

Councillors' Information Bulletin: 13 January 2025

Title of Update: RAMM Highlights Report 2024-25 (Q3)

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1. What is the update about?

This is the quarterly highlights report for the Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery, showing museum activity for the period October to December 2024.

2. Background

The quarterly highlights report, along with other reports showing activity against targets, is taken to RAMM's Oversight Panel and reported to Arts Council England as part of its National Portfolio Organisation funding agreement. The oversight panel consists of six councillors and two external representatives.

3. Current position

Activity plan

Visitor Experience (Activity 1)

- Opening hours were extended to incorporate the museum into the city centre late night Christmas shopping events for the first time. A successful financially sustainable initial trial which we hope to grow in future years.

Exhibitions and Events (Activity 2)

- Dartmoor: A Radical Landscape opened on 19 October. It is a major new contemporary art exhibition exploring Dartmoor's evocative landscape through photography, film and Land Art. Showing artwork from 1969 to 2024, this exhibition demonstrates Dartmoor's attraction to artists who, through photography, explore current issues including the interconnected ecological and climate crises and access rights.

- Pressing Images: prints from Exeter's fine art collection was refreshed and re-opened on 24 October. It explores the history of printmaking through a selection of around 45 works on paper and print plates, woodblocks and other printing tools that lead audiences on a captivating journey through time, from 16th-century woodcuts to the cutting-edge creations of the 21st century.
- October half term saw RAMM welcome families to take part in felt Dartmoor pony badge making, the chance to create a Dartmoor wonderland with Nature make and dressing up in historical costumes. A popular night at the museum event named Hairy hands and howling hounds saw 250 children's and adults explore the museum by candlelight whilst they solved riddles themed around Dartmoor myths and legends.
- The November RAMM Lates event was sold out. Again themed around Dartmoor visitors watched morris dancers, musical performances, talks around the moor and its future as well as having opportunities to get creative with cyanotype and collage workshops. We also ventured out of the museum with two walks on Dartmoor with artists from the exhibition, sharing their inspiration.
- A new and unique experience was had by an intimate group of visitors when the English Touring Opera performed in RAMM's galleries.

Digital (Activity 3)

- In December the GLAM-E Lab, a partnership promoting open access including RAMM and led by the University of Exeter, launched a new toolkit and resources for institutions wanting to develop their own open access policies.
- RAMM is now undertaking the soft launch of Bloomberg Connects to provide additional museum content for on-site visitors through smart phones.
- RAMM installed Civic Cookie Control on its core website (rammuseum.org.uk). This makes RAMM's site fully GDPR compliant.

Contemporary Art (Activity 4)

- In October, two new acquisitions by Céline Condorelli were exhibited at RAMM. Condorelli was the National Gallery's Artist-in-Residence in 2023, a partnership between the National Gallery and RAMM. It provided the artist an opportunity to respond to one of the greatest collections of paintings in the Western European tradition, as well as RAMM's rich collections. RAMM subsequently acquired two works courtesy of the Contemporary Art Society.
- In October two of RAMM's commissions were launched in Dartmoor: A Radical Landscape. These were by internationally renowned artist Alex Hartley and filmmaker Ashish Ghadiali both works were inspired by RAMM's Dartmoor-related collections. Hartley's takes the form of images of granite standing stones on recycled solar panels, while Ghadiali's film reflects on the climate emergency.

Children and Young people (Activity 5)

- 757 additional KS2 pupils have visited RAMM to participate in Time Odyssey. The feedback from schools was positive stating that the experience added significantly to the children's enrichment and cultural capital as well as enabling them to practise and develop their critical thinking skills. In December representatives from RAMM attended a Time Odyssey event in London, organised by Art Explora, the funder. Attendees included the British Museum and other partner museums as well as representatives from Art Explora and Clore Duffield foundation. The event was a chance to reflect on the programme, share experiences and provide feedback for future development.
- The home education programme continues to be a success with three monthly sessions fully booked within hours of advertising. These offer home-educated students a chance to take part in the same museum visit as school attenders, as well as a more creative offer designed to appeal to child-led interests within the education curriculum.
- 32 A level students on Exeter College's Art, Craft & Design (film & video) course made short video creations inspired by their visit to RAMM's Dartmoor: A Radical Landscape exhibition. Their videos will be projected in RAMM's courtyard space in January for two weeks.
- Young people with mental health needs co-created a year-long exhibition for the café area, linked to Dartmoor: A Radical Landscape. The Frame of Mind project – using mindful photography and creative skills to lay stepping stones for young people to regain mental health, meaningful activity and social engagement – was also selected as a case study for a museum sector conference showcasing best practice nationally.
- Primary school children from a state school choir joined older visitors with dementia and their paid and unpaid carers and companions for a Midwinter Morning themed around Arctic objects, sharing jokes, song, and simple craft-making together. This encourages creativity within the school, as well as wellbeing across generations.

Individual Creativity (Activity 6)

- As part of its Dartmoor-themed programme, RAMM held two creative workshops – weaving and needle felting – creating moor-inspired pieces and introducing these skills to people for the first time.
- Museum Meet-Up kicked off monthly sessions with National Lottery funding, building quickly to an average of 20 participants, often accompanied and encouraged by community mentors among RAMM's citywide wellbeing contacts. Visitors, aged 50-75, are invited to a low-pressure, cultural and social space for people coping with anxiety, low mood and/or isolation. It includes participants living with mild dementia and their partners. The sessions – which, along with the name, were determined by pilot project participants – ranged from a relaxed history curator's tour with handling; a gallery visit on the autumn theme of time and light, with clay lamp-making; object-handling around a winter theme.
- RAMM's age-friendly programme continues to provide regular multisensory outreach sessions at hospitals, care homes, older people's social housing common rooms. These focus on the theme of the seasons, or food, and sometimes include a

craft element, led by a trained artist-facilitator. The programme's charging model covers its costs, while targeting subsidised sessions at NHS wards and Age UK.

