

Seed Commission Dance Brief

Museums at Night: Magic

Introduction

Dance artists are invited to submit proposals for a bold, imaginative, awe-inspiring performance to take place as a headline feature of the *Museums at Night: Magic* event at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery on 1 November 2019. This event will accompany our upcoming exhibition *Magic*. We are aiming to create an unforgettable experience of the museum after hours.

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery can offer a commission amount of £3,000. We welcome artist's applications that deliver within this budget or that use this budget as match funding for further bids

Museums at Night at Bristol Museums

Museums at Night is a twice-yearly festival of late openings, sleepovers and special events taking place in museums, galleries and heritage sites across the United Kingdom. It takes place late May and late October and aims to re-imagine museums by turning upside –down audiences' preconceived expectations of what museums are like and who they are for.

Complementing an ongoing dynamic programme of public events, Bristol Museums has hosted three of these Museums at Night (MAN) events in the past year (as well as other lates), all connected to a temporary exhibition:

Museums at Night: Trying It On – 16 May 2018

Accompanied *Grayson Perry: The Vanity of Small Differences*

Based on notions of identity, class and gender found in Grayson Perry's exhibition, one of the UK's leading iconoclastic choreographers, Lea Anderson MBE, created a sensational dance performance featuring costumes by Academy award winners Sandy Powell, Emma Fryer and Simon Vincenzi. The museum arranged for hyperactive drag queen Aida H Dee to mingle with guests for banter, the audience revealed identities within us through mask-making and dressing up, and there were many other engaging activities and performances.

For footage of Lea Anderson's *Trying It On* see: <http://www.leaanderson.com/works/trying-it-on-in-bristol>

Museums at Night: Circus Spectacular – 21 October 2018

Accompanied *Clowns: the Eggs-hibition*

An incredible evening saw acrobats and circus performers take over the museum's grand halls with live performances from Circomedia, The Shakedown Boys, Invisible Circus and Cirque da purr. Guests had opportunities to learn hoops, juggling and tightrope walking as well as opportunities to step inside a vintage circus caravan, enjoy pop-up displays and activities and entry to the exhibition featuring vintage clown costume and archival footage plus hundreds of 'clown eggs' (used to register individual faces).

Museums At Night: Tattoo Live - 16 May 2019

Accompanied *British Tattoo Art Revealed*

With live music from three bands and a DJ set, this daring evening included live tattooing demos, hairdressing demos, body painting, henna art, vintage poster making, roving circus performers and cool stalls as well as entry to the exhibition.

Generic information about our Museums at Night event

Timing: 7pm-10pm

Visitor figures: Maximum capacity for the event is 750 visitors at any one time (depending on numbers of performers involved). This will be a ticketed event.

Audience demographic: mixed audiences from across the city but primarily younger people aged 18-40 who do not ordinarily visit the museum.

Background information about the venue

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery is an internationally renowned organisation with impressive collections, exhibitions and free entry for our 460,000 visitors every year. It is one of 7 museum and heritage sites cared for by Bristol Culture within Bristol City Council.

Situated in an impressive Edwardian Baroque building, the collections range from natural history and world cultures to Egyptology and seven galleries of fine and contemporary art. Several collections are of national importance and have been awarded designated status by the Government, the mark of an outstanding museum, including our eastern art collection, which also contains the most significant holdings of Chinese glass and porcelain outside of China.

The phenomenally successful Banksy vs Bristol Museum exhibition in 2009 attracted great international acclaim and saw us welcome over 300,000 visitors in its three-month run, providing a huge boost to the city.

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, along with its sister venues, makes the City's vast range of collections accessible to provide inspiration, learning and enjoyment for everyone. It offers a wide range of services including special exhibitions and events, access to the collections,

substantial outreach work with local communities and a comprehensive service for schools and young people in the region.

You can find more information on the museum at: <https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/bristol-museum-and-art-gallery/>

‘Magic’ - the exhibition

The concept of the exhibition is based on a revelation - that magic plays a part in all our lives. Moving away from the idea of magic based on illusions and a modern Western popular culture perspective, the visitor will move into and amongst other worlds revealing new arenas of magic and pushing the boundaries of expectation.

Just as there are many definitions of magic, the exhibition will explore the variety of ways magic can be perceived – from communion with the gods and the work of folk healers to the power of the charm to protect from harm. The exhibition will subvert ‘conventional’ magical imagery, juxtaposing the familiar with the unexpected or unknown. Theatrical, emotive, playful and object rich, the design of the exhibition is intended to reflect a sense of awe and wonderment, of light and shade that engages the visitor’s imagination, asking questions of truth and reality, real and imagined.

