

NNNi
NATIONAL MUSEUMS NI

ANNUAL
2019/20
REVIEW

ANNUAL REVIEW

2019/20



National Museums NI is made up of four museums and serves as a custodian for 1.4 million objects in the national collection. Our founding legislation outlines our responsibilities, with particular reference to the heritage of Northern Ireland.

- To care for, preserve and add to the collections
- To ensure that the collections are available to the public through exhibitions, effective interpretation and availability for research and study
- To promote the awareness, appreciation and understanding of:
 - Art, history and science
 - The way of life and traditions of people
 - The migration and settlement of people

The purpose of this review is to reflect on how National Museums NI has met these responsibilities in the financial year ending 31st March 2020.

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A NOTE FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

As Chairman of the Board of Trustees of National Museums NI I am delighted to be able to present to you the Annual Review 2019/20. I do so at a moment when we are living through exceptional times and the future is less certain than it has ever been before.

Despite that I believe there has never been a more important role for museums to play within our society. Evidence demonstrates that engaging with the collections and our programmes supports improvements in health and wellbeing, builds skills and confidence and stimulates learning and understanding.

As custodians of the objects that tell the story of our people and our place we are uniquely placed to help build stronger connections to our shared heritage and pose the questions that help us to make sense of the world around us.

Looking back on 2019/20 this Annual Review highlights that as an organisation we have firmly established strong foundations from which to achieve this and I look forward with confidence to the year ahead.

Miceal McCoy
Chairman of the Board of Trustees



DIRECTOR'S WELCOME

In many parts of the culture and heritage sector, 2019/20 will be remembered as a deeply challenging year. Managing and responding to unprecedented challenges – fuelled first by Brexit and then the COVID-19 pandemic – requires resilience, agility and diligence.

In this period of toil and turbulence, I am heartened by the opportunity that the Annual Review provides to pause and reflect. This year has undoubtedly presented challenges but, more importantly, it has seen significant progress across all parts of the organisation.

I reflect on the journey we embarked on when I first joined the organisation in 2016. It is a marathon, not a sprint. It has not been a case of adapting our strategy and continuing as we were. Rather, it has been a case of plotting a new course and resetting how people perceive and engage with our museums. In reaching toward our ambitions, we acknowledge the depth of the change process. We are moving from a position of imbalance and passivity to one where our museums play a genuinely valued and meaningful role in the lives of all people and every community in Northern Ireland. We also recognise that more changes need to take place to ensure our continued relevance and sustainability. While the record-breaking success of 2018/19 is a welcome accolade, we are under no illusion that our journey of transformation is complete.

I recall Culture Lab; Don't Believe the Stereotype, part of our Making the Future programme, as one of the highlights of the year. Not because of what the exhibition achieved, but of what it represents. A challenging, brave and contemporary museum voice that came together through teamwork, innovation and creativity. Indeed, Making the Future is an appropriate name for this endeavour. It represents the whole year at National Museums NI. We had fewer large-scale exhibitions to deliver in 2019/20, so we pressed the button on building the structures and plans that will sustain our journey into the future. This includes completing a significant restructuring of the organisation to strengthen skills and capacity in key positions. It includes major developments in our ability to care for, manage and research the national collection with significant progress being made in our storage redevelopment projects as well as the announcement of strategic partnerships with Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University.

Crucially, it also includes progress on the masterplan, which articulates our vision and roadmap for change at each museum. The Ulster Folk Museum was shortlisted to proceed to the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Heritage Horizon Awards in February, out of 146 initial expressions of interest. This is the finest endorsement that our plans are inspiring, compelling and transformational.

Looking forward to 2020/21, we know it will be extremely challenging as we chart our way out of the current pandemic and welcome audiences back into our museums. However, I am convinced that the structures we have put in place will propel National Museums NI toward creating the best possible museum service of the future.

Kathryn Thomson
Chief Executive





National Museums NI's role is to work alongside the public to explore and share compelling stories through real objects and collections to allow all of us to gain new knowledge and understanding.

We are passionate about playing a vital role at the heart of our society. We do this by making a difference to the lives of many individuals and contributing to the development of a vibrant society. The collections are at the centre of everything we do. We are committed to working in partnership with people, local communities and organisations that share our aspirations, ensuring the widest possible audience has access to the national collection.

We operate for the public and national benefit, for future generations, and for all visitors to Northern Ireland. We facilitate a better understanding of our collective heritage and foster dialogue, curiosity and self-reflection.

OUR ROLE & PURPOSE

**WE ARE PASSIONATE
ABOUT PLAYING A VITAL
ROLE AT THE HEART OF
OUR SOCIETY.**

OUR VISION



**CELEBRATE WHO WE ARE,
TELLING THE STORIES OF OUR PAST,
CHALLENGING OUR PRESENT AND
SHAPING OUR FUTURE.**

OUR VALUES

Striving for excellence

Being the best we can be in everything we do; delivering excellent customer service internally and externally; and sharing our expertise.

Being authentic

Being true to our collections; having integrity in everything we do; and creating unique experiences.

Working together

Promoting teamwork; building mutually beneficial partnerships; and being receptive to others and their ideas.

Showing respect

Valuing everyone; supporting diversity; and respecting the collections.

Being courageous

Being ambitious in programming; embracing change; being brave and creative in the stories we tell; and empowering our people.

OUR MISSION

- Develop, manage and care for our collections to benefit current and future generations.
- Make our collections accessible to the widest possible audiences.
- Play a leading role in the economic and social wellbeing and future of this place.
- Build an organisation where people feel valued.



OUR ECONOMIC & SOCIAL IMPACT

Museums play an important role in modern societies. We strive to increase access for everyone, play a meaningful role in our communities and generate a positive social impact. As a charity and non-profit organisation, we rely on strong economic performance to fund our activities.

