



School: Bath School of Art

Researcher: Mike Tooby

Project Title: Journeys With 'The Waste Land'

UOA: 32 - Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory

300-Word Statement

Journeys with 'The Waste Land' is a long-term participatory project led by Mike Tooby, with major exhibitions and public programmes in 2018 for Turner Contemporary Margate and The Herbert Coventry and partner venues.

The research inverted the typical linear route from research to public engagement in which audience members are 'targeted' by engagement only after concepts and content are decided. Instead, they devised, advocated and controlled the approaches to content and engagement from the outset.

Key research questions were: how do participatory methodologies, usually confined to small-scale short-term projects, work in major exhibitions with long lead times and big quantitative targets? can participatory methodologies change the relationship between curating and the responsibilities for public engagement?

Over 100 volunteer participants were recruited by 'open call' to co-create exhibitions and events in response to T. S. Eliot's poem, (partly written in Margate and often associated with post-war Coventry). The exhibitions were large scale and included loans of major historic and contemporary works of art and new commissions. Scheduling, budgets, audience targets and evaluation, were themselves addressed through participative methodologies.

Initiated in 2012, from 2015 Tooby worked with Margate-based curator, Dr. Trish Scott. They co-ordinated the Participant Research Group, recruited in 2015 through 'open call'. From 2016 a second group led by Tooby developed a Coventry version.

The Research Groups involved over 100 individuals. People with no prior knowledge of Eliot and modernist poetry, or visual arts and curating, joined people with longstanding interests in them. Off-site programmes engaged further partners and participants. Some research activities developed their own identities as continuing projects.

The chief outcomes were: two major exhibitions demonstrating a tested new participative methodology; new insights on relationships between visual arts and poetry; a website dedicated to the project's process including participant testimony (<https://www.jwtwlresource.com>) and dissemination nationally and internationally.