

SAVING MANET FOR THE NATION: SUMMARY EVALUATION

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Flow

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ASHMOLEAN
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2012 TO 2016

Summary evaluation of the engagement programme accompanying the Ashmolean Museum's acquisition of Manet's portrait of Mlle Claus, 2012 to 2016. Alongside saving the painting for the nation, the Ashmolean intended to try out new ways of working and build relationships with new audiences. This tells the story of this adventure, and shares lessons for the sector to help plan similar programmes around acquisitions for public collections.

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ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

AIMS OF THE ACQUISITION PROJECT

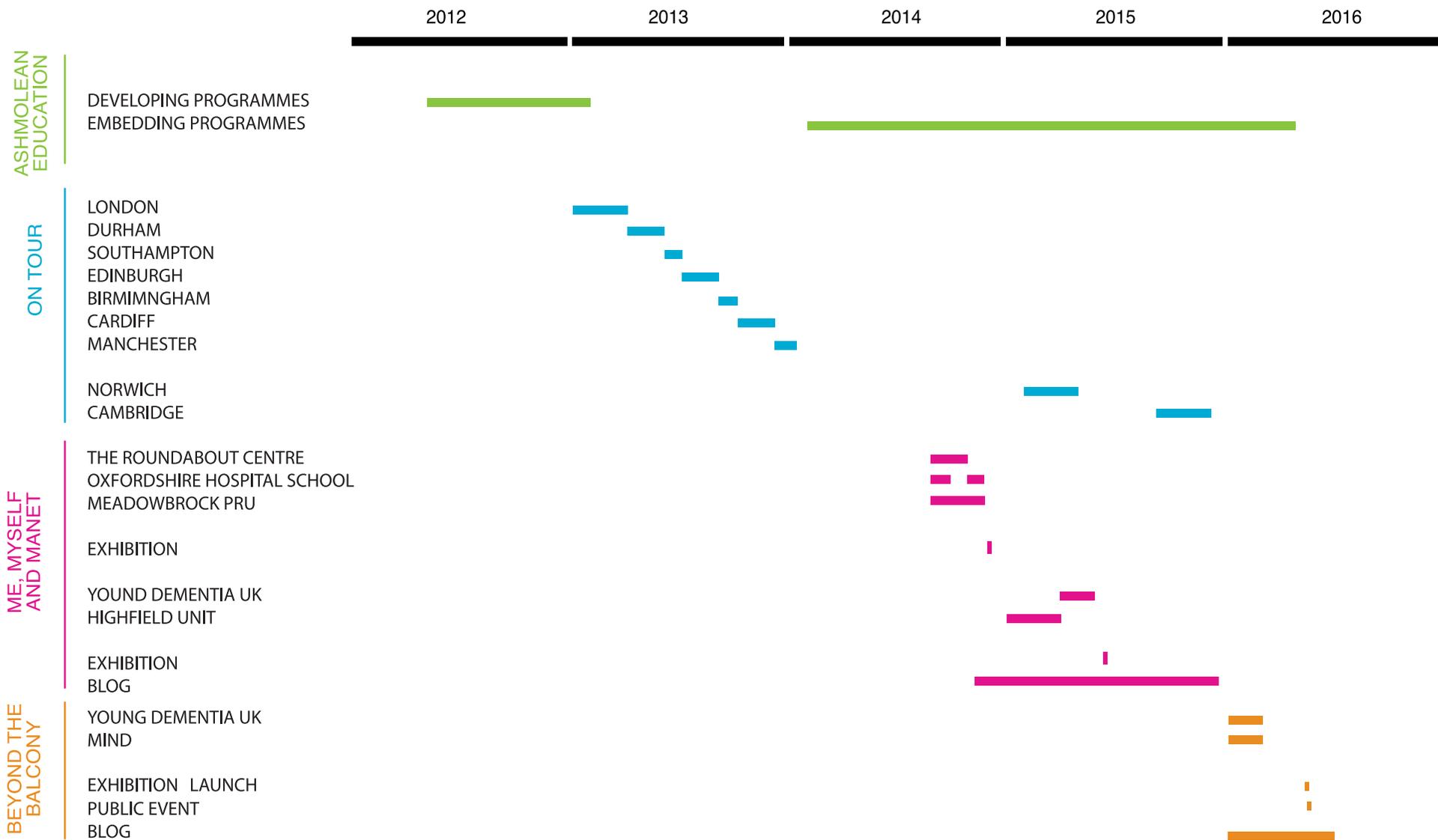
The acquisition by the Ashmolean Museum of Edouard Manet's Portrait of Mademoiselle¹ Claus in 2012 was the starting point for a range of public activities designed to enable learning, participation and development of skills.

