

Institution: University of Glasgow (UofG)		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 14 Human Geography		
Title of case study: Changing museum practice to create cultural legacies for mental health groups and other communities.		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014–2016		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Dr Cheryl McGeachan	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Lecturer, Human Geography	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2012–present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015–present		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>McGeachan's research into a unique 'arts and mental health' collection, <i>Art Extraordinary</i> (AE), fostered a new model of academic-museum curatorial practice, enacted and evaluated across Glasgow since 2015 in partnership with Glasgow Museums (GM) and GM's Open Museums (OM). This work produced innovative community co-curation of AE in public exhibitions, with evidence showing a direct increase in the skills, confidence and empowerment of 290 participants from mental health and community groups. Two impact legacies emerge: (1) McGeachan's successful model of academic-museum curatorial practice levered new GM-OM investment in an 'Art Outside the Box' Handling Kit, to reach an estimated 25,000 people annually, institutionalising the benefits of the partnership work; (2) McGeachan's research and model of partnership working secured a new GM commitment to allocate <i>permanent</i> exhibition space representing AE and mental ill-health in the flagship Kelvingrove Museum, which receives an estimated 1.3 million visits annually. Together, these impacts have changed GM's engagement with mental-ill health.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Since 2012, funded by the Wellcome Trust and the British Academy, McGeachan has been leading research into the historical geographies of mental ill-health using archival sources and museum collections. As part of a broader programme emphasising the 'humanity' of those enduring mental ill-health, and the possibilities for creating spaces of care-and-compassion even in the heart of 'closed' institutional worlds (References 3.1, 3.2), she has explored the role that artworks – viewing, engaging and making art – can play in fostering such spaces. Her approach is at once that of painstaking archival scholar and engaged <i>animateur</i> of practices, events and impacts beyond the academy.</p> <p>McGeachan's specific research here opens up and demonstrates the significance of <i>Art Extraordinary</i> (AE), a unique collection of Scottish 'outsider art' collected by art therapist Joyce Laing during the period 1970–2000s and donated to Glasgow Museums (GM) in 2012. The collection consists of 1,134 pieces from various dates c.1880–2007, encompassing a diverse set of artworks made by people with no formal art education and who often lived on the margins of society, including in mental health institutions and prisons. McGeachan's research began with the overall AE collection, recovering the motivations, practices and geographical reach of Laing herself, as well as clarifying the 'provenance' histories of many artists and artworks. Next, she dived more deeply into the details of 9 artists from the collection (responsible for 705 pieces in the collection) tracing them through in-depth archival inquiry. The upshot was to produce rich 'geographical biographies' of objects, places, materials, practices and people associated with AE (3.3, 3.6), furnishing <i>the</i> foundational treatment of this collection to inform and encourage future researchers and expand the category of, and approaches to, 'outsider art'.</p> <p>The results from McGeachan's 'geographical biographies' are twofold: (1) they reveal for the first time <i>where</i> the artwork was made, <i>how</i> it was produced and <i>who</i> had been involved in its making; and (2) they trace the explicit connection between the lived experiences of mental ill-health of the artists and their creative practices. Particular artist-patients are drawn out of obscurity, such as Adam Christie, the 'Head Carver' or clandestine stone-sculptor of Montrose Asylum (3.4), while a spin-off project illuminates the lived dynamics of confinement in the otherwise highly 'sealed-off' environment of Barlinnie Prison, specifically the now-closed Barlinnie Special Unit (BSU) (3.5).</p> <p>McGeachan worked collaboratively with GM staff to deploy her intensive research on AE, devising research-led catalogue information and creating future plans for working with AE, specifically with</p>		

Glasgow's Open Museum (OM), a branch of GM. Her research findings were thereby used as the basis for a new collaboration between the University of Glasgow (UofG) and Glasgow's museum sector. GM Collections are internationally renowned and comprise the largest museum service in the UK outside of London, with over 3.8 million visitors to its 9 venues in 2018–19 (5.4). GM maintains a philosophical commitment to promoting the museum as a civic space that values diverse community engagements; OM augments this commitment by taking museum collections outside of the museum walls to generate new creative opportunities for active public participation. This research collaboration led by McGeachan has directly influenced how GM delivers this commitment by using the AE collection to rectify relative ignorance of Scottish 'outsider art', and to change the ways in which GM, via OM, engages people with mental ill-health in their work programmes and cultural venues.

