

KEYNOTE | WHAT ART CAN DO FOR YOU? | NIGEL HINDS

So welcome back. And let's hope this is going to add some exciting and stimulating layers to what we have heard already.

This session is called - What Art Can Do For You? Who are we making art for? And what factors can help us succeed?

My name is Nigel Hinds. I am Executive Producer at 14-18 NOW which is the UK's First World War Centenary Cultural Programme. I'm an Arts Administrator. I have worked in the contemporary performing arts all my working life, both as a curator of performance programmes in theatre, dance and music, and also running arts organisations. And immediately before working for 14-18 NOW, I worked on the Cultural Olympiad as part of the London 2012 Games.

I am being joined for this conversation by two people. Miriam Haughton, Dr Miriam Haughton, who is Director of Post-Graduate Studies in Drama, Theatre and Performance at NUI in Galway. She's the author of the new book, *Staging Trauma, Bodies in Shadow*, which is published by Palgrave. She's also published widely in international journals and edited collections, and in 2017, I nearly said last year, but obviously we are in 2019 now, she established the Feminist Storytelling Network at NUI Galway. And later on we are going to also hear from Lynnette Moran, who, as well as curating today's symposium, is Creative Producer at Anú and one of the three producers who worked on these rooms and helped realise it. She's the Founder and Creative Director of Live Collision, which is Ireland's leading annual festival of live art, and the first independent creative producing house of its kind in Ireland. She's a specialist in live art, in theatre, in visual art and digital platforms, and works across Ireland, UK and Europe. So we are your panellists and company for the next hour and a bit.

I'm going to start just by reflecting on the experience of 14-18 NOW, and more broadly, and then Miriam and Lynnette will focus us in a bit. So - our role in 14-18 NOW has been to connect people, primarily across the UK, with the First World War, experience of the First World War, through artworks, through commissioning new artworks. And we did this by working in partnership with arts & heritage organisations right the way across the UK. And our work began in the summer of 2014 and ended on 11th November last year, although we are delighted that many of the works that we have commissioned, such as *These Rooms*, and now *Beyond These Rooms*, have a very active and ongoing life. When we took breath a little bit, towards the second part of November, we looked back at some of the headline statistics and the feedback that we were getting from looking at our work. And we have been simply astonished, that the various works that we have commissioned, have collectively engaged over 35 million people across the UK during those four-and-a-half years. And of those, 8 million people were young people, aged under 24. Many of the works that we helped commission took place in particular geographical locations. But a few

large-scale, participative in many cases, works took place right the way across the UK. And they had an astonishing reach and impact. And it's driven in part by the extraordinary ideas that artists were able to come up with, and in part by a very receptive public in the UK, who seem to have taken the opportunity for the centenary very strongly to their hearts. And the levels of awareness of the works that we have done and the engagement has beenwell it's been a once-in-a-lifetime experience for me. I have never worked on a programme of such reach. We have worked with 420 artists from over 40 countries. And we worked in 220 locations in the UK as well as outside the UK as well. So it's been an extraordinary scale, reach and achievement.

And I just want to look back at how it came to start.

We were very much part of a legacy of the Cultural Olympiad. Government and other decision-makers, funders, thought that the Cultural Olympiad succeeded in engaging a wider cross-section of the UK's population in the London 2012 Games than would otherwise have been the case. And so they thought, well if it worked for a sporting festival, will it work for a much more serious moment in the national discourse? And so they held their noses and took a leap of faith with us. So we were set up, we were announced in June of 2013, and we were asked to focus on three key dates, the start of the war, the start of the Battle of the Somme and the end of the war. And when we were set up, a huge part of the UK's commemorative programme was already in place, through Imperial War Museums, through government plans, through the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and so on and so forth.

So we had both the need and the opportunity to be quite focused in establishing our aims. And the aims were threefold. The first was, to help artists create a very rich body of work, across a whole range of different art forms, and working with great artists drawing on their reflections on the period of the First World War. That was the first aim.

The second aim was through working with artists, to engage a wider cross-section of people in the UK, in some kind of meaningful reflection on the centenary of the First World War, than would otherwise have been the case. And a particular focus on young people, and on people who would be less likely to respond to the more formal established forms of commemoration.

And our third aim was to work in collaboration with partners, with Arts & Heritage organisations across the UK and internationally, in the commissioning, producing, realising and promoting of the work from the programme, and the significance.

And our targets were over the period to create 100 projects, and through those projects to reach 10 million. So we have actually done 107 projects. And as I already said, we reached 35 million.