VISITORS

Visitors are our lifeblood. They keep us relevant and their support generates crucial funding through admissions, donations, retail purchases and catering orders.

We welcomed 685,935 visitors this year, 15% behind our target. This shortfall is consistent with sectoral trends across the UK and Ireland. Bad weather, low consumer confidence, Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic have all taken their toll. On a positive note, the proportion of new visitors rose to 36% against a target of 32%. Our mission to create new connections with more people is showing progress.

IN 2019/20

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Our sites are located in areas that are strategically important to Northern Ireland's economic development and tourism. Attracting almost 430,000 visitors this year, the Ulster Museum is the third most visited attraction in Northern Ireland and provides a free, must-see cultural experience for locals and tourists alike.

Fermanagh and Omagh District attracts over 400,000 visits and receives more than one million overnight stays each year. These visitors spent £72.89 million in 2019/20.

Ulster American Folk Park attracts over 100,000 of these visitors each year, almost half of whom come from outside Northern Ireland. Ninety-nine percent of the businesses in this district are SMEs, mostly self-employed people with fewer than nine employees. National Museums NI uses these SMEs whenever possible, in order to support the local economy.

The Ulster Folk Museum and Ulster Transport Museum attracted almost 150,000 visitors to the Ards and North Down District this year. This area attracts over 250,000 visits and more than a million overnight stays each year, generating £45 million for the local economy.

National Museums NI provides employment to a significant number of SMEs and self-employed people through our commercial activities and the construction which is carried out at these sites. We secured capital investment of over £4 million through our funders, allowing us to carry out a range of estate improvements and acquire site equipment and specimens – vital for growing and enhancing our collections.

SOCIAL IMPACT

Our economic performance is driving growth in our social programmes.

- We worked with 44,892 participants through our formal and schools learning programmes.
- We worked with 19,972 people through our participatory programmes focused on social inclusion, active ageing, community cohesion and youth engagement.
- The participation of audiences from lower socioeconomic groups remained steady at 21%. We are committed to improving this figure over the coming years. We are encouraged by the fact that it remained steady despite the absence of "mass appeal" exhibitions such as *Dippy on Tour* in 2018/19.



MUSEUM MASTERPLANNING

TRANSFORMING THE ULSTER FOLK MUSEUM: A PEOPLE'S PROJECT

The last few years have seen measured progress for National Museums NI. However, we know that transformational change needs to be embedded in our long-term plans to truly take root. We took significant steps in the masterplanning process at each of our museums this year. That's particularly true of the plan for Ulster Folk Museum, which has already led to positive results.

Ulster Folk Museum has been one of Europe's finest open-air museums since it opened in 1964. It expresses the symbiosis between Ulster's people and its landscapes. It is a living museum that evokes Ulster's heritage through memories, stories and connections.

Research shows that many visitors engage with Ulster Folk Museum on a nostalgic level, despite its pedigree and potential for deeper engagement. They enjoy the evocation of a simpler and gentler time, but the lack of context and orientation limits their engagement with the values that underpin the experience. It is commonplace to hear expressions of warmth towards the museum without any genuine intention to visit again. This audience pattern, coupled with an increase in other leisure options, has led to a slow decline in participation rates over the past decade.

Yet, we are entering a time of opportunity for Ulster Folk Museum. The founding vision for the museum was to create a place where people could explore Ulster's shared heritage. This was difficult during the Troubles. Now, however, communities are rediscovering life before and beyond that conflict. This is the right time for Ulster Folk Museum to emerge as a unique space that reflects what is shared and distinctive about Ulster. In doing so, it will play a significant role in exploring identity and cultural expression in society.

Ulster Folk Museum's transformation offers an opportunity to redefine the word "folk" – increasing its relevance for today. We can help it shed its nostalgic connotations and acquire a more dynamic meaning by putting stories, participation and partnerships at the heart of our activities.

This shift in thinking among National Museums NI's internal teams has already produced results. Our approach to programming has shifted from a tried-and-tested event model to an exploration of key interpretive themes based on the essence of each museum. Food, farming, and arts and crafts have served to shape our events. This change in emphasis has allowed new ideas to take root and old ones to be revived.

A NEW WAY OF THINKING



The language and literature theme has been particularly encouraging. It has yielded a series of new programming events under the direction of stakeholders who represent the Irish and Ulster Scot languages. Events such as Teach Airneál and Burns Night have celebrated Ulster's rich linguistic heritage. The positive feedback from partners and stakeholders has shown that we are on the right path.

The redevelopment of McAlinden's Hardware Store in the town area of Ulster Folk Museum is another indicator of our progress. Like all museums, we must explore new ways to generate income to achieve greater financial sustainability. The challenge – in a place like Ulster Folk Museum, where authenticity is so important – is to do so in a way that does not disrupt the “fourth wall”.



We redeveloped McAlinden's as a fully functioning store, selling original home cleaning remedies such as stain-removing laundry soap. The project demonstrates that income generation, visitor experience and curatorial integrity can work in harmony.

UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF ULSTER FOLK MUSEUM

Despite the progress that National Museums NI's dedicated teams have achieved, unlocking the full potential of Ulster Folk Museum requires significant investment. That is why the completion of the masterplan this year is such a positive step forward.

The museum is an unfinished project. It was conceived as a people's museum, infused with a spirit of community ownership. The masterplan identifies a five to 50 year programme to unlock the wider natural environment and heritage potential of the site, and create new opportunities for generations to come.

