

reimagining museums for climate action

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PRESS
RELEASE

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE WINNERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL DESIGN COMPETITION
'REIMAGINING MUSEUMS FOR CLIMATE ACTION'

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Reimagining Museums for Climate Action is an international design and ideas competition launched on 18th May 2020 for International Museum Day. The competition, which closed on the 15th September, challenged designers, architects, academics, artists, poets, philosophers, museum professionals and the public at large to radically (re)imagine and (re)design the museum as an institution, to help bring about more equitable and sustainable futures in the climate change era.

The competition attracted significant international attention, with 264 submissions from 48 countries. Entries were judged by an international panel of museum, architecture and design, climate change, heritage and sustainability experts. The winners have now been announced.

The eight successful teams will each receive £2,500 to develop their ideas into exhibits, which will be displayed at Glasgow Science Centre ahead of and during COP26, the United Nations Climate Change conference. COP26 is due to take place at the Scottish Event Campus in November 2021. Glasgow Science Centre, which is situated next to the SEC, will be playing a key role in the conference.

The exhibition will be accompanied by talks, workshops and other activities encouraging debate around the future role of museums and heritage in times of rapid environmental change.

The competition was developed by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Heritage Priority Area, led by Prof. Rodney Harrison of the UCL Institute of Archaeology, in conjunction with Colin Sterling (UCL Institute of Archaeology) and Henry McGhie (Curating Tomorrow). Rodney Harrison said “the number, range and quality of the proposals we received far exceeded our hopes and expectations. The response to the competition shows how significantly the need to transform our institutions for climate action is viewed by the public, and the hopes for museums to participate in a range of different ways in this transformation. We are excited to begin working with the competition winners and Glasgow Science Centre to develop our exhibition in advance of COP26 next year”.

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Emma Woodham, climate change programme manager at Glasgow Science Centre said “the exhibition will make an important contribution to Glasgow Science Centre’s overall climate change programme, which aims to inform, inspire and empower people of all ages and backgrounds to engage with COP26, and take action on climate change in their own lives.”

Jury members were impressed with the creativity and originality of the submissions. Miranda Massie, Director of the Climate Museum in New York said “It’s been an honor to serve as a juror for this important competition. Our collective will and talent must be mobilized to address the climate emergency, and museums, due to their popularity and public trust, have a central role to play in that transformation. RMCA elevates and advances that necessary role.”

Professor Kavita Singh, Professor of Art History, School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India said “It was particularly enriching to see the range of different approaches taken by the projects, from speculative science-fiction, to collective action, to humour. When you see so many ways of responding to the same, looming crisis you think there has to be hope!”

Lucia Pietroiusti, Curator of General Ecology at the Serpentine Galleries, said the competition provided “An excellent and visionary brief to begin to think creatively not only about what museums – and the art field at large – can show or say, but what they can be. It stood as an example of thinking ecologically, that is to say, about systems, subjects and commitments as one and the same.”

Asher Minns, Executive Director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research said, “Engaging people with climate and environmental change is an essential function of socially relevant modern museums. I hope the competition will be a spark that ignites public museum partnerships to stimulate and provoke dialogue that responds to climate change in communities worldwide. I congratulate the organisers for their leadership in this essential endeavour showcasing what is possible between museums and their publics at COP26 in Glasgow.”

The eight winning proposals are

Weathering With Us (Isabella Ong & Tan Wen Jun; Singapore) which imagines a new kind of contemplative museum space where climate action is materialised in the very structure and experience of the building.

Existances (Jairza Fernandes Rocha da Silva, Luciana Menezes de Carvalho, Nayhara J. A. Pereira Thiers Vieira, João Francisco Vitório Rodrigues, Natalino Neves da Silva & Walter Francisco Figueiredo Lowande; Brazil) which shows the power of collective knowledge in the fight against climate change, imagining a network of micro-museums embedded in and responding to the diverse lifeworlds of Indigenous communities.

Elephant in the Room (Design Earth: Rania Ghosn, El Hadi Jazairy, Monica Hutton & Anhong Li; USA) which offers a fantastical story in which a stuffed elephant comes to life and forces museums and wider society to confront their role in climate change.

Museum of Open Windows (Livia Wang, Nico Alexandroff, Akil Scafe-Smith & Angus Smith, UK) which repurposes the existing global infrastructure of museums to support inter-community collaboration and citizen research on climate change and climate action.

Dundee Museum of Transport (Dundee Museum of Transport: Alexander Goodger & Katherine Southern, UK) which asks how a traditional museum might evolve to address the contemporary challenge of sustainable travel in an inclusive way.