The acquisition was funded by the Art Fund, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and private donations. The campaign's lead gift came from the HLF, which enabled the Ashmolean to fulfil its duty to the nation to provide and evaluate a broad engagement programme. The project had four broad aims, each with a specific strand of activity.

AIM	ACTIVITY	FOCUS
Engage a nationwide audience with the painting	A UK tour of the painting and educational resources to seven partner museums, plus any subsequent loans requested.	Breadth of engagement The tour to partner museums, on-going digital presence and gallery activities with school and family groups were designed to enable as many people to access the painting as possible in Oxford and across the nation.
Engage with a wide range of visitors to the Ashmolean	Embedding the painting into existing education activities at the Ashmolean including trails, talks, education and family workshops.	
Widen the Ashmolean's community engagement	A series of community projects under the heading 'Me Myself and Manet' and 'Beyond the Balcony', working with specific hard-to-reach groups.	Depth of engagement The community projects were designed to more deeply engage a smaller number of people. This element targeted audiences who would otherwise not have had the opportunity or inclination to visit, enabling them to enrich their lives through exploring the painting, creative activities and the Museum.
Increase the Ashmolean's capacity to deliver projects for hard to reach audiences	Testing new ideas such as a project blog and developing new partnerships throughout, culminating in an artist-led digital community project, 'Beyond the Balcony'.	Strengthening engagement The project as a whole was designed to enable the Ashmolean team to learn and strengthen partnerships both internally and externally.

¹ Shortened to Mlle Claus. Sometimes, she is referred to as 'Fanny Claus'

