

mima

Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art

Where do we go from here?

A vision statement for 2015 - 2018

mima is seven years old. In this time it has established itself as an institution to sit comfortably amongst the most prestigious galleries in the UK and beyond.

However, it sits in a context where the currency of the modern or contemporary art is in doubt. Furthermore, the world is now a more uncertain place since 2007 when mima was formed. Traditional forms of art and culture are under scrutiny as never before and the use value of art has slipped away from ordinary society.

In Middlesbrough, an industrial region that is perhaps most removed from the capital that has supported the visual arts, there is the opportunity to evolve a new kind of institution that leads the

field in testing new approaches to making art work in society.

So, what kind of an institution do we want to be?

Sustainable

Efficient on resources, ecologically sound and of continuing value and use to all its constituents

Important

mima should be seen as vital to people locally, regionally, nationally and internationally

Valuable

A large number of people should understand what it does for them and civic society

Interesting

It must have a role in creating diversity in life, to offer new thoughts, ideas and ways of doing things

Popular

Many people should use it and be enriched by the experience

Experimental

Art, in the broadest sense, is the mechanism that

evolves human development. We should try things that might or might not work, we can do this here, we have a duty to this here.

Habitual

The museum should not just be for a special occasion or a destination day out, but a guide in how to live more creatively, humanely; a resource that people can use regularly – like a church, the gym, a social club – to replenish and enrich their daily lives.

Useful

So that the users of mima do so because they develop an understanding of art as a tool for living and doing things better; of use value in life, not merely as an object of contemplation for the few.

The Museum 3.0

The next chapter in mima's history will evolve around the concept of The Museum 3.0. This is an idea of the museum that is built on usership, that is, a place that is created and given meaning by the sum actions of all its users.

This idea comes from 'Usership Theory' and the language of our age - information technology.

(For those of academic leanings see the online publication [*A Lexicon of Usership by Stephen Wright*](#).)

The ideal goal of the Museum 3.0 would be that its users, do not pay to use it, but in fact could be remunerated for their use of it, for helping to create its value - through making, teaching, doing something with it or in it.

Think of the museum like a shared network or an online game, with everyone building and modulating its development according to individual and group needs.

A full realisation of this may be a way off yet, but this mindset starts to point to a different way forward, to a new way of thinking about culture, about mima's role in public life and even new options for making the museum financially sustainable.

Such a museum would be aimed at generating resources and skills not consuming them, it would move us away from the confines of cultural tourism, spectatorship and the attention economy towards embedded cultural production.

In this scheme we might say the users are all practitioners not participants*

This would drive us towards a more inclusive and contributive institution. One that provides a holistic education for all and is valued for what it does for everyone.

It will not be a place of retreat, separate from society, but an Institute that takes part in everyday life, integral to the economy, not supported by it.

***Participation implies an imbalance of power, where the 'participants' perform a function for someone else's agenda.**

Values and Aims

The programme for the future is not set in stone. We need to be attentive to what is needed. To do this we need to build the next phase of mima's history around a core set of values and aims that will shape how we evolve the programme with its constituents.

We should not have a predetermined set of outcomes in mind, but use the values and aims to shape our evolution and response to changes and opportunities around us. We should listen to and monitor the context and respond accordingly.

This will allow us to move away from a fixed programme of exhibitions to a wider, interconnected, responsive range of activities that see everything we do as an education and every aspect of it as an artistic project.

Values

- I. Art is a process, a way of doing things**
- II. Art is a tool for social effect**
- III. Art is education, not for its own sake**
- IV. Art is for the everyday**
- V. Art is for everybody**
- VI. Art is how something is done not what it is**
- VII. Art is not a set of objects**
- VIII. Art is political**
- IX. Art is how we make our history visible**

Aims

1. A unified team

Everyone working to the same mission, together

2. A holistic educational approach

Everything we do is education, to show that art is key to creating and evolving where and how we live

3. Integration of departments

With no separation of educators and curators, the the building and its people working under one roof

4. Not a neutral space

But an inter-subjective interface, an institution with a personality, with something to say

5. An inspiration to artists

To do things differently and provide a stimulating, creative context to work with

6. A leading institution

Nationally and internationally; influencing culture, showing the way - exporting ideas not just importing them

7. A Civic Institution

Contributing to the local economy and ecology,

taking part in, developing and enhancing what we have.

