Bringing the outside in

An installation concept for The Bowes Museum

Francesca Whyte (FA4006)

Design space, audience and cohesion

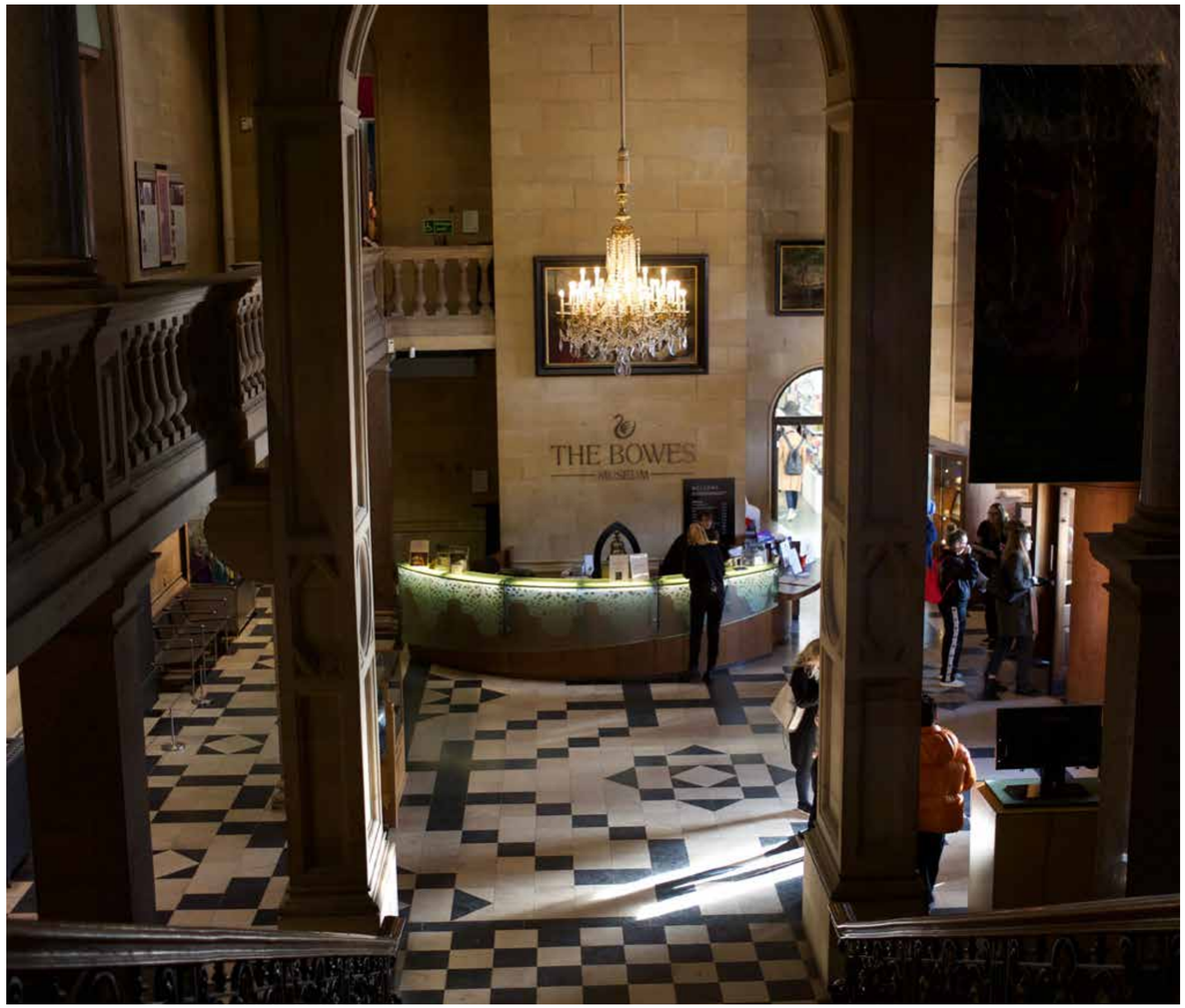
The entrance to the prestigious Bowes Museum offers an inspiring but underused space, which could be better designed to enchant and welcome in the visitor audience.

Visible from the moment one steps through the entrance door, the concept installation proposed will transform the lobby into a more engaging and intriguing space. The three-dimensional installation will occupy the space beneath the stone balustrade of the gallery floor above, and the elegant wrought iron and stone staircase.

Key to this brief is an expectation that, as well as appearing to the current visitor demographic, the installation will attract a whole new audience to the museum; particularly millennials, families with young children and teenagers, harder-to-reach and multi-generational groups, and schools.

The installation is designed to tie in and complement the current exhibition programme, as well as the permanent exhibitions and the outdoor space offered by the 20-acre gardens and grounds. A particular connection is made with the fashion photography exhibition planned for the summer ‘Catwalking: Fashion through the Lens of Chris Moore’.

