



Northumbria University Architecture Portfolios

WHERE YOUR WINGS WERE: JOURNEYS WITH DAVID ALMOND SEVEN STORIES. THE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Peter Dixon

northumbriaarchitecture.com/research

*'words should wander and
meander.*

*they should fly like owls and
flicker like bast and slip like cats.*

*they should murmerand scream
and dance and sing.*

sometimes

there should be no words at all.

just silence.

just clean white space'

David Almond, My Name is Mina

Fig 01_ Front cover

*Mumuration of words. Video
installation inspired from quotes
from David Almond.*



Fig 02_ Raft, a gravity defying interactive that takes participants on a flight over a flowing river.

1. Project Details

Principal Researcher	Peter Dixon, Northumbria University
Research Collaborator	Ben Couture, Jardine Couture
Title	Where Your Wings Were: Journeys with David Almond
Output type	Exhibition Design
Venue	Seven Stories: The National Centre for Children's Books
Curator	Sarah Lawrence Seven Stories
Function	Immersive Interactive Educational Exhibition
Location	Newcastle Upon Tyne, England
Client	Seven Stories; The National Centre for Children's Books David Almond, International Children's Author
Practical completion	June 2018
Funding source	Heritage Lottery Fund (Now National Lottery Heritage Fund) Hachette Children's Group Arts Council England Community Foundation (Newcastle Culture Investment Fund)
Budget	£50,000
Area	Newcastle Upon Tyne
Collaborators	Jardine Couture, Field Design
Co-exhibitors	Ben Couture
Support/acknowledgements	Sarah Lawrence - Joint Chief Executive and Head of Exhibitions, John Coulburn - Joint Chief Executive, John Beattie - Business Development Manager, Gillian Rennie - Senior Curator
URL	https://www.sevenstories.org.uk/blog/david-almond-archive-comes-home-to-seven-stories



Fig 03_ Raft, a gravity defying interactive that takes participants on a flight over a flowing river.

2.Summary



Fig 04_ Interactive theatre installation made from illustrations undertaken by 7-14 year olds from their imaginings of what Skellig represented. Skellig by David Almond.

'Where Your Wings Were: Journeys with David Almond' is the realisation of an inventive exhibition which sets out an innovative inquiry to reconsider exhibition design as a more democratic process that, in addition, also seeks to promote a self-exploratory learning process for its visitors. An unconventional exploratory and sensory interpretation allows visitors to examine and interpret numerous narratives, physical, representational and self-generated narratives associated with the works and creative processes of David Almond the International best-selling children's author.

The design methodological approach for the research combines qualitative and participatory methods under a Research by Design practice. Extensive and rigorous analysis within a 3-month period from conception of the ideas to the built public exhibition. The output aims to challenge established practices of exhibition interpretation and design, and in doing so make a valuable contribution to this field of inquiry. This output represents an innovative approach through the reconsideration of exhibition design practices and the integration of design research methods to provide new ways of interpreting the creative process and the retrospective works of an author for audience elucidation.

The exhibition, *Where your Wings Were: Journeys with David Almond*, signalled a shift from literal artefact and graphic-based exhibition design towards an immersive visitor experience based upon exploratory and participatory visitor engagement, a first for the host institution, *Seven Stories: The National Centre for Children's Books*. Similar projects are planned with Seven Stories and the design team are going to work up a masterplan and a future exhibition strategy for the museum's first permanent gallery. ■

3. Location Context

Seven Stories, National Centre for Children's Books.

Seven Stories is the National Centre for Children's Books, based within the Ouseburn Valley in Newcastle Upon Tyne. It is a museum and visitor centre dedicated to children's literature. It was established as a charity in 1996 by Elizabeth Hammill OBE and Mary Briggs OBE as an institution to collect, archive and celebrate children's literature.



Fig 05_ Promotional vinyl's on the windows of Seven Stories.

4. Statement of Significance

This *Design by Research* project was an opportunity to make a significant input into the cultural landscape and design practice towards interpretation design within *Seven Stories: The National Centre of Children Books*, through reconsidering the typology of exhibition design and the means for visitor engagement. Other aspects of significance include:

1. The design team were selected via a national expression of interest and competitive tender to supply design and build services for the project.
2. The exhibition marked the first retrospective exhibition towards the award-winning International children's author, David Almond.
3. The exhibition was showcased and represented *Seven Stories* contribution towards of the *Great Exhibition of the North*, an international two-month exhibition, celebrating art, culture and design in the North of England, that saw 3.8million visitors engaged with the event across the duration of the exhibition.
4. The exhibition represented the main event for the 2018/19 exhibition programme for *Seven Stories* and was on public display for a 12-month period.
5. The dissemination of the exhibition also benefitted national and local coverage through TV, radio and social-media.
6. The design interpretation was a distinct and significant shift for the Museum's exhibition typology but also with regards to the impact on their practice of facilitating storytelling, putting faith into their audiences to interpret for themselves. It challenged established practice of exhibition interpretation within the context of a national children-centred museum. This is a significant stance in recognising

and respecting the developmental processes of children and young people in engaging them in an interactive, experiential and emotional response to museum exhibition. A cultural and significant shift for the National Museum.

7. The success of the design process and the interpretation of the exhibition led to further commissions of the Design team by *Seven Stories*. Culminating in the masterplan for the museums first permanent gallery 'Where Stories Come From'. The principles adopted secured funding for further immersive visitor led engagement. Funding secured from National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Wolfson Foundation, the Foyle Foundation, the Rackham Foundation, the Catherine Cookson Foundation, and Newcastle University.

8. The success of the exhibition led to invitations from several other Museums, and allowed the design team to explore the national exhibition design market with notable commissions from The National Museum of the Royal Navy, Hartlepool, The Jewish Museum, London and The National Science & Media Museum, Bradford. 'Where Your Wings Were: Journeys with David Almond' therefore aimed to redefine the typology of children's museum exhibition design and instigate institutional change towards children's learning and interpretation.

'Where Your Wings Were' exhibition was like 'walking through my own mind'.

David Almond (commenting on the realisation of the exhibition).



5. Statement of Rigour

The design by research project has involved extensive practice and praxis-based design activities, as well as traditional research methods to answer the research question and realise the design of a sensory immersive interactive children's exhibition.

1. The design team undertook a phenomenal amount of background research, reading the full catalogue of the author David Almond, intensive study of original workings and manuscripts of the author creative process

2. The design team have engaged in primary research activities and qualitative research methods by visiting and studying a number of case study facilities, including traditional museums and experienced-based visitor centres. This was to explore how traditional object-based and more sensory ways of interpretation can be challenged to stimulate self-initiated learning whilst concurrently still recognising the importance of the narrative.

3. The design team used extensive participatory and co-design research methods, including interviews and design workshops, with user groups to gain their insights. Intensive creative workshops with specialist young person groups and school children, were incredibly useful process helping the design team to produce an interactive, theatrical stimulating, environments utilising the creative outputs of the young people.

