PhD Research Showcase Speakers and Presentations

**PhD Showcase Panel 1: Immersive Collections, Sites, Archives**

**PhD TALK 1**

**Lynn Verschuren**

Glasgow

Lynn Verschuren is a PhD Candidate in Information Studies at the University of Glasgow. Working in collaboration with The Burnett Collection, Glasgow Museums, Lynn’s research explores how immersive technologies may be used to enhance visitor engagement with late medieval devotional artefacts. She holds an MLitt in Medieval and Renaissance Studies (2016) and an MLitt in Museum Studies (2016), both from the UofG. Lynn’s research is supported by SGSAH’s Applied Research Collaboration Studentships (ARCS).

**Teachings and Research:**

- **Title:** Tears of Our Lady: Digital Engagement with Burnett’s Late Medieval Collection
- **Abstract:** Late medieval devotional artefacts are inherently interactive, engaging both the body and the mind. The practice of museums, both within the UK and without, to present medieval objects as decontextualised objects of art engenders an often incomparable distance between viewer and viewer, not just physically but also emotionally. In exploring the potential of using immersive technologies in overcoming this distance, and fostering a more fully engaged, more empathetic engagements with the medieval past. In doing so, I will be sharing insights into my own practice-based research that I am carrying out in collaboration with The Burnett Collection, Glasgow Museums, and in the process, will critically reflect on the challenges, opportunities and lessons learned along the way.

**PhD TALK 2**

**Alison Hadfield**

St Andrews

Alison Hadfield is a second-year doctoral researcher at the University of St Andrews (School of Classics and School of Psychology and Neuroscience), and the University of Glasgow (School of Information Studies). Her work, funded by SGSAH, employs interdisciplinary methods to examine how digital and sensory experiences of archaeology affect memory and wellbeing, particularly for people living with dementia.

**Teachings and Research:**

- **Title:** Technology, Touch and Transmission – Object handling in the Age of COVID
- **Abstract:** The rapid growth of digital media, including immersive technologies, has transformed access to heritage collections, offering dynamic, user-driven experiences. Although 3D digital models and virtual museums allow considerable control over navigation, perspective and scale, they present a predominantly visual narrative, diminishing the object’s material, sensory and kinesthetic properties (Eve, 2017). By contrast, an object handling session illustrates these features perfectly, sparking powerful emotional reactions in both the observer and the collection custodian. Furthermore, memory research at the University of St Andrews suggests that touch reactivates long-suppressed levels of recognition and recall after handling original artefacts, compared to viewing displays or 3D digital models (Sweetman, Hadfield & O'Connor, 2020). Multisensory stimulation in museums is particularly important for people living with dementia, improving cognitive processing and wellbeing. Dementia-friendly arts programming and remediating touchable objects provide valuable peer support and prove that a dementia diagnosis need not precipitate withdrawal from activities that provide meaning and intellectual challenge. Until now archaeological collections have rarely been used as a stimulus (Paddon, 2013) and few studies have compared the impact of digital and physical approaches. This presentation highlights key evidence from heritage-in-health interventions and explores how the COVID-19 Pandemic has accelerated the ‘wellbeing agenda’ in museums and changed attitudes to technology and touch.

**PhD TALK 3**

**Basil Al-Rawi**

GSA

Basil Al-Rawi is a visual artist working with photography, moving image and simulation. He’s in the 2nd year of his practice-based PhD at SImLS at GSA, funded through a GSA scholarship affiliated with SGSAH. His research explores the remediating of archives and narratives from Iraq diapora in VR.

**Teachings and Research:**

- **Title:** Recomposing the Archive: remediating memories of Iraq diapora in Virtual Reality
- **Abstract:** This PhD practice-based research adopts a participatory design approach to explore the creative remediating of archive photos and associated memorias from Iraq diapora within Virtual Reality (VR). Through interviews with Iraq diapora in the UK, Europe, and beyond, primarily 1st generation Iraqis who have emigrated since the 1950s and their descendants, the researcher is curating an online archive of personal photographs and audio-visual accounts of memories surrounding those photographic moments. The Iraq Photo Archive (www.iraqphotoarchive.com) has gathered 104 images from 23 contributors, along with 6 oral history interviews to date. The methodology involves going to agency to Iraq diapora to populate the archive with images of their choice and the opportunity to narrate their individual stories. The VR experience utilises a digital reconstruction of a traditional Iraqi 'Shanasheel' house as the central virtual environment and as such incorporates an element of heritage preservation. The project will be a figurative and virtual home for these photographs and memories, and aims to create a platform to convey the narratives of Iraq diapora to the wider community. This research also experiments with different methods of remediating photographs within VR such as the reconstruction of photos as immersive 3D environments with voice-over narrations.

**PhD TALK 4**

**Florence Felsheim**

St Andrews

I am currently in the first year of my PhD, which I am pursuing at the University of St Andrews under the supervision of Prof. Rebecca Sweetman (Classics), Dr Andrea Brock (Classics) and Dr Alan Miller (Computer Science).

