

## Session notes

### 'In conversation' Curating temporary exhibitions

'In conversations' focus on a particular theme or current issue in the culture and heritage sector. They work alongside our e-learning modules and will add an extra dimension to your 'core skills' sessions. They are informal discussions with colleagues across the sector and while we can't deliver 'live' sessions the ITP team aim to ask the questions you would be asking if you were in the room with us!



In this 'in conversation' Claire Messenger talks to Miriam Lloyd-Evans who is a former British Museum colleague now an independent curator.

Miriam is a curator, art historian and specialist in Modern and Contemporary art from the Middle East region. As Lead Curator for the British Museum's International Engagement department, she curated exhibitions about the use of the Arabic script in contemporary art, and 100 years of Saudi Arabian culture. She also provided expertise to the British Museum for acquisitions of works by contemporary artists and photographers.

Miriam has extensive experience delivering exhibitions and has curated exhibitions and education programmes in Berlin, Venice, Istanbul, London, Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Oman. Alongside this, she has edited numerous artists' monographs and exhibition publications as well as writing for select newspapers and magazines.

Previous consultancy projects include work for Tate Modern, The Fitzwilliam Museum, The University of Cambridge, The Courtauld Gallery and Channel Four, where she broadcast programmes on the subject of contemporary art.

Miriam holds an MA with distinction from the Courtauld Institute of Art in Curating the Art Museum, and a double first BA in History and History of Art from Leeds University.

---

## Introduction

Museums' temporary exhibition programmes are at the heart of the visitor experience. They provide a way of bringing new research and interpretation to visitors as well as an opportunity to display collections in a different way, often together with objects borrowed from other museums that may not have been seen before in that context. They can complement and put into context your existing displays, encouraging visitors to return to see a museum's permanent collection. They can heighten a museum's profile and increase its visitor figures, which are likely to increase, directly or indirectly, a museum's income. Importantly, in museums with a largely local or community-based audience, temporary exhibitions can be a way to keep your visitors returning again and again to enjoy something new.

In today's cultural sector, you do not need to be a museum staff member to curate an exhibition. You could be an independent art curator and work independently.

A curator's job is like a movie director's in that you need to oversee every detail of the production, so it helps to be extremely organised and to work well with others as it takes many skilled people to put on an exhibition.

So, in this 'in conversation' we are speaking to Miriam Lloyd-Evans who has worked extensively on a wide variety of temporary exhibitions, about what she sees as the role of the curator and how she develops her concept, theme and the stories – or multiple stories - that can be told.



This 'in conversation' will look at the myriad ways we can create an exhibition, aiming to inspire you in your museums going forward and leaving you with clarity and advice on how to plan a temporary display.

We are also going to talk more generally about the impacted of the COVID pandemic and what – post-COVID - the future of exhibitions will be considering cost, risk and sustainability.

## Top 10 Tips for curating an exhibition

1. Always think about your audience first – who are you targeting? Is there a broad enough range of displays? What would they like to see? What would challenge them or their thinking? If possible, carry out an evaluation to test the above.

2. Are you displaying objects in a way that is: chronological, thematic, monographic, creating juxtaposition between different objects, mixing objects from all ages? Be consistent once you have decided. While a mix can often work e.g. a timeline in a thematic exhibition or a series of themes alongside a chronological display, try to think the methodology through so as to not confuse the visitor.

3. Be sensitive to the environment in which you are working and diplomatic with any partners.

4. Be creative with your thinking – think outside the box! Sometimes this means taking a step back from the detail to look at the bigger picture.

5. Always keep in mind the key messages of the exhibition – both of each section and the overarching key message of the exhibition. What do you want the main ‘take-away’ points of the exhibition to be for the visitor? If they were summarising to a friend what the display or exhibition is about, what would they say? Are you able to find gateway ‘objects’ that illustrate your main points and help the visitor? (nb. these don’t necessarily have to be objects, they could be photographs, interviews, role play, games etc.)

6. Reinterpret objects in the collection and try not to get stuck on one way of interpreting them. Are there contemporary voices or practitioners who may shed new light on this object? Are there new ways of approaching this theme?

7. Try and have a broad and varied exhibition and education programme that works for a variety of audiences, age groups, and learning styles. Utilise social media.

8. Talk to your peers, managers and colleagues with other experiences and expertise.

9. Stay calm, flexible and open to change.

10. Enjoy it all!



## Course resources

The links below will provide you with more information on the theme of the session. Additional resources are provided with this session which aim to give you reading material that you may find useful – both now and in the future.

Barker Langham films for the cultural sector featuring Miriam Lloyd-Evans.

<https://www.flipsnack.com/BLBarkerLangham/barker-langham-films-for-the-cultural-sector-vksg5lj7t9.html>

Top 10 tips for curating exhibitions and displays: Lights, levels and labels

<https://curatorialresearch.com/top-tips-in-curating/top-10-tips-for-curating-exhibitions-and-displays-lights-levels-and-labels/>

V&A Podcast - Curating Contemporary Fashion.

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/v/v-and-a-podcast-curating-contemporary-fashion/>

How to curate an exhibition - Victoria Art Gallery, Bath

<https://www.victoriagal.org.uk/videos/exhibitions/curating-exhibition>

How to Curate Your First Art Exhibition—No Gallery and No Money Required.

[https://www.artspace.com/magazine/art\\_101/art\\_scene/guide-to-curating-art-exhibit-54840](https://www.artspace.com/magazine/art_101/art_scene/guide-to-curating-art-exhibit-54840)