THE PROJECT TIMELINE

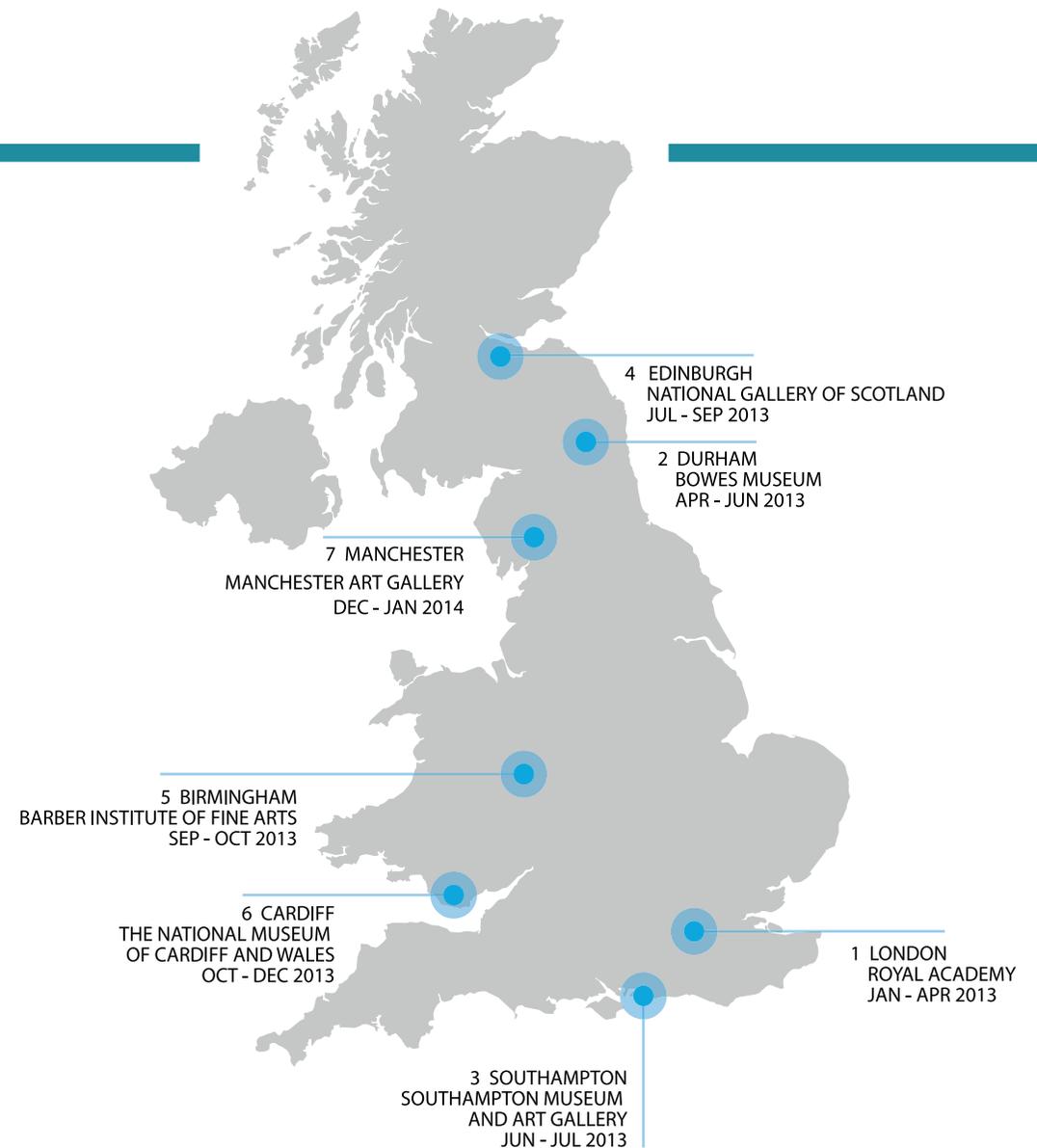


BREADTH OF ENGAGEMENT



ON TOUR – A NATIONWIDE AUDIENCE

The painting visited seven museums and galleries around the country from January 2013 to December 2014. Each venue received a suitcase of props for family and school workshops, and where possible Colin Harrison, the Ashmolean's Senior Curator of European Art, delivered a talk. The Ashmolean also provided teachers notes, family activity sheets and curatorial information for the partner museums to use in their interpretation and activities. Each venue curated a distinctive display, and were free to use the props and resources as they wished to fit in with their own collection and narrative. Despite the official tour ending, the portrait has since been in demand with other galleries, being loaned to Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery (Jan – April 2015) and the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge (September and December 2015).



EDUCATION – A WIDE RANGE OF VISITORS

The portrait features prominently on the education pages of the Ashmolean's website, and in a number of education initiatives both before and after the tour. Immediately after the painting was acquired in 2012, focused family and school workshops reached 820 people, and the painting was featured in teacher training and special projects. Between April 2013 to December 2014 downloadable teachers' notes and family activity sheets were accessed over 10,000 times.

From 2014 onwards the painting has been embedded in the Ashmolean's education programme, directly reaching 4500 people through gallery tours, school workshops, adult learning activity, informal family activities and resources exploring portraits and Impressionism.

By identifying different ways to interpret the painting the education teams have created new ways for children and adults to engage with art. As Schools officer Clare Coleman reflected, the painting has enabled participants to empathise with the character in the painting:

"As soon as they got into the outfit and were taking on the persona [of Fanny Claus] they talked about the difference in how they felt, and even had to sit differently."