3. References to the research

- 3.1 McGeachan C.** 2014 'The world is full of big bad wolves': Investigating the experimental therapeutic spaces of R.D. Laing and Aaron Esterson *History of Psychiatry* 25: pp.283–298. ([doi: 10.1177/0957154X14529222](https://doi.org/10.1177/0957154X14529222))
- 3.2 McGeachan C.** 2016a 'Do you have a frog to guide you?': Exploring the 'asylum' spaces of R.D. Laing. In: Kritsotaki, D., Long, V. and Smith, M. (eds.) *Deinstitutionalisation and After: Post-War Psychiatry in the Western World*. Palgrave Macmillan, pp.195–213. ISBN 9783319453590 ([doi:10.1007/978-3-319-45360-6_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-45360-6_10)) [PDF available on request from HEI].
- 3.3 McGeachan C** 2016b Researching *Art Extraordinary*: A fieldwork photo-collage essay. (<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/119693/>)
- 3.4 McGeachan C** 2017 'The Head Carver': *Art Extraordinary* and the small spaces of the asylum *History of Psychiatry* 28: 58–71. ([doi:10.1177/0957154X16676693](https://doi.org/10.1177/0957154X16676693))
- 3.5 McGeachan C** 2019 'A Prison within a Prison?': examining the enfolding spatialities of care and control in the Barlinnie Special Unit *Area* 51: 200–207. ([doi:10.1111/area.12447](https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12447))
- 3.6 McGeachan C** in press Tracing the *Art Extraordinary* Collection, in Ellis R, Kendall S and Tayler S (eds.) *Voices in the History of Madness: Patient and Practitioner Perspectives*. Palgrave Macmillan [copy can be supplied by HEI]

4. Details of the impact

Experiences of mental ill-health have previously been under-represented in the work of GM (Source 5.3), their only previous mental health exhibition being removed from Kelvingrove Museum in 2012. McGeachan's research impact remedies this situation, most *directly* through the co-development (with OM) of: **5 one-day exhibitions** of AE across 4 years (2015–2019) for the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival (SMHAFF), a **one-week** specialist exhibition in Barlinnie Prison, a **six-month** exhibition in Kelvingrove, and a **one-year** exhibition in Pollok Civic Realm (PCR), a GM exhibition venue; **18 specialist curator tours** of AE in storage at GM; and a **12-month community programme of arts-based events** inspired by AE at PCR. The research-led curation of AE also reached 800 prisoners via the Barlinnie Prison exhibition. Circa 50–70 visitors attended each SMHAFF event, with 3,500+ visitors to the PCR exhibition and community programme. Beyond this extensive 'outreach' to varied publics, **two key impacts** have arisen:

(1) Changes to collaborative museum-academic practice, leading to a permanent cultural mental health legacy and a sustainable model for future practice: A key concern for GM/OM when operating with previous academic partners was limited meaningful collaboration and minimal follow-through engagement with community partners (5.5, **Head Nurse in Recreational Therapy, Leverdale Hospital**, 2019). Through partnership with McGeachan, a new *model of meaningful collaboration and co-curation* has been nurtured between the University, Museum and mental health, prison and other communities: "We seek to use this model of collaboration for future projects" (5.3, **OM Manager**, 2020). Interest in this 'ground-breaking' model of collaboration has been shown by other museums in London, Sweden and Belgium, and it has been invited as a case study of good practice for the international edited volume *Cultural heritage for wellbeing: Inspiring cases that create positive change in wellbeing with heritage collections*, a professional museum publication (5.1). The model of collaboration resulted in the exhibitions listed above:

“The exchange of knowledge and skills between us has benefited the delivery of a community co-curated project at Pollok Civic Realm in 2018–2019 ... This has enhanced inclusion and representation of mental health and community knowledge on the subjects of mental health and creativity ...” (5.2, Curator of Scottish History, Glasgow Life, 2020).

“Working with Dr Cheryl McGeachan has enabled the collection to reach new audiences ... This project enabled people with lived experience of mental (ill) health to collaboratively research and exhibit objects in our collection. Our collaboration facilitated an approach which gave agency to people whose voices are either under-represented or spoken ‘for’ in museum and academic establishments ...” (5.2, OM Curator, 2020)

“The team collaborating on this project developed a dynamic, socially engaged project ..., which not only allowed the general public to benefit from this collection, but also two very distinct marginalised social groups: people incarcerated in prison and those struggling with mental health conditions ... The value of this project cannot be understated.” (5.2, Outsider Art expert, Edinburgh College of Art, 2020)

This collaborative model and its outcomes received external recognition in the UK ‘Arts in Criminal Justice’ *Koestler Bronze Award*, 2017, was shortlisted for Best Collaboration (Arts & Culture) at the *University of Glasgow Knowledge Exchange and Public Engagement Awards*, 2019, and has been nominated for a *Museums Change Lives Institutional Award*, 2020 (5.6).