We submitted a development proposal to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for a £12.5 million investment. It was one of 12 projects, of an initial 146, to make it through to the application stage. The project is based on phase 1 of the masterplan and focuses on completion of the town area. It will create new arrival and entry points, and a new focus on industrial heritage supported by facilities for volunteers, schools, community groups and staff.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund's endorsement of this project is a strong indicator that our transformation is progressing as planned.



MAKING THE FUTURE

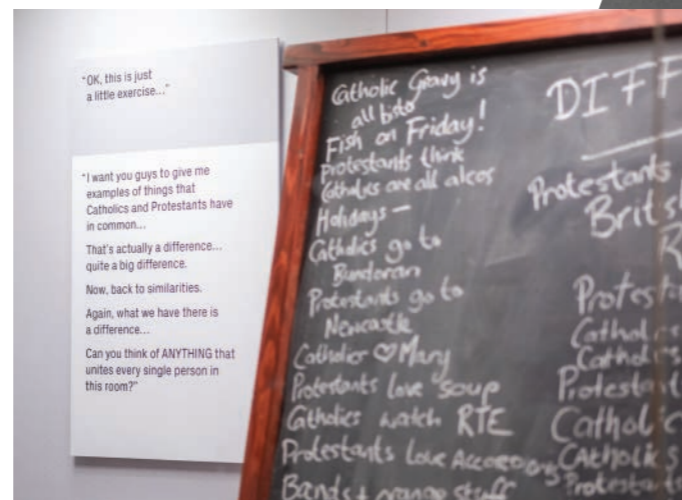
In last year's Annual Review, we marked the newly reinvigorated *The Troubles and Beyond* gallery at Ulster Museum. This year, it has continued to provide impact, relevance and engagement with our audiences. "Beyond" is the operative word in the gallery's title. We have continued to seek out projects and opportunities that not only examine the past, but challenge the present and shape the future. Most of this work has been channelled through the appropriately named *Making the Future* project.

Making the Future is a three-year project funded by Peace IV and led by a consortium of leading cultural organisations including National Museums NI, the Nerve Centre, PRONI and the Linen Hall Library. It engages people from across Northern Ireland and the border counties to take part in innovative programmes that encourage them to make their voices heard, to tell stories about their lives, and to propose ideas for a shared future.

National Museums NI's contribution was launched in January 2019 with the Troubles Art project. It included a touring exhibition of a range of responses to the Troubles by artists from Northern Ireland and beyond. It travelled to Derry-Londonderry, Fermanagh, Armagh, Lisburn and Monaghan throughout 2019/20. Its pieces were carefully curated to evoke a variety of experiences and emotions and to reflect on the causes, impact and complexity of the Troubles.

BEYOND THE TROUBLES

The second strand of the project – named *Culture Lab* in the funding application – offered National Museums NI an opportunity to try something different. It was billed as a peek inside our cultural state-of-play and a platform to ask questions about cultural identity in Northern Ireland. That is no easy feat in a society that is only recently at peace and has not achieved reconciliation between its two main communities.



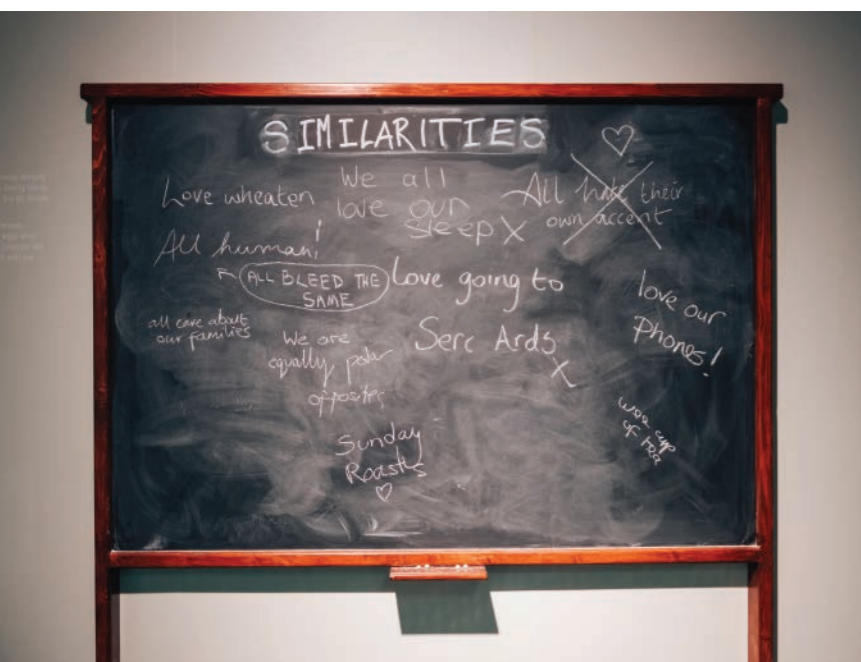
"SO WELL THOUGHT THROUGH. USING THE 'MAINSTREAM' TO REFLECT AND CREATE DIALOGUE ON SUCH A SENSITIVE AND NECESSARY TOPIC." TWITTER USER

Achieving impact through *Culture Lab* was a corporate priority throughout 2019/20. The project had two goals – to demonstrate our change mantra of "thinking differently, acting differently, and talking differently" and to prove Ulster Museum's credentials as a safe and trusted space to discuss difficult issues. It would help us to maximise our impact and reach and to play a meaningful role in dealing with living and contested history.



