

Critical Portfolio

Section 1: Creative Work

I. Defining 'Creative Worker'

According to the UK government (2023), a 'creative worker' refers to individuals who work in the creative industries, including visual art, design, music, theatre, and film. These people may be painters, sculptors, directors, producers, designers, performers, or writers. They all possess their unique imagination and creativity, which are essential aspects of their professions. The working environment of the creative workers is often dynamic and exciting. However, it is also unpredictable, presenting unique challenges, such as job instability, long working hours and low income. According to Mayer (2014), creative workers are often paid well below the minimum wage. For example, freelance writers may receive as little as a few cents per word, and when adjusted for inflation, freelance writers' compensation has fallen by more than 50% since the 1960s.

I also identify myself as a creative worker because I have been personally involved in voluntary and paid arts projects within the UK. In this self-reflection, I will share some of my experiences as a creative worker.

II. Introducing My Experience

In 2023, I was granted the opportunity to organise "We Are Here", a remarkable exhibition from the esteemed organisation called "Community Arts Box". The exhibition showcased art, poetry, installations, and music created by the global refugee community. Hosted in Brixton, South London, this exhibition aimed to display the strength and resilience of refugees under challenging circumstances.

The Community Arts Box has a noble goal of providing artistic opportunities to underrepresented individuals and communities in London. Through visual arts, music,

literature, theatre, and film, they aim to nurture social inclusion, enhance creativity, build self-confidence, and support the well-being and mental health of participants and communities.

The "We Are Here" exhibition visually depicted the experiences of struggling refugees and their arduous journeys to arrive at their current homes. Drawing on stories that chronicle the past and the pains of the present, the works illuminated the strength and resilience of these communities. The exhibition included art by established Iranian artist and refugee Nima Javan and sketches by Wedi Tsion, capturing the horrific moments of the Tigray Genocide. In addition, artworks were selected from a reputed and displaced Ukrainian contemporary art gallery, 'Spilne.' This selection of paintings, sculptures, photography, poetry, and installations was underscored with a live Norooz (Persian New Year) music performance, emotively resonating to expose their story for all to see.

As the exhibition organiser, I worked carefully with the team at Community Art Box to ensure that everything ran smoothly and that the artworks were displayed in the best possible way. We communicated with each artist, so the artworks were curated to tell their personal stories in depth. In addition, we worked hard to promote the exhibition to ensure that it reached a broad audience, including those who might only occasionally attend art exhibitions.

The exhibition is organised to stimulate discussion about global migration and border politics. The exhibition encourages all visitors to question any assumptions or beliefs about refugees. The exhibition can be considered a success because of the many visitors from different backgrounds who attended the exhibition. The artworks on display provide insight into the refugee experience and the strength of the human spirit in the face of adversity. Overall, my experience as the exhibition organiser was enriching and highlighted the power of art in promoting social inclusion and understanding.

III. Main Aspects of Working Conditions

One of the most exciting aspects of this project was working with a diverse group of young people from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. It was inspiring to witness the consequence of their different encounters and perspectives on the definitive inventiveness, allowing them to learn from each other.

Despite that, being involved in such a community artistry project presented several unforeseen predicaments. For instance, our resources were limited, thus necessitating us to be resourceful regarding seeking out materials and equipment. In addition, We also had to manage different expectations and priorities among the young people and other stakeholders involved in the project. Another significant obstacle was the pressure to deliver superior excellence work within a constricted time frame. Moreover, due to my standing as an organizer, I had to balance my commitment to the project with my other professional and personal commitments. It was sometimes challenging to find the time and energy to give the project the attention it deserved.

IV. Overall Reflection

My time organizing the 2023 "We Are Here" exhibition at Community Arts Box was a transformative experience that revealed essential insights for anyone pursuing creative endeavours. Firstly, it impressed upon me the significance of fostering community collaboration within artistic projects. By unifying global refugee community, we were able to bring together different perspectives and experiences to create something that was powerful and resonant.

Secondly, it highlighted the significance of being adaptable and resourceful as a creative worker. When faced with challenges throughout the exhibition organisation with limited resources, we had to utilise our innovation and flexibility to find solutions. This encounter strengthened my belief that resilience and quick adaptability to change is crucial for those in creative fields.

Finally, my contribution to this project illustrated the value of art for generating social impact and promoting inclusivity. Through the exhibition, the refugee community showed their strength and perseverance by challenging misconceptions about them and creating opportunities for the audiences to develop empathy and understanding towards their plight. This agrees with various scholarly works within the creative industry highlighting the cultural and social benefits of implementing art and creativity to promote social cohesiveness and well-being.

In conclusion, my involvement in the "We Are Here" exhibition provided invaluable lessons on the significance of community engagement, adaptability, and the transformative power of art. These experiences have reinforced my deep-seated passion in creative expression and conviction that artistic endeavors have tangible positive effects both individually and within communities.