Direct change to GM exhibition space (permanent): The research-led collaboration detailed above became one of the OM’s “largest scale endeavors” (5.1), significantly changing the representation of, and engagement with, mental ill-health across GM. The successful cultural outcomes here were critical to the senior management of GM approving a permanent AE display at Kelvingrove Museum (installed 2021 due to COVID-19 delays), specifying the use of the model of collaboration developed in the ‘AE project’ (5.3):

“Having been accessioned in 2012 the [AE] collection is finally recognised in the service’s foremost venue in 2020. Without Dr McGeachan’s academic work ... this may well not have happened.” (5.2, Curator of Scottish History, Glasgow Life, 2020).

(2) Community engagement with Art Extraordinary benefiting the well-being and skillsets of diverse community participants: A total of 290 people participated across the AE community engagement programme, including individuals in prison, psychiatric care and mental health community services: ie. those from some of the most marginalised and discriminated-against groups in UK society. Not all participants could or were allowed to complete formal evaluations by their professional care staff, but a proportion offered verbal comments (5.5). All the cultural outcomes discussed here were co-developed and co-curated *with* community partners.

Research-led ‘stories’ of the AE artists were shared with community participants, who were then supported and enabled to select over 60 related objects for display in multiple exhibitions and for use in a dedicated GM handling kit (see below). Participants wrote over 40 exhibition labels, designed 7 exhibition panels and devised 6 exhibition guides and postcards (see illustrations) (5.8), ensuring that the voices and expertise of participants became intimately woven into GM’s curatorial practice. These cultural projects were designed to train participants *themselves* to become curators of the AE collection, developing new skills, enhancing senses of individual and collective achievement, and offering learning opportunities for groups not usually engaged with museums.

New skills: Participants and professional staff have identified direct cultural and skills outcomes:

Participants: *“It really feels amazing [to be a curator], it really feels like a big achievement ... I suppose I have a little bit of an insight into how things go together, how to position things ... I feel like I’ve got a little bit of an insight. It’s been really interesting learning what goes into that and I feel really proud that we have been able to have it up for the year [at PCR] and it’s been really special.” (5.5, participant, 2019)*

“I think I’ve got a much stronger ability to interpret things and to be able to put into words, writing and interpretation – that was something I found interesting.” (5.5, participant, 2019)

Professional: “[It enabled us to] highlight some patients who are acutely unwell to introduce them to outsider art and also give them the opportunity, I guess, to go somewhere where they possibly have never been before, to see things that they never have that chance living in the community. So it was ... was a great experience for myself and the patients.” (5.5, Patient Activity Coordinator, Leverdale Hospital, 2019)

In Barlinnie prison, 15 participant prisoners gained their *Scottish Qualification Authority* qualifications in ‘Communications’, demonstrating presentation skills through engaging their peers via object-handling in connection with project workshops. The resultant exhibition event was attended by the **Head of Education for Scottish Prisons**, who indicated “that the type of work being undertaken in this project, particularly its innovative collaborative nature, was a model of good practice for other prisons working with the arts” (5.2). 12 project participants acted as tour guides for the 800 prison exhibition visitors, leading a total of 40 facilitated tours of the exhibition, relating expert knowledge about the collection and further practising presentation skills:

Professional: “This has been an exciting opportunity to get students [prisoners] to carry out original research on a part of Barlinnie’s social history, whilst also gaining qualifications and improving their confidence.” (5.2, Head of Education Barlinnie Prison, 2017)

Building senses of inclusion through arts practice: The ‘stories’ used in the projects enabled participants to connect their lived experiences with the AE artists and artworks. Professionals supporting participants harnessed the value of the work, and it changed senses of inclusion and identification for patients:

Professionals: “I think the stories behind a lot of the art inspired a lot of the patients ... to actually be able to do some art ... I think something’s changed for the better, I mean we’ve made these links, these connections ... it has changed for the positive.” (5.5, Patient Activity Coordinator, Leverdale Hospital, 2019)

“Our patients can relate to the objects because they potentially may have been in their life suffering as some of these artists may have been ... Working with our colleague from Glasgow University to find out a bit more about each and every artist ... that gives them a bit of hope that they could potentially produce something ... that could in the future be in Kelvingrove [in the permanent exhibition].” (5.5, Recreational Therapy Nurse, Leverdale Hospital, 2019)

Confidence and empowerment: A key aspect to the design of the projects was to encourage confidence and inspire empowerment through the displaying of participants’ work in exhibitions and recounting of it in text:

