

Jill Randall, School of Arts & Media University of Salford

Dr Gaynor Bagnall, School of Health & Society University of Salford

Address for Contact : <mailto:j.randall@salford.ac.uk>

Address for Contact: <mailto:g.bagnall@salford.ac.uk>

Working title of abstract.

Presentation type: Oral presentation with images.

Encounters theme

Abstract (up to 300 words total).

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

This paper examines the outcomes of collaboration between an artist (Randall) and a sociologist (Bagnall), to explore how the use of contemporary visual art might engage audiences and generate new knowledge and understanding of an industrial heritage site. It also considers how the intersection of the different methodologies of practice of an artist and a sociologist allows fresh insights into why, how, and for whom art is produced and displayed. In 2016 the contemporary visual artist Jill Randall exhibited new work in a solo exhibition ‘Aftermath’, at Geevor Mine World Heritage Museum, Cornwall, as part of a wider project which employs contemporary visual art to explore the post-industrial landscapes of Cornish Mining World Heritage sites, provoking memory, reconnecting communities with their industrial past, and bringing new knowledge and understanding to these sites. The juxtaposition of the different modes of presentation of the art and the mining heritage, and the differing methodologies behind them offered a unique opportunity to explore how audiences respond to this intersection of a particular kind of heritage space and art.

A range of sociological research methods were employed, including walking interviews, questionnaires, in-situ observation, creative engagement artist workshops and focus groups to investigate audience response to and experience of the exhibition. Randall and Bagnall also engaged in an on-going conversation as practitioners from different fields about what and who the art was for, and what was meaningful engagement from their differing perspectives.

They explored how this approach provided visitors with an unexpected but not unwanted encounter with challenging contemporary art in a heritage museum environment. This juxtaposition contributed to visitor’s knowledge and understanding of art and heritage at Geevor, and exploring this together showed how dialogue between an artist and a sociologist can allow a more nuanced understanding of this experience.

