Short Narrative Report
August 2017 - October 2018

armchair gallery

brings world-class art & culture to you

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"The Baring Foundation is very proud to have been a funder of the development of the Armchair Gallery app along with our partners the Nominet Trust and Arts Council England. It is a work of art in its own right and has been created with a lot of love and respect for the residents of care homes with which City Arts has been working. It is a major step forward in showing the potential and relevance of digital arts for older people. The Foundation has been privileged since 2010 to fund many wonderful arts projects working with older people, but Armchair Gallery is the one with the potential to have the greatest reach."

David Cutler, Director of The Baring Foundation

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1. Executive Summary

The main aim of this report is to explore the introduction of the Armchair Gallery app, managed by City Arts, with older people and understanding how creativity and digital technology can be of benefit in later life. We have been using digital technology to work creatively with older people for the past four years. During this time, we have trialled and evaluated a wide range of approaches. We found the Armchair Gallery model to be particularly effective at capturing the imagination of our participants and creating tangible wellbeing outcomes.

About City Arts

Incorporated in 2004, City Arts is a community focused organisation. We work with people and groups to identify the issues and challenges that matter to them, then co-design and deliver projects that produce real social impact. The organisation has pioneered creative approaches to increasing personal wellbeing, such as an innovative 'Arts on Prescription' project supporting adults with mental health issues in their recovery. We are now taking this expertise and approach to wellbeing into the digital realm, working specifically with older people in care. Bringing specialist digital knowledge into the organisation and using technology creatively, has allowed us to transform our approach and increase the portability and scalability of our projects.

Background and Overview

The primary evaluation objectives of Armchair Gallery were to:

- Assess the benefits of the Armchair Gallery app with users of the app.
- Explore methods of increasing confidence in using the digital technology and the app.
- Examine the role of care staff in facilitating the benefits with app users.

The key findings are as follows:

- Facilitators reported that they noticed the app had benefits to older people's health and wellbeing.
- Many of the older people using the app benefitted from support from both the artists and care staff initiating interactive with the app. Ongoing support in using the app helped participants gain confidence in its exploration.
- In the testing phase, some of the older people found the visual aspects needed to have greater contrast in order to navigate and view the app.
- Facilitators felt that if the older people were to use the app more often, then their confidence in using the app (and iPad) would increase.
- Training at the outset of the project was led by City Arts with artist facilitators. The artist found this really useful. Care staff also suggested their interest in attending future training that would guide them to engage older people in the use of the app.

"Armchair Gallery is a really exciting venture that will bring artworks and tours to older people who are unable to visit the actual locations. The app is a great way in which several leading venues have come together to bring some fantastic works much nearer, in fact just a click or two away. It is fun as well as being culturally stimulating. My colleagues at University of Nottingham and I have really valued being able to work with City Arts during the time that the Armchair Gallery has been developing."