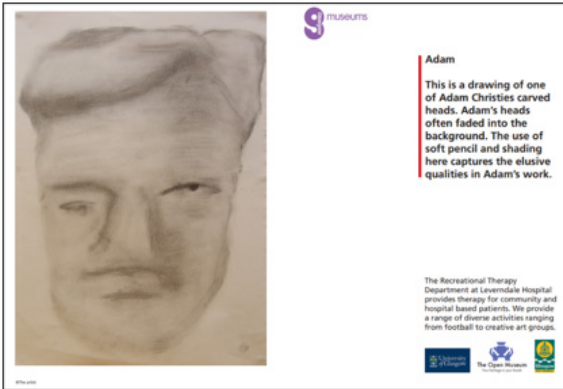
Participants: “On a specific level, I do feel that I have a bit more confidence in my own work and what I feel comes under art. Prior to getting involved I was always very sceptical of my own work ... I’ve got a new found confidence in looking at other people’s work and being able to see other than just the surface.” (5.5, participant, 2019)

“I’m a bit more confident as-well with the work being up and people reading it and I can go home and think about what do people think about my work and what do the words that I’ve put to someone else’s work mean.” (5.5, participant, 2019)

Professional: “I know she feels more confident about doing more sketching and drawing and she’s been doing murals for wards and I think it’s just being connected that has been inspiring for her ... it connects in a way that kicks off another stage to your personal development ...” (5.5, Head Nurse in Recreational Therapy, Leverdale Hospital, 2019)

Research impact legacy: Leading tangibly from these enhancements of participant skills, senses of inclusion and growing confidence, and from the deepened sense of what makes for successful community engagement, the following impact legacies can be detected:

Direct individual impacts: At least 13 participants created their own new artworks inspired by their work with AE, including textiles, painting, drawing and sculpture. A month-long exhibition at partner project Project Ability, entitled ‘Extraordinary Responses’, featured 6 participants who took displaying over 25 pieces of their own original artwork. These impacts have been long-lasting and demonstrate success in building participants’ sense of their own agency and expertise: indeed, as



a direct result of participation, “some of the group have gone on to form AARG [Autistic Artists Research Group] and will be undertaking an autism audit of Glasgow museums; responding to the museum estate and the collections’ (5.2, **Director of Project Ability**, 2020). Furthermore, one participant drafted and compiled 2 edited writing collections, another has written a blog, and prisoners have written 4 poems prompted by the BSU (5.7). Participants described the process here as ‘a fantastic journey’ (5.5).

Permanent cultural impacts for Glasgow communities: These benefits have been recognised at GM, who have invested a budget and staffing resources to fund the co-curation of a research-led AE handling kit called ‘Art Outside the Box’, designed as a permanent community resource. This handling kit will be on permanent loan from 2021. In 2018–2019, over 18,725 community members engaged with the OM’s handling kits (5.4). The research has thus directly influenced GM’s service priorities and investments, building on the benefits of community engagement with the AE collection and formulating

a generalisable model of practice that will continue positively to impact various publics: “The permanent resources created in both Kelvingrove and through the Handling Kit create a strong legacy of the unique collaboration and are an asset to Glasgow Life’s cultural infrastructure as they represent a range of the city’s underrepresented voices” (5.2, **OM Manager**, 2020).

Covid-19 effects: The pandemic led to the delay of the agreed installation of the AE exhibition in Kelvingrove Museum (5.3) until 2021. Due to the inability to pilot the handling kit with community groups, a postal pack based on the kit was devised by all project partners. 250 packs were created and used by individuals connected to psychiatric (30) and community mental health services (60) and prisons (120) across Scotland (5.8). Packs were designed to extend the reach of the collaborative work while the handling kit was unavailable, and also to support vulnerable communities through the arts during the pandemic.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 Cultural Heritage for Wellbeing Case Study: emails from **OM manager** on a Flemish-British Working Group confirming the UofG-AE-OM project was submitted as an inspiring UK case.

5.2 Professional Testimonials from two **Curators from Glasgow Life** and **OM, Outsider Art expert, OM Manager, Director of Project Ability** and **Head of Education in Barlinne Prison**.

5.3 Art Extraordinary Concept Proposal and the **Proposal Adopted** by Kelvingrove Museum.

5.4 Glasgow Life Annual Review, 2018–19, p8 annual visitor numbers to museum estate. <https://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/news/record-breaking-year-for-glasgow-life>.

5.5 Participant Testimonies: video recorded 6 testimonies via protected YOU TUBE location.

5.6 Evidence of Award email with ‘Highly Commended’ *Koestler Award* (2017); *UoG awards* shortlisted nomination evidence (2019); OM manager nomination: ‘*Museums changes lives*’ awards (2020).

5.7 Participant Output Examples:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JdCopDX1SoAplus>;

<https://www.project-ability.co.uk/blog/launch-of-publication-by-simon-mcauley/>

<https://www.project-ability.co.uk/blog/heritage-lottery-group-art-extraordinary-collection/>;

<https://www.project-ability.co.uk/blog/storytelling-workshop/>;

<https://www.project-ability.co.uk/blog/pollock-civic-realm-visit/>.

5.8 Exhibition Panel and Label Examples: Pdf available on request from the HEI.