

Brent Museum and Brent Archives: Exhibitions and Projects 2009

‘Reassessing what we collect’-The Polish and Brazilian collecting project

This project ran from March 2007 – April 2008, culminating in an exhibition in Brent Museum’s Community Gallery and celebration event in 2009.



Between March 2007 and April 2008, Brent Museum took part in a London Museums Hub project to work with experts and community groups in order to establish and share new understandings of its collections. Contemporary collecting is central to Brent Museum’s work, and ensures that the museum continues to evolve and embrace the concept of being a “community museum.”

Brent Museum worked with local Brazilian and Polish groups, both of which are currently underrepresented by Brent, with less than 1% of accessions related to these community groups. Brazilian community groups were identified through working with Brent Libraries, who held a Brazilian carnival in 2007.

The participants were then asked to decide which objects they thought the museum could acquire, through discussions which explored and discussed what it mean to be a Brazilian or a Pole living in London. A series of workshops examined how museums and collections document objects, this included tours of the museum galleries and stores. This was to provide a clear idea of how and why museums collect and illustrated that the museum valued all of their stories and ideas. The Museum and Archives collected objects identified by group members as objects they felt represented their culture.



An example of the Polish Group’s photography

The participants also had the chance to develop new skills through a variety of workshops. All group members were provided with training in collecting oral history, they were also supplied with digital audio recorders which were used to collect oral histories from their community. The result of this was a collection of valuable oral history recordings of what it is like to be a member of a Brazilian or Polish community living in London. Both groups also took part in a photography workshop which provided them with valuable skills in a range of photographic techniques, learnt from a professional photographer. These skills were used to photograph areas in London that were identified as important to them. These photographs formed a part of the final exhibition and were been added to the Museum and Archives collections.



The Divine Cat: Speaking to the Gods in Ancient Egypt

In partnership with London Museums Hub and The British Museum

This exhibition ran from 12 March – 10 May 2009.



The Divine Cat exhibition was the first in an ongoing project by the London Museums Hub to bring objects from the National Museums to regional museums, helping to increase access to collections of national importance and enabling small museums to reach new audiences.

It coincided with the opening in early 2009 of a new Ancient Egyptian gallery at The British Museum, centred around the spectacular painted tomb-chapel of Nebamun, which contains some of the most famous images of Egyptian art.

The Divine Cat is one of the treasures from the Ancient Egyptian collection at the British Museum, and was loaned to Brent Museum for the duration of the exhibition. The exhibition centred not only on the story of the Cat and its collector, Major Gayer-Anderson, but also on George Titus Barham, Brent's local collector, who also collected objects from the ancient world.

The original publicity for the exhibition ran as follows:

Visit Brent Museum to find out about the Gayer Anderson Cat, an Egyptian statue dated to 600BC and generously loaned by the British Museum. The cat is one of the treasures of their Ancient Egyptian collection. This exhibition centres not only on the story of the cat and its collector, Major Gayer Anderson, but also on George Titus Barham, Brent's local collector.



Belonging in Brent

This community-curated exhibition, coordinated by Elders Voice, ran in Brent Museum's Community Gallery from 20 August 2009 to 21 February 2010.

The Belonging in Brent project, which took place between from March 2008-August 2009, was run by local community organisation Elders Voice. The project coordinator recruited and trained a group of volunteer oral history interviewers to produce a collection of oral histories from West Indian, Irish and Jewish people who settled and made roots in Brent between 1930s-1950s, and the recordings were used as part of the oral history and video exhibition in Brent Museum's Community Gallery. Project participants also took part in drama sessions which culminated in a play at the end of the project.

The fascinating oral history recordings produced through the project were donated to Brent Archives for use by residents and researchers.

Understanding Contemporary Arts: Works from the Noble Sage Art Gallery

This exhibition ran from Friday 12 June 2009 - Sunday 3 January 2010.



Understanding Contemporary Art: Works from The Noble Sage Art Gallery was a collaboration between Brent Museum and The Noble Sage Art Gallery in East Finchley, the first gallery in the UK to specialise exclusively in Indian, Sri Lankan and Pakistani contemporary art. It aimed to give visitors an answer to the question 'what is contemporary art all about?'

The work in the exhibition was loaned to Brent Museum by the Noble Sage Art Gallery, and the display was split into 5 themes: Colour, Composition, Content, Method & Concept and Technique & Style. Each section explored four works of art in relation to that theme, and looked at how that element affects what we see in contemporary art;

Jana Manuelpillai, Director of the Noble Sage Art Gallery said at the time "Many people either don't see the point of contemporary art or perhaps they like it but don't really know why. In this exhibition we really want to get people thinking about how an artwork is put together. Often when you understand the thought-process behind a work, you are able to appreciate it much better."

Hannah Phung, Brent Museum's then Exhibitions Officer said "We want visitors to leave this exhibition feeling that they are better able to interpret and be more comfortable and confident when looking at contemporary art. The exhibition will help stimulate ideas about art that visitors might want to consider and our programme of activities will help to bring the creative and imaginative side out in all of us."

The original publicity read as follows:

Brent Museum invites you to take a closer look at contemporary art. Our exhibition will guide you through five easy steps to understanding and interpreting a range of artworks on display.