a time and may have excluded visitors who lacked confidence or experience in using sewing machines. By contrast, allowing visitors to take part through hand sewing or embroidery carries a much lower risk of injury and a reduced risk of damage to equipment. These techniques are easier to demonstrate and supervise, enable multiple people to participate at the same time, and are more familiar to a wider range of visitors.

Participating with *A Virtuous Woman*

I recorded how visitors participated using a combination of my own research journal notes and 'End of Day' notes I had asked each of the volunteer room guides to complete.³³⁴ The research journal forms my own observations of progress with the artwork, participation, and my own thoughts and feelings as I was creating the artwork and working with staff and visitors. I chose to keep this as a separate record to the End of Day notes I asked the room guides to complete as I did not want my notes to influence the observations they chose to make. These daily observations

³³⁴ End of Day notes template, Appendix 14.

have been invaluable in reviewing engagement throughout the period of participation. Taken together, they show how the project functioned in practice: how visitors responded to it, how participation unfolded across different groups, and what kinds of conversations and behaviours were prompted by the activity. In my role as an embedded researcher, I recognise the inherent subjectivity of these observations, a reality that aligns with Hope's work on capturing participatory processes in situ.³³⁵ We all chose to record different moments each day, but this ethnographic approach gives an impression of the moments of participation and personal interaction that images, video and the finished textile cannot. In doing so, it addresses both Bishop and Schrag's reflections on the difficulty of recording participatory work, while drawing on my own experience from previous projects and the Temple Newsam evaluation in Chapter Three.³³⁶

Public participation with the work began on 30 March 2024, with visitors invited to take part in sorting fabrics, selecting colours, and cutting block shapes using stencils to form the background of the main textile work. From the first day of participation, the scale of engagement was high. More than 600 people (approx. half of visitors to the house that day) entered the making space and undertook some form of action. This was also within the limited opening hours of the hall which provided only a four-hour window for participation.³³⁷ This volume of visitors was due to the Easter holidays being one of Hardwick Hall's busiest periods, and immediately shaped the nature of participation. The space was busy, noisy, and

³³⁵ Hope, 'Participating in the 'Wrong' Way?', p.66.

³³⁶ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p.26; Schrag, 'Agonistic Tendencies', p.77.

³³⁷ Reduced opening hours in historic house museums function as a conservation mechanism, regulating the cumulative 'lux hours' to which light-sensitive collections are exposed. National Trust, 'Our Work in the House at Erddig' <<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/wales/erddig/our-work-in-the-house-at-erddig>> [accessed 31/3/2026].

frequently overcrowded, particularly with families and young children.³³⁸ While many visitors appeared engaged, the conditions made sustained or reflective co-creation difficult.³³⁹ It was difficult to strike a balance between the open invitation to participate and depth. There was little opportunity to work slowly with individuals or to develop deeper and more complex understanding and engagement. Participation often became fleeting, compressed into a few minutes within a visit which already had a tight time schedule.

Helping visitors to understand how they could participate was an issue at this early stage. Many visitors were initially uncertain about cutting or stitching, highlighting the importance of staff encouragement and guidance to build confidence and foster engagement. Visitors specifically expressed excitement at seeing an artwork actively created in a historic space, suggesting that participation can draw additional interest from the heritage site's cultural and symbolic value - directly challenging Graham's claim that museum participation should 'not centre the museum as a valued space'.³⁴⁰ Many expressed as much pleasure in observing the process as participating directly. The sewing machine became a regular focal point. When running and embroidering automatically, it drew people into the room out of curiosity, functioning as a spectacle and conversation starter. Visitors of all ages would stand and watch the machine, transfixed, while passing commentary and asking questions from the practical 'how is it doing that?!' to the theoretical 'isn't that cheating – they didn't have those in the sixteenth-century!'. These informal conversations and commentary often became impromptu interpretation sessions, which visitors enjoyed and for which they gathered regularly. The number

³³⁸ Research journal notes 1/4/2024.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Graham, *Deconstituting Museums*, p.144.

of people wishing to participate and visitors wanting a full interpretative talk from me as well as the room guide created difficulties not just in the participative element of the work, but also in being able to progress with the creation of the background of the textile. The huge visitor numbers and difficulty in creating a participative experience raised early critical questions which resonate with debates around participation as spectacle vs authorship, and relational encounters of social interaction over material contribution.³⁴¹ Would visitors have been just as engaged had the experience been limited to explanation rather than participation? Were they responding to the opportunity to act, or simply to the novelty of witnessing making in a historic space?

Although participation numbers were high at this early point in the project, meaningful co-creation remained difficult to achieve. On the busiest days, the participation risked becoming tokenistic when framed explicitly as ‘co-creation’. Visitors often had only a short time in the space and were therefore more likely to ‘have a go’ than to contribute with deliberation or ownership. At this point I debated whether this was inherently problematic, or simply a different mode of engagement, but it was difficult to articulate what visitors were gaining beyond a brief experience. A recurring observation was that visitors were far more interested in expressive acts - writing, choosing words, selecting colours - than in anonymous labour such as cutting background blocks or stitching sections that would not be visibly identifiable as theirs. This distinction became increasingly important and reinforced the need for this artwork and research to remain iterative in nature. I believe the participant preference for expressive acts became significant primarily

³⁴¹ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*; Jancovich and Stevenson, *Failures in Cultural Participation*; Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*.

This also provided the opportunity for me to experiment with how to ask questions and test how visitors would respond to the participation of others. Anonymous co-creation clearly does not imply co-authorship. Many participants seemed to seek recognition, traceability, or narrative connection rather than collective anonymity and this became an important consideration in how invitations to participate were structured. The iterative nature of both the research and the artwork, combined with embedded, ongoing evaluation, revealed both the need and the potential to create multiple, simultaneous entry points into participation. Rather than presenting participation as a single activity requiring a fixed level of commitment, visitors were able to determine for themselves how, and to what extent, they wished to engage. Their choices were shaped by practical factors including the time available, how busy the room was, existing sewing skills, confidence, personal interest, and the social circumstances of their visit. Some participated only through observation and conversation; others wrote a name or virtue for somebody else to stitch later, contributed a single stitch, completed an existing contribution, or added an entirely new name or virtue. More experienced contributors, such as the Doe Lea sewing group, assumed responsibility for designing and creating substantial elements of the work within the overall visual framework. The availability of these different forms of participation appeared to reassure visitors that participation did not require a substantial investment of time, skill, or creative confidence. Many initially chose a modest form of engagement before deciding whether to become more involved, suggesting that agency was strengthened by allowing participants to calibrate their own level of commitment. Providing multiple, simultaneous routes into participation therefore reduced barriers to engagement while accommodating the varied motivations and circumstances of visitors. Agency lay not simply in

contributing to the artwork, but in choosing the nature and extent of that contribution. While co-creation allowed the feeling of being a small part in something much bigger, it did not necessarily create a personal engagement with the artwork and the narrative.

The personal and emotional resonance of the project quickly became evident. One visitor asked if she could write down the name of her grandmother who had passed away the previous week.³⁴² She understood that her contribution might not be used in the final piece, but just writing it here seemed profoundly meaningful.³⁴³ Similarly, a young girl named her teacher, “Miss Thorn,” explaining that the virtue she admired was “inspiration” and was encouraged to stitch the word “inspired” connecting values to personal role models in a hands-on way.³⁴⁴ These early interactions demonstrated how the project appealed to visitors who wanted to make a personal connection to the work.

Local visitors frequently expressed a desire to return and became more involved, suggesting that time constraints and overly busy periods during a single visit were a key barrier.³⁴⁵ This led me to question whether co-creation might be more meaningful with a smaller, focused group over a longer period. Casual visitors might engage more productively as observers or contributors to smaller, more individual, clearly defined elements. I felt a tension between institutional pressures for scale and access for all visitors, and the desire to foster meaningful, individual

³⁴² End of Day notes 31/3/2024.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ End of Day notes 1/4/2024.

³⁴⁵ End of Day notes 9/4/2024.

engagement - an intimacy that is difficult to maintain when participation is often judged primarily by numerical metrics.³⁴⁶

As participation continued, it became clear that visitors needed explicit guidance. Some were hesitant to join in without encouragement and specific invitation, and participation increased markedly when people were given specific tasks. Writing on fabric, nominating virtues or values and naming virtuous women proved to be one of the most effective entry points both to participation and to opening conversations with visitors about the project and the inspiration behind it. Visitors participating in writing also introduced challenges. Because it was fast and required little instruction, it enabled reactive or argumentative contributions, particularly as visitor numbers increased. Unrelated or provocative phrases began to appear on the fabric, including religious slogans and political statements. I felt that the combination of high visitor volume and rapid participation could create a slightly chaotic atmosphere, and I began to consider how participation might be slowed down to encourage reflection and deeper engagement rather than this immediate and at times unconsidered response.

The physical layout of the space, one large table covered in a wipe clean cloth with a supply of art materials (FIG. 33), further shaped behaviour.

³⁴⁶ Department for Culture Media and Sport, *Taking Part Survey 2022/2023*, Arts Council England, *Let's Create*.



FIG. 33. Fabric on table, Hardwick Hall.

If adults came in and saw only children at the table, they assumed this was an activity for children. Conversely the opposite was not true - even when children saw only adults at the table, they still assumed the activity was for them.³⁴⁷ Visitors tended to read the room as a make-and-do area. Parents often allowed children to engage freely, sometimes pushing back when asked to follow prompts or constraints. In one instance, a parent responded to guidance by saying, 'oh yeah, no, he just wants to colour it all in' highlighting a disparity between expectations of open craft activity often expected on a family day out and the structured needs of the artwork.³⁴⁸ This reinforced the need for very clear instructions and interpretive material, both to manage expectations and behaviour and to reposition the space as

³⁴⁷ Research Journal entry 3/4/2024.

³⁴⁸ Research Journal entry 1/4/2024.

an art-making and interpretative environment rather than a generic activity zone. The blurred boundary between participatory art and activity workshops is an area I regularly have to consider on a theoretical level in my work. Here, I was able to analyse how visitor perception of this can be impacted by practical elements such as room layout and interpretive materials. The framing of participation and my role as facilitator versus author can be hard to define. A fine balance is then required to ensure that the space and the invitation to participate is still welcoming. The point is to enable all visitors who wish to participate and not put them off by appearing too complex or exclusive.

Over the following few weeks, I developed a more nuanced, tiered approach to participation. Recognising that visitors had different amounts of time, confidence, and skill, I offered multiple levels of engagement. Some visitors wanted to return to take part in the project later to work on the more expressive elements. Very few were interested in non-expressive, unidentifiable shared labour. This insight led to a shift in focus as to how visitors could participate in the ways they clearly wanted to. I decided to invite visitors to embroider words of virtue. Following a written line allowed even inexperienced visitors to sew confidently, while still producing something recognisable. Visitors often chose their own thread colour, enabling them to identify their contribution even when working on a shared word (FIG. 34). This degree of expressive freedom - choice of word, colour, and sometimes stitch style proved crucial, it allowed small individual identity, creative freedom and authorship while making a small contribution to a much bigger piece.



FIG. 34. Visitor embroidery, Hardwick Hall.

Those who did not wish to sew at all could still write their thoughts on virtue on the rolls of fabric on the table. While these pieces would not be included in the finished artwork, many visitors used the words as inspiration for the word they would embroider. At this stage, numerous activities / modes of participation were taking place in the room at any time. Visitors interacted with me or the room guide to talk about the artwork and how it related to the collection, writing nominations of virtue or virtuous women on the fabric, embroidering a word of virtue to be included in the finished textile, observing and assisting me making the background to the large textile and observing the participation of other visitors. During busy periods such as weekends and school holidays this could become a difficult task to manage in the space. Even when fully staffed, this only consisted of two people (including me) and there were regular occasions where only one person was left to facilitate participation in the room, which added to the difficulty of facilitating meaningful participation.

Family groups often worked collaboratively, sometimes for extended periods - for instance, a mother and son spent over an hour sewing a single word together.³⁴⁹ Such engagement exemplifies Bourriaud's notion of artworks as "interstices" - spaces where people can come together, build relationships, and

³⁴⁹ End of Day notes 25/5/2024.

create small, utopian moments of connection.³⁵⁰ There were several instances where the project supported meaningful engagement for visitors who might not otherwise participate fully. These included neurodivergent children, disabled visitors, and those with health conditions. Three boys from a school for autism amazed their teaching staff by sitting and stitching uninterrupted for ten minutes.³⁵¹ A teenage girl in a wheelchair embroidered for half an hour and this resulted in her mother becoming emotional because she was welcomed and able to participate.³⁵² A partially sighted visitor explored the textile by touch, understanding its arches and stitched words.³⁵³ Quiet observation and conversation were also valid forms of participation, with visitors engaging deeply in discussions even if they did not stitch themselves. These experiences resonate with Rancière who disrupts the hierarchical distinction between active participants and passive spectators.³⁵⁴

One visitor spent several hours embroidering the word ‘integrity’, producing a highly detailed piece that drew attention from other visitors.³⁵⁵ Other visitors were fascinated by watching her work, and several expressed a desire to return to embroider more.³⁵⁶ In other instances, visitors who did not have long to stay were invited to add just a few stitches to a word already started. Parents appeared relieved by this option, as it allowed children to participate without committing to a lengthy task.³⁵⁷ The concept of “virtue” repeatedly generated uncertainty and discussion. Despite this uncertainty, patterns soon emerged in the content. Certain virtues - respect, bravery, kindness - were embroidered repeatedly by different

³⁵⁰ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*.

³⁵¹ End of Day notes 14/5/2024.

³⁵² End of Day notes 30/7/2024.

³⁵³ End of Day notes 3/7/2024.

³⁵⁴ Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*.

³⁵⁵ Research Journal entry 4/4/2024.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Research Journal entry 6/4/2024.

visitors. Initially, I questioned whether repetition should be limited (did I really want a textile covered in the same few words repeated?) but I came to see it as more meaningful to allow the repetition to continue. Repetition added weight and more accurately represented collective visitor sentiment and intention, showing how many participants independently valued the same idea. I felt that the work was more representational of those who participated by not looking to reach consensus or equality or an even distribution of ideas, but by allowing the bias and trends to show through encouraging visitors to make their own choices as freely as possible within the parameters of the artwork.



FIG. 35. Doe Lea sewing group participation, Hardwick Hall.

In April a local community sewing group was invited to participate in a dedicated session (FIG. 35). Unlike many casual visitors, these participants had time, skill, and experience. Due to their locality, they were also familiar with Hardwick Hall. Initially, they appeared overwhelmed when given free rein to choose which elements to work on, and the opening talk ran for longer than

expected. As the session progressed, however, they became enthusiastic, sharing stories of stitching, fabric, and personal history. I initially felt some discomfort stepping back and watching participants work on their own sections of the textile background - areas I would normally consider central to my own authorship - echoing Bishop's concerns about balancing participation with the preservation of aesthetic integrity.³⁵⁸ However, once past this initial resistance, I felt that the work was richer for it - both in its aesthetics and in achieving the objective of deeper, meaningful participation and engagement. Several members expressed pride in contributing to a work displayed in a place they had lived near for years, and many wanted to return to complete what they had started. While continuing to work with members of the group over the following months, I reflected on the discomfort in letting go of artistic ego in participative works. Allowing others to make choices I may not have made is unsettling and carries risk, but is ultimately rewarding. This reinforces Kester's thoughts on dialogical aesthetics and the relationship between artist and collaborators.³⁵⁹ Here was a key issue for me to consider: where is the line in this work between participation and collaboration? The work became more complex and less singular, and the sense of shared ownership deepened. Working on a regular basis with members of the sewing group represented a different layer of participation running alongside the daily visitors.

The medium of embroidery prompted conversation, both about the project itself and about wider personal and historical themes. Many visitors shared memories of learning to sew, often from female relatives, and expressed regret that these skills are seldom taught.³⁶⁰ This prompted conversations about the history of

³⁵⁸ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, pp.26-30.

³⁵⁹ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*.

³⁶⁰ End of Day notes 23/4/2024, 24/4/2024, 21/5/2024, 18/6/2024, 2/7/2024.

embroidery, and who would have learned this skill and for what purpose, plus the difference between doing this for entertainment and out of necessity. The act of participating in embroidery functioned as a trigger for storytelling and reflection, particularly about family history and women's creative labour, and visitors connected this to the heritage collection around them.³⁶¹ As Parker argues in *The Subversive Stitch*, embroidery has historically been coded as 'women's work' and excluded from the fine arts, a categorisation that devalues women's creative labour and shapes cultural expectations around domestic craft.³⁶² Similarly, Pollock and Parker's *Old Mistresses* highlights how women's creative practices such as textile work have often been marginalised within art historical narratives.³⁶³ It is therefore unsurprising that embroidery also attracted comments, assumptions, and expectations around gender, as visitors navigated both the historical framing of the medium and its contemporary significance. While some visitors expressed the view that 'sewing is for women', these assumptions were frequently challenged in practice.³⁶⁴ Men and boys did participate, sometimes tentatively, sometimes with enthusiasm. On the occasion when a military commemoration event was taking place on site, the armed forces veterans (all men) took over the participation space entirely, jovially ridiculing anybody who suggested that men might not be able to sew.³⁶⁵ As visitors continued to nominate virtues and values, tensions around gender assumptions became increasingly visible. Some visitors, particularly younger

³⁶¹ End of Day notes 2/4/2024, 3/4/2024, 8/4/2024, 23/4/2024, 24/4/2024, 26/4/2024, 30/4/2024, 21/5/2024, 2/7/2024, 11/8/2024, 9/10/2024, 19/10/2024; Research Journal entry 24/4/2024, 29/5/2024, 24/7/2024, 26/7/2024, 3/8/2024, 5/8/2024, 16/10/2024, 21/10/2024, 23/10/2024, 27/10/2024.

³⁶² Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*.

³⁶³ Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), pp.65-92.

³⁶⁴ End of Day notes 23/4/2024, 11/5/2024, 14/5/2024, 25/5/2024.

³⁶⁵ Research Journal entry 11/5/2024.

women, expressed discomfort and frustration with the prevalence of words such as 'soft', 'gentle', 'nurturing', and 'kind'.³⁶⁶ They felt these virtues did not represent them and suggested that the project spoke only to a narrow and out of date idea of womanhood.³⁶⁷ When encouraged to add values that reflected their own views, these visitors began to deliberately position oppositional words next to those they disagreed with, for example: 'dominant' beside 'soft', 'brave' next to 'peace', 'ambitious' alongside 'compassionate', 'ferocity' next to 'sensitivity'.³⁶⁸ This practice quickly spread, as others noticed and followed suit. The textile began to hold visible tensions, with polarised values sitting side by side rather than being resolved.

These early incidents of agonism reflected my previous experience with *Change in Attitudes*, while also resonating with Schrag's argument that participatory art should not be shaped by institutional imperatives to seek consensus and eradicate conflict. The public (and therefore participants) contains difference, conflict, and disagreement, and this should be embraced rather than suppressed within participatory practices.³⁶⁹ I needed to consider whether conflicting views could coexist materially without being reconciled – where the artwork becomes a space where disagreement was not only permitted but visibly embedded. How well would visitors and the hosting site tolerate these visible conflicts?

Embroidering words of virtue became so popular that I had to alter the design of the finished textile to incorporate all of the participants' work, given that participants had been told that all embroideries would be included in the finished

³⁶⁶ Research Journal entry 26/5/2024.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Schrag, 'Agonistic Tendencies'.



FIG. 37. Work in progress on *A Virtuous Woman*, Hardwick Hall.

I needed to decide how the next aspect of the embroidery would be presented and how participation would be facilitated. Who was the ‘virtuous woman’ who would fill the centre of the embroidery? I had originally envisaged one woman being chosen for this replacement embroidery, just as the original Hardwick embroideries had one woman in their central archway. Many of the staff and visitors were under the impression that there would be some sort of voting system whereby participants could nominate their virtuous woman and we would somehow choose who should be featured in the final embroidery. This did not seem fitting for the creation of something representational, and in allowing visitors to participate in a way that was meaningful to them. Through the many conversations

had every day with visitors on the subject of ‘virtuous women’, it was apparent that there would be a wide variety of nominations, all made for very personal reasons. It seemed more appropriate to let the artwork reflect that. With this in mind, I decided that the central figure in the embroidery would be an ‘everywoman’ - a deliberately open, undefined figure onto whom visitors could project their own ideas of who she should be. This decision was conveyed to, and agreed by, the Hardwick Hall management team.³⁷⁰ I tried to make the figure racially ambiguous by avoiding conventionally skin-coloured fabrics, which led to a complicated decision. Blue made her resemble an avatar, green suggested illness or something alien, and yellow evoked Marge Simpson. To further resist a fixed identity, her hair was created using embroidery threads in every possible hair colour (FIG. 38).



FIG. 38. Work in progress on *A Virtuous Woman*, Hardwick Hall.

³⁷⁰ Meeting with Hardwick Hall team 20/6/2024.

She is dressed in a plain white dress. Like all of the materials used in the piece, this fabric was upcycled, and in this case it was my own meaningful contribution to the project - my wedding dress from my first, unsuccessful marriage. The dress was practical because of its pale colour, and the generous amount of fabric made it easy to incorporate additional sections of participant embroidery in matching fabric. However, its symbolism also felt appropriate; the white wedding dress is a widely recognised Western symbol of virtue, which, in my own experience, had been imperfect and flawed.

Active participation was temporarily paused while the final background of the textile was assembled. During this time, visitors were still able to observe the process, see the work being completed, and talk with me about the project. The next stage of participation involved inviting visitors to actively contribute to the final artwork. Once completed, the background textile was installed on the wall and this element of the artwork no longer appeared as a work in progress. At this point, visitors were invited to add the names of their own virtuous woman to the piece by embroidering a name onto small sections of fabric, which would later be sewn onto the dress of the central figure. Each fabric panel allowed space for multiple names.

Over the previous months, I had learned the importance of clear interpretation. Anticipating the challenges of explaining the project to larger summer holiday audiences while also discussing the historic collection, I developed new interpretive material for this stage of participation. At the entrance to the room, I installed a machine-embroidered blanket providing detailed interpretation (FIG. 39), including the background to the project, the objects that inspired it, and an invitation to participate. This was followed on the table by a selection of machine-embroidered cushions (FIG. 40) featuring brief prompts for participation,

enabling visitors who did not have the time or inclination to read a longer text to quickly understand what was happening and how they could take part.³⁷¹



FIG. 39. Interpretation for *A Virtuous Woman*, Hardwick Hall.

³⁷¹ Full text of embroidery panel interpretation, Appendix 15.



FIG. 40. Interpretation for *A Virtuous Woman*, Hardwick Hall.

The invitation to nominate a virtuous woman generated the most sustained and emotionally charged engagement. Visitors repeatedly wanted to explain why they had chosen a particular person, and these explanations were often offered unprompted and sometimes defensively, as participants anticipated judgement from others. For example, younger visitors explained to older visitors the many justifications for including Taylor Swift on the textile; they saw her as an astute businesswoman and as encouraging young Americans to vote.³⁷² Visitors continued to engage in respectful debate around contested figures. These moments often led to extended conversations between strangers, conducted while sewing together at the same table. They were often linked to the potentially controversial nature of the women Bess of Hardwick had chosen to celebrate, and indeed that she could have also been seen as a contentious figure of ‘virtue’. As participants questioned the

³⁷² End of Day notes 2/4/2024.

women and values contributed by others, conversations regularly returned to Bess's original embroideries and the historical figures they depict. Visitors compared contemporary nominations with Bess of Hardwick's own selections, discussing why particular women had been chosen, whether they truly embodied the virtues they represented, and how these judgements might differ today. Participants frequently moved between the room containing the contemporary artwork and the room displaying the original embroideries, using each to interpret the other. The artwork therefore became more than a contemporary response to heritage; it created a space in which visitors could actively negotiate the values embedded within the historic collection itself. Rather than prescribing a particular reading of Hardwick Hall or of Bess of Hardwick, the participatory artwork enabled multiple interpretations to coexist, creating opportunities for dialogue about contested histories that emerged through participants' own discussions rather than through institutional interpretation.

The most popular misconception was that the aim was to sew your name on something. Even when faced with an embroidery covered in famous people's names (many dead), parents would regularly tell their children 'look, you can write your name on this'.³⁷³ While most people were happy to take part when the actual nature of the project was explained, some visitors were still quite put out that they could not just write their name on something. This seemed to hold the tension of my role as author of the work and facilitator of participation. If I truly wanted people to participate in whatever way they wanted, should we have just let them add their own names?

³⁷³ Research Journal entry 19/7/2024.

Suggestions for virtuous women reflected broad and diverse values and the life experiences of the visitors and reflected their personal interests and broader historical and political awareness. Queen Elizabeth II was mentioned repeatedly, often because she was seen as consistent or dutiful.³⁷⁴ Contemporary figures such as Greta Thunberg, Michelle Obama, Dolly Parton, and Beyoncé also appear, prompting discussion about leadership, activism, cultural influence, and public scrutiny.³⁷⁵ Many visitors struggled to define what a virtuous woman might be today, commenting on the difficulty in identifying someone without flaws in an age when we know so much about everybody.³⁷⁶ As the project progressed, conversations often intersected with contemporary politics, social issues, and debates about virtue. A visitor was visibly upset to see Theresa May's name embroidered and asked if it could be removed.³⁷⁷ She ultimately embroidered Angela Rayner's name on the same panel, explaining she wanted to counterbalance the politics she had seen.³⁷⁸ This sparked a broader discussion about representation, the need to agree to disagree, while maintaining respect during political debates. Tracy Emin, Lady Gaga, Madonna, and Coco Chanel all generated diverse reactions, with visitors exploring questions of individuality, morality, scandal, and the societal expectations placed on women.³⁷⁹ Over this period we repeatedly discussed the phenomena of being able to hold differences of opinions and different

³⁷⁴ Queen of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth Realms 1952-2022.

³⁷⁵ Greta Thunberg - Swedish environmental activist; Michelle Obama - American lawyer, author and First Lady of the USA 2009-2017; Dolly Parton - American Singer, songwriter, musician, actor, entrepreneur and philanthropist; Beyonce - American singer songwriter and businesswoman. For full list of embroidered names, see Appendix 16.

³⁷⁶ End of Day notes 5/4/2024, 30/4/2024, 4/5/2024, 13/7/2024, 3/8/2024.

³⁷⁷ Theresa May - British Conservative politician, UK Prime Minister 2016-2019.

³⁷⁸ Angela Raynor - British Labour politician.

³⁷⁹ Tracy Emin - British artist; Lady Gaga - American singer, songwriter and actor; Madonna - American singer, songwriter, record producer and actor; Coco Chanel - French fashion designer and entrepreneur (Gabrielle Chanel).

values. The majority of participants were wholly supportive of this conflict being expressed on the textile and found the differences a fascinating talking point.



FIG. 41. Visitor embroidery, Hardwick Hall.

Historical figures prompted reflections on ethics, heroism, and intention. Conversations around Miep Gies, who hid Anne Frank and preserved her diary, led visitors to talk about unsung heroes and the quiet moral courage often overlooked in history.³⁸⁰ Similarly, Henrietta Lacks (FIG. 41), whose cells contributed to groundbreaking medical research without her consent, provoked debate about whether virtue requires intention, consent, or social recognition.³⁸¹ Visitors grappled with nuanced questions: should virtue be defined by the act itself or the consequences of the act? How do we honour people whose achievements were made possible by circumstances beyond their control? One visitor contacted me ahead of her visit to ensure she would be able to embroider Al-Ijliya Al-Askulabi, a

³⁸⁰ Research Journal entry 27/10/2024.

³⁸¹ Research Journal entry 28/10/2024.

tenth-century Syrian astronomer and astrolabist. Visitors had difficult conversations about women overcoming trauma. Gisele Pelicot, for example, prompted conversations about reluctant heroes who rise to meet extraordinary challenges.³⁸² Figures like Valentina Tereshkova led to discussions about the importance of being first in a field and the barriers women faced historically, with visitors noting that achievements stood out precisely because they were rare.³⁸³

A recurring feature was the emotional significance attached to naming and stitching. Many visitors chose to embroider names associated with personal relationships rather than public recognition. Others stitched names in memory of mothers, grandmothers, teachers, friends, or foster carers often describing these acts as meaningful or moving. In one particularly poignant episode, two visitors embroidered their late mother's name using scraps of her clothing already incorporated into the textile.³⁸⁴ They sat together for hours, sharing stories with strangers as they stitched. In another instance, a young visitor embroidered the name of a friend who had been seriously ill, explaining that she found her bravery inspirational.³⁸⁵ A young woman adapted another person's stitching of the letters "M" and "E" to link her mother's and her aunt's names (FIG. 42), reflecting the complex family history of her father marrying her mother's twin after both had been widowed.³⁸⁶ Families contributed together, sometimes taking turns stitching, while others planned subsequent visits to see the work that they had started completed by somebody else or to continue an embroidery that had been started by

³⁸² Gisele Pelicot - French mass rape survivor.

³⁸³ Valentina Tereshkova - Russian engineer and cosmonaut, first woman in space.

³⁸⁴ Research Journal entry 12/8/2024.

³⁸⁵ End of Day notes 22/7/2024.

³⁸⁶ End of Day notes 9/10/2024.

a relative. A visitor with a love of needlework who had retired from working with children spent much of the day showing other visitors' children how to sew.³⁸⁷



FIG. 42. Visitor embroidery, Hardwick Hall.

These moments highlighted that participation was as much about storytelling and recognition as it was about making. Participants wanted their reasons to be known - the 'why' mattered as much as the 'who'. Explaining why a particular woman or virtue mattered often became as important as the act of stitching itself. These conversations revealed participation to be a form of self-expression, allowing visitors to articulate personal memories, political beliefs, family histories, grief, admiration, or aspirations through the shared language of the artwork. This raises questions about how participatory projects might capture motivations, not just outcomes. The stories shared alongside the stitching were rarely visible within the finished artwork itself. Instead, they were temporarily held

³⁸⁷ End of Day notes and Research Journal entry 10/4/2024.

by those present, particularly myself and the room guides, before being distilled into research journals and End of Day notes. This raises wider methodological questions about whether such ephemeral forms of participation should be documented at all or whether their significance lies precisely in their existence as lived encounters that resist permanent capture.

Sewing itself became a point of reflection and fascination. Visitors commented on the meditative and focusing nature of embroidery, how it can restore calm, how easy it was to talk to strangers while taking part in this work and the satisfaction of contributing to a larger, collaborative work. For many, the act of stitching revived memories of family craft practices, highlighted skills no longer taught in schools, or inspired visitors to take up sewing again. Several visitors described how seeing the project inspired them to reconnect with personal histories, pick up unfinished projects, or begin teaching new generations of sewists.

Over time, patterns of engagement emerged. School groups often engaged in focused, short-term contributions, while adult visitors lingered, discussing historical context, ethics, representation, controversial or polarising figures, media influence, and personal admiration. Visitors repeatedly emphasised that the project allowed them to participate in a 'living history' connecting personal narratives to historical and contemporary figures. Categorising participants' choices of women reveals a pronounced emphasis on the personal and relational. Women who were personally known to participants, along with family members, constituted the largest category, 43% of contributions, with participants choosing mothers, relatives, or close acquaintances as virtuous women.³⁸⁸ This substantial proportion suggests that

³⁸⁸ Full list of embroidered names, Appendix 16.

participants were far more inclined to draw upon intimate, lived relationships than distant public figures when asked to identify their virtuous woman. While this may indicate the central role of personal experience in shaping participants' value systems, the act of contributing a named individual to a public artwork also implies a desire to leave a visible imprint and to acknowledge or celebrate those closest to them within a shared cultural space. Beyond the personal, participants referenced figures from broader cultural, political, and intellectual realms.³⁸⁹ Arts and Entertainment (11%), Literature and Media (8%), and Politics and Public Office (6%) together illustrated engagement with socially visible women, while Science, Medicine, and Technology (6%) reflected recognition of intellectual and technical achievement. References to Royalty and Monarchy (5%) and Activism (5%) demonstrated an equal interest in tradition and social change. Smaller categories included Religion and Myth (3%), Art and Design (2%), Fictional Characters (2%), and Sport (1%).³⁹⁰

809 names were embroidered onto the artwork.³⁹¹ References to "Mother," including variants such as mum or mummy, were the most common single entry, appearing 37 times.³⁹² Among public figures, Taylor Swift emerged as the most frequently cited individual, with 22 references, highlighting the influence of contemporary cultural figures.³⁹³ Historical and political figures such as Queen Elizabeth II (15), Marie Curie (13), Rosa Parks (12), and Emmeline Pankhurst (9) point to a continued recognition of women associated with leadership, resistance,

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Ibid.

and social transformation, Florence Nightingale (7) and J. K. Rowling (7), all names were listed and catalogued.³⁹⁴

J.K. Rowling's name took the work and my practice in an entirely unforeseen direction, one that challenged me as an artist and reshaped the course of this thesis. Chapter Five reflects on the transformations that unfolded and the unprecedented challenges they brought into view.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

Chapter Five – Polarised Participation

This chapter examines a critical turning point in the research - the emergence of polarised participation and its ripple effects across the project, the institution, and the public sphere. Participatory art is inherently open to unpredictability as its outcomes cannot be fully anticipated and it is capable of producing tensions, dissent, and disagreement.³⁹⁵ Joe Lewis has said 'Artists who produce work that they know is not favoured by our established regime are not necessarily taking risks, since they can forecast the results. Truly taking a risk means not knowing what's going to happen in the end'.³⁹⁶ This unpredictability is not a failure of method but a defining characteristic of socially engaged practice, echoing theoretical frameworks that foreground dissensus, agonism, and the productive potential of conflict within participatory and institutionally mediated art.³⁹⁷ As participation with *A Virtuous Woman* became a more personal expression of participants' values, tensions surrounding offence, harm, marginalised voices, moderation, and reputational risk intensified. These issues came to a head when a participant objected to the inclusion of J.K. Rowling's name in the artwork and attempted to remedy it. Initially accommodated within the participatory framework, this intervention quickly became a flashpoint, sparking debates around censorship, authority, and the boundary between institutional voice and individual agency.

This chapter traces the sequence of events that followed: informal discussions, a formal complaint, a temporary pause in the project, a reopening under revised conditions, and a second complaint that generated protest, activist

³⁹⁵ Graham, *Deconstituting Museums*, pp.140-141.

³⁹⁶ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, p.142.

³⁹⁷ Mouffe, *Agonistics*; Schrag, 'Agonistic Tendencies'.

responses, and widespread media attention, ultimately resulting in the artwork being removed from display. Drawing on research notes, room guide observations, institutional documentation, staff interviews, mainstream and social media coverage, and my reflections as an embedded researcher, the chapter interrogates the limits of institutional tolerance within participatory heritage practice and the risks inherent in inviting public engagement. It considers how engagement can be productive precisely when it polarises opinion, the ethical responsibilities of all stakeholders, and how heritage institutions negotiate the balance between openness, care, and governance in times of political polarisation and cancel culture.³⁹⁸

Following a first-person narrative approach, the chapter situates these events within the broader theoretical debates on participation, agonistic engagement, and the interaction of creative practices with social, political, and cultural frameworks, as introduced in Chapter Two. While I have previously acknowledged the inherent subjectivity of occupying multiple roles as artist, researcher, evaluator, and facilitator, this chapter represents the apex of that entanglement.³⁹⁹ The events under discussion, including the public and media responses, were directed not just at the institution, but at me personally, making impartial reporting impossible. At the time of writing, less than a year has passed since I found myself at the centre of a media storm connected to the artwork and the research, and this proximity shapes both my perspective and my analysis. It is difficult to capture the full weight of the trauma, stress, and personal cost that this experience has imposed on me, and the ways in which it continues to reverberate through my work and life as a researcher, an artist, and a woman. Conducting research into participatory practice in this

³⁹⁸ Hope, *The Only Way Is Ethics*.

³⁹⁹ Hope, 'Participating in the 'Wrong' Way?', p.66.

context has exacted an extraordinarily high personal toll. The anxiety it continues to induce is immense, and while this may be part of the cost of engaging in this kind of research, it is profoundly different to experience it as a named individual than as an anonymous representative of an institution. To continue working through such traumatic experiences - observing, recording, analysing, and reflecting - has been both deeply painful and emotionally exhausting.

Rather than seeing this subjectivity as a limitation, I have come to recognise it as a lens that affords a distinctive, insider understanding of the dynamics at play. It allows a detailed exploration of the intersections between participatory practice, institutional authority, and public intervention. I am conscious that this account is necessarily subjective, but it is precisely this positionality that offers critical insight into the realities of participatory engagement in institutional heritage contexts. This positionality - simultaneously painful and illuminating - has made the work difficult, but it is also vital. The insights gained are significant, yet they carry the undeniable mark of the personal cost required to reach them.