Tom Dening - Professor of Dementia Research, University of Nottingham

Demographic of co-producers

- Armchair Gallery took place with older people in care settings, assisted living apartments, retirement villages and within the community at a day centre and within memory cafés. Participants taking part were therefore diverse in terms of their circumstances, settings and experiences in later life.
- In this study, participants involved range from 50+ to 100.
- Later life can involve particular challenges regarding health and wellbeing, isolation and sadness. However, it can also be an opportunity to experience and learn new things, engage in new opportunities in the community, start new connections with different people and engage in creativity.
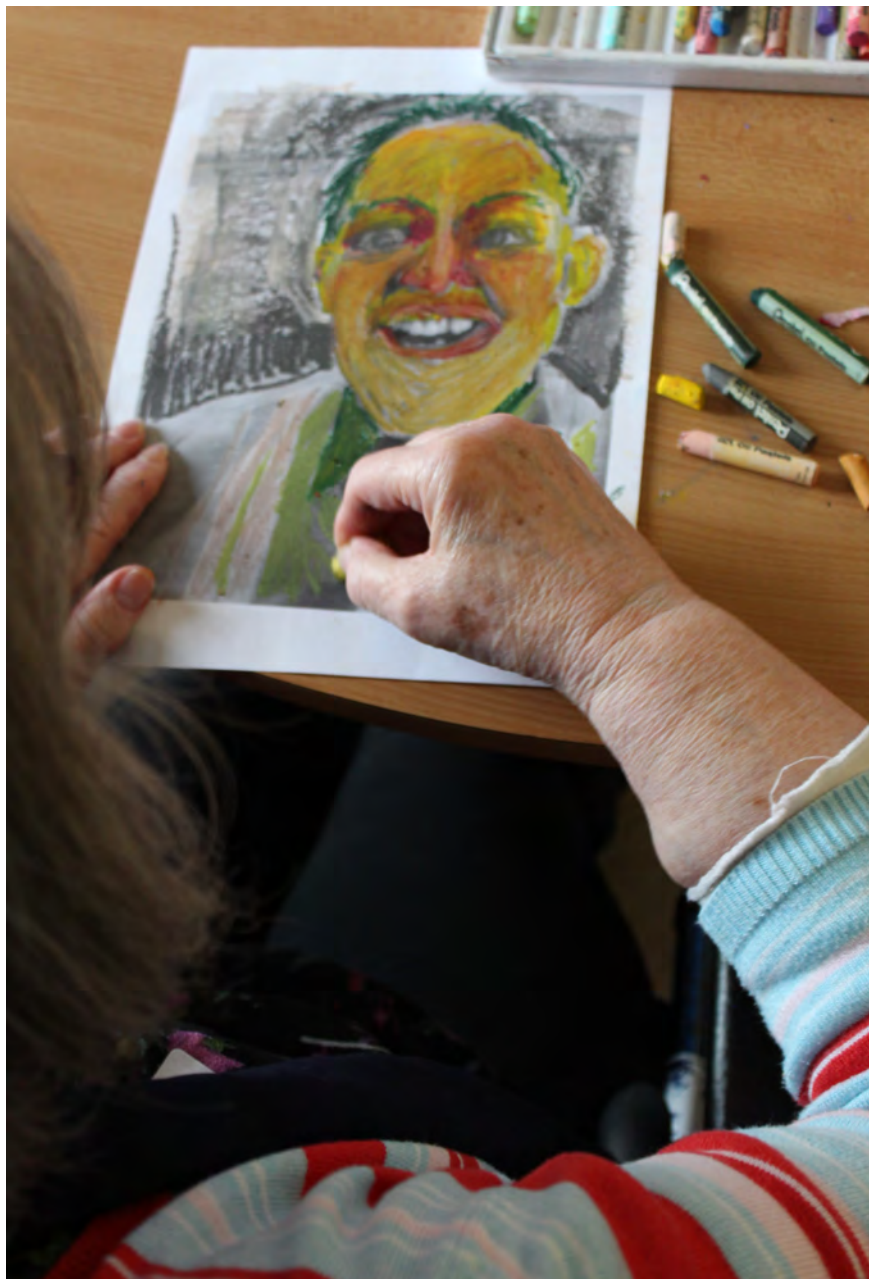
Cultural and Heritage Partners

Seven partners were involved in providing content and presentations for films produced by City Arts for inclusion in the Armchair Gallery app. The partners are:

- Chatsworth House
- Dulwich Picture Gallery
- Newstead Abbey
- Mr Straws House
- The Lowry
- Pitt Rivers Museum
- Yorkshire Sculpture Park

Armchair Gallery has provided opportunities to develop new cross-cultural approaches in exploring digital technology to look at how we widen audience development across the arts, heritage and museums sector. Armchair Gallery has been developed for the purpose of increasing choices and opportunities that diminish in older age. In a unique and engaging way, the app offers access to places where physical visits have become impossible. This partnership approach offers mutual benefit for all the stakeholders as it widens and expands the reach of their collections and is scalable, accessible and sustainable.

