

Title: Understanding the culture of the Romani's

Student Number: 1900676

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Tutor Name: Martin Bush

My plan is to curate a festival type of exhibition which points to three different artists. The theme of this festival is to illustrate the Romani environment. I intend to locate my festival in a small village in the North of England, called Appleby which has a long history of having an annual event for the Romani's. The chosen location would provide free space to hold my festival, which highlights the culture of the Romani's. Due to curating this festival, I have chosen specific pieces of artwork which can uphold my idea. My proposal is to use the Romani's Vardos known as the bow topped wagons, to showcase these chosen pieces of art.

I intend to adhere to the *The essential practical handbook for curators and curatorial students*, advice, 'mapping out every stage of the exhibition making process from initial idea to final installation' (George, 1994). I have a view of having the festival exhibition in a field next to the Appleby Grammar School. Figure 1 below shows that the wagons are pieces of art, each telling a story of the lives that have lived in them. It is found that when the Romani's travel through the countryside, they would have a design to have on the vardo which was unique to the Romani family. "Specific patterns and designs on the vardo were almost always associated with their artist. A well-known design likely meant a reputable craftsman. Many of the designs were inspired by nature and wildlife, therefore the recurrent flowery patterns" (The Vintage News, 2018). The viewpoints on the Romani/Gypsy cultures cannot simply rely on the cliches but explore a greater viewpoint. The culture the Romani/Gypsy live is a different quality of life where they have their own way of living, beliefs, and freedom.



Fig 1 Vardo Wagons of Britain's Romani People (The Vintage news, 2018)

My intention is to place the artist works inside the wagons which is shown in Figure 2 below, this is my drawing where I am showing an example of how it will be displayed, where the portrait paintings are in the vardos. The wagon will be easily accessible where the viewers can freely step into the wagon, looking at the craved images of birds, flower, and animals. There will be a sitting place where the viewer can take a seat. Confidently the viewers should be able to picture the portrait of the people where they could see the Romani people having to live in the wagons and how they lived their lives freely.



Fig 2

The festival will be a three-day festival held in Appleby in the summer, which enables all viewers to come and see the state of art. The date that this festival will take place is on the 09/08/21 to the 11/08/21. The reason for this is that the wagons themselves are like a exhibit piece from the outside to the inside. “For the visitor, the exhibit environment is the primary medium of communication” (Dean, 1996). The wagons are known to be approximately ten feet long and seven feet wide, and the flooring on the inside is about 5 feet across with one-foot ledges extending over the wheels.