Dissensus and Debate

On 5 August 2024, I was stopped in the corridor by a member of the Hardwick Hall House and Collections team, “Greg” in between the morning staff briefing and opening the artwork for participation. Greg asked what the policy on censorship for the artwork was. I confirmed that we (the Hardwick Hall management team and I) had previously agreed we would not censor participants’ additions of people’s names, only offensive or aggressive language - but that this would also have to be dealt with as situations arose. He stated that he was concerned that he had found two instances of JK Rowling’s name embroidered on the artwork as a celebration of

a virtuous woman. He stated that both he, and LGBTQIA+ visitors and staff would feel triggered and traumatised to see the name of JK Rowling, a 'hateful figure' embroidered on the work, and asked if I would allow somebody to embroider Myra Hindley on there. I said that as Myra Hindley was a convicted child mass murderer, I did not feel this was quite the same and was quite unlikely to be an issue, but that I understood his concerns. We talked about the possible offence caused by other public figures such as politicians and royalty, but he felt this was different as they had caused historical hurt, whereas he felt JK Rowling is causing active, current harm to the LGBTQIA+ community. I said that I would not be changing our position on censoring any names without a direct complaint, as I did not feel it was my place to do so and I also did not feel the sole responsibility for the decision to censor or not should lie with me - an instruction to censor would need to come from the National Trust. He confirmed he would be making a formal complaint, I agreed he should do so if he felt he needed to. I added that in the case of both occasions the name J.K. Rowling was embroidered [at this time], it had been by young people wanting to celebrate their favourite author, not adults looking to court controversy or cause offence, in case that changed how he felt about it. I told him that I was not sure how I could go about stopping a child from embroidering the name of a woman they admired, and that we are telling all visitors that they can come back and see the work they have done attached to the finished textile. Many visitors were photographing their work so they could come back and see it on a subsequent visit. I spoke to Greg again slightly later that morning as I had remembered that we had previously discussed in our team meeting that if a name was to have an embroidered line sewn through it, we would let that stand. I recall that I informed Greg that if any participants were upset by the inclusion of any of

the names of any of the women included, they would not be prevented from stitching a line through the name. Greg recalls that I invited him to not only sew a line through the name, but also to add annotations.⁴⁰⁰ As nobody else was present during this conversation we have had to agree to disagree. From my perspective the conversation was open, amicable and non-confrontational throughout, although I felt as though I had been put in a slightly difficult position being asked to respond to this by a member of staff without time for consideration or advice and support from the wider team. After this conversation took place I contacted my university supervisor to ask for advice from the University perspective, and contacted Maggie (Experience and Partnerships Curator and my primary point of contact within this project) to let a member of the National Trust team know as soon as possible that this might become an issue.

On 6 August 2024, when I was not on site, I received confirmation from the Hardwick Hall team that a Letter of Concern had been received from the member of staff, raising concerns about the psychological impact of the inclusion of J.K. Rowling's name on the artwork, feeling that it affected their well-being and sense of safety at work.⁴⁰¹ There was also a wider concern about how other staff, volunteers, and potentially visitors might respond.⁴⁰² On the same day, I was informed about and sent photographs of the actions taken against the embroidery featuring J.K. Rowling - on each of the two instances the name had lines of embroidery stitched over. The name was still clearly visible but had stitches in the colours of the transgender flag (pale pink, pale blue and white) crossing through the name, along

⁴⁰⁰ Interview Greg 4/2/2025 via Microsoft Teams, Appendix 18.

⁴⁰¹ Interview Helen 20/12/2024 via Microsoft Teams, Appendix 9.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

with the acronym “terf” and an arrow pointing to one of the instances of the name (FIG. 43).⁴⁰³



FIG. 43. Embroidery of J.K. Rowling crossed out, Hardwick Hall.

I was informed by email ‘that the team’s initial reaction had come from a duty of care to staff, and a desire to make sure they do the thinking to make equitable and inclusive decisions on this’; the Hardwick Hall management had taken the individual pieces of embroidery featuring J.K. Rowling off display

⁴⁰³ The term *TERF* (*trans-exclusionary radical feminist*) was originally coined as a descriptive acronym but is now widely regarded as pejorative or disparaging in many contexts. Lexicographic sources note that the term is “often disparaging” and that unless self-identifying, individuals labelled this way may regard it as a slur, particularly given its association with hostility toward transgender people. In academic and public discourse, scholars and editors have debated its use, with some commentators advising against its inclusion in formal writing to avoid deploying offensive language. People targeted by the term themselves frequently characterise it as pejorative or hate speech, and its use in media and activism has generated controversy and whether it functions as a slur in practice. *OED.com Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. ‘Terf Noun’, [accessed 28/2/2026]; Sian Baldwin, ‘What Is a Terf? All Explained as Oxfam Apologises for Pride Cartoon’, *The Standard*, 7/6/2023; H.J., ‘Transgender Identities: A Series of Invited Essays’, *The Economist*, 29/6/2018; Andrea James, ‘Transgender Slang, Slurs, and Controversial Words’ <<https://www.transgendermap.com/guidance/resources/words/slang-slurs/>> [accessed 28/2/2026].

temporarily while they worked through the issue with Hardwick staff and volunteers, myself and the University.⁴⁰⁴

I was in contact with the Hardwick Hall team via email and confirmed the following (included here in full to show the clear communication at this stage between Hardwick Hall and me, and my position as the artist responsible for the artwork):

Removal of work from display

I understand the decision to temporarily remove this from display - there were actually two instances of JK Rowling appearing on the panels so I assume two have been removed from display? Hopefully we can come to a resolution on this reasonably quickly so the artwork can progress - regardless of the decision on the inclusion of JK Rowling, there are many other visitor contributions included on these panels which I would like returned to display as soon as possible. Visitors who do not actively participate in the making of the work often engage in conversations by looking through the embroideries and choices of others. Removal of sections of the work limits this interaction.

Censorship of names

I stand by the decision we made as a team before the installation opened. If I begin telling people that certain people's names are not acceptable because they may cause offence to others, I'm not sure where we draw the line. We all knew that JK Rowling's potential inclusion would be divisive. I recognise that many people view her as hateful, dangerous and traumatising, however I also recognise that others find her inspirational and representative of their views. I don't believe it is my place, or the place of this artwork to decide whose opinion should take precedence. I would apply the same rationale to the inclusion of the name of any other controversial or divisive figure - there are likely to be numerous before the project is done. The very nature of the participatory artwork allowing visitors to express their preferences and ideologies is that there will different choices shown alongside each other. The aim is to create a space for discussion and debate over what are values are and who we look to to personify them - not to come to a consensus as to what and who that is.

⁴⁰⁴ Email dated 6/8/2024 from National Trust staff.

Slurs / Offensive language

I have been forwarded the photograph of the new addition to the JK Rowling embroidery, showing the crossing out with embroidery and the addition of the term "terf". The crossing out of the name is something we have previously discussed and is fine. The addition of the word "terf" is an offensive slur and as such will be removed as per our previous discussions regarding inflammatory / aggressive / offensive language. In addition to the removal of the word, I would like to know whether it was added by a visitor, or a staff member. I believe ***** was the room guide facilitating participation today, so may be able to shed some light on this. Room guides have been advised not to intervene if visitors are embroidering something offensive, so as to avoid direct confrontation, so I would not have expected her to prevent this, but I would be extremely surprised if she hadn't noticed it happening and who by. I sincerely hope it was a visitor - as if a member of staff has gone to the effort to add an offensive slur (in this case one particularly and increasingly used to silence women's voices) on an artwork designed to celebrate women, then that is a whole other issue which I would expect to be taken very seriously by the National Trust. Hopefully just the coincidental intervention of a visitor.

Suggested next steps

I would suggest that we have some additional interpretation in the room in the form of an explanation / disclaimer. Something along the lines of "In direct response to the Ancient Noblewomen embroideries, this artwork seeks to encourage consideration, debate and discussion of the values visitors hold in high esteem and the women they believe possess and uphold these values. By inviting visitors to express their choices through participation we hope the artwork will come to illustrate the diverse selection of inspirational figures, representing and respecting the wide-ranging views, beliefs and life experiences of our visitors. The women and girls named in this artwork are the choices of individual participants and are not indicative of the values of the artist Layla Khoo, the University of Leeds or the National Trust" Happy for others to weigh in on any suggested edits.⁴⁰⁵

At this point I also informed the Hardwick Hall team that I had taken the preventative steps of temporarily disabling all of my social media accounts and professional website, and that the University press and media team and security services had been made aware of the issue in case the situation escalated due to the heated conflicts often associated with issues related to J.K. Rowling and gender.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁵ Email dated 6/8/2024 to Hardwick Hall, National Trust staff.

⁴⁰⁶ The Week, 'The Trans Debate: A Fiercely-Fought Battleground in the Nation's Culture Wars', *The Week*, (15/11/2021), <<https://theweek.com/news/society/954778/the-trans-debate-a-fiercely->

A meeting was held on 14 August 2024 with the Hardwick Hall team, where options were explored for ways forward. I was informed that the participant who had embroidered the lines of stitching was the complainant member of staff, Greg. It became clear that the Hardwick Hall team were not able to continue without further advice from national colleagues and given the timing of this falling within the summer holidays and annual leave this would cause further delays. Throughout the period of this initial complaint I was supported by “Maggie” Experiences and Programme Curator. In this instance Maggie essentially found herself ‘in the middle’ trying to understand both sides without directly engaging with all staff or volunteers affected.⁴⁰⁷ Her role was to observe, interpret, and mediate between conversations happening in different parts of the organisation, keeping relationships positive while both sides tried to navigate a path forward.⁴⁰⁸ The case highlighted broader institutional challenges within the National Trust.⁴⁰⁹ While many heritage organisations routinely respect the autonomy of visiting artists, the Trust’s long-standing institutional voice sometimes makes it harder to accommodate perspectives that are provocative or unfamiliar.⁴¹⁰ As Maggie noted, the organisation has “an incredibly strong National Trust voice,” which can make it difficult to hold other voices fully.⁴¹¹ The team agreed that, in the interests of fairness and to allow adequate time to consider the implications of the decisions being made, all participation in the project should be paused while these discussions took place.

fought-battleground-in-uk-culture-wars> [accessed 28/2/26], Caroline Davies, 'JK Rowling's Journey from Harry Potter Creator to Gender-Critical Campaigner', *The Guardian*, 18/4/2025.

⁴⁰⁷ Interview Maggie 23/12/2024 via Microsoft Teams.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

The Hardwick Hall management felt that it would not be helpful to draw further attention to the issue by publicising that the project had paused for this reason and did not wish to make the wider staff team aware of the issue. It was decided that the official communications would be that, due to annual leave, we could not facilitate participation for a few weeks, and that we would be open again soon. At this point I expressed the importance of transparency with the staff team. I had already been approached by volunteers who had heard rumours and wanted to know what was happening. I was assured that, while it was felt to be unnecessary and unhelpful to alert the whole Hardwick team to the issue, those working directly with the project would be kept informed. This was the first of many points throughout this area of conflict where the clarity and honesty essential for successful participatory work were compromised due to an aversion to risk.⁴¹² A staff workshop was being arranged to include the member of staff who had raised the complaint, any other staff and volunteers directly involved with the project, the general manager and the volunteer manager. The intended content of this workshop was to discuss the issues raised in this complaint, how people felt about visitors expressing themselves in ways which may not be in line with staff members values, and the complexities involved in moving forward. The General Manager, “Helen” was keen for this workshop to take place as soon as possible, as many Hardwick staff had upcoming annual leave booked for multiple weeks. It was decided for the sake of expediency that the workshop would take place while I was on prebooked holiday. The complainant member of staff later relayed in interview that my absence from this workshop had not helped matters.⁴¹³ I also felt somewhat

⁴¹² Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, p.20.

⁴¹³ Interview Greg 4/2/2025 via Microsoft Teams, Appendix 18.

removed from this. I spoke to Helen before the workshop where she listed the areas she would be discussing, and I was given a full update from Helen afterwards that it had gone well and staff had engaged in constructive discussion. However, not being able to be there put me at a disadvantage in understanding the staff issues and being able to join in the discussion. I was able to provide a statement clearly outlining my own views to be shared at the meeting, but I think it would have been more helpful for ongoing relationships to have been able to answer questions and enter into a wider debate on this in person.

On my return from leave further meetings with the Hardwick Hall management team were held online on the phone and in person to discuss the steps being taken. At the meeting on 2 September 2024, we were able to discuss ways forward. At this stage, Helen had sought advice from multiple national teams within the National Trust, including the Head Curator, the Inclusion and Belonging Team, the LGBTQ+ Network, the Trans Inclusion Lead, and the Communications Lead for *Everyone Welcome*. In a later interview, Helen explained that, while having significant leadership and decision-making responsibility locally, Hardwick was also operating within a wider organisational structure, interacting with multiple disciplines and layers of leadership.⁴¹⁴ Helen described this as being like ‘the middle of an hourglass’ where decision-making requires balancing local autonomy with guidance and oversight from across the organisation.⁴¹⁵ The National Trust press and communications team were also managing both pre-emptive and reactive national media responses. Despite this wide consultation, Helen reported that the LGBTQ+ Network, Trans Inclusion Lead, and Inclusion and Belonging Team

⁴¹⁴ Interview Helen 20/12/2024 via Microsoft Teams.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

were unable to reach consensus on how the Trust should respond to the inclusion - and subsequent crossing out - of J.K. Rowling's name within the artwork. In parallel, Greg later stated that although he had not acted in an official capacity on behalf of the National Trust, he believed the organisation would support what he described as a 'pro-trans stance'.⁴¹⁶ He explained that he felt a personal moral obligation to act in order to protect 'fellow human beings from things that were triggering and harmful'.⁴¹⁷ However, the absence of agreement at a national level about what constituted harm - or how it should be mitigated - complicates this position. In this context, Kester's observation becomes pertinent: 'Discursive violence occurs whenever one individual speaks for another, no matter how firmly he or she is anchored within a given collective.'⁴¹⁸

From the National Trust perspective, the key areas to consider were: staff and visitor wellbeing being central to decision making, the integrity of the artwork, and Hardwick Hall being a place that remains welcoming. Helen highlighted the importance of managing communications risk carefully, with particular attention to avoiding reputational harm that might arise if any single group were framed as villains. Their aim was to identify a compromise that all parties could work with, and several options were proposed. One suggestion was that the repetition of names might intensify the impact of encountering a name that some visitors may disagree with, and I was therefore asked to consider limiting or preventing the repetition of names. I explained that I would not be willing to adopt this approach. Many visitors arrived with a specific individual in mind whom they wished to include and informing them that a particular name had already been embroidered, for example,

⁴¹⁶ Interview Greg 4/2/2025 via Microsoft Teams.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, p.130.

Rosa Parks, would be unlikely to prompt them to choose an alternative figure. Furthermore, repetition was already an established feature of the work. Removing duplication would raise practical and ethical questions. How could I decide which of the multiple embroideries of a name such as Taylor Swift should remain, and which should be removed? Having observed visitors spend many hours embroidering the piece, I was not prepared to undo or remove any aspect of their contribution. Restricting repetition would also have implications for non-famous names, raising questions about whether there could now be only one “mum” or one “Sarah,” and how such decisions could be justified. The General Manager also expressed a desire to involve groups from currently under-served communities in order to broaden participation and better reflect the diversity of those the National Trust seeks to engage, rather than only those it currently serves. While this aim was welcomed, any outreach of this kind would need to be facilitated by the National Trust team, as I did not have the capacity or the ethical approval required to undertake additional research or engagement with outreach groups.

The issue of the name being crossed out was discussed. The complainant, a member of staff, was already unhappy that their action of embroidering the word “terf” had been removed. In a later interview the staff member, “Greg” raised that one of their points of contention was my response to their attempts at annotation.⁴¹⁹ Greg had wanted to add context by labelling Rowling’s stance as trans-exclusionary, using the widely recognised term TERF (trans-exclusionary radical feminist).⁴²⁰ They argued that this term accurately described Rowling’s views without being a slur in intent, highlighting her exclusion of trans people as

⁴¹⁹ Interview Greg 4/2/2025 via Microsoft Teams.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

extreme.⁴²¹ However, this annotation was rejected by me, who deemed TERF a slur, while simultaneously leaving the name of Rowling on the piece.⁴²² Greg found this contradictory: the work tolerated a name representing active harm but we had censored an accurate descriptor intended to explain that harm.⁴²³ Greg seemed to insinuate that this choice indicated my lack of support to transgender people.⁴²⁴ The Hardwick team and I agreed that if the crossing-out stitches were allowed to remain (consideration had been given to whether the line of crossing-out stitches should be removed), then any other participant should also continue to be permitted to stitch through (but not cut out or unpick) any other names. I felt that, as this was something we had already agreed prior to participation, it would be wrong and disingenuous to go back and change that agreement once it had taken place. Concerns were raised that, if the signage explicitly permitted crossing things out, the project could quickly devolve into a series of participants crossing out one another's work. Having previously worked on a project, *Change in Attitudes*, in which participation evolved without any change to the instructions, I felt it would be sufficient for new participants to see that a name had been crossed out and to decide for themselves whether they wished to do the same.

The final option considered was that, if an agreement could not be reached between me and the National Trust on an acceptable way forward, the project would have to end without any further participation. In a later interview Helen reflected on the dual risks present at this stage: some members of the public might object to JK Rowling's inclusion, while others might be upset if her name was

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² Ibid.; *OED.com Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'Terf Noun'; Baldwin, *What Is a Terf?*.

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

edited or removed.⁴²⁵ Preparing for both possibilities was essential, but cancellation of the project was never seriously considered, as maintaining freedom of artistic expression was deemed a key principle.⁴²⁶

On the 11th September the project reopened to the public for participation with the following agreed between myself and the National Trust team:

- All existing names would remain in place, and participants would be free to add any name they wished.
- Participants could respond directly to each other as they see fit, including through crossing out or stitching over names contributed by someone else. This also meant that the embroideries with JKR's name crossed out would be returned.
- Additional contributions to the embroidery (e.g. labels, symbols) will be considered appropriate contributions and be left in situ, providing they were not offensive. A proposed 'decision group' will agree parameters (e.g. child friendly, no violent language etc.) and will then use that framework to make decisions on a case-by-case basis as the project progresses.
- Reactive communications would be confirmed so that we would be prepared for any challenges arising in the external landscape.

⁴²⁵ Interview 20/12/2024.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

- Wellbeing sessions, training, and support would be put in place for staff and volunteers to ensure that those involved were properly supported.
- To proceed with the Material Power outreach sessions which would be run by the National Trust and would use the full scope of Material Power to explore textiles and symbolism, while also including a section allowing participants to contribute to Virtuous Women. The National Trust would lead on the design of these workshops and would liaise with me to ensure that they did not cross any ethical boundaries and that I was comfortable with the inclusion of the contributions in the finished piece. This would include sections of fabric being taken out to outreach groups, who could then add their own contributions.

Upon reopening there were further issues. Information was not being conveyed clearly, often as an oversight and due to different part-time working hours. The impact was that I was not informed of changes made relating to how visitors would participate, and volunteers working with me had not been fully informed of the issues which had caused the temporary closure of the project, or how we had chosen to move forward with this. The visitor route through the house had been changed by the Hardwick Hall team. Previously, all visitors were directed through the room in which A Virtuous Woman was located and actively open for participation. The revised route bypassed this room, with visitors informed of its existence only as an optional extra. Additional doors had been closed to facilitate this change. I became aware of this only when a volunteer mentioned in passing over lunch that the opportunity to participate had been 'downgraded'. Further

discussions with volunteers revealed that vague and inaccurate information had been given regarding the reasons for the decision - specifically, that it was intended to prevent members of mining communities from being offended by the inclusion of the name Margaret Thatcher on the dress.⁴²⁷ I raised both issues immediately with the Hardwick Hall team stating that the change to the visitor route should have been explained to me prior to my arrival on site, that the alteration was already causing difficulties for visitors, who were repeatedly trying to open closed doors and were unclear about the correct route through the house, and volunteers had been misinformed about the actual challenges faced by the project. I was assured that this had been an oversight rather than a deliberate omission. The visitor route was subsequently reviewed by the house team, who concluded that the changes were detrimental to both the visitor experience and the overall flow of the house. As a result, the original route was reinstated.

It became apparent that the volunteers had still not been informed of exactly why the project had been paused. Two weeks later I was contacted by a volunteer who regularly worked on the project because she had just come across the crossed out J.K. Rowling, had been unaware of it and did not know what to do about it. I had also been asked by many of the volunteer team over this time what was going on. With no means of contacting all of the volunteer team electronically and my requests for this to be done by Hardwick Hall staff unanswered, I resorted to leaving a hand written note in the room guide handover file in the participation room, briefly explaining what had happened, what had been decided, and what to do if a member of the public had any questions about this (FIG. 44).

⁴²⁷ This reason seemed particularly disingenuous given that Margaret Thatcher's name does not actually appear on the dress.

Hi - couple of updates!

✱ There are two instances on the embroideries of the name JK Rowling being crossed out - this is known to me + Hardwick team and doesn't need any action taken. If you're unsure how to talk to visitors about this please see [redacted] re the reactive commas.

✱ If visitors object to a name, please encourage them to think of 'another name to 'counter' the person they object to, we're not expecting everyone to agree to what or who a virtuous woman is, which is why we are letting everyone choose their own instead of waiting for the favourite.

As always, please remind visitors of ~~the~~ timescale for house closing after 2.45pm, feel free to embroider if you'd like to, and avoid starting new pieces if there are still spaces left to fill!

Email me with any queries. Thanks as always
[redacted] Lanton.

FIG. 44. Handwritten note for volunteers, Hardwick Hall.

Despite all of the concerns raised during the period of temporary closure, there was no significant negative reaction from visitors to the presence of J.K. Rowling's name on the piece, or the fact that she had been crossed out. The two panels featuring her crossed out were on the table for people to continue embroidering for a further three weeks after the project reopened. I observed that people noticed them and some visitors took photos.⁴²⁸ Two visitors who spoke to

⁴²⁸ Research Journal notes 11/9/2024, 17/10/2024.

me while they were participating during this time stated that they had embroidered J.K. Rowling's name entirely because they had seen she had been crossed out (FIG. 45).⁴²⁹ One of these visitors shared J.K. Rowling's gender critical views and wished to reinstate her name in solidarity.⁴³⁰ The other visitor told me that she was not a fan of J.K. Rowling and had no strong feelings either way on her ideology.⁴³¹ However, she strongly opposed any kind of cancel culture and so would re-embroider her name for that reason alone.⁴³² During this period, Maya Forstater, Jess de Wahls, April Ashley and Marsha P Johnson also appeared on the embroidery panels, signalling a quiet conflict between participants on the issue of gender.⁴³³ In face-to-face discussions around differences of opinion and belief systems, comments were overwhelmingly respectful and debate remained constructive. When participants were able to engage directly with someone holding a different view, conversations were conducted in good faith, characterised by curiosity rather than judgement. This dynamic aligns with Simon's observation 'what started with unsettling personal exposure ended in dialogue'.⁴³⁴ By contrast, disparaging judgement tended to emerge only when visitors encountered the expression of an opinion - or the nomination of a woman - with which they disagreed, but without the original participant present to contextualise or defend it.

⁴²⁹ Research Journal notes 14/10/2024.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Josephine Campbell, 'Cancel Culture', *EBSCO*, (2024), <<https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/cancel-culture#full-article>> [accessed 1/3/2026].

⁴³³ Maya Forstater is a director of Sex Matters and a gender critical campaigner, Maya Forstater, 'Forstater.Com' (2025) <<https://www.forstater.com/>> [accessed 30/12/2025]; Jess de Wahls is an embroidery artist also known for her gender critical views, Jess de Wahls, 'Jessdewahls.Com' (2025) <<https://www.jessdewahls.com/>> [accessed 30/12/2025]; April Ashley was a model, dancer and socialite and amongst the earliest people to undertake gender realignment surgery, Veronica Horwell, 'April Ashley Obituary', *The Guardian*, 2025. 30/12/2025 (2022), <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/jan/19/april-ashley-obituary>> ; and Marsha P. Johnston was an LGBTQ activist and drag queen, Tyler Piccotti, 'Marsha P. Johnson' (2024) <<https://www.biography.com/activists/marsha-p-johnson>> [accessed 30/12/2025].

⁴³⁴ Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, p.54.

of Hardwick Hall winning the Europa Nostra award.⁴³⁵ Invitees were the final people to add names to the embroidery. As the participatory phase drew to a close, both practical and conceptual challenges persisted. While all contributions were included in the finished textile, not all could remain fully visible; some elements were layered, obscured, or positioned high on the piece and potentially unseen. Photographing and cataloguing every contribution became an essential part of the documentation, ensuring that each participant's input was recorded. This echoes the reflections of Bishop and Schrag, who acknowledge the difficulty of capturing participatory art. Photographs and documentation cannot replicate the experience of participation, but they do preserve the social, political, and aesthetic significance of the work, providing a crucial reference for future engagement and research.⁴³⁶

At this point Hardwick Hall moved to its traditional Christmas showing of the House which does not include the room *A Virtuous Woman* had been created in and for. This gave the opportunity to photograph each embroidered panel, to catalogue all acts of participation and then sew each of the panels onto the background textile to complete the artwork. This work was completed through December and January. The interpretation was updated to reflect that the piece was no longer available to participate with, and the artwork was hung on the wall (FIG. 46), protected by a rope barrier in the same way all artworks are in the house to dissuade visitors from touching them.

⁴³⁵ European Heritage Awards, 'Gideon Tapestries' (2024) <<https://www.europeanheritageawards.eu/winners/gideon-tapestries/>> [accessed 28/2/2026].

⁴³⁶ Schrag, 'Agonistic Tendencies'; Bishop, *Artificial Hells*.



FIG. 46. *A Virtuous Woman*, Hardwick Hall, Photograph by the author.

Escalation and exposure

On 6 March 2025, I delivered a presentation on this research in progress at the Annual Post Graduate and Early Career Researcher (PGEER) Country House Group conference at the Paul Mellon Centre, including details of the postponement of the project and the issues arising from the embroidery and subsequent crossing out of J.K. Rowling. On 11 March 2025, a PhD researcher posted an inflammatory thread on the topic, tagging in several journalists and J.K. Rowling.

@LottieHistory Hardwick Hall was used as a filming location in one of the Harry Potter films. Last year they ran an art installation the public could take part in, embroidering names of women they admire. Several children embroidered the name @jk_rowling and it caused so much controversy the

@LottieHistory project had to be shut down temporarily whilst The National Trust decided what to do. Someone had embroidered a line through the name, and they weren't sure if they should scrap that piece or not (some other names chosen below). Some staff said they felt unsafe. In the end they

@LottieHistory decided to let people choose any name they wanted, but they put a sign up saying the names on display did not always reflect the views of The National Trust. Utter madness @Craig_Simpson_ @MailOnline @Stewcarr @JuliaHB1 @MichelleDewbs @ZacGoldsmith @soniasodha @VictoriaPeckham⁴³⁷

The post gained 266.6K views, 3.3K likes and 454 retweets. The National Trust press and media team were aware and ready with pre-prepared reactive communications but these were not needed as interest on X died down within a couple of days and mainstream media did not take the bait.

On 24 May 2025, a visitor to Hardwick Hall made a complaint on site after seeing that JK Rowling's name had been crossed out on the *Virtuous Woman* finished embroidery. The Women's Rights Network Derbyshire and Staffordshire posted a thread on X detailing the visitor complaint regarding the crossing out of JK Rowling's name and calling for the National Trust to add a statement to the artwork, explaining why the crossing out remains on display.

@WRNDerbyshire 🗨️ At a recent visit to the magnificent #HardwickHall in Derbyshire, managed by @NationalTrust, a visitor was dismayed to find that even the celebration of women in the medium of something as innocuous as embroidery is not safe from a woman-hating ideological infestation 1/10

@WRNDerbyshire A Virtuous Woman, a participatory textile artwork piece inspired by Bess of Hardwick's Ancient Noblewomen embroideries, launched in 2024 by creator @KhooLayla to "represent brilliant women" that "align our values with today" is on display at Hardwick Hall during 2025 2/10

⁴³⁷ Post on X.com, 11/3/2025.

@WRNDerbyshire The inspirational piece consists of recycled fabric, the creator says it aims to "represent & reflect the wide-ranging views, beliefs & life experiences of Hardwick's visitors" Contributors were invited to nominate women's names & virtues to be embroidered onto the piece 3/10

@WRNDerbyshire Words expressing a woman's virtue or value from today's time were embroidered on panels, such as: positivity, resilience, sisterhood, valour, temperance, respect, justice, empathy 4/10

@WRNDerbyshire Names of inspirational women were added including: Queens Elizabeth I & II, Ruth Walker, Yoko Ono, Amy Winehouse,

@KamalaHarris, Marie Curie, Anne Boleyn, Margaret Thatcher,

@GretaThunberg @taylorswift13, Beatrix Potter, Enid Blyton, and

@JKRowling 5/10

@WRNDerbyshire Of all the many, many names that were added to the tapestry, only ONE name was allowed to be disrespected. Can you guess who's name it was ? 6/10

@WRNDerbyshire Indeed. JKRowling's name was embroidered over with neat stitching to cross out her name! Can you imagine the malevolence, of the perpetrator who did the deed, then the creator who didn't unpick it, & ultimately the National Trust that allowed this to stand a year on? 7/10

@WRNDerbyshire So, what should we do about this? We are not asking them to unpick it. Nor do we advocate anyone taking action to correct this nasty act of spite. No, we want it to stand. With a simple addition to their description 9/10

@WRNDerbyshire We ask @NationalTrust to add a statement about the crossing out of @jk_rowling's name, explaining the reason it remains. How this nasty act of spite is a symbol of the banality of evil. Where even embroidery is not safe from the woman-hating intolerance of our times /END⁴³⁸

This post was reposted by other satellite branches of the Women's Rights Network and so had a much wider reach across social media. At this point communication between Hardwick Hall / National Trust and me was again limited and information was not being shared consistently. When I became aware that these posts had been published on social media, I had assumed that the National Trust had not seen them as I had not been informed. However, by the time I had

⁴³⁸ Post on X.com, 24/5/2025.

seen the posts and contacted the National Trust to inform them, they had already released a statement on X,

@nationaltrust May 25, 2025 Hello, this is a visitor engagement research project, in collaboration with a visiting artist and the University of Leeds which involves a collaborative piece of art formed of participants' views from a variety of age groups, life experiences and beliefs. Any contributions to the piece have been made by those who chose to take part. None of the views expressed or actions taken by participants represent the views of the National Trust, the artist or the University of Leeds.⁴³⁹

Members of the Women's Rights Network subsequently carried out a protest on site (FIG. 47). Again, I was not informed of this by the National Trust and came across it during my now regular checks of social media to ascertain if there was any risk of direct action being taken against me. Women's Rights Network also created a short film explaining their position.⁴⁴⁰

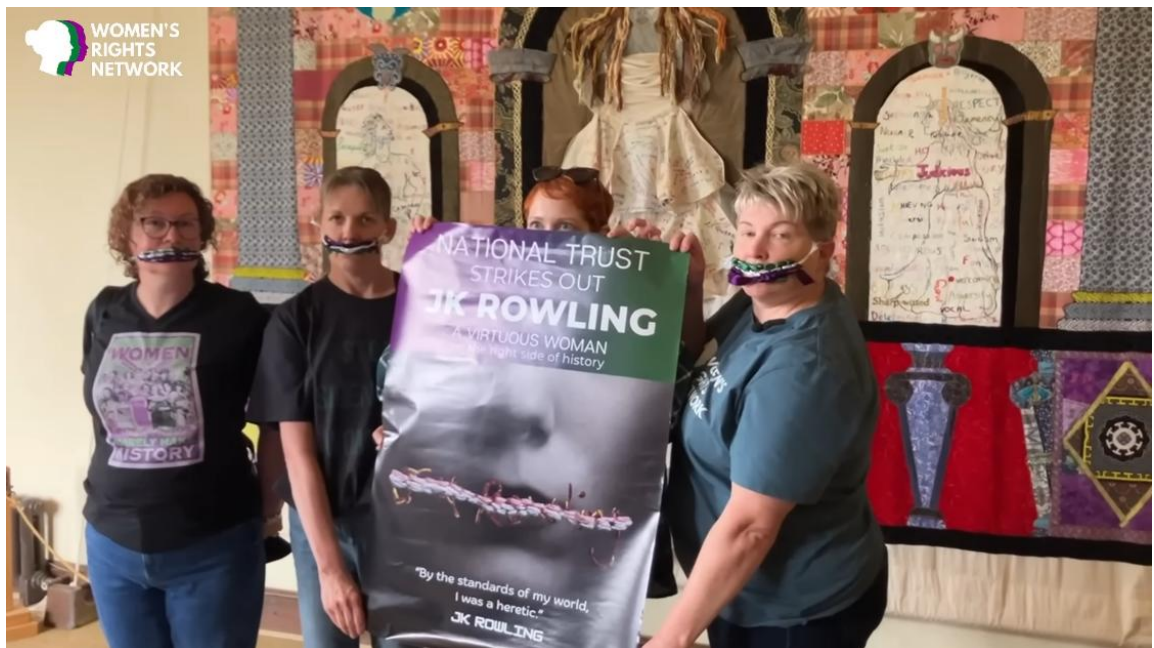


FIG. 47. WRN Protest at Hardwick Hall, still image taken from YouTube (2025)

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewqfnC0-4DY>> [accessed 30/12/2025]

⁴³⁹ Post on X.com, 25/5/2025.

⁴⁴⁰ Women's Rights Network, 'The Story of the Shocking JK Rowling & National Trust Embroidery Scandal' (2025) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewqfnC0-4DY>> [accessed 30/12/2025].

On 31 May 2025, two visitors to Hardwick Hall cut away the line of stitches through one of the instances of J.K. Rowling's name and posted images and video of themselves doing so on X.

@JeanHatchet May 31 2025 Injustice to JK Rowling corrected. Don't erase the names of women from art or life. #TerfsDidThis @LightninLex perfect wingwoman as always.

At this point the mainstream media began to take an interest in the story, including a gender critical journalist posting on their own blog and articles appearing in *The Times*, BBC, *Sky News*, *Yahoo News*, *Pink News*, *The Independent*, *The Telegraph* and others.⁴⁴¹ I had been advised by National Trust press and media to not comment on social media or directly to journalists, as this would likely blow over if I refrained from commenting. The press and media team from the University of Leeds held a similar view. However, at this time I was now being contacted constantly throughout the day and night. Some contact was private and direct; some was on public platforms - demanding to know what my position on this was and why I had let this stand. The National Trust Press Office were inconsistent in the information they gave to the press - on one occasion I was forwarded an email from a journalist including questions the National Trust had already answered.

Are you telling me the stitching over of JK Rowling's name was done by an anonymous, unknown participant in the project, without any oversight sought or given by the artist? Is the participant's name known to the NT or

⁴⁴¹ Nick Wallis, 'National Trust "Deeply Disappointed" by Removal of JK Rowling Stitch-Over' (2025) <<https://genderblog.net/national-trust-deeply-disappointed-by-removal-of-jk-rowling-stitch-over/>> [accessed 30/12/2025]; Jessica Sharkey, 'National Trust Pulls JK Rowling Artwork after Name "Tampered With"', *The Times*, 5/6/2025; Danny Fullbrook, 'National Trust Covers Artwork Referencing JK Rowling after Tampering', 2025 (2025), <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c2d5867e61go>> [accessed 30/12/2025]; Sky News, 'Artwork Referencing JK Rowling Taken Down by National Trust after Being "Tampered With"', ; Chantelle Billson, 'National Trust Removes Artwork Bearing JK Rowling's Name to Protect It from "Tampering"', *Pink News*, 5/6/2025; Holly Evans, 'National Trust Covers up Artwork with JK Rowling's Name after Public Interference', *Independent*, 5/6/2025; Charlotte McLaughlin, 'Artwork Featuring JK Rowling's Name Taken Off Display to Stop "Tampering"', *Yahoo News*, 4/6/2025; Craig Simpson, 'National Trust in Row over Artwork That Refers to JK Rowling', *The Telegraph*, 4/6/2025.

the artist? Was the person who did it male or female? **The action was taken by an unknown member of the public as part of the invitation to people to participate in the project.**

Does the NT see any irony in platforming what is almost certainly an act of misogyny in a piece dedicated to women? **Without knowing the identity or opinion of the person who took this action we can't comment.**⁴⁴²

This placed me in an impossible position. I was unwilling to corroborate the claim that the identity and motivations of the participant were unknown, given that I had conducted and recorded a full interview in which the individual clearly articulated their reasons for acting. At the same time, I was acutely aware of the potential consequences of contradicting the National Trust publicly. Members of staff at Hardwick Hall were already being subjected to abuse and accusations on social media, particularly those whom commentators speculated were transgender. Had I informed the journalist that the organisation's statement was inaccurate and that the participant who crossed out J.K. Rowling's name was a member of staff there was a significant risk that, taken out of context, this information could have intensified the hostility. In the charged online environment, it was foreseeable that the public might wrongly infer that the individual in question was transgender, reinforcing existing speculation and potentially placing colleagues at further risk. While I recognise that the National Trust may also have wished to avoid such an outcome, I was neither consulted nor informed prior to the statement being issued. Indeed, I was not told that the same journalist intended to discuss the matter on national radio that evening until five days later.

Social media attention increased and I was bombarded with online abuse, both publicly and privately. While most of the abuse took place on X.com individuals found my accounts on Instagram and Facebook to leave abusive

⁴⁴² Email to National Trust Press Office from Nick Wallis, 26/5/2026.

comments there and posted links and images to my LinkedIn and University profile pages. Thinly veiled threats were being made which I was advised to take seriously.

