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CRAFT, CARE AND COMMUNITY AT THE PEOPLES PALACE

The meaning of the word curate originates from the late 19th century Latin word “curare” meaning to take care of. The contemporary definition covers a wider context, including business, social media and the art gallery but for this exhibition I wish to concentrate on the traditional role of curator.

For this purpose I have chosen The Winter Gardens, Morecambe for my exhibition space, a rare type of music hall in need of restoration.

I propose to use the space to promote local artists and craftsmen, providing workshops and exhibition space in return for contribution of their skills to the preservation of the theatre. It is my opinion that the displays should be artist-led for full benefit of the audience and artist. “It is not the job of a curator to impose their own signature but to be a mediator between artist and public” (Obrist 2014 p.98)

In addition I have chosen Portuguese artist Joana Vasconcelos. Her creations are large scale and site specific, as I would like the exhibits to feel an organic part of the building.

It is my intention to provide a comfortable and familiar space for the public to pause and interact with the artist through recognisable objects, textures and materials; therefore, I would consider the content of her work appropriate to the exhibition space.

The winter Gardens enjoy a prominent position on the seafront. Originally called The Peoples Palace it is of significant value, historically, architecturally and especially to the social and economic welfare of the area.



fig.1 Interior of the Winter Gardens

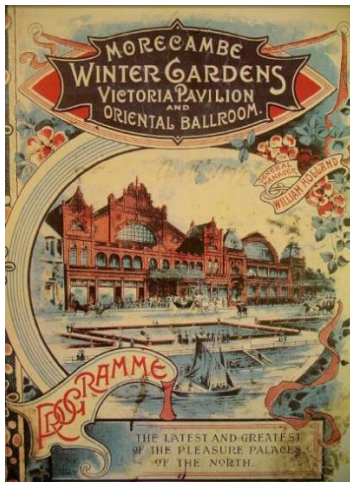


fig.2 Facade

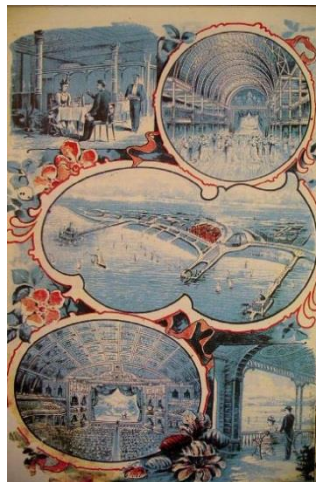


fig.3 Attractions

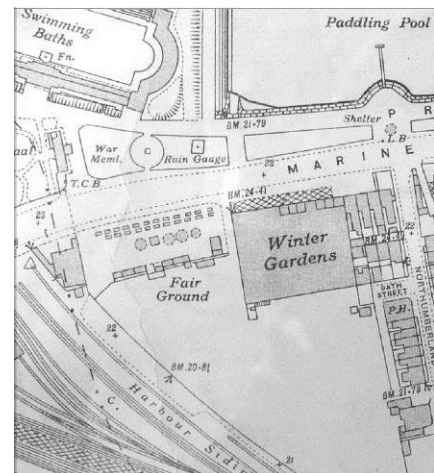


fig.4 Map of the area

The Peoples Palace was frequently visited as a bathing space. It consisted of seawater and medicated baths with a 30ft long aquarium surrounded by gardens. Bus, rail and sea links brought visitors from the industrial towns. The industrial

revolution left traditional past times behind and a new culture was forming, leisure and work time became clearly defined and leisure activities became increasingly important.

In the early 19th century the towns suffered major problems with social disorder and public health. As a drive for social improvement leisure time was used as an instrument for education, they were provided with appropriate attractions such as “curiosities of the deep” exotic plants and an art gallery. Admission charge was kept within reach of the working man. Three restaurants and a temperance bar were added along with music for dancing, it was thought the admission of women would inhibit the sale of alcohol, improve standards of dress and encourage respectable social behaviour.

In general, the Peoples Palace was instrumental in improving standards of conduct and increased social stability and making public space more accessible to women.

A recent study shows that the modern urban visitor to Morecambe comes in search of an almost spiritual experience. The role of the sea, the idea that a visit to the seaside is good for you and childhood focused nostalgia, play their part. The traditional seaside attractions have faded but the fact that the Winter Gardens, the promenade and the beach are in need of renovation does not diminish the illusion of an unchanging sensation.

The timelessness of the seaside is considered to have a comforting effect, a chance for a person to escape and be themselves. In a manner of speaking, a form of reverie where the visitor can relive their own childhood while continuing the traditions passed down through generations.

“Childhood lasts all through life – it returns to animate broad sections of adult life”

(Bachelard 1971 p.20)

In my opinion, The Winter Gardens contribute to the feeling of continuity, provides the local community with a sense of belonging and pride in where they live.