All of this will be achieved through an installation design that is interactive and stimulating to multiple senses; demonstrates excellent STEM educational principles; and, is quite unlike anything else the museum has showcased to date. The installation will intrigue and draw people into the lobby, with the interactive audio-visual concept encouraging them to become an intrinsic part of the creative project itself.



The concept installation

‘Bringing the outside in’ is an interactive and kinetic energy installation that visitors can interact with and influence. The installation takes the form of a catwalk – a narrow walkway or elevated platform extending into an auditorium – to tie it in with the exhibition programme, with kinetically powered, LED-lit graphic floor and wall panels, run off the energy generated from the movement of a participating audience.

The catwalk starts with a single puddle and a single stepping stone. ‘Jumping’ into the puddle or treading on the stone causes the next in a series of puddles or stepping stones to appear, along with projected images along the side wall; all illuminated by a transformation of the kinetic energy harvested from the visitor’s movement.

It is expected that the younger generation will enjoy interacting with the puddles whereas the more mature visitors will opt for the stepping stones. As you progress down the catwalk, the installation wall reveals key scenes from the grounds at Bowes Museum (trees, vistas, walls, gates) until the concept widens and the visitor has the option to step into a boat. This final step illuminates the iconic Bowes silver swan serenely floating ahead.

As well as visual illumination, the installation will feature audio; for example, birds tweeting in the trees, splashing, people laughing and playing ‘in the park’ and the honk of the swan as it appears. The sound from the installation will attract the attention of other visitors, pulling them in for a closer look.

Siting and installation design elements

The installation will be sited in the main entrance hall where there is heavy footfall, in a space beneath the stone balustrading of the gallery above that naturally lends itself to a linear installation. It also has a side wall for the projection of visuals.

The catwalk itself will be made of lightboxes featuring the graphics of puddles, stepping stones and boat in water, and be illuminated by LED lighting powered by the transformation of kinetic energy to electricity. The wall images and swan will be projected on to the side wall in turn, along with associated sounds, again using visitor-generated electricity.

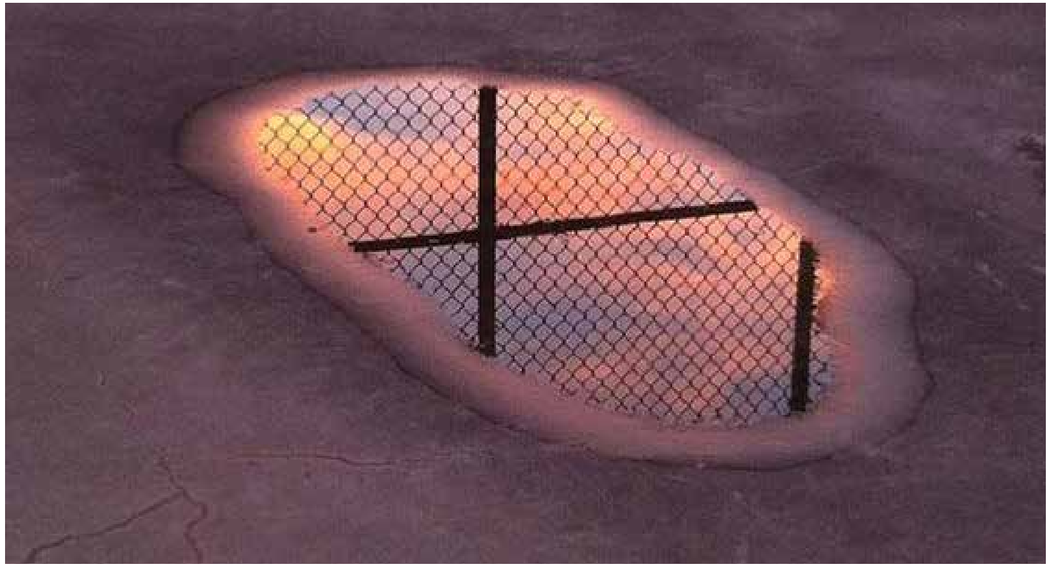
Installation inspiration

Key to my design were influences from a creative installation by teamLab and the engineering behind the sustainable dance floor modules.