4. A comprehensive literature review was carried out, within the area of museum and exhibition design interpretation.

5. A thorough and intense three-month design and construction process using drawings, making, painting, modelling, computer modelling were used

to arrive and to realise a high-quality design that satisfied the brief.

6. Computer modelling was used to ensure modular construction of the exhibition system to ensure accuracy so that the work could be relocated as part of a touring exhibition. ■

6. Statement of Originality

The design by research project sets out an original and innovative inquiry that challenges traditional exhibition interpretation and the process to realise and interpret narrative as a more democratic design process.

1. The national competitive tender and brief from the *National Centre of Children Books* called for the design team to speculate a new means to celebrate and represent the creative process and extensive catalogue of the author David Almond.

2. *Where Your Wings Were: Journeys with David Almond* represents the first ever exhibition of the workings and works of the internationally acclaimed author.

3. The design team was considered the most successful and presented the most original approach to the brief, reflective of the creative process of the author in the competitive interview process against other teams.

4. Originality can be seen in how the design team took a greater democratic approach to the design process, intensifying the consultation process with curators, the author and wider consultative groups comprising young people and school children. The intensive creative process analysis of the author, through interviews and studies of his manuscripts, had not been used in the design of this type of exhibition previously.

5. The project utilised traditional technologies, as well as innovative theatrical and technical approaches to produce cutting edge, original and economically realistic design interpretations.



7. Description

David Almond's works have been translated into 40 different languages and his books have been made into films, stage plays and operas. Almond's most famous book 'Skellig' has been named one of the top ten Carnegie medal winning works and is a major influence in children's fiction, now being part of the National Curriculum. In recognition of David Almond's significance within the international literary world and the influence of his writings for children, an exhibition was commissioned and a national competitive design tender was launched. The venue to host the first exhibition documenting the untold story behind David Almond and his complete works, would be within the only museum, Seven Stories, wholly dedicated to the art of British children's fiction.

The design team consisting of Peter Dixon of Northumbria University in collaboration with Ben Couture of Jardine Couture, submitted and successfully won the competitive tender for the commission. Approached as a *research by design* project, the collaboration undertook an extensive analysis of the writings of Almond, his creative process by exploring the extensive manuscripts which form part of the collection at Seven Stories. This research was triangulated with data with in-depth enquiries of existing interviews and accounts about the author. A process of working with young people, who were the target audience, engaging them within the process of thematic analysis and interpretation of their understanding of the works of Almond and utilising their outputs, resulted in them being co-researchers by default. The application of design methods was utilised to analyse and identify creative process, themes and motivations within Almond's works. The *research by design* approach distinguishes between the 'analysis' and the 'representation' of the findings. Where traditionally in museum settings, a physical object collection would

usually be accompanied by text. This exhibition promoted interpretation utilising various media within a multisensory immersive exhibition on the literature of Almond. The validity of this approach elicited a powerful and emotive response by David Almond who said the experience of walking through the 'Where Your Wings Were' exhibition was like '*walking through my own mind*'.

Exhibition Content Context: Celebrating the International best-selling Children's Author - David Almond

'Writing can be difficult, but sometimes it really does feel like a kind of magic. I think that stories are living things - among the most important things in the world.'

David Almond, *Counting Stars*, Hodder Children's Books, 2000.

David Almond draws upon a variety of influences in his work, not least his own childhood. Many of his novels are set in his home in the north-east of England and are vivid reflections of the landscape, nature and people. His novels explore the boundaries between fantasy and reality and are influenced by Arthurian legends, Greek Myths and magic, with nods to the work of William Blake. Critics have often referred to his work as that of a modern fairy tale (*ref Guardian article, 2010*).

Author's Biography

David Almond was born in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1951 and grew up in neighbouring Felling, Gateshead. His early years were touched by the sadness of the death of his younger sister and later when he was 15, of his father. He went onto study at University and became a teacher for a number of years. Whilst he was a teacher, he wrote several novels for adults,

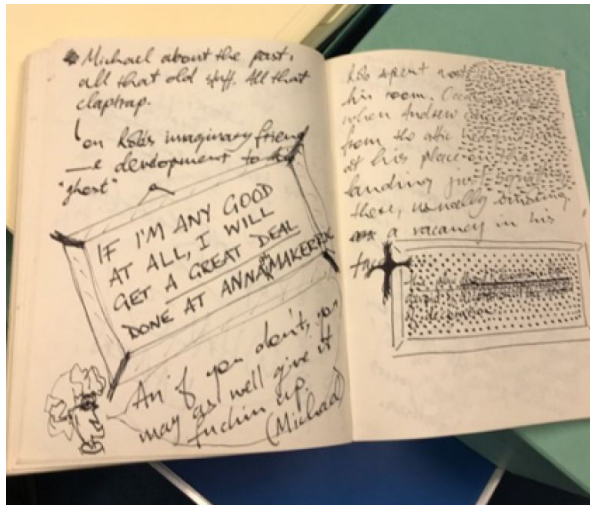


Fig 06_ David Almond original manuscript, Seven Stories Collection.

but he is now best known as a leading British writer of children's fiction.

One of his earlier short stories 'Where your Wings Were' was based on his experiences of his baby sister dying and served the foundation of his collection of stories '*Counting Stars*', all set around his childhood home in Felling. As David Almond has reflected, he '*found the extraordinary in the most ordinary of places*' (ref - *Guardian* article). Over the coming years, David Almond wrote a number of books for children, with four of these being shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal (the British literary award for outstanding English Language book for children and young people).

In 2010 David Almond received the Hans Christian Andersen Medal for writing (the highest international recognition given in children's literature). The jury praised his imaginative approach '*the jury has recognized the unique voice of a creator of magic realism for children. Almond captures his young readers' imagination and motivates them to read, think and be critical. His use of language is sophisticated and reaches across the ages.*' (*British Council* ref)

David Almond and Seven Stories

David Almond is a patron of Seven Stories and was influential in the establishment of a National Centre for Children's literature. He donated to the Seven Stories Collection draft material for *Heaven Eyes* (2000) and *My Dad's a Birdman* (2007). David Almond wanted to donate the manuscript for *Heaven Eyes*, because the book is set in the Ouseburn Valley, in an old warehouse, very similar to the building which is occupied by Seven Stories now. Seven Stories now holds the entire collection of works by David Almond.

Exhibition Design

The term 'Exhibition Design' can be generically applied and includes a range of different types of professional or practical application. Typologies of exhibition and the demands of the differing cultural landscapes in which they sit can be considerable in variation. From the extensive world expositions, large-scale commercial trade fairs concerned with brand and brand experiences and themed attractions to art installations, visitor centres, historic sites and museum galleries, even landscape interpretation, can be categorised under the umbrella of 'exhibition design' (Locker, 2011). These exhibitions may be permanent or temporary from 5 days to 25 years, from small-scale cabinets of curiosity (Locker, 2011) to the size of a small city in regards to world expo's (BIE, 2018). Yet, the common link to all these genres is the goal to communicate a story, a narrative, within a three-dimensional environment (Brooker, 2004).