@LightninLex That's not the corrected one, this is. Khoo has posted the corrected one WITH the name crossed out, so either she's redone the trans censorship or she's using an old photo. Either way she's made a very clear statement, now it's FAFO time⁴⁴³

My artistic and academic reputation were being dragged through the mud. I was accused of transphobia for allowing J.K. Rowling's name to be on the work in the first place and being a traitor to women for allowing her name to be crossed out.⁴⁴⁴ I was accused of creating this issue in the first place in order to further my artistic career and my own research. On social media platforms and in the comments sections of articles, aside from the general outrage that people had participated in ways that other people did not agree with, there appeared to be confusion as to why one piece of participation had been allowed (the crossing out of the name) and another had not (the removal of the crossing out). While I am sure it was quite clear to the visitors who cut away the stitching that what they were doing was not part of a participatory artwork, it would not be clear to the wider public who had not encountered the artwork and had not read much beyond the headlines.

@JeanHatchet, Jun 1, 2025 Replying to @ClementiaFandal and @LightninLex I was given my instructions by LLex - "if anyone tries to stop you just keep going - they can't touch you until the police come" but yes I was scared. We were both shaking. Hard to unpick when your hands are shaking.

@JeanHatchet Jun 6, 2025 Replying to @Sarakay80 @JazzJobsworth and 4 others It was an act of resistance. It took ten minutes actually. Shaking, sweating and open to arrest. The two of us were willing to risk this. @WRNDerbyshire didn't approve. You can't force people to pay attention

⁴⁴³ Post on X.com 1 July 2025. FAFO is an acronym which stands for Fuck Around and Find Out, meaning that there will be consequences to actions. Depending on context this can be used casually, as a joke, confrontationally or to threaten. Christopher, 'What Does Fafo Mean? Fafo Meaning in Text, Slang, Social Media & Real Life (Updated 2026)' (2026) <<https://meanary.com/what-does-fafo-mean/>> [accessed 29/3/2026].

⁴⁴⁴ Recommendation to be blocked on Bluesky 14/6/2025 for transphobia; X.com @ToothbrushMaestra 2/6/2025 'She's a coward and likely a traitor to our sex'.

to “measured” and “insightful” when they want rebellion. Are you cross direct action worked? Or is there something else? @HeatherB_WRN are you ok with these criticisms?

@JeanHatchet Jun 1, 2025 A story accompanies the unpicking. As @LightninLex and I walked to the rooms with the dress in, trying to look NORMAL and NOT DRAW ATTENTION, I got my little unpicking shears out and put them in my back pocket. Both very nervous we were pretending to examine things near the dress. A man suddenly said to me, “Erm, sorry, you erm dropped something” And sheepishly pointed to my shears. “I’ve no idea what it is!” He continued theatrically. I looked down. It was only the chuffin shears. I picked them up hastily, sure he would make a scene with security. Only later did I realise. He thought it was a pregnancy test! 🤔🤔🤔⁴⁴⁵

Hope’s question ‘Can, or should, arts practices skirt around the edges of ethical dilemmas, tickling and teasing people into a response?’, warning that in doing so, artists must accept the risk of being called out on these actions by those who might not agree, was strikingly appropriate in this context.⁴⁴⁶ This concern is particularly borne out by the issues that emerged during *A Virtuous Woman*. At the time of these events I was on sick leave from work recovering from major surgery, and so was not meant to be working on anything related to this research. The Security Services at the University had to be informed of the threats being made in case they developed from online ‘noise’ into real action. I had colleagues do a sweep of my online presence to make sure no connection could be found online to my children or my home address. I asked my family not to look at what was being written online. I had good reason for concern - the last high-profile case to be dragged through the press with connections to the National Trust was Prof Corinne

⁴⁴⁵ Quotes on X.com indicating both activists fully understood that their actions were not within the parameters of the participatory artwork.

⁴⁴⁶ Hope, *The Only Way Is Ethics*.

Fowler, who received a tirade of online abuse, hate mail, safety threats and threats to her academic funding in response to her report on colonialism.⁴⁴⁷

The Limits of Institutional Tolerance: Risk and Removal

The National Trust is no stranger to online and media controversy over new interpretations and interventions at their properties.⁴⁴⁸ While the organisation has publicly stood by its actions during some media storms, tensions remain between diversifying audiences and avoiding the alienation of existing members and volunteers.⁴⁴⁹ One notable instance occurred at Felbrigg Hall, where volunteers were initially told they would be unable to carry out visitor-facing duties if they declined to wear Pride badges.⁴⁵⁰ The decision was subsequently reversed, with the Trust clarifying that wearing the badges was optional.⁴⁵¹ Although the Trust may be willing to weather such institutional storms, the situation becomes considerably more difficult when individuals themselves are targeted. This highlights Ashton's recommendation that appropriate infrastructure and support must be in place to manage the personal and professional risks faced by staff and volunteers in controversial contexts.⁴⁵²

Hardwick Hall staff initially took the decision to cover the damaged section of the dress while a decision was made on how to proceed. Visitors to the hall took

⁴⁴⁷ Tim Adams, 'I'm Not Afraid of Anybody Now': The Woman Who Revealed Links between National Trust Houses and Slavery – and Was Vilified', *The Guardian*, 21/4/2024.

⁴⁴⁸ Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG). *Prejudice & Pride*.

⁴⁴⁹ Farley and Pollock, 'Contemporary Art in Heritage Practice', p.252; Catherine Bennett, 'Is Outing People Really the Remit of the National Trust?', *The Guardian*, 13/8/2017.

⁴⁵⁰ Lucy Pasha-Robinson, 'National Trust U-Turns on Forcing Volunteers to Wear Gay Pride Badges after Membership Exodus', *Independent*, 5/8/2017.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Ashton, *A Room of One's Own*.

photos of the dress covered and posted this on social media as evidence of censorship (FIG. 48).



FIG. 48. Post on X.com showing image of *A Virtuous Woman* covered up from display.

The room the artwork was in was then closed to prevent visitors having access to the work. Threats had been made of further activism both to this artwork, and potentially to other areas of the collection. Graham's participatory worlding had come into fruition - social media users had created 'self-organising alternatives to "on behalf of" governance' and the professionals were certainly no longer the mediators.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵³ Graham, *Deconstituting Museums*, p.125.

@JeanHatchet The name Was on there 7 times and crossed out twice. I unpicked one of those examples and if it's on display again I will unpick the Other.

@SueDefiant67 Perhaps a large group of women should arrive, needles and thread at the ready and begin stitching over the names of #SexTraitor s who promote men in womanface and violating our sex based rights

@KerryGrims75843 So are you saying that if there is a piece of artwork on display it's ok to bring a marker pen and cross out the bits I don't like?

@MockKing_J So can we come and throw orange paint over it and call this performance art? You are supposed to represent everyone, you know, the first word in your name? Do Your Job.⁴⁵⁴

The decision was made that the artwork would have to be taken down from display. The National Trust was not in a position to protect the artwork from further acts of activism, and further activism presented a threat to the artwork, the wider collection and the staff and volunteers of the hall. Hardwick Hall staff informed me that they had been struggling to deal with abusive contact, via email, telephone calls and in person. The original complaint had now escalated into wider abuse aimed at transgender staff, and the National Trust's position on gender.

@LightninLex Yes. We saw a man in a schoolgirl skirt working at the reception when we were buying our tickets. Apparently there are two at Hardwick Hall.

@IamGCWendy I'm glad that you were able to restore JK Rowlings' name and remove the over stitching. The National Trust is completely captured by trans ideology, which is why I'm no longer a member.

@ToothyMaestra There are at least two men who say they are women who work there. One 'greet's you on reception in a girl's school uniform skirt. The other shows his manhood off in tight pink leggings. It's perverted. The @nationaltrust have no idea what they are supporting. @RestoreTrustNT⁴⁵⁵

It is important to be clear at this stage that the issue with which I am concerned, as both artist and researcher, is not whether J.K. Rowling should have

⁴⁵⁴ Quotes from X.com. The reference to orange paint could be interpreted as a reference to Just Stop Oil direct action including vandalism involving orange paint and attempting to damage artworks to draw attention to their cause. Reuters, 'UK Climate Protest Group Just Stop Oil Says It Will Stop Direct Action', *Reuters*, 27/3/2025.

⁴⁵⁵ Quotes from X.com.

been included in, or crossed out, of the artwork. As an artist–researcher who invites visitors to participate in my work, it is neither relevant nor productive to publicise my personal views on whether J.K. Rowling should be celebrated or denigrated. Rather, the issue at hand concerns participants’ ability to express their views, opinions, and preferences; where the lines around censorship can or should be drawn and how, as an artist working within a heritage context, I can ethically and safely facilitate such expression within institutional constraints. This is particularly complex within a wider societal climate characterised by polarised political positions, diminished tolerance for opposing viewpoints, and cancel culture.⁴⁵⁶ This dynamic also involves an element of self-censorship. As reported in the Freedom In The Arts (FITA) report, the arts are traditionally understood as one of the last bastions of free expression; however, artists cannot ignore the very real concern that if work is deemed too controversial for an institution, opportunities for work may simply disappear.⁴⁵⁷ In the case of *A Virtuous Woman*, there was no “right” opinion that would have satisfied social media audiences. The debate had become tribal and binary. If I was perceived as aligned with one ideological position, I was assumed to be opposed to the other. Even declining to publicly endorse either viewpoint was taken as proof of my position. This brings to mind Gómez-Peña’s manifesto in *Mapping the Terrain* stating that we must avoid intercultural warfare,

Perhaps the key here is that we are all partially guilty, and that most of us are partially disenfranchised. At least among ourselves, like in a family reunion, we must face these issues frontally but with respect, without indicting anyone, without calling names. Our cultural institutions can perform an important role in this respect: they can function as laboratories to

⁴⁵⁶ Christopher Brito, "'Cancel Culture' Seems to Have Started as an Internet Joke. Now It's Anything But.", *CBS News*, 5/4/2021; Campbell, *Cancel Culture*; Stephen A Hassan, 'Why Cancel Culture by Anyone Is Harmful and Wrong', *Psychology Today*, (2021), <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/freedom-mind/202103/why-cancel-culture-anyone-is-harmful-and-wrong>> [accessed 14/2/2026].

⁴⁵⁷ Denise Fahmy, Rosie Kay, and Jo Phoenix, *Afraid to Speak Freely* (2025).

develop and test new models of collaboration, and as “free zones” for intercultural dialogue and radical thinking.⁴⁵⁸

I released my own statement by writing an article for *The Conversation* in an effort to ensure an accurate version of events was published and my voice could be heard, having been advised to avoid speaking to mainstream media or respond through social media.⁴⁵⁹ The irony was not lost on me that during a protest about women being silenced, I was being silenced. Having read their recent report *Afraid to Speak Freely*, I also had conversations with the founders of Freedom in the Arts to ask for advice on how to handle what felt like an uncontrollable surge of abuse coming from all angles.⁴⁶⁰ Their advice and support, along with private support given by other individuals who had found themselves on the wrong side of a media storm was invaluable. Rosie Kay subsequently also released an article on the situation in which I found myself, with my permission, and publicly called for the online abuse to end on X.⁴⁶¹

I continued to work with the National Trust on ways in which the artwork could be redisplayed. The National Trust team were clear that the original work could not go back on the wall; however, they were keen to work on other ways to display what was possible and created new interpretation to talk about what had happened. This far into the process the artwork had certainly created a space where

⁴⁵⁸ Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *From Art-Mageddon to Gringostroika: A Manifesto against Censorship* (Bay Press, 1995), pp.108-109.

⁴⁵⁹ The Conversation is a non-profit, independent news media outlet that publishes evidence-based analysis and research news written by academic experts, edited by professional journalists. Layla Khoo, 'My Artwork, a Virtuous Woman, Has Become the Centre of a Protest – It Shows How Our Polarised Society Can Affect Art', *The Conversation*, 2025. 30/12/2025 (2025), <<https://theconversation.com/my-artwork-a-virtuous-woman-has-become-the-centre-of-a-protest-it-shows-how-our-polarised-society-can-affect-art-260349>> .

⁴⁶⁰ Fahmy, Kay, and Phoenix, *Afraid to Speak Freely*.

⁴⁶¹ Rosie Kay, 'Against the New Witch-Hunt in the Arts', *The Critic*, 2025. 30/12/2025 (2025), <<https://thecritic.co.uk/against-the-new-witch-hunt-in-the-arts/>> .

‘conflicting points of view are confronted without any possibility of a final reconciliation’.⁴⁶² I worked with the team on creating new interpretation and a projection of images of the artwork which would be shown on the wall where the textile had previously hung. The team were initially keen to have this redisplay in position as soon as possible but then seemed equally keen to delay due to existing pressures on the press and media team, which was then followed by equipment delays. These delays meant that the redisplay was not installed until 21 August 2025.

With hindsight, the redisplay interpretation shown below more closely reflects what should have been presented from the outset: a clear and transparent account of the situation (FIGS. 49 and 50). Although the inclusion of contextual information regarding J.K. Rowling in the original interpretation was discussed informally, it was not carried through into the final version. The original interpretation instead reflected my proposal to prioritise a project overview and a list of participant-contributed names with brief descriptions.

⁴⁶² Mouffe, *Agonistics* p.92.



FIG. 49. Interpretation text for *A Virtuous Woman*, image supplied by National Trust, Hardwick Hall.

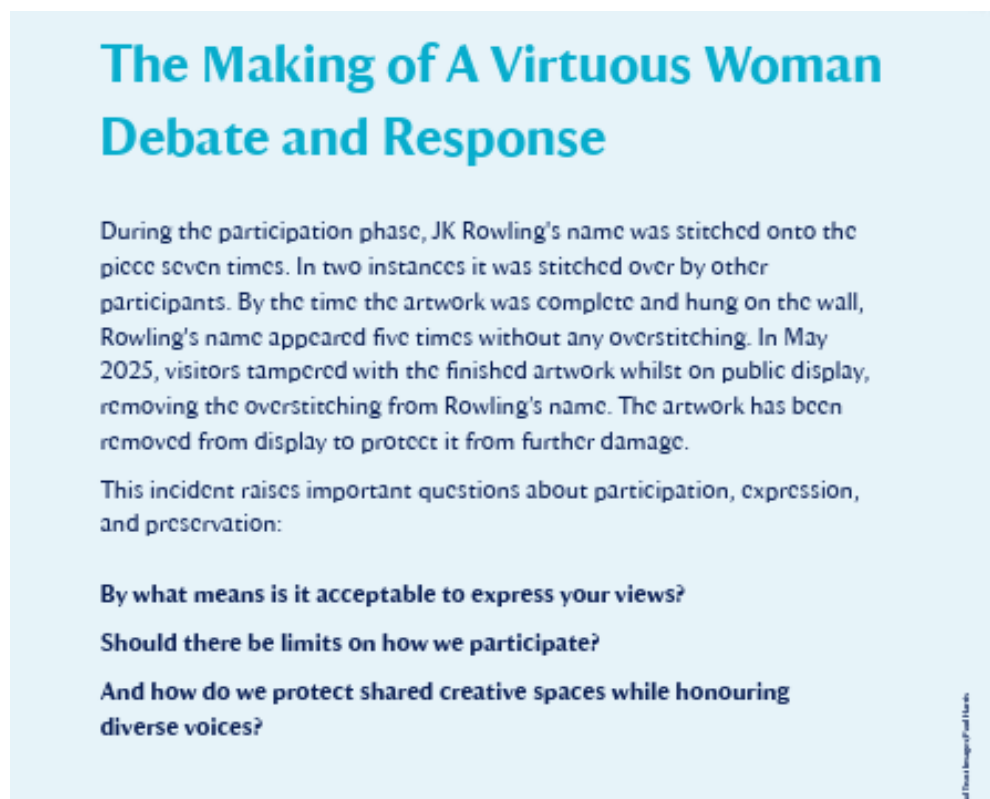


FIG. 50. Interpretation text for *A Virtuous Woman*, image supplied by National Trust, Hardwick Hall.

As far as I am aware, the redisplay of the work did not incur any further complaints or protests. I had asked the Hardwick Hall team if it would be possible to place a written feedback mechanism with the redisplay to be able to learn from people's reactions to the fallout from this, but I was told this would not be possible for the sake of staff and volunteer wellbeing, as they did not want to provide another platform for the abuse they suffered over the summer.

The redisplay of the artwork was deinstalled as planned in November 2025.



FIG. 51. *A Virtuous Woman*, Hardwick Hall.

Chapter Six – Findings, Implications and Conclusions

‘A direct battle between two opposing values’ is how the Hardwick Hall General Manager, “Helen” referred to the dilemma the Hardwick team faced in responding to conflict within *A Virtuous Woman*.⁴⁶³ “Maggie” the Experiences and Partnerships Curator, described two competing truths.⁴⁶⁴ This tension became the most visible and consequential moment of the project, shaping both its public reception and the institutional response that followed. However, the significance of this research extends beyond the conflict itself. This moment exposed the wider complexities of participatory practice within heritage contexts: the challenges of balancing institutional responsibility, artistic authorship, participant agency, and the unpredictable nature of visitor engagement. It revealed both the potential and fragility of agonistic participation, demonstrating the conditions required for disagreement to remain productive rather than become antagonistic. Through examining this moment alongside the wider participatory process, its evaluation, and the institutional context in which it unfolded, this research identifies not only the limitations of current approaches but also the possibilities for participatory art to enable heritage sites to support meaningful dialogue, embrace complexity, and accommodate multiple interpretations of their histories.

This research began by asking how participatory contemporary art installations shape visitor experience within heritage contexts, how such encounters might be meaningfully recognised and evaluated, and how participatory practices are negotiated within institutional frameworks when divergent perspectives emerge. While the research initially focused on emotional engagement and evaluation, the

⁴⁶³ Interview 20/12/2024.

⁴⁶⁴ Interview 23/12/2024.

unfolding realities of the project expanded this enquiry. The findings demonstrate that participatory art within heritage settings is not only a process of creating opportunities for visitor engagement, but also a complex negotiation between agency, authorship, institutional responsibility, and the conditions required for meaningful participation to take place.

Embedded Evaluation as Research Method

A significant contribution of this research lies in repositioning evaluation as an embedded and iterative method of enquiry rather than a retrospective measurement of outcomes. The evaluation processes explored in Chapter Three and subsequently embedded within the practice in Chapter Four became integral to the development of the practice itself. Rather than relying on conventional heritage evaluation methods alone, I developed an approach that sought to capture the complexity of participatory encounters: the motivations behind contributions, conversations generated through making, moments of disagreement, and the ways participants negotiated meaning with one another. The methodological approach developed through this research responded to these limitations by embedding evaluation throughout the life of the project. The use of reflective practice and ongoing observation documented through research journals alongside the End of Day notes completed by room guides enabled understanding to emerge alongside the artwork rather than after it. This was particularly significant because the participatory process was continually evolving. Decisions about expanding opportunities for participation, introducing different levels of engagement, and allowing participants to nominate personally meaningful figures were responses informed by ongoing observation of how people were encountering the work. Evaluation became a

means of listening to the developing conditions of participation and adapting the artwork accordingly.

The involvement of room guides was especially important because it recognised a frequently overlooked source of knowledge within heritage environments. Their sustained presence within the participatory space enabled them to observe visitor behaviour, conversations, and emotional responses that would rarely be captured through formal feedback mechanisms. Their daily reflections provided a complementary perspective to my own observations as artist-researcher, enabling a richer understanding of how participation was experienced.

This embedded approach became crucial when the project encountered conflict. The staff member's intervention following the addition of J.K. Rowling's name could therefore be understood within the wider context of the project rather than as an isolated incident. Through the ongoing evaluative process, it was possible to recognise that disagreement was not an unusual disruption to participation, but had been present throughout the project in quieter and often productive forms. Participants regularly challenged, questioned, and discussed one another's choices, and these moments frequently generated deeper engagement with both the contemporary artwork and the original embroideries that inspired it. The evaluation methodology therefore provided not only evidence of what was happening, but the contextual understanding required to distinguish productive dissensus from harmful conflict.

Evaluating in this way provided a means of understanding, questioning, and continually adapting participation throughout the project while it was taking place. This embedded evaluative approach enabled the research to move beyond asking

whether participation had occurred towards understanding how and why it mattered. By attending to the processes through which agency, interpretation, disagreement, and connection emerged, evaluation became fundamental to both the development of the artwork and the knowledge generated through the research. This evaluative approach also surfaced a further finding: that meaningful participation could not be measured by the scale of a visitor's contribution, but by the agency it afforded them.

Agency, Authorship, and the Conditions of Participation

This research suggests that meaningful participation should be understood through agency (even when limited) rather than the scale of a participant's contribution. A small act was not necessarily a token act; a visitor adding a single stitch could exercise the same intentionality, expression, and personal connection as someone contributing over several hours. The significance of participation lay in the opportunity to make choices, express values, and locate oneself within the evolving artwork. The iterative development of *A Virtuous Woman* demonstrated the importance of creating multiple conditions for participation, enabling visitors to determine the nature and extent of their own involvement. This finding also challenges assumptions that meaningful participation requires the artist to relinquish authorship or institutional structures to be removed. Instead, the research suggests that agency can be created within carefully negotiated artistic and institutional boundaries, enabling meaningful expression, productive agonism, and self-directed engagement with heritage. This understanding of participation also reinforces the limitations of evaluating participatory practice solely through the material outcomes produced, as the significance of contribution frequently emerged

through the conversations, negotiations, and personal narratives surrounding the act of making.

The Afterlife of Participatory Art

As the participatory phase of the project drew to a close, a central unresolved question emerged: can participatory art remain meaningful once participation itself has ended? Throughout the active phase, visitors repeatedly expressed a desire to “leave a mark” not only through the physical act of stitching, but through the expression of personal reasoning, values, and affect.⁴⁶⁵ This urge to individualise the visitor experience and physically leave a mark takes Vagnone and Ryan’s theory of fingerprinting one step further, suggesting that participants sought not simply to personalise their visit, but to contribute to the evolving interpretation of the site.⁴⁶⁶ This agency also altered how visitors engaged with Hardwick Hall itself. As both Maggie and Helen observed, participation shifted the visitor experience from passive observation towards reflection, discussion, and questioning.⁴⁶⁷ The artwork encouraged visitors to approach the collection as something open to interpretation rather than simply to be viewed, reinforcing the potential of participatory practice to deepen engagement with heritage narratives.

Once completed and installed as a finished textile, the work was required to function independently as a static object of interpretation rather than as an unfolding, relational process. This exposed a significant tension - not simply within the artwork itself, but within the assumption that participatory practice can be

⁴⁶⁵ Research Journal notes 31/3/2024, 3/4/2024, 5/4/2024, 6/4/2024, 24/4/2024, 19/7/2024.

⁴⁶⁶ Franklin Vagnone, Deborah Ryan, and Olivia Cothren, 'The Anarchist Guide to Historic House Museums Evaluation Methodology for Historic House Museums', *The Public Historian*, 37. 2 (2015), pp.97-111 (pp.146-149).

⁴⁶⁷ Interviews 23/12/2024 and 20/12/2024.

stabilised and re-presented without loss. The work's meaning had been generated through conversation, negotiation, hesitation, disagreement, touch, and duration. Once fixed in textile form, these contextual relationships disappeared, leaving the trace of participation rather than its lived complexity. Participatory practice is inherently relational and contingent upon the circumstances in which it occurs, making it resistant to translation into static display. As Bishop observes, the challenge lies not only in the work's divergence from conventional aesthetic categories, but also in its documentation: 'many social projects photograph very badly, and these images convey very little of the contextual information so crucial to understanding the work.'⁴⁶⁸ Her point underscores the difficulty of conveying the experiential, dialogic, and situational dimensions of socially engaged art once it has been reduced to an object or image.⁴⁶⁹

Although the transition from live participation to static display could not be explored fully within the scope of this research, it nevertheless emerged as an important finding. The project revealed that participation does not simply end when the making stops. Instead, unresolved expectations, interpretations, and relationships persist beyond the participatory period, raising questions about institutional ownership, long-term display, authorship, and the sustainability of participatory practice once the conditions of invitation and dialogue have been withdrawn.

My positionality as an artist-researcher embedded in participatory practice afforded me experiential insight into this dynamic. While visitors were happy to participate as active spectators while participation was ongoing, I feel this changed

⁴⁶⁸ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p.26.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., pp.38-39.

after participation had closed.⁴⁷⁰ By closing participation while continuing to display the accumulated contributions of others, the project inadvertently introduced a structural tension. Visitors encountering a stitched opinion with which they disagreed could no longer respond through the artwork itself. Conflict and dissensus had been possible only within a defined period; once participation was foreclosed, so too was the possibility of agonistic response. In Mouffe's terms, democratic agonism depends upon recognising one's opponent as a legitimate adversary.⁴⁷¹ Earlier participants had been granted that right through the artwork's structure. Once participation closed, later visitors no longer possessed an equivalent means of response. The conditions that had previously supported agonistic exchange therefore shifted towards antagonism.

The project strongly reinforced that participants valued not only the shared activity or collective endeavour, but the opportunity to express why they chose a particular woman - what that choice meant to them personally, ethically, or politically.⁴⁷² When that explanatory space was no longer available, the work became more vulnerable to misinterpretation, projection, and conflict, particularly when viewed out of context.

Dissensus and Power

One of the principal findings of this research is that participatory art can create a discursive space in which heritage narratives are actively negotiated by visitors on

⁴⁷⁰ Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*.

⁴⁷¹ Mouffe, *Agonistics*, p.7.

⁴⁷² Research Journal notes 21/7/2024, 22/7/2024, 23/7/2024, 24/7/2024, 25/7/2024, 26/7/2024, 3/8/2024, 5/8/2024, 10/8/2024, 14/8/2024, 22/9/2024, 25/9/2024, 27/9/2024, 28/9/2024, 2/10/2024, 9/10/2024, 11/10/2024, 12/10/2024, 14/10/2024, 16/10/2024, 23/10/2024, 26/10/2024, 27/10/2024; End of Day Notes 13/7/2024, 22/7/2024, 7/8/2024, 11/8/2024, 24/9/2024, 9/10/2024, 19/10/2024.

their own terms. The artwork created conditions in which multiple and sometimes conflicting interpretations could coexist for visitors about both Hardwick Hall and Bess of Hardwick. In many instances, it was precisely these moments of dissensus between participants that prompted deeper engagement with the heritage collection. As visitors questioned one another's choices, they were drawn back to the original embroideries, reflecting on Bess of Hardwick's own selections, the values they represented, and how these might be understood differently today. Dissensus was therefore not something to be avoided or managed away, but became the catalyst for dialogue, reflection, and individual interpretation. Rather than functioning as a didactic or educational tool that directed visitors towards a preferred reading of the site, the artwork created a space in which participants could negotiate heritage for themselves. In doing so, the research demonstrates that participatory art offers heritage institutions a distinctive means of embracing dissensus, enabling heritage collections and narratives to be explored through dialogue without requiring consensus or replacing one authorised interpretation with another. Escalation only occurred once the work was removed from its immediate context and circulated through social media. Dissensus became conflated with antagonism, and the work entered a different political arena altogether. While Mouffe argues that the role of artists is to construct and subvert, this role can be too much to carry in a charged political climate where the consequences range from being the target of cancel culture at best to real harm at worst.⁴⁷³ Unlike Schrag's intentionally conflict-driven practice, the disagreement within this project emerged through participants' own contributions rather than being designed into the artwork.⁴⁷⁴ The research therefore

⁴⁷³ Mouffe, *Agonistics*, pp.104-105, Campbell, *Cancel Culture*.

⁴⁷⁴ Schrag, 'Agonistic Tendencies', p.6.

suggests that dissensus is not an exceptional condition requiring artistic intervention, but an inherent feature of expressive participatory practice when visitors are given genuine opportunities for agency.

The contrasting responses at Nunnington Hall and Hardwick Hall illustrate the importance of context in sustaining this form of agonistic participation. At Nunnington, unsolicited acts of participation, such as writing on the walls, were clearly visible and implicitly understood as part of the artwork's evolving life. Visitors responded to one another's comments, sometimes emotionally, but without holding the institution responsible for those expressions. The artwork was understood as a hosted participatory space in which visitors were making individual choices. Also key was that throughout its installation period, *Change in Attitudes* was available to participate with. At no point did it become a finished, static artwork. At Hardwick, this dynamic shifted dramatically following the inclusion of J.K. Rowling's name. The initial act of embroidering her name fell within the project's stated framework of participation, regardless of the contributor's personal motivations. Simon notes that most visitors will not challenge others' participatory efforts, and that an open environment where actions are visible can help prevent such incidents.⁴⁷⁵ The situation became significantly more complex when a staff member, positioning themselves simultaneously as participant and employee, added a line through the name in the colours of the trans flag. While this intervention occurred within the timeframe of participation and did not remove the original contribution, the staff member occupied a position of substantially greater power than visiting participants. They had ongoing access to the work, an

⁴⁷⁵ Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, pp.222-223.

understanding of unwritten institutional boundaries, the ability to participate privately, and the capacity to escalate concerns through internal workplace processes.

This created a cascade of responsibility attribution. Subsequent visitors held both the institution and me, as the artist, accountable for the staff member's intervention and took matters into their own hands by cutting away the stitches after participation had formally closed. This final act occurred outside the rules of engagement. Tools had been removed, participation was no longer invited, and the work was behind a barrier. This was direct activism - to describe this as just another act of participation would be disingenuous. Crucially, no other participants, despite encountering many names they may not have agreed with, chose to intervene in this way. The incident exposed how uneven power relations within participatory settings fundamentally alter what participation means and how it is perceived.

The activists who later intervened had ample opportunity to participate during the open period but chose not to engage in good faith. Their intervention operated differently from the participatory acts invited by the artwork. Rather than contributing within the established framework of participation, it became an external intervention shaped by the wider public controversy surrounding the work. This distinction matters. Participatory art inevitably becomes political through the choices participants make, but when it enters external, polarised spaces, it becomes an unplanned iteration of the work - one that institutions are often ill-equipped to manage. The incident demonstrated that, regardless of how participatory an artwork becomes, responsibility continues to be attributed primarily to the hosting institution and artist rather than to individual participants. This creates a

fundamental tension for participatory practice within heritage settings, where authority is intentionally shared but accountability remains unevenly distributed.

Institutional Preparation and Responsibility

Participatory practice within heritage settings depends upon institutional preparation as much as artistic intention. This research demonstrates that creating opportunities for visitor agency also requires organisations to prepare for disagreement, communicate transparently, and support staff and volunteers in navigating the ethical and emotional complexities that participation can generate. These conclusions resonate with a growing body of literature that positions heritage sites as spaces for dialogue, emotion, and the negotiation of multiple perspectives. Zembylas highlights the importance of emotion in participatory heritage practice, suggesting that museums should be spaces where emotions can be expressed.⁴⁷⁶ Simon echoes this in *The Participatory Museum*, noting that ‘object-centred institutions are uniquely equipped to support creative and respectful community dialogue’.⁴⁷⁷ Lacy similarly recognises ambiguity, disagreement and even censorship as inherent features of participatory practice.⁴⁷⁸ Black and Farley emphasise the importance of involving staff and volunteers fully in the development and presentation of contemporary art and of evaluating both audience reach and depth of engagement.⁴⁷⁹

In alignment with this, my research embedded staff and volunteers within the development of the artwork from the outset; however, this alone was insufficient. Despite careful planning, the project’s most significant weakness was

⁴⁷⁶ Michalinos Zembylas, *Emotional Regimes of Reconciliation* (Routledge, 2018), p.208.

⁴⁷⁷ Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, p.351.

⁴⁷⁸ Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain : New Genre Public Art* (Bay Press, 1995), pp.38-39.

⁴⁷⁹ Black and Farley, *Mapping Contemporary Art in the Heritage Experience*.

communication. Preparation had focused largely upon visitors, while insufficient attention was given to ensuring that all staff understood the participatory methodology, the degree of agency being offered to participants, the kinds of disagreement that might emerge, and the limits of institutional intervention. Earlier, clearer and more transparent communication would not necessarily have prevented disagreement, but it would have enabled staff to understand why particular decisions had been made and what forms of participation had intentionally been left open.

It is crucial for this research to examine and acknowledge the areas where this project failed. Hope critiques the tendency for commissioned projects to report only success, while Jancovich and Stevenson identify a culture of fear and blame avoidance across the cultural sector.⁴⁸⁰ Graham similarly stresses that to deconstitute the museum through participatory worlding, we must adopt 'approaches that can fail and make it possible to learn.'⁴⁸¹ This research supports those concerns. The tensions encountered at Hardwick were not deviations from the research but became integral to understanding how participatory practice operates within heritage institutions.

Maggie identified the most significant tension as emerging internally rather than from visitors.⁴⁸² She recognised that this involved two competing ethical concerns: staff wellbeing and inclusion on one hand, and the artist's intention to provoke reflection and dialogue on the other.⁴⁸³ Both positions were legitimate, yet the project lacked sufficient structures and shared understanding for negotiating

⁴⁸⁰ Hope, 'Participating in the 'Wrong' Way?', p.10; Jancovich and Stevenson, *Failures in Cultural Participation*, p.151.

⁴⁸¹ Graham, *Deconstituting Museums*, p.144.

⁴⁸² Interview 23/12/2024.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

between them. This reinforced the need for earlier conversations about disagreement, unexpected interventions, and the responsibilities of staff and artists within participatory processes. Helen similarly highlighted the need for structured briefings before participatory projects begin, enabling staff to understand the aims of the work, anticipate areas of tension, and make informed choices about their involvement.⁴⁸⁴ She noted that the project had increased staff confidence in supporting participatory practice and contributed to organisational learning about managing complex contemporary work within a heritage environment.⁴⁸⁵

Greg, the staff member who added the line through J.K. Rowling's name, expected that public nominations would ultimately be mediated by the institution, revealing an underlying assumption that institutional authority would continue to determine the boundaries of participation.⁴⁸⁶ His reflections exposed how differently artist and institution understood the participatory framework, reinforcing the importance of explicitly communicating where authorship, participant agency and institutional responsibility begin and end.⁴⁸⁷ This highlights the tension between traditional models of museum authority and the distributed forms of authorship proposed through participatory practice. This speaks directly to Graham's critique of the museum constitution, in which institutional authority remains the primary determinant of what can be included and how meaning is produced.⁴⁸⁸

Maggie reflects that the project raised practical considerations for future participatory work. The high level of on-site artist involvement was crucial to success but may not always be feasible. Future projects will need to consider how

⁴⁸⁴ Interview 20/12/2024.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Interview 4/2/2025.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Graham, *Deconstituting Museums*.

participatory experiences can be maintained within existing staff and volunteer structures without relying entirely on continuous artist presence. This includes clarifying roles, establishing processes for iterative responses to unforeseen developments, and involving staff and volunteers in decision-making while keeping processes manageable. Maggie emphasised that anticipating disagreement, holding diverse perspectives, and supporting staff and volunteers in participatory processes are key to success.

A culture in which staff feel unable to speak openly, even with one another, is deeply counterproductive. While institutions may have clear public positions on certain political or moral issues, they cannot assume that all staff, volunteers, or visitors share these views, nor expect participatory art to operate without friction in inherently political spaces. Historic houses are not neutral backdrops; they are shaped by power, wealth, gender, and exclusion.⁴⁸⁹ To avoid discussing these dimensions is to miss the most significant opportunity heritage sites have to connect meaningfully with contemporary audiences. The challenge exposed by this project was the absence of sufficient shared language and structures through which difference could be held, despite a clear commitment to inclusion. When institutions retreat into generalities and euphemisms, disagreement does not disappear - it is displaced into whispers, resentment, and ultimately rupture.

The project ultimately demonstrated that comprehensive preparation must extend beyond artistic planning. Despite careful planning and engagement with many staff and volunteers, the wider implications for all staff on site were insufficiently acknowledged. Participatory projects that explicitly invite engagement

⁴⁸⁹ Tunbridge and Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage*, pp.20-21; Smith, *Emotional Heritage*, p.59, Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, pp.80-84.

with values, ethics, and disagreement cannot be treated as isolated interventions; they reshape the working environment and the emotional labour required of staff and volunteers. Institutions and artists must spend sustained time with all staff prior to the launch of participatory work, openly discussing potential flashpoints and rehearsing responses to likely scenarios. Since completing the artwork, training as a Restorative Engagement Practitioner has further shaped my understanding of how institutions might prepare staff for disagreement through facilitated dialogue before projects begin.⁴⁹⁰ This reinforces Graham's argument that restorative approaches encourage participants to understand both their own actions and those of others through processes of ethical intra-action.⁴⁹¹ The other significant failing was the site's attempt to avoid undue attention and controversy by trying to treat the issues that arose as general rather than specific. Avoiding specificity, particularly around politically sensitive issues, does not protect institutions, 'Fear of a name only increases fear of the thing itself.'⁴⁹² These difficult conversations are essential, for without them confusion, reactive decision-making, and internal division are inevitable once conflict arises. The project also revealed that institutional responsibility extends beyond managing visitor responses; it includes supporting the artists whose practices institutions invite into contested spaces.