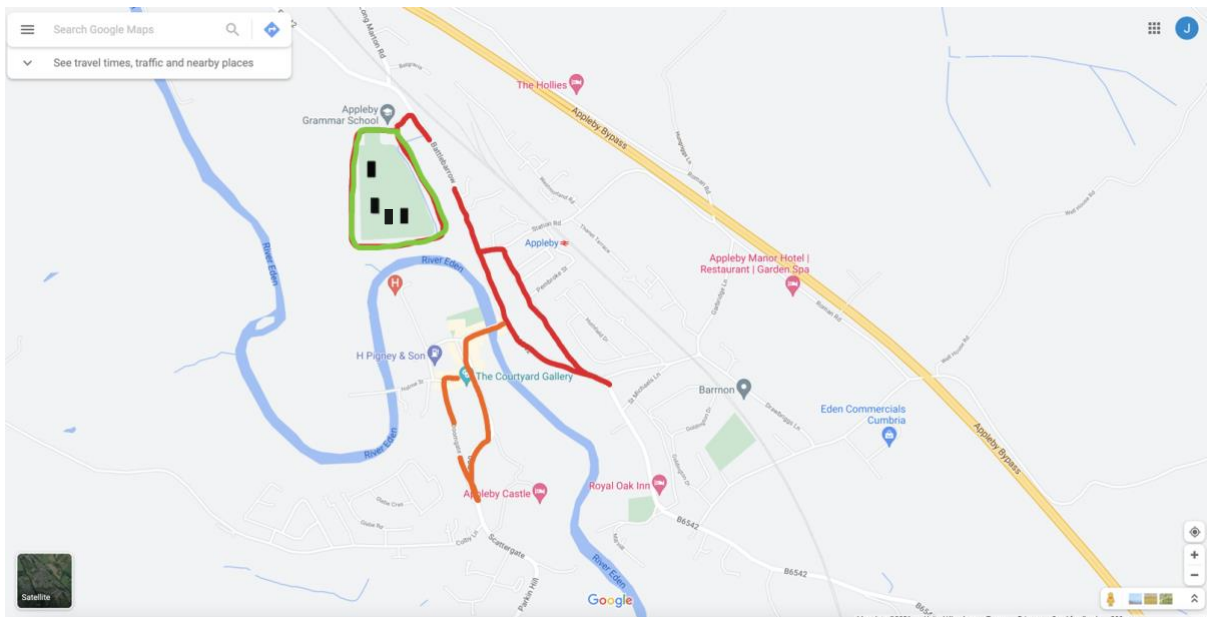


Fig 3 (Google maps, Appleby, 2021)

Figure 3 above shows where the festival event will take place and what the route is.

This is a road map of the small town of Appleby, the green marker pen that I have circled around, is a green area which is a field next to the Appleby Grammar School. There is also a river where the horses can drink from to keep hydrated. The green area is where the exhibition will take place which has four parked wagons, and an area where the horses will be stationed. The four black rectangular shapes in the field space are where the four wagons will go and where the portraits will be placed in. The thought of walking on a field and entering the wagons will bring some feelings and give the viewers the right mindset. This is where, “The wrong use of venue/space can reduce the work to nothing and therefore have no impact on the audience.” (Greenberg, Ferguson and Nairne, 2010). Therefore, curating an exhibition this way will make an impact to the audience that I am aiming at. The red marking and the orange marking on the map is one route where the riders can ride the wagons around the route and back, therefore there is a clear flow. By having the wagons on foot, this will enable the people to see the incredible artwork on the outer side of the wagons. The reason for this is that the wagons themselves are like an exhibit piece from the outside to the inside. “For the visitor, the exhibit environment is the primary medium of communication”

(Dean, 1996). It is a chance for the Romani to come and express themselves to the public.

The main outcome of doing this festival is to use the pieces of art and the experience of the Romani's life should break down some barriers on those who are critical against the Romani.

Appleby in Westmorland is known to have a fair called the, 'Appleby Horse Fair.' This fair is mainly run by the Romani, they all come to Appleby from all over Britain to have a Horse fair. "Residents of Appleby are fearing for their safety ahead of the annual horse fair."

(Newsandstar, 2019) The idea of having a festival about these artifacts that has been chosen for this festival is to try and make Appleby a safe place, the event can be done differently by showing the people in the village about their history.

The character of "Curators play a pivotal role in either approach, as their choices simultaneously create and reflect the dominant cultural narrative interpreted through the curator's training, beliefs, and experiences" (Robins, 2005). Therefore, to help bring more of an experience for the target audience there will be a vital role for the Romani's to help create this festival, where they showcase how they live in the wagons and be welcoming to the viewers, this shall then enable the viewers to witness and experience the Romani's life.



Fig 4 (Pino, The Gypsy)

Figure 4 to 6 shows the three pieces of art done by three different artists who are all Romani Gypsies themselves and depicting their own people and culture. These three images are all significant as they are all portraits of Romani people. Figure 3 was done by an artist called Pino, who named his artwork as 'The Gypsy.' He painted a gypsy guy who was playing a guitar. The size of this piece is 22" x 20" this would fit perfectly in the wagon at the back. The motive of choosing this specific piece of art is part of my exhibition is this painting represents the culture of a gypsy man playing a guitar. The artist who painted that was an expressionist who was interested in the culture of Romani life, therefore this piece should highlight to them that the Romani people like their music.



Fig 5 (Mueller, 1927)

Otto Mueller was a printmaker who did Figure 5, this piece is called the 'Gypsy Mueller.'