The range of research and development that has been carried out by the Ashmolean's education team and in tour venues has influenced and enhanced the others' work, most notably with the suitcase of resources. This suitcase, originally developed for use by the tour partners has proved invaluable in connecting adult outreach audiences and families with the painting, and has since become embedded in in-house education programmes.



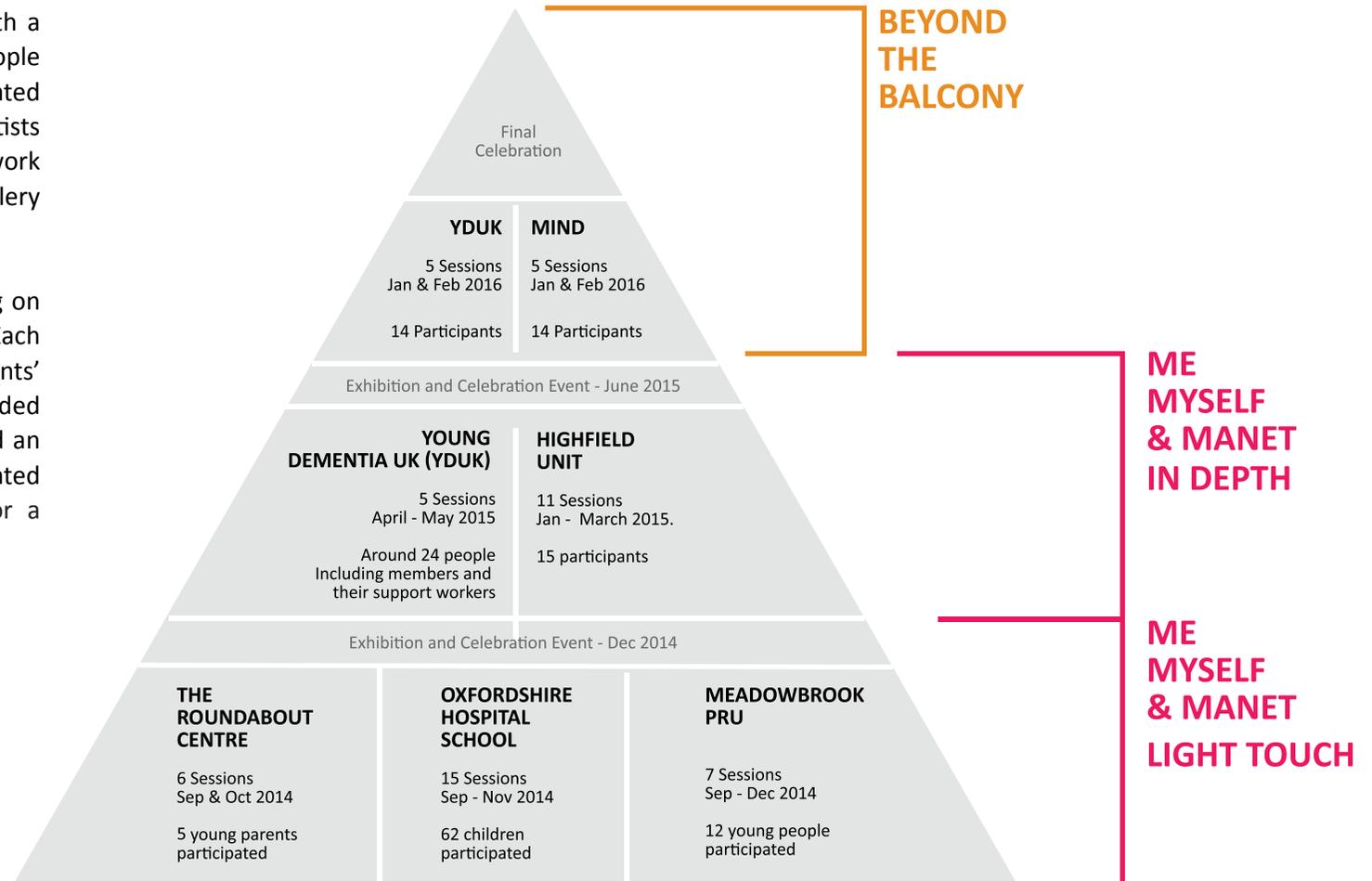
DEPTH OF ENGAGEMENT



COMMUNITY PROJECTS

The Ashmolean's community projects engaged with a range of local community groups, to work with people who would otherwise not have been able or motivated to visit the museum. Participants worked with artists and musicians to explore the portrait, and their work was displayed in the Ashmolean's community gallery near the Education studio.