Recommendations for the Heritage Sector

The findings of this research suggest that participatory practice within heritage settings requires a shift in how institutions prepare for, support, and evaluate collaborative work. The challenges encountered at Hardwick Hall were

⁴⁹⁰ Restorative Engagement Forum, 'What Is Restorative?' <<https://restorativeengagementforum.com/what-is-restorative/>> [accessed 1/3/2026].

⁴⁹¹ Graham, *Deconstituting Museums*, p.135.

⁴⁹² J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Bloomsbury, 2015), p.298.

not unique to this project, but reflect broader questions facing heritage organisations seeking to engage with contemporary art, contested histories, and diverse public perspectives. As Helen identified in her interview, there is a need for practical guidance to support heritage leaders when considering participatory or potentially provocative projects.⁴⁹³ Drawing on her experience and responsibilities as a property manager within the National Trust, she highlighted the value of a framework that could support decision-making around staff and volunteer wellbeing, ethical tensions, stakeholder involvement, and the conversations required before a project begins.⁴⁹⁴ The challenges encountered at Hardwick demonstrate that participatory work cannot be understood solely through the experience of visitors; it also reshapes relationships between artists, institutions, staff, volunteers, and the communities they serve.

The following recommendations emerge from this research and from the reflections of those involved in delivering and hosting the artwork. They are not intended as a prescriptive model for participatory practice, but as areas of consideration for institutions seeking to create meaningful opportunities for engagement while acknowledging the complexity, uncertainty, and potential disagreement that genuine participation can generate.

Clear communication between artists and institutions is essential throughout the development and delivery of participatory projects. Collaborative relationships must include transparent discussions about decision-making processes, responsibilities, institutional boundaries, and responses to potential conflict. Artists entering heritage settings need to understand the points at which institutional

⁴⁹³ Interview 20/12/2024.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

responsibilities may require intervention, while institutions must acknowledge the implications of inviting participatory methodologies that intentionally distribute authorship and interpretation. The conditions of collaboration should therefore be negotiated openly from the beginning, including discussions about who holds responsibility when unexpected situations arise and how decisions will be made.

This responsibility extends beyond the practical management of a project to the ethical support of artists working within institutional contexts. As external practitioners, artists often rely upon host organisations to communicate the intentions, methodologies, and potential complexities of their work to staff and volunteers. When disagreement or controversy emerges, institutions must recognise their responsibility in supporting the artists they have invited into their spaces, rather than positioning them as external individuals accountable for institutional decisions alone. Ashton highlights this concern within the heritage sector, noting that artists have increasingly been asked to engage with contested histories while the responsibility for navigating contentious issues has frequently fallen disproportionately upon them.⁴⁹⁵ She argues that appropriate infrastructure and support must be established to manage the personal and professional risks that can arise in such contexts.⁴⁹⁶ Participatory practice therefore requires not only openness from artists, but institutional willingness to stand alongside them when difficult conversations emerge. If heritage organisations are unwilling to engage honestly with their staff, volunteers, and audiences about challenging material, they should carefully consider whether participatory approaches are appropriate. However, when these conversations are approached transparently, they offer institutions

⁴⁹⁵ Ashton, *A Room of One's Own*.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

valuable opportunities to examine assumptions, develop confidence, and engage with perspectives that may otherwise remain unexplored.

Staff and volunteers must also be recognised as active participants in participatory projects rather than simply as those responsible for facilitating visitor experiences. The Hardwick case demonstrated that front-of-house staff occupy a complex position as interpreters, mediators, and relationship-builders between the artwork, institution, and public. Their knowledge and perspectives should be incorporated throughout the development process, rather than relying on briefings once decisions have already been made. Preparation should include opportunities to discuss the intentions of the work, potential areas of disagreement, and appropriate responses to challenging situations. This supports staff wellbeing while also recognising their contribution as essential knowledge holders within heritage environments.

The heritage sector should recognise that participation is not a singular activity or experience. Participatory artworks are most accessible when they include multiple forms of engagement, allowing visitors to contribute through observation, conversation, brief interventions, sustained making, or deeper involvement over time. This is particularly important within heritage environments, where visitors arrive with different expectations, motivations, available time, and levels of confidence. Designing participation around agency rather than a predetermined model of contribution allows more people to encounter and respond to artworks on their own terms.

Evaluation should be embedded throughout participatory practice rather than positioned as a retrospective assessment at the end of a project. As

demonstrated through this research, participatory work develops through relationships, conversations, and unforeseen responses that cannot always be anticipated at the outset. Evaluation processes should therefore allow institutions and artists to reflect during the development and delivery of a project, enabling adaptation where necessary and capturing complexity rather than simply measuring satisfaction or reach. Such approaches recognise that uncertainty, disagreement, and unexpected outcomes are not necessarily indicators of failure, but can provide important insight into how participation operates in practice.

If institutions invite participation, they must also prepare for the possibility of dissensus. Participatory practice does not inevitably lead to shared understanding or consensus; it creates encounters between different perspectives, values, and interpretations. The ambition for heritage sites to be spaces “for everyone” requires an acknowledgement that those who enter them will not necessarily share the same beliefs or readings of the past. Accommodating difference is therefore not a challenge to inclusive practice, but one of its consequences. Heritage institutions should develop approaches that enable disagreement to be expressed, considered, and held constructively rather than assuming that challenging responses represent a failure of participation.

A further consideration for the sector concerns what happens after participatory artworks are complete. Bishop and Schrag identify the unresolved question of what occurs after participatory projects have been made, and this research reinforces the complexity of that issue.⁴⁹⁷ The future of *A Virtuous Woman* remains uncertain: although legal ownership in this case remains with the artist,

⁴⁹⁷ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p.26; Schrag, 'Agonistic Tendencies', p.77.

materially and conceptually it remains entangled with Hardwick Hall, the National Trust, the University of Leeds, and the many participants whose contributions shaped it. This uncertainty reveals a wider need for institutions and artists to consider questions of ownership, care, maintenance, and responsibility before participatory projects begin. Participation creates relationships that extend beyond the moment of contribution, and these relationships require consideration after public engagement has ended.

Despite these challenges, this research demonstrates that heritage institutions are highly productive contexts for participatory contemporary art. Their collections, histories, and public role create opportunities for visitors to encounter unfamiliar perspectives, reflect upon contested narratives, and engage with the complexity of the past and present. Black and Farley suggest that, as visitors increasingly use heritage sites as spaces of leisure and social interaction, contemporary artworks have the potential to transform these institutions into ‘the new town square for informed exchange of ideas’.⁴⁹⁸ However, realising this potential requires institutions to embrace not only participation itself, but also the uncertainty, disagreement, and plurality of interpretation that genuine participation creates. Heritage sites can become spaces for dialogue precisely because they bring different people, histories, and perspectives together; their responsibility is therefore not to eliminate complexity, but to develop the confidence and structures required to hold it.

⁴⁹⁸ Black and Farley, *Mapping Contemporary Art in the Heritage Experience*.

Final Conclusions

Ultimately, this research demonstrates both the potential and fragility of participatory art within heritage contexts. The concentric framework developed through this research reflects this understanding: heritage and museum contexts form the outer circle, providing the institutional setting within which the research is situated; participatory art forms the middle circle, the specific practice through which this setting is engaged; and agonism, at the centre, provides the lens through which the resulting encounters and emotional responses are interpreted. It is this innermost circle - participation understood not as consensus-building, but as a space for complexity and disagreement - that reveals the distinctive possibilities of this research. Conflict can be held productively, but only when institutions are willing to prepare for it, communicate clearly, and recognise that participation does not conclude when the making process ends. As this research demonstrates, new approaches are required for holding conflict and dissensus within increasingly polarised societies, and participatory art offers one possible means of creating spaces in which these tensions can be explored. As Mouffe states, 'art's great power lies [...] in its capacity to make us see things in a different way, to make us perceive new possibilities'.⁴⁹⁹ Heritage sites, with their complex histories and layered narratives, are uniquely positioned to host such encounters, creating opportunities where disagreement, reflection, and dialogue can coexist as part of meaningful engagement with the past and present.

The relationship between agency and authorship explored throughout this research reflects the historical example that initially inspired the project. Bess of

⁴⁹⁹ Mouffe, *Agonistics*, p.97.

Hardwick did not physically execute the stitches within the Noblewomen embroideries, yet she authored meaning through her choices of subject, symbolism, design, and display. Similarly, participatory artists do not relinquish authorship by inviting others into the creative process. Rather than understanding participatory practice as a transfer of authorship from artist or institution to participant, this research suggests that meaningful participation emerges when authorship itself is understood as distributed. The artist authors the conditions for participation; participants author individual acts of expression and interpretation; and the institution authors the context in which those encounters take place. It is through this negotiated relationship, rather than the transfer of control from one party to another, that participatory heritage practice becomes capable of holding multiple voices while maintaining artistic coherence.

The findings therefore challenge the assumption that authorship, governance, and participation exist in opposition. Instead, they can operate as complementary forms of responsibility when participation is carefully structured, transparently communicated, and responsive to context. This research demonstrates that participatory practice in heritage settings does not need to be defined by the removal of artistic or institutional frameworks, but by the thoughtful creation of conditions in which agency, dialogue, and difference can coexist productively. In heritage contexts, where histories are already contested and continually reinterpreted, these conditions provide not a solution to disagreement, but a means of engaging with it.

In responding to the original research questions, this study demonstrates that participatory contemporary art can deepen engagement with heritage not simply by encouraging interaction, but by creating opportunities for visitors to negotiate

meaning, express personal values, and encounter perspectives different from their own. It also demonstrates that these encounters can only be fully understood through embedded evaluation and sustained institutional collaboration.

Participatory practice within heritage settings is therefore not defined by consensus, but by the careful creation of conditions in which dialogue, disagreement, and multiple interpretations can be held constructively. In an increasingly polarised society, this capacity may be one of the most significant contributions that participatory contemporary art can make to the heritage sector.

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Appendix 1: Transcript of Visitor writing on Change in Attitudes

Please note that the comments provided are selective and non-exhaustive, intended to highlight a selection of key points rather than offer a comprehensive analysis. All comments contain original spellings and grammar.

‘Excellent way to communicate an important message’

‘do not take the horns just because they look nice’

‘I love the concept – ‘chapeau’ to the artist for this work’

‘NO DEMAND = NO SUPPLY’

‘Excellent! Very Thought Provoking!’

‘I took a photo!!’

‘We didn’t take one – neither should you 2021’

‘To kill or not to kill, that is the question’

‘don’t take rineo horns beacos you have spiolit it’

‘we took a photo not a horn!’

‘I want rhinos to not be killed’

‘I will not be taking a trophy’

‘We wouldn’t dream of taking one! Don’t be ignorant and help Save the Rhinos!’

‘Although a free rino horn would be really Dope, I chose not too, There like cool unicorns! I might need one when I rule the world’

‘PLEASE LEAVE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS’

‘Choose not to take their horns!! YOU DON’T NEED THEM BUT THE RHINOS DO!!’

‘I love rhinos but want a souvenir’

‘Love the idea NOT THE TAKING’

‘took photos but no “trophy”’

‘Didn’t take one as they should be for everyone to enjoy forever’

‘I took one it’s a bit of clay not on animal life’ ‘True’

‘Why would you take one? Why?’

‘THE NUMBER OF MISSING HORNS MAKES ME WONDER IF WE WILL EVER LEARN’

‘It’s just a piece of plastic’

‘Take what you need not what you want’

‘WHAT DID THE RHINOS DO TO YOU?!’

‘Save the animals and the planet’

‘I love rhino’s and I want them to have peace’

‘THE HORN LOOKS BETTER ON THE RHINO’

‘Great coat hook’

‘I will never take a horn! Save the fat unicorns!’

‘Having seen rhino in the wild WHY!! would anyone want to kill them???’

‘I hate rhino they should die’

‘We didn’t take one’

‘Why leave less for others to enjoy’ answered by ‘This should not be about human enjoyment!’

‘The rhinos are like the sun without them there is no joy! Save the rhinos!!’

‘I took one it’s a bit of clay not an animal life’ answered both by ‘TRUE’ and ‘But the principle is the same’

‘please leave them, you don’t need one!’

‘What is a rhino without its horn? A hippo! Save the rhinos’

‘I’m 19... I want to see rhino’s when I’m 90’ answered by ‘Good bloody point!’

'Very thought provoking rich people always took what they wanted / exploited. Ordinary people take what they need and replenish and nurture' answered by 'So not true, we're all the same I'm sorry to say'

'The idea that this exhibit is presented to us shows it is not about individual choice but commercialism and the transnational corporations that trust the human race and each individual to save our planet' > 'From a 15 year old worried about the future of our planet' > 'I haven't decided if I'm going to take one yet' > 'kind of mean about all resources in general'.

'Not taken one!'

'This is WHY White Rhino are extinct'

'Why take one?'

'Not surprised how many people still take a horn. Us humans will never learn...'

'Don't do it!'

'No way I will take one!'

'Horns should be worn on, The ones they were born on'

'Skins and horns etc belong on the animals they are taken from. Leave the animals alone'.

'leave no trace'

'People taking trophies make me despair!'

'Don't kill animals for fun. They deserve to live'

'DON'T BE SELFISH SAVE THE RHINOS'

'All Animals Matter! Save the Rhinos'

'RHINOS ALMOST EXTINCT! PEOPLE NEXT???'

'Why would you feel the need to take one?'

'One Planet, One Chance'

'If you take, you aren't a collector instead, a hunter who barely cares for rhinos'

'Horried by the number taken! We are running out of time to save, not just rhinos, but many, many species'

'Definitely leaving for all to see'

'Did you know rhino horns are made from keratin, the same as our hair and nails. They are no good to us!'

'IT'S EXACTLY BECAUSE FAR TOO MANY PEOPLE CHOOSE TO 'TAKE' THAT THE PLANET FACES SO MANY CHALLENGES TODAY. I WON'T BE TAKING ONE'

'What if it was your child or parent? Please let live'

'Why have ANY gone...???!!'

'There's a lot of uncaring, greedy people who have visited this exhibition. No wonder the world is dying. Own it!'

'Leave them here don't take one! If you do not only are you thick you are on oxygen thief'

'You're not meant to take one! (You numptys!) The more we take away... the less beauty there is for others to see'

'SS [heart] DD'

'I choose to leave the display for others to enjoy'

'Who took the horns how would you like me to take your ears'

'Shoot the hunters not the rhinos'

'WE ARE THE ONLY CREATURES THAT PAY TO LIVE ON OUR PLANET'

'NOT JUST RHINOS! ELEPHANTS ETC'

'RHINOS NEED THOSE HORNS WE DON'T'

'I am appalled that people feel the need to take these rhino horns! Let them be'

'It's not ok to kill Rhino or anything else just to satisfy your ego. Leave the rhino alone. Enjoy their beauty. They are part of the beautiful tapestry of life'

Appendix 2: Interview Transcript, Temple Newsam Ron 25 October 2023

Ron is a Visitor Assistant member of the staff team at Temple Newsam House. The interview took place in person at Temple Newsam.

Layla Khoo

Okay. Yep, that's right. Excellent. So, obviously, there's been researchers in the house through the summer to look at the art installations and sort of see, see how that's working. And what I'm particularly interested in as part of this is how we evaluate them, not necessarily what the evaluation is, but how we, how we know what visitors have experienced when they've been here.

Ron

Yes.

Layla Khoo

And so obviously, there's been questionnaires and has been visited books. But what I'm really interested in is how visitors speak to people like yourself, about what they've seen when they're here, and how those how those conversations take place. And so, the first question is, have the visitors talked to you, at any point over the summer about the contemporary art installations,

Ron

You mean, the art on west...

Layla Khoo

Yes, so People Powered Press that's outside...and...

Ron

I personally thought that was great, actually. Very, very mixed very, very marmite, very either one way or another. Some people thought it was it was very interesting. And others thought that it was a bit of not a bit of a blot, really, to be honest. I mean, in presentation, you could understand that. If people weren't looking beyond the script that was on it, then they would think that it was not very artistic. But if you actually looked at the script, and the people who looked at the script, and the way the script was laid out as well, because all history lies it goes, you know, so we got the the word lies is very ambiguous there, you know. And well, the people who managed to see that that that ambiguity seemed to appreciate a lot more than people just looked at it as an object or thing.

Layla Khoo

So, did visitors talk to you directly about that without being prompted that they wanted?

Ron

Oh Yes, yes people. Not many, I must say, yeah, but people did notice that. And that was quite an interesting thing.

Layla Khoo

And when they spoke to you about it, was it to tell you what they thought of it, or was it to ask for more information?

Ron

Neither really was more of an observation.

[interview interrupted by another staff member]

Layla Khoo

And so, as we were talking about this, the installation the people powered press, some people came and spoke to you voluntarily about that was there, and did anyone just kind of talked about any of the other pieces in the house. So, there was the birds in the Chinese room. There was the soundscape in the picture gallery and then there was the little embroidery pieces as well down something.

Ron

Yeah. The soundscape in the gallery people did mention that they wondered what it was some people wondered what it was, we had to explain the music being the outside in an expert the nature of the picture gallery, which was of course, even back in the 18th century, the idea of being a being a garden and a forest and stuff. Yes, so people did mention that as for the, the the installations on the west there, not many people really mentioned them, I did see them looking at the signs and the explanations and everything for a minute. But actually, asking about them not so much.

Layla Khoo

And do you do you think people had more conversations with you because of the artwork or...

Ron

People didn't really mention that the installation on that side so much. They're pretty much self-explanatory. And they did have the, the notes there to tell them what the what they were. So, you know, and yeah, it was it was there and it was self-explanatory, pretty much explained by the notes on the side, you know?

Layla Khoo

And do you think that there's is there ways for you to be able to feed back the conversations that you have with visitors about that work so like positive or negative if it's just people saying I liked it, I didn't like it.

Ron

I think that not many people said they didn't like it. Yeah. I think most people found them interesting. Yeah.

Layla Khoo

Do you have any way that you can feed back to sort of the wider house teams about the conversations that you've had with visitors

Ron

Not, like none of them spring to mind? I mean, the things that people spoke more about the installation in the courtyard Yeah. And the installation in the in the picture gallery there were the ones that people took people's fancy most people walk along there and they the saw, they did notice installations, but I wouldn't say they started a lot of conversations about them

Layla Khoo

And so, when you do have conversations with visitors about anything really about - it's not just about the artworks it's about anything else in the house – is, what's the way that you would feed that back to sort of the overall Temple Newsam team?

Ron

Well, unless you're something tremendously negative, then then we probably wouldn't I mean, if somebody came in and found something very wrong with something or found something that disagreeable and we might pass it on to them

Layla Khoo

So only if it was really like a complaint.

Ron

Yeah, only complaints. You wouldn't with the other conversations we have which we have many a day. If we had to read them all, back to Temple Newsam, you know, staff it'd take, you'd have to do half a day of work and half a day reporting back!

Layla Khoo

So, it's difficult to know when to

Ron

So, when there's an extremely, extremely memorable conversation or something that needs to be told to the Temple Newsam team then [we would, but] we don't really report conversations back to them.

Layla Khoo

But it was, so do you think if you were asked at the end of the day, what was the most memorable conversation you'd had

Ron

About the installations?

Layla Khoo

Just anything about like any like, yeah, if you're asked at the end of the day, what's the most memorable thing a visitor said to you today?

Ron

Said to me today?

Layla Khoo

On a general basis if, yeah, if that was at the end of your normal day, you're asked to remember what the most memorable thing was do you think you'd be able to

Ron

No, I can't think? I mean, I've had many conversations today, in fact, spoke to the radio spoke to all sorts of people today, but I can't think of any one exceptional one.

Appendix 3: Interview Transcript, Temple Newsam Hannah 25 October 2023

Hannah is a Visitor Assistant member of the staff team at Temple Newsam House. The interview took place in person at Temple Newsam.

Layla Khoo

My name is Layla. And whilst the other researchers that have been looking at this project had been interested in sort of how visitors felt about it, and what visitors did, I'm a bit more interested in the ways that we actually collect feedback and the ways that we sort of evaluate how visitors experience the house. And so, I'm particularly interested in sort of the conversations that room guides and so the visitor experience staff have with visitors. So, it's a semi structured interview, there's a few questions to sort of just quickly run through and then just expand on anything needs expanding. So how did any of the visitors talk to you specifically about any of the new contemporary art installations?

Hannah

Um, well, since I haven't been downstairs since this, I haven't been downstairs much because I fractured my foot, and then I'd not been well. So, I've been mainly on the middle there, you know, which has got a lot of the new exhibition there. And people, what people liked mainly was actually the picture gallery, and the sounds of the birds. So, they did ask about that. Then, of course, that got us talking about the outside in and how the picture gallery sort of reflected was meant to reflect that to bring the outside of Temple Newsam to the to the Picture Gallery, where you could walk up and down in wet weather, and how it was decorated and how it had the green flock. So yeah, so the, you know, the sounds of the birds, which I believe are from the grounds of Temple Newsam did yeah did, you got a lot of conversation over that.

Layla Khoo

So, do you remember, do you remember any particular comments that were made or particular themes? Or was it just kind of a sort of interest in asking well what it was about?

Hannah

Just interest in, really asking why we have this bird sound in the picture gallery yeah and that got people talking about the house and the grounds yeah

Layla Khoo

And do you think that, do you think it gave you a different way to speak to visitors about that, or do you think those are conversations that would have happened, anyway?

Hannah

I think they would have happened anyway. Yeah. But because of the sounds people did, did talk a lot more about that

Layla Khoo

That maybe prompted the visitors to start those conversations.

Hannah

Yes. Yeah.

Layla Khoo

And do you think that they are more likely to have conversations about those kinds of things, or more likely to write it down on like, sort of feedback or questionnaires?

Hannah

I think they're most likely, I don't know if a lot of people actually filled in the feedback forms because we did have some on the you know, the seats, picture gallery, which were good cos, you know, people did just sit there a lot of people did just sit there and listen to the birds. But I don't think a lot of people actually filled in the sheets

Layla Khoo

No. But would you say that, so, what kind of a portion of visitors do you think would have had conversations about it while they were there? Do you think most people spoke to whoever was in there, or?

Hannah

No, just some not everybody, obviously, you know, I'm gonna tell that there was more of this exhibition thing down on the West Wing. But people didn't really talk about the other things on the West Wing. It was mainly

Layla Khoo

That they were just talking about the one that they were in?

Hannah

Mainly the sounds in the picture gallery. Yeah.

Layla Khoo

Do you think, obviously you were in a position to sort of watch how people were in that space, do you think it changed how they behaved in that space? Or how long they stayed?

Hannah

The picture gallery? Yeah, I think that is spent longer in there. Yeah. Yeah. I think they did.

Layla Khoo

And do you think though, has the contemporary art so yes, especially in the picture gallery? And has that sort of changed the way you've spoken to visitors about about that, or do you think it's just sort of like an extra layer?

Hannah

I think it's just been an extra bit, no. Yeah, I mean, you know, I think I think it was a bit, although you know, with the sounds actually being from Temple Newsam, I did find

Layla Khoo

That there was that connection?

Hannah

Yeah, yeah. I'm not too sure about the thunder storm bit if that was at Temple Newsam or not

Layla Khoo

Yeah, it felt a bit exciting that bit, I was in there a few times when people thought there was an actual bird in there

Hannah

Yeah some people did!

Layla Khoo

Looking around for a bird! Do you, aside from just sort of like mentioning in passing to people in the meetings, do you have any way to be able to feedback those conversations that you have with visitors?

Hannah

Um, well, we could have talked about it at meetings. Yeah. I think I think that's about it really, I mean, yeah, yeah. Just mentioned it at meetings really. Yeah. About the feedback.

Layla Khoo

Yeah. And can you think of any way that would? Do you think that's sufficient? Or do you think that you could find that think of any other way that you could have that going forward, that that kind of information could be fed back as part of the feedback in terms of what worked and what didn't

Hannah

You mean from the visitor's point of view? No, I think I think just saying at meetings I mean, I suppose that I suppose if they'd really wanted to, they could have printed a form out and they could have filled the form you know, something like that you're doing and sent it back. But I think it was just enough to, to be able to feed that back and a lot of it I mean, like say I wasn't downstairs very often. Yeah. But I was on the west, and I've got to say a lot of it, with the blinds, it's so dark. And you couldn't always see some of the things. I don't know if anybody else has mentioned that.

Layla Khoo

And you did some of the visitors mentioned that as well.

Hannah

Yeah.

Layla Khoo

Mentioned that they couldn't see?

Hannah

Yeah. Well, not just the artwork, you know, a lot of the other things. Yeah. I mean, we do give them the torches they can shine the torch on it. But some of the some of the things as well are quite far back in the room.

Layla Khoo

What like the embroidery pieces and things? Yeah, there were quite a lot. Yeah. Quite a long way from the rope.

Hannah

Yes, that's the I mean, they were very nice. But you couldn't always see them so good

Layla Khoo

No, and did visitors ever mention that?

Hannah

I think they did sometimes. Yeah. Especially about the blinds been down. Yeah.

Layla Khoo

And do the visitors understand why the blinds are down?

Hannah

Yeah. We do explain it to them and then they're more or less okay with it. Yeah, you know, and they've got the torch. So when they are more or less okay with that, but it does make it difficult sometimes to especially this, this artwork, which like I say, some of it wasn't quite far back and it was very small and it was quite far back in the room. Yeah. Apart from the massive boom one which we had in the courtyard!

Layla Khoo

Yeah so you need something massive or a sound that you can hear rather than relying on something small. Yeah. That's great. Is there anything else that you'd like to say about it?

Hannah

I don't think so. I mean, like say, I mean, it was really nice a lot of the artwork was very nice, but I don't think people knew about it as much. Or came especially for it if you know what I mean

Layla Khoo

do you think they do you think they were pleased to find it when they came?

Hannah

I think so yeah, especially the picture gallery like I said. And the big piece of artwork. I mean, they did wonder why it was there. You know, so,

Layla Khoo

yeah, maybe prompted a few conversations.

Hannah

Yeah, yes, it did.

Appendix 4: Interview Transcripts, Temple Newsam Harry 25 October 2023

Harry is a Visitor Assistant member of the staff team at Temple Newsam House. The interview took place in person at Temple Newsam.

Layla Khoo

Christina was in the house doing research on the effect of the art installations on the visitors. My research sits a little bit adjacent to that, in that I'm for this particular piece more interested in the ways that we evaluate visitors rather than what the evaluation actually is. So, the evaluation of what it actually is will be fed back to the house so that it can be useful for you guys. But for my end of things, I'm more interested in sort of how we, how we get that information in the first place, and then finding more, probably finding more meaningful ways of being able to understand the visitor experience a bit better. So which is why there's been lots of different methods through the house so that we can try and compare and contrast them to some degree and weigh them up as to which one's more valuable, or indeed look at sort of more of a triangulation method that actually maybe it's valuable to have lots of different ways to gather this information for different people to feedback in different ways. And so, for this part, I'm now interested in how visitors have spoken to room guides and visitor assistants and anybody who's in the house themselves as to how those conversations take place. So have the visitors during this, sort of, over a long period of time, have visitors talked to you specifically about the contemporary art installations?

Harry

Not all of it. There's been some which has resulted in more conversation than others, I would say so the embroiderers guild, nothing to be honest with you that I've actually encountered if I'm totally honest with you, I've taken a few groups through on guided tours and talked about it as we've gone through. But I've not actually had any conversations to my recollection with anybody about that. That's the say sort of do try and when we're room guides, explain various bits and talk about how it ties in with general exhibition. More so with the installation in the Chinese room, that seems to have got quite a lot of attention. I think initially, we were getting a lot of visitors that were visiting because of the advertising, and you know, the actual designing of the advertising with the birds. Initially, it was a little, it was not negative, but there seemed to be a little bit of a slight disappointment about the scale of it that was in there. So, I think they were expecting sort of larger pieces and like the live things. Yeah, exactly. So that was sort of the initial conversations that we were having regarding that. But very quickly, we were sort of over that and talking about the actual piece itself, which was really interesting. The one that obviously seemed to be perhaps most controversial was the people power press piece in the courtyard. And I would say sort of overall; it didn't seem to particularly go down that well with the visitors that I spoke to they seemed slightly put off by it. I know that a lot of people find it quite difficult to sort of see past that, and I've said on numerous occasions, it was like, it spoils the look at the house. But we always were able to come back with, you know why that's there in the first instance. And it's meant to, to, to provoke and to inspire you to actually walk in. But I did notice on quite a number of occasions, particularly when we first installed it, I actually went up onto the roof one day and did a time lapse video of visitors coming into the courtyard. And there were numerous people that were actually

walking in, to take it all in, really. So, it did work in a lot of respects. And it was great to be able to open up those conversations, we had one occasion where a guy came in to the Great Hall, and he was a bit, slightly aggressive and wanted to know whether or not I worked there and as I said I do, yeah, he said, can I talk to you about the thing outside? Yeah, Okay. And he thought it was a Black Lives Matter statement. And then went off on one about political correctness gone mad, the usual things about 10 minutes, you know, and yeah, he wasn't a very pleasant bloke, but it was nice to be able to, invoke, that was nothing to do with that, to sort of explain that there are other narratives within places like this, that those stories need telling in the same way. So, in a way, you know, even though he was completely incorrect and how he's perceived it, it then opened up an opportunity to have a conversation.

Layla Khoo

So, what I was going to say was that even when some of that feedback is quite negative, and it's sort of, yet it's the first the first thing they see and it's that's a slight affront right at the very beginning of the visit. Do you think that then, actually did open up some more opportunities to have those conversations really early on in the visit?

Harry

Yeah, absolutely I think if you're working in the Great Hall and the entrance there as soon as they come in immediately you get those, not all the time, but there was a good proportion of people, particularly the early days, whether were walking in and immediately wanting to know a little bit more about what that was about. So that was, that was great. Because, you know, the whole sort of message of that and I think that what I liked about that particular piece that you can interpret in quite a few different ways, and different members of staff had different sort of takes on it. And there's no right or wrong and the same from a visitors point of view, you know, it's art, and you don't have to like it, you can engage with it, or you can or you don't have to, but yeah, it did give you those opportunities for those conversations.

Layla Khoo

And so, do you think there was obviously so thinking about yeah, specifically about the people powered press piece, did you feel that there was more or same sort of level of conversations about what that specifically referred to? I'm thinking in terms of like the physicality of the house and the balustrade stuff. Do you think there was more conversation had about that because that was there? Or do you think it was more about broader themes around the house?

Harry

No, I'd say probably was slightly more conversations regarding that, actually. Yeah. Which was nice for us, because it did. So again, when you get visitors coming into temple museum quite often, they are very familiar with the, the estate, less familiar with the actual house itself. So that was quite nice to be able to have those conversations about that. So, it made almost like a bit of an in into that side of things as well. Yeah.

Layla Khoo

So that leads them to then. So, do you think having the art installations in the house, has that impacted the way you speak to visitors about the collection?

Harry

Yeah, I would say so. Absolutely. So the only one I found sort of difficult to really, I don't know why because it's actually my favourite pieces really was the embroidery, but I found it a little bit difficult to engage with visitors with that. And I don't know if it's the setting of them, just wanting to take the room for what it is and didn't particularly like the idea that there was something distracting them from those spaces. Whereas the people power press outside it was so in your face, you couldn't help it engage with it, you couldn't look past it. Similarly, with the birdsong as well, in the in the picture gallery, in a similar sort of that was very well received, as far as I could tell, you know, an awful lot of visitors that seemed to linger longer in the picture gallery than they would ordinarily, you know, sort of enjoying the space a little bit more. And of course...

Layla Khoo

So, something really important that dwell - in that they might not have specifically engaged with the particular thing but it's encouraged dwell time.

Harry

Absolutely. Yeah. Which is great, because quite often you do, I mean, it's an impressive room, but we have observed how people will walk into that space, take it in and then move on very quickly at the so much to engage with and again, from a physical system point of view. It gives you a lot more opportunity to actually engage with the visitor as to why this is here. And that idea that we have brought the outside in which was very deliberate from the point of view of the seventh viscount that had designed that room in such a way

Layla Khoo

As being sort of that walking space and being able to be exercising and feeling like you're outside when you can't be

Harry

Absolutely, precisely yeah, and I know we had a few visitors that came specifically for that piece as well. I mean, there was one that I'd actually met the artists whilst making the sound recordings and been told that it's going to be Temple Newsam, but there was quite a few that came because they've heard about this. So that was, yeah, that was well received, I would say, yeah, absolutely.

Layla Khoo

And do you think these conversations that you're having with the visitors when they're, when they're here, and they're, presumably, do you think they're more prompted by, the visitors are more prompted by the staff as to when these happen do you think it's prompted when the visitor say you know, 'what's that about?' Or 'I don't like this, or why is the birds playing?' Or do you think it's equal?

Harry

I think it's equal for me from my point of view, I quite like to initiate conversation about something so if I can see somebody, for example, earlier on today in the Chinese room where there were people with the torches and they were really paying very close attention to the to the birds gives you the opportunity to make a conversation and to sort of get stuck in with that but I will say this fairly equal from my from my sort of sensing of a visitor assistance as well, that there was quite a lot of occasions where the, again with the Birdsong, where the visitors would sort of be sat on the benches, enjoying the space you prompts walk past, and then they would initiate conversation just based on that one thing alone, which would then open up the opportunity to have a deeper conversation.

Layla Khoo

And so aside from sort of anecdotally passing it on when you speaking to another member of staff, oh, yeah, by the way, I've a load of people complain about that today or people seem to really like it is do you have any sort of semi formal way of recording that kind of feedback that is only given verbally like, aside from a step down from like an official complaint, where somebody says I want to complain about this? Just these conversations you have, is there any way that you can record that?

Harry

I mean, we have had opportunities to record it. It's been more it has been a bit more anecdotal, to be truthful, but tend to sort of come up more in meetings. So we have the daily meetings. And I know a lot of these things get fed back. I mean, I've mentioned a couple - of the chap that came into the great hall and that particular occasion, within sort of half an hour or so of that particular conversation taking place, I'd been to see my manager

Layla Khoo

With that being a more significant event

Harry

Well, yeah, yeah, I suppose I suppose because he's stuck out has been quite an unusual conversation to have, but I thought it was relevant as well. It wasn't just that this guy seemed a bit obnoxious. It was the fact that it provoked that reaction, which I wasn't expecting, and it was worth mentioning from a research point of view. So, I suppose it is a little bit more anecdotal than anything sort of written down more formally. Yeah.

Layla Khoo

And well, obviously you're, you're all trying to do jobs and you're trying to speak to people and do everything else that you need to do. Can you think of any way that wouldn't be hugely onerous for you to be able to feed that back? Other than sort of just passing on anecdotally? Obviously, nobody wants to see you all walking around with clipboards taking notes every time you speak to a visitor!

Harry

No. Yeah, I mean, some of the sort of questionnaire sheets that we've had, which I've sort of observed, and I've guided people towards when we've been in the Great Hall, when I've been walking around. Again, this is more from a visitor point of view than a VA point of view, but I suppose similar sort of approach to that have been something that is more sort of tick boxes or just being able to record something there and then on a wing is going to be useful. But I've always made a point of trying to push people towards those opportunities to record their views. So, if I've met them, for example, sort of in the picture gallery just sort of reminded that there are spaces that they can record their thoughts and feelings towards that. And then as they're leaving as well. So, I'm trying to encourage people to fill in the questionnaires out to I mean, a few do many, many don't for whatever reason, you know, they just like to enjoy what they've done. And that's it.

Layla Khoo

Yeah, exactly. They don't want to have to do a task during their visit. And I think that's kind of what I'm sort of looking at, when speaking to you all more specifically about this is this, this idea that from what I can see, from what was happening, people are feeding back that most visitors will have an interaction With a member of staff at some point while they're on the site, whereas most visitors are not writing down what they experienced, and sort of finding a way to capture that more natural way of feeding back, I guess.

Harry

Yeah. And that's fair to say. There was that visitor book at the bottom of the oak stairs. Yeah, I would sort of quite regularly pick that up and have a look through. Sometimes it'll be discouraged to see that quite often it was, you know, scribbles, and you're gonna get from time to time, and I'm sure amongst all that there's gonna be some useful information in there. So, I suppose actually, the deeper conversations are the ones that I had with the, with the staff, but then by the time we get to translate that down onto something, you know, has that have we misinterpreted what their intentions were and put our own spin on something?

Layla Khoo

There's always there's always with that kind of recording, there's always going to be a degree of bias. Yeah, yeah. I mean, you. You'll have a degree of bias in, if I'm looking at people's questionnaires completed. Yeah, I'm going to interpret it a different way to how you'll interpret it to be honest. Yeah. But there is always that level of bias within that. And so, it's just acknowledging that that's there. And sort of working with that. Yeah. I think I think the last one, then is Do you feel? Do you feel that the art installations have impacted the visitor experience here in a way that couldn't have been achieved any other way?