"Armchair Gallery is an amazing resource. I think technology has to be sensitive to the site. Mr Straw's House had a minimal intervention with technology and Armchair Gallery is a really nice way to recreate our history and help people have an immersive experience in ways that they may or may not ever be able to visit.

There's something really powerful about taking a venue outside of its boundaries and look at how technology can help us widen participation and increase engagement. Armchair Gallery offers people that opportunity to experience a venue in a way they wouldn't be able to at that site. It allows the opportunity for participants to get more hands-on and have experiences that bring the collections to life."

Torri Crapper - House and Visitor Services Manager, Mr Straw's House

Practice informing Armchair Gallery

City Arts has a track record of forty years in developing arts programmes with and in communities. As an organisation, we place a high value on our partnerships and regularly devise projects that aim to address comments, suggestions and identified gaps that directly come from our stakeholders and participants that we work with.

Over the last ten years we have been devising programmes with older people in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. Whilst rolling out our Imagine, arts and older people's programme (2014-2017), we found that many health professionals welcomed the introduction of the arts in their settings. However, in order for activity co-ordinators and sometimes care staff to sustain creative activities beyond the lifespan of arts programmes, barriers include the necessary resources to do this, embedding a culture of arts within care homes, confidence to facilitate sessions and demands on care staff to fulfil people's daily care needs.

Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that *"Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits".* However, old age and dementia present major barriers to visiting galleries and museums. It was also clear that care homes often lack the infrastructure and resources to facilitate regular trips outside of the care home within the community. In addition to the increased likelihood of physical health problems, people can suffer sensory overload in crowded public spaces. Loss of confidence and lack of companionship are common. Armchair Gallery was developed with the aim of addressing these issues.

Armchair Gallery provides resources and digital content that can both stimulate older people using the app in care or community settings independently, and also enable health professionals access to resources (How-To Guides) to facilitate their own creative sessions. It provides a specific but flexible framework within which to engage in new creative activities. Its structure provokes discussion about artworks and artefacts using the imagination, and gives people the opportunity to make individual artworks and share these outputs with others in their peer group and also externally via the app.

Many staff also reported the need to be better informed about people living with dementia and support in using approaches that would suit the needs of people living with dementia. We have subsequently developed a training package for health professionals and creative practitioners on how to best use Armchair Gallery and how to devise personalised creative sessions for older people with different stages of dementia in mind.

Armchair Gallery model

Armchair Gallery began as a project within the *Imagine, arts and older people's programme* funded by Arts Council England and the Baring Foundation. An initial prototype web app was made as a pilot project. In 2017, a grant was secured from Nominet and The Baring Foundation to take Armchair Gallery to the next stage.

Digital technology and older people

- The digital arts can offer flexibility and spontaneous interactions with people. Artists are increasingly using this medium to make it easier to facilitate personalised creative opportunities that support a person-centred approach in health settings. Armchair Gallery has been developed with this in mind.

- Whilst some people suggest that the use of digital technology could be an isolating or excluding experience for people, it also have the potential to build opportunities for interactive, face-to-face human experiences. One of the opportunities that Armchair Gallery presents in care settings, is to bridge the generational digital divide. It offers intergenerational opportunities to use the app together as a family, between younger and older generations, sparking new conversations stimulated by the content.

- In our experience during the Armchair Gallery programme, we have found older people very open to trying out the app, challenging the stereotypes often associated with older peoples assumed analogue preferences.

- Whilst some of the older people introduced to the app needed support in using it, care staff reported that it has the potential to improve the levels of engagement and proficiency in its use over time. The confidence and use of digital technologies also varied greatly across the care staff involved in this project.

- The Armchair Gallery app has been devised to support health professionals to use as a portable creative tool in their settings, benefitting from freely available resources. A series of *How-To* guides provide tutorials to utilise the collections in a creative way with older people. A training package will be made available to health professionals in order to extend their knowledge and use of the app.