The final exhibition – *Culture Lab: Don't Believe the Stereotype* – achieved just that. It was both provocative and playful, using a replica of the famous "differences" blackboard from *Derry Girls* to set the tone and frame the narrative. The blackboard is accompanied by an interactive quiz called the "Religious Stereotype Calculator". This tongue-in-cheek game tests visitors' preconceptions and challenges traditional stereotypes. National Museums NI's collections – sitting alongside the *Derry Girls* anchor points – take on more relevance than ever. They offer an interpretation of how identities are shaped on the island of Ireland. Highlights include:

- A Gaelic League bannerette from Hannahstown
- Sir Edward Carson's court uniform from his time as Solicitor General of Great Britain and Ireland
- A t-shirt by Dior designer Maria Grazia Chiuri that reads "We should all be Feminists"
- A post from the Fridays for Future climate strike demonstrations that reads "Our Planet, Our Rights"
- A map of Gaelic East Belfast from Turas, an Irish language project led by the East Belfast Mission.



FINALLY MADE IT TO @MAKINGFUTUREHQ #CULTURELAB @ULSTERMUSEUM - HUGE KUDOS TO THE TEAM... IT'S GREAT. AND A LITTLE EMOTIONAL ACTUALLY. I FELT, FOR THE FIRST TIME MAYBE, THAT MY CULTURE AND IDENTITY WAS REFLECTED BACK AT ME IN A MUSEUM EXHIBITION. TWITTER USER

The exhibition closes the loop in the present. Visitors get the opportunity to interact with the stories of people from across Northern Ireland and the border counties. These stories were collected from participants in the *Making the Future* engagement programme, and have been brought to life through animations by BAFTA-nominated artist John McCloskey.

Culture Lab created waves when it opened on 21st February and enjoyed local, national and international media coverage. It went viral on social media and there were queues in the gallery to take part in the interactive quiz. Visitors' feedback, and their interaction with the exhibition, vindicate National Museums NI's audience engagement approach – grounded in the collections, styled to suit audiences and attuned to contemporary culture.

The exhibition is now temporarily closed, along with the rest of the Ulster Museum, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, an immersive digital version of the exhibition has taken its place, and was enjoyed by 25,000 people in its first week. There's no keeping good content down.



Making the Future is a project supported by the European Union's PEACE IV Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS

This year was a return to normality following the extraordinary convergence of *Dippy on Tour*, *Tim Peake's Spacecraft*, *Leonardo da Vinci: A Life in Drawing*, and *Modigliani's Female Nude, 1916*, in the 2018/19 schedule. What 2019/20 lacked in scale it made up for in punch. Quality curation and contemporary design have fast become the trademarks of National Museums NI's new way of working.



THE ART OF SELLING SONGS

The Art of Selling Songs drew on the V&A's long-standing collection of music graphics to explore how graphic design wraps around music and considers the past, present and future of the artform. A century of trends in visual culture, graphic design and consumerism are framed in the world of popular music marketing. Among the artwork and objects were posters from the late 1800s, advertising French and British live "smoking concerts", rare record sleeves for artists such as Louis Armstrong and Blue Mitchell, and the iconic sleeve designed by Peter Blake and

Jann Haworth for the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

Ulster Museum's bespoke addition to the exhibition was "The Overtones" section, which was specially curated to mark the role that music has played in Irish culture and identity. This selection of images, artworks and objects stretched from Irish traditional music to the international superstardom of Ash and Snow Patrol. It demonstrated the range and skill of artists and designers who translated music into striking imagery.





CHANGING VIEWS

For centuries, artists provided a window on the world that was only available to a few. Their work brought back views of the familiar and the unknown through their eyes. Many of these “living pictures” inspired viewers to become visitors and turned places that artists depicted into the travel destinations of the modern era. *Changing Views*, an exhibition drawn from our own collections, considered the various forms that art has taken. It included works from the first widely read encyclopaedia, the birth of Romanticism, the Picturesque movement, and sites along the route of the Grand Tour.



DUTCH MASTERPIECES FROM THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND

Masterpieces of Dutch Landscape brought together four outstanding Dutch landscapes from the National Gallery of Ireland with related work from the Ulster Museum. The 17th century was the “Golden Age” of Dutch landscape painting. Dutch painters found a particular beauty in the low horizons, unremarkable vegetation and luminous skies of their landscape. Their sensitive depictions of daily life, ordinary people and the changing light through the day and the seasons has rarely been surpassed. This exhibition offered the rare chance to reunite these masterpieces of Dutch landscape painting and to celebrate the connection between the Alfred Beit collection, the National Gallery of Ireland and Ulster Museum.

GAILEARAI NAISIÚNTA
ÉIREANN

NATIONAL GALLERY
IRELAND

Image: NGL.4531, Jacob van Ruisdael, *The Castle of Bentheim*, Oil on canvas, 110.5 x 144 cm. Photo © National Gallery of Ireland

GAME OF THRONES® TAPESTRY

The Game of Thrones® Tapestry is an epic feat of weaving that depicts scenes from the most popular television series of all time. It was first displayed in 2017, but was relocated to a new gallery in the Ulster Museum to create room for the fateful events of the eighth and final season.

It is designed by hand, but weaved on a state-of-the-art machine and hand-finished in Northern Ireland. The linen it is stitched on comes from Ferguson’s Irish Linen, one of the last surviving linen mills in Northern Ireland.

The tapestry travelled to Bayeux in September to be exhibited next to the Bayeux Tapestry. This 70-metre, 11th century embroidered tapestry depicts the conquest of England by William Duke of Normandy in 1066.

The Game of Thrones® Tapestry continues to be a major draw for local and international visitors. We are proud to take the National Museums NI brand to a global stage, as we work with Tourism Ireland to promote Northern Ireland as a must-see cultural destination.

IRISH ART AFTER 1870

Irish art is at the heart of the Ulster Museum collections. This display featured some of our best-loved paintings such as Séan Keating's iconic *Slán Leat, a Athair (Goodbye Father)* and the intimacy of Paul Henry's miniatures.