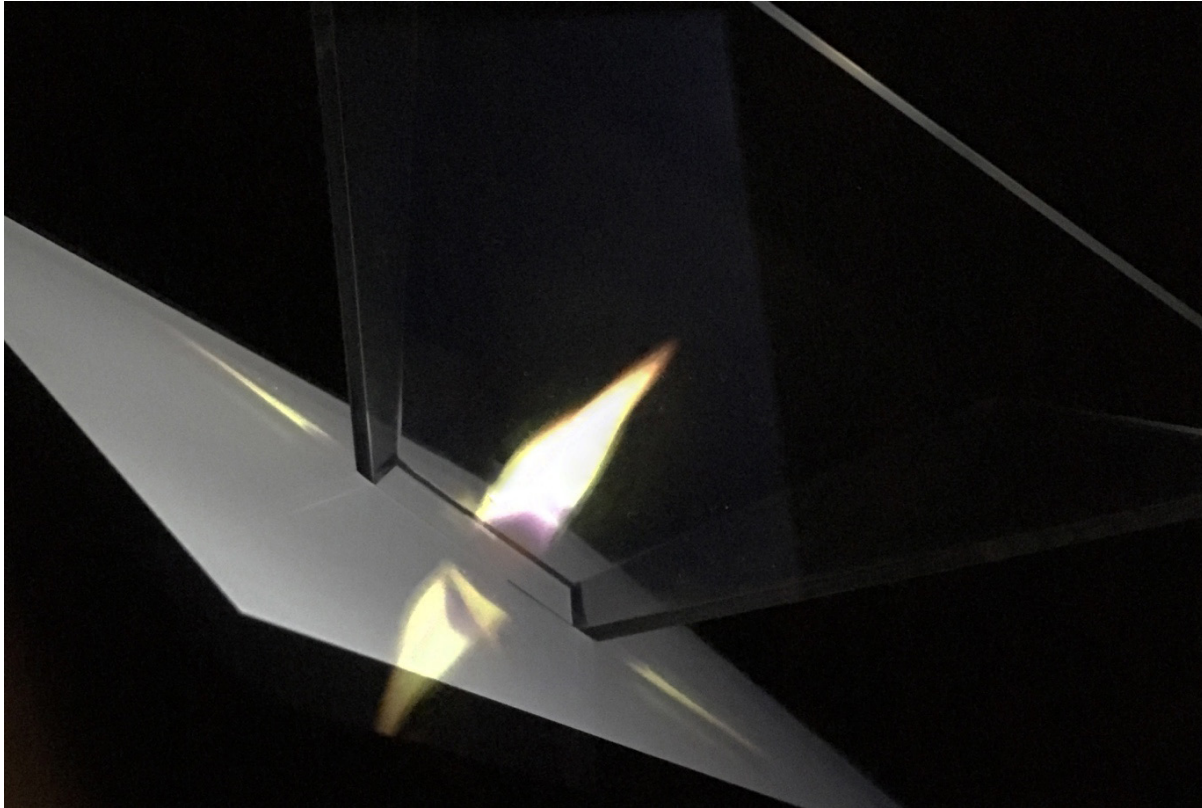
UK museums now exceed 100 million visitors a year (MA, 2018). Competition for visitor engagement also has increased, needs and demands of visitors are evolving, visitor attractions are becoming more varied and museums are required and are having to compete and respond to this in new and engaging ways. Therefore, are museums at a crossroad within museum exhibition interpretation? Should museums be more than just a receptacle for the display of collections and the sharing of knowledge for learning? Does the cultural and social landscape of our audiences need greater consideration and understanding to ensure the museum exhibition gallery provides greater opportunities to stimulate and encourage audience participation, exploration, imagination, insight, curiosity, wellbeing and encouraging visitor empowerment? To enact change, do the established approaches of design

engagement between the museum curator and museum exhibition designer need to be revisited and challenged. Should we be adopting a strategy of the 'Expansive notion of design as a strategic resource' (Macleod, 2018). Striving for a more democratic approach towards design to blur boundaries between design and curation and audience development to establish a new museum exhibition design process?

Seven Stories has established itself as a world leader in researching, commissioning and curating exhibitions for young children. Traditionally, exhibitions at Seven Stories have been largely Question / Answer / Graphic image based in their interpretation approach and have led the field within this area since 2005. Yet the changing visitor landscape has demanded a more progressive approach towards interpretation of their collections. 'Where Your Wings Were' exhibition is the first step for the Museum in this new journey.



8. The Design Approach



*Fig 07_ 3D hologram of flame.
Artefact to trigger response to
fire and the dancing of a flame.*

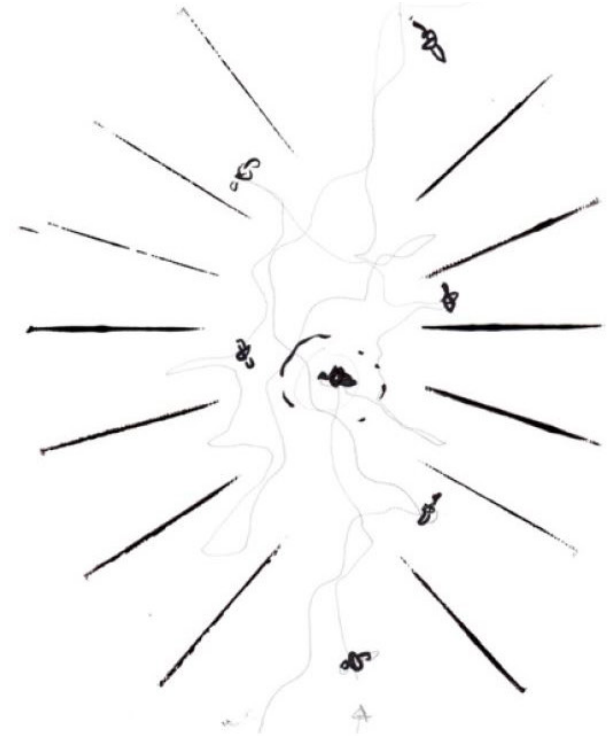
*Reference to 'The Fire Eaters' by
David Almond.*

The exhibition responded to the imagination and creative processes of David Almond and the rich themes he covers in his works. It looked to empower visitors to discover and engage with sensory experiences and unique personal insights of the author. The gallery was divided into different zones with original artwork and manuscripts sitting alongside digital motion graphics, smells, sounds and interactives capturing the essence of David Almond's inspiration, imagination and journeys. The exhibition minimised the use of text and exhibits to avoid overwhelming the target 7-14-year-old audience with information, guiding them instead to bring their

own imaginations and experience to interpret the writer's works and understand his creative process by journeying inside his mind's eye.