- Armchair Gallery will be rolled out nationally once it is available to download on Android and iOS platforms. It is unclear at this moment in time the potential reach of Armchair Gallery. A business plan will be put in place to ensure its legacy beyond the current programme.

2. Project Statistics:

Total for project 2017-2018

Attenders and Attendances

703

session attendances

228

participants

75

sessions
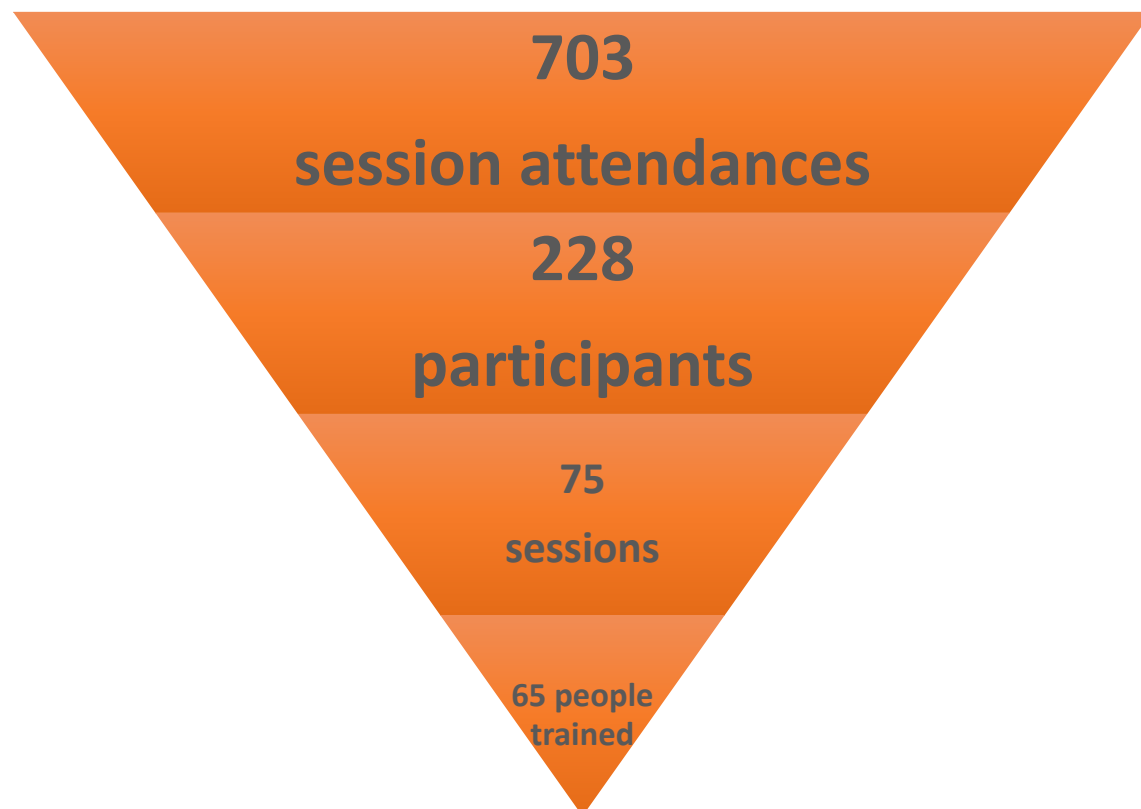
**65 people
trained**

Gender

Female 167

Male 61

Under 65   **25 people**

65+   **74 people**

85+   **129 people**

3. Project Aims

Social challenge

Armchair gallery proposed to address the digital divide with older generations and increase connections with the wider community.

- digital technologies are stereotypically perceived as an artform for younger generations resulting in a digital divide
- choices and opportunities can diminish in older age resulting in isolation and loneliness
- older people living with dementia can find it more challenging to engage with cultural opportunities due to diminishing cognitive function
- health professionals, volunteers, family etc. may not have the skills to facilitate and produce artwork using digital technology
- Wi-Fi access and tech infrastructure in care and community settings may be a limiting factor in access to digital inclusion.

