

Performing Transformation for Liveable Futures: GLAM in Action

CreaTures/Happy Museum
pointers to making change from
the cultural sector

Ann Light and Hilary Jennings

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Making a better world calls on us to work towards positive cultural change – above and beyond essential reduction in our carbon footprints. Cultural institutions and workers can lead a shift towards re-envisioning worlds, connecting with others and fulfilling lives through finding new meaning (and lead a shift away from individualism, materialism and consumption). We have a vital stake in transforming society to liveable futures.

At CreaTures¹ and the Happy Museum Project², we believe that creative practices have great - and as yet untapped - power to support humankind in the urgent task of shifting cultures towards sustainability. Uniting our research (on the potential of creative practice and culture to respond to ecological crises), we invite you to consider our findings, share your practice and pool experiences for maximum influence.

We understand that we cannot design to make change happen, but suggest our work can support the conditions for change to emerge. Change is fractal: it happens at all points in the system - individual, institutional, community and beyond - and its impacts spread in many different ways, in museum, gallery, cultural and other public spaces.

¹ **CreaTures – Creative Practices for Transformational Futures** is an EU project investigating the potential of creative practices in art, design, and related cultural fields to support eco-social change.

² **The Happy Museum Project** explores how the museum sector can respond to the challenge of creating a more sustainable future.

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we act together

We create work that brings people together with others in a place or locality. We bring people together in cultural or communal spaces to find new significance in the world and build connections, while working to make such spaces safe for honesty and sharing.

We explore the qualities of culture - experiential, exploratory, immersive, connective, thought-(and-feeling-)provoking - to make opportunity for encounter with something outside ourselves and to encounter ourselves AND ourselves in relation to others, including other life forms and other ways of being. We learn about difference; we accept surprise; we lay foundations for trust in unexpected places.

we stress the experiential

We create sensory experiences, using playfulness and making as central components. We make links between the here-and-now and the remote, complex and emergent systems that are affecting us all. We invite/prompt more-than-rational senses and responses, including those that engage with emotions and we find paths for those emotions towards active hope. We communicate abstract concepts well.

We critique current ways of life (by surfacing contradictions or defamiliarizing the everyday) and destabilize norms, particularly when our practices are aggregated. We make room to explore political, moral or ethical concerns and do not force solutions. We experiment, seek our way and share the journey so that we grow and change with our partners and participants.

we look forward

We create opportunities/encounters oriented towards positive futures: imaginative, generative, prefigurative, anticipatory, speculative, and hopeful, which:

- prompt people to imagine,
- ignite new possibilities and dissolve limiting assumptions (generative),
- invite people to experience how the future could be (prefigurative),
- help people to understand how the future is influenced by the present (anticipatory),
- encourage people to think about possible futures (speculative).

We heed the words of John Schaar:

'The future is not a result of choices among alternative paths offered by the present, but a place that is created - created first in the mind and will, created next in activity. The future is not some place we are going, but one we are creating. The paths are not to be found, but made. And the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destination.'

We are reflexive and reflective

We create support for people to move from recognizing serious issues to acting for change. We share and reflect on our own and others' experiences, grounding them in everyday life and thinking realistically about capacity and capabilities.

We offer opportunities to reflect, to make sense of experience in one's own terms, and hear the same (or different) from others. We establish space to explore and understand what matters to each person and why – to engage with different responses and perspectives.

We make time and place for individuals to reflect *together* on:

- Other people's views and how they might differ from or complement our own impressions
- Our own thought processes and what we value
- How this relates to our worlds and what is salient to take away/act on
- What it might mean/require in terms of change
- Who we might want to collaborate with – become friends and allies with.

We know that careful and skillful facilitation is needed – so that people can give their attention without interruption or judgment, to practice equality and respect for others; to honour confidentiality; to experience processes being practiced and adhered to - for us to be able to trust in participation as hosts and as participants.

we build agency for change

We create conditions to enhance people's sense of agency, rather than focusing on education or facts. We know that being told or shown doesn't engage individual or collective agency; it merely informs.

We contribute to creating a sense of agency by:

- Understanding the future is made not found;
- Sensing through imagination and/or immersive, experiential activity how a different future might feel;
- Reflecting with other people, particularly those who fuel our desire for better;
- Discovering that others hold values similar to ours³.

We realize that the act of exploring positive, practical possibilities may, in itself, help people to find new meaning, feel more connected and experience greater agency.

³ **Common Cause Foundation's** research shows that most of us hold common values around compassion and community, but that most of us **believe others do not** hold these values – making us feel less positive about getting involved in meetings, voting, volunteering and less responsible for our communities and surroundings.

our invitation

This document, and the learning distilled within it, represents a snapshot in time, written as CreaTures ends in late 2022. Our learning continues and we hope to build on it, connecting and collaborating with what we believe is a growing field of practice and a newly defined genre of engagement. If this work resonates with you and you would like to be part of an ongoing exploration – please contact us by email on happymuseumproject@gmail.com or ann.light@sussex.ac.uk

There is also a low-volume discussion list of people interested in the intersections of art, technology, nature and culture you can join at: atnc.persona.co

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for CreaTures and Happy Museum.

More about the organisations responsible for this research summary

CreaTures and Happy Museum draw this analysis from combined learning over ten years of commissioned projects and peer learning in museums across the UK and 20 experimental projects across Europe led by artists, designers, cultural cooperatives, activists, art and design researchers. The activity has covered a range of subject matter including heritage, land and resource use, planning, our relationship with nature, alternative economies, what constitutes sustainable and just futures and much more.

CreaTures – Creative Practices for Transformational Futures

received 3 years of funding from EU Horizon 2020 to investigate the potential of creative practices to support positive eco-social change (a term that we use to signal an interlinked concern for ecological and social relations), conducting action research with practitioner partners to understand paths to transformation. The project responds to current social and environmental challenges and the urgent need to find new, more sustainable and nourishing ways of living and being together on our shared planet. Ann Light has led the UK research node. Our wider discoveries can be found at: creaturesframework.org and creatures-eu.org

Design by [Savannah Vize](#) for the CreaTures project.

The Happy Museum Project explores how the museum sector can respond to the challenge of creating a more sustainable future. It stimulates and supports museum practice that places wellbeing within an environmental and future-facing frame, rethinking the role that museums can play in creating more resilient people, places and planet. Through action research, academic research, peer networking and training it supports institutional and community wellbeing and resilience in the face of global challenges. Hilary Jennings has been Project Director since 2015. happymuseumproject.org

We are asked to account for carbon saved, not hearts and minds changed or worlds re-envisioned—a great misunderstanding of what our cultural contribution is and could be.



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**the happy
museum**
CREATURES