Harry

That's a good question. I don't know how to answer that really. I think it's impacted, not always positively. As I say the there's been practical things like with regards to the installation, it sounds ridiculous, but the number of times you have people not being able to find the entrance. And then to sort of add something in front of the entrance to it. So, there has been a practical sort of consideration to it as well, but then having similarly it's quite a nice thing when you're interacting with

the visitor outside of the house. So, for example, down in the courtyard, and you are explaining where to go to sort of explain that there's the people power press piece in the front of it, and you can't miss it. And it's also quite useful as well. So, there's obviously pros and cons to that aspect of it, whether or not it's impacted them. Could you repeat the question how worded it if you can?

Layla Khoo

Do you think the art installations specifically have impacted the visitor experience in a way that something else couldn't have done the same job effectively? So, it's sort of I guess it's playing devil's advocate a little bit. So, if you had a great big signpost at the front of the building, saying entry this way, would that have done the same thing? Or you know, for Paul Radcliffe's, if he had had any other music playing with that...do you think it was the artwork specifically or do you think it could have been achieved any other way?

Harry

I suspect there's always different interpretations of something really, that could get the same message across I mean, you know, just from the point of view of that piece in the courtyards, again, that comes down quite often to how you interpret something I can't imagine with Paul Radcliffe's piece, when you're sitting in that picture gallery you surrounded by the Birdsong, I think it's pretty clear to most people what the intention of that really is, you know, literally bringing the outdoors inside and engaging with that space. And again, maybe this is not obvious to a visitor, but until you've spoken to a visitor assistant, but the fact that quite often people were restricted to those spaces, and if the weather wasn't great that they will take exercise in there, but it I think, with the stuff in the courtyard, it's and I suppose a lot with the embroidery as well. There's deeper questions to be asked with that. So, whether or not you could maybe go about answering those questions and maybe interpret that differently. I'm sure you could, but this seems like an effective way of doing it. Probably a very poor answer. I don't know.

Layla Khoo

No. not at all. And so, do you think that, have the artworks given you, as a visitor experience staff - has it given you new ways to speak to visitors? Or is it just that it's just something to add to the collection effectively?

Harry

Yeah, I say it has, I'd say it has, I think with, particularly with the People Powered Press, and with the embroidery as well, I would say that there were things that those pieces questions those pieces, or subjects that they tackled, that maybe we hadn't thought about, particularly before, particularly with the people power press, and the idea of sort of, sort of 'history lies without' I think that for me personally was something which I hadn't really considered in such a such a detailed way before. So yeah, I'd say that has had an impact positive impact.

Appendix 5: Interview Transcript, Temple Newsam Molly 25 October 2023

Molly is a Visitor Assistant member of the staff team at Temple Newsam House. The interview took place in person at Temple Newsam.

Layla Khoo

I'm a PhD researcher with the University of Leeds. And I've been working with Nick Cass, and Christina for a while on this sort of joint research project. So, I'm specifically interested in the ways that we evaluate artworks, but more than sort of the actual evaluation itself, if you see what I mean. So, whereas Christina was specifically interested in in in how sort of the outcomes of the artworks within the house, I'm maybe a little bit more interested in how we find that out in the first place, it's a bit of chicken and egg, really. And so, there's been questionnaires in place, and there's been a visitor book in place. But then the final piece I wanted to be able to do is to be able to speak to the sort of people like yourself who are actually on the ground and speaking to visitors all the time. Because I'm interested in sort of how those conversations take place, perhaps ways that visitors might speak to room guides in ways that they wouldn't necessarily write down feedback anywhere and look at ways that that can be captured, go sort of going forward. So did any of the visitors talk to you about any of the contemporary art installations while you were here?

Molly

The most questions that I got were of the big installation outside from people powered press. A lot of that was just like, what is it about? And why is it there? It was, like kind of a marmite situation, a lot of people finding that it was a really good piece of artwork. Some people didn't really like it that much and thought it broke up the sort of historic landscape a little bit, but yeah, but otherwise, it was just the questions about why it's there generally.

Layla Khoo

And do you think, were you able to have conversations with people about how that artwork connected to the site? Or do you think people were interested in that? Or had they made that jump themselves?

Molly

I think some people are able to make the jump themselves, but some people needed that little extra sort of information about like, what it truly is saying about the house kind of thing.

Layla Khoo

And did visitors, opinions on the artwork change once they knew what it was about?

Molly

Yes, yeah, I think it the people that thought negatively, were a lot more positive and a lot more open to learning about the sort of exhibition piece when they found out more information about it.

Layla Khoo

Okay. Do you think the art installations have helped you to speak to visitors in a different way about the about what's here or do you think it it's the same or...

Molly

I think it's sort of the same, but also because it's contemporary art. It's a little bit different to how we would talk about the actual collection itself. We probably were able to speak more, I don't know about the artists themselves a bit more and sort of present tense and kind of talk about the true meaning properly. Instead of just trying to do guesswork on what it could have been, like the origins of it. But yeah, it was a little bit different, but sort of a little bit general museum talk.

Layla Khoo

Do you think it helps to have almost having them as like, a prompt, I guess, to spark that conversation with visitors?

Molly

Yeah. Yeah definitely

Layla Khoo

So, the, if most people were sort of talking to you about the big people powered press piece outside, sort of to focus on that, then. Obviously, there's the there's the direct correlation between that and the sort of words on the top of the balustrade? Do you think that there was there would have been as many opportunities to talk about that sort of those wordings? If there hadn't been that prompt there in the first place? Do you think it helps to have that there?

Molly

I would say so. It's a sort of added extra onto what would prompt them normally, usually, they're just curious about it anyway, because the like, what does it mean? What does it say kind of thing, but having the installation out there and like, having sort of like kind of statement that is a bit more contemporary bit more meaningful, and a bit easier to understand. sort of brought forward more conversations about like, what's the writing kind of thing?

Layla Khoo

Do you think they so they, the visitors the house would they... would they normally ask questions about that particular area of the house anyway.

Molly

Sometimes depends on like, who you're speaking to really, if it was like a historic houses person they would generally ask like, 'what was the meaning, what was the connection to the house?' And a lot of people would just be like, 'What? What does it say?' Because you can't really read the full thing. But otherwise, people don't really mention it half the time. So, it's more just 'what's in this room?' 'What's in this room' kind of thing? Or 'what's this painting mean', kind of thing?

Layla Khoo

And so where were visitors coming up to you and unprompted to talk about the artwork, rather than sort of you having to say, 'oh, have you seen the artwork?'

Molly

Yes, yeah, I'd say so. A lot of the time, it would just be like, yeah, people come up to us and ask, but there were a few occasions where we'd be like, or, we, when, like visitors first come into the house, they'll either ask about it or we'll be like, 'Oh, we've got this exhibition on just in case you didn't see it outside and all of this'. Tell them a bit more about like the birds upstairs and the, forgot what it's called now, the stitching.

Layla Khoo

So yeah, all the textiles works

Molly

Yeah textiles. Other than that, it's them coming to us generally.

Layla Khoo

And do you think, they, do visitors feedback to you as much or more or less than they would like fill out a questionnaire or a feedback form or something like that?

Molly

I think so, I think people are a bit more honest, in person than they are on paper. A lot of the times we will just get more negative opinions from them. But we can we always try and counteract that and try and give a reason for why it's there and why it should be thought of, well, why it should be discussed and debated, not necessarily seen in a positive light if they don't feel like they should see it in a positive way, but just kind of express meaning and try and change their opinion a little bit.

Layla Khoo

And do you have any way that you can, aside from just like, passing on anecdotally, do you have any way that you can feed back those conversations that you have with visitors on like a daily or weekly basis?

Molly

Not at the moment, generally, we'll just say, in passing, like to a manager, just be like, oh, people didn't like that, or Three people have complained, or a couple of people coming in said it was really nice.

Layla Khoo

But there's no sort of like, not necessarily formal but a way of like recording those conversations?

Molly

No, not at the moment no

Layla Khoo

And how would you, obviously you're the person doing the job having those conversations, and knows what's sort of practical in terms of feeding back - how would you how would you feel that you could feed that back is there any? Can you think of any ways that that could be fed back in a way that was easy to record it?

Molly

I don't know. Maybe, even if it's just like writing it down, keeping track of it that way in similar to like the visitor book that we have out there when people write feedback, we could have our own little book just to sort of write any sort of comments that is said to us or anything and keep it in the great hall so we can and access as soon as they say, because that's where we get the most feedback generally.

Layla Khoo

So that that is where the most feedback happens is it, isn't it? So is it on sort of when people are both arriving and leaving then, that's when they'll generally so that is there less feedback actually happening is that in the rooms when they're...

Molly

Again, it kind of depends on the person, generally, it's just if we're talking to them, they'll give them give their opinions like, well, we'll broach some of the question, and I'll tell them about a piece. And then they'll sort of start that sort of rapport and kind of chat back to us and give any sort of feedback then, or they'll just say, in passing as the walking past us, and just kind of spring up a conversation like that. But yeah, it does depend on how they are as a person, I guess.

Layla Khoo

Yeah. I mean, so do you think you would end up but they, most visitors would speak to definitely speak to a member of staff at some point during the course of their visit?

Molly

Yes, yeah. This is pretty much impossible to avoid. Yeah, but yeah, most everyone's friendly, that visits the house, and most people will have a chat with us if they can

Layla Khoo

And do you think that they would even would visitors or staff for that matter even classify those conversations as as givens of evaluation or feedback, or do is it just a part of?

Molly

I would say that it's sort of feedback. I think any sort of opinion about the house is given to me as sort of take note of all like, consider as feedback. If it's just like a normal friendly chat, then that's just a normal friendly chat!

Layla Khoo

Yeah sort of 'it's raining outside', that sort of thing. And just, do you feel that the art installations have had any impact on the visitor experience? Positive or negative?

Molly

I think so. Yeah. A lot of people taking notice of it, especially the birds upstairs like, everybody likes that and thinks it's really, really sort of peaceful and positive kind of

environment. And Diana's work as well, people really enjoy that and think it ties in with a room quite well. It's just, it's, it's been a nice addition to the house I'd say

Layla Khoo

And do you think it's in any way changed sort of how visitors engage with the house at all or do you think it just like an additional layer to talk to add to it?

Molly

I think it can be seen in both ways. I think with Diana's work in particular that makes people more investigative into the Chinese drawing room and have a look at the wallpaper and stuff we've got in there. And the deeper meaning behind both that object and the artwork itself. And with the birds, it sort of the birds in the picture gallery, it sort of makes people stay there a little bit longer because usually they just like walk through to the groomsmen bedroom, but now they sort of walk in and investigate a bit more and be like, 'Oh, what's with the birds sound' sort of thing

Layla Khoo

it's almost a sort of impacting dwell time a little bit more as to sort of people staying in the space for a bit longer rather than using there's a walkthrough?

Molly

So yeah, I think so

Appendix 6: Padlet Temple Newsam

<https://padlet.com/khoolayla/temple-newsam-outside-in-evaluation-3jmhxxsu0gniugc7>



Graphics displayed on tent cards directing visitors to the Padlet site

Appendix 7: Sample Questionnaire, Temple Newsam

Temple Newsam – Outside In Evaluation (Research with University of Leeds)

We would like to understand more about the effect contemporary (new) artworks have on visitor's experiences in historic houses. Please answer as many or as few questions as you would like, and place the completed questionnaire in the box provided

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
When I visit a historic house, I like to have information to explain what is here	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When I see an artwork, I like to have information to explain what it is about	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The new artworks improved my visit to Temple Newsam	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The new artworks improved my understanding of the history of Temple Newsam	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Which artwork do you feel most closely connected you to the history and stories of Temple Newsam ?

People Powered Press - Print Works (Courtyard and West Wing)	Diana Herrera – Bird Sculptures (Chinese Room)	Paul Ratcliff – Soundscape (Picture Gallery)
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Please add any comments about how or why the artworks did or didn't make a connection for you (please continue on reverse if you need to)

Please circle as appropriate (only answer the questions you want to)

I have visited Temple Newsam <u>house</u> before	Yes / No	I have visited Temple Newsam <u>grounds</u> before	Yes / No
I knew about the new artworks before I visited today	Yes / No	I knew about the history of Temple Newsam before I visited today	Yes / No
My age	Under 18 / 18-25 / 25-64 / Over 65	Gender	Non-binary / Female / Male

Appendix 8: Sample Visitor Book, Temple Newsam

What is your favourite new artwork in Temple Newsam (and why!)?

My favourite thing was the clock, it's so impressive and beautiful, seems something of nowadays

Flora: Ammarnaswa, Campanda (IT)

3/08/23

Office! H. J. Birman, Kaufman / Secretary
202-23

IdV-

everything
vork so
becaus they
cool
becaus they're
everything
so interesting.

What 3 words would you use to describe the new artworks in Temple Newsam?



cool.

Interesting, magnificent, eye-catching

Breth-taking

This page is
empty ♡

Appendix 9: Interview Transcript, Hardwick Hall, Helen

Helen was the General Manager at National Trust Hardwick Hall at the time of writing. This interview took place by Microsoft Teams on 20th December 2024. Interview questions were provided in advance of the interview.

Layla Khoo

So, thanks for sending back the consent form. The one thing that wasn't unless I didn't missed it on the consent form. It didn't make it clear whether or not you were wanted to be anonymised or not, but obviously it's quite difficult to anonymise your position.

Helen

Yeah, sorry if I missed that on the form. No, I'm very happy for you to not anonymize me.

Layla Khoo

Thank you. That's very helpful.

Helen

Yeah.

Layla Khoo

So, I'm aware that you're really restricted for time as well, and I don't want to keep these interviews running for any longer than they need to. So, are you OK for us to jump straight in?

Helen

That's right. Yeah, of course. Yeah. Let's go for it.

Layla Khoo

Excellent. So, first one is, can you tell me why Hardwick Hall agreed to host this artwork and research?

Helen

So actually, I wasn't really involved in in this stage of the thinking. So, I there's not a huge amount for me to kind of say on this one.

Layla Khoo

Yeah.

Helen

I by the time I heard about it, Liz and Dawn and the team had already had a conversation about it. They knew that they, you know, that it was something that, and Maggie, obviously that that they wanted to do. And like many things that came to me just for a final is, is it all right that we do this? And it was a very quick decision from my perspective.

So, in terms of why I think it was we know we want to do more and more participatory work. We know we want to do more and more work that brings a contemporary layer to the history and the stories we tell in the hall. So, when Maggie pitched it, it was a bit of a no brainer in terms of something that ticked both of those boxes.

Layla Khoo

OK, so just I want to, probably on a more generalised basis why? Why do you... why are you specifically interested in doing more participatory work with Hardwick?

Helen

No. So I've been at Hardwick for two years and I've kind of known really from the beginning of that time that like Hardwick is really quite successful as a visitor business. But it's successful with a certain type of audience for a certain type of day out.

And really, people, it's, people get kind of one thing from it, no they get multiple things from it, that's not true, but it's been that for a very long time. What we know is that we don't directly serve, very effectively, our hyperlocal communities, so there are people who live very close to Hardwick, especially people from a certain socio-economic demographic that just are not engaging with what we do and find us quite intimidating.

And we know that our audience, as is true across the rest of the National Trust or lots of the, you know, big parts of the National Trust. It's quite kind of, it, it misses people. There's certain sectors of society that are just not represented.

So that's been part of our ambition for Hardwick ever since I started to try and engage people in different ways, tell stories in new ways, find things that connect with people's lives in a really meaningful way so that that relevance, we think Hardwick is relevant to everybody. We think the story of Bess in particular is a universal story that everybody can benefit from. But we also know that we can't be complacent. We actually have to actively find ways to demonstrate that relevance to people so this type of this type of work is just one of the ways one of the many ways that we can demonstrate that relevance.

Layla Khoo

That's great. Did you have any reservations about hosting this kind of work? I mean, obviously at the time it was brought to you, I mean, I know it was brought to you as a semi completed thing, but even at the time it was brought to you, we were unclear as to where this would end as to what this would look like when it finished. And yeah, huge thanks to (I'm interviewing Maggie later) but the huge thanks Maggie and the team for being willing to go along with that of really iterative way of working and seeing how it went, but there's a lot of people I've spoken to who have been very surprised that the National Trust, and especially a property like Hardwick were willing to take that risk with an unknown outcome.

Helen

Yeah. In all honesty, no, I don't think. I don't think I did really take any time to consider, so I knew because of my experience with the trust, I worked at a different property before I came to Hardwick. I knew that anything we do has the potential for external comms risks and particularly in the culture war space, there's always

that risk. It's that's not something that ever puts me off. I think often that's a sign that we're doing the right kind of work.

Because we're actually, you know, we're doing things that makes people ask questions and, you know, engage with what we're doing and that always brings difference of opinion. So I wasn't worried about that at this at that stage at all.

Layla Khoo

That's brilliant, so if it's OK with you, I'm going to skip straight onto the part where you did have to get involved with the projects. I realise, yeah, every property works differently, and from Hardwick's perspective, as GM, you weren't sort of involved in the day-to-day running of the project. So aside from sort of the bigger decisions, so just for context for the interview during participation, there were issues raised in how both visitors and staff expressed themselves. This issue was raised by a Hardwick Hall member of staff and this caused us all to sort of take a moment to pause and to consider how we're doing things and what things were being done. So, from the point at which this got flagged to you that the name, specifically JK Rowling, was flagged up as a problem. Can you talk me through the processes that were followed from your end that I perhaps, some of which obviously I was involved with and some of which I was, I wasn't, if you can just talk me through how that works from the, from the trust perspective, but also specifically from your perspective and Hardwick's.

Helen

Sure. So I think I think first of all, I don't think we, I don't know whether process is quite the right word in the sense that there isn't really a process or a set of processes for this kind of thing from my perspective, the general manager role at the National Trust sits in quite a kind of unique position because it's obviously I have a lot of leadership responsibility and decision making responsibility at Hardwick specifically, but I also sit within a much wider structure and there's kind of leadership and across different discipline areas that sits above and around me. So, I'm kind of, I've seen it depicted before as an inverse triangle and then, you know, I'm kind of the, the middle of the hourglass, if you, if you like, in terms of decision making.

Layla Khoo

Yeah.

Helen

So, I think what happened was from my perspective was that we had as you exactly as you say, we had this kind of issue raised by member of staff who felt very much that the piece of work and the inclusion of the name JK Rowling in particular was really quite detrimental to their well-being and their sense of psychological safety and security at work and there was a wider concern that that impact might be felt by others in the staff and volunteer team and possibly by visitors as well. So, what I ended up with was a sort of almost like a direct battle between two opposing values. Two equally important opposing values, that that personally I feel really strongly about, one of which is all of the people who engage with Hardwick, whether they're staff, volunteers or visitors or anybody else, artists, feeling really safe and secure and supported no matter what their background is. You know how they identify I want people to feel like this is a place where they can feel genuinely safe and secure.

And that kind of butted up against this principle of participation and artistic expression, and all of the important elements of this project, so I didn't follow any processes to be honest. There's no kind of set "well in this situation I must talk to this person, this person, this person" What that, that kind of values tussle prompted for me personally was a load of conversations. So, you know what I mean, you were in some of those conversations we kind of talked about it. We talked about the nuance and the detail and the options for how we move forward, the practicalities of how we dealt with the situation, but I also reached out to a range of people internally to get advice and guidance to help me with that decision making and what that, and this is often the case in the National Trust, what that meant was every time I spoke to someone they said, "oh, you should probably speak to so and so" So I think one of the questions you sent me in the in the pre information for this interview was "who did I speak to?" And I had to write them down because actually I knew I needed to speak to someone in the curatorial line around how we do exhibitions, displays, work with artists, I knew I needed to speak to someone in the comms tree that you know, discipline area because of the potential external comms risk, but also the internal comms and that's a slightly different branch. So, I talked to someone from external comms, someone from internal comms. I then was put in touch with someone who is specifically the comms lead for the "everyone welcome part" of our strategy, so anything we do around inclusion and belonging. So, I spoke to someone specifically there. I reached out to the LGBTQI Plus network at the National Trust and spoke to them, but they also put me in touch specifically with their trans inclusion lead so spoke to them. I spoke to my line manager. You know, she's my Direct Line of support with decision making. And I also spoke to someone from the people team around the staff well-being, how do we support our staff and volunteers in this space? And each of those conversations, like I said, kind of, they were really useful and interesting conversations in their own right, but they often triggered a need to go away and talk to somebody else. So that essentially was the process I followed, which was just to have a lot of internal conversations and then to try and make sense of the, because you get different perspectives and different opinions from each of those different areas. So that kind of left me in a situation where I then had to make sense of that and decide...

Layla Khoo

Absolutely.

Helen

...ultimately, how to move forward. The other thing that just on a really practical level that because of when it happened, it was just the start of the summer holidays, wasn't it? Yeah.

Layla Khoo

Yeah, we were going into, yeah, we were just in the summer when it happened.

Helen

And it meant that loads of people were on annual leave. So, from a practical perspective, just in terms of the timings of those conversations, I actually ended up talking to people much higher up the discipline tree than I would have done otherwise just because so many people are on annual leave. So, it just, you know it meant, in some ways, that was really useful because it meant I got guidance straight

from the horse's mouth, so to speak. You know, from the people who were best placed to give me that, that guidance and then ultimately, I brought that back to you. We had that conversation with you and Maggie and Emma, I think we talked through the different options, and we agreed on a way forward that was sort of a kind of compromise of all of those different views and perspectives that I'd heard from. I suppose the other set of conversations I was having actually, you know, I didn't write on my list was obviously with the impacted member of staff and more widely with the staff team and the volunteer team just having conversations to understand their perspectives as well.

Layla Khoo

So, who made the final decision as to what the outcome would be in that the final decision that laid with you as to sort of how we move forward, yeah.

Helen

I did. Yeah. Yeah, I did.

Layla Khoo

And obviously, yeah, I was part of some of those conversations, and we did consider all options and one of those options was stopping the project entirely. And that's yeah, that was of a realistic option to consider as going to be if we can't come to an agreement, then this is one of the options that we go forward with.

Helen

Yeah.

Layla Khoo

Through to the other extreme of just letting everything run riot and see what happens and see how things go.

Helen

Yeah

Layla Khoo

From a comms perspective, what were the... what are the specific concerns with comms with us going forward, and / or stopping?

Helen

So, one of the things we did through you know is off the back of those conversations was to, was to write a reactive set of comms so that we were ready if it did escalate externally. So, we were essentially we were preparing for the worst-case scenario of an article in a newspaper or social media activity online. So, the things we considered as part of that, if you know the risks of going forward essentially, were that, I guess, I guess in essence they were twofold. There's the risk that people who objected to the inclusion of JK Rowling's name on there and felt that that was the wrong decision for the National Trust to support the display of that name in a public space would, would be concerned and take exception to that and that we would see either activism or kind of activity in the external comms space that sort of shared that displeasure or the opposite actually was equally a risk - that the edited nature of JK Rowling's name, leaving the

stitching on there of her name essentially being crossed out or cancelled would have exactly the same effect, but from people who felt that you know her name was a legitimate inclusion and should have been left there.

So that we're all, we were always preparing for those two eventualities. I don't think I know we talked about all options because I think it's always important to do that. I don't think we ever seriously considered cancelling the project. I think it was, it's too important that that freedom of expression principle was upheld. So we never, I don't think we ever really thought about that. But we knew that if we had cancelled the project actually we would be we would potentially be playing into that cancel culture narrative and doing something that actually had as big a comms risk as allowing the project to go ahead unchanged so essentially, there was risk on every side from a comms perspective and it was just a case of being prepared for that.

Layla Khoo

Yeah.

Yeah, absolutely.

I, I appreciate sort of the amount of work that got put into being able to find a way through this because it was, it was a certainly a learning curve for everybody and in many ways is a is a huge part of this research is to look at how we, how we can allow people to participate in the way that is meaningful to them while also protecting everybody else and that that's you know that that's complex and that's something that we're still learning how to do as to what you know where we draw those lines.

Helen

Yeah.

Yeah.

Absolutely, yeah.

Layla Khoo

And then I'm actually going to jump straight onto the I'm going to jump a question. I'll come back just because it follows on a bit more nicely from this. So, what do you think your lessons learned from hosting this installation and research and sort of you know what, what would you have done differently if you know from the beginning? Yeah, from the earlier stages, knowing everything that we know now, knowing where it went? And what would you do differently going forward you would you have this kind of artwork again?

Would you change the parameters for how people participate?

Helen

Yeah, great question.

So, the simple answer is that we would absolutely do this kind of work again. It hasn't in any way put us off having this kind of activity happening. So that's good news. I think. I was thinking about this question. I think the only thing I would do differently, I would want us collectively as a team to do differently, is really think about how, because like I've said, I think we were prepared for the external comms risk and what that's not the bit I was worried about.

Layla Khoo
Right.

Helen

The bit that took me by surprise was the way that people were very, you know, articulately and very legitimately explaining the well-being impact that that name was having on them in their place of work. So I think the only thing I would do differently is in the set up stage of the project in terms of how we really helped staff, volunteers, staff and volunteers in particular to understand what the project was going to be have thought through for themselves what might come through that project that that could be triggering or impactful for them, you know, regardless of their background or what that might be, really understanding you know, helping them understand what might happen, but also helping them understand the principle of freedom of expression, participation as a, as a kind of really genuine approach to engaging with people and the fact that actually we might then need to set up really good well-being structures to support people with the with the fact that they might be seeing something that they find uncomfortable or difficult or triggering in some way, and there are obviously adaptations we can make in terms of people's work, where they work, how sort of close they are to the project, and to any future project that would have mitigated for some of those risks to people's well-being. So yeah.

Layla Khoo

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, I think it's also one of those soul searching areas that I've done is kind of, you know, we obviously we did a huge amount of prep work at the beginning of this, more than I've ever done on a project before, and for the most part that was really successful in terms of sort of getting people to understand it and buy into projects to really get that staff buy-in on that. But I can see that even with all of that work that we did, we missed a really key element and that, yeah, that's certainly something that I'll take forward within my work as well that that's something that needs to sit within participatory work as a really important part of how we work with different, yeah, with different groups of people with very different opinions. And that's the nature of it.

Helen

Yeah.

Yeah, absolutely. And I think it's really important for, you know, leadership teams in National Trust properties or any other heritage setting to understand that when they, when they do this kind of work because it's important for the visitors and because it helps them diversify their audiences and all those kind of things, that comes with a real responsibility actually to make sure that the staff teams and the volunteer teams are really supported with that. So, I think it's a, it's a mutual thing, Layla. I think we should have absolutely recognised that the that risk was there and given people the opportunity to really understand it before it started.

Layla Khoo

Yeah, I know. Yeah, that's the point of doing this as a research project because hopefully to be able to feedback this and kind of say, yeah, that these are some key points that we would definitely move forward with. Probably just sort of related to that, obviously one of the, or not necessarily obviously, but for me one of the interesting and also very difficult grey areas to the specific incident was that the issue was raised and action was taken by a participant, but that participant was a staff member and that enters into a really interesting grey area just because normally we'd, you know, actively encouraging staff members to take part in this and to be a participant as well, but because of the nature of how this was participated with this, then I think from a comms perspective as I understood it also raised a slight grey area as to "are they participating for themselves? Are they participating on behalf of the National Trust?"

Going forward, would that impact how you would have staff participate with this sort of work?

Helen

Yeah, I think it would, because I think actually that individual member of staff genuinely and I've said this to you before, but genuinely believes they were participating in a way that was, you know, welcomed within the framework of the project.

Layla Khoo

Yeah, absolutely.

Helen

And did it with the very best of intentions in terms of representing their viewpoint as an individual. But when that, you know, at the end of the day, they are wearing the National Trust badge on their T-shirt. And that means that it that comes with a sort of certain responsibility.

So, I think I think I would be again, I think it's in the set-up stage. I wouldn't want staff and volunteers to not be able to take part, but maybe that comes with a bit of a framework around "you take part once, you take part during the opening hours of the project"

Layla Khoo

Yeah.

So, in the same way that a visitor would, rather than that the power imbalance, being that you have constant access to the project.

Helen

Yeah, absolutely. And that member of staff was able to sit down, I believe outside, you know when the hall was closed with all of all of the time and the the space to then take the action, and privacy to take that action. And actually, I think if you're talking about a public participation, it should be, it should be within that kind of public framework. I do want to emphasise, though, that that person did not do that maliciously. That wasn't a malicious act to do it. Yeah.

Layla Khoo

Privacy.

No, absolutely. And there's going to, there's going to be a very full interview with the member of staff as well to make sure that they're, all intentions are properly recorded because it's, and that's the other interesting aspect of this is intention versus impact.

Helen

Yes. Yeah.

Layla Khoo

We all went into this with the best intentions, I believe, but the impact of various different aspects of this changed or was read differently by different people and continues to be read differently by different people and will continue over the next year to be read differently by different people. And I think that's probably a follow on as well - is there, is there is there any comms concerns...

Helen

Yeah.

Layla Khoo

...with displaying the piece fully for the next year. We're creating a list, but I'm in the process of creating a catalogue list of everybody who's on there so that people can see who's on there. Yeah, and will be guided by yourselves as the sort of hosting site as to how much detail goes on to that description. But yeah, all of the names will be listed. There are, yeah, there's more than one divisive name on that list.

Helen

Yeah, absolutely. Yes. I don't want to pre-empt Emma's decision ultimately in terms of the, the, how it, you know how it will be displayed in any kind of specific actions we might need to take, but I don't, I don't think that there is any new comms risk. I think it's the same all that preparation we did for the continuation of the project back in the summer, preparing for people with very different views to raise those views in different ways will stand. So, I think we'll just continue under this, that same set of guidelines.

Layla Khoo

Right. So then moving on. So what impact, if any, do you feel installation had both on staff and visitors. So, within staff, I'm covering room guides and volunteers as well within that umbrella.

Helen

Yeah.

Yeah. Well, certainly from a, from a, I guess I was going to say from a staff perspective, but it might almost be more from an organisational perspective as in as in Hardwick, the organisation. The impact that it's had I think is actually around giving us a huge amount of confidence in how we move forward with this kind of work. So actually, that that will go beyond, that impact will go far beyond the

parameters of this particular project because we know we want to do more of this. We know we want to bring more, as I've said, more contemporary pieces in more artistic responses to the stories, more participation. So, we'll be able to do that and you know with the with the lessons learned in the bag really from this project. So, I think in lots of ways that's probably the biggest thing from my perspective that we've got from this.

I think that that kind of trickles down in terms of people, so room guides and the staff who work directly in the House or directly with visitors, their confidence in knowing that we can have something like this going on within the context of the hall visit and it works and it flows and people like it. And you know that that we can do it, that that's all organisational learning. That's just incredibly valuable. In terms of visitors? I've heard nothing but positive, so you know, I don't I don't get the opportunity, unfortunately, to get out and speak to many visitors, but I do get quite a lot of people contacting me and saying, oh, I was at Hardwick last week and I saw this or I came to the event that we held and coming back and saying that was such a powerful thing, I absolutely loved seeing it. I loved having that representation of femaleness and what it means to be a woman in this space that belonged to Bess of Hardwick. So, I think the impact for some people has been quite profound, actually. And that again sort of circling back gives me the confidence to say we need to do this more because people have really connected with it on a quite a deep level.

Layla Khoo

Yeah.

That's great. And it's lovely to hear as well.

Then finally, what, what are you hoping to - both you-personally, and you-Hardwick, hoping to learn from this research and what's probably the most effective way of disseminating this? Probably this is, yes, a long write up. There's an awful lot of data to go through for this, but what do you hope to be able to take away from this and how, you know, how would it best be used, through an organisation like the trust.

Helen

Yeah, I think sort of as me personally and for Hardwick, it's really I think the most useful thing that can come out of the research is almost a framework for how we approach the next project of this type, that kind of what do we need to think about, who are the people we need to engage with, how do we do that engagement ahead of this project starting. I know I've laboured that point, but that's probably the main thing that you know, all of all of this research is going to inform.

How we do that in quite a powerful way, I think.

I think that essentially, you know, for other people in my position, other general managers of National Trust properties, for example, I was actually talking to someone else about this this morning. I think so often what we need, because I described how the decision came to me and it's so often somebody sticking their head around my office door and saying, oh, by the way, I've got this opportunity to have this great project. Are you up for it? It's about women. And I'm like, yeah, sounds great. And then that's it. That's the end of the decision.

Layla Khoo

Yeah.

Helen

But actually, really simple sort of framework of as a as a leader in terms of making that that kind of yes / no, green button / red button decision – “What do I need to do? How do I set my team up for success? How do I support the well-being of people within that space? What are the key things I might need to have thought about before I flippantly say yes? Go for it.”

Layla Khoo

Yeah, sure.

Helen

Yeah, I think that would be a really powerful way of you know, within your case studies, I don't know what the research will physically look like, but within that case study, if it can have something that's really like quite practical for people, I think that would be really powerful.

Layla Khoo

Yeah, I think I think that they that the same sort of applies back to the arts as well is that, the one of my hopes from this was to be able to create a framework for sort of best practise almost for artists to work with within this participatory sort of arena, which is still sort of relatively new for certainly for artists working with heritage sites as to sort of you know, what works, what doesn't, and while sort of, the problems that we had over the summer were incredibly difficult and quite unpleasant to sort of work within while it was happening, I'm a big believer that you don't learn a lot from things that only go well. You learn much more from things where you've stumble a bit and you've got to find your way around things. And I think in that respect we learnt, or certainly I learned, so much more from something causing a problem and then having to fix it than we ever would have everything and just run smoothly and here'd been no issues throughout. I think, yeah you don't learn from that you go “oh well, we did everything great then excellent” which, you know, we maybe did we maybe didn't.

Helen

Yeah, absolutely, yeah.

Layla Khoo

So, I think that sort of I think that's why it's so, that but that particular area -

Helen

Yeah. Yeah. No, I think you're right.

Layla Khoo

- while it seems like sort of focusing on a negative, but that particular area really does exemplify for me all of the issues around working with participation and the things that need to be thought through properly for that to be genuinely meaningful and not harmful to anybody involved.

Helen

Yeah.

Absolutely. And I think I've said this to you before, but I'm really glad that that happened. You know, that whole process that I know it was incredibly time consuming and certainly challenging at times to wade through the ethical and moral quagmire that we ended up in, it was really essential for me personally and for the Hardwick team more widely to kind of cut our teeth on a on a conundrum like that so that we can actually have more confidence as we go into things like this again in the future. We wouldn't have gained that confidence without it being really difficult at times.

Layla Khoo

Yeah, I think that's sort of the interesting part. So, I think I'll obviously where I'm in the process of trying to interview everybody that needs to be interviewed at the moment and questionnaire for those who I don't unfortunately, don't have time to get an interview and transcribe it as well. Then I've got a huge amount of raw data to put together. I've got a small matter of finishing the piece of work.

Helen

Yeah, yeah.

Layla Khoo

But then yeah, that my hope would be to be able to have feedback, something that can hopefully be useful, or that it can be adapted to be useful at some point, and it'd be, it would also be nice to have the opportunity to feedback some of that information to sort of the wider staff team have been involved with this and have supported this all the way through as well. But it is it's been, it's been a lot of work and it'll be nice to let people know sort of what the outcomes were.

Helen

Yeah, I think that would be really, really useful, actually. Yeah, sounds good.

Layla Khoo

And so, for that is there, is there anything else that you'd like to add or any other sort of thoughts that you would like to recording on this?

Helen

I don't think so. I'm just looking at my notes. I I don't think so. I think we've covered everything that that was in your questions and that I'd written down. So yeah.

Layla Khoo

That's brilliant. Well, thanks ever so much for taking the time to do this, Helen. I know you're really, really busy at the moment.

Appendix 10: Interview Transcript, Hardwick Hall, Maggie

Maggie was the Experiences and Partnerships Curator for the National Trust Midlands prior to, and during the creation of *A Virtuous Woman* at Hardwick Hall. At the time of this interview, Maggie had resigned from her role at the National Trust. This interview took place by Microsoft Teams on 23rd December 2024. Interview questions were provided in advance of the interview.

Layla Khoo

OK, so firstly can you briefly I think just because your role is probably one of the more complicated roles to describe to anybody outside of the National Trust, what your role was during the National Trust, at the point that we were working together?

Maggie

Absolutely. So, my job title was experiences and partnerships curator. I'm part of the National Trust's internal consultancy and I work with a portfolio of properties, of which Hardwick is one. On projects that either include external partnerships, external creative partnerships, with the purpose of an internal experience as the as the output of that partnership and in reality, that means I kind of often end up working in that sort of middle space between holding a relationship with an external partner or partners and a property team. I can often sort of broker those introductions where appropriate, help for property team who may not have worked with external creative partners to shape a brief or work through project proposals. Help them through the sort of contracting that happens in those sorts of projects and then help to hold the relationship along with a member of that property team, because it is really important that the property team also are part of that, but sort of help and support in holding that relationship between a busy operations team and often an external artist or community partner who may be working with the trust for the first time, so helping both sides ideally to sort of navigate how that partnership looks and what and how to make it a win-win so everyone gets what they want out of the end of a project like that.

Layla Khoo

It felt like you're the middleman between the, between the artist and house, which is it's nice to have sort of that sort of direct point of contact rather than to go through the house team as well. So linked to that then obviously for the for the purposes of transcribing this. You and I started discussing this project a very long time ago and this is something that's sort of grown as those discussions have gone along. I know why I approached you. Can you tell me why you were willing to support and promote this happening, both as a as an art installation to happen at Hardwick and as a piece of research?