Story:Web (The Great North Museum:Hancock (GNM:H), Open Lab: Simon Bowen, Sarah Mander & David de la Haye; UK) which mobilises existing museum collections to empower people to curate their own climate stories, experiences and networks on a global scale.

A Series of Collective, Non-Statistical Evidence (pppooolll: Kamil Muhammad, Haidar El Haq, Amelia M Djaja, Gregorius Jasson & Ken Fernanda; Indonesia) which applies familiar museum practices of collecting, display and participation to imagine spaces of dialogue, where different communities come together to share and articulate their personal experiences of climate change.

Natural Future Museums (Takumã Kuikuro & Thiago Jesus; Brazil/UK) which asks what it would mean to confer museum status on existing Indigenous lands in forests and other places that play a key role in climate action.

THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES RESEARCH COUNCIL (AHRC)
HERITAGE PRIORITY AREA TEAM

Led by Professor Rodney Harrison, Professor of Heritage Studies and based at the UCL Institute of Archaeology – works with the AHRC/UKRI, the heritage research community, and national and international heritage partner organisations, to draw together and stimulate the development of a wide range of research across the arts and humanities that makes an important contribution to understanding heritage. We also aim to support the interconnections between research, policy and practice, both in the UK and internationally. We take an expansive view of heritage, and aim to encourage and stimulate work that highlights intersections between natural and cultural heritage, and key global challenges. www.heritage-research.org.

The AHRC Heritage Priority Area’s work on the design competition is undertaken in partnership with Colin Sterling (also based at the UCL Institute of Archaeology) as part of his own AHRC-funded leadership fellowship project New Trajectories in Curatorial Experience Design www.experience-design.co.uk, and Henry McGhie, founder of Curating Tomorrow, a consultancy which aims to help maximise the contribution that museums, the heritage sector and other organisations and sectors make to support a thriving society, economy and environment www.curatingtomorrow.co.uk.

GLASGOW SCIENCE CENTRE

One of Scotland’s most popular visitor attractions. It is an educational charity that inspires and motivates people to engage with science. Its vision is a Scotland where all people feel empowered through learning and engagement with science to make positive differences in their lives, their communities and to society as a whole. Glasgow Science Centre’s values are to strive for excellence, to be inclusive, innovative and collaborative. Glasgow Science Centre is for all ages, genders, abilities and backgrounds. Its role is not to teach science, but to change the way that people feel and engage with science to build their social, cultural and science capital. The Centre presents the scientific process in an accessible manner to help people develop their own knowledge and understanding, presenting good-quality science without bias. The Centre wants to inspire the next generation of scientists and engineers. The Centre will be playing a key role in the COP26. www.glasgowsciencecentre.org/

THE UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON
CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE PARIS AGREEMENT

In 1992, the world’s governments committed to address the rapidly growing threat of global climate change by adopting the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to achieve the “stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system...” The Convention came into force in 1994.

Since then, governments and their representatives have met twice a year to monitor progress, evaluate what action is needed to meet the Convention’s key goals, and agree programmes of activity that are then to be delivered in each country. Notably, the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 committed its

signatories by setting internationally binding targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Paris Agreement of 2015 saw its signatories agree “to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping a global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius.”

The year 2015 also saw the launch of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, the most ambitious programme ever to secure a sustainable future. The Sustainable Development Goals are strongly linked to activity for the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement.

COP

Signatory countries of the Framework Convention on Climate Change meet twice a year. A meeting is held in Bonn, Germany, in the summer, to help set the direction for the larger, more important conference that is usually held in November or December. This meeting is often referred to as the COP, which means the ‘Conference of the Parties’. As the first COP was held in 1994, the next COP will be COP 26, and it is due to be held in Glasgow in mid-2021.

ACTION FOR CLIMATE EMPOWERMENT

The original Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the Paris Agreement, both recognise the crucial importance of involving the public in climate action. They both specify the importance of public education, training of key groups of staff, public awareness campaigns, public participation in climate change decision making, public access to information relating to science and policy regarding climate change, and international co-operation. These six areas are known informally as Action for Climate Empowerment, or ACE.

Museums present a huge potential to support ACE, with somewhere between 80-100,000 museums in the world, reaching hundreds of millions of people each year. They have a wealth of resources that can contribute positively, often uniquely, towards climate action. Governments have recognised the important part that museums, and other educational and cultural institutions, can play in helping achieve the goals of the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, specifically mentioning their contribution in the Work Programme for the Paris Agreement, which was agreed at COP 24 in Katowice, Poland, in 2018.