

Understanding the audience experience of
contemporary visual arts at Geevor Mine World
Heritage Site:
A Dialogue between a Contemporary Artist and a
Sociologist.

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University of Salford

The context:

Geevor Tin Mine World Heritage Museum, Pendeen,
Cornwall, UK.





The Museum opened in 2008 and tells the story of tin mining through interactive displays, artefacts, oral histories, and film. It employs a form of presentation, representation, and display that is in stark contrast to the cool bare white walls of the room where Randall's exhibition was located and displayed.

This juxtaposition of modes of presentation and the differing methodologies behind them offered Randall and Bagnall a unique opportunity to explore how audiences respond to this intersection of a particular kind of heritage space and art.



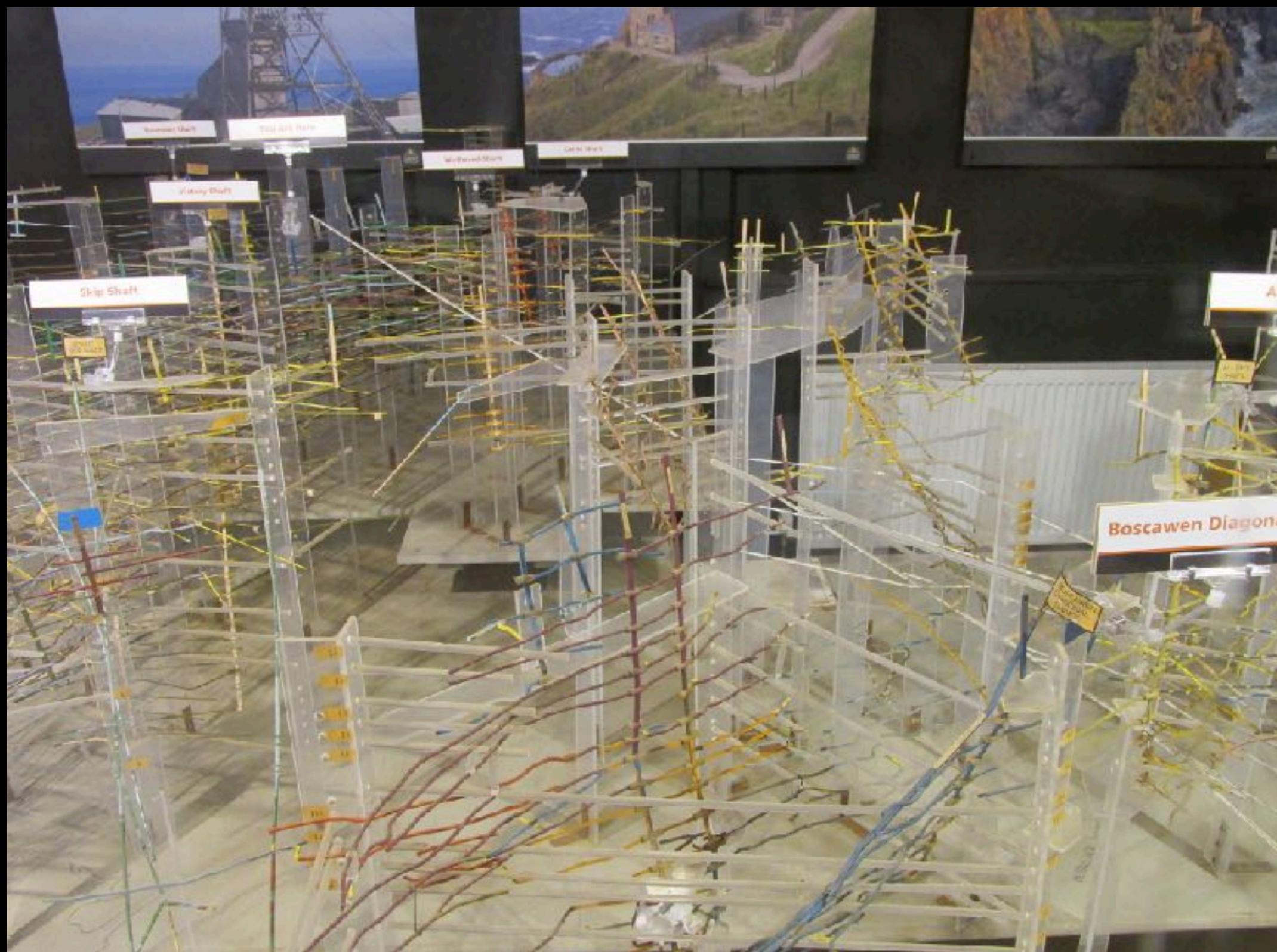
GEEVOR TIN MINES LTD.
BLASTING SCHEDULE

2.10 P.M.	W. SZATHOWSKI	B. WILLIAMS	2.10 P.M.
2.15 P.M.	KNEEBONE	MARTINS	2.15 P.M.
2.20 P.M.	W. TREGLOWN	EAST	2.20 P.M.
2.20 P.M.	S. TREVAINS	D. WILLIAMS	2.20 P.M.
2.20 P.M.	C. HONEY	WHEELER	2.20 P.M.
2.25 P.M.	HARVEY	DAVEY	2.25 P.M.
2.30 P.M.	SMITH	M ^c ARDLE	2.30 P.M.
		DYDYK	2.35 P.M.
2.40 P.M.	ROGERS		
2.40 P.M.	HOSKEN		
	AS INSTRUCTED	THYSSEN	2.40 P.M.
2.45 P.M.	AS INSTRUCTED	AS INSTRUCTED	2.45 P.M.

BY ORDER THE MANAGER

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Jill Randall
'Aftermath' Exhibition,
Geevor Tin Mine World Heritage Museum,
Cornwall, Feb-Oct 2016.