Solution

Armchair Gallery will increase access to digital arts inclusion for older people through the promotion of virtual visits to world class cultural and arts venues and heritage sites.

- links will be established with care homes, memory cafes and engagement with the wider community 65+
- a series of bespoke films will be produced in partnership with cultural and heritage organisations
- an application and different artforms will be developed for practical workshop sessions, increasing choice and active participation
- approaches will be specifically developed for people living with dementia, with technology offering multisensory experiences, intuitive touchscreen participation and discussion tools (i.e.TimeSlips)
- a series of digital tutorials will be co-produced with participants involved in the project to inform a bespoke app
- (one time) downloadable content in the app will be available offline negating the need for Wi-Fi with its ongoing use
- development of training for health professionals on creative practice and its application with people living with dementia
- support a scalable Armchair Gallery model through national training and dissemination.

Social return on investment (SROI)

Armchair Gallery app offers a free resource that can be shared and adapted to suit the individual needs of the people you care for. There is the potential to add new content and resources over time. The app offers creative inspiration and How-To Guides for health professionals, family members, artists and volunteers.

Early findings from the pilot project:

- creative workshops inspired by Armchair Gallery have given participants new opportunities that they hadn't tried before
- the introduction of tablets has been successful in breaking down the fear of technology both for older people and health professionals
- activity co-ordinators are utilising the Armchair Gallery app after completing training
- using tablets offers flexible, accessible options for people with limited mobility, visual impairment, non-verbal communication and impaired cognitive function
- there is increased confidence and interest with residents using digital technology
- sharing artwork with others produced during creative sessions, has positive effects such as promoting new connections, increases concentration and supports social interaction
- the project offers opportunities for older people to express themselves, be heard and listened to and promotes individual choice

4. Evaluation

The evaluation took place from March 2018 to August 2018, and was conducted by the Research Support and Consultancy team at the Institute of Mental Health (IMH), Nottingham.

Evaluation Objectives

The evaluation aimed to use a qualitative methodology to explore the use of Armchair Gallery with older people as the users:

- Assess the benefits of the Armchair Gallery app with users
- Explore methods of increasing confidence in using the digital technology and the app
- Examine the role of care staff in facilitating the benefits the app with users

Interviews and Observations

Ten interviews have been conducted over the phone and in person with partner organisations staff and volunteers. Three observations have been carried out at three different older people's settings.

Methodology

Qualitative data was gathered regarding the experiences and perceptions of Armchair Gallery.

Interviews with Facilitators

Interviews with care staff were conducted to explore the benefits of Armchair Gallery with the older people using it in relation to the outcomes and impacts, i.e. confidence using digital technology, confidence using the Armchair Gallery, reconnections and reminiscence, enjoyment and quality of life. The utility of training was explored, and confidence of care staff in using the app.

A total of 10 facilitators (care staff and volunteers) were interviewed. Interviewees were invited to take part in interviews during evaluation site visits and through email. Interviews were conducted over the phone and in person.

Observations with Older People

Three site visits were conducted in order to observe how older people used the Armchair Gallery app.

Observations aimed to assess the following:

- Their experience of the app
- Satisfaction with the gallery content
- Confidence in using the technology and app
- Any other outcomes and impacts relating to reminiscence, enjoyment and quality of life
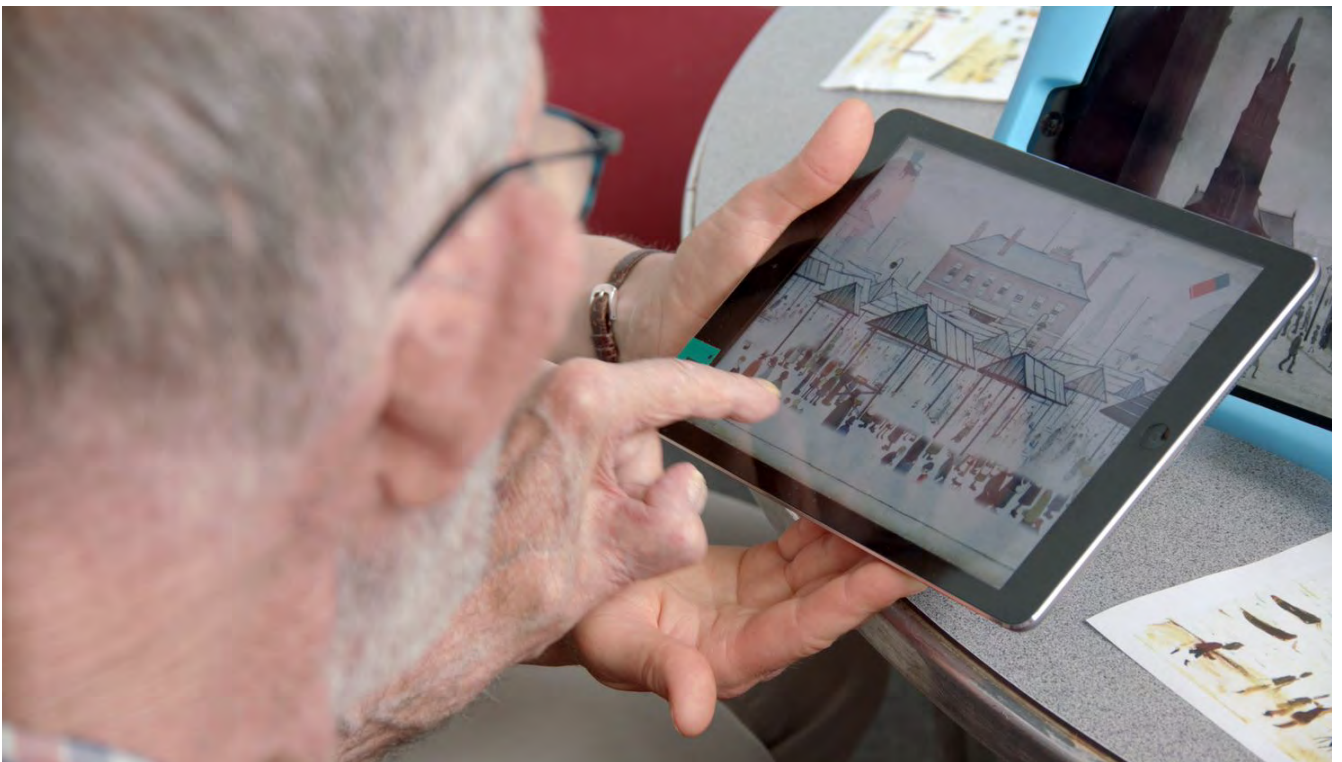
5. Findings

The use of technology has a number of benefits:

1. The hardware is lightweight and intuitive, suited to use by care home residents. Using Armchair Gallery normalises technology, with the additional benefit of addressing the digital divide between older and younger generations. It therefore has the potential to reduce negative emotions and the exclusion that some care home residents experience both in the real and digital world.

2. Armchair Gallery is versatile and adaptable. It can be used alone, one-on-one or as part of a group activity, online or offline. The portability and small physical footprint of the activity means it has potential to be used in a wide variety of settings. The relative affordability of tablet computers means it has huge potential reach. It could be used across the UK, possibly even internationally.

3. It increases choices and opportunities that diminish in older age. It can provide access to places where physical access has become impossible. This offers older people the well-known and documented health and wellbeing outcomes that engagement with, and participation in, culture provides.