Section 2: Creative Institutions

I. Defining the Key Terms

The definition of audiences, visitors, and participants is essential for this assignment. When discussing creative institutions, audiences engage with creative works through various forms of media, including galleries, museums, theatres, and concerts (Sandell, 2003). Visitors refer specifically to those who physically attend these establishments, such as galleries and museums, to view exhibits and interact with programs presented (Falk and Dierking, 2000). In addition, participants are people who actively engage in creative activities or performances, such as workshops or interactive exhibits, within these institutions (Helguera, 2011).

II. Introduction of the Institution

For this task, I undertook a walking ethnography at the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square, London. This renowned institution serves as a holy shrine for Western European artwork, hosting masterpieces from the 13th to the 19th centuries. Visitors to the museum

have the opportunity to relish the unparalleled splendour and beauty of works created by legendary figures such as Leonardo da Vinci, Vincent van Gogh, and Claude Monet.

During a thirty-minute walking ethnography, I directed my interest to observing the visitors who had gathered within the museum's various exhibition rooms - each with a different subject and theme. The Renaissance Gallery was a specific point of fascination for me, as it featured creative masterworks from the Italian Renaissance. The space was suffused with visitors carefully analysing the artworks of prominent artists like Botticelli, Michelangelo, and Raphael. Furthermore, I recognised the museum's communication and public engagement resources, like signs, labels, and interactive displays. The observation took place on April 15th, when the museum was open to the public.

III. Observations

I observed various fascinating and unexpected things during my visit to The National Gallery. One of the most remarkable things I beheld was the diverse ways in which visitors engaged with the artwork. Some visitors stood quietly in front of the paintings, taking in the details, and appreciating the art in solitude. Others engaged in lively conversations with friends or family members, expressing their views and interpretations of the paintings. Several visitors even took pictures of the artwork, perhaps to capture a memory or to share with others later.

In addition, my exploration of the museum led me to observe that the staff were highly invested in interacting with the visitors. Throughout the galleries, many staff members provided guided tours or gave talks about the artworks on view. They also engaged visitors in conversation and answered questions. This was particularly unexpected as I had assumed that visitors would mostly be left to their own devices to explore the artwork. The enthusiasm of the staff towards the artworks was contagious, and it was evident that they were keen on imparting their expertise and knowledge to the visitors.

Another unexpected aspect of my visit was the presence of interactive exhibits. It had not crossed my mind that there would be opportunities for visitors to interact with the artworks more intimately. For example, some touchscreens allowed visitors to zoom in and explore details of specific paintings. This was an excellent method to get the audience to delve into the art more deeply and actively, which I saw many taking full advantage of.

Finally, I was impressed by the various forms of communication and marketing that the museum utilized to engage with visitors. The signage in each gallery provided information about the artwork and the artists, while electronic displays provided additional information on the museum's history and collections. The museum also offered audio guides and guided tours to help visitors navigate and learn more about the artwork. This attention to detail and visitor experience was impressive and contributed to a very enjoyable and informative visit.

IV. Overall Reflection

After spending time observing visitors at The National Gallery, several patterns and themes emerged that were interesting and important to consider.

One pattern that seemed to be recurring was the diversity of ways in which visitors interacted with the artwork - from quiet contemplation to lively discussion among companions. This uncovering is compatible with the reports on visitor engagement, which emphasizes the importance of creating a variety of experiences that cater to different interests and learning styles (Black, 2010).

One exciting aspect of the observation was the implementation of interactive exhibits to amplify visitor engagement. Specifically, the touchscreen exhibit that enabled visitors to zoom in and analyse details of select paintings proved captivating and proficient in cultivating interest among visitors. This finding is consistent with the extensive literature on technology's role within museum settings, indicating interactive exhibits can enhance learning and foster a

deeper connection between viewers and art (Enhuber, 2015). As stated by Charr (2020), *the use of technology in a museum is less about being innovative and more about being accessible.*

Furthermore, the museum's use of various forms of communication and marketing was effective in engaging visitors and providing them with information about the artwork and the museum. Signage within each gallery was useful in providing essential information to the artwork and the artists, while electronic displays provided more explanations on the constitutive of the museum's background and collections. Additionally, the museum's use of audio guides and guided tours was also effective in helping visitors navigate and learn more about the artwork. These findings are mirrored in the vast amount of research that has stated effective communication is key for enhancing visitor learning and engagement (Enhuber, 2015).

Generally, the experiences of visitors at The National Gallery underline the necessity of providing several distinctive opportunities and utilising efficient communication methods in order to enhance engagement. Such results conform to literary works regarding visitor involvement and interpretation, emphasizing the demand for artistic and cultural institutions to cater to diverse audiences and learning styles. In so doing, institutions can foster a comprehensive understanding and appreciation for art and stimulate participator fulfillment.

References

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