There were three phases of projects, each building on the successes and learning of the previous one. Each phase culminated in a celebration event for participants' friends and families, and their progress was recorded in a blog. Many of the young participants achieved an Arts Award through the project and everybody created an artistic response. See the following pages for a description of each activity.



ME MYSELF AND MANET

The first five projects came together under the title 'Me Myself and Manet', and unfolded in two phases; three light touch projects, and two more in depth. These were:

LIGHT TOUCH

- **The Roundabout Centre:** A jewellery artist worked with five young parents to create items of jewellery as responses to the portrait.
- **Oxfordshire Hospital School:** Sixty-two children who were in hospital between September and November took part in music and art workshops imagining the spaces and sounds the painting could contain.
- **Meadowbrook Pupil Referral Unit:** Twelve young people who were part of the PRU's art class created artworks in response to the painting and other Impressionist works in the Ashmolean.

IN-DEPTH PROJECTS

- **Young Dementia UK (YDUK):** Twelve participants with early onset dementia and their support workers or partners collaborated to create artworks using collage, paint, music and poetry.
- **Highfield Unit:** Fifteen young people in a residential unit for children up to 18 with acute mental health issues. The painting was used across their curriculum to inspire music, art, jewellery, creative writing and French work. They each produced an artistic response.

Project blog: www.ashmolean.org/ashwpress/manet



BEYOND THE BALCONY

The final two projects ran in parallel, with five workshops for each group. Participants explored the conceptual space behind and in front of the balcony, imagining themselves looking out, and looking in. Participants created digital collages incorporating poems and self-portraits in imaginatively depicted scenes of their lives, using the balcony as a device, looking back into their past and domestic world, and looking out to future and wider landscapes. These were combined into animated narratives, one for each group. The workshops were led by conceptual digital artists brook & black (Tiffany Black and Leo Brook) who also created their own artwork in response. Two young volunteers from Oxford Young Arts Practitioners (OYAP) assisted the artists and participants, which gave them an opportunity to develop their own knowledge and experience with support from the artists.

Project blog:

www.ashmolean.org/ashwpress/beyondthebalcony

DIGITAL ART PROJECT

- **YDUK:** Twenty people took part, 10 of which had been involved in the previous community project.
- **MIND:** Twelve participants, who were part of an existing art group formed by MIND at The Mill.