The timescales for design and build were exceptionally tight, being three months from appointment to exhibition opening. The designers began by immersing themselves completely in the David Almond's full works, through reading, listening, watching and studying original manuscripts of his body of work. They gathered biographical information from independent sources and in conversation with the author himself, treating him as a client in the design process, to extract themes from his life that he utilises within his novels to then structure and scaffold the exhibition as a contextualisation of his influences and stories. They studied interpretations of his work in other media and in the school curriculum.

The designers then began mark making around the key themes that emerged from the research phase, to convey complex 3-D concepts compellingly in two dimensions. The exhibition had to incorporate more traditional artefact display in a way that satisfied both the designers' experimental concept and the author's and museum's expectations. The designers explored ways to translate the concepts into the physical space, involving young people themselves in the design of the exhibition.



*Fig 08_ Initial mark making
influenced by the designers in
replicating David Almond's
creative process.
(Couture, B. 2018)*

Aims and Objectives

The exhibition aimed to redefine the typology of children's museum exhibition design and instigate institutional change towards children's learning and interpretation. The project aimed to challenge an established national practice of literal image-based exhibition interpretation within a child centred museum that holds national and international significance.



Fig 09_ Hidden gallery beyond the event space.

- To utilise the power of imagination, creativity and allow the ability for self-interpretation so as to harness passion and to allow young visitors to find their own conclusions.
- To challenge constricted notions of learning within exhibition design
- To harness the developmental approach of learning through exploration.
- To mark a transition from a traditional chronological retrospective towards a process and iconographical interpretative approach.
- To encourage creativity in interpreting complex themes through the mind's eye of the audience and celebrate esoteric meaning and perception.
- To utilise the creative process of the author and symbolic representation of objects and associations influential to the authors practice to provide the vehicle to celebrate and explore the workings of the author.



9. Research Question

1.

Can multi-perspectival codesign approaches (including curators, the author, visitors' audiences etc) lead to a more challenging and immersive exhibition that blurs boundaries between design, curation and audience participation enacting institutional change towards museum interpretation design?

□

10. Research Methods & Design Methodology



Fig 10_ Participatory methodology. Utilising young producers as subject experts to document their imaginings of the character Skellig.

An integrative approach, combining multiple elements of the design process of Research by Design with rigorous qualitative and participatory research has been undertaken with curators, authors, public and other stakeholders, to consider how to develop a narrative to enhance visitor engagement and interpretation for the interpretation of the exhibition and its content. This has included public consultation using focus groups, questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, using design methods (including sketches, drawings, models, both physical and virtual, animation and audio) to analyse and represent the findings around the focus of David Almond, the author's, creative process and works.

Taxonomy

- Conceptual design iterations
- Drawing
- Model-making
- Construction methods
- Spatial analysis
- Participatory activities
- Text-based research
- Phenomenology
- Theoretical research
- Fieldwork
- Photography
- Topographic survey
- Design research
- Trial and error experimental design processes
- Design-led research
- Historical research
- Typology research
- User experience
- Diagramming
- Interviews/user consultation
- Scale modelling
- Digital fabrication methods
- Site analysis/study
- Visiting similar building types

- Exploratory research through interviews and contextual enquiry to affirm the interpretation, intervention and exhibition requirements.

- Secondary analysis of papers, books, interviews, literature reviews of author, further analysis of exhibitions, museum interpretation and exhibition precedents on topics related to the research questions.

- Collaborative generative research with young people (target audience 7-14 year olds) contextualizing their lived experience and their perceptions through storytelling, drawing, sculpting and imagination, engaging them in the process of thematic analysis and interpretation of the meaning ensuring young people, as the target audience, became co-researchers..

- Analysis of thematical topics of exhibition through visual methods (sketching, drawing, models, both physical and virtual, animation and audio).

- Analogue, digital drawing and modelling to test the interventions physical forms and their potential engagement means with the Museum visitors.

- Evaluative research through visitor and stakeholder feedback on the design research process (formative) and the designed outcome (summative).

- Analytical Architectural measures: including general site analysis and surveys (both digital and analogue) to establish boundaries and threshold, site pathology, environmental and logistical conditions and constraints, access, circulation and views (interior) of the host space to establish the appropriate configuration, form and location of exhibition interventions.

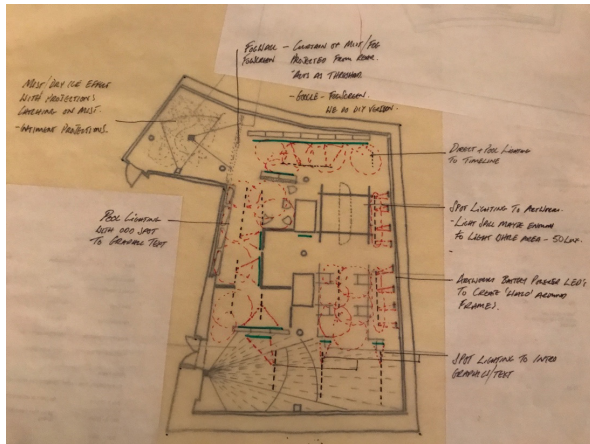


Fig 11_ Sketch plan of exhibition and events taking place within the gallery.

11. Exhibition Interpretation

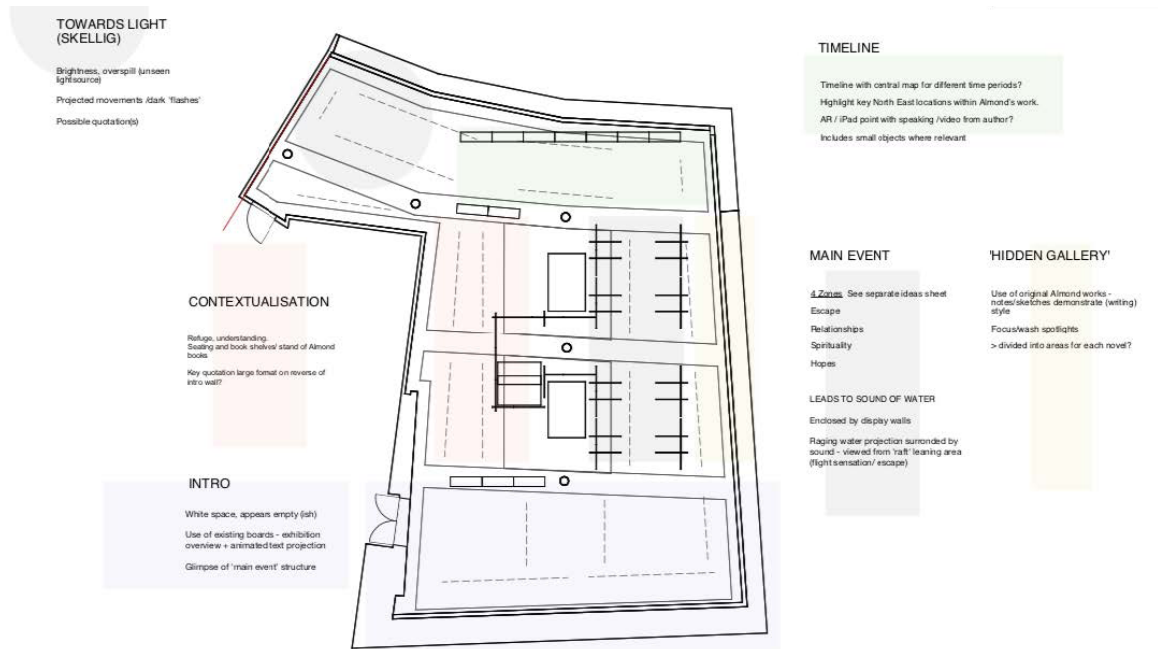


Fig 12_ schematic development plan for the gallery. (Jardine Couture, 2018)