The findings demonstrate that the Armchair Gallery app has had a positive effect on older people who directly experienced using the app. Most facilitators also believed that older people would continue using the app if they had more opportunities to become familiar with it. The training that facilitators did receive on how to use the app was found to be useful. The facilitators are also key in stimulating and encouraging its use with older people. app users were more engaged when a facilitator showed them how to use the app or helped them use it.

To further these findings, it would be useful to examine app usage data (Google Analytics) once the app launches to see how and where app is being used across the country.

6. Legacy for Armchair Gallery

Armchair Gallery has become a flagship programme for City Arts. The funding from Nominet and The Baring Foundation has supported its ongoing development. The Armchair Gallery model ensures its sustainability and scalability with its use, in particular with older people in many varied settings, in group and one-to-one work. The programme has gathered a lot of interest and has been presented nationally at several high-profile conferences around the county.

We invited participants during Armchair Gallery's creative sessions and artists, cultural, heritage and tech partners to co-produce and contribute to the app's development along the way. Attendees at specific development events included the City Arts Armchair gallery team, artists, cultural partners, health professionals, activity co-ordinators and academics from the University of Nottingham.

Armchair Gallery Iterations

Prototype Armchair Gallery designs:
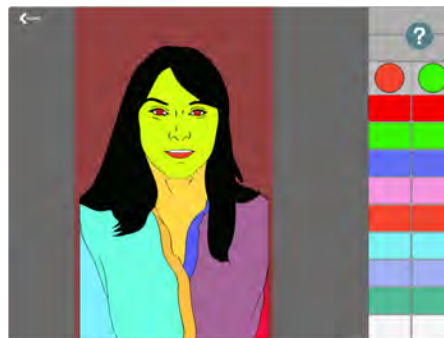
Finished designs:

One of the aims of Armchair Gallery is to provide a unique and relevant experience for each of the venues. The in-app activities have been devised to take into account the different needs of people engaging with the app including ease of use, multi-sensory elements and accessibility in response to people's health and cognitive needs. The content has also been tailored to encapsulate the individual qualities of each venue. A number of 3D models feature as interactive activities, enhancing the experience and sculptural qualities of the artworks.
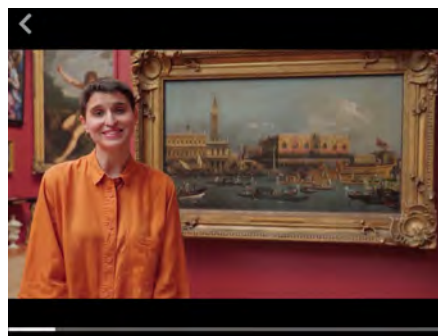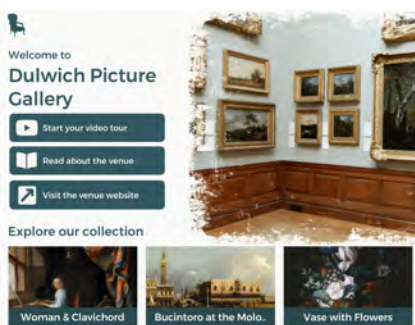