And that brings me on to the question which is kind of one of the headlines of this session, is who were we commissioning for. And it's fairly obvious that with those aims and the government's brief to us, our aim was to engage particular audiences. Whenever I have been commissioning work throughout my career I'm always looking at artists and audiences. Your aim is to help artists create work and then to engineer meetings between artists and audiences. So you are always looking in both directions. But for us, we wouldn't have had a role, we wouldn't have existed without the imperative of through working with artists to create works of broad appeal, which can be either broad, right the way across the UK in one event, or specific targeted appeal to try to get into a particular demographic who might otherwise feel excluded from the dominant narratives of the centenary. So to a certain extent, that question for us was relatively straightforward.

What I'm going to unpick a little bit now is some of the factors that we think were helpful in helping us reach the achievements that we did.

And when we started work the first thing that we needed to do, as an initiative set up by the UK government, was to establish ourselves as credible partners to artists and arts & heritage organisations. There's natural suspicion of initiatives being set up by government in moments of national discourse. And so it was very important that our leadership, both in terms of governance, and in terms of the executive leadership, should be set up in a way that the arts & heritage sectors recognised as being potentially trustworthy partners. So we needed an independent board, we needed strong leadership, and we needed to establish ourselves at arm's length from government, in the same way as the traditions of UK arts funding are. And we needed to get that message out into the sector very quickly.

It helped a lot that we took the decision also that this was going to be a curated co-commissioning programme. So we weren't working as a funding body with a complex set of criteria and complex funding applications. Jenny Waldmann, our director, was the curator of the programme. The programme was her choice of works that she wished to commission. She had a group of artistic advisors. Her choices were overseen by the board. But it was her selection. And so there was a human relationship in the co-commissioning, and a relationship between Jenny and the team, and the partners and artists that we were working with, was a hugely important part of how we went about our work, and which we think contributed to its success.

The next thing was, we needed to create the space and the conditions whereby artists could feel free to make the work that they wanted to make in response to the invitation to make a work. And obviously one of the great advantages of the First World War period is, it's an incredibly rich period. So there are a whole range of different gateways that artists could look into to see if there was work that they wanted to make. And there are huge resonances between things that were going on 100 years ago, and things that are going on now. So it was very easy to make strong contemporary work, or relatively easy, it's never that easy to make work, but to make strong contemporary work, borne out of reflections on

the period, because there are so many echoes, and obviously not least the debates going on in Brussels today.

So we needed to create a free space. If the government had said, our primary role in the commemoration is to convey the message that it was a jolly good thing that the British won the war, and that the German empire was evil, we could not have done what we did. The fact that the government had very very broad views around commemoration, around what we and others were doing, was extremely helpful. If we had a specific agenda set for us we couldn't have done it.

And then our role was not to say anything ourselves, 14-18 NOW stood for commissioning artists to create work and through that work engaging audiences. So there was no agenda that we were imposing on artists.

The other hugely important factor was the partnership model. So that everything we did, we did in partnership. We co-commissioned with other arts organisations around the UK and in Ireland and further afield occasionally. So that what we were doing was feeding into the interests of other partners. We were adding value to other organisations who wished to engage with us. So that we were helping them keep ambition and reach and the ability to work creatively with artists right the way through the whole programme. And key partners in that as well were the BBC and other media. Because obviously without mainstream media partners we could never have reached the numbers that we reached.

And crucially, we were hosted within Imperial War Museums. So our board was independent, but we sat under the umbrella of Imperial War Museums. They gave us our offices. And they were our historical and heritage gold standard partner, as well as, we never said anything about history unless it was approved IWM. But also they threw open their archives and other resources to artists to research work in, and a number of some of the most fascinating projects came out of initial encounters between artists and the Imperial War Museums archives. So that was hugely important.

What this led to is obviously...I have talked about the numbers of reach...but the reach in itself isn't the point on its own. The point is, what difference it made to people experiencing the works. And whether it was crowds of people on the streets of Liverpool coming out to see the Giants of Royal de Luxe evoking the histories of the formation of the Liverpool PALS Battalions in 2014, or a solitary person on a beach, contemplating the end of the war 100 years before, during Danny Boyle's Pages of the Sea, moments of shared and solitary reflection triggered by artists. And the thing about when artists are making work in relation to commemoration is that you are not buying in, as a member of the audience or a participant, you are not buying into a narrative that's imposed from somewhere else, you are bringing your own narrative to the encounter with the artwork. And that's hugely valuable, and picks up on points that we were hearing about earlier.

In 2014 we did a full evaluation, as we have done after every season. And one of the statistics, points that came back to us, was that of people experiencing one of the arts-led projects in 2014 and our 2014 season, people were nearly three times as likely to find the First World War relevant to their lives now, than people who had experienced commemoration through another part of the programme in the UK. Now we don't need telling that artists are able to make those connections with people in a way that are meaningful to people, better than anybody else. And so it's been a hugely rewarding programme to work on.

I'm going to stop there, and I'm going to ask Miriam to come up and take over and then we will resume the conversation and extend it later. Thank you very much.