Maggie

Yeah, so you'd come to my attention through the changes in attitude project at Nunnington, which I'd seen and seen images of and heard about through the sort of internal sharing that happens within the National Trust. And I just thought that that was one of the most powerful artist led projects that I'd seen in the 15 years that I've been in the National Trust. I was just absolutely blown away by it. And the way that it really seamlessly and authentically made intellectual and emotional

links between collection objects from the past and the way that people behave and think now on a level that, that really, yeah, that really made sense in terms of kind of making ethical - creating conversations about modern day ethics and the way to live in the world today. And using the past as a source to do that, and that's the bit that I personally am really interested in when I'm working with heritage sites, is kind of how, how is their offer more than, how is it both a wonderful experience as a day out for a social grouping or family, but also how does it bring that extra level of richness where these places, objects, stories and people of the past help us think about who we are and why the world around us is the way it is and how we act and behave in that world and treat each other, and so on. And that project absolutely did that in such a wonderful way. So that when you approached me saying that you were interested in working at Hardwick, it was it felt like a really yeah, it felt like a really perfect marrying of that because Hardwick is one of the properties that I work with, where I also think they are absolutely dripping in stories and people and collections that are both beautiful and fascinating for their in their own historical bubble, but also have so much more that they can open out for people to do that bit where they elevate from a social day out here to something that really also makes you think and connect and talk to others.

And so, the project started with trust in you as an artist and what I'd seen from your work because we didn't know what the product was actually going to be, which collection items it was going to be about. And I tried to work with the property team so that they could kind of put forward some areas that they were interested in discussing at that time so that your work didn't sit as an extra to what was going on, but that it could work with whatever the property were already wanting to display or talk about, which turned out to be tapestries and other material culture.

And with you to try and find you know a way to navigate through that process. That meant that the property team got something that really worked for them and their experience offer at the time but also something that you as an artist wanted to explore in your practise and then also there was this piece of research that sat around it, so it wasn't even just that artistic product, but it was also going to yield a piece of thinking that could be used across a lot of trust properties.

I can keep talking!

Layla Khoo

No, I think I just to expand on something I because it's something that I wasn't really fully able to speak to Helen about because there's sort of the decision-making part of this largely happened before she was in post. So, she sort of inherited a lot of this project, happily so. But nonetheless, she hadn't been involved in part of that. And one of the questions that I've been asked her a few times since; that's one of those things that I take for granted because it happened that way and it happened organically, is how on Earth I managed to get a property like Hardwick Hall to agree to a project with no defined outcome?

Because generally speaking, as the larger heritage sites that have the big numbers tend to want to know what it is that they're getting themselves into before they'd agree to something, and the fact that this was allowed to be a genuinely iterative project whereby even, you know, even at the point at which we, you know that it was agreed that it would happen, that we didn't have, even I had no idea what the artwork would look like at this point and what that would be as to sort of who was involved in deciding that would be OK and were there reservations about taking that slight leap of faith?

Maggie

I think that would probably be my fault!

And I don't use fault pejoratively! I think because I had such confidence in the work that I'd seen from you, I was able to bring that confidence to the property team and also because they hadn't worked with a lot of artists before. They kind of didn't have anywhere else to take that lead from if you see what I mean. So, I don't think they even thought that it - the team that we ended up working with were not the team that originated the project. So, I think they were happy to put their trust in me, who was happy to put my trust in you. So, there was a kind of a paper chain of trust going on

Layla Khoo

Trusting everybody else's experiences.

Maggie

Yeah. Yeah. And. And I don't, you know, I don't think that's blind trust. I think there was – you, you have a really, really clear, you know, portfolio of work that shows exactly the quality and the authenticity and the way that you work. We had experience within the National Trust of a very successful project. So, you know that that trust has a foundation to it. It, you know, we knew that that and then I've worked with various artist projects before and actually when we've tried to define an outcome, even here at Hardwick, they've had some in the past. They can remember some where - there was sort of ***** , probably don't use this example by name in in the research because I don't don't recall the artist, but that it was someone who'd you know, there's a very specific commission and then, because it didn't have time to sort of breathe and grow organically within the place, it felt really sort of dropped in. Yeah, it didn't feel like it had that, that yeah, that authenticity and that and the place didn't have a relationship with the artist and the artist didn't grow the sort of relationship with the place and with the volunteers that you've been able to here. So, so actually bringing a seed and then growing the plant together. Creates something that is much more rooted. And so, I yeah, I had. I had the confidence and I was able to bring that confidence to the team here.

Layla Khoo

Huge thanks for doing that because, it's, yeah, it couldn't have happened any other way that it was the way the project needed to happen. I'm going to jump on to something the slightly difficult aspect of the work, but probably also one of the most interesting areas of and certainly one of the most interesting sort of learning points of the work which is the point at which the act of participation started to raise issues with how we allow people to participate. So, for the sake of the transcript, there was a point at which the name JK Rowling was embroidered on the work and was flagged up as a problem by a member of staff. I immediately informed you that this had been flagged up and expected this to possibly snowball, and then we, various actions had to be taken on both sides from there. Can you talk me through from your side of thing sort of what happened? What processes were followed, who was consulted with?

Your thoughts on how it was handled, how what we did well, what we could have done better, that sort of thing.

Maggie

Yeah.

So yes, so the first thing I'd heard about it was from you, having had a conversation with a member of staff, so I immediately took that to the property team to see whether they had also had contact about it and were aware of it. And then.... because of this sort of slightly could be because I sit in the middle. I was never sort of fully at the coal face of it, as it were, in that I never had conversations with the members of staff or volunteers who were directly affected. So where I sort of sat was trying to understand both the conversations that you were having around this corner of a circle, if that makes sense, and the conversations that Helen was having as the general manager with her team around on this side and both of you were therefore having conversations back in the same space over here. And I was sort of on the other side of the circle. But trying to I guess, keep that relationship positive while both sides sort of tried to work out and navigate what they how they wanted to get through the situation, I think it was one of those situations where there wasn't some kind of perfect answer that that people were being stubbornly unable to agree on. It was... so I felt I felt it really deeply because I could see that both the sides, both the people I was trying to sort of support and listen to in it had really, really valid concerns and were coming from a place of heart and ethics, but there were, it was a situation where two sort of ethically true things impinged on each other.

Layla Khoo

Yeah, and this is the thing is, yeah, more than one thing can be true at the same time.

Maggie

Yeah. So, so I was absolutely, I really wanted to support you as the artist and be and be able to sort of come back and say to the property, listen in most museums and heritage sites where they have an established practise of working with artists, if you invite an artist in to work with you then then their work and their voice is how it is, is what you what you support once you've got that far into the relationship, then then their vision is what happens in the place and there's kind of no question about that. So, you you've done your thinking beforehand in terms of is, is this an artist whose voice we trust? But also in organisations that work in that way routinely, the public there's a public understanding that the artist's voices, the artist's voice of the artist's work, is that, within the National Trust, I think we've had, you know, 130 years of establishing the Trust's voice in a way that is actually quite unique in the kind of cultural landscape.

Layla Khoo

Yeah, it is.

Maggie

And we probably don't see that fully from inside the organisation because that's kind of, we're institutionalised into that. And so when we bring partners in and I have seen this in, in other properties as well, when they when they put forward or say something that the, the organisational line, the curatorial line, or even the volunteers disagree with there's an inability for people to go, but that that's OK and it's OK for an artist to come and say something that might be provocative or different, or have a range of people who agree and disagree. But we don't have a

sort of institutional maturity in kind of being able to hold other voices. We have an incredibly strong National Trust voice to the point that we've sort of forgotten how to hold those other voices. Our new strategy period is talking about doing a lot more of that sort of work. It will be really interesting, and this piece of research could be really interesting to feed into that, because as I say I think it's something the organisation is sort of slightly blind to actually. Because of the way it works.

Layla Khoo

I think that's it's sort of the feeling I got was that it was that the hardest thing seemed to be accepting that by inviting people to come and participate with something you're not, they're not going to have the same view as the trust or the "correct" view or the view of all of the staff members. It's yeah, they are going to express their views in very different ways and some of them aren't going to be things that are agreeable to everybody else. But that's what the nature of participation is. And that's if you want people to meaningfully engage and express, then that's going to throw up some things that are sometimes uncomfortable for everybody else to sit with. And it's, I think there's definitely workarounds of having the language to be able to talk about that properly and to be able to say, yeah, we are inviting you to express yourself and therefore you might not like the way other people express themselves. And just stand by that and you not dive into whether or not this is opinions that are held by anybody else or not. That that's all that that is, this is just a space to hold other people's opinions. And so, I think there's, there's work to do around language and being able to for everybody to be able to sit comfortably with something that's a little bit uncomfortable. And that's not necessarily easy to sit with and to sit with people who have different opinions. But I think you know to jump on to the next part. I think there's obviously within anything like this, there is many lessons learned to be able to reflect back on as kind of how you know with the benefit of hindsight what we'd have done differently. I think you and I have spoken sort of off the record before about, you know, things where we can see that we thought we'd done everything right, but there was, there was clearly holes in it. And so, the more distance I get from it, the more clearly, I can see where there was just huge gaps in in what I thought I'd done really, really well as part of a consultation process, but that actually would miss some really key elements. And yeah, for me, one of the big issues was that we didn't open up that discussion about censorship much more widely at the time and we had a very brief discussion in a meeting with key staff members, but it wasn't opened up to everybody to make it very clear that there would be no censorship of this project. I think that would be one of the ways that this could have been, nipped in the bud. And I think in other ways just sort of more widely consulting about what that might look like and what that means to not censor and start to flag up, so we could have worked through some of these issues before we even started. Which I think would have, it wouldn't have prevented people being upset or offended, but it would have given us the preparation, I think to be able to have those frameworks in place to say "no, we all discussed this and this is this is what we said that we'd do, under these circumstances", but from, from your perspective as to sort of how what you were involved with from your side, what do would you have done anything differently? Would you have had us all do something differently and would you allow something like this to take place again?

Maggie

So, it's it is really interesting one because, this all, well we'd, we had foreseen that name being, if there was going to be a problem it was going to come around that

Layla Khoo

Yeah, it was going to be that one.

Maggie

So, it was in the risk register, and we had some reactive comms statements around it from the start what we hadn't foreseen is that the pushback would come from internally would come from, from staff and volunteers themselves. And that therefore it changed the nature of that pushback for Helen and Emma and those who are holding the project on behalf.

[video link temporarily breaks up]

Maggie

So yeah, it was it was. It made the situation a lot more complex for Emma and Helen, and those were who were holding the project on behalf of the property here. Because, you know, it is their role to ensure that there's a duty of care for their staff and their staff are coming to them to tell them that they were being adversely affected on a daily basis around sort of protected characteristics and things that we would take really seriously, we should take really seriously. If someone from a you know a from a minority group is feeling that they are unable to express themselves at work, and for this property particularly that really wants to be a place of.

Layla Khoo

Inclusivity. Yeah.

Maggie

Inclusivity. It was a it was a really serious piece and it and that, that really changed it, because if it was, if it was visitors, I think we would have we had, we had enough thought through as to kind of how we were going to hold that and visitors just come through, you know, for a single visit.

Layla Khoo

Once, yeah.

Maggie

It's not that now my workplace now overtly has something physical on the wall that I walk past every day that I feel is a sign of oppression against me. So, Helen was also right to really take that seriously. And it, I do feel like we'd, that was a gap we hadn't seen, in looking at things. But that and also, you're looking back at your sort of track record of work of work, they were all really participative, but they there wasn't one that had previously kind of touched on this kind of, you know the stuff that's in the in our culture wars in the UK.

Layla Khoo

Yeah.

Maggie

And had hadn't had that kind of tension around it. We do need to have a conversation about censorship, or about what we're holding, the diversity of opinions that we might be holding, so we hadn't gone into that as much with the volunteers. We'd looked at the nature of your participative work. We'd looked at this particular piece. We'd looked at what was inspiring it. At the practicalities of it, we didn't had conversations within those amazing conversations we had with volunteers. And I think I thought we'd done the volunteer stuff really well and on every other level, I think we did a really good job of bringing a volunteer team along with us that were confident and capable and champions for the work when you weren't there in a way that is quite rare to see with a visiting artist collaboration.

Layla Khoo

Yeah, I've never had it before. I've never had it buy in like this before, and I put that down entirely to the amount of pre work that was done.

Maggie

Yeah. And I think that and I don't want that to be lost in kind of oh we got that wrong because there was loads that we got really, really right about that.

Layla Khoo

Yeah, this is it. We just didn't get it 100%, right, that's the point.

Maggie

But yeah, the little chink that we missed was that bit around really talking to them about what, what happens if visitors. Yeah. What, how do we hold this diversity of opinion that we might not agree with? And I will definitely have that in my head in in if I'm ever in a similar project in future is a kind of must have as part of that that process around participative work, even if it doesn't feel like it's going to be a controversial piece. Cause, you never know what people are gonna find.

Layla Khoo

Yeah, me too. This is it, I think. Yeah. Interesting. It's already feeding in. Yeah, my, my work's revisiting the Bronte Parsonage piece next year. So that the first one gets cracked open in May next year. But we'll obviously have to start those discussions about how we do that and what that looks like. And obviously we have no idea what people have written inside any of those pieces. They've been sat there for four years, and we ask people what's happening in their lives and what they're hoped for the next four years, which you know now it's.

Maggie

Have you done the cracking open?

OK, so it's still a while, but yeah.

Yeah.

Layla Khoo

We need to be a little, we need to sit with, so we're now putting the framework in place now for where are our hardlines as to what gets published, what doesn't get published? What do we show? What don't we show?

Maggie

Yeah.

Layla Khoo

And make sure that that's very clear before we start that we've spoken to all the staff very clearly before we start about what that might look like.
And how we hold those things.

Maggie

'Cause, like because I I'm sure there will be something in there that you haven't foreseen, right.

Layla Khoo

Oh, absolutely there will be.
Yeah.

Maggie

And I think with this project, even if we'd even if we'd tried to write our lines beforehand, we wouldn't have thought about what happens if someone embroiders the, you know, in a particular colour scheme over the top of the, there would have been aspects of it that we would not have foreseen even if we had spent more time getting deeper into that those conversations. And I think that's part of that question about. Working on an iterative, participative project and the fact that it does, and as you found with changes in attitude, people do things that you're not expecting.

Layla Khoo

Yeah.

Maggie

And with all of these, part of it is having a system for how we will deal with that iteratively. And that not necessarily coming as much of a surprise that as it did here.

Layla Khoo

Yeah, this is that space to pause and how you how you are able to thoroughly but relatively quickly think through what to do with something to unexpected happens.

Maggie

And who should be in the room for those conversations? And how do we try to keep it kind of quite small and tight in terms of trying to move quickly, there could have been another version when we moved a lot slower but had much wider conversations about it. And what does it mean?

Layla Khoo

Yeah.

Maggie

And there's a degree of expertise needed to hold a big conversation like that. If we had got, you know, all of your volunteer and staff champions in a room together and had a whole conversation about it when it happened. Maybe that would have been really helpful, but maybe that would have created more diversity of opinion, and it would have been even harder to navigate, but I think.

Layla Khoo

I think it, yeah, I think that sort of thing, I think while I think my initial feeling was that that would have been really useful and really positive. And I'm, I'm quite passionate believing that as much transparency as transparency as possible where these things are concerned. And it became an ongoing bugbear that people weren't being informed what was happening and it was turning into a sort of a bit of a rumour mill as to what was going on. However, on the flip side of that, having had some discussions with some of the volunteers directly who basically just came to me and asked me what had happened, and the way they responded to what had happened is definitely something that I wouldn't have wanted happening in a big room with lots of people without somebody who knows how to facilitate those kind of discussions much more carefully. It could have ended up quite unpleasant in lots of different ways because people have quite strong opinions and it's being able to manage that even within a small, you know, it was a relatively small staff team that I was working within, actually on the project. But even within that team, there was there was quite a diversity of opinions just in the action that was taken. And the follow-on actions from that that would have taken us a very long time to have worked through in a group environment.

Maggie

I know you, you put feelers out to colleagues and trusted advisors and so did we internally, contacted our, we spoke to various advisory internal groups. We escalated it up through conservation, through comms, and through our LGBTQ plus internal network. And people disagreed across all of not, not just across each other, but in within each of those, there was disagreement. There was disagreement as to the way forward. So I think it, you know, it was, it's empirically wasn't easy and straightforward because this was taking two, two truths that needed to be true at the same time, but also couldn't both be fully realised at the same time because we had to make a decision and we had to decide whether the extra embroidery stays or goes. We had to decide whether we were going to allow it to happen again.

Layla Khoo

Yeah.

Maggie

So yeah, so I I'm not sure there's necessarily a whole lot we could have done differently at the moment that it happened, but I definitely do think and I will take away from this learning around having... So I think the conversation, I think what I've learnt is that there needs to be conversations up front about the fact that unexpected things will happen and there could be difference of opinion. We don't know what this will look like. But this is the direction of travel that that we tend to, this is how we support artists that we've brought in. And have a bit of a kind of

clearer line on that within the trust. And just leave, leave enough space and understanding that with a participatory project, we don't know what will happen.

Layla Khoo

Yeah.

Maggie

And there will be this group of people who will need to navigate it if something does happen. The other thing that I suppose was difficult for you and me was that the communication on site was not controlled by us. So, we could see what we wanted to happen, but we don't actually know how complex or, or what the mechanisms for that are on the site.

Layla Khoo

Yeah. And even just some of the practicalities for that, of just staff members working part time, different people being in on different days, things not being passed across as yeah, some of it wasn't even intentional. It was just, it was just people that just various things slipping through the net. Which is just off the nature of working with a group of people and staff team and also in the middle of the summer when everybody had leave booked. Which make things complicated. So, obviously you're, you don't work directly on site, but from what you've seen and the conversations you've had, what impact do you feel the installations had, if any, on, on both staff volunteers and visitors?

Maggie

So, I think in the context of what Hardwick were doing last year around celebrating the tapestries and embroideries. Having your project as part of that, can you hear me all right?

Layla Khoo

Yeah, yeah

Maggie

Made a huge difference to the, the life that was able to be within those conversations and those and that exhibition. It brought it, it brought a dynamic to it that otherwise wasn't there. Otherwise, it was a kind of come and look at these objects from the past in a very recognisable frame of the way that they were presented and so on. Your piece completely switched up the energy I guess is what I'm trying to say of how people visited, so I thought it was brilliant as well that it was towards the beginning of the exhibition so that people were got a little bit of context and then they were into something active, participatory, where they were thinking where they were looking at objects. And having to actually then question themselves and talk about them to each other. So, I think it changed the way people then visited the rest of the hall. It's certainly changed the way people looked at the noble women embroideries and were thinking about what they meant and stop them being kind of a background wallpaper and brought them to be these, you know, active choices that people that Bess had made that brings her story to life. And it also brings those objects to life. And sets people off in a way where they've been sitting in a room talking and doing and being active in the space, active in the way they think and active in the way that they were visiting with their friends or

family. So, for visitors, I think that yeah, it was that real energy shift that gave them a different lens from the start through which they could experience the rest of Hardwick. I think it's been amazing for the team at Hardwick, even though it was really hard at times for them. I think the learning there and the maturity with which they will be able to approach projects in future has been incredibly valuable. I really hope that it means that they are more likely to engage in participatory projects.

Layla Khoo

Helen says she is. Helen says she'll do it.

Maggie

Yeah. Brilliant.

And they, but they will be able to go into that with experience and their eyes open. And more of an understanding of the sort of internal culture that they need to build in order to support that. So, both that staff and volunteers are really secure in understanding the inclusive culture here but are also really are so secure in that that then they are able to let difference express itself here without that being a threat. Without needing to take that personally because they know that this place has got their back and I think because it was so soon after a new GM starting who was trying to bring in a different culture, they the team didn't have that security of what the internal values here are.

Layla Khoo

Yeah.

Maggie

They had them spoken, but they hadn't. There hadn't been enough time for them to really kind of be lived and embedded.

Layla Khoo

Yeah, and feel that they were being upheld.

Maggie

Yeah, and know, know them on such a deep level that something got, you know, a passing thing, like a piece of temporary partnership or exhibition work of whatever nature is not going to shake that 'cause you would have an unshakable understanding of the values and culture here. And I think that's really helped Helen to understand that. And I think they, they certainly last time I was speaking to them were planning on embarking a piece of work to take things like the purpose of and proposition that I wrote with them here that expresses some of that inclusive culture, but actually turn it into a more people focused culture piece rather than this is, this is the sorts of stories we tell, but also this is how we're going to live it internally and I think that will be transformative for them here and transformative within a National Trust property to not just have something we say we stand for, but to really embed it deeply within internal culture.

Layla Khoo

Yeah.

Embedded throughout.

Maggie

So, I think it's got the potential to be a really powerful game changer. For them here to and is really kind of laser focused on what they need to work on because it's not something that is normally part of what a National Trust property manager thinks they need to do. And there's a lot of very practical pieces of work, but really, embedding values-led culture and value, not just the sort of generic National Trust values, but one that is actually really specific to this place because of the stories that it tells. So I think that's really exciting for them actually and I'm really grateful that they got the chance to learn that with an artist who, you had a clear vision for what you wanted, but you brought it with sensitivity and an openness to kind of discuss and patience, I guess while they navigated through it. Yeah. So that that really helps them. So, thank you.

Layla Khoo

Yeah. No, I think it's.

I think it's a really interesting take away from work like this is that, yeah, experiences from a lot of the feedback that I had on sort of how things went and how things were dealt with at the time as that. Yeah, the huge difference, the huge gap that there is between intention and impact. And that applies both to sort of the actual participative work, but it applies to what I intend versus the impact that it ends up having. And the site and it's trying to be able to marry those things up and understand that there can be a huge difference between them as well. And acknowledging that whether you intended it or not, the impact was whatever it was and needs dealing with sensitively. As in in every respect, so it's.... I'm glad it happened..... now. Because now I can see how useful it's been, and it will... it's actually one of the biggest pieces of learning from this project and it's a really useful thing to have happened and to have gone through in terms of a working process to go through as well. And there's a there's a huge amount to take away from all of that because yeah, that one instance is indicative of exactly what participative work is, and how we handle that. So, following on from that obviously this is we're now finally in sort of the analysis part. So, while I'm also still back up and forwards on site, I'm actually back at Hardwick in January to finish stitching. So, we got called off by the wind last week. But aside from some final stitches, we're now on top of the actual analysing everything that's happened, which is once again starts off being as relatively small areas of the work start off being relatively small and end up being huge to even just things like cataloguing the names is rapidly turning into a massive piece of work that needs analysing in about 20 different ways as to how you look at that and how you look at names that were placed together and how you separate those out and how you talk about recurring names and why they've recurred in a certain way. And so there's a whole lot to talk about in just in terms of how people participated with that, without even going into the rest of it. So, I need to at some point start whittling this down into what are the key points to move forward with. But one of my hopes in in doing this research and the write up of this research is that it would be hopefully provide some kind of learning useful learning for both artists working in the way that I work with heritage sites and site specific works and also for those commissioning artists to work in this way that you hopefully will be some learning that's across the board. So, what would you hope to learn from the research and in in your professional capacity, what do you think the best way to disseminate that information is that in a way that's actually useful rather than just sending a thesis around to everybody?

Maggie

So, I think it's just really useful and interesting to see all those different intentions and impacts in the words of the people who have experienced them kind of collated all in one place. Sorry, I thought that car was just going to back straight into that other car. It's OK, narrowly avoided it. But yeah, to, because when you hear those voices together "This is my this was my intention and this is how it felt for me" It brings that into a really sharp focus. It brings it to life; it gives it the ability to carry a lot of meaning and therefore understanding in how to navigate situations that might be similar in future. I think the, I really hope that the learnings help us see how impactful participative work can be in our places that are often quite static and quite one-dimensional and it just it just brings this, yeah, this life and this conversation that's I've mentioned already in a really unique way that people can engage in on their own terms. We are very prescriptive in many ways about what we want people to learn and how we want people to visit. And so to be able to bring a bit of that to a heritage visit I think is incredibly important I hope it will also show that it made a demonstrable difference in how people engaged with the collections and with the stories, and that it really can create a shift from a from that sort of passive visit to something really active that will lead to greater interest in future. So, I'm hoping it shows the impact of the work on those levels and then that there will also be some really great learnings in this climate where the National Trust is caught up in culture wars and well, the whole nation, we all are. Everyone's sort of identity and whether that's political or personal, are all kind of potential fuel for disagreement at the moment and heritage spaces have an ambition to be a sort of neutral third space that can hold some of those conversations intentions, because where else can those conversations happen in the world that we've created around that they're not going to happen in online spaces. And there are very few spaces that do not, you know that have such a broad church of visitors as somewhere like the National Trust hopefully getting broader. But there's, there's certainly a breadth of opinion and to be able to create spaces where we can hold that will be an incredibly valuable thing for our nation and our people and humanity. Like to put it on a grand scale so starting to get that right at you know, our small local level and then being able to share that across the organisation. And that is one of the amazing things about the National Trust is that once something that's happened in one place can be spread across such a big organisation change can very slowly happen. So, I think, yeah. So, I think it does carry the potential to change, to change the way that we understand heritage spaces and their role in the world. And yeah, particularly that bit of learning that we've talked about around how to anticipate disagreement and how to hold voices that you don't necessarily agree with. Isn't that just the thing that humanity leads to needs to learn right now? How do we listen to people we don't agree with? And how do we?

Layla Khoo

Yes.

Maggie

How do we respond in respectful ways? How do we live in environments and work alongside people that we don't necessarily see eye to eye with on everything? And why would we even think that was possible?

Layla Khoo

Exactly. There's literally nobody that I like, you know, 100% agree with.

Maggie

Agree with on everything.

Layla Khoo

Yeah. So yeah.

Maggie

So, I'm not sure if that if I got a bit waffly and grandiose there, but.

Layla Khoo

No that's fine.

Maggie

And how do we share it? I think I think there's it's starting to certainly internally, once it gets to be known as a project that has some really interesting learnings, there are lots of internal conferences and sharing mechanisms. So that is a case of how do we particularly, particularly without me in my usual post how do we make sure that that gets under the right noses? And I'm still really happy to help with that with names of kind of, where do we scoot that

Layla Khoo

Thank you.

Maggie

But Helen is also very well versed in that, particularly from her previous experience at the Children's Country House as well. There's also the potential for sort of holding a learning day where other properties that may be interested in embarking on similar sorts of projects come along and see the work and have discussions with you and the team. That's a that's a really good way to do a whole load of people in one go and yeah, our intranet is built for kind of little videos and blog posts. So, things like that are quite good for getting seen rather than a whole report. There will be a few strategic individuals for whom understanding how participative art works within the trust is exactly what they want, and they will read the whole report. But for that sort of wider dissemination, yeah, it's a question of finding ways to pop up at different conferences but also finding a product that can pop up without you having to be there in person.

Layla Khoo

Yeah.

Maggie

Yeah, build post and a little video. If, if there's any budget for something like that can be a really useful way to be able to get something in front of a lot of eyes. It can be played on our experiences and partnerships or curatorial call if it's just like a little 5 minutes of like, this is what we did. Here's some really key learning. Here's how you find out more. Yeah, I think if there's a way to do something like that.

Layla Khoo

Yeah, I'm sure they'll be, that's actually really useful. Thank you.

Maggie

That's a good way to get it, get it wider than the amount of people that will open an attachment and then actually read.

Layla Khoo

Yeah, and this is the thing, I think something that myself and sort of some of the other practise, practise-based researchers who were all in the same boat of I know they'll have to write a thesis and that's great. But the whole point of doing this wasn't so that a thesis sits on a shelf. It was so that we actually learn something and use it. That's the reason why I've done this. It's not so that I can go and be a professor at university. So, it's finding ways to make this useful and readable and suitable for different audiences in different ways as well, rather than it just being sort of something that's published that nobody ever looks at. So that's useful. Is there before I turn the recording off? Is there anything else that you'd like to add about the project that you'd like on the record?

Maggie

I don't think so I'm just. There was a time when it was really, really heart wrenchingly hard for everyone. And sort of unexpectedly so.

Layla Khoo

Yes.

Maggie

But I'm still really proud of us all for working through that because I genuinely, I don't think we were, like, making a mountain out of a molehill. I think it was a really difficult situation where everybody wanted to do the best by everyone else. Everyone was very much thinking about their colleagues and peers. And bringing a lot of you know, heart and care to it. And that's difficult. And so, I don't want the fact that it was difficult to make the project feel like it somehow failed.

Layla Khoo

Yeah. No, I don't. I don't think it. I don't think it did. And I think even if we'd have had to follow the worst-case scenario and would have had to close it at the point that that happened, I still wouldn't have viewed that as a failure. I would have viewed it as a massive learning curve, but I still wouldn't have viewed that even sort of that extreme end of things as a failure because the whole point of this work was to see what happened and to see what people did and how people reacted. And it's... I've never spent that amount of time physically on site with my own work while people are participating, I've normally, you know, come in and do sort of the initial opening week and then leave the team to it. And yeah, toddle off and do something else. Obviously, because of the nature of his work and because of yeah, because it was part of my own research and the need was there to be able to personally observe how people behaved in that space and that, what gave me the confidence to want to continue to go ahead and say no I really think we can do this if we do this the right way to keep, to keep going was that I sat with so many people and had those conversations with them directly and 99.9% of them were really

interested good-natured coming at it from the right angles and all of those things were happening. It's just that they don't get the big shout out because they're yeah. Because it went well and something happened and there's good, but yeah, thankfully, most of the other conversations are recorded and that's part of it. But so even if we'd have had to close it down at that point there's a huge amount of learning about kind of where the hard line was, where you know, where things have gone too far, where what we couldn't handle anymore. And so, there was still a huge amount of learning from working this way anyway and seeing what people can tolerate and sit with and what they can't and seeing how people respond. And I think we'll see a bit more of this next year. And so, part of this is going to come down to the interpretation and part of it is going to come down to how one of the catalogues is listed, is that there was a huge amount of people who didn't participate directly with the project, but they were just as interested in seeing how other people had participated. And that, yeah, that was that was as much of a draw as actually coming and doing something was to be able to look at and, you know, either agree with or disagree with or and sometimes get a bit judgy about what other people's choices were. And so how we put together that interpretation is going to be quite important because that's going to entirely bring that end into the into focus is to, yeah, how other people took part within this project and how you sit with the choices that they made when you can see very clearly the choices that they made and how we talk about people's choices will be sort of the next barrier.

Maggie

Yeah, I think it would be.

It would be lovely to find some wording for that interpretation. That's sort of almost fronts that and invites people to look at the work, have a reaction and then examine their reaction.

Layla Khoo

Yeah. And that's it. And yeah, acknowledging that rather than trying to sort of hide from it and kind of go, oh, yeah, to say, yeah, that this is there. You know there this is a long list of names and, but they were chosen by people who participated and yeah by the very nature of that, there'll be some names that you agree with wholeheartedly and there'll be other names that you that you don't. And have a think about that. Yeah. Have a think about the names that Bess chose and but yeah, they were problematic in their own way. Yeah. And I think I think there's an interesting conversation to have about, you know, what what's viewed as problematic? And talk about duality of different people and values etcetera. So, I think if we can gather some of that into the interpretation, I think it would be useful. And I think it'd be a much more useful way to look at that list of names rather than waiting for people to have the reaction that they are going to have when they're see some of the names on that list. And yeah, how we talk about sort of, especially how we talk about the names that have been crossed down. I think it's a missed opportunity to not actually highlight that that happened in in a sensitive way. So, and especially now, we've got all the comms in place. And I take the total recording off and then

Maggie

Oh, hang on. I have one other point. I say one other thing.

Layla Khoo

Absolutely.

Maggie

Which is not. It's a tiny side point actually. It's not really like the big to finish on, but what you were just saying about you being on site as the artist, that is another thing that I'm interested in in the research is if we're going to do a lot more of this across National Trust properties, it can't all depend on having the amount of artist's presence that you gave to this project.

Layla Khoo

It's too expensive.

Maggie

So how? How is that possible? How can we? How can we hold participative experiences at heritage sites with the kind of is it possible with the kind of team structures and volunteer structures that we have currently, if it's not dependent on an artist being like if there is a way to do all the setup that we did and then kind of largely let it roll, what are the dangers in that and?

Layla Khoo

Hand it over to the team.

Maggie

Yeah, that does it, can it still carry the can it still hold itself with the integrity that the, that the artist intends it if it is then held over handed over to, you know, effectively a self-selecting random group of people who will be taking it forward, that's a little subsection that I'm also quite interested in.

Layla Khoo

Yeah, I think that does need covering. So, it's been to say this has been very different for me in being on site as much as I have. And yeah, I had very definitely my own thoughts because I've seen it before on projects that I've worked on where yeah, there's an obvious draw to having the artist there and there's certain people who want to come and speak to the artist because you'll give them a different perspective. But the, the way we worked with volunteers this time round. And the small team that I had working with before, I had absolutely, 100% faith that they were giving 99% of the experience I would have been giving if I was there because they knew it, they knew it inside and out and they were confident with it but also that they'd chosen to be there as well. They haven't had it put upon them as part of their shift. They've chosen to put themselves in that. I think that that was a huge difference. So yeah, there's a lot to be said about that. So yes, I will. I will be including some information about that as well. Right. Well, officially, thank you. I'll turn off the recording.

Appendix 11: Volunteer introduction text

Text sent to all volunteers at Hardwick Hall via email October 2023.

Hi, I'm Layla Khoo, and I'm an artist working and researching with the National Trust. You may have seen me around the Hall in the last few months - I've tried to introduce myself to as many people as possible! But for those I haven't met yet, please allow me to introduce myself now. My artistic practice usually involves heritage sites, is often participatory and is more often than not in ceramics - although I'm increasingly interested in textiles. I make site specific artworks which help to interpret an object, site or collection to engage visitors in the narrative in a new way - this is often achieved by making artworks that require visitors to take part, or take action in some way. You are welcome to take a look at my website to see some examples of recent works.

My work with Hardwick Hall will result in 2 participatory artworks which I will install one after the other next year - the first artwork will be installed for Easter and the second for the beginning of the summer holidays. These artworks will differ slightly from my previous works, in that they also fall under the umbrella of the practice based PhD I am currently working on with the University of Leeds. I am researching the effect of participatory contemporary artworks on visitor experience of heritage narratives, and also how we evaluate this. I am looking at the methods we use to evaluate this sort of work, and trying to find ways to create more meaningful feedback than forms used to create statistics. And for some of this, I would like to ask for your help. For those of you who would be interested in being involved with this project, I'll be looking at ways to use the conversations you have with visitors as part of the evaluation - and I'll also be looking for feedback from you as to how you feel this could be managed! Please let me be clear though, nobody has to take part in this research - it's entirely up to you.

Helen has very kindly invited me to come and speak to you all in a bit more depth about what you can expect from the artworks and ways you can choose to get involved, so I look forward to meeting you and answering any questions you have then. In the meantime, if you see me wandering about the house please say hello and ask anything you like!

www.laylakhoo.com

Appendix 12: Example Room Guide Folder Documents

Process for nominating a Virtuous Woman

Visitor chooses their Virtuous Woman
(any woman or girl, dead or alive who
they admire or align themselves with)

Visitor checks fabric panels on the table
to see if anybody else has already written /
started embroidering the woman they
have chosen

If their choice is not written yet, they can
write the name using Frixion Pen

Visitor can embroider over the writing of
the name - only names which have been
fully embroidered will be included. Names
which have only been written will be
ironed off

When each panel is full, Layla will sew the
panel onto the dress of the Virtuous
Woman in the central archway of the
embroidery. By November the dress will
be made up of the names of all of the
Virtuous Woman

The Volunteer Role

Layla Khoo's – Hardwick Hall 'Deeper Engagement' Visitor Research Project

This document aims to give you general guidance on the 'key tasks' you will perform each session. However, tasks may vary as the project progresses.

Start of Day

- Two volunteers will be present when the project is open to visitors.
- If Layla is not onsite, please read her weekly guidance notes detailing the creative options you can offer to visitors to the project.

When visitors arrive in the room:

Offer a welcome and engage them in conversation about the Layla's project.

- Refer to the FAQ's and other literature Layla has provided.
- There will be interpretation to complement your conversations and the usual Room Guide 'Green Folder' will be available, containing valuable information about the room you are in, the 'Virtues' and health and safety procedures.

Facilitating Involvement in Art Activities

- When the project is open to visitors your role is to enable people to become involved, but remember you are not expected to 'do the task for them' or 'give expert advice on sewing technique's.
- The key is to provide an inclusive experience, supporting visitors to feel that their participation is valued. Encourage them to be creative (in whatever way they choose) and facilitate discussions on the project.

Other Priorities

- As always being mindful of the health and safety requirements. Immediately alert the staff team to any concerns.
- Managing the visitor flow in this area will also be important, especially on busy days. Ask for support from the staff team if necessary.
- A parent or guardian must supervise all children.

End of Day

- Tidy the creative area ready for the next session.
- Complete the handover book, entering at least one noteworthy conversation you have had with a visitor that will support Layla's research.

Please remember:

- Some visitors may choose not to engage with the project and we must respect this.

