

Lost and Found

Lost and Found began when a colleague handed me a one eyed, raggedy toy cat from Birmingham Museum and Art Galleries lost property pile, that no one had come back for. I immediately became attached, named him and made him an eye patch; Edd the Cat now resides surrounded by other upcycled lost property as part of *Lost and Found* in Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

During my time working in the galleries I came across a lot of lost property, that after some time would be given back to me if no one claimed it. Due to my habitual and often inconvenient need to “save” all of these sad lost objects my locker had become quite full.

While thinking about my vast amount of forgotten objects and how they could be used within my art practice I was inspired by the Arts Council Collection and BMAG exhibition *The Everyday and Extraordinary*. The exhibition displayed common items obscured and reimaged. On the floor lay *New Stones - Newton's Tones*, a cheerful rainbow made of plastic debris and everyday waste by Tony Cragg, stood alongside it was Bill Woodrow's more dejected *Crow and Carrion*, taking the conversation on plastic waste and recycling in another direction.

Crow and Carrion was the first piece in the room I found myself drawn to, Bill Woodrow used discarded and broken umbrellas to form a crow pecking at a dismembered arm, with exposed metal resembling its bones. Being morbid yet somehow still playful with its form *Crow and Carrion* helped me realise my growing pile of lost objects could be transformed. I wanted to take something that made me inexplicably sad and create an uplifting artwork. Looking at pieces such as Laura Godfrey Isaacs' *Plasticine Painting* and Hew Locke's *Jungle Queen II*, contemporary art that is (literally) playful with materials, I decided to embrace the garish colours and cute aesthetic of my objects and give children and families the opportunity to upcycle them using everyday craft materials. After a month of collecting I was armed with a bag that included approximately forty plastic dinosaurs (thank you Dippy), multiple stuffed toys and a ball of tangled costume jewelry.

I was informed of an upcoming project called My Collection; an intergenerational engagement project by Arts Council Collection that explored the social and cultural histories common to collecting, both publicly and privately. This aligned with my art practice perfectly. Due to my hoarding nature and obsession with the temporal, my work often discusses lost experiences, and my personal inability to let go of them. I often see my artwork as performative due to how cathartic it becomes during the making process, and although I am discussing my own private experiences, it's my goal to provoke emotive responses from the viewer about themselves. By creating art I embrace things that aren't always positive but that hold power, using the process and a tangible final outcome to deal with difficult experiences. With this project I took my common, often emotionally heavy theme, and created a whimsical celebration of forgotten and neglected items, that anyone of any background and ability could experience.

During the event I was overwhelmed with positive feedback from families, children and staff. Adults were questioning the value of their belongings and the waste that we create, and children completely embraced the creative freedom I was handing to them. I explained the concept and they ran with it, excited to be able to rummage through an old bag of belongings and do whatever they wanted with them. Each child reimagined a story for their object, emotionally and physically upcycling the lost property. I heard tales of surfers lost at sea, evil plants and dragons that turned to stone. For My Collection we also posed the question "What do you collect?" creating an open space for stories and discussion, alongside other creatives stalls.

For displaying these new art pieces I wanted to use a case reminiscent of a formally curated exhibition. This contrast of children's toys and a white cube space appealed to me, as I believe galleries should be approachable to all communities, art can still provide enjoyment while discussing the more serious topics. By having *Lost and Found* in a display case we question the value of both lost property and the artwork surrounding it, while also appealing to audiences of all ages. That the children had the immediate experience of making their art, writing a label and watching it being placed in the case was incredibly satisfying for them, and their parents who took photos of them standing beside it. *Lost and Found* engaged with families and children during the event, and continues to evoke responses from the general public as it sits in the gallery.

Working alongside creatives from the Walker Gallery and the ACC made me joyfully aware of the common aspirations we all have to positively impact the community with art. To be able to give young children the opportunity to have their artwork displayed in a renowned gallery, alongside world famous artists, was incredibly rewarding for me, both personally and creatively.

All leftover lost property is being donated to charity, distantly continuing my project outside of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

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