Skills Development (Activity 7)

- 20 Liberal Arts students completed a 'think tank' challenge based on how to attract people to the museum who don't usually visit.
- 14 people joined the Youth Panel (aged 18-25).
- 2 students have started a paid Access to Internship in connection with the University of Exeter.
- 6 people have joined the Future Skills Programme.
- 6 students have started a student placement in Engagement, Marketing, Contemporary Art and Collections.

Dynamic Collections (Activity 8)

- Workshops for the first community project have been delivered. We worked with artist Simon Lee Dicker to deliver a series of 6 workshops with participants from Hikmat. 109 people from a variety of backgrounds (including Southeast Asian, Chinese, Arab, Libyan, Egyptian) took part in the project. We received excellent feedback on the workshops from attendees particularly in relation to skills building and connection with others.
- A wide variety of outputs have been created as a result of the project, including over 100 community-produced ceramic pieces; a collection of community comments relating to ceramic pieces (and food) from RAMM's collections; photogrammetry (3D scans) of 6 of the ceramic pieces produced in the workshops and a series of artworks, inspired by the workshops, created by Simon Lee Dicker which will be included in the Food: Beyond the Plate exhibition at RAMM in 2025.

Community engagement and university collaboration (Creative Arc) (Activity 9)

- The Tastes Like Home project held community conversations around the city on the theme of food, meeting around 80 residents from Beacon Heath, Wonford, Summerway, and St Thomas. Collaborations with community hub LOVEfood and colleagues in ECC social housing included older residents through coffee mornings and lunch clubs. Comments are being woven into an artists' representation to decorate the RAMM café space. Another element of the project is a collaboration with multiple researchers within the Exeter Food Network at University of Exeter, to compile a digital map of food activism around Exeter. This will feature in RAMM's upcoming exhibition, Beyond the Plate, and be passed on to community researchers in Food Exeter to maintain as a legacy.

Investment principles plan

Ambition & Quality

- Impact & Insight toolkit results for RAMM's summer transport exhibition had high scores of 86 for enjoyment and 82 for captivation. Also 96% of those surveyed rated their experience good or excellent.
- The age demographic who responded to the survey indicates we reached a good spread of ages (more than previous summer exhibitions of Lego and GTH). 25% of those attending came with children and 96% of those attending particularly wanted to see this exhibition. Those who came to the exhibition wanted to bring their children and had a good experience when they were here.

Inclusivity & Relevance

- Mental Health First Aid training was carried out in October 2024.
- A process for monitoring how RAMM's accessibility materials are being used has been implemented.

Environmental Responsibility

- Events and engagement around Beyond the Plate and Tastes Like Home have highlighted and collaborated with sustainable initiatives around the city, including surplus food projects, foraging and food-growing initiatives. They have also connected with community groups sharing skills around low-cost, low-energy cooking.
- Craft activities are planned with sustainability in mind, avoiding single-use plastic and non-recyclable materials, and sourcing from low-carbon suppliers as much as possible.
- Exhibition materials are procured with sustainability as well as restrained budgets in mind, re-using items whenever possible.
- The Environmental Forum for Action group continues to meet, discussing how RAMM might communicate its ongoing decarbonisation with external audiences.
- AECOM, the third-party consultant working with ECC on a city-wide decarbonisation plan, produced their final report in November 2024 outlining current energy usage, sustainable/suitable alternatives, and projected energy/cost savings.

Dynamism

- The AI team is meeting regularly, and the digital officer has attended a seminar entitled How AI will Transform Museums. The team has engaged with the new Head of IT at ECC, asking to be kept informed about the council's AI policy as RAMM's approach will have to be governed by this. A survey was sent to all staff, to assess understanding of and attitudes to the use of AI in the museum and the results show common themes. Most respondents are interested in learning more and do see potential uses for AI but want to understand it better before trying it out. 92% of respondents expressed concerns, over RAMM losing its "personal touch" as well as the ethics of AI, copyright issues, deskilling/job replacement and the environmental implications.

- RAMM's community panel met to discuss the museum's commercial offering and some useful feedback was received.
- A new model of venue hire (large scale ticketed events) was piloted at the museum 'Night at the museum - a Halloween Silent Disco'. Following the success of the event two further years have been booked. Reviews are ongoing to adapt the terms and conditions of hire, invest in low level event infrastructure from the profits, and improve event management plans. A working group is exploring similar events and provider/organisers to grow this area of commercial activity.
- With the launch of Dartmoor: A Radical Landscape the team is now delivering point of sale ticketing in the exhibition itself. It is hoped that this new approach will improve the visitor journey and encourage further customers to visit paid exhibitions. It has also provided further training and development opportunities for the front of house team.
- RAMM's Volunteer Engagement Lead is participating in a conversation between a number of organisations, led by the National Trust Volunteer Engagement Lead. The aim is to deliver a changed experience of volunteering in the UK and build strong civic participation for our communities.

4. Future position

n/a

5. Are there any other options?

n/a

6. Conclusion

RAMM continues to deliver a varied, inclusive and ambitious programme of activities to its audiences in the city and further afield. It is performing well against its targets and KPIs