STRENGTHENING ENGAGEMENT



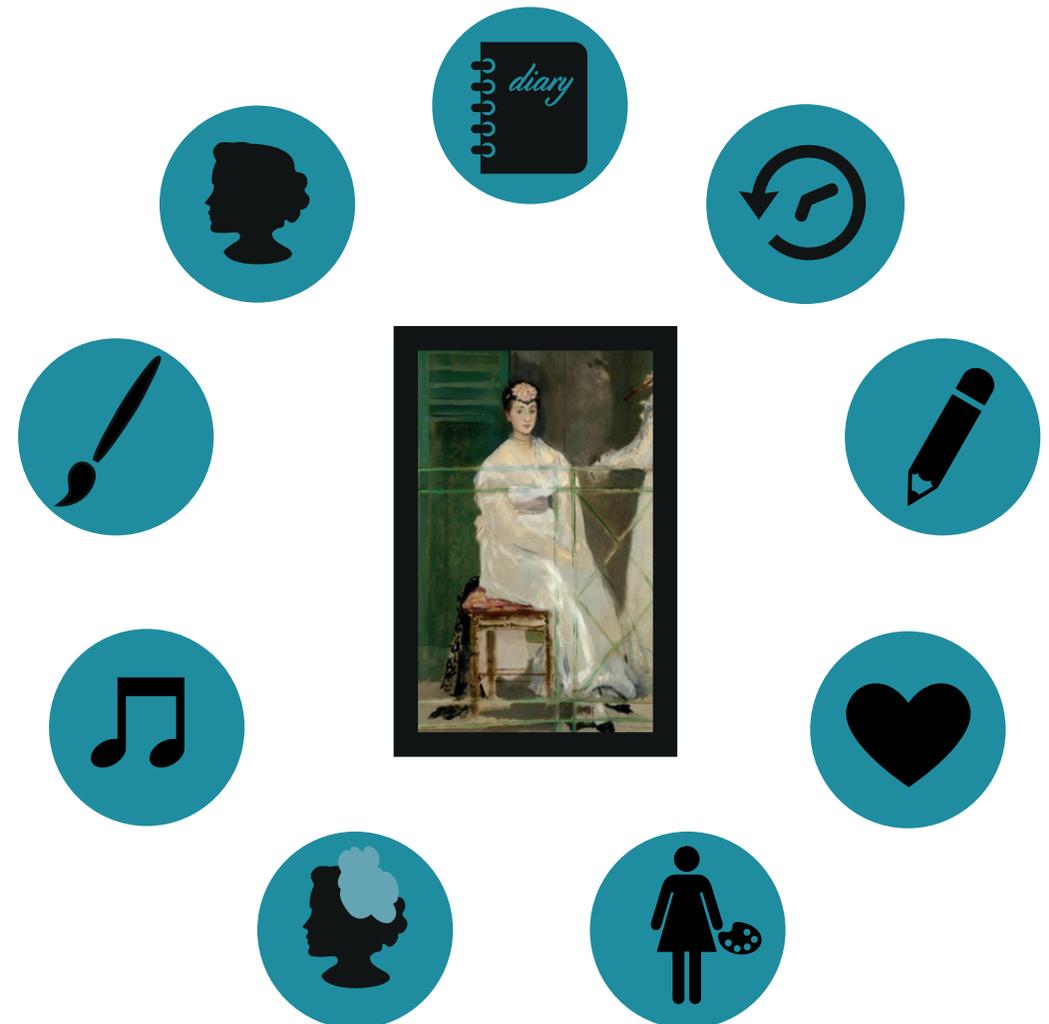
INTERPRETING FANNY CLAUS

The experimental and participant-led approach to the project enabled this single painting to inspire a great number of activities, and cater for many complex needs. The painting was interpreted in a variety of ways by the tour venues, the Ashmolean team, the artists, facilitators and the participants themselves.

The common purpose of all activities was to make Manet's Portrait of Mlle Claus accessible by opening up new interpretations of it. The acquisition project has provided investment and motivation to investigate methods of interpretative outreach for different audiences, around one work of art.

This project has demonstrated that some artefacts are more powerful than others, showing the value of the campaign to acquire it. Moreover, the quality of interpretative methods developed around this painting shows the validity of the acquisition by the Ashmolean Museum, as well as the active involvement of the Learning team.

See the following page for a breakdown of each approach.



INTERPRETING FANNY CLAUS



A portrait: An image of a woman, directly facing the viewer, offered a simple human connection through which to explore the painting.



A real person in history: Stories about her life and the historical context around her, such as her premature death from tuberculosis enabled participants to connect with her as a personality.



An unfinished sketch: The painting is a sketch for *Le Balcon* with areas of fairly rough brushwork revealing how Manet made his paintings. This enabled participants to explore the artistic process, and respond with creative activities that are small steps on the route to a bigger or finished work.



A space: Fanny sits on a balcony, with her back to an open window, gazing out into the street. By imagining what might be in the space behind and in front of her the participants were able to place themselves in this space.



An historical artefact: Painted in the 1860s, the portrait gave participants a window into Manet's world. This history is recent enough for participants to connect, and far enough back in time to be fascinating as history.