LEFT, RIGHT AND CENTRE

This exhibition celebrated National Museums NI's acquisition of *Left, Right and Centre* (2017) a major new video work by Cornelia Parker, one of the most acclaimed artists of her generation. It explored artists who, like Parker, have set out to break the framework of traditional artistic representation. It surveyed three periods – early 20th century art, the post-war period to 1970, and the 1970s down to the present.

**LEFT, RIGHT AND CENTRE 2017,
A MAJOR NEW VIDEO WORK BY
CORNELIA PARKER, ONE OF THE
MOST CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED
ARTISTS OF HER GENERATION.**

PURPOSE & PORTRAYAL

Maps have a unique ability to shape how we see the world. This exhibition of Irish maps, atlases, surveys and charts examined how they shaped and reflected the way our forebears thought about society, economics, politics and culture. It showed that the shape of Ireland – and what the word “Ireland” meant – changed over the centuries. It included maps by two of the 16th century's greatest map-makers. Abraham Ortelius and Gerard Mercator.

Ortelius produced the world's first published atlas in 1573, while Gerard Mercator's innovative projection method produced the world map that is most familiar to us today.





URSULA BURKE: A FALSE DAWN

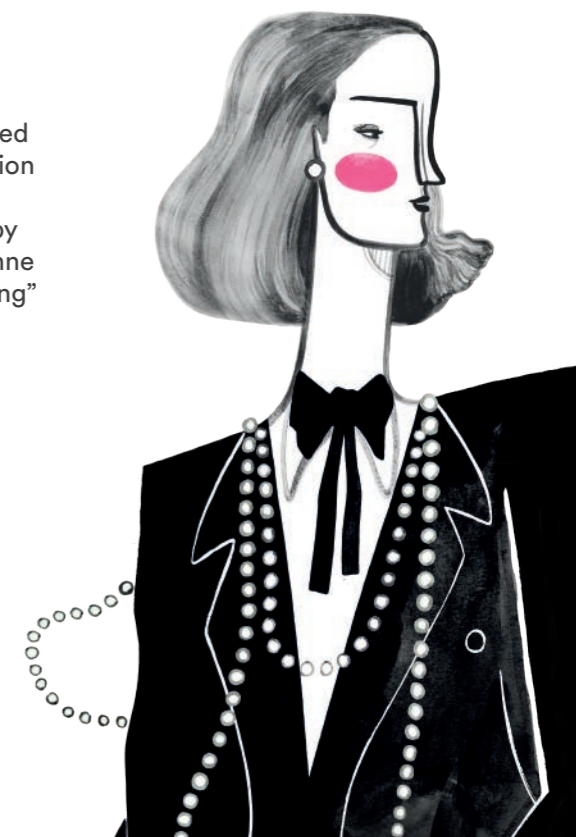
Irish visual artist Ursula Burke works in porcelain sculpture, embroidery and drawing. *A False Dawn* is the culmination of Ursula's recent work. Much of her art practice deals with issues of representation and identity, exploring abuses of power in both the social and political sphere. Ursula worked for many years in Belfast and often takes post-conflict Northern Ireland as a critical point of departure to approach international concerns. Contemporary and impactful, this exhibition showcased beautiful artworks that act as a bridge between the classical ideal and the reality of today's world.

VICE / VERSA



Men and women continue to redefine gender boundaries – not only in fashion but in day-to-day life. *Vice / Versa* – another stunning exhibition that is breathing new life into our unique fashion collection – explored the influence of menswear on women's fashion and vice versa. Thoughtful and provocative, it featured beautiful pieces of historic men's fashion that challenge modern ideas about what it means to “dress like a man”.

These pieces were juxtaposed with designer women's fashion that drew inspiration from male fashion such as work by Alexander McQueen, Vivienne Westwood and a “Le Smoking” dress made by Yves Saint Laurent for his mother.





UNLOCKING OUR COLLECTIONS

Caring for, developing and managing the national collection on behalf of the public are vital, core activities for National Museums NI. This year has proven to be another eventful and progressive year for these activities, as we focus on unlocking the potential of our rich collections for our audiences; ensuring relevance and prioritising access and engagement.

COLLECTIONS DEVELOPMENT

This year was the final year of the transformational 'Collecting the Troubles and Beyond' project, generously supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Since 2016 we have grown our collections of History and Art relating to this key period in our recent past and are now home to the most comprehensive Troubles collection in the world.

This collection has been used to inform research, engagement, audience development and, significantly, the Ulster Museum's new 'The Troubles and Beyond' gallery, which opened to commendation in 2018. There has been no loss of momentum in this final year, with the exceptional acquisitions including the photographic *Peacelines* series by Frankie Quinn, which was exhibited to mark the 50th anniversary of these structures in 2019, and *Billy's Museum*,

a video artwork by Amanda Dunsmore which provides emotive and nuanced context to the NI Prison Service Collection, also acquired as part of this project.

The importance of collecting informed by and in partnership with communities was illustrated this year with the acquisition of a wood-burning stove from Twadell and Woodvale Residents Association, used by protesters at the Twadell Avenue camp.

The project has improved our practice and widened our horizons for collecting as well as our networks. It is therefore not the end of this work, just the end of the first phase, and we are already researching and developing the next phase.