The exhibition design challenged convention of a typical exhibition. Spaces conceived as imagination or reality. As visitors step within the gallery they enter the mind of the author where words come to life, dancing and swirling all around them. As the words lead you through the space a shaft of pink light signposts a number of events that signify key happenings and associations with stories through the author's collections. The sound and touch of the sea, the flicker of a naked flame, delicacy of a floating feather, to the smell of candy floss, the illusion of an infinity mirror to the trepidation of placing a hand into the unknown darkness, stimulate the senses and play with the emotions of the visitor. As the visitor passes through these events – small slithers within the walls of the events reveal a reality beyond these spaces. A hidden gallery that displays original manuscripts, writings and mark making by the author. To the other side you catch a glimpse of a desk and the mind-mapping exercise of the conceiving and the production of a typical book between the author and the publisher. Towards the end of the events a wall houses 'Centres of Energy' memories, artefacts, significant elements from the authors life are contextualised and demonstrated how the authors experiences are influences towards his writings.

Nestled amongst all these interpretations are key immersive experiences that transport the visitors to particular references and experiences within key books. An out-of-body gravity-defying flight over and across a flowing river, to the discovery of a strange and spiritual winged being, brought to life through theatrical means. Not until the end that an introduction greets the visitor and explains the journey that has just been taken.

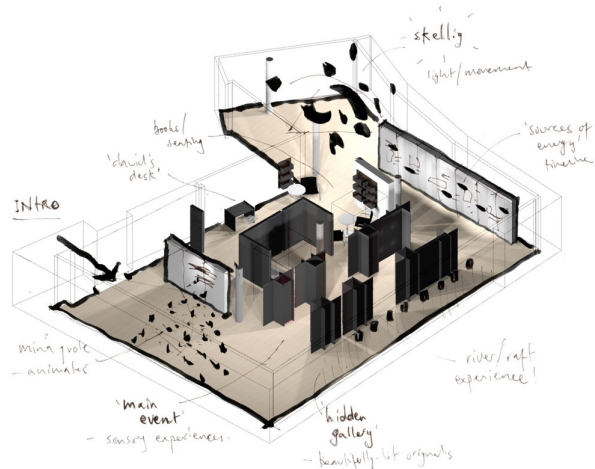


Fig 13_ Axonometric sketch of gallery. (Couture, B. 2018)

“The routine is very important, setting aside time, sitting down and dedicating hours to it, even when nothing much seems to be happening. It’s a mixture of being very playful and impulsive, but also being dogged. It’s also messing about a lot. I do a lot of scribbling, a lot of doodling, a lot of playing around with notebooks and pens, seeing what’s inside my head and what’s in the language.”

- David Almond on his creative process.

The task of celebrating the artistry and the author David Almond to a particular young audience - 7-14-year olds, along with any accompanying adults required the designers to take a more lateral approach. A retrospective of the works of the author would not be suffice. The narratives within the exhibition needed to inspire and aspire. To show and illustrate how the ordinary and can be extraordinary. It would need to explore ideas, ideologies and creative processes. Allow opportunity to explore and question and help to contextualise story telling. The design approach to interpret the works, writings, process and stories around David Almond as an author and the stories he creates required a much varied design approach to what might be considered the norm. The designers viewed David Almond as character in his own right, a character that went on journeys with the characters that he created within his writings. To understand the characters the design team also had to get into character and likened the design process similar to an actor getting into character.

In the first instance extensive reading of the catalogue of his books, listening to some as audiobooks, watching of stage plays and subsequent films were rigorously studied. Analysis of the different

interpretations of the writings - from book to screenplay to stage, slight yet dramatic interpretation changes to adapt to different mediums. All of his writings can be interpreted as highly philosophical, with many reoccurring themes, the binary relationships between opposites, such as life and death, reality and fiction, past and future along with aspects of education, growing up and interpreting and adapting to change. Distinct characters emerging with a particular focus of the nature of ‘self’ and awareness of ‘self’ in each individual. Although, many of the personalities with the books experience change, dilemma, emergency, confrontation and crisis, the stories provide hope and interpretation to the individuals. The stories and the way they are written could easily be interpreted by some as magical, yet they are cemented within realism that most readers can associate with. Context and references to the authors own life and experiences is evident throughout the works. Within a period of two weeks, 16 books two stage plays one film and numerous reviews had been digested by the design team and detailed analysis, quotes and narratives highlighted.



Fig 14_ Discussions with the curator and the author about the gallery design.

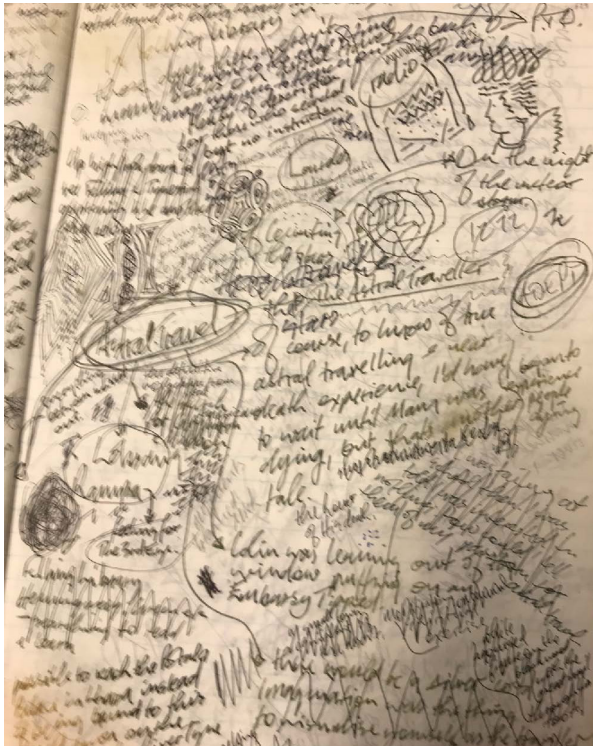


Fig 15_ Marking making and notes from David Almond's manuscript.