The exhibition will be largely drawn from our own collections with a handful of loans from other institutions and individual lenders. The exhibition will be cross-cultural and cross-discipline, and cover a time depth from pre-history to the modern day.

The exhibition centres on the idea that Magic is universal; it is part of our human experience.

This will be told through the following concepts:

- It offers an explanation of the world
- It is part of everyone’s cultural heritage
- It is a conduit for other realities
- It allows the supernatural to influence this world and how it works
- It is difficult to pin down and means different things to different people

The exhibition will cover the following topics:

- Stories of how people have used magic to heal, hunt and harm
- Stories of how people use magic to communicate with the spirit world
- Stories of people and spirits who are magical
- Stories of magic in popular culture and literature
- Stories of the tensions within the concept of magic (science/religion/psychology)

It will comprise of three main themes:

- Magical People e.g. shamans, witches
- Magical Beings e.g. angels, fairies
- Magical Things e.g. lucky rabbit foot

A fourth area will look at where magic/science/religion overlap.

What we are looking for in the commissioned performance

We are looking for an exciting and bold, audience facing performance that can take place with limited technical infrastructure and that can respond to the museum audiences, architecture and atmosphere.

We require a dance performance lasting a minimum of 20 minutes and maximum of 30 minutes, to be performed two or three times over evening, from 7pm-10pm. The work must interpret and animate the concept of the exhibition and explore at least one of the three key themes.

Many of the objects displayed in the 'Magic' exhibition are from our World Cultures collections although British magical people, rituals, beings and things will also be represented. The event takes place on 1 November (All Saints Day) which is sandwiched between Halloween and All Souls Day but the performance should avoid the overly-commercialised ways of marking the occasion. We are looking for authentic work that balances creative risk with sensitivity to considerations of cultural appropriation.

Further information about the event

The event will be for an adult 18+ audience and is likely to attract mainly people who are 20-40 years old.

The activities of the event have not been worked up yet but might include tarot and clairvoyance readings, opportunities to hear the experiences of people like witches and modern pagans, craft activities and more. A bar and café will also be open.

The physical performance space

The performance will take place in the front hall of Bristol Museum & Art Gallery using a space of approx. 6m x 11m. The floor is not sprung and has a very hard, marble-like surface. The viewing space will comprise the perimeter of the dance area on all four sides and upper and top floor balconies overlooking the space. It's imperative therefore that the piece is public facing and engaging from all sides and from a bird's eye view. The whole of the performance area is exposed so performers will be 'on stage' for the performance duration.

The museum has no staging, dance floor or props so, if required, these will need to be factored into costs of the application.

Technical support

The museum has a PA kit and microphone but no technical support unless hired in as a cost factored within the commission proposal budget. The museum has a few up-lights that can be programmed in different colours, and will hire in additional up-lighting to create more ambience. Any specialist requirements such as the hire of sidelights or spotlights will need to be factored into the commission proposal budget

Rehearsal and get in

As a public building, please note that on site rehearsal is limited and devising and rehearsal will need to take place off-site.

Dress rehearsal and technical run through could occur on a Monday when we are closed to the public (not during half-term which includes 28 October 2019) or evening after hours. Set-up time for the night of the event can begin at 5pm once the public have vacated the building.

How to apply:

We can accept proposals in writing or by MP3/MP4 file

Proposals should include:

- Your ideas for animating the exhibition key themes
- Consideration of the audience experience
- Consideration of the performance space and technical requirements
- The performance length, number of performers and number of times it can be performed at the event
- A commission budget and a timescale of key milestones
- A filmed example of your choreography / performed works

We anticipate that artists may require additional funding to deliver ambitious ideas. If required, we can connect the successful artist with support to develop a project funding bid via Gather Up Project's Library of People. Bristol Museum and Art Gallery will also provide further information on audience demographics and our marketing plan and reach.

Should you require this information in large print please contact karen.garvey@bristol.gov.uk

Please email your proposal to Karen Garvey, Engagement Officer for Events: karen.garvey@bristol.gov.uk by midday Monday 29 July. Shortlisted candidates will then be selected to meet / have a phone conversation before 2 August.

For further information or for an informal conversation

Please contact Karen Garvey, Engagement Officer for Events: karen.garvey@bristol.gov.uk
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