Images © Frankie Quinn (frankiequinn.com)

A hugely significant and important gift to the collection arrived just in time for Christmas, in the form of six etchings by Rembrandt. Gifted through the Acceptance in Lieu scheme, these were the first works by the Old Master to enter a public collection in Northern Ireland. Rembrandt's originality and deeply-felt humanity can be startling even today. His ability to connect directly with the viewer is unquestioned, and his influence on contemporary and later artists is profound. Many works in our collection can be linked back to this small group of etchings, and we look forward to sharing them with current and future generations. Another significant acquisition was a collection of five sculptures and 26 works on paper by Elisabeth Frink (1930-1993), provided to National Museums NI in accordance with the wishes of the artist's late son, Lin Jammet. A selection of these works was celebrated in the exhibition *Altered States: Elisabeth Frink and Post-War Art from the Ulster Museum Collection*.

AS ALWAYS, WE ARE THANKFUL FOR THE GENEROSITY OF THE MANY DONORS WHO SUPPORT OUR WORK AND HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COLLECTIONS THIS YEAR.

The donations of transport and costume material, rich with human interest, are particularly notable. For transport these include keys from the Harland & Wolff shipyard, for use on the cabins of the SS *Asturias*, and a Viking Clubman bicycle used by a local cyclist for an epic round the world adventure in 1981. For costume we have received a stunningly beautiful and amazingly well-preserved court presentation dress from 1912, and a collection of 1960s and 1970s outfits by the fashion label Biba.

Funding from the Department of Communities has enabled us to make a number of important purchases. The artwork series, *Lost Monsters* by Julian Friers, consists of twenty depictions of animals that once inhabited Ireland but are now extinct. They were originally created for the successful *Dippy on Tour* exhibition in 2018 and represent an important legacy of that exhibition that we hope to tour to both local and national museums. Another acquisition, *Blue Sky Thinking* (2019) by Patrick Goddard, also crosses the disciplines of Art and Natural Science. Funded by the Department for Communities and the Art Fund, this work is comprised of one hundred and eighty lead sculptures, each depicting the form of a dead ring-necked parakeet. As commentary on climate change and the fragility of the environment, we hope it will help to open up debate and discussion about these pressing contemporary issues, and the role of museums and the arts in relation to them. A research partnership with Dr Claudia Kinmonth has helped to guide strategic collecting for the Ulster Folk Museum this year, as we have purchased new furnishings and domestic life

material to enhance the authentic presentation of a number of the domestic buildings on site.

Four disposals by destruction were authorised this year on health and safety grounds – a 1972 VW Beetle saloon, a 1972 Triumph Dolomite, a 1940s AEC Belfast trolleybus and a collection of ship signalling flags. A more creative proposal was possible with three clinker-built boats, which were authorised for disposal so that the parts can be utilised in replicas. These replicas will support interpretation and audience development. Such positive, creative thinking is also being applied to other cars that are scheduled for disposal, and we are in discussion with a number of organisations about them being transferred into their ownership for the purposes of education, engagement and rehabilitation.

COLLECTIONS RESEARCH



In April, National Museums NI announced the formation of a new strategic partnership with both Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University to enhance cross-institutional collaboration. The partnerships will see National Museums NI collaborate with departments across a broad-spectrum of research areas at Queen's and at Ulster University's Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

in a bid to advance cultural research, maximise public engagement and share expertise. At their core, the new agreements outline how the universities will work together with National Museums NI, with emphasis on collaboration in future research projects and improving access to facilities and expertise between organisations for faculty members, students and staff.



One of the most significant collaborative projects this year was the research surrounding Takabuti, the Egyptian mummy. The project has been progressed in collaboration with the University of Manchester and Queen's University, Belfast, with support from Kingsbridge Private Hospital and funding from the Friends of the Ulster Museum. The tests and examination of Takabuti were carried out over a period of months by the team using the latest scanning technologies, leading to new insights into Egyptian high society in the 25th dynasty. She was the focus of a study day at the KNH Centre for Biomedical Egyptology at The University of Manchester in January 2020, where all research to date was discussed.

This was followed on 27th January (the 185th anniversary of her unwrapping in Belfast) by a press event revealing new findings about her life and death, including that she suffered a violent death as the result of a knife attack. There was widespread interest from global media in these findings, which are detailed in new gallery interpretation. A book is currently being produced by the project team and supported by the Engaged Research Fund, Queen's University Belfast, and the KNH Centre for Biomedical Egyptology, The University of Manchester. The book will bring together all of the research findings to date on Takabuti.

We celebrated our new strategic partnership with Queen's University Belfast by confirming three members of National Museums NI staff as Visiting Fellows. Drs Mike Simms, Karen Logan and David Tosh all began visiting fellowships at the start of 2020. We are also proud to announce funding for a Doctorate that will look into creating a built heritage asset management system, using the buildings at the Ulster Folk Museum as a pilot. This project is being led by Dr Will Megarry of the School of Natural and Built Environment and is being funded through Queen's University, Belfast's Collaborative Studentship Scheme. We hope it will be the first of many such collaborations.

National Museums NI has supported research internally via its 'Foundations for the Future' programme. Five curators received funding to enable research activity associated with the collections. These grants have funded research visits to St Fagans Museum of National History and the Museum of Cardiff, attendance at a millinery collections workshop at the Museum of London, and the production of bird boxes by Holywood Men's Shed, to enable monitoring of the breeding success of birds at the Ulster Folk Museum.

National Museums NI staff published 18 articles in journals during the year and presented at 13 conferences or workshops. In addition, eight papers on exhibitions or objects in the collection were published as was one book that highlighted works by the artist Mary Delaney. We were pleased to take a leading role in the 'From Northern Ireland to Algeria: Dealing

with Contested Memories Through Education' symposium at the Ulster Museum, and we continue to contribute to international research and discourse on this theory of agonism in museums, with specific reference to dealing with the legacy of the past.

This year over 120 independent and museum or university-based researchers made enquiries about National Museum NI's collections. Of those, 48 followed their initial enquiries by directly using the collections for their research. University research dominated, representing 85% of research agreements made in 2019/20. Our most common university collaborators came from the UK and Ireland.



COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT AND CARE

The care and management of our national collection lies at the core of what we do. We have made major progress on a number of storage projects this year, which will transform access to important parts of the collection – particularly our transport and industry collections. Our new transport store will bring our remarkable and diverse transport collection under one roof for the first time. This impressive new facility will enable a degree of public access that has never been possible before. We have made strides in the fit out of the new store and preparing the collection for the move to its new home. Unfortunately, this progress was interrupted by the COVID-19 lockdown. However, Collections Services is looking forward to completing this project in the coming year.

This year also saw the relocation of the internationally significant Harland & Wolff ship plan collection from off-site storage to a new facility on the Cultra site. This will allow greater public access to this unique asset. We look forward to adding the finishing touches to this project over the next year.



Collection Services collaborated with a team from Queens University Belfast to perform a complete 3D digital scan documentation programme for the *Result* ship masts, in preparation for their move to a new store. The *Result* – a three-mast schooner built in 1893 – is the last remaining ship built in Carrickfergus. It has outlived the hundreds of schooners and other small sailing craft that were once of such importance to coastal communities. The cutting-edge scanning process gives us a detailed 3D map of the masts' structure and dimensions, and raises our documentation standards for this iconic ship.

Since August 2018, National Museums NI has been participating in *Unlocking Our Sound Heritage*, a UK-wide project that will help to save the nation's sound collections and make them available to everyone. The sound archive in the National Museums NI collection is a remarkable resource.



It contains recordings of transport, industry, crafts, folklore, language, traditional music and song. We made great progress on this project in 2019-20, digitising 2,351 items. Project highlights from the last year include:

- utilising recordings from our own sound archive for social benefit, working with Shankill Women's Group and the Big Friendly Group at Newtownards
- bringing our sound recordings to public audiences at wider events, including the 'Night at the Museum' and 'The Dark Side of Ballycultra' event in the Ulster Folk Museum at Halloween
- presenting a paper at the British & Irish Sound Archives (BISA) annual conference at Dublin in November 2019
- going out on the road to take in collections from project partners, including the Glens of Antrim Historical Society and Larne Museum
- having 18 weekly volunteers assist on the project, by cataloguing, sensitivity-checking, repairing tapes and promotion on social media.



CREATING NEW CONNECTIONS

National Museums NI's mission is to make the collections we hold accessible to the widest possible audience. While we strive for this across all of our museum activities, we know that there are many audience groups who believe that museums are not for them. We cherish the opportunity to run projects that actively reach out to audiences and prove that this is not the case.

LIVE WELL: ENGAGING WITH OLDER PEOPLE

National Museums NI's commitment to growing participation and engagement in disadvantaged communities is central to the Department for Communities' work in enabling and promoting social inclusion and community cohesion. Social isolation and loneliness are common among older people and can have a detrimental effect on their health and wellbeing.



“Live Well is especially good if you are living on your own and for widowed pensioners – most people find it hard to go out on their own but a group like this gives you confidence. It is that combination of friendship and activities - you don't feel left out in the group and we all help each other out.” Participant

The Live Well programme is a community outreach scheme, designed primarily for older people. It represents a key start of our work in supporting active ageing. We offer social, cultural and intellectual engagement to disadvantaged older people. The programme supports the wellbeing of older people at risk from social exclusion, suffering with physical and learning disabilities, facing mental health issues, living in rural isolation and areas of urban deprivation. We have delivered almost 600 sessions with older people across Northern Ireland to encourage the development of new skills and social connections through museum-based learning activities.

The Live Well project is now at the end of its four-year funding lifecycle. An independent, end-of-project evaluation into its effectiveness was completed in September 2019. Participants have stressed that opportunities to be in a learning environment is a critical factor in maintaining mental health and building their confidence. The evaluation found that 98% felt they had got to know people better, 96% reported feeling more confident and 100% engaged in new learning.

“IT TAKES YOUR MIND OFF THINGS OTHERWISE YOU WOULD BE SITTING IN THE HOUSE LOOKING AT THE FOUR WALLS. YOU CAN BEGIN TO FEEL YOURSELF USEFUL AGAIN – IT MAKES US REALISE YOU CAN DO THINGS AND YOU ARE NOT AS DAFT AS YOU THINK YOU ARE.” PARTICIPANT



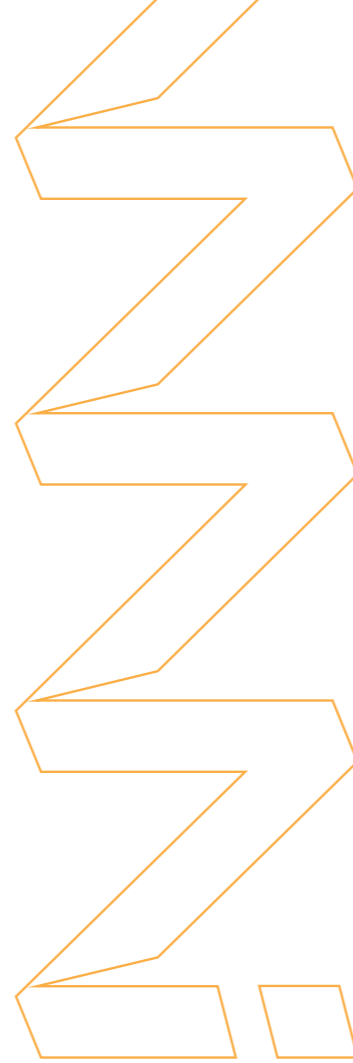
Deirdre Hargey, the new Minister for Communities, visited the Ulster Museum in her first official engagement to talk to participants in January 2020. This is a testament to the importance of the project.