FAQ / Crib Sheet for Volunteers and Room Guides for A Virtuous Woman By Layla Khoo

Nominating the Virtuous Woman

What is the artwork?

A new, participatory textile artwork (embroidery and applique), approx. 3m tall by 3.4m wide to be created and installed in the room between the Muniment Room and the Penelope and Lucretia embroideries room

When will it start?

From 20th July – 3rd November the finished textile will hang on the wall. Visitors will be given the opportunity to nominate a modern virtuous woman of their choice by writing or embroidering this onto a piece of fabric, which will be attached to the artwork

How long will the artwork stay up for?

The embroidery will remain in place until at least the end of 2025.

What will volunteers / room guides be expected to do if they are in this room?

Room guides will be asked to explain the link between the artwork and the collection alongside Layla (and sometimes on days when she is not there) and encourage and assist visitors in participating – this might be encouraging them write a name, threading needles, sewing, writing, or just sharing their thoughts

Do I need to be able to sew?

You do not need to have any sewing skills to work on this project (although for those who do, we can certainly put them to use!) the priority is to make all visitors feel able and welcome to engage with the artwork and the narratives it is responding to.

What else will I have to do?

You will also be asked to share the experiences and engagements with visitors you have with Layla. This may include recording and evaluating visitors in new ways. This artwork, and the evaluation of visitor experience with it, form the central practice of Layla's PhD research with University of Leeds, which seeks to know the impact of participatory contemporary art on visitor experience with heritage narratives, and the ways in which we evaluate this interaction. As such, all staff and volunteers working directly with the project will be asked to consent to their experiences and feedback being included in the research.

What is the inspiration for this artwork?

Layla has been inspired by all that the Ancient Noblewomen embroideries are made from and depict – reusing fabrics which already have their own story, choosing women and virtues to represent Bess's own values, and the "virtue signalling" of these values along with her knowledge, education, dynastic family and love of architecture by creating these spectacular textiles to be displayed to all distinguished visitors. Layla set herself the challenge of a collaborative endeavour to reimagine the "lost embroidery" - the fifth instalment of Bess of Hardwick's colossal Ancient Noblewomen embroideries. This is not a re-creation of the fifth embroidery, but a reimagining – the creation of a new embroidery constructed from textiles donated by the people who occupy and care for Hardwick Hall today – the National Trust staff and volunteers. This new artwork invites visitors to participate in contributing the virtues they feel represent us today and the women who embody these virtues.

Why does the artwork ask about female virtues and women who represent them?

Layla is seeking to reimagine the fifth in the series of embroideries, and the series created for Bess considered female virtue and female embodiment of virtue. Layla would like this new embroidery to be a direct parallel of contemporary female values contrasting with female values of the 16th Century.

Can only women take part?

No, all visitors are invited and encouraged to participate and share their views regardless of their sex or gender identification

Can visitors bring in embroidery from home?

No, all fabrics have to be frozen for conservation reasons before they can be included. It is not practicable to do this with visitor donations.

Can visitors nominate anybody to be their Virtuous Woman?

Yes. There is no wrong answer to this – the key element is for visitors to consider the Noblewomen embroideries and the stories they tell, and relate that to how we live now. If visitors engage in a way we had not anticipated, we will adapt to this as we go. Encourage visitors to think of a woman or girl they admire or align themselves with, but the choice is theirs.

Will any responses be censored?

Written responses that are not embroidered over by the time each panel is full will be ironed to remove. Written responses which are offensive (swearing, aggressive, hate speech) will be reviewed by Layla and the house team to determine if they should be removed. If you are concerned about what a visitor is writing / embroidering, please do not intervene. Make a note of it, put it aside after the visitor has left if you are concerned and Layla will review it at the next opportunity.

What if a child makes a mess / scribbles all over it?

As above, any scribbles etc can be removed with the iron. This is why it is imperative visitors only use the “Frixion” pens which can be removed with heat.

Who will attach the embroidered pieces to the main textile?

Layla will attach these throughout the project. If you have a complete panel on a day you are working, put it aside on the windowsill and Layla will attach it next time she is in.

What if visitors disagree about their choices of Virtuous Woman?

This is quite likely to happen at some point. This part of the project aims to celebrate the many women visitors choose to nominate as “virtuous” – feel free to encourage visitors to accept we all have very different views, which is why we are not nominating only one woman – and neither did Bess! If discussions become heated follow normal protocols for requesting assistance via the radio.

Can we finish off visitors embroideries for them?

Generally speaking, please try not to – unless of course you agree with the nominated woman they have chosen!

Can visitors participate when the room is unstaffed?

No – they can view the “books” of previous visitor comments but they can only participate when the room is staffed.

Can visitors take photographs?

Yes absolutely – the same rules apply as to the rest of the house.

Who will see / hear about this artwork and how visitors participate?

This artwork forms the “practice based” element of PhD research with University of Leeds. Separate information sheets are available from the university to explain what the research is used for and what visitors are consenting to if they choose to participate. Some visitors may be asked to provide further feedback in the form of an interview or focus group, but separate consent would be sought for this.

Appendix 13: Volunteer fabric callout

Text sent to all staff and volunteers at Hardwick Hall via email January 2024

A call out for donations to create a new artwork for Hardwick

Artist Layla Khoo is creating a new participatory artwork for Hardwick Hall - a "reimagining" of the 5th (and sadly missing) Noblewomen Embroidery. In keeping with the recycled fabrics used to create the original embroideries, and as an acknowledgment of the memories and value textiles can hold, Layla would like this new piece to be created entirely from recycled fabrics connected to the people who now occupy Hardwick Hall - the National Trust staff and volunteers.

Donations of fabric will be disassembled and used as pieces sewn into the finished artwork, including having visitors' opinions and ideas written and embroidered on to them.

If you would like to donate any fabric to be used in this project please keep in mind the following:

We cannot guarantee that the fabric you donate will be included in the final artwork (anything unused at the end of the project will be donated to fabric recycling)

We cannot guarantee who will sew which pieces of fabric into the artwork

We do not know what opinions might be expressed - an opinion you do not agree with may end up written on (for example) a shirt you donate

Not all fabrics will be suitable for this project - final sorting will take place after donations are made, but in order to reduce waste here are some guidelines to consider before donating:

Most Needed: Brightly coloured and / or patterned cottons and cotton blends (eg shirt fabric) and linen

Still useable: Plain cotton / cotton blends, T shirts (stretch jersey fabric), duvet covers, pillowcases, ties

Not useable: Knitwear, coats, denim, organza, tulle, any very thick fabric, any stained fabric, leather (real or faux), fur (real or faux)

Please bring any donations of clean fabric to XXXX no later than 28th February to allow time for us to sort and freeze all donations prior to work starting on the artwork on 30th March.

Layla would like to keep a list of the names of everybody who donates materials, which will be displayed as contributors to the final artwork. Please label your donation with the name you would like displayed - just a first name is fine if you would prefer (or choose a pseudonym if you would like to remain anonymous)

Appendix 14: End of Day notes template

See University of Leeds information sheet dated 18.03.24 for how this information will be used

A Virtuous Woman - End of Day Notes

Anything important to handover to the next shift? (eg jobs which need to be done, changes to participation, have we run out of anything?)

Participation Observation (Please make a record of at least one note worthy conversation or participation – positive or negative, whatever stood out today. Continue on reverse if needed)

Name (or state anonymous): Date: |

This information will be used in research conducted by Layla Khoo on behalf of University of Leeds. See information sheets for further details or email Layla at pcullrk@leeds.ac.uk

Appendix 15: Embroidery Panel Interpretation Text

In 1573 Bess of Hardwick commissioned a series of five monumental applique embroideries created using recycled fabrics - including Catholic vestments acquired from the reformation of the church and the dissolution of the monasteries.

Four of these embroideries are still on display here – in the next room and two upstairs. Originally all five would have been shown together.

Together, and individually, the embroideries were telling visitors what Bess wanted them to know about her - her tastes, her wealth, her education and her values – 16th Century virtue-signalling

The textiles express this information through the women she has chosen to be depicted. Each embroidery features three archways - the central arch shows an ancient noblewoman Bess admires or aligns herself with, flanked by two smaller arches depicting the female personifications of virtue the noblewoman represents.

The surviving four embroideries at Hardwick feature the following noblewomen and virtues:

Lucrecia with Chasteti and Liberaliter, Penelope with Perseverans and Paciens, Zenobia with Magnanimitas and Prudentia, Athemesia with Constans and Pietas. The fifth embroidery hasn't survived through the centuries: Cleopatra with Justicia and Fortitudo

A Virtuous Woman is a contemporary "re-imagining" of the lost fifth embroidery. In homage to the original textiles, this new applique has been created on the same scale made from recycled fabric donated by the people who occupy Hardwick Hall today – the National Trust staff and volunteers.

Now visitors can participate with the embroidery by nominating your “Virtuous Woman” – who would you choose to stand in the central archway to represent your values and virtues? Write or embroider the name of a woman or girl you want people to know you admire or align yourself with on the fabric panels and we’ll sew her to the dress of our Virtuous Woman

Appendix 16: List of Embroidered Names

Some names were embroidered multiple times – each name is listed once here.

Publicly Recognised

Name	Short Description	DOB-DOD
Ada Lovelace	English Mathematician and Writer	1815-1852
Adele	British singer Songwriter	1988-
Aethel Floaed	British Ruler 911-918AD, Lady of the Mercians	c870-918AD
Agatha Christie	British Author	1890-1976
Alice Kinsella	British Olympic Gymnast	2001-
Alice Walker	American Author, Poet and Social Activist	1944-
Alicia Garza	American Civil Rights Activist and Writer	1981-
Al-Ijliya Al-Askulabi	Syrian 10th Century Astronomer and Astrolabist	c940
All the suffragettes	British and American activists campaigning for women's right to vote	c1900
Allison Russell	Canadian Singer, Songwriter, Musician and Activist	1999-
Amanda Palmer	American Singer, Songwriter, Musician and Performance Artist	1976-
Amelia Earhart	American Aviation Pioneer	1897-1937
Amika George	British Period Poverty Activist	1999-
Amy Carmichael	Irish Christian Missionary and Writer	1867-1951
Amy Johnson	British Pioneer Pilot	1903-1941
Amy Winehouse	British Singer Songwriter	1983-2011
Angela Davis	American Feminist Political Activist, Philosopher, Academic and Author	1944-
Angela Merkel	German Chancellor 2005-2021	1954-
Angela Raynor	British Labour Politician	1980-

Ann Lister	British Diarist, Landowner and Traveller	1791-1840
Anna gurney	British Scholar, Philanthropist and Geologist	1795-1857
Anna Mae Wong	American Actor	1905-1961
Anne Boleyn	English Queen 1533-1536	c1500-1536
Anne Bradstreet	British American Poet	1612-1672
Anne Bronte	British Novelist and Poet	1820-1849
Anne Frank	German Jewish Diarist during Nazi persecution	1929-c1945
Anne Green	British domestic servant, survivor of wrongful hanging	c1628-1659/65
Anne of Brittany	French Queen 1491-1498, 1499-1514	1477-1514
Aphra Behn	British playwright, poet, prose writer and translator	1640-1689
April Ashley	British Transgender Pioneer, Model and Author	1935-2021
Arbella	Lady Arbella Stuart, English Noblewoman	1575-1615
Ariana Grande	American Singer, Songwriter and Actor	1993-
Artemis	Greek goddess of the hunt, wild animals, the moon, childbirth, and chastity	
Astrid Lindgren	Swedish Author	1907-2002
Athena	Greek Goddess of Wisdom, Warfare and Handicraft	
Audre Lorde	American Writer, philosopher, professor, intersectional feminist, poet and civil rights activist	1934-1992
Barbara Streisand	American singer, songwriter, actor, producer and director	1942-
Barbie	Fashion Doll and Fictional Film Character	
Beatrice Webb	British Sociologist, Economist, Feminist and Social Reformer	1858-1943

Beatrix Potter	British Writer, Illustrator, Natural Scientist and Conservationist	1866-1943
Becky Hill	British Singer Songwriter	1994-
Bess of Hardwick	Countess of Shrewsbury, Businesswoman, Originator of Chatsworth House and Hardwick Hall	c1527-1608
Bessie Coleman	American Aviator - First Black American Woman to hold a pilot license	1892-1926
Beth Shriever	British BMX Cyclist	1999-
Betty Boothroyd	British Labour Politician and Speaker of the House of Commons 1992-2000	1929-2023
Betty Friedam	American Feminist Writer and Activist	1921-2006
Beyonce	American singer songwriter and businesswoman	1981-
Billie Eilish	American Singer Songwriter	2001-
Billie Jean king	American Tennis Champion. LGBTQ, race and women's rights campaigner	1943-
Boudicca	British Queen of Iceni Tribe	30-61AD
Bridget christie	British comedian, actor ad writer	1971-
Britney spears	American singer songwriter	1981-
Caitlin Moran	British Journalist, Broadcaster and Author	1975-
Caroline Amory	Fictional Character - Hercule Poirot	
Caroline Lucas	British Green Party Politician and Member of European Parliament	1960-
Catherine the Great	Empress of Russia 1762-1796	1729-1796
Celia Hammond	British Animal Welfare Activist and Campaigner	1943-
Celine Dion	Canadian Singer and Philanthropist	1968-
Chantal Akerman	Belgian Film Director, Screenwriter, Artist and Professor	1950-2015
Charlotte Bronte	British Novelist and Poet	1816-1855
Charlotte Bunch	American Feminist Author, Organiser, Scholar and Activist	1944-
Cinderella	Fictional Character	
Clare Balding	British Journalist and Author	1971-

Cleopatra	Egyptian Queen 51-30BC	c69-30BC
Coco Chanel	French Fashion Designer and Entrepreneur (Gabrielle Chanel)	1883-1971
Constance Markiewicz MP	Irish Revolutionary Political Activist	1868-1927
Corrie Ten Boom	Dutch Watchmaker, Holocaust Activist and Author	1892-1983
Cressida Cowell	British Author	1966-
Cristina Yang	Fictional Character, TV Series	
Dawn French	British Actor, Comedian and Author	1957-
Deborah Frances-White	British / Australian Comedian, Author, Podcaster and Screenwriter	1980-
Diana Nyad	American Long-Distance Swimmer, Author, Journalist	1949-
Diane Fossey	American Primatologist and Conservationist	1932-1985
Dolly Parton	American Singer, songwriter, Musician, Actor, Entrepreneur and Philanthropist	1946-
Donna Tartt	American author	1963-
Dora Taylor	Scottish Writer and Professor of Literature	1899-1976
Doreen Lawrence	British Jamaican Campaigner for Social and Race Reform, Life Peer House of Lords	1952-
Dove Cameron	American Singer and Actor	1996-
Dr Elizabeth Garrett Anderson	British Physician and Surgeon	1836-1917
Dr Gail Dines	British Professor, Author and Radical Feminist	1958-
Dua Lipa	British Albanian Singer Songwriter and Actor	1995-
Edith Cavell	British Nurse, World War 1	1865-1915
Edith New	British Suffragette	1877-1951
Eglantyne Jebb	British Social Reformer, Founder of Save the Children	1876-1928
Elinor Dashwood	Fictional Character	

Eliza Hamilton	American Socialite and Philanthropist	1757-1854
Elizabeth Blackwell	British American Physician	1821-1910
Elizabeth Fry	British Prison Reformer, social Reformer and Philanthropist	1780-1845
Elizabeth II	Queen of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth Realms 1952-2022	1926-2022
Elizabeth Warren	American Democratic Politician	1949-
Ella Lambert	British Period Poverty Activist	2000-
Ellen MacArther	British Sailor	1976-
Elsa	Fictional Disney character	
Emily Batty	Canadian Mountain Biker	1988-
Emily Bronte	British Author and Poet	1818-1848
Emily Davidson	British suffragette	1872-1913
Emily Maitlis	British Journalist, Newscaster and Presenter	1970-
Emma Raducanu	British Canadian Professional Tennis Player	2002-
Emma Watson	British Actor	1999-
Emmeline Pankhurst	British Political / Women's Rights Activist - Suffragette	1858-1928
Enid Blyton	British Children's author	1897-1968
Esme Young	British Fashion Designer, Costume Maker, Lecturer and TV Presenter	1949-
Ethel Holdsworth	British Writer, Feminist and Socialist Activist	1886-1962
Ethel Smythe	British Composer and Suffragette	1858-1944
Eugenie Clark	American Ichthyologist "The Shark Lady"	1922-2015
Eva Burrows	Australian Salvation Army Officer	1929-2015
Eva Peron	Argentine politician, activist, actress, philanthropist and First Lady of Argentina	1919-1952

Evelyn Glenny	Scottish percussionist	1965-
Fatima Al-Fihri	Arab Legendary figure credited with founding the oldest university in the world	c800- c880CE
Femke Bol	Dutch Olympic Athlete	2000-
Florence Nightingale	British Nurse, Statistician, Social Reformer and Founder of Modern Nursing	1820- 1910
Florence Welch	British Singer Songwriter	1986-
Frida Kahlo	Mexican artist	1907- 1954
Fury	Greek Goddesses of Vengeance and Justice	
Georgia O'Keefe	American artist	1887- 1986
Gertrude Bell	British Explorer, Writer, Archaeologist and Diplomat	1868- 1926
Gisele Pelicot	French Mass Rape Survivor	1952-
Glennon Doyle	American author, activist and podcaster	1976-
Gloria Steinem	American Journalist and Feminist Social-Political Activist	1934-
Gloria Swanson	American Actor	1899- 1983
Grace darling	British lighthouse keeper's daughter, rescued survivors from Forfarshire shipwreck	1815- 1842
Grace Petrie	British Singer songwriter	1987-
Greta Gerwig	American Actor, Screenwriter and Film Director	1983-
Greta Thunberg	Swedish Environmental Activist	2003-
Hannah Fry	British Mathematician, Author and Broadcaster	1984-
Harper Lee	American Author	1926- 2016
Harriet Harman	British Labour Politician	1950-
Harriet Tubman	American Abolitionist and Social Activist	1822- 1913
Helen Bamber	British Psychotherapist and Human Rights Activist	1925- 2014
Helen Keller	American author, disability rights advocate, political activist and lecturer	1880- 1968
Helen Mirren	British Actor	1945-
Helen Sharman	British Chemist and Cosmonaut	1963-

Helena Bonham Carter	British actor	1966-
Henrietta Lacks	American donor of HeLa cells	1920-1951
Hera	Greek Goddess of marriage, women and family	
Hermione Granger	Fictional character - Harry Potter novels and films	
Hester Leggett	British MI5 Secretary and character in West End Musical	1905-1995
Hestia Goddess of the Hearth	Greek Goddess of Hearth, Home and Family	
Hilary Hahn	American Violinist	1979-
Hillary Clinton	American Democrat Politician, Secretary of State 2009-2013, First Lady of USA 1993-2001	1947-
HRH Catherine	British Princess of Wales	1982-
Indira Ranamagar	Nepalese Politician, Social Worker, Human Rights Activist	1970-
Izzy Wong	British Cricket Player	2022-
Jacinda Ardern	New Zealand Prime Minister 2017-2023	1980-
Jack Monroe	British Food Writer, Journalist and Poverty Activist	1988-
Jamie Lee Curtis	American Actor, Producer and Author	1958-
Jane Austen	British author	1775-1817
Jane Goodall	British zoologist, primatologist and anthropologist	1934-
Janja Garnbret	Slovenian Olympic Rock Climber	1999-
Jacqueline du Pre	British Cellist	1945-1987
Jeanne de Clisson	French Noblewoman and Pirate	1300-1359
Jennifer Aniston	American Actor	1969-
Jennifer Saunders	British Actor, Comedian and Screenwriter	1958-
Jess Carter	British Professional Football Player	1997-
Jess de Wahls	German-English Textile and Embroidery Artist	1983-
Jess Ennis	British Olympic athlete	1986-
Jess Phillips	British Labour Politician	1981-

Jessica Gadirova	British Olympic gymnast	2004-
Jill Scott	British Professional Footballer	1987-
JK Rowling	British Author and Philanthropist	1965-
Jo Cox	British Labour Politician, Campaigner on Syrian civil War Issues	1974-2016
Joan of Arc	French Military Leader, Patron Saint of France	c1412-1431
Joni Mitchell	Canadian-American Singer, Songwriter, Musician and Painter	1943-
Josephine Butler	British feminist and social reformer	1828-1906
Judy Dench	British Actor	1934-
Julian of Norwich	British anchoress and writer	c1343-c1416
Kamala Harris	American Democratic Politician, Former Vice President of USA 2021-2025	1964-
Karine Polwart	Scottish Singer Songwriter	1970-
Katarina Johnson Thompson	British Olympic Athlete	1993-
Kate Bush	British Singer, Songwriter, Record Producer and Dancer	1958-
Katharine Johnson	American Mathematician, NASA	1918-2020
Katherine Howard	English Queen 1540-1541	c1523-1542
Katy Perry	American Singer Songwriter and TV Personality	1984-
Keeley Hodgkinson	British Olympic athlete	2002-
Ksynia Marko	British Textile Conservation Consultant and Author	
Kylie Minogue	Australian Singer Songwriter and Actor	1968-
Lady Alice le Strange	British Farmer, Estate Manager and Record Keeper	1585-1656
Lady Gaga	American Singer, Songwriter and Actor	1986-
Lady Hale	British Judge, Former President of the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom	1945-
Lady Jane Grey	British Queen 1553-1553	c1536-1554

Layla Khoo	British Artist	1982-
Leila Hessini	Transnational Feminist Leader, Strategist and Advisor	
Leonie Hirst	British Judge of the Upper Tribunal, Immigration and Asylum Chamber?	
Leonora Carrington	British / Mexican Surrealist Painter and Novelist	1917-2011
Lhakpa Sherpa	Nepalese Sherpa Mountain Climber	1973-
Lindsey Burrow	British Physiotherapist and widow of Rob Burrow	
Lise Meitner	Austrian-Swedish Nuclear Physicist	1878-1968
Liz Taylor	British / American Actor	1932-2011
Lizzo	American Rapper, Singer, Songwriter	1988-
Lizzy Webb	British Fitness Expert, Author and Presenter	1948-
Lottie Brooks	Fictional Character of Children's Books	
Louise Michel	French Teacher, Anarchist and Feminist	1830-1905
Luna Lovegood	Fictional Character	
Lyse Doucet	Canadian International News Correspondent, Journalist and Author	1958-
Maddie Moate	British TV Presenter, podcaster, Youtuber and author	2011-
Madonna	American Singer, Songwriter, Record Producer and Actor	1958-
Mae Jemison	American Engineer, Physician and Astronaut	1956-
Maggi Hambling	British Artist	1945-
Maggie Smith	British Actor	1934-2024
Mahsa Amini	Kurdish Iranian woman, arrested for failing to wear hijab, died in police custody	1999-2022
Malala Yousafzai	Pakistani Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Female Education Activist, Film and TV Producer	1997-
Mandy Rice Davies	Welsh Model and Showgirl	1944-2014
Margaret Calvert	British Typographer and Graphic Designer	1936-

Margaret McDonagh	British Labour Politician and Life Peer of House of Lords	1961-2023
Marge Berer	British Activist, Advocate and Campaigner for Women's Reproductive Rights	
Marie Antoinette	French Queen 1774-1792	1755-1793
Maria Montessori	Italian Physician, Educator and Innovator	1870-1952
Marie Curie	Polish-French physicist and chemist (pioneering work in radioactivity) Nobel Prize winner	1867-1934
Marilyn Monroe	American Actor and Model	1926-1962
Marina Abramovic	Serbian Conceptual and Performance Artist	1946-
Marjorie Guthrie	American Dancer, Teacher and Health Science Activist	1917-1983
Marsha P Johnson	American LGBT Activist and Drag queen	1945-1992
Martina Navratilova	Czech-American Tennis Champion	1956-
Mary Anning	British fossil collector and palaeontologist	1799-1847
Mary Berry	British Food Writer, Chef, Baker and TV Presenter	1935-
Mary Carpenter	British Education and Social Reformer, Philanthropist	1807-1877
Mary Cronk	Scottish Midwife	1934-2018
Mary Earps	British Professional Footballer	1993-
Mary Eliza Rogers	British Author	1828-1910
Mary Johnson	Author and Supporter of Women's Rights in the Arts	1958-
Mary Kingsley	British Ethnographer, Writer and Explorer	1862-1900
Mary Linwood	British Needlewoman	1755-1845
Mary Magdalene	Biblical figure	
Mary Martin	American Actress and Singer	1913-1990

Mary Mother of Jesus	Biblical figure	
Mary Queen of Scots	Queen of Scotland 1542-1567	1542-1587
Mary Robinson	Irish President 1990-1997, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights 1997-2002	1944-
Mary Seacole	Jamaican Nurse and Businesswoman	1805-1881
Mary Shelly	British Author	1797-1851
Mary Slessor	Scottish Presbyterian Missionary to Nigeria	1848-1915
Mary Somerville	Scottish scientist, Writer and Polymath	1780-1872
Matilda	Fictional character created by Roald Dahl	
Maureen Lipman	British Actor, Columnist and Comedian	1946-
Mavis Staples	American Singer and Civil Rights Activist	1939-
Maya Angelou	American Poet, Memoirist and Civil Rights Activist	1928-2014
Maya Forstater	British Gender Critical Activist	1973-
Medusa	Greek Gorgon	
Meghan Duchess of Sussex	American actor, charity advocate and member of the British Royal Family	1981-
Mel B	British Singer, Songwriter, TV Personality	1975-
Michelle Obama	American Lawyer, Author and First Lady of the USA 2009-2017	1964-
Miep Gies	Dutch citizen, hid Jews during World War 2 including Anne Frank, preserved the diary	1909-2010
Millie Bobby Brown	British Actor	2004-
Miranda Hart	British Actor, Comedian and Writer	1972-
Miriam Cates	British Conservative Politician and News Presenter	1982-
Mo Mowlem	British Labour Politician	1949-2005
Morgana Pendragon	Fictional Character	
Mother Eve	Biblical figure	

Mother Teresa	Albanian-Indian Catholic Nun, Missionary and Charity Founder	1910-1997
Nadia Hussein	British TV Chef and Author	1984-
Nancy Astor	American British Unionist (Conservative) Politician, First woman MP	1879-1964
Nigella Lawson	British Food Writer and TV Cook	1960-
Nina Simone	American Singer, Songwriter, Musician, Composer and Civil Rights Activist	1933-2003
Nnedi Okoroafor	Nigerian American Author	1974-
Noor Inayat Khan	British Resistance Agent, World War 2	1914-1944
Octavia Hill	British Social Reformer and Founder of the National Trust	1838-1912
Olivia Grant	British Actor	1983-
Oprah	American Talk Show Host, Actor, Producer, Author and Philanthropist	1954-
Orla Guerin	Irish International News Correspondent, Journalist	1966-
Our Lady	Biblical figure, Mother of Jesus Christ	
Peggy Guggenheim	American Art Collector, Gallerist, Bohemian and Socialite	1898-1979
Persephone	Greek Goddess of the Dead and Queen of the Underworld	
Phiona Mytesi	Ugandan Chess Player	1996-
Pink	American singer songwriter and Activist	1995-
Princess Diana	Princess of Wales, Charity Advocate and Activist	1961-1997
Prov 31 Woman Warrior	Biblical Figure	
Queen Elizabeth 1st	Queen of England	1533-1603
Queen Esther	Biblical Figure	
Queen Victoria	Queen of the United Kingdom 1837-1901	1819-1901
Rachel Ball	UK Boxer	1991-
Rachel Hayward	Canadian Actor	1968-
Reni Edo Lodge	British Journalist, Feminist and Author	1989-

Rosa Parks	American Civil Rights Activist	1913-2005
Rosalind Franklin	British Scientist	1920-1958
Rosamund Kissi Debrah	British asthma and air pollution campaigner	
Ruth Bader Ginsburg	Former Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States	1933-2020
Ruth Kirk	New Zealand anti-abortion campaigner	1922-2000
Sabrina Carpenter	American singer Songwriter and Actor	1999-
Saint Martha	Biblical figure	
Sali Hughes	Welsh Journalist and Author	1975-
Sara Mardini	Syrian swimmer and human rights activist	1995-
Sarah Corbett	British Activist, Author and Craftivist	
Sarah Lucas	British Artist	1962-
Sarah Millican	British Comedian and Writer	1975-
Sarika	Indian Actor and Costume Designer	1960-
Serena Williams	American Champion Tennis Player	1981-
Sheila Kitzinger	British Natural Childbirth Activist and Author	1929-2015
Sheila Landi	British Textile Conservator	1929-2024
Sifan Hasan	Dutch Olympic Athlete	1993-
Simone Biles	American Olympic Gymnast	
Sinead O'Connor	Irish Singer, Songwriter and Activist	1966-2023
Sky Brown	British Japanese Olympic Skateboarder and Surfer	2008-
Sophia Lauren	Italian / French Actor	1934-
Sophie Kinsella	British Author	1969-
St Cecilia	Roman Christian Martyr, patron of music and musicians	c200-c222AD
St Mary MacKillop	Australian Religious sister, Educational Charity Work	1842-1909
St Winifred	Welsh Virgin Martyr, decapitated by her refused suitor	c7thC

Sue Townsend	British Author	1946-2014
Sylvia Earle	American Marin Biologist, Oceanographer, Explorer, Author, Lecturer	1935-
Tabitha Dorcas	Biblical Figure	
Tabitha King	American Author	1949-
Taylor Swift	American Singer Songwriter	
Teresa May	British Conservative Politician, UK Prime Minister 2016-2019	1956-
Tina Turner	American / Swiss Singer, Songwriter, Actor and Author	1939-2023
Tracy Emin	British Artist	1963-
Tu Youyou	Chinese Nobel Prize Winning Malariologist and Pharmaceutical Scientist	1930-
Una Marson	Jamaican Feminist, Activist and Writer	1905-1965
Valentina Tereshkova	Russian Engineer and Cosmonaut, First Woman in space	1937-
Venus	Roman Goddess of Love, Beauty, Fertility, Desire, Sex, Prosperity and Victory	
Vera Wang	American Fashion Designer	1949-
Violette Szabo	British-French Secret Agent	1921-1945
Vivienne Westwood	British Fashion Designer and Businesswoman	1942-2022
Waad Al-Kateab	Syrian Journalist, Filmmaker and Activist	1991-
Wednesday Addams	Fictional TV Show and Film Character	
Yelena Popova	USSR Artist / Designer	
Yoko Ono	Japanese Artist, Singer, Songwriter and Peace Activist	1933-
Yusra Mardini	Syrian Olympic Swimmer	1998-
Zandra Rhodes	British Fashion and Textile Designer	1940-

Personally Esteemed

Aimee	Gretta	Muriel/Bella/Me
Aimi	Gwenda Culkin	My Grandma Jill
Aishah	Hal Frynithen	My Mum
Alice	Hannah	My Mum Jo
Alice Bennison	Hazel	My Mummy
Alice brathworth	Hazel Marshall	My Mummy Jodie
Amelia	Helen	Mya
Amy Blundell	Helen Cooke	Nadia Qurhi
Angela	Helen My Pal	Nana
Ann Connolly	Hnri	Nancy D
Ann Vaughan	Holly	Nannie
Anna	Irene Peace	Nanny
Anna noble	Isabella	Nasim
Annie	Izzy	Netta
Anthea Stock	J.W.	Nicola
Audrey	J.A.	Nima
Audrey Fessler	Jana	Nora
Aunty Jude	Janet Hill	Norma
Ava	Jayden Morris	Norma A Campas
Batota Warren	Jean	Norma Ines V
Bess	Jenny	Olive
Bess of Walton	Jess B	OM
Brandi	Jill Perry	OMA
Brianda	Jo	Our Mums Beryl and Brenda
Bronte	Joan	Pat
Bronze	Joan Gee	Pauline
Bruna Gushurst	Joleell	Pele
Camila	Judy	Pippa
Carla	Jules	Polly
Carol	June	Priscilla
Carol Mary	Karin T	PS

Charlotte	Karrie	Queen Albina
Chloe	Katapa	Rachael
Christine	Kate listerg	Rachel Lockhart
Cristina	Kath greaves	Rebecca
Dada	Kathy	Regina
Daisy	Katie	Rosa
Danielle Bosworth	Katy	Rosemary
Daughters	Kerry S	Rosie
Diana	Kiera Saint	Ruth
Doreen Heeley	Kirsten Quirk	Ruth Walker
Dorothy May	Lainey	S??ry
Dr Janet Saunders	Lilian Nixon	Sam McThearadser
EAM	Lillian Lithorne	Sandy Stanbridge
Eden Weston	Lily	Sarah
EH	Little Mother	SB
Elizabeth	Liza Love	Sheila Hirsch MBE
Elizabeth Fry	Lizzy	Shelly Jiop
Ella	Logan	Sigma
Ella Weston	Lorraine Moody	Simone Chandeurge
Elsie	Louise	Sister Mary Adrian
Emily	Lucy Atherton	Slyvia
Emma Ajerlo	Lynn Tracey Carter	SM
Emma Darby	Lyra	Sofie
Esther	Maakeki	Srchiam Cfr
Eunice	Maisie	Steph B
Evangeline	Mama	Strangers Who Help
Eveline D/Bennison	Mamma Daisy	Sue Harris
Evie	Mamy	Sylvia
Ezzy Kimot	Mane	Tania
Fi Rust	Margaret	Tara Gothert
Fleur Lennig	Margaret Allen	Taylor
Flo	Margaret Paish	The Witch
Florence	Maria Wedlich	The Women of Steel
Freda	Marie C	Tilly

Freya	Mary	Tilly B
General S Army	Mary B	Trina
Georgia	Mary Howlett	Uma
Georgie	Mary Shafer	Veronica
Georgina	Maureen	Veronica Andre
Gertrude	Michelle Kim D/Brury	Victoria
Gingin	Military Wives	Volunteers
Glenys My Nainy	Miss Seaborn	Wilhelmina
Gma Margaret	Molly Middleton	Win Newman
Grace	Mommy	Yvette Turnbull
Grandma	Mrs Hamna	Zara
Grandma Humphrey	Mrs Penistone	Zofia K
Grandma Julie	Mrs s Newby	Zuzu
Grandma Peters	Mum	
Grannie	Mummy	
Granny	Mummy Irene	
Granny baker	Mummy kate	

Appendix 17: List of embroidered virtues

Some virtues were embroidered multiple times – each virtue is listed once here.

Achieving	Dignity	Hard-working	Passionate	Sharp witted
Adventurous	Diligence	Have Fun	Patience	Shrewdness
Aim High	Diplomacy	Helpful	Peace	Sisterhood
Ambition	Diversity	Honesty	Percipient	Soft
Ambitious	Dominant	Hope	Perseverance	Stewardship
Argute	Drive	Humility	Perspective	Stimulate
Art	Empathy	Imagination	Pioneering	Stimulating
Artistry	Empowered	Inclusion	Positivity	Stoicism
Assertive	Enthusiasm	Inclusiveness	Practicality	Strength
Assured	Equanimity	Independence	Pride	Striving to Improve
Astute	Faith	Individual Worth	Principled	Supportive
Authenticity	Faithful	Inner Strength	Productive	Temperance
Belong	Fearless	Inquisitive	Purpose	Tenacity
Bold	Ferocity	Insightful	Rationality	Togetherness
Boldness	Focus	Inspiring	Redemption	Tolerance
Brave	Forceful	Integrity	Refuge	Unapologetic
Brazen	Forethought	Intelligence	Reliable	Unique
Calmness	Fortitude	Judicious	Resilience	Unity
Charitable	Friendship	Justice	Respect	Valour
Charity	Fury	Kindness	Sassy	Versatile
Clemency	Generosity	Leadership	Self Determination	Visionary
Compassion	Gentle	Live	Self-awareness	Vocal
Conviction	Good Listener	Love	Selflessness	Willingness
Courage	Grace	Mercy	Sensible	Wisdom
Curiosity	Grounded	Multi-tasking	Sensitivity	
Determination	Gutsy	Nuance	Serendipity	
Dexterity	Happy	Nurturing	Serenity	

Appendix 18: Interview Transcript, Hardwick Hall, Greg

Greg was a Collections Assistant at Hardwick Hall during the research period and at the time of writing. This interview took place by Microsoft Teams on 4th February 2025. Interview questions were provided in advance of the interview. Due to the sensitive nature of this interview, Greg was given the option to choose whether the interview took place in person, via Microsoft Teams or in the form of a questionnaire. Greg was invited to have a friend or colleague accompany him during the interview; he accepted, and a second member of the Hardwick Hall staff team was present throughout.

Layla Khoo

Alright, excellent. So first thank you so much for agreeing to the interview. This is going to be a really, really important, but probably actually one of unexpectedly one of the key parts of this research. One of the biggest parts of the takeaway is how we go about doing this sort of thing and the much wider impact this kind of work can have. So huge, huge thanks for agreeing to this. I've got your consent form. I just want to double check on the record and that the deleted part is appropriate in that you're happy that you don't need anonymity for the purposes of this, I'm unlikely to name you by name anyway. But it just means I don't have to be too careful about I doing anything that identifies you as which member of staff you might be. Just want to check that you're happy with that.