On a personal level writing is hard, whether a writer, painter or designer the individual creative processes is unique and key. 'Imperfect, messy, playful, often childlike, often weird' David Almond in conversation with the designers 2018. This is how the author describes his creative writing process. Utilising large sketch books, blank pages with no lines on the page, he begins to mark make, scribble and doodle. Embracing the imperfections of abstract thought, allowing the playfulness of interpreting his imagination onto to paper. Utilising pens, pencils, markers, colouring pencils and range of writing and mark making devices. The marks, impressions, scores, sketches, doodles are interpreted as conversations between the authors mind and the paper a realisation of a mind mapping process - playing with what is in his mind, messing with ideas of what stories might be within - words sentences, scribbles, masses of marks combination of marks and words shapes - a disorganised mess, and output of thinking as marks onto paper. For the author, they form the basis and starting points of ideas, they create connections between the flow

of the authors mind to the first elements of a story, abstract thought become visual representations on paper allowing physical connections to be further made from the various scribes on the pages. The designer adapted this process in the initial interpretations towards the spaces.

The initial ideas were created replicating the process of David Almond. Blank sheets became canvasses for initial mark making. Abstract shapes, strokes represented initial responses to David Almond, his creative processes and workings and the character and stories that he has produced. The marks would start to deduce complex themes, the strokes, weight of strokes, inaccuracies and accuracies would be developed to represent such things as life or death, family and friend and fear and spirituality. Representations of flight, movement darkness and light.

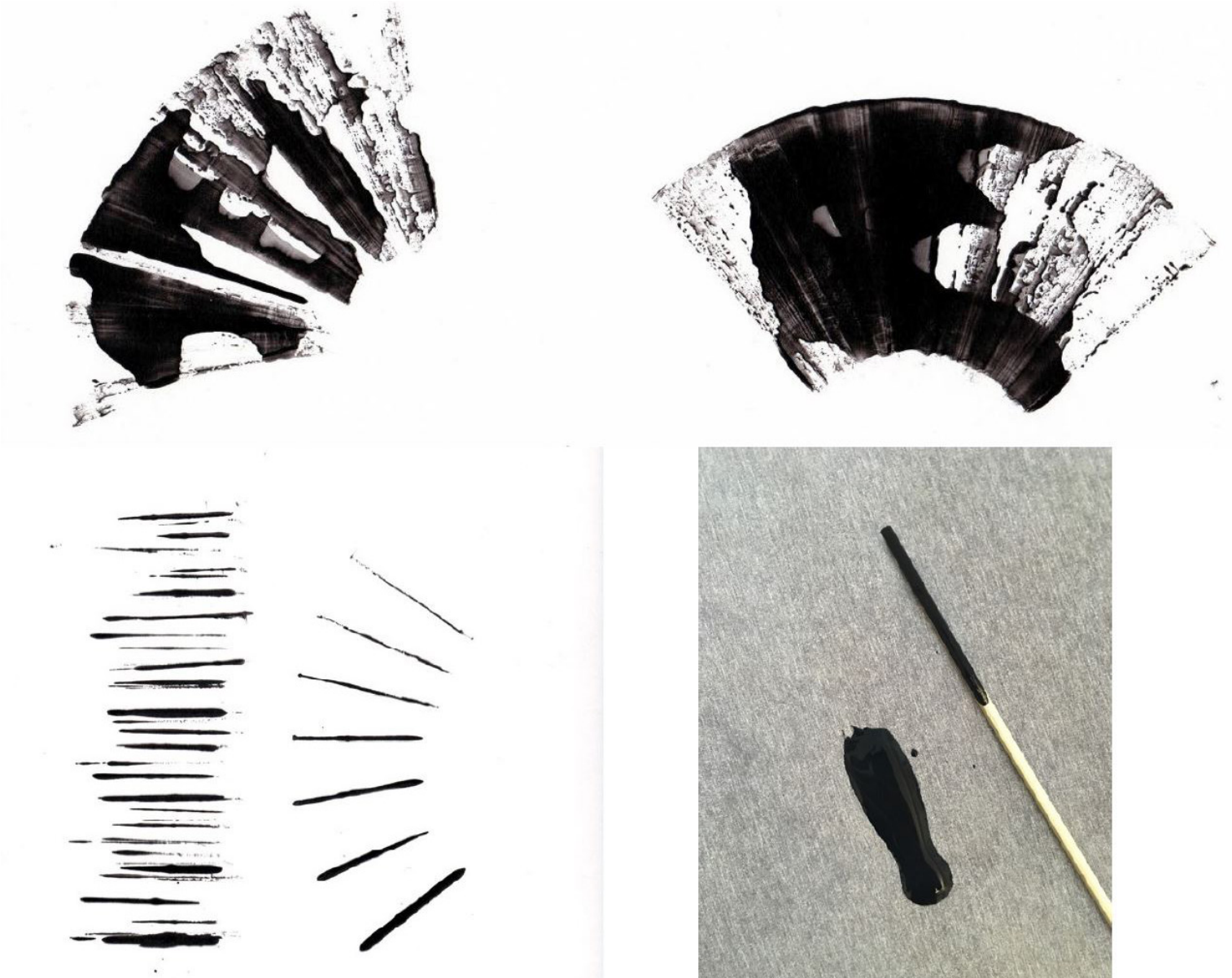


Fig 16_ Initial mark making with references to flight, movement, darkness and light influenced David Almond's creative process. (Couture,B. 2018)

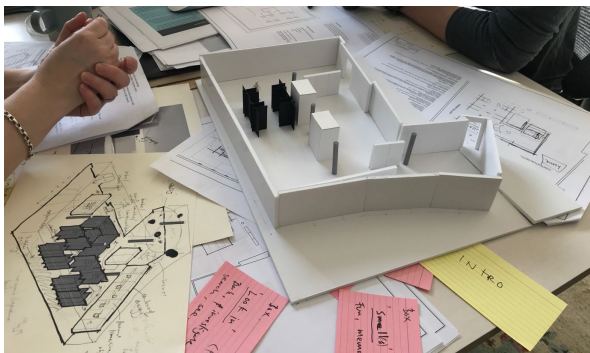
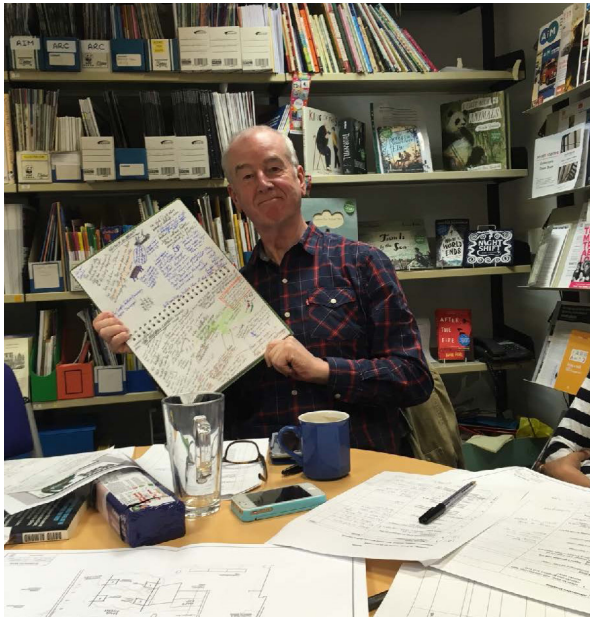


Fig 17_ Discussions with David Almond and the Design and Client team around the exhibition interpretation and the creative process adopted by the author.

