**Best Temporary or Touring Exhibition submission**

**LARKIN: NEW EYES EACH YEAR / 5 Jul – 1 Oct 2017 / Brynmor Jones Library, University of Hull**

A Hull UK City of Culture 2017 commission in association with Philip Larkin Society and University of Hull Archives. Curator: Anna Farthing / Designer: Craig Oldham / Producer: Cian Smyth

**DESCRIPTION**

*LARKIN: New Eyes Each Year* took place in the library Philip Larkin built from 5th July – 1st October 2017 celebrating the artist and the man in the city he called home. We wished to look at the man behind the artist - a 360-degree immersive point of view leaving the visitor in charge of their own interpretation of him.

The exhibition avoided presenting flat things on walls but attempted to evoke the period in which Larkin lived, the objects he surrounded himself with, the family that formed him, the domestic materials of his life, the lovers, the peers, the toad-work. The exhibition hand-sheet in supporting materials offers background to the inspiration behind the exhibition.

The University of Hull campus is based 15mins outside of the city centre and the exhibition was intended to attract visitors beyond the fringes of the city centre. It took place during the University’s Summer recess when, in 2016, the gallery attracted a little over 1,500 visitors. In 2017, the exhibition attracted over 7 times that number with 12,000+ visitors.

Opening with the Philip Larkin Society’s Distinguished Lecture by Grayson Perry, the exhibition closed during the BBC’s Contains Strong Language spoken word festival. The exhibition offered tours providing new access to areas of Larkin’s Brynmor Jones Library, his original office and walking tours of city locations relevant to his poems, a talk by Andrew Motion, inspired and presented premieres of two new documentaries for the BBC (by John Wedgwood Clarke’s *Through the Lens of Larkin*) and Sky Arts (*Sky Passions: Motion on Larkin*).

The exhibition gathered a widely dispersed collection of Larkinalia beyond that which is currently archived. Much of the contents previously existed in the homes of friends, Society members and other groups on long-term loans for the purposes of storage. The exhibition gathered in one place the entire collection of Larkin artefacts and personal possessions for future archive.

**OVERALL OBJECTIVE**

To raise awareness of: Larkin’s connection to the city; Larkin’s life and work to a more diverse age-range in the city; the gathering of new items for archive and the fact that the Larkin archive is held and publicly accessible by the Hull History Centre/University of Hull Archives.

**STRATEGY FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION**

Curate an exhibition exploring the man behind the poet and his connection to Hull.

Design a visually striking and immersive exhibition that engages new audiences to literature.

Gather all Larkinalia for future preservation in archive.

**OUTCOME AND EVALUATION OF THE RESULTS**

In a sample survey of just over 1000 visitors to the exhibition: 53% noted they had not attended or visited the gallery or University of Hull in the 12 months prior to their visit to the exhibition. 90% agreed that ‘*LARKIN: New Eyes Each Year* was an enjoyable experience.’ 62% agreed that the exhibition ‘made me feel more connected to the stories of Hull and its people.’ 25% agreed that the project ‘introduced me to exhibitions about literature for the first time.’ 22% agreed that ‘*LARKIN: New Eyes Each Year* introduced me to Philip Larkin for the first time.’ 25% of the visitors were under the age of 50. The exhibition attracted live coverage on BBC Breakfast News with pieces broadcast across BBC Worldwide and Evening News, a visit by the BBC’s *Flog It* show), a full page 3 article in The Guardian as well as coverage in The Sunday Times, Sunday Mirror, Yorkshire Post and Hull Daily Mail. Hull 2017 digital communications plan around the project delivered 12 unique posts on social media, reaching a total of 135,000 people and over 5,500 likes, reactions and post-clicks.

**CREATIVITY AND ORIGINALITY**

The exhibition was designed by one of the UK’s most acclaimed young designers, Craig Oldham. A specific choice was made to include a soundtrack of Larkin’s favourite Jazz records to both enhance the world of Larkin the exhibition was trying to express but also to give the public permission to talk and discuss the exhibition while viewing it. Raising questions and answers about the man himself in a dialogue with other visitors.

The design inspired an immersive experience offering peeps and bursts through innovative displays in library shelving which was arranged to both reflect Larkin’s career as librarian but also a maze of display units to engage visitors in quizzical fashion o explore the many objects on display. Domestic objects, like his lawnmower, famously featuring in his poetry, were installed in prominent ways on the side of walls mowing across murals of the related poem. His obsessive collection of ties and tea-towels were arranged in sculptural fashion to engage the public’s curiosity in the man’s obsessions.

Hull 2017 Volunteers were used as invigilators across the 3 month exhibition, offered inductions by Larkin Society members on the man and his work and afforded an exhibition feel with all items on display coded as per a librarian shelving system. Invigilator were presented to the public as librarians of the exhibition and encouraged to ask them questions or engage in discussion about the man and his work.

Finally, the exhibition printed its own letterhead paper arranged near a pile of Larkin’s favourite 2B pencils and the public were invited to write a Letter to Philip. The exhibition gathered over 500 letters to Philip in the course of its dates.

**COST EFFECTIVENESS, ROI AND BUDGETS**

£100,000 budget raised with support from Hull 2017 partners and University of Hull. All objectives were met, the primary ones being reaching new audiences for Larkin and increasing awareness of his association with the city. The exhibition was delivered below budget and on target and the University of Hull secured exhibition related book sales of up to £4,000.

**IMPACT ON VISITOR NUMBERS**

From 1 July to 1 October 2016, the same period as the exhibition in 2017, visitor numbers to the gallery were **1,682.** The exhibition in 2017 attracted around 7 times that number, with over **12,000** visitors.