

Skill-Sharing Workshop: Interpretation and Label Writing

Tuesday 8 December, 12:00 – 2:00pm (GMT)

Anna Garnett, Curator, Petrie Museum of Egyptian and Sudanese Archaeology

Attendees

UK

Loretta Kilroe, British Museum

ITP Fellows

Rasha Ali Attia Abd El-Mageid, Alexandria National Museum (Egypt, ITP Fellow 2011)

Ikhlas Alkrm, Sudan National Museum (Sudan, ITP Fellow 2016)

Elizabeth Asafo-Adjei, Ghana Museums and Monuments Board (Ghana, ITP Fellow 2019)

Khadijeh Zohreh Baseri, Golestan Palace (Iran, ITP Fellow 2007)

Ketevan Chitashvili, Money Museum of the National Bank of Georgia (Georgia, ITP Fellow 2019)

Gertrude Aba Eyifa-Dzidzienyo, University of Ghana (Ghana, ITP Fellow 2009)

Ma. Yohana Rosales Frias, National Museum of the Philippines (Philippines, ITP Fellow 2018)

Rebecca Njeri Gachihi, National Museum of Kenya (Kenya, ITP Fellow 2010 & ITP Senior Fellow 2016)

Shambwaditya Ghosh, Ambedkar University (India, ITP Fellow 2012 & Senior Fellow 2015)

Xu Liyi, Shanghai Museum (China, ITP Fellow 2018)

Jacob Nii Marley, Leventis Digital Resource Centre for African Studies, University of Ghana (Ghana, ITP Fellow 2019)

Khine Mon Kyaw, National Museum, Yangon (Myanmar, ITP Fellow 2019)

Eileen Musundi, National Museum of Kenya (Kenya, ITP Fellow 2008 & ITP Senior Fellow 2013)

Balqees Abdul-Hakeem Nakhla, Birzeit University Museum (Palestine, ITP Fellow 2019)

Shadia Abdu Rabo, Sudan National Museum (Sudan, ITP Fellow 2006)

Norhan Hassan Salem, The Egyptian Museum (Egypt, ITP Fellow 2017)

Shreen Mohamed Amin Taher, Egyptian Museum, Cairo (Egypt, ITP Fellow 2016)

Aprille Tijam, Ayala Museum (Philippines, ITP Fellow 2018)

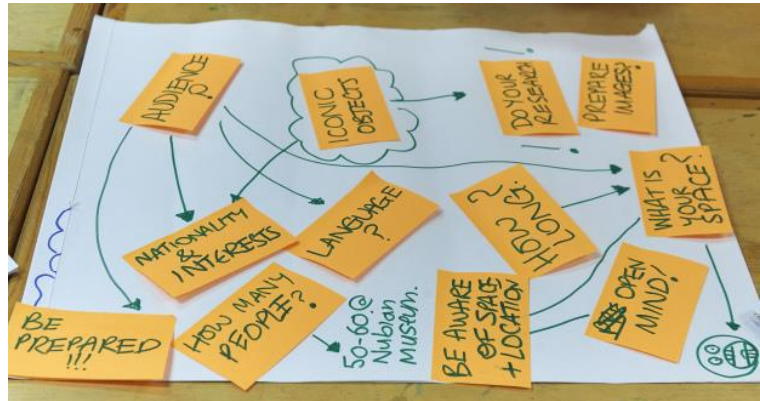
Chantal Umuhoza, Institute of National Museums of Rwanda (INMR) (Rwanda, ITP Fellow 2018)

Fatih Yucel, Sabanci University (Turkey, ITP Fellow 2014)

Introduction

Anna Garnett is the Curator at the Petrie Museum of Egyptian and Sudanese Archaeology having previously worked for Manchester Museum and the British Museum. She has extensive experience of international fieldwork projects as a Ceramicist, Small Finds Registrar and Archaeological Illustrator. Her further research interests include the material culture of ancient and modern Sudan, New Kingdom sculpture, the history of British Egyptology, and the reconciliation of ancient Egyptian and Sudanese object collections.

Anna has long-time links to the International Training Programme having been an ITP departmental representative at the British Museum, hosting ITP fellows at the Petrie Museum and joining us in Aswan for the ITP+ course in *Museum interpretation*.



Background, content and potential learning outcomes

This workshop provided an opportunity for participants to discuss current issues and ideas around museum interpretation and label writing. It offered participants a greater understanding of colleague's approaches to interpretation, current worldwide sector trends and the skills needed to edit object labels.

Following a short presentation to introduce the Petrie Museum and their priorities for new interpretation, the group was split into Zoom 'break-out' rooms to work on editing a museum object label. The group reconvened to discuss their findings, and what they have learned from their discussions.