Fig 18_ Client and Design Team meeting.

The design team exchanged sketches, thoughts and dialogue throughout the creative process. The designers worked in isolation throughout the duration of the process due to their working locations, yet sketches, precedent references, conversations of interpretations would be exchanged hourly. The pace and the intensity of the mark making was quite crucial to the process. The mark making was not to be literal, the abstractness was becoming key. It was revealing to the design team that aspects should be allowed to be interpreted and be encouraged to be interpreted by individuals in their own way.

The emergence of reference points to happenings in books, what the designers started to call 'Events'. The 'Events' would signify particular moments or references with some of the books. They would act as signposts for engagement and discussion. Simple in form, a single colour of pink light - referencing the colour seen from a character when looking towards heaven, a dancing flame, from the book *The fire eaters*, smell of candy floss accompanied by infinity mirror referencing the fun of the fair and a fear wall, consisting of a chalk board to reveal your fears to an opportunity to lean out over a running water to represent flight across a local river.

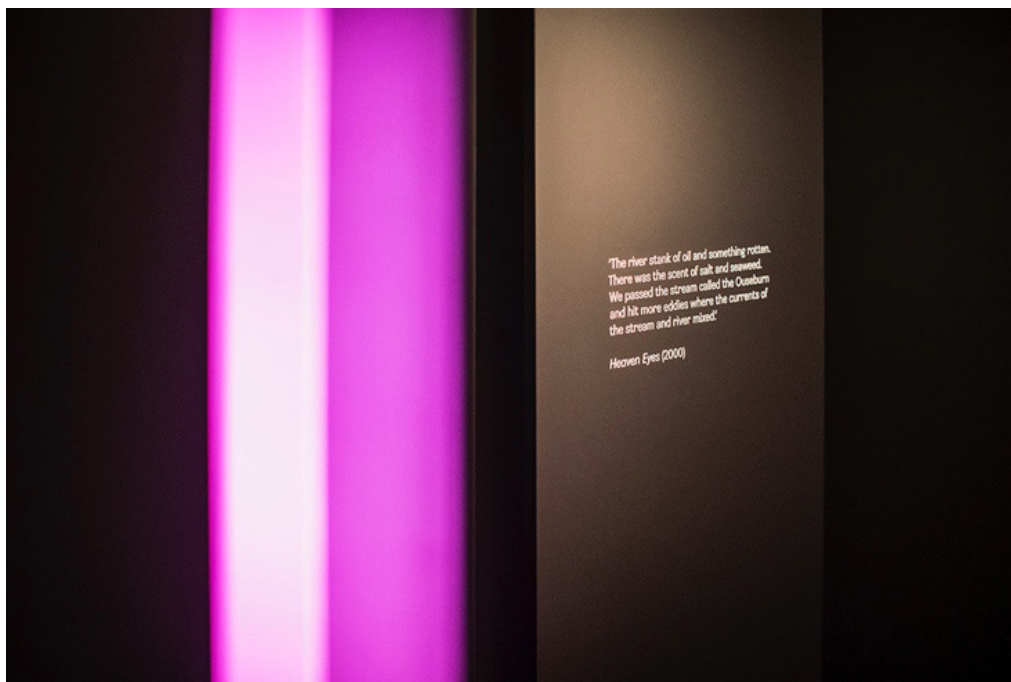
These events provided references to specific readings, encouraged facilitators to pick up stories and make further references. Quotes associated with these events further contextualised narratives for the visitor. Most importantly it allows the visitor to make their own interpretations and endorsed that their interpretation is just as correct as the authors.

above right

Fig 19_Entrance to raft interactive and The fairground event with Candy Floss smell station and obscure infinity mirrors.

right

Fig 20_ Pink light makes reference to the entrance to the events space and signifies and interprets meaning of light.



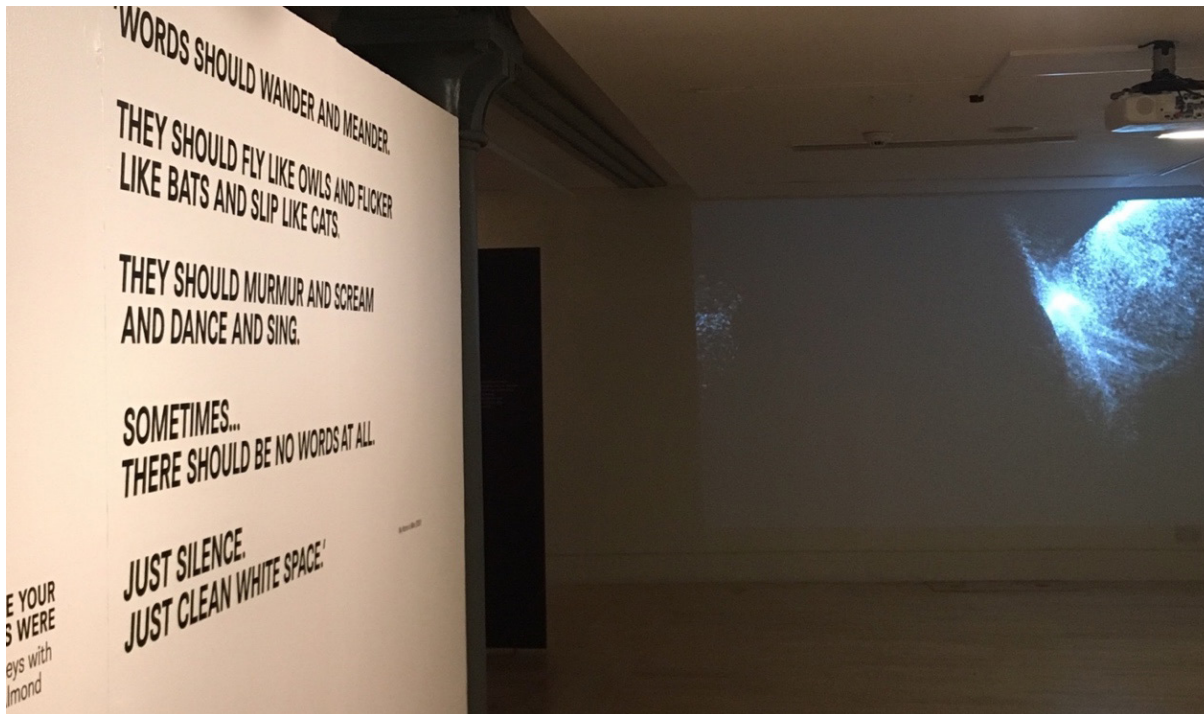


Fig 21_ Mumuration installation - Introduction area.



Fig 22_ Mumuration. Guy Edwardes/2020VISION concept sketch.

