

Specialist Support Scheme – Engagement Report

Museums Sheffield

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Islamic Art and Material Culture



Birmingham
Museums



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Introduction

This report aims to identify possible audiences that Museums Sheffield can engage using its Islamic Art and Material Culture (IAMC) collections. It is not a comprehensive report focusing on all audiences. In consultation with the Curator and Learning Officer, several audiences have been identified as a priority. The current Education team consists of two Learning Officers and a small team of Session Leaders. This report focuses on ideas and suggestions that are realistic, deliverable and sustainable. The museum learning team is working to near capacity and therefore any work focusing on the IAMC collection needs to either fit into the existing offer or be added to the mid to long term learning strategy.

The author of this report visited Museums Sheffield in February 2017 to discuss the IAMC collection and ideas for engaging local audiences.

Open Day

The museum could hold an open day to show case a sample of its Islamic Art and Material Culture collection. The items selected could be based on a range of objects discussed by the collections specialist in his report. The open day would provide the museum with an opportunity to engage its general visitors with these items, sharing with them information about each one. It would also provide an opportunity for some targeted marketing. In advance of the open day, the museum could contact local Iranian and Turkish community groups and organisations and invite them and their members to the museum to view some of the collection.

Open day staff could invite/encourage all visitors to share responses to the objects, sharing what they like about them and how they might like to see and / or engage with them in the future. The museum could invite visitors to share any personal stories they may have that are linked to or inspired by the objects. The museum, with the individual's permission, should record these for future reference. It would also be worth making a note of any new contacts generated by this event.

Feedback generated on the day should be used by the museum in its future planning of both the display and use of its IAMC collection.

The open day would also provide the museum an opportunity to share some of their own ideas with the public on how they might like to use the collection.

Two members of staff and several volunteers would be needed to run an open day successfully.

Asylum Seekers and Refugees / ESOL

The museum is planning to develop its relationship with organisations supporting asylum seekers and refugees, and those providing ESOL services. The museum would like to engage these audiences through new drop-in sessions/workshops and developing ESOL trails. The

SSN has purchased art materials for the museum to deliver printing and tile making drop-in sessions linked to the IAMC collection, for refugees and asylum seekers. The museum should evaluate the success of these initial sessions and use this to help decide how further sessions could be planned in the future. In addition to this the museum could contact the following:

ASSIST Sheffield who organise regular Art workshops for asylum seekers and refugees, providing an opportunity for people to meet and socialise, and create artwork together. The museum could offer to host one or two art workshops with them either at the museum or at the ASSIST art venue. The workshops take place at:

ASSIST Art Workshops, The Christadelphian Hall, Cemetery Road, Sheffield, S11 8FP.

You could also contact the Redcross Refugee Support service:

Redcross, Refugees Support, Sheffield Office, Unit 20 Jessops Riverside, 800 Brightside Lane, Sheffield, S9 2RX

ESOL

Museums Sheffield have several gallery trails for ESOL learners, which have recently been updated. The SSN is supporting Museums Sheffield to purchase a new mannequin to display some of the armour and weaponry from the IAMC collection. This display could be included in any future additions to the ESOL trails. It could focus on words associated with the armour and weaponry including nouns, adjectives, etc.

For further support and advice Museums Sheffield could contact the following:

There are a number of ESOL providers in Sheffield.

The Sheffield College, email: info@sheffcol.ac.uk

ESOL Learn For Life Enterprise, email: info@learningforlifeenterprise.com, telephone: @0114 2559080

Adult Learning North-East Community Assembly Area, weblink: www.ne-adultlearning.org.uk

Engaging the local Turkish and Iranian communities

Sheffield University has both a Turkish Society and a Persian Society. In the application, the museum stated that it would like to use the IAMC collection to engage both the Turkish and Iranian communities in the city. Within the collection are both early Iranian ceramics and later Ottoman ceramics. A starting point would be to contact both university societies:

The University of Sheffield Turkish Society

Email: turkish.society@sheffield.ac.uk

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/sheffielddturkishsociety/>

The University of Sheffield Persian Society

Email: nu4per@sheffield.ac.uk

Facebook: <http://facebook.com/UoSPersianSoc>

The museum should arrange a meeting with both societies so that it can introduce itself and discuss the possibilities of forming a partnership. The museum could arrange visits to the museum for both societies. This would be an opportunity for the museum to showcase its IAMC collection. The museum could invite the societies to develop projects/events linked to elements of the IAMC collection. For example, members of the Turkish Society may wish to work with the museum to create a temporary exhibition of its Ottoman ceramics. In addition, they may wish to create a series of events/resources linked to the temporary exhibition, including guided talks, a gallery trail, a simple gallery interactive or perhaps pottery/tile making workshops for adults, or a family drop-in event.

An event that could be the focus for the societies is one of the museums Live Late: Craft Jam's (see below).

Forming relationships with both societies may help the museum make contact with the Turkish and Iranian communities within the wider city. They may have contacts for community leaders or links to local mosques

Live Late: Craft Jams

Millennium Gallery is situated next to Sheffield Hallam University, yet the museum struggles to attract significant numbers of student visitors. The museum has recently introduced a series of Live Late: Craft Jams to attract this audience. These events are held 7-10pm and focus on creating an evening jam packed with workshops, demonstrations, and live music. The museum could use its IAMC collections as the inspiration for a future Live Late.

The event could consist of calligraphy workshops, a selection of live music influenced from across the Islamic world, storytelling, clay tile making, metal working demonstrations and a series of informative talks.

Calligraphy and Tile Making workshops or short courses for adults

The IAMC collection could be used as the inspiration for a series of calligraphy and /or tile making workshops or short courses.

The museum could run one-off calligraphy and/or tile making workshops for adults. These could be delivered by local practitioners. However due to the time it takes to develop the

technique and confidence with materials, and thus to produce a pleasing piece of work it may be more advisable to run a 4-6 week course for each. You could offer 10-12 paying places, and run weekly 2 hour sessions. The museum could hire an external calligraphy artist and/or a clay tile specialist to deliver the course(s). Participants could work towards producing a final piece of work that could be displayed in a temporary gallery at the museum, or an alternate space. To make the course financially feasible all costs, including the artist and materials, will need to be covered by the course fee.

Gallery – mannequin of armoury, ESOL trails, interactives

A short term aim of the museum is to display a selection of the Indo-Iranian metal work and armoury in conjunction with supporting material from the collection. Staff at the museum have shown interest including this display in a future ESOL trail of the museum galleries. The museum could enhance the display with a selection of simple interactives. This could include a collection of replicas that enable visitors to experience the decorative metal work through touch. Small pieces of raised decorative metal would allow visitors to experience the design and texture of the helmets, a piece of chainmail would allow visitors to experience the texture of the neck sections, and textiles that replicate the interior of the helmets would enable visitors to experience the contrast between the interiors and exteriors.



Detail on metalwork



Chain mail on helmet

Short films / Object images on the museum website / database

The museum could create a series of short films focusing on different elements of the IAMC collection. These could be 30-40 seconds long and could include responses from a range of people, including museum staff, volunteers, students, and a selection of community participants, including adults, young people, and school children. The films could include historical facts and visual descriptions, or perhaps be more personal responses. Local people

could be given a selection of IAMC objects from the collection and asked to choose their favourite. They could then be filmed talking about why they chose it and what they like about it.

The museum confirmed that up to 30 new images of the IAMC collection would be added to the online database. These images are important for a range of audiences and their inclusion on the database should be promoted via the museums' social media platforms and website, and in newsletters and museum updates that are circulated. A link to the database should also be promoted to any potential group that the museum wishes to work with regarding the IAMC collection.

Conclusion

This report aimed to highlight possible audiences that could engage with the IAMC collection at Museums Sheffield. The report did not aim to cover all audiences or all possibilities, rather it aimed to highlight a selection of both. Much will depend on future priorities, staff time and budgets.

As a result of the Specialist Support Scheme from the SSN for Islamic Art and Material Culture it is hoped that the staff at Museums Sheffield have an increased confidence to both explore the potential display of their IAMC collection through permanent or temporary exhibitions and to use them to engage a range of audiences in the local community.