

The Enlightened Eye.

A new interactive craft work for Liskeard District Museum Cornwall. 2014 by Jason Cleverly.



Photo: Matthew Tyas. 2014.

Introduction.

There is growing interest amongst craftspeople, artists, curators and designers, in devising new ways to address and enhance engagement with art galleries and museum collections. These initiatives reveal a commitment to creating new opportunities for visitor participation, interaction and learning, and for the creation of a wide range of distinctive and thought-provoking interpretive forms.

Grayson Perry's headline exhibition *Tomb of The Unknown Craftsman* project at the British Museum, is but one of long list of interpretive responses, Katherine Morling and the Staffordshire Hoard, Heatherwick studio's *Materials House* for the Science Museum and Richard Landy's *Saints Alive* for the National Gallery are direct artistic responses. Other more didactic and interactive works are less about their authors and more about the audience, the Wedgewood Museum's charming *Virtual Medallion* and the immersive *Listening Post* by Hansen and Rubin at the Science Museum use new technologies to provoke. Another form: artist led participatory workshops such as Kathy Miles' *Toolshed* for the Guildhall Museum Rochester engage the visitor directly through making and establishing a final contributory installation.

Jason Cleverly.

Immersed in this context, the designer and maker Jason Cleverly has for a number of years been developing and making a series of site-specific interactive works. Emerging from a practice rooted in automata, the work has evolved to examine a range of museum objects collections and themes. Using the structural and sculptural, combining and embedded technology and with a close interest in visitor behavior and learning, these are hybrid assemblies that fuse craft, art and design attempting to heighten interaction.



Electric Crab Photo Jason Cleverly 1990

Interactive Worktable and Escritoire.



Interactive work Table and Escritoire. Photo: Jason Cleverly 2009

Interactive Work-table and Escritoire a previous work by Jason Cleverly was commissioned for the exhibition “The House of Words” (2009) at Dr. Johnson’s House London celebrating the 300th anniversary of Dr. Johnson’s birthday. Johnson is famous for writing one of the most influential dictionaries in the history of English language,

Developed in collaboration with the learning technologist Tim Shear, and with additional support from the Automatic research group in digital craft production at Falmouth University. The installation recreated Dr. Johnson’s writing table, updating it with interactive and networked technology. Placing it in the very garret room in which Johnson originally worked, visitors participated in compiling a modern version of the dictionary. Special paper and digital pen, allowed uploaded entries to be viewed on the web. The House of Words Exhibition also featured works by Caroline Broadhead, Clare Twomey and Robert Dawson.

The Enlightened Eye.

The Enlightened Eye is a museum interactive made for the Liskeard and district Museum designed to deepen visitor experience of mineral specimens. The *Enlightened Eye* supports a system of planetary gears allowing mineral samples to be examined sequentially by a digital microscope. Using a touch screen and a specially designed interface, visitors can annotate and select close up views to make unique responses that can be shared online.

The machine uses seemingly antiquated technology; the kinetic machine styling is an evocation of the camera obscura and the orrery, think magic lanterns and Joseph Wright of Derby's Eighteenth century paintings of scientific enlightenment experiments. Simple Manual controls are positioned to encourage visitors to cooperate, engender collaboration and enrich participation.

These compositional considerations are part of a deliberate approach. Where aesthetic design and affordances are meant to support memorable interactions and meaning making. Additionally by inviting virtual and material inspection through a drawn response, the *Enlightened Eye* aims to connect the objects under scrutiny persuasively to the visitor.



Testing the interface. Photo: Matthew Tyas. 2014

The museum visitor is invited to draw directly over the microscopic images of the minerals, this invitation supported by the suggestion that images may be seen within the morphology of the rock structure, landscapes faces and other visual associations can be unearthed and isolated. This process allows for a playful or a serious relationship to be made with the specimens. The mineral samples a drawn from the Museum's own collection and very local and connected strongly to Cornish mining history and culture. To be in a museum tracing and annotating curious and beautiful structures from deep in the earth may also place the visitor in the shoes of the eighteenth century gentleman scholar, recreating the taxonomic process of closely observing, identifying and recording mineral samples before the advent of photography.



Drawing Using the Enlightened Eye



Drawing using the Enlightened Eye



The Enlightened Eye at the Museum Photo: Jason Cleverly 2014

The *Enlightened Eye* is experimental, speculative and actually treads a difficult path, in designing a multifaceted, multi-modal structure (an assembly to be sited in a public place with a mixed agenda) such as *The Enlightened Eye*, generates conflicting positions; a responsibility to curatorial procedure, to visitor amusement and interaction, and the self-indulgent aesthetic and technical predilections of the artist-designer (craftsman).

It is hoped that the machine, will be supportive and attract those visitors who are less concerned with accuracy and more interested in instinctive responses to objects, and this in turn may lead them to further scrutiny of nearby traditional displays and labelling, or indeed flow in the reverse for some visitors.

Museums are clearly treasure houses for artists and craftspeople and the way research supports practice is well understood amongst them, interpretation in a range of forms helps the non-maker non-artist to see new things, and to highlight details that may be obscure to them. *The Enlightened Eye* is now operational and needs contributions!

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<http://enlightened-eye.com/>

<http://www.drjohnsonsgarret.net/>

<http://www.autonomic.org.uk/>