“History has depth and time bestows value” (Tuan 1977 P.191)

My intention is that the viewer will enter from the Promenade, through the front but will not be guided around the exhibition. It is my aim to encourage the audience to explore, to view the larger exhibits from a distance but have the opportunity to connect more closely with them through touch, their tactile nature making the artwork feel accessible and the viewer a participant and not a bi-stander.

“All my work demands a degree of involvement, it needs the other body’s presence to be able to exist” (Vasconcelos in Rubio 2017 p.166)

There will be a central area concentrating on the work of local artists, displays around a Seating area will enable the public to relax with refreshments and absorb the work above and around them. Information about the exhibits will be available here, should the viewer like to read it at their leisure and revisit better informed if they wish.

On either side of the Auditorium will be workshops for local artists and craftsmen, providing a creative space and enabling the public to view the processes and materials involved in the production of their art and the renovation of the building.

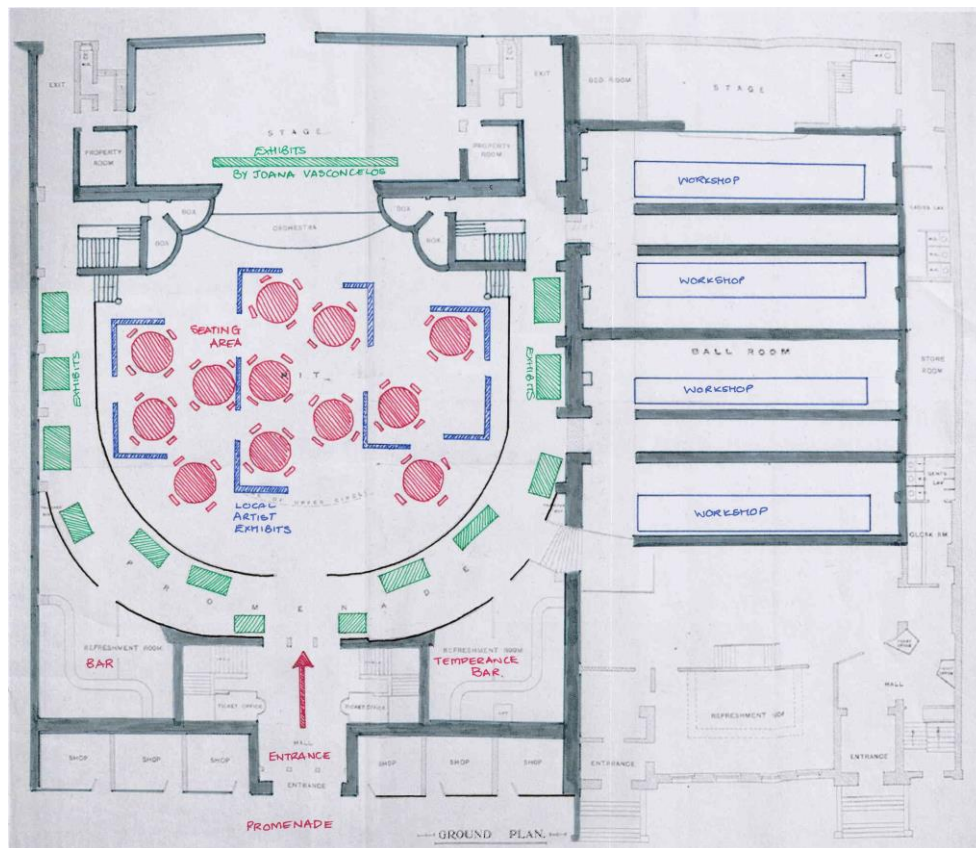


fig .5 Proposed layout in relation to original plans

Obrist offers, as an example of this in practice, Kasper König, the curator of the Ludwig Museum in Cologne. Artists in residence create what he considers to be a dialogue between generations, using the past to construct the future, believing that art and architecture are intertwined.

“The ultimate aim of all visual arts is the complete building! To embellish buildings was once the noblest function of the fine arts; they were the indispensable components of great architecture.” (Walter Gropius 1919)

A survey by the crafts council in 2020 showed that people still prefer buying direct from the maker. Face-to-face buying is still preferred over online purchasing, with around four in ten consumers browsing crafts fairs, stores or galleries for craft to buy.

It also identified an appetite for craft experiences, with 20% of those interviewed indicating that they'd pay to attend a craft workshop in the future. They want to see and interact with the objects and materials, hear the stories associated with them and their makers. The interaction is vital in helping the visitor appreciate what has gone into the making of it.

