In the Media

The Institute picks interesting stories and news items every week from the worlds of art, culture and social study and presents them in the blog. This week the stories are from the British Library's "Digital Conversations: Cultural Heritage Institutions and Videogame Technologies" panel held on the 8th of December and have been chosen by the Institute's Maria Pirkkalainen.

Minecrafting the British Museum

Putting together the world famous game Minecraft and the even more legendary British Museum might not sound like the most logical pair at first glance. However, like Nick Harris from the British Museum's Museum of the future project pointed out at the Digital Conversations panel discussion, the mix of these two has proved out to be very fruitful to both parties.

Initiated and managed by Mr Harris, the crowdsourcing project Museumcraft aims to give anyone interested in the Museum or Minecraft the opportunity to engage with the Museum's spaces by working together to build the Museum in Minecraft. Engaging the interested audience first via a post on Reddit, the project provides Minecraft users the chance to personalise and modify the Museum according to their wishes. The building will be freely available to download after its completion, and it is also planned to be used as an educational tool.

The idea behind the project is to give the museum and the general public a chance to think together how, for example, the museum space could be customized. Would the people want to build the museum themselves? Judging from the enthusiastic feedback and interest that Museumcraft has generated, the answer seems to be a strong yes.

Victoria and Albert Museum's Games Designer in Residence

The world's largest museum of decorative arts and design, the Victoria and Albert Museum took another step forward when it introduced its new initiative of a games designer residency in 2013. The museum's first chosen games designer Sophia George completed her yearlong residency in the fall of 2014, and the V&A's Team Leader for Digital Programmes, Alex Flowers, discussed some of the achievements and results of their collaboration at the Digital Conversations panel discussion.

Before her residency, BAFTA winner and Chair of Swallowtail Games Sophia George was known, for example, for her family-friendly puzzle game Tick Tock Toys. Organized as a partnership between the V&A, V&A at Dundee and the University of Abertay Dundee, Ms George spent the first half of the residency in London and the other half in Dundee.

Image: Victoria and Albert Museum

The residency aimed to find new interpretations and ways of use for the museum's large collection of British heritage. The final product of the residency was therefore a free iPad game called Strawberry Thief. The game was inspired by a historical William Morris textile piece in V&A's Britain 1500-1900 galleries.

Besides working and producing the game in question, the games designer's residency tasks included working on public engagement, workshops and being active in calling for more women to enter the games industry. The museum's focus on video games will also be seen at their upcoming video games exhibition in 2016.

World's first cultural centre for gaming to open in the UK

GameCity is a British institution that celebrates the artistry and creativity of video games and has held the annual GameCity festival each year ever since 2006. And as the company's Director Iain Simons told at the event, starting from March 2015, GameCity will also be the main party behind the world's first cultural centre for gaming; the National Videogame Arcade in Nottingham, United Kingdom.

The 2.5 million pound centre aims to promote video gaming as an art form as important as for example film and theatre. With five floors, video game exhibitions and a permanent display of gaming world objects, the centre is sure to answer a need for an important area of the creative culture and economy.

British Library's annual quest for finding inspiring video games

Besides engaging professionals from the cultural heritage and academic videogame design sectors, the British Library's Digital Conversations event also introduced the third edition of the Library's and GameCity's annual video game competition Off the Map. The competition's co-curator Helen Melody explained how the theme of the next Off the Map coincides with the 150th anniversary of the publication of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland – or as originally known, Alice's Adventures Underground. 2015 also marks the year when British Library will celebrate the anniversary with an exhibition.

The idea of the contest is to challenge video game designers with the task of using the British Library's collections as an inspiration to create new digital media - and in new creative ways. The competition will have three entry categories in 2015; the games should be submitted as either 3D, 2D or Interactive Text. On top of this, the competitors should search for inspiration from three particular themes: Oxford, underground and gardens. Taking into account the interest generated by the previous years' competitions and the forthcoming anniversary of the legendary book, this will no doubt be another successful year for bridging together the gap between cultural heritage institutions and new digi-savvy audiences.

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Published originally at the Finnish Institute in London's blog Talk Art / Talk Society on December 12, 2014. Click here for the online version of the "In the Media" article.