

Public Programme as Practice

Building Collaborative Public Programmes in a University Museum

University
Museums: Today,
Tomorrow, Together

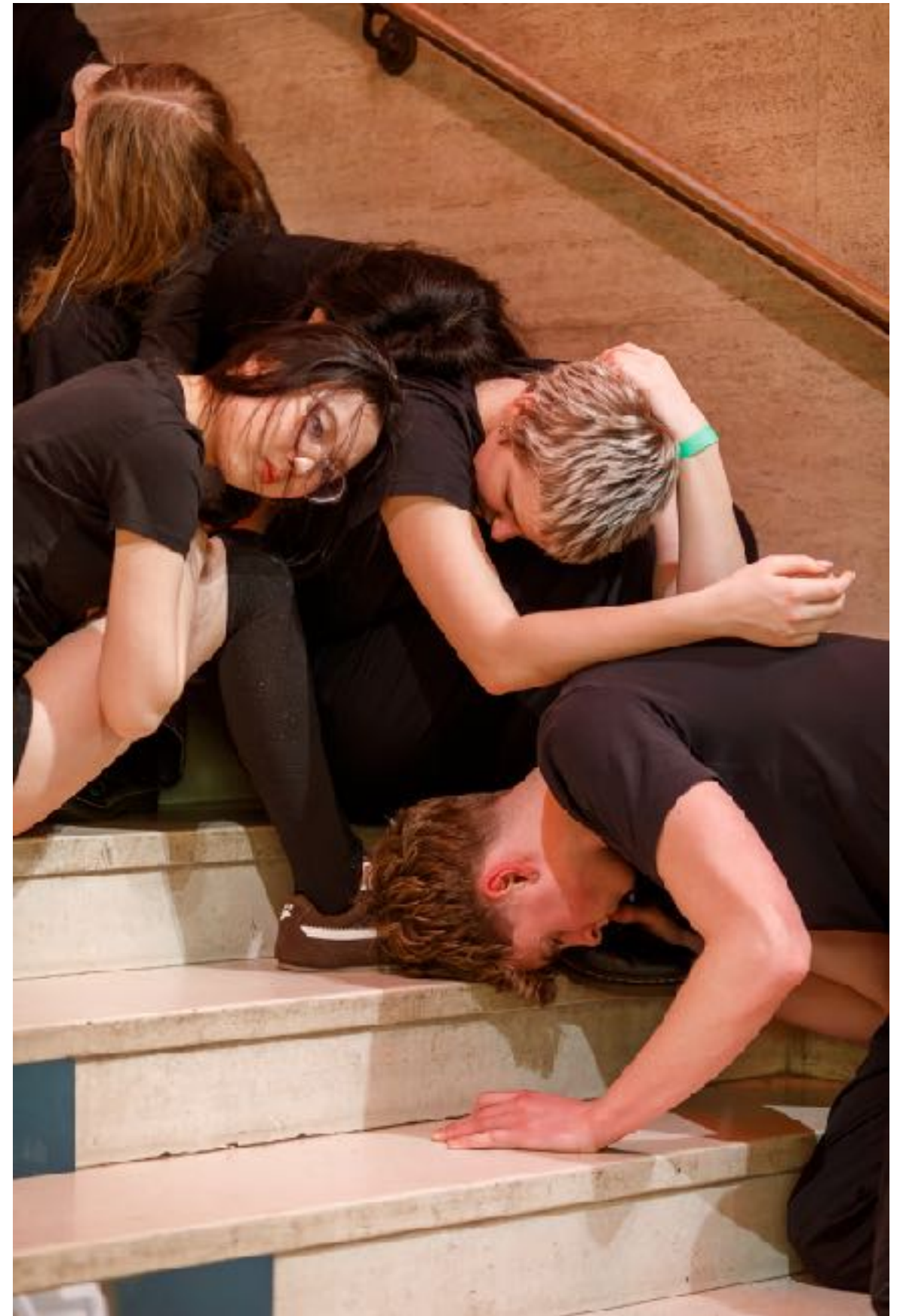
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Why this Matters Now?

Changing conditions for university museums

- Civic engagement agendas are expanding
- Pressure to evidence “value”
- Rising expectations around participation & inclusion
- Museums positioned between university + public life
- Demand for collaboration across disciplines and communities



The transition from events to infrastructure

From:

- Events
- Outputs
- Audiences
- Delivery

To:

- Encounters
- Relationships
- Participation
- Infrastructure



What Does Relational Infrastructure Look Like?

- Not a single audience
- Not a single partnership
- Not a single outcome

Instead:

Research ↔ Collections ↔ Curators
↔ Conservators ↔ Students ↔
Artists ↔ Communities ↔ Visitors ↔
Civic Partners



Relational Infrastructure in Practice

Football, Heritage and Youth Voice

Partners

- Fitzwilliam Museum
- Romsey Mill
- Cambridge United FC
- Artist Antonio Roberts

Process

- Weekly workshops with young people
- Inspired by Joy Labrinjo's *An Eighteenth-Century Family*
- Exploring identity, belonging and local histories
- Co-designing a football kit for Cambridge United

Outcome

- First team match kit
- Black History Month campaign
- Youth creativity made publicly visible



Case Study 1: Museum Lates

Museum Lates as Civic Laboratory

- 200–700+ visitors per event
- Students as co-creators (CSVPA partnership)
- Live performance, installation, workshops
- Cross-disciplinary programming with artists + researchers
- Transformation of gallery space into participatory site



Case Study 2: Creative Studio

The Creative Studio as Civic Infrastructure

- Community hires
- Homelessness charity partnerships
- SEND youth arts programme
- Young parents wellbeing workshops
- 65+ Creative Connections programme
- Artist residencies and co-production



Case Study 3: Research & Knowledge Exchange

Public programmes as knowledge infrastructure

- Critical Co-Labs (curators + public dialogue)
- Piloting platforms for research
- Artist–researcher collaborations
- Collections activated through interdisciplinary dialogue
- From interpretation → co-production of knowledge



Dig Where You Stand & Decolonise the Archive | Museum Late: Future Legacies (2025)



What This Produces...

Relational outcomes (not outputs)

- Sustained partnerships across sectors
- New forms of audience participation
- Shared authorship with communities and students
- Stronger civic visibility for the university
- Expanded meanings of collections
- Repeatable conditions for collaboration



Designing Togetherness

Public Programmes as Infrastructure

- University museums as civic meeting points
- Infrastructure for encounter, not just display
- Relationships as method, not outcome
- Public programmes as institutional form-making





Thank you!