8. Everything is a project

If we believe in art, we must do everything artfully

9. Rethinking aesthetics

Art is neither useless nor separate from the real world. We should work with to re-establish aesthetics as a field of transformation - that all activity is shaped and defined by the sensory field we inhabit and that our control of aesthetics is the way to take control our lives.

Rebuilding

What are the next steps?

Make the planned programme and collections work to our values and aims – how can we do the museum differently?

Establish a curatorial advisory team with people who subscribe to the vision – local, national, international.

Rebuild the architecture of mima, physically and conceptually – with the galleries, education spaces, café, shop all working as active artistic components of the same project.

Opening up mima to a multiplicity of users and uses.

Build new connections in the community and plug mima into to the region and its residents.

As part of this, mima needs to be relevant to people and to global issues.

We should address and work with subjects and projects that matter to people – housing, food, education, employment, popular culture, technology, ecology, politics, identity, religion, industry...

As part of of what we do, mima should be building relations with design, industry and commerce, in a

way that shows how art or artfulness can enrich and enhance day-to-day life.

mima should undertake projects that bridge mima and the world, extending its reach and having civic function – creating projects that work and show how things might work better with increased creativity – in housing, planning, wellbeing, healthcare, education, manufacture, skills development and more.

We need to work on activating and animating the collections.

What stories and processes can we make with the collections and our resources? How can we make the Collections more used and useful?

Using new methods and new technology could we be more playful?

Could we reproduce the collections as products, can we design and manufacture as a way to teach and a way to use art?

Can we use the art at our disposal as a tool, to teach mathematics, chemistry, history, geography, economics, ethics?

We should think of making and production as part of learning for all.

We should take a lead on the re-assimilation of art,

craft, design, architecture and technology – these are all facets of the same thing: creative human activity.

To do this how can we make all the components of mima and the University work together?

Let us think of mima as a public bridge between University and the region.

We should create public maker-spaces in the education spaces and throughout.

Teach and orchestrate activities in the galleries – even design the exhibitions around this function

Extending the learning resources to include technology – can we technologize *the art trolley*?

Learning and teaching should take place in the galleries as part of the exhibition

Let us rethink the café and its food or the shop as an artists' projects, as an artworks in the collection.

Can we make the shop an outlet for our makerspaces, the programme of production and learning

Partnerships with like-minded institutions

We should network mima nationally and internationally with like minded institutions who are also pushing for a new way forward, including:

Museum of Art and Design New York

MACBA Barcelona

Grizedale Arts

Van Abbe Museum Eindhoven

Institute of the School of the Arts Chicago

Edgware Road Project

Liverpool Biennial

Tensta Kunsthalle

SALT Istanbul

Moderna Galeria Lubijana

Reina Sofia Madrid

MKHA Antwerp

The School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Tate Liverpool

Working with and growing what we've got

Importing and exhibiting culture is the norm in galleries, but to make mima relevant we have to work with the existing local cultures and traditions.

What can art do with the culture people have in their lives, what they are already interested in?

The avant garde culture of 'the constant new' is now old. Contemporary Art is a historical moment now passed.

We should take a long view and look at how art can evolve what is already in place, whilst seeing the past as a material part of our current culture to be re-used and re-told as part of our present.

Online development

“The Curated Life”

mima’s online presence should be a subjective voice connecting our activities with other peoples lives.

This would mean the website and online platforms developed as part of mima’s public facing activity, not just a point of information.

Like mima the building, it should be a resource for people to use as they would the building – video, collections, talks, classes, making facilities and evolve as technology evolves – a tool in the lives of our constituents to help them shape their the way they live.

It should represent the people who use mima – its staff and its visitors; it’s friends and its critics: mima is not a building, it is the people who make it.

A civic institution

Ultimately mima needs to become more valued and respected within the communities of Teesside through a programme of active citizenship, taking part in the life of the region, contributing to the widest understanding of culture – the economy, education, business, housing, as well as the traditional arts.

We need to find ways to increase the links with the communities and to make mima an integral part of life on Teesside and helping to shape its consciousness, its future – in effect creating Society as the Institution