Greg

Yeah, that's all good. Thanks for checking.

Layla Khoo

So are you OK for me to jump straight in with the questions?

Greg

Sure I've kind of. I sort of wrote up answers because I will give you better answers that way as it were, rather than kind of totally off the.

Layla Khoo

Yeah. No, that's the that's the whole point of sending the interview questions in advance. Yeah, none of these interviews are aimed to try and catch anybody out, and we generally get much better answers when people have had a chance to think about it before rather than being asked to answer a question on the spot, there's just nothing to be gained from interviewing that way and not things like this anyway. So firstly, could you briefly describe your role within the National Trust?

Greg

Yeah so, I'm a collections assistant. So, the day-to-day care of the collections and interiors are in the house for opening and to the public and to help in support and direct the volunteer team.

Layla Khoo

Ok and is that primarily at Hardwick Hall?

Greg

So, two days a week at Hardwick currently, and the other three days is spent at our private house doing similar things without the volunteer visitor angle, just collections.

Layla Khoo

OK. Thank you. And can you tell me how much you knew about the virtuous woman project prior to the actual work being installed within the house?

Greg

Oh, sorry that just threw me a bit I thought that'd be the installation question.

Layla Khoo

Oh, sorry. No, you're absolutely right. I've missed a question. So, we'll go back. Sorry. Have you? So, have you, have you worked alongside an art installation / participatory project before, either here or anywhere else?

Greg

Yes, I've encountered a few at different properties and also outside of the National Trust from relatively simple art trails through to larger scale installations like winter tide at Hardwick. It's done with the support of an artist or the immersive experience that was created online part when I was working there. I was telling the story of a family member through the house, culminating in a courtroom atmosphere, creative light and sound of visitors participated in the hearing of the case, and we've always been really into those. It's been a really interesting way to explore a new element of the site's history and story, to engage new audiences and create experiences that move away from the stuff being stated misconceptions of museums and historic houses, and there are obviously always challenges along. We had issues balancing lines, sound elements and you'll never please everyone, but it can be a really rewarding experience. My father's an artist and was a gallery owner prior to retirement, so I've also enjoyed visiting various things with him and seeing how it contrasts.

Layla Khoo

All right, thank you. So, can you tell me how much you knew about the virtuous woman prior to being installed at Hardwick? So how involved were you with the within the staff discussions about this? What did you sort of expect or understand the work and research to be about?

Greg

So how involved - I wasn't involved in discussing until the sessions for staff came into place, staff and volunteers where we met with yourself and talked through what was going to be involved. So that was kind of my first introduction to it. I understood that the work was to be about creating as a community a piece of art that was a modern parallel for Bess of Hardwick's own embroidered hangings. They would invite discussions about modern virtues and how they might be different or similar to Bess's time. I believed the public would be happily involved in creating the piece and helping choose a modern figure that we felt embodied to 21st century virtuous woman. To continue to the next question as it were. Was that about 'did I

have any hopes or concerns prior to the participatory period?' Is that right? So, I was excited about the concept. I thought it sounded brilliant way of adding a hands-on element to people's visits that would get them thinking about virtues about modern expectations, changing role of women and the challenges they faced and still face today and a great way of highlighting how ahead of the times Bess was. Bringing fresh appreciation to the noblewomen women hangings that sometimes get lost among the other textiles and tapestries. Been interesting to hear about your other projects, such as the Changes in Attitudes installation at Nunnington Hall, which was brilliant. I was really looking forward to seeing a virtuous woman progress.

Layla Khoo

Did you have any concerns at this stage about how it might progress and how visitors might participate?

Greg

No, I don't. No, nothing at that stage that I don't think I can't cover later. I know you've asked later about that separately, but no, I didn't have any concerns going in at this stage.

Layla Khoo

Yeah. No, that's fine. So just as, for the record of the interview, during the participatory period, you raised concerns about the ways visitors have had participated and how this could impact staff and other visitors. I was obviously closely involved in these discussions, both with yourself and with the wider staff team at the time, but it'd be helpful to hear in more detail and specifically in your own words, sort of how this sort of came about, how this was for you? So, could you tell me about the circumstances leading to you raising your concerns about the participation with the artwork? Such as when and how you became aware of the name that JK Rowling had been included. What that initial reaction was, what were your concerns were and the course of action that you took?

Greg

OK, so I kind of I'm just being really nitpicky, but I kind of wanted to clarify that in some ways, my concern wasn't about the way the visitor had participated and the concern I raised was really kind of about the fact there was no structure to the way in which visitors were participating, something which I hadn't thought would be the case and the fact that this lack of structure meant that any old names were getting thrown forward. So, people were putting themselves down, putting their mums down, but also hate figures were being included, which was obviously my concern. And so, when I became aware of it, I'm not sure how long it would have taken me to notice as we discussed, I'm not full time here. The whole team's been interested in the process. So, we've often checked in throughout to see what values have been written down and what virtues have been suggested and what names have come forward. So, I'm not sure at what point I will have spotted it because my interactions with the piece have been more sporadic than other team members. And as to what my reaction to this was, my reaction was that this name being included was unacceptable, to see it included as an example of virtuous woman. There were other controversial names on there too that I believe have no place alongside virtue. Coco Chanel was a Nazi collaborator, for example, but the reason I came forward

in response to the name JK Rowling is her status as a contemporary hate figure. Other names don't still have the same power or influence, and while she is very active in using her platform and her money to promote intolerance, she is undeniably a dangerous individual and this piece of work has provided a platform for her. As for my concerns, my concerns were that JK Rowling's a figure currently dealing a great deal of damage to the LGBTQ plus community in the UK and around the world. As a member of the queer community, I don't want trans people to be confronted by the name of the figure that denies their existence and campaigns to cause them harm. It's hard enough for these people to constantly be bombarded by her creations out in the world but to see her put forward as a paragon of virtue is an insult to those that she stirs up hate against. And as for my course of action, my first thought of course to come and talk with yourself about my concerns, and I went on to raise it with my manager as well. Do you want me to continue to say about my way of participating at this stage or?

Layla Khoo

Can I just jump back a little bit? I just want to quickly clarify and thank you for 'nit-picking's' absolutely great, because that's the whole point is to try and clarify exactly sort of what happened and why it happened and the thinking behind it and the concerns and where they came from. Can I just quickly jump back to the lack of structure?

Greg

Hmm.

Layla Khoo

What's what specifically about that was, do you think that they should have been more structure in how people were able to participate with it or, can you sort of expand a little bit on that?

Greg

Sure. I kind of I kind of talk about that later on as well so I might end up repeating myself.

Layla Khoo

That's fine.

Greg

But I think my kind of understanding of it was that people would be involved in the kind of more general creation of it. So, I thought that people would kind of be sitting around sewing bits of the main banner and possibly discussing as part of that with your input and with the input volunteers who they thought would be a kind of figure that could be involved. I never realised that the suggestions of figures were going to be something that people could just kind of instantly commit to threads without it going through any kind of process of discussion with anybody. So that's what I kind of meant by structure, not that it should have necessarily been incredibly, strictly controlled, but just I didn't realise that names were going to be recorded quite so permanently without any kind of, you know, without it going through any process or being part of the discussions.

Layla Khoo

Without any sort of filter process, effectively, so yes, it wasn't sort of made clear that they'd be able to participate that directly...

Greg

Yeah

Layla Khoo

...in the immediate term, without the being a sort of filter between sort of what they wanted to put in and what actually featured in the artwork, that's great. Thank you. That helps.

Greg

Yeah.

Layla Khoo

So yeah, so from there, can we move on to if you've got nothing else to say on that, if we can move on to the way you chose to then participate and the action that you took directly with the artwork?

Greg

OK, so after discussion with you and agreement that it was an acceptable counter because I wouldn't have done this without that conversation, I did sew through the names with the trans colours. I left it so it could be clearly read with the strike out colours used at least showed solidarity with any trans person or trans ally who happened upon it. When we had that discussion. I was surprised when you suggested sewing over the name and annotating it. And I said it would be great if we could perhaps have a sign for the public offering that freedom because I don't think people would have felt able to strike through or annotate other people's suggestions without being given that permission to interact in that way and that never came to light. And I think that would have encouraged some really interesting discussions. I know with your previous art installation people started writing on it and interacting with each other in that way, but I don't whether because it meant writing over the top and stitching over the top of someone else's artwork, I think people didn't feel they could jump in and do that. So perhaps the invitations to do that would have would have opened that up a little bit more, which would have been nice. And I was disappointed that you chose to censor my other form of participation, which was my annotation using the widely accepted term *terf* or trans exclusionary radical feminist. And you said it was a slur, which I found interesting as it's a simple term to explain what JK Rowling is: she's a feminist, she excludes trans people and her stance on that is radical – defined in dictionaries, believing or expressing the belief that there should be a great extreme social or political change. And I would say claiming that trans people don't exist and should be denied all the rights and legal protections they currently have is pretty extreme. There's a simple way to refer to a stance on that, and she has also referred to herself *terf* before tweeting Merry Terfmas. So, I'm really not sure what the issue with the word *terf* was.

Layla Khoo

OK. So, would you like me to answer that in in this interview?

Greg

Yup go for it

Layla Khoo

So the, for me, so my memory of the conversation that we had was that I absolutely told you that we had, had specifically had this discussion because I sort of went away and came back to speak to you again later. And we talked about censoring and I'd said that we'd already made the decision that we wouldn't censor names, but that it should be flagged up further if you were concerned about that. And I did come back to you and said, actually, what one of the discussions that myself and the wider team had had in one of the staff meetings was that we wouldn't stop people from crossing through a name, that while nobody would be able to unpick somebody else's name, that we wouldn't stop somebody from crossing through and invited you to go ahead and do that if that's something that you felt you wanted to do. I don't recall telling you to annotate something. But that could...

Greg

I'm just gonna check because I'm sure that's mentioned actually somewhere in here and.... because it says about additional text and stuff could be...well I'm sure, I mean this this is going to be one where if there's not a recording of it, we're not going to be able to see either way because I would say you I would, I remember being told I could annotate and that I thought that was one of the things we were going to encourage was going to be annotations around, and I know then decisions were made differently. But I thought at the time the discussion was the crossings out were acceptable and also annotating to explain because that was one of the things I thought was important was discussing why there's a problem with the name, not just.... because if you just block a name out, yeah, people don't necessarily understand why it's been blocked out of the importance of that. And it's not a discussion then and that is just plain censorship.

Layla Khoo

Absolutely. And one of the one of the wider discussions that we had and a direct discussion that we had with a lot of participants was around rather than annotating was around countering. And if you saw a name that you didn't like to counter it with the equivalent that you think would be more appropriate. So yeah, I don't want to give any particular examples of that, but yeah, if you saw a Tory politician, you could counter with a Labour politician for as an example of counting with something very different.

Greg

OK. Yeah, but I'm sure that that and kind of either way, I know that you'd said the problem with terf was that it was a slur and it just isn't a slur. So, I just think that's kind of an interesting point in itself.

Layla Khoo

It is an interesting point in itself, and there was a huge amount of discussions specifically, initially specifically, about the term terf and whether terf can be described as a slur. There were views on both sides of that argument. There were some views who very strongly believed that this wasn't a slur, that this was a factual

description of the person. There was also arguments from myself, as well as others included, that *terf*, while it made... and this was what we ended up coming back to a lot was intention versus impact and this actually feeds back into sort of the using of a name that some people find hateful and other people don't, is that intention versus impact are two very different things. If the person who in, who wrote that intended it to be hateful, it's very different to somebody who wrote something and didn't intend it to be hateful. There are... from the perspective of viewing *terf* as a slur, there are many people who view it as something that is now regularly used, not for a factual descriptor, but as a way to silence women, and is often used in extremely violent circumstances online of violent language. That's not to say that it is, that the word itself, is a slur, it's the way it is more popularly being used now.

Greg

I would disagree that you're saying more popular. I'd say that depends on what side of the argument you're reading, because if you're reading on a positive trans angle and it's being used to describe people that hate trans people and spread hate against them. So, I think saying it's being used more one way than another is something that frankly, you'd have to back up with statistical elements, statistical evidence to say, and I would also just like to say that....

Layla Khoo

OK. Yeah. No, you're right. Not more one way than the other maybe. But it is being used both ways.

Greg

I'm sorry but the point is, I'm sorry, but I thought you wanted my side on this. You are saying as well so you're...

Layla Khoo

I do. I do, which is why I asked whether you wanted me to answer or not. That's all.

Greg

Yeah, and you did. But also, you're saying, I get what you're saying. But the point is you're happy with JK Rowling staying up there, which again, you're admitting is hateful to some people and not to others. But you are not happy with *terf* being up there when that has exactly the same thing for some people as a hateful thing, for some people, it's just a descriptor. So why is one of those OK to be up there? And the other one isn't OK when it's exactly the same thing. Some people say it's good. Some people say it's bad.

Layla Khoo

It is, which is why we then subsequent to this, because this was an area that we hadn't covered in enough detail on the run up to it was that no further annotations would be allowed. On the grounds that JK Rowling's there, because it is a name and we're inviting people to write names.

Greg

OK. I mean, OK, we can move on from it. But yeah, I just think that's - yeah, they're all words, aren't they? They're all words and names. And saying one is OK

and the other isn't when they're not black and white, but OK, yeah, we've made the decision about annotation. I just wanted to touch on the fact that you had called *terf* a slur. And I just found that kind of ironic that you were happier to support that side of it than support the trans community is one way of reading that. But yeah, OK.

Layla Khoo

OK. It probably, yeah, we'll move on to the next question I think. Prior to... can I just touch back on the last question again? Had you intended to participate with the artwork prior to the inclusion of the name JK Rowling and wishing to take action against that?

Greg

Ok erm, I know I'm doubling back again, but I did think it was interesting. You'd asked whether I'd participated as a representative of the National Trust or whether I participated as myself in that. I thought that was an interesting distinction to make.

Layla Khoo

Yeah.

Greg

But I kind of said well, it never crossed my mind that I was participating as anything but a human being with a moral obligation to protect other vulnerable human beings. So, I wasn't doing it as a member of staff. I wasn't doing it as an individual. I was just reacting, something that I saw and didn't think was right. As to whether I'd intended to participate, like the rest of the team I had discussed figures that we might have included, and we saw several of those names appear, and were interested to see the piece come together, had I come as a visitor, I might have added a name at some point, but it didn't feel like an appropriate use of my time to add the name, but had I been a visitor, I probably would have added one.

Layla Khoo

OK. Thank you. And yeah, just to clarify on the reason why I'm asking about whether or not you're participating as a representative of the National Trust or as yourself as an individual? That clarification line is important when we're talking about how people participate with artwork, specifically in sites like Hardwick where you've got staff and volunteer time and myself as the artist who's there all the time, who have access to the artwork in a different way to how day-to-day visitors do in a very brief period of time. And when I know because one of the wider concerns that was raised in the many discussions that were had around this while we paused participation with it to decide what the best way forward was, was the, the public and more outward perception of JK Rowling's name being crossed out as to what that said to people about whether or not the National Trust has chosen to censor that name. Whether I'd chosen to censor that name or whether a participant had chosen to sense that name. And those three things are very, very different to each other. As the artist who is inviting people to participate in an artwork, if I choose to censor something, as the artist who's with the work all the time, I'm in a much greater position of power in that respect, in that I could go through the artwork every day and censor anything that I personally don't like. National Trust members of staff are in a different position, as are the volunteers who work in the space all

day because they're seeing what people are doing and know the reasons why they're doing it. And so that's why that distinction was there was to ask whether or not you felt that you were acting on behalf of the National Trust or Hardwick Hall as a whole, or whether you were just acting as an individual who felt that you wanted to participate in this way.

Greg

I would I'd say in that case it crosses two things because a) the Trust has always been a very strong supporter of LGBT individuals and staff and trans staff. And I would say that the Trust will be equally happy in supporting a pro trans stance. And I was acting for myself because I think it's I think anyone should be morally obligated to protect their fellow human beings from things that are harmful and triggering.

Layla Khoo

Absolutely. Thank you for the clarification. So, following the concerns raised, National Trust and Hardwick Hall team made the decision to pause participation with the artwork. While advice was taken from a variety of sources as to how to move forward and I already have a separate interview with Helen as to how that worked from an organisational perspective, many options were considered on how to do this. I was involved with some of them and some of them it wasn't appropriate for me to be involved, but it was in but discussed on a sort of National Trust level rather than with myself as the visiting artist. Some weeks later, the installation reopened, with further interpretation, explaining that participants choices were not reflective of the views of the National Trust. The University of Leeds or myself. The installation also reopened with a clear mandate that names of nominated women would not be censored, but any additional text would have to be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. So with that in mind, do you feel that your concerns were fully addressed, were sufficient steps taken and what would you have done differently if not?

Greg

So, I'll be honest I don't feel my concerns were even partially addressed, to be honest from the outset, I felt fully supported by my colleagues at the Trust where you made me personally feel like I was being nothing but a troublemaker. You seem very worried about your own feelings and this impact on you, but in all honesty you completely, it seems, completely blind to its impact on anyone else and very unwilling to compromise. I personally felt that the unwillingness to compromise was accompanied by a lack of interest in working together on the solution. I was hurt to find the name JK Rowling had been added again and that you hadn't felt that that was something you could share so that we could have look at adding the same trans positive strike through that the other iterations had. I personally thought you cultivated an us versus you atmosphere that made it harder to work together on a positive path forward. And I also feel that you're being untruthful when saying it was decided not to censor the art project. When I gave extreme examples of women such as Myra Hindley post the discussions you said they would obviously still have to be removed, so censorship was still in play and dictated entirely by you and who you thought you wanted to protect. And the trans community apparently remained fair game. Also, as I said earlier, the fact that there wasn't a sign introduced encouraging people to strike through, or not encouraging

it, but giving people permission to strike through and have that interaction with the artwork because that one never appeared. I don't think people felt they could do that.

Layla Khoo

OK. Would you like me to answer any of that or would you like to move to the next question?

Greg

You can, if you'd like to, yeah.

Layla Khoo

So, to go back through from the end forwards, in terms of the signage around being able to strike through that was discussed and it wasn't entirely my decision as to whether or not people could / would be encouraged and it was felt within the Hardwick Hall team that they didn't want to encourage any further.... activism. In terms of they didn't want, their concerns were that you would end up with people from two very different viewpoints, feeling the need to continually strike out each other's participation, and that this would turn the artwork into something very different. There were also concerns from the Hardwick Hall team about if that happened, how the media would perceive this. And that wasn't my decision as to whether or not people were invited, invited to strike through. I am genuinely sorry that you feel or that I have done anything that would make you feel that I am either not supportive of the trans community, and that I didn't take your concerns seriously. I took your concerns very seriously. I believe myself to be supportive of the trans community. And I also hugely value.... the potential for participatory artworks to be able to display a range of views which are very often not my own. If I wanted to put forward my own views, I wouldn't be inviting people to participate in the way that I do. Which is why it was as important to stress that the names on the list were not my choices any more than they were the National Trust choices or Hardwick Hall's choices. I believe I did explain to you at the time when you first raised the name that JK Rowling was on there, that it was a child who placed it on there. And that I'm not sure how I would be able to speak to a child and a child's parents about why they can't put the name that they want on there and I would need a lot more organisational support to be able to state that.

Greg

I think just as a kind of quick aside on that, but I just think that gets worryingly close into the territory about not very many years ago when people weren't telling children about gay people, you know or, you know, a child couldn't ask why two men were holding hands or anything. It's kind of for me that's worryingly in that territory. Trans people exist. Trans children exist and when people go out into the world, they are going to come across different viewpoints. And I think acting like trans people are something that can't be discussed. Children obviously wouldn't need details, but just to say, "Oh well, I know she wrote those books. I'm glad you enjoy those books, but actually she doesn't like this group of society very much. She makes their lives quite difficult, so we'd rather not include it if we wouldn't like to upset people." I don't think that's too high brow for children to understand.

Layla Khoo

OK. Additionally, on the note that you said that I didn't tell people when JK Rowling had appeared back on there, I did. I emailed the team when the first time JK Rowling reappeared on the list. Obviously, she subsequently appeared numerous times. I think it's, I think it was 7 occurrences of her name on the list. And I did inform the team in writing as soon as JK Rowling appeared on there again, because I wanted them to be aware that this was going to come back up. There's an e-mail chain to show that.

Greg

OK. Well, no, that didn't make its way back to me, so I'm sorry for that point.

Layla Khoo

But yeah, I think that's I think there are, there's a lot that I feel could have been done differently in this as well, and it will probably not always all be the same as what you feel could have been done differently, but that's why I want to make sure that we have your views exactly in your own in, in your own words and for this to make sure that this isn't my perception of what happened. This is your perception of what you did and the reasons why the reasons why you acted and your ongoing concerns. If you feel that we didn't, both myself and the team didn't take it that seriously. So, from, from that what, what do you feel could or should have been done differently both prior to the installation and, and during I suppose, as, as that?

Greg

OK, so I don't believe that there's really any way I could have raised concerns earlier with the project without the project having been more clearly explained or defined in the 1st place. I and some of others that I've spoken with were under the impression that members of the public will be working on the actual hanging itself, stitching together the main fabric of the piece while discussing virtues and those people that could be considered, this kind of felt like how it was described to me, and it was certainly to be suggested, and I didn't feel that it was made clear that they would all be recorded and included and I'd assumed it would potentially in the end come down to something like a public vote shortlist of figures, with that person being included as the central figure, like in the existing hangings. So, because of that, I kind of didn't anticipate it going this way. Personally, I feel the piece created was not in exactly in some ways representative of public participation, and personally it kind of felt like you kept a very tight rein on the creation of the main piece, choosing the fabrics, the colours, stitching the entire thing. And then the only thing the public kind of were allowed to do was embroider names and virtues. As this wasn't something I expected to be happening it didn't occur to me to flag it as a potential issue. Had I known people would be committing names to thread with no discussion about why they chose that person, I would have raised concerns about there needing to be a structure to that. I also personally felt a little bit disappointed by the figure that was chosen in the centre of the pieces as the embodiment of a virtuous woman, as I'd expected that to look like a selected figure from history, culture or stories instead of every woman figuring. Well, I love the idea of an every woman figure, I find it troubling that she's slender, that she's long haired, and she's wearing a wedding dress. One kind of typical feminine body and presentation standards just isn't something I thought would be reinforced through it. And I thought that she's in a wedding dress is quite ironic and kind of is marriage sort of

assigned a virtue. And it just, I don't know. It just felt kind of a strange thing to me. So, I think my understanding of what the piece was going to be was very different to that. And I just think, yeah, that structure of if names had been discussed before they went up, it would have been nice to have those kind of discussions about, you know what, what that would mean and then discussions like, things like, why have you suggested that figure? Because so many of the figures were suggested that were brilliant ones have done great things for society or kind of forward the cause for women, all kinds of different exciting things. But then some people were just kind of putting down their aunts or their mums or yeah people. Yeah. JK Rowling. She's only written a book. That's not really, you know, kind of up there with kind of somebody like, you know, female scientist or all kinds of different things. So, I thought there was going to be discussion about that. And I suppose on days I know obviously you couldn't be there every day. But on days when there are no volunteers in and people would or there's just one volunteer people stitching, it didn't kind of feel like the discussed, involved sort of thing, it was going to be more kind of felt like people just drifted in, threw stuff into the hat without necessarily thinking about it. So, I think I suppose there was going to be more discussion and like you said earlier, a filter as to what kind of got included in it perhaps?

Layla Khoo

OK. So just to clarify on that. So do you feel that a) I just want to make sure I've understood this correctly, that a) it should have been made significantly clearer to the staff team, the process of how people would participate and how quickly that would be incorporated into the artwork.

Greg

I think that's on bang on yeah, that's a really good way of putting it.

Layla Khoo

Yeah. Yeah. No, that's fine. Because that's...

Greg

People might have different views than me on that as well. I kind of, you know, I'm saying from my interpretation what I understood from the meetings other people might have got something entirely different from them.

Layla Khoo

Yeah, absolutely. And there's a degree of this that's quite difficult because from the from the beginning this was always designed to be sort of a quite an iterative piece of work in that we would see how... the aim was always to get people to participate in a way that was meaningful to them, and in a way, that they wanted to participate. And so we'd always... there'd been an openness from the beginning about exactly what that would look like. And that we would move with how visitors were showing, they wanted to participate. That probably could have been made clearer to the staff team or certain wider teams - the management team very much understood that. And just to give you sort of a background as to why, specifically around things like sort of why they weren't stitching the main banner and the choosing the elements of that, they didn't want to. Visitors that were invited to sort of take part in that sort of stitching and they didn't want to do that, what they wanted to do was to leave something that was theirs that they could very easily

identify when they came back to see it again, which is why that... because I also envisaged much more of people taking part in the actual physical making of the background as well as that expressive form of participation, and that will definitely form part of this research was that that's just not how visitors wanted to participate. There was very, very few visitors wanted to participate in that way. Most wanted to be able to effectively very clearly leave their mark by expressing themselves in that way. Which is what, rightly or wrongly, that's just the way that ended up. And that's why we ended up going in that way specifically. For the, sorry, I'm just thinking back through. So, for the process of, so obviously we all now have the benefit of hindsight as to sort of where this ended up and sort of the names that are on there and how many were on there that other people might not agree with. If we were to have the power to go back and do this again and there was a filtration process effectively in place between what visitors wanted to go on there and what went on there. It's just out of interest. How would you? How would you think that would best work as to have sort of different kinds of representatives from within the team to be able to be that filter process? Who would you want to see? How many people would you want to be able to have the power to be able to argue whether things should or should not be included?

Greg

I think that's kind of a difficult question because I think I didn't think so many names would be making it through to the final stage, if you like. So, I assumed it would be more a case of kind of excluding kind of 99% of the names almost rather than excluding specific names. So, I felt it would be lesser, it would be less an issue of having a problem with individual names and they were excluded for that reason. You wouldn't need to give a reason, it would just be "they were all great suggestions. We love them all including figures that people feel differently about. And the five that we've picked out are..." and the ones that came out would be much kind of more clear-cut figures. You know, rather than the ones which, as you say, we knew we'd get divisive figures. So, I think that's that was my, I suppose that's where I thought the cut off would be. I thought it would be the most names that people would talk about and discuss when they were sitting their stitching wouldn't end up getting committed in the same way there might have been like a, you know, an Excel document or something for your, for your research, but they wouldn't be actively out there in the artwork. And other than that, I think I think for me the reason that the Rowling is such an issue is that she is still current.

Layla Khoo

Yeah.

Greg

And that she is on a day-to-day basis, making people's lives difficult. She is donating tens of thousands of pounds to charities that are campaigning to remove the rights from trans people. She is a very active kind of figure, spreading hate in the country at the moment, whereas others, they've not got that same power. I think it's for me, it comes down to do they still have modern power? Are they still influencing people's lives and when they are? Then I think giving them, putting their name up there, whether it's just because the child's written or not is adding power to that. And so I know that's a really difficult thing to define, but I think

basically a) I didn't think all the names would be the issue and b) I thought the fact that she's modern and that she's current is the issue as much as anything.

Layla Khoo

Yeah. So to make sure I've understood that correctly. So, a large amount of this is around communication for a start - that this wasn't communicated in a way that was clear, that there was going to be so many names on there rather than sort of one or two. I mean just to very quickly flip back to the fact that people put their parents, aunts, Tracey that works in the community centre, etcetera, down there, that was again quite.... it came about as the artwork, as soon as we started asking for people to put, bring up names, was that, that was one of the quite sort of, in my mind, quite valid things that were brought up was just because somebody isn't a public figure, that certain people wouldn't find a celebrity as such or somebody who happened, sort of a prominent scientist or anybody like that, they wouldn't....that wouldn't be the person they would look to. And we're asking them to look to sort of who you would find, who embodies these virtues that you're talking about. So well, actually, my mum does. Or my daughter does. Or my best friend who's overcome cancer or, there are various examples of that and so then we sort of moved with that to say well then that's OK, if that's, that's fine. If that's your virtuous woman, then that's your virtuous woman and there's a there's a whole separate argument around not forcing people to choose public figures and where you draw the line is to somebody who's a public figure anyway.

Greg

I do like their inclusion as well. I think. I think that's totally valid and I think almost looking for virtuous women that we know is a really nice thing to be doing and making it that personal place. And I suppose again with my thinking that the majority of names will be discarded it wouldn't have been the same issue almost. You know that everyone could have gone down and then yeah, people would have their say or something.

Layla Khoo

Yeah. Yeah. It's not on the questions list, so feel free not to answer it, but it is just a sort of a curiosity point from that based on sort of if we had been down the route of only selecting a few names. What would you suggest that we would, would have been the course of action if Rowling, or anybody else.... like we discussed Rowling is, she's quite unique in that she is, as you've just said, very current and this was.... to give you some reassurance that about... of the discussions that we had around this, that was one of the main factors that we discussed was the fact that there are lots of other names who are contentious, but Rowling is unique in that she is so current and the debates around her and her opinions and how she uses her position are right now rather than something historical. And so that's it's very fresh for a lot of people. And so that's, that's what makes that particular argument very different. We are very much and we were very much during these discussions aware of that and aware of sort of how current that is and that that makes a difference. But with that in mind, if I mean specifically Rowling or any other figure that's not easily agreed upon. How do you think we would have been able to manage that if her name still appeared as the most voted for the most nominated for the want of a better word?

Greg

I suppose in my head, the names that we put forward for a vote would be ones it wouldn't just be the name has appeared the most times it would be, you know, we think these are some really great suggestions that would, you know, make a lovely centrepiece sort of thing there or that we think are great parallels to what Bess had and we you know you as the artist or you know discussions as a team whatever. But the names that put forward would have been ones that are less divisive. And then the vote on that would have, you know, who other people have voted for would have been a choice that we, you know, 99.9% of people would feel proud saying yes, that's a great example of a of a kind of modern virtuous woman sort of thing, rather than it being purely based off statistics at the earliest stages if you like. The filtering of the names have happened, women are voted on kind of and hopefully those figures will be ones that have appeared really commonly, you know, ones like Greta Thunberg, who's been put down multiple times. But we'd have had that slight guidance to make sure that hate figures don't slip through.

Layla Khoo

Yeah. So, you think they should, almost a bit that they're, they'd have been a panel in place effectively to be able to make that decision on behalf of Hardwick.

Greg

Yeah. Yeah.

Layla Khoo

OK. Thank you. Have you got anything to add to how this could have been done differently? Or how would you how you would have liked to have seen it done differently?

Greg

I don't think. I think I've kind of kind of covered it in that way in other questions. Oh, you know, I think that's kind of said everything I'd wanted to on that point. But yeah, I suppose for me it was just a disappointing outcome that the name remains. And that you know that again, the censorship wasn't completely out the window because you agreed there would name were names that would still be censored, but that that she was allowed to persist as a name on it. So, I suppose that, I suppose when I first raised it as an issue, I'd hoped that there'd be enough people that viewed her as enough of a hate figure to get her name removed. So that was that was my disappointment. But no, I think in terms of how I thought it would go differently or, I think I've covered it all.

Layla Khoo

Thank you. How do you feel about working alongside participatory artworks in the future? But I guess both at Hardwick and anywhere else.

Greg

Yeah, looking forward to it. And I always think it's really interesting seeing what is produced, thinking as I said earlier, a really nice way of engaging audiences. I'd say in the future, maybe I'd have a few more questions initially to make sure that I was fully up to speed on and understood fully what was happening with it. About you

know kind of any measures or controls in place to ensure people's protection. But no, looking forward to it

Layla Khoo

OK. Thank you. And what, if anything, would you hope could be learned from this research?

Greg

So I think just the need perhaps for transparency and planning or just clear understanding and you know that I suppose perhaps the importance of anticipating as well that anything with public participation is likely to encounter conflict and that, you know, the readiness, the need to be ready to kind of adapt and flex for that. But yeah, I think just that transparency and planning, everyone being on the same page sort of thing from the offset. And I suppose in some ways I'd hope that perhaps compromise could be considered of big importance in it. And when the participation are working in public space as the element of controlling kind of what public, say or don't say. But there's also kind of a general sense of control kind coming from the artists and all kinds of different elements of control. I suppose it's just, creating something solo in a private studio, just give complete freedom. But then when it's in a public setting, particularly one within an organisation which has the same values, there's kind of what, two-way communication around that and the compromise which, you know, I know we've all kind of learnt stuff from it. So I suppose, yeah, that's the kind of lesson going forward.

Layla Khoo

So just on that. Do you? Do you feel that as the artist, I didn't compromise on this?

Greg

I felt sometimes that it did feel, and I know that it's difficult because you weren't, you weren't able to come to that meeting and we weren't able to always get together in the same space, which obviously always makes it harder to discuss, but it did, sometimes I felt that there were times where we'd put forward a suggestion of how we could move forward, and it was kind of always rejected. And I kind of personally felt in the end that we ended up conceding an awful lot of ground and that you perhaps didn't concede as much ground, in the, on issues. But as I said that's just, that's my personal opinion on it.

Layla Khoo

Do you feel the name JK Rowling should have been removed entirely for every time it was placed on?

Greg

Honestly, I do because I think a hate figure is a hate figure and shouldn't be given a platform.

Layla Khoo

OK. Is there anything else that you would like to add for the record?

Greg

No, I just want to say thanks for the opportunity for the feedback, and it's been really good to discuss it with you and it has cleared up some things for me, which has been really nice. So, thank you for taking the time to talk with me about it.

Layla Khoo

Yeah. And thank you for taking the time for this and I appreciate you being willing to be as open as you have been in this interview and been willing to sort of discuss this at length with me. I know it's these sort of things can be quite uncomfortable, especially sort of discussing directly with the person who was involved in at the time. So, I really appreciate you being willing to do that. So, thank you very much for that.

Greg

Thank you.

Appendix 19: Ethics example documentation

Ethics Approval reference FAHC 22-114

School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

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Staff member and volunteer consent to take part in *Hardwick Hall / University of Leeds 'Deeper Engagements' Visitor Research Project*
ONGOING OBSERVATION

Add your
initials next
to the
statement
if you
agree

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 05 March 2024 explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason until 28 days from today, and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. To withdraw, please email Layla Khoo: pou1lrk@leeds.ac.uk If withdrawal takes place within the 28 days, all data you have provided will be deleted or destroyed.	
I understand that members of the research team may have access to my responses. Delete as appropriate: I understand that my name will be linked with the research materials, and I will be identifiable in published outputs from this research. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identifiable in published outputs from this research.	
I understand that the data collected from me may be stored and used in relevant future research.	
I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the lead researcher should my contact details change.	

Name of participant	
Participant's signature	
Date	
Name of lead researcher [or person taking consent]	Layla Khoo / [REDACTED] (NT)
Signature	
Date*	

*To be signed and dated in the presence of the participant.

Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/ pre-written script/ information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be kept with the project's main documents which must be kept in a secure location.



HARDWICK HALL 'Deeper Engagements' Visitor Research Project

Artwork Participant Information Sheet

We are carrying out research into the experience at Hardwick Hall. We'd like to invite you to participate, so it's important that you understand what your participation will involve.

Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the project?

Artist Layla Khoo is working with Hardwick Hall to explore and understand the effect of participatory contemporary art on visitor experience in heritage sites. We are also interested in testing different ways of doing this kind of research.

Why have I been chosen?

All visitors to Hardwick Hall are being given the opportunity to participate with this artwork. We, and the staff of the house are interested in understanding the effect of participation with contemporary artwork on visitor experience.

Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide. If you decide to take part you will be offered a copy of this information sheet to keep.

It is not possible to withdraw from the artwork after you have participated, as your participation now forms an intrinsic part of the artwork, you should consider this before participating.

What do I have to do?

Participation with the artwork is entirely optional. You may view the artwork without participating.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no risks to you in taking part.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There are no direct benefits for you today, but we hope that our research will help the National Trust and the wider heritage and artistic community to understand and meet the needs of all its visitors in the future.

Use, dissemination, and storage of research data

The information we gather will be analysed to help us better understand how we can carry out research on the experiences of visitors, and how heritage sites and artists work together. We will share this information with other researchers at research events and in published writing.



What will happen to my personal information?

We will not collect identifiable information about you – just a record of how you participate. This and other data you provide will be stored on University of Leeds servers.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

Yes but only on designated days and times which will be clearly signposted – however you can still participate with the artwork and opt out of the video / photograph recording of you – please see information sheet about recording. Images and excerpts from the recording will be used in the outputs of this research such as journal articles.

Video and photographs of the completed artwork will be used in research outputs and published, this may include images and recording of the materials you participated with, even if it does not include images or recording of you.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The data we collect will be used to analyse your experiences of Hardwick Hall. We are likely to write a report for Hardwick Hall, share our findings at conferences and also publish the results of our research in journal articles.

By participating with this artwork you are consenting to us using the information in this way.

What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?

Information such as age grouping; experience of viewing artworks; experience of visiting heritage sites will be collected via visitor books and questionnaires which you do not have to complete in order to participate with the artwork. This information is important in helpful as it enables us to discuss and compare different experiences of Hardwick Hall and the artworks based on your wider experiences.

Who is organising/ funding the research?

The research is being carried out by the University of Leeds in collaboration with Hardwick Hall. The University of Leeds has funded the research.

Contact for further information

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