A style of painting: Manet's technique and impressionist style broke with painting traditions, which offered a comparison to modern non-traditional artwork.



Through fashion: Fanny Claus was a fashionable celebrity figure. The painting shows her wearing delicately decorative clothes, including a rose headdress. The project's activities have ranged from dressing up in similar clothes (exploring pose and gesture), to creating new jewellery and accessories inspired by the portrait. This has enabled an immediate connection with young people's interests, as well as stimulus for enjoyable making activities.



Through music: Fanny Claus was a violinist, so listening to music of the 19th Century opened up the participants to new cultural experiences and helped them grasp the context of the painting. A range of musical activities offers a familiar route for participants more comfortable with music than visual art.



Through feelings and emotion: It is a simple calm image that can help explore feelings in a non-threatening way. Fanny's mood can perhaps be seen as bored, or feisty with her strong direct gaze. Another figure is semi-visible, adding the possibility of a friendship or conversation.



Through beliefs and values: Fanny was unusually independent for her time, and part of the first ever all female string quartet. This inspired conversation and led the artist's research into different directions.

OUTCOMES AND LEARNING

LIKE MANY ACQUISITION PROJECTS THIS HAS RAISED QUESTIONS ABOUT:

- **Focus:** how to expand interpretations around one object, without losing intellectual integrity about the object's histories and meanings
- **Interests:** how to use one object as a hook into a museum or wider offer, for many different individuals who may not have an immediate interest in this object
- **Energy:** how to sustain momentum in the programming around this object with staff and partners if it lasts several years.

THIS PROJECT HAS SUCCESSFULLY TACKLED THESE ISSUES BY:

Filling a gap: There are various gaps that the painting fills in the Ashmolean's collection, but one of the most important for their schools, family and adult education programmes is the presence of an identifiable female, who not only indicates a window into her own life, but also a period of change in the art world. The fact it is an unfinished sketch also allows visitors to see the brush

strokes and the process of the artist at work, which Primary Education Officer Clare described as 'startling' for the children, as they realise that unfinished work is still valid and can be shown on a gallery wall.

Digging deeply into themes around the painting:

Inviting and celebrating diverse interpretations by artists and community members, supported by knowledgeable curators and other staff such as the education teams who have researched the painting to include it in their own programming. Inviting artists brook & black has pushed staff to think laterally and try new creative digital methods of response. Family learning officer Jane Cockroft felt that the project has enabled her team to think in a different way about their approach to activities, taking them out from the Education studio which is geared towards craft activities, and into the galleries, where more direct connections with the paintings can be made. The programme has shifted the Ashmolean so that it is open to showing how different people view its collections. It has led to many internal conversations about the benefits (and challenges) of participatory interpretation.

Letting participants' own interests take the lead:

Consulting intensively with educators and community leaders, and connecting well with the interests of participants. For example, young parents decided to pursue jewellery as the best way to explore the Portrait, leading to recruitment of a jewellery artist to work with them. Ashmolean staff accepted the risk of letting participants write posts for the blog, which has made it more lively to read. It has enabled hospital patients to share their creative responses to their friends and family, and, over time, families of people with dementia to access creative work of their loved ones as a souvenir.

Being agile: Not fixing project plans before consulting groups, and letting learning from each project feed from into the next. This kept alive the interest amongst staff and partners, important with such a long programme. Saving a high-profile project until the end, celebrated with a major commission exhibited in the galleries, meant that it rose to a strong finish.

OUTCOMES AND LEARNING

ALL OF THESE FACTORS WERE ENABLED BY:

People: An exceptional dedicated project manager who was highly personable and committed to building relationships with the community groups. A caring and hospitable approach by all staff to partners and participants.

Resources: The suitcase of props and accompanying learning materials enabled the painting to reach a wide range of audiences by giving staff creative tools to engage them with the painting which they may not have had the time or resources to develop themselves. This was evident both on the tour, and within the Ashmolean's own education programmes for schools, families and adults.