**Teachings and Research:**

- **Title:** Imaging the Mithraeum: Recomposing the Archive of a Roman cult in Virtual Reality
- **Abstract:** My research involves creating VR reconstructions of mithraea – ancient temples to the god Mithras, whose cult was celebrated in the Roman empire between the 1st and 4th centuries CE. I am researching cultural variations of this cult in Roman Gaul in order to study how these variations affected the cognitive experiences of the cult. VR offers a unique opportunity to explore the physical environment of this cult as it would have existed. VR has the potential to act as an act of both researching and archiving: it requires precise measures, detailed layouts, and meticulous data gathering. Therefore, this project is directly linked to the digital preservation of heritage sites.

**PhD TALK 5**

**Lise Olsen**

Aberdeen

Lise Olsen is a second-year PhD Candidate at the department of Humanities, University of Aberdeen. Since starting her research journey she’s presented her work at many events/broadcasts, including Gwathmey’s ‘The Sonic Body’ and ‘The Active Listening Project’ conference in Paris.

**Teachings and Research:**

- **Title:** Through immersive, interactive audio soundscapes, my research is about to creating new forms of interaction with Scottish Highland landscapes
- **Abstract:** Through immersive, interactive audio soundscapes, my research is about to creating new forms of interaction with Scottish Highland landscapes. This PhD project transends the boundaries of the physical and digital as well as the human and the ‘other’. The project is concerned with the way in which non-digital forms of heritage can be creatively rendered using digital technologies and support the dissemination of contextually situated content. With the specific focus of mapping folklore to the landscape, can these technologies enable more people to meaningfully engage with and reconsider their experience of folklore in the landscape? Can immersive technologies be a positive disrupter in documenting and preserving ocean knowledge and heritage? The research postulates that by utilising extended reality technologies, ocean governance for equitable and inclusive sustainability and allows stakeholders to learn and experience ocean knowledge and cultural heritage.

**PhD TALK 6**

**Lizzie Robertson**

Aberdeen

Lizzie Robertson is a current 1st year PhD in the Archaeology department at the University of Glasgow creating landscape-scale immersive sound experiences, with Glencoe as one of my case studies. This research is funded by the Scottish Graduate School for Arts and Humanities.

**Teachings and Research:**

- **Title:** Recreating sound and place in Scottish Highland landscapes
- **Abstract:** Through immersive, interactive audio soundscapes, my research is about to creating new forms of interaction with Scottish Highland landscapes through their archaeological, historical, environmental and ecological dimensions, and how this differentiates representations that primarily rely on visual stimuli. As part of this practice-based research I will seek to explore the ways in which creative audio experiences, experiments and acoustic reconstructions can engage audiences with the past in emotional, meaningful ways. These immersive experiences, resting somewhere between AR and XR, can show how such technologies can augment audience’s experience of cultural heritage landscapes, and how immersive audio can play with the lack of visual presence versus sonic presence when it comes to interpreting such landscapes. These immersive audio experiences enable us to reframe our understanding of cultural landscapes, empowering and enriching our experience of the past and our relationship to it. Through immersive audio experiences, we can learn and experience the past in a new and meaningful way, allowing us to understand and appreciate the complexity of cultural landscapes in a more holistic manner.

**PhD TALK 7**

**Shona Noble**

GSA

Shona Noble is in her first year of study of a GSA scholarship-funded PhD at the Glasgow School of Art. She is interested in mapping cultural data to the landscape, can these technologies enable more people to meaningfully engage with and reconsider their experience of folklore in the landscape? In the context of heritage visualisation, can the digital realm be thought of as a medium for revealing the hidden layers of information and meaning in the landscape? Is there a way of working with the technologies that is inclusive and beneficial to all? Can the use of digital technologies in this context enable more ethical tourist economies and sustain creative economies, locally? This project will critically reflect on the use of digital technologies in not only becoming a new access point for folkloric content, but assess its potential in reimagining new approaches for map making and encouraging its use in support of local economies. Ultimately, it seeks to reframe the heritage of place so that it is outward looking, and the stories are told by the communities themselves, in ways they choose to tell them.

**PhD TALK 8**

**Marly Muendeni Samuel**

GSA

Marly Muendeni Samuel is a first-year PhD Candidate at the Glasgow School of Art, School of Simulation and Visualisation. Her PhD is funded by the UK Global Challenges Research Fund through the One Ocean Hub, a five-year collaborative research programme aiming to integrate ocean governance for equitable and inclusive sustainability.

**Teachings and Research:**

- **Title:** The interaction of technology and ocean cultural heritage: A Namibian case study
- **Abstract:** My research explores ocean communities in Namibian coastal towns that are part of a social ecological system and have long-standing cultural links and emotional connections with the ocean. Nonetheless, there is realised potential to benefit and learn from heritage and emotional connections with the ocean for sustainability and to enable livelihoods and enhance communities through knowledge preservation and ocean literacy. The research examines ocean cultural heritage, integrates local communities’ knowledge, and improves digital cultural heritage and knowledge preservation through extended reality (XR) technologies. It uses research through design and transdisciplinary research as research and development methodology to design and develop culturally appropriate and engaging virtual reality experiences that will enhance community participation in cultural heritage, beliefs, ocean knowledge, and emotional connections between people and the ocean, working towards enhancing how technology can empower and be a positive disrupter in documenting and preserving ocean knowledge and heritage. The research postulates that by utilising extended reality technologies, ocean cultural heritage can be reimagined as a cohesive whole and embedded in a technique that complements ocean literacy and provides new avenues for ocean benefits and sustainability and allows stakeholders to learn and experience ocean knowledge and cultural heritage.