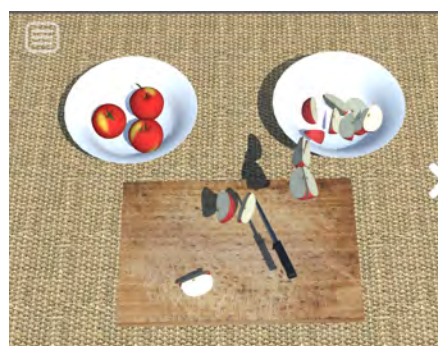3D models: YSP Two Forms   Chatsworth Veiled Vestal Virgin   YSP Family of Man
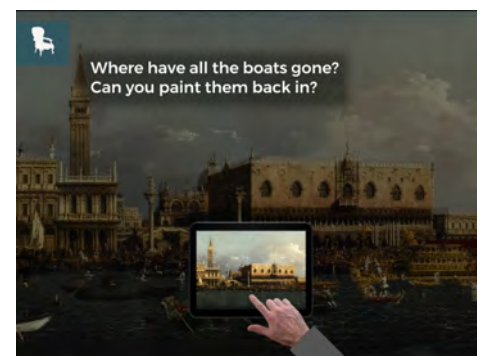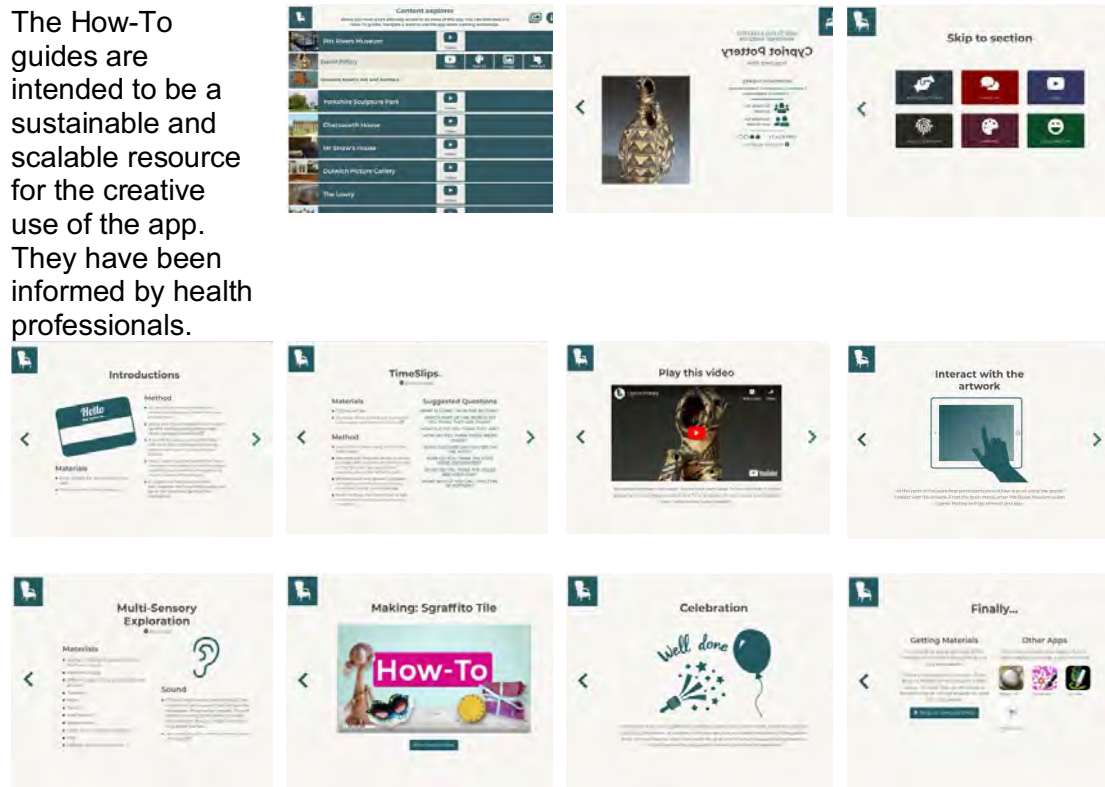

In each of the venues you can view the film guides, find out more about the artworks and artefacts and interact with the in-app features.

In-app activities correspond directly to each of the artworks and artefacts.

The How-To guides are intended to be a sustainable and scalable resource for the creative use of the app. They have been informed by health professionals.

Armchair Gallery team

Kate Duncan - Co-Founder and Director

Sharon Scaniglia - Co-Founder

Timothy Chesney - Digital Developer

Robin Shackford - App Developer and Designer

Joe Pick - Marketing, Design and Web Development

Claire Ford - How-To Guides Development and Training

Creative Practitioners

Andrea Haley

Annie Ball

Elaine Winter

Emma Wass

Graham Elstone

Jane Stockley