The success of Live Well validates National Museums NI's role in supporting vulnerable people and communities. We are proud of the role that we play in supporting active ageing and we look forward to exploring ways to continue initiatives such as this as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic.

REIMAGINE REMAKE REPLAY: ENGAGING WITH YOUNGER PEOPLE

Reimagine Remake Replay is a four-year project that connects young people and heritage in meaningful ways. It uses creative media and the latest technologies to delve into the museum collections. The programme is led by a consortium including the Nerve Centre, National Museums NI, NI Museums Council and Northern Ireland Screen. It is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Kick the Dust programme. The project has just completed its first year in nine museums across Northern Ireland and aims to reach more than 4,000 16-25 year-olds.

Reimagine Remake Replay has been as busy as it has been creative over the past year. There has been a plethora of workshops, events and learning opportunities for the 164 participants to get hands-on, have fun and be creative.



It has offered exploration and engagement in a range of media including motion graphics, film making, 3D printing, app development and event management through projects such as Museums in a Box, Digital Maker Club, Time to Create, and Shout It Loud.

It has succeeded in creating opportunities and enabling young people to showcase their own work. During the *Tim Peake's Spacecraft* exhibition, participants hosted a Late Lab event at the Ulster Transport Museum. Further afield, they brought the project to Ulster University Art College as a Curiosity Box.

The Making Waves event at the Ulster Museum was a significant showcase for the project. The participants "took over" Ulster Museum, developing and managing every element of the event. It was created as part of an event management course that 15 participants completed. Their involvement gained them a Digital Badge Award. Seventy-two such badges were awarded throughout the project in the past year.

Making Waves has been a highlight event of Reimagine Remake Replay, and for the wider annual programme of events at Ulster Museum. There was something for all 857 visitors to enjoy – art workshops, VR experiences, live gigs, raving while learning about undersea ecosystems, and poster, badge and tote making. It was an incredible showcase for the project's participants.



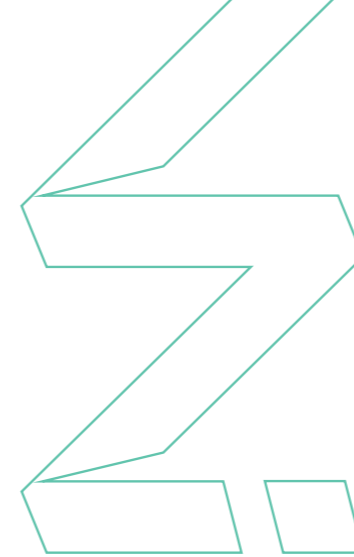
ACTIVATING NEW PARTNERSHIPS: LOAF CATERING

We know from experience that finding the right community partner can open up doors to engagement with new audiences. We also know that visitors to our museums value high quality, locally sourced food and drink. We were delighted to capture both in a new partnership with Loaf Catering, a social enterprise operated by NOW Group.

Loaf Catering supports people with learning difficulties and autism into careers. They operate three existing cafés – in Belfast City Hall, on Grosvenor Road and at Crawfordsburn. The new Loaf Café at Ulster American Folk Park opened in July 2019 and champions local produce. The refurbished space offers a light and airy setting to enjoy a range of freshly made food, including Loaf's award-winning sausage rolls, healthy salads and traditional soups and stews.



National Museums NI is a purpose-driven organisation and places a high value on working in partnership with other like-minded organisations. Our partnership with Loaf Catering allows us to create real benefits in the lives of NOW Group's training and employment programme participants. They are already being felt across the organisation through the rollout of NOW Group's popular "Just A Minute" training. This initiative helps our staff cater to visitors with learning difficulties and communication barriers.



"WE'RE DELIGHTED TO BRING LOAF CAFÉ TO OMAGH – AND ESPECIALLY IN PARTNERSHIP WITH NATIONAL MUSEUMS NI. WE LOOK FORWARD TO EXTENDING THIS OFFER TO THE OMAGH AREA AND CONTINUING TO BUILD EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUR PARTICIPANTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND AUTISM." DIANE HILL, NOW GROUP

DEVELOPING OUR PEOPLE

National Museums NI is committed to developing a highly skilled and engaged organisation. We are dedicated to caring for the national collections and providing an excellent service to the public. Our organisational development activities reflect our key corporate enabler of developing our people as our greatest asset. We need to ensure that we are agile, resilient and striving for excellence in a challenging operating environment.

Over the course of 2019/20, we delivered the second year of objectives set by our Culture Development Teams. These included leadership and management development, a team briefing system, and a new Performance Excellence Framework. All have been successfully adopted by the organisation. As part of our commitment to enhancing staff engagement, we conducted an extensive staff survey in May and hosted a Staff Conference in November 2019.

VOLUNTEERING & PARTICIPATION

Volunteers have a significant and meaningful part to play in delivering on our core purpose. Involving the communities we serve is crucial in ensuring our museums remain relevant and benefit from the skills and experience that volunteers have to offer.

We appointed a new Volunteering and Participation Manager at the beginning of 2019/20. Since then, we have focused on developing volunteering engagements over the course of the year and laying plans for the long term. We have seen the number, diversity and value of our volunteering opportunities grow. There were volunteering engagements at all of our sites and across curatorial, conservation, archival and visitor services. We look forward to developing this critical area as we move forward.

LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

We supported a wide range of learning and development opportunities covering statutory compliance, best practice, professional and personal development. Externally, we are building new networks and platforms for knowledge sharing via the pilot British Museum Visitor Services Knowledge Circle, and the British Museum International Training Programme. We have also rolled out the Just A Minute initiative to all staff as part of our new partnership with NOW Group.





