

COMMENTS FROM NATIONAL WELSH MUSEUM ON CREATING DURGA

Creating a Goddess: Making a Durga image - Oriel 1 St Fagans: National History Museum

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Following a successful community curated display of traditional objects at the new Oriel 1 Gallery at St Fagans and a 2 day festival celebrating the Hindu culture in Wales in 2007, the Museum was pleased to accept an invitation from the Wales Puja Committee (WPC) to work in partnership on a project to create an image of the Goddess Durga and her companions. The Oriel 1 gallery focuses on Welsh identities and explores who we are by examining language, beliefs, family ties and a sense of place. It was therefore the perfect backdrop for this project that was partly funded by the Arts Council of Wales.

Two award winning artists from Kolkata - Purnendu and Dubyendu Dey - were invited by the WPC and the Museum to take part. Over three weeks, with the help of Artworks, followers of the project were amazed as their skill, craftsmanship and dedication created a flash of colour in Oriel 1. The interpretation of the project by long standing WPC member Roma Chaudhury brought it alive. Over the three weeks, school groups, students and families alike were fascinated by the creative process and by the stories about Durga.

A total of 1316 visitors took part in the project and experienced the different layers of interpretation. Purnendu and Dubyendu shared their skills with museum staff members and artists from Wales such as Luned Rhys Parry. Papier maché workshops for students and family activities were organised alongside the project focusing on the processes involved. Some visitors liked to sit and watch the process unfold. Two religious ceremonies were held as part of the Creating a Goddess project. The eye painting and the closing ceremonies were important parts of the process and both were well attended by the Hindu community, staff and visitors.

During the project a blog was maintained detailing the process. This enabled more visitors to access the project and enabled the Hindu community and members of the WPC who could not attend the venue on a regular basis to keep up to date with its developments. Additionally images were uploaded to flickr in order that they might be easily accessed.

The project also aimed to create material that could be added to the Museum's collections as there was nothing representing the Hindu community in Wales prior to this. A short film was created detailing the project from start to finish. It has now been archived as part of the permanent Museum collection. As a result of the ongoing good relationship with the WPC, the old images used as part of their annual Durga ceremony will be donated to the Museum.

Throughout the project a comments book was available to all members of the public attending the event to leave feedback on the artists work and the interpretation.

Here are some of the comments:

'Wonderful to see the art work by these artistes - feel privileged to be able to see this.'

'Wonderful to see Hindus in a Welsh setting. The museum is to be congratulated'

'An eye-opener! Specially the way it has been created. Amazing ambience'

'A great experience - my grandchildren thoroughly enjoyed it'

'We were impressed by the way they are taking pains to protect Indian tradition in making deities'

‘Amazing display of skill and dedication, and lovely lady to explain the work and concept!’

Working with the WPC on such an important project has brought both organisations closer. It has helped to create an understanding between our communities that has continued after completion of the project. Through this partnership we have succeeded in adding important representation of the Hindu community in Wales to the national collections.

The work undertaken as part of this project has helped to challenge ideas of what the Museum is. In the past, the Museum has been seen as a showcase for traditional Welsh heritage and has not reflected the diverse cultures that make Wales the modern country it is. Through community projects such as this the traditional image of the Museum is being challenged and visitors are able to see that we aim to reflect all of the cultures that now make Wales their home.