Ideas and Inspiration

Rare flora-bryophytes- adapted to grow on contaminated ground.
Ideas of 'alternative nature' and alternative 'beauty'.

Introduction of exotic species into the UK via Cornwall by plant hunting expeditions financed by mining wealth.

Archival maps and objects in Geevor's collections visualising mapping of complex 3-dimensional spaces of mines.

"Art does not reproduce the visible;
rather, it makes visible."

Paul Klee.





‘Aftermath’ was the first exhibition for a major research project which Randall is leading, aiming to explore and reinterpret sites of world heritage metal mining through contemporary Fine Art, creating innovative new artworks, and engaging local communities and visitors to the sites.

Against the rich backdrop of the Geevor Mine, the exhibition drew strong connections between the environment of the working mine and its aftermath landscapes , offering a different way of interpreting these sites, their history, unique ecology, and alternative beauty.

The exhibition had 30,000 visitors over 8 months.









PHOTOGRAPH OF A TANGLED NETWORK OF FIBERS, CHANG 2004

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The collaboration.

Randall and Bagnall are both academics at the University of Salford, Randall in the School of Arts and Media and Bagnall in the School of Health & Society.

From their different disciplinary perspectives, both have an interest in the relationship between people and place, how this is transformed by social and economic processes such as post-industrialization or globalization, and to challenge the ways in which working class culture is often demeaned and devalued.

The task was to explore whether Bagnall's knowledge of researching audience experience and engagement, alongside her expertise in using social science methodologies in heritage and museum contexts, could be used to examine the impact of Randall's challenging, non-representational artwork at Geevor.



Methods:

In-situ observation, walking interviews, face to face questionnaires, documentary analysis of the in-gallery visitor comments book, focus group creative engagement workshops, and 'meet the artist' events.

Results:

Substantial amount of data-written questionnaires, taped interviews, Focus Group outcomes, artwork produced in workshops.



The findings:-

Overall visitor response to the exhibition was positive, data from the questionnaires indicated that 96% of the visitors had enjoyed the exhibition, and most (80%) would have recommended the exhibition to family and friends.

Qualitative data from the interviews, questionnaires and the visitor comments book revealed that visitors had enjoyed engaging with the artwork, *'lovely to see different perspectives through art'*, and were indeed even *'surprised how interesting it was'*.

Visitors identified how the textures, scale, colours and the different forms of art all contributed to the impact it had on them, stimulating their interest, enhancing their experience of the exhibition and providing a different view of the mines and mining landscape.

There was also an acknowledgement that the use of visual art had added to their understanding of the heritage of mining, and post-industrial landscapes, as it offered an alternative perspective to visiting an industrial museum like Geevor, *'adds a different dimension to the subject, and 'it gives another angle to it'*.

It was also suggested that the use of the 'visual' to provide more understanding might be widened to industrial heritage more generally, as *'art can give additional insight into industrial heritage by bringing a visual element'*.

Visitors also commented on how that art had added to their learning about mining and the area, the textures, scale, size, colours, form and detail of the artwork all contributed to the impact it had on visitors.

Others noted how having art in an industrial museum is a good idea because it changes the visitor experience, it '*breaks it up*'.

Others reported that because the art was about the place it was located in, this added to their enjoyment of it.

Significantly, in terms of impact, most (65%) of the visitors did not visit art galleries on a regular basis, so this exhibition provided a unique opportunity to encounter this type of art.

As one participant stated, the most enjoyable thing about the exhibition was *'that it was related to the place itself'*, without that context some of the meaning and message of the art appears to be lost.

Or as another participant articulated it, the art needs to be *'relevant somehow'* as this enables visitors to connect to the art and be able to grasp its meaning and significance.

There was an awareness amongst the visitors that it was unusual to see art in this context, that it was *'not expected, different'* and recognition too that , *'it is very unique'*, with *'enlightening pieces'* which can inform the visitor.

Quote from visitor to 'Aftermath' exhibition.

..”Your work really spoke to me. I have family connections with Geevor and Levant (I am a descendent of Richard White the Captain of Levant) but the often twee and realist representations of Levant and Geevor didn't really connect with me.

*Your representations are really powerful and thought provoking.
I loved them.”*

Conclusions:

Randall and Bagnall were both keen to explore and understand how to achieve meaningful engagement with heritage and to understand the intangible dimension - the personal and potentially collective transformative experience visitors have when encountering exhibits or art in a museum or gallery.

They questioned why this means something fundamentally important to the viewer, how they can be reconnected with something they have lost or forgotten from their own cultural heritage through the encountering of artefacts, and how this taps into identity and belonging through an emotional and spiritual response.

Seeing and analysing this in action at Geevor allowed them to bring and to encounter alternative perspectives on the presentation and consumption of art and see the influence different modes of engagement with the art and the artist had on the visitor experience.

Collected data using a range of sociological methods enabled them to see the complex relationship between the site, the audience and the artist.

It provided a rare opportunity for both an artist and a sociologist to immerse themselves in the museum, gallery and exhibition together, and to be able to exchange views and access each other's perspectives on how visitors consumed and experienced the exhibition, and how they engaged with the concept of heritage through the medium of visual art.

The idea of what heritage is, and how it can be represented and communicated, and the specifics of how this operates at Geevor also formed part of that dialogue.

Future developments:

Book chapter

‘Understanding the audience experience of contemporary visual arts at Geevor Mine World Heritage Site: A Dialogue between a Contemporary Artist and a Sociologist ‘

For ‘Intersecting Practices: Contemporary Art in Heritage Spaces’.

Collaborative AHRC bid:

‘Made Visible’- Exploring the Cornish global mining diaspora using contemporary art.

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