He print made this using ink to paint the Romani mother and the child, this is 70cm in height and 51cms in width. Mueller was apparently the grandson of a Romani, which led him to join the Die Brucke in 1910. In the last years of Mueller's life, he studied the Romani culture in Dalmatia, Hungary, and Romania. The importance of his work is that he was an expressionist and was known to paint Romani women. The viewers should be able to see what the gypsies were like, as you can see there is a mother and her child, the mother smoking a pipe, and there is a halo on the mother's head, this could be suggesting that she has a religious belief, this is one feature that the Romani are known for.



Fig 6 (Henri, 1913)

Lastly Figure 6 was done by Robert Henri and he called this piece 'The Spanish Gypsy,' the size of this is 103.5 x 83.8cm and this was done in 1912 of a Spanish

Gypsy woman. The purpose of having this painting as one of my exhibits, is the back story of this painting was this lady was Henri's model who belonged to a band of Gypsies who lived on

the outskirts of Madrid, 1912. The significant of this piece, “She entered with austere defiance. I asked her to sit on the model’s chair. She got up and sat there in the gesture which is that of the picture.” And “She seems as solid and mysterious as the sphinx” (Henri, 1912). As mentioned, the lady was as curious as a sphinx, this would have been an unusual situation for the gypsy lady as this would have not happened before. Analysing the painting, the lady does not appear relaxed and is sitting up with her arm resting on the arm rest, rather than sitting back on the chair.

It is spectacular how the Romani/Gypsies are such creative people as they have done many great pieces of art. Figures 7 to 10 shows images that express the life of being a Romani/Gypsy, this was taken 25 minutes away from where I live. The images show a history about this group of Romani/Gypsies in Morriston, Swansea. There are great paintings of horses, caravans, religious people, work life and wagons. These paintings are one example of sharing a traditional story by showing a mini exhibition to help people see something of their history.



Fig 7 (Photographed, 2021)



Fig 8 (Photographed, 2021)



Fig 9 (Photographed, 2021)



Fig 10 (Photographed, 2021)

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Figures

Fig: 1 – Thevintagenews.com 2018, Caravans of Colour: The Intricate Vardo Wagons of Britain's Romani People - <https://www.thevintagenews.com/2018/06/22/romani-vardo-wagons/> Accessed by 30 Apr. 2021

Fig: 2 – Drawing of Vardo (2021) *Possible plan for the Vardo exhibition* [Pen on paper]. Home

Fig: 3 – Google Images 2021, *Appleby-in-Westmorland* - <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Appleby-in-Westmorland/@54.5771037,-2.4927566,15.11z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x487c50836e9219d5:0x32e48167826147bf!8m2!3d54.578302!4d-2.489614> Accessed by 28 Apr. 2021

Fig: 4 – Jacob Gallery – 2021 Pino – The Gypsy - <https://www.jacobgallery.com/pino-the-gypsy%20Accessed%2029%20Apr.%202021> Accessed 29 Apr. 2021

Fig: 5 – Leicester's German Expressionist Collection - [https://www.germanexpressionismleicester.org/leicesters-collection/artists-and-artworks/otto-mueller/gypsy-woman-and-child-\(gypsy-madonna\)/](https://www.germanexpressionismleicester.org/leicesters-collection/artists-and-artworks/otto-mueller/gypsy-woman-and-child-(gypsy-madonna)/) Accessed 29 Apr. 2021

Fig: 6 – The Met – 2021 The Spanish Gypsy 1921 <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/19226> Accessed 29 Apr. 2021

Fig: 7 – Skinner, J (2021). *Photo of a painted horse* [Photograph] (My own private collection).

Fig: 8 – Skinner, J (2021) *Photo of a painted Vardos* [Photograph] (My own private collection).

Fig: 9 – Skinner, J (2021) *Photo of a painted forest* [Photograph] (My own private collection).

Fig: 10 – Skinner, J (2021) *Photo of a painted workers* [Photograph] (My own private collection).