Pre-course reading

Museum Next, What makes a great museum label?

<https://www.museumnext.com/article/what-makes-a-great-museum-label/>

Museums and Heritage, Museums need to write conversational text to be more inclusive

<https://advisor.museumsandheritage.com/blogs/museums-need-write-conversational-text-inclusive/>

Museum Development Yorkshire, A practical guide for text interpretation

<https://www.museumdevelopmentyorkshire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Practical-guide-for-text-interpretation-2017.pdf>

Useful resources

The British Museum, A question of interpretation

<https://blog.britishmuseum.org/a-question-of-interpretation/>

The British Museum, From the British Museum and Citi: 'Gateway' objects - storytelling in the Money Gallery

<https://blog.citigroup.com/2011/12/from-the-british-museum-and-citi-gateway-objects---storytelling-in-the-money-gallery/>

ITP+ Course on museum interpretation, handy guide and report

<https://bmitpglobalnetwork.org/2019/01/08/itp-course-museum-interpretation-report-and-hand-guide/>

Discussion

Shambwaditya Ghosh (ITP 2012, Senior Fellow 2015): Intervention is required to make museum collections more insightful and interpretive. Thinking about themes, for example, and select objects for a display to build a narrative. For a non-specialist audience or visitor there is a requirement to read object labels and panels. So these need to be written in simpler ways. How are objects connected to each other? That is sometimes difficult to understand and labelling can help with this.

Yohana Rosales Frias (ITP 2018): I remember visiting the Imperial War Museum and seeing their effective use of colour and font in their displays. Their panels included quotations from their sources. Just looking at the quotations you get an idea of the type of story the museum is trying to tell.

Jacob Marley (ITP 2019): I think for a label or introductory text to be engaging, visitors need to be able to connect with that is being displayed. For instance, the language could be community centred in terms of cultural heritage, social status etc.

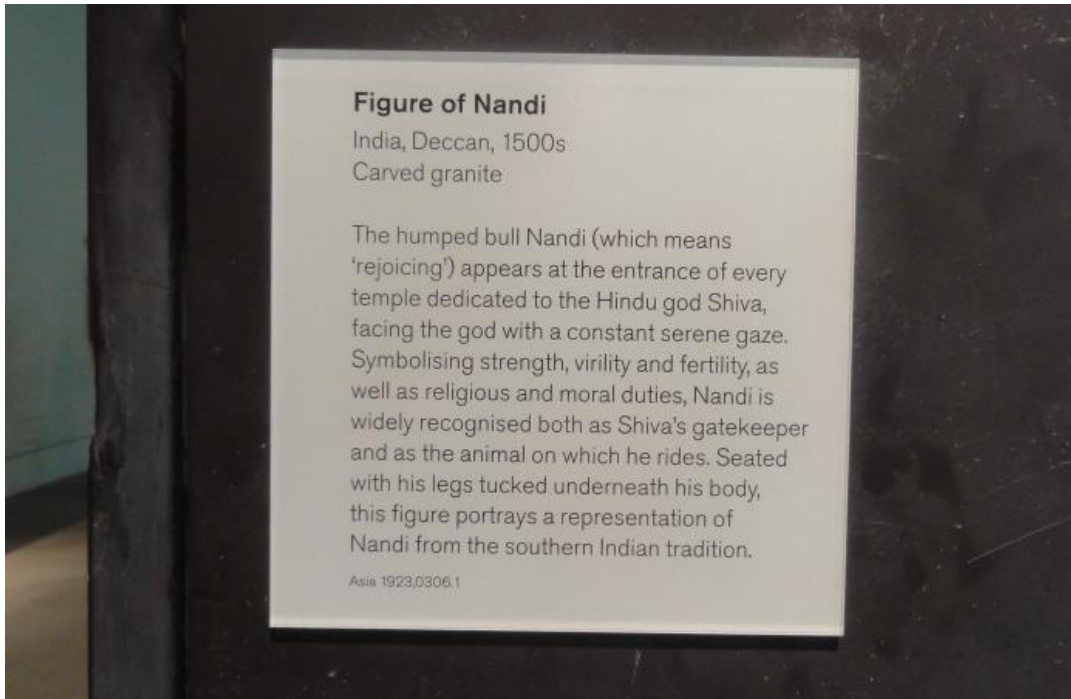
The attendees were split into smaller groups and asked to look at some examples of labels. The groups were asked to work together to discuss the following things:

- *What is good about the labels?*
- *What could be changed to make the interpretation as strong as possible?*
- *Think about the length of text.*
- *Words that could be potentially confusing or misunderstood.*
- *How could you create a good example of a label?*