This interest in going 'behind the scenes' and understanding the creative process is a phenomenon we have observed elsewhere amongst museum visitors, who want to understand conservation processes or how curators and designers approach selecting and displaying objects in exhibitions. (Craft Council 2020 p.12)



fig.6 Workshop interior



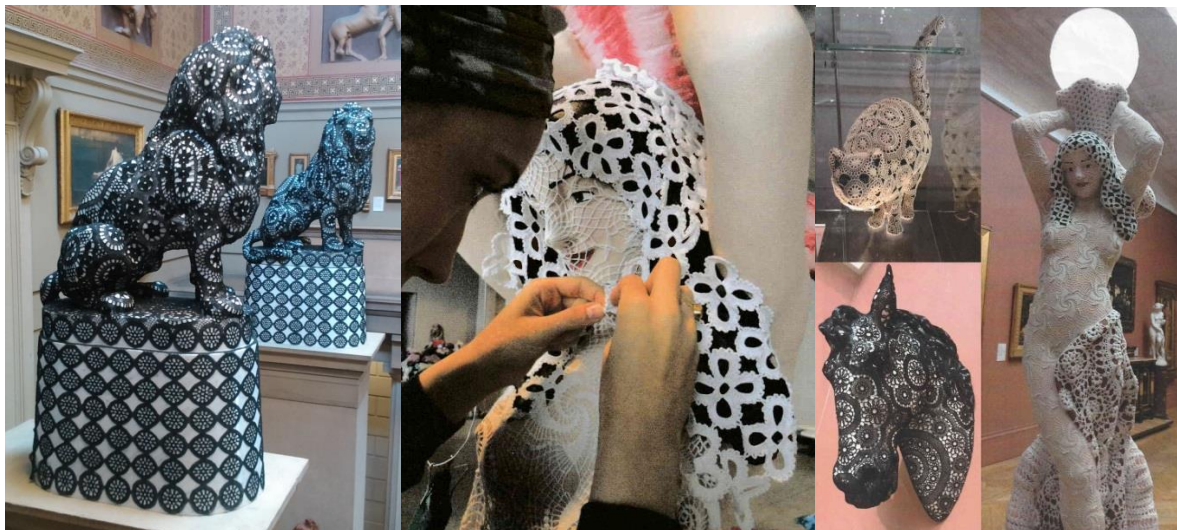
fig.7 Workshop exterior

Craft is central to the work of Joana Vasconcelos. In the making of her work, she uses popular material usually associated with traditional techniques and everyday life. Hand-made crochet, such as the doily, is often used in her treatment of objects, both every day and monumental. The wrapping of these reflect different periods and

tastes, the object and the wrapping are interconnected and inseparable, bringing the past and present together and closing the gap between high and low culture.

The crochet technique, usually performed by female labour, is traditionally used to decorate and protect domestic furniture the process of covering is protective and the making of them adds value to the form.

“The technique is international; it’s a fully globalising language, relative to women of the entire world. Everyone believes crochet is their own, but it isn’t.” (Vasconcelos quoted in Rubio 2017p.162)



Figs. 8 -10 Works including Hwarang, Cheshire Cat, Bestie and Bond Girl

Joana has been associated with the Nouveau Réalisme movement, who made use of collage and assemblage in their painting, some using real objects in their work. An example of which was Picasso's Still Life with Chair Caning. He was one of the first artists to put into question whether art could consist of pre-made materials and the separation of life and art, the forerunner to the Readymades of Duchamp,

whereby an object is raised to the category of art due to having been designated as such by the artist.



fig.11 Still Life with Chair Caning – Picasso



fig.12 With Hidden Noise - Duchamp

In constructing her work she creates a space for discovery, she believes her work is incomplete without the viewer and the aim is immersion through the softness of the fabric and the intimacy of the detail.



Fig.13 Time Machine and Big Booby – impression of the exhibition in situation

Tuan proposes, the way people feel about a space is affected by experience, through these we construct a reality. Those experiences can be tactile, visual and conceptual. We use the sensitivity of the hands to know and explore our environment or to comfort. As we look at a scene we cannot view that scene in general, our eyes pause at points of interest and the pause is brief so we are not aware of it.

It is, therefore, important to keep the visitor in the art moment a little longer, as

Foerster says “making art is not a matter of the moment” (in Obrist 2014 p.24)

By providing an immersive atmosphere I hope to draw attention to the importance of art and craft in the community, in its history and in its culture.

“To repudiate skill is perverse, one might say, ideological; skill is paradigmatically artistic in that it entails absorption in process for its own sake as well as for the sake of the finished product” (Sartwell 2015 p.308)

In caring for the structure of the Winter Gardens, artists and local community, it is my intent to continue the tradition of accessibility to art and culture, provided in the past. A feeling of familiarity, visual stimulus and a sense of community will play a large part in defining a sense of place – as it represents a significant aspect of the town’s history.

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<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/melanie5231/theatre>

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Joana Vasconcelos Time Machine (2014) Published by Manchester city art gallery.

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fig.10. Cheshire Cat, Bestie and Bond Girl, own photograph, available at

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fig.11. Still Life with Chair Caning – Picasso, available at

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fig.12. With Hidden Noise – Duchamp, available at

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fig.13. Time Machine and Big Booby, available at

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fig.13. Theatre interior, available at

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