

Inheriting the Anthropocene

Manchester Museum

Researcher: “What does it feel like to be inheriting the Anthropocene?”
Young person: “It’s like being given the Mona Lisa and then realising someone’s drawn a moustache on it”

This project involved a series of free after-school workshops for 11-14 year olds (Young Adventurers), taking place in Manchester Museum and delivered over seven consecutive weeks in June and July 2019. Six local young people, researchers from Manchester Metropolitan University’s Biosocial Research Lab and members of the Museum’s Learning, Curatorial and Conservation staff took part with a focus on expression and creating a display exploring “inheriting the Anthropocene”.

Together the group shaped all the ideas, discussions, activities and content that were produced throughout the project. During the workshops, their museum adventure took them around the galleries, behind the scenes and Vivarium. Over time they found that certain ideas started to turn into actions which they showcased during a final celebration event at the end of the project.

They created a beautiful and strange cabinet of curiosity, combining objects, words and images that were gathered throughout the workshops. The cabinet shared how it feels to be inheriting the Anthropocene and raised some of the challenges that were encountered around care and curiosity and how easily they can both become forms of control and mastery.

This project has demonstrated the value of opening up the museum; by reimagining it and by challenging some of the practices and ideas that often go unquestioned, they were able to start to rework the relations between people and things. Through this ‘unplanned’ and organic approach to the Museum, and by encouraging the participants to lead their own adventures, they moved towards a different ethic of care; one that is perhaps more appropriate for the contemporary world.

These insights continue to shape how the Museum works with young people and have been shared internationally at conferences (both academic and sector-specific) as well as being published in the journal Cultural Studies.

Partners: Manchester Museum, Young Adventurers, Manchester Metropolitan University Biosocial Research Lab



Image caption:
The Cabinet of Curiosity, co-produced by the Young Adventurers, on display at Manchester Museum