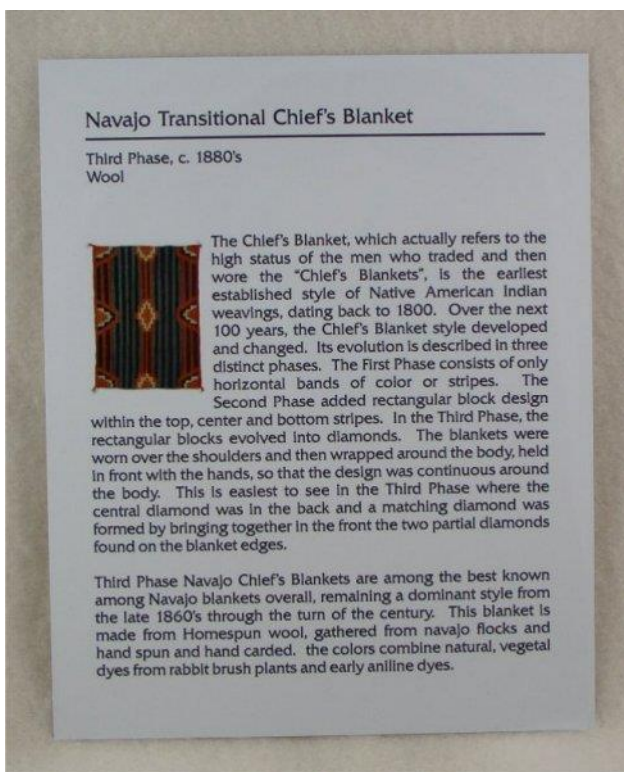
Below are some of the labels that the groups analysed:



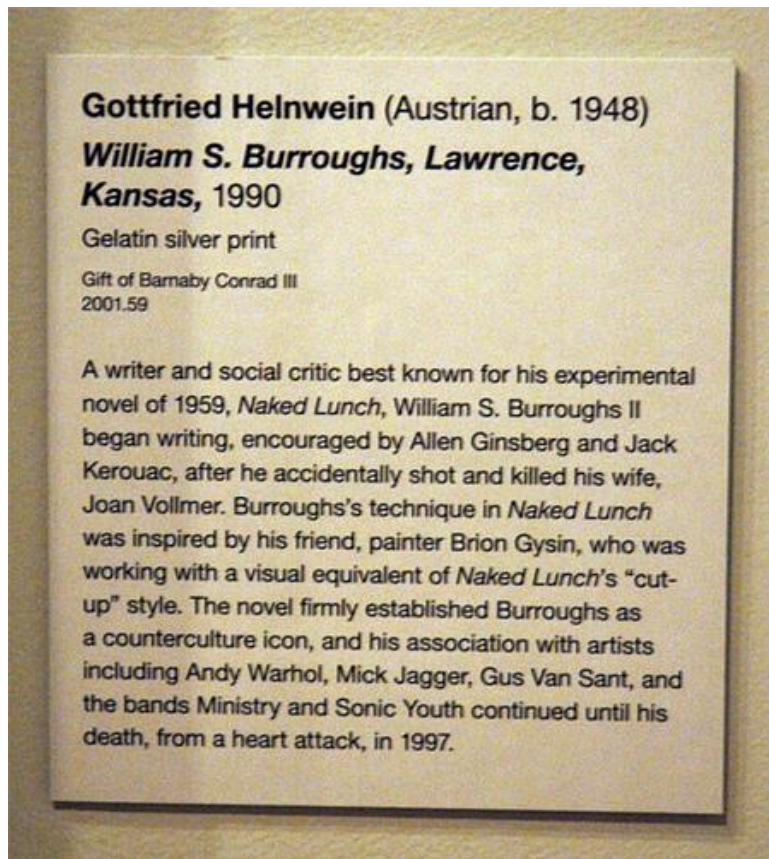
Label 1



Label 2



Label 3



Label 4

Dove Bradshaw

American, born 1949

Performance

Brass, paint, canvas, reinforced glass
1976

Calling it a *claimed object*, Dove Bradshaw in 1976 quietly affixed her label next to this fire hose. In 1978 the artist made a guerrilla postcard of her work and placed it in the museum postcard racks. She purchased two. In 1980 the museum acquired the original photograph used for that card. In 1992 the museum issued an official postcard telling its history. The card sold out. In contrast to an *objet trouvé*, the fire hose is integrated into the art context. It exemplifies one of the major shifts in art since the 1960's – refocused attention from the object and picture plane to the site itself. A second distinction from the *objet trouvé* is the fact of the hose's potential function. Both the City's Fire Department and the Metropolitan Museum's Fire Department who inspects the hose regularly assures all concerned that in the case of its need this label would not in any way be a deterrent – thus the title *Performance*.

Purchase: Rosalind Jacobs, 2006
In honor of Melvin Jacobs

Label 5