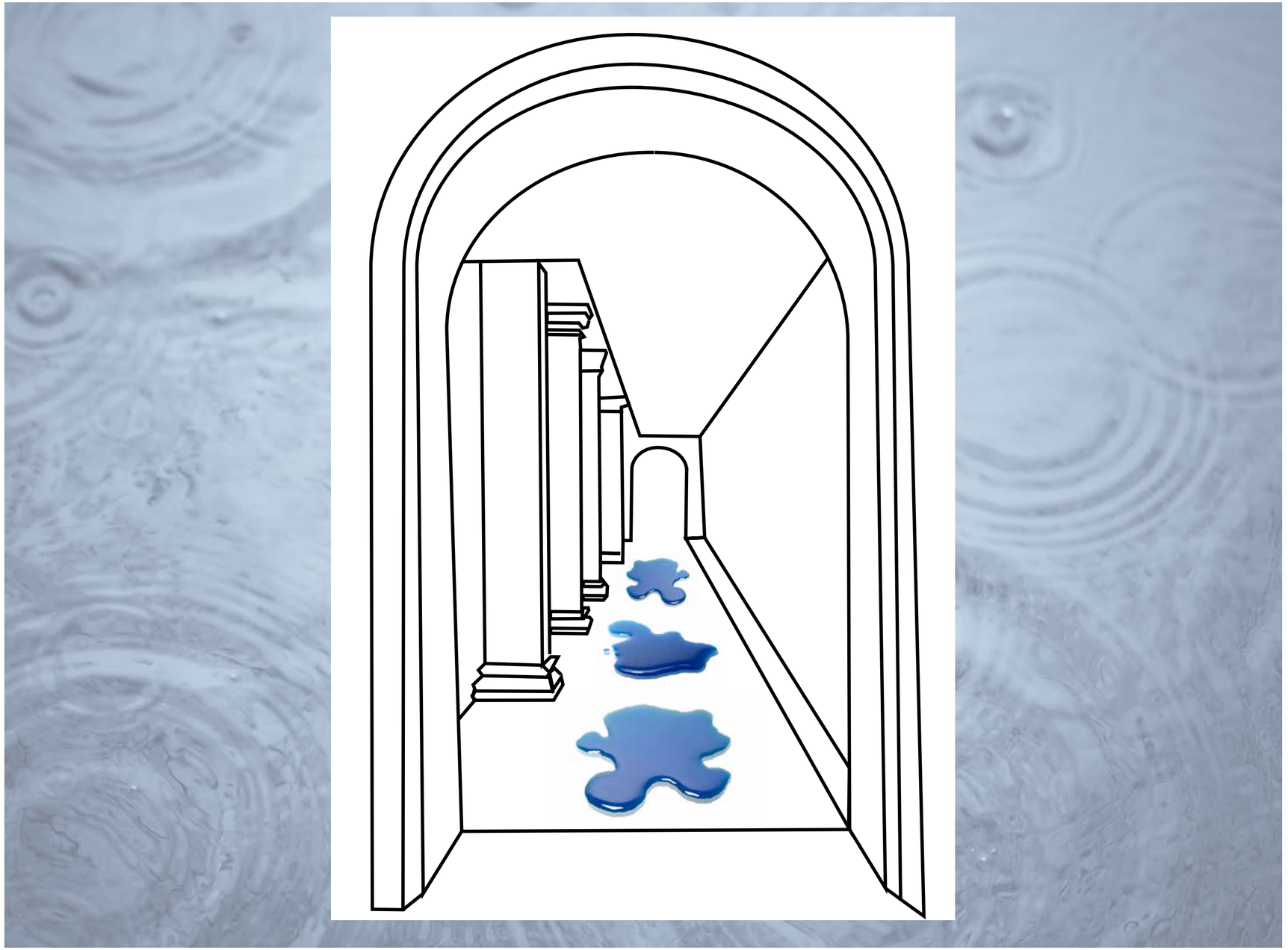
The teamLAB installation, “Moving Creates Vortices and Vortices Create Movement”, is designed to appear like the Naruto whirlpools. The installation starts to react when a person moves, applying a force in a particular direction. As a result a flow occurs. Works are born and continue to transform under the influence of people’s movement.

A sustainable dance floor converts kinetic energy of dancing people into electricity to power the dance floor.


JD
Jessica Drossin



Visualisation



Visualisation

Logistics

STEP 1

CONCEPT DESIGN

- Photographer to capture orginal images from gardens and grounds
- Set designer
- Lighting designer
- Audio visual specialis

STEP 2

SUBCONTRACTING

- Set builders
- Mechanical engineer
- Sound engineer
- Lighting engineer

STEP 3

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- Fire exits
- Access points
- Risk assessment
- Staff training

STEP 4

MUSEUM INTERFACE

- Construct overnight/ cordon-off area
- Clear area
- Insurance
- Signage

STEP 5

ADAPTING TO NEW AUDIENCES

- Source small budget items for giftshop
- Suitable cafe provison
- Free wifi
- Pop up suppliers eg. ice cream van

STEP 6

PROMOTION

- Local and regional media
- Social media
- Print ads and posters
- PR direct to schools and local education authority

“All art is the result of one’s having been in danger of having gone through an experience all the way to the end when no one can go any further. This is what it is like to be an artist – you are unsteady on the edge of life like a swan before an anxious launching of himself on the floods where he is gently caught.”

Edmund de Waal