Management support: Continued support for the programme from senior management, visibly demonstrated at celebration events.

Partnerships: The collaborative partnership approach across Oxford, and the Manet project manager also playing a community development role across this partnership. This has helped the Ashmolean team build strong networks and take a strategic overview of local audience development. A range of partnerships were strengthened with groups that will continue to use the Ashmolean and other Oxford museums. Young artists from the OYAP Trust were able to shadow the project, helping to diversify access to arts professions.

Display of the outcomes: Using space outside the Education studio to display creative outcomes to museum visitors, and in the final project, installing an artwork alongside the portrait in galleries. Also, the process and outcomes were well shared on the project blog via the Ashmolean website.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED FOR THE SECTOR

Stretch: Four years of continuous activity was a long time to keep up momentum. Future acquisition programmes at the Ashmolean will be broken up into bursts of activity, allowing time for recovery and reflection. Project management was challenging as time was stretched across this and other projects. Acquisition programmes can lose relevance over years as new priorities arise. Enough staff resource needs to be allocated to the project for the full length of its life. Project leads need to be in the loop, and know how to maximise project outcomes so that they can meet needs of the organisation as these change.

Be agile but with purpose: The iterative approach, continually reflecting to inform next stages, requires an investment of time for project staff to meet up regularly. It can make staff feel that the project is never ready to 'wrap and deliver'. The lesson here is to apply an iterative approach in limited ways, with well-defined timescales and a real focus on priority outcomes.

A good consistent name: Have clarity around the branding of the core programme and names of different project 'tendrils'.

Generic and adaptable resources: Providing each venue

with a 'suitcase' of resources to accompany the portrait on tour was efficient and generous, and the materials were very high quality. While these resources were adaptable to different audiences, they rely on the presence of the painting itself. By creating more generic resources which could be adapted easily by tour venues for different paintings this resource could have had a longer legacy.

Ensure purpose sits with core values: Rather than focus on the detail of the programme, continually question the purpose of any activity. The Ashmolean team tried to ensure that the projects sat well with the Museum's core values².

Respond to people: Community groups are not homogenous, although they may have needs and experiences in common. The community projects had excellent outcomes for participants because they were welcomed and supported as individuals, many of whom were vulnerable. All staff contributed to reducing barriers, to ensure that participants were comfortable visiting the Museum. Other projects took place outside the Museum where participants felt most comfortable, or were unable to travel. Young parents felt proud to

achieve Arts Awards, and safeguarding procedures were followed scrupulously for young people in vulnerable situations.

Timing: The portrait toured after the Education team had incorporated it into their school and family programmes, and it returned before the in-depth projects back at the Ashmolean. During the tour, activity at the Ashmolean was put on hold. Planning the tour later in the project would have allowed a more joined up approach, and ensured tour partners were fully involved in planning so they could 'bid' for times that suit relevant scheduled activities and events. Extra time would allow them to generate accompanying resources or activities that suit their needs.

² The Ashmolean's core values are:

To be in every way the world's greatest university museum of art and archaeology; Constantly questioning what we do and challenging ourselves to do better; Being intellectually ambitious and coherent; Ensuring the encounter of our audiences with our collections (both in the museum and online) is as inspiring, meaningful and rewarding as possible; Being a powerhouse of teaching and research; Making the most of our university and encouraging our university to make the most of us.

APPENDICES

We have produced full reports and in-depth case studies of each phase of the project, which together provide a complete picture of the activities. These are:

A – PHASE 1: ME MYSELF AND MANET REPORT

B – PHASE 2: BEYOND THE BALCONY

C – BREDTH OF ENGAGEMENT: EDUCATION AND TOUR ACTIVITY

D – CASE STUDIES

- THREE LIGHT TOUCH PROJECTS: YOUNG PARENTS, HOSPITAL SCHOOL & MEADOWBROOK
- TWO IN-DEPTH PROJECTS: HIGHFIELD & YDUK
- BEYOND THE BALCONY