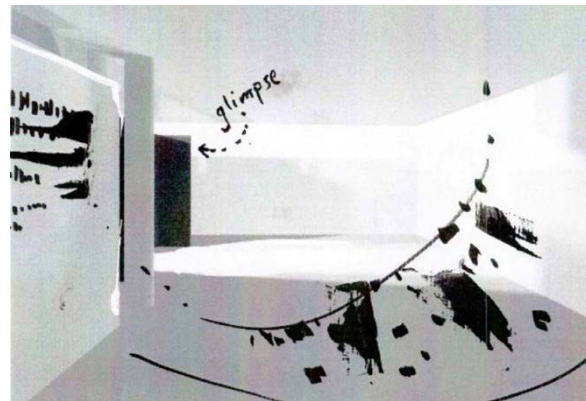


Fig 23_ Mumuration installation Concept Sketch - Introduction area. (Couture,B.2018)

Throughout the gallery larger scale immersive events occurred. These signified a different mode of engagement. These were to touch the visitor, to immerse them within the moment. Provide theatrical engagement and begin to animate the spaces and anything within that environment. Combination of multimedia, lighting and sound design bring narrative to life. Stimulating the senses of those within the spaces.

Interpreting quotes from the author, lifting and placing the author's influences, combining the two and contextualising bringing word, intrigue and imagination to life. Spaces to explore narrative, explore meaning behind narrative and space to be stimulated and reflect within the context of storytelling.

The quote "Words should wander and meander. They should fly like owls and flicker like bats and slip like cats. They should murmur and scream and dance and sing. Sometimes there should be no words at all. Just silence, Just clean white space" taken from Almond's Book 'My Name is Mina' welcomes visitors within gallery as opposed to an introductory explanation of what the gallery holds. Instead, a clinical white space, words and letters twisting, turning, swooping around and swirling within the space, dancing and flying around the space, like a murmuration of starlings, animating the words upon everything and everyone within the space.



*Fig 24_ Catching a murmuration.
Child interacting with moving
image.*

*Fig 25_ Mumuration - initial
animation.*





Fig 26_ The designers facilitating participatory session with 'The Young Producers' to interrupt text and readings from 'Skellig' in which the illustrations of young producers were animated into an immersive abstract performance piece.

'Skellig' notably the most successful and celebrated story by David Almond presented an opportunity to engage with 'The Young Producers', a body of young people that Seven Stories consult with on the activities taking place within the museum, from the perspective of a young people of the community.

Skellig is an emotive tale revolving around strong themes of nurture, the value of friendship, loyalty, family units, trust, love and responsibility along with many other aspects impacting on childhood and wellbeing. Mystical and slightly unnerving the story charts the friendship of two young people and focus's on their relationship with one another and family but also on the relationship that develops with a creature they discover within a forbidden garage at the bottom of their garden. The identity and form of this creature is never revealed within the book. Text within provides hints to 'Skellig' as being crippled with Arthritis, living on a diet of insects and spiders surrounded by pellets, later in the film through the main character that Skellig has wings. Throughout the story the true identity of Skellig is never revealed, leaving to the imagination of the reader to form an image and further characteristics of the creature.

To celebrate 'Skellig' the designers wanted to include young people in the development of the narrative and the immersive piece for this event. Consulting with the 'Young Producers' the designers set the context and described the design process for the developing exhibition for them to understand the role of the designer.

Skellig was to be one of the three main immersive environments. The designers provided drawing equipment and asked the Young Producers to illustrate what they imagine as abstracts from Skellig were read to them. Encouraging them to follow the instinct, whether it just be marks, streaks, sketches

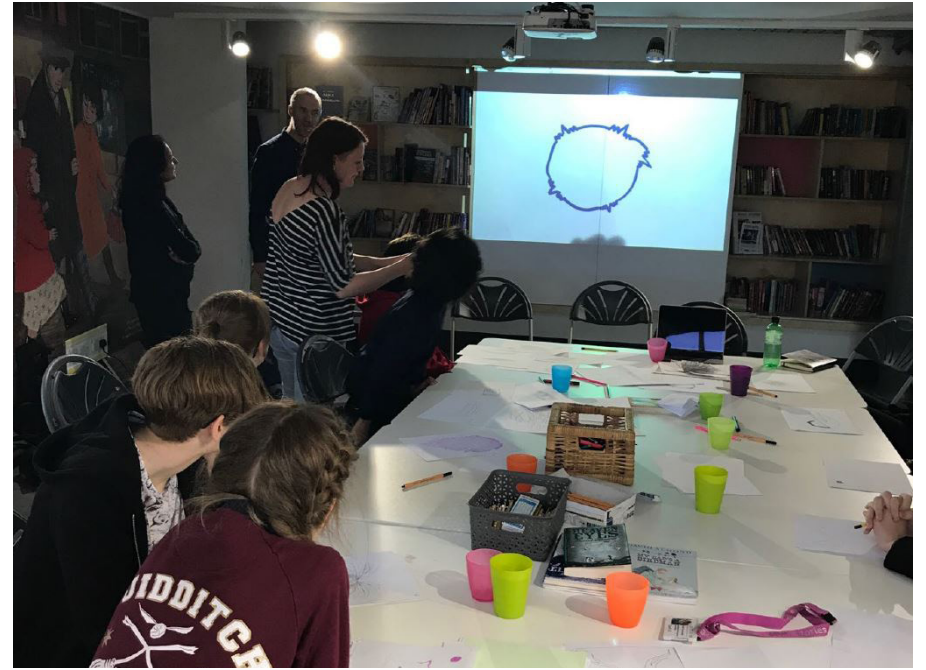
drawings, to get down on paper reactions to the words and text. The results were wide reaching, some literal and others much more abstract almost dark figures and feelings of emotions. In parallel to this session, curators did a similar exercise within a local primary school, but instead of visually recording the exercise an audio recording was produced. The abstract and surreal interpretations from the exercise were to be embraced and become the body of the material for a theatrical animation. The visual outputs were combined along with other interpretations such as wings, darkness and light mashed together with the soundscape into animated 3 minute sequence. Sound escapes across the gallery - voices, posing questions, abstract sounds to entice visitors to the space. A dark disformed figures begins to appear of the darkness of the space, growing in statue and omitting fluttering echoes across the whole of the space and onto anyone within the vicinity. Darkness turns to light, figure emerges dancing, voices of the children become more relaxed and laughter can be heard. The creature's wings open and embrace everything and everyone in a pirouetting swirl of joy. An open space filled with theoretical trickery visually and acoustically for visitors to lose themselves in the emotions that the story conjures up. Self-reflection or group activities offer further events to be instigated with the space with the installation being the provocation for activity.

right

Fig 27_ 'The Young Producers' view the first animated sequence of their interpretation of 'Skellig'.

below

Fig 28_ Facilitator interacting with a theatrical abstract performance of 'Skellig' in which the illustrations of young producers were animated into an immersive abstract performance piece.





In addition to the sensory immersive events and theatrical happenings, rest bite is granted through calm reflective spaces. A hidden gallery displays a select few moments of the authors thoughts through displaying backlit pages from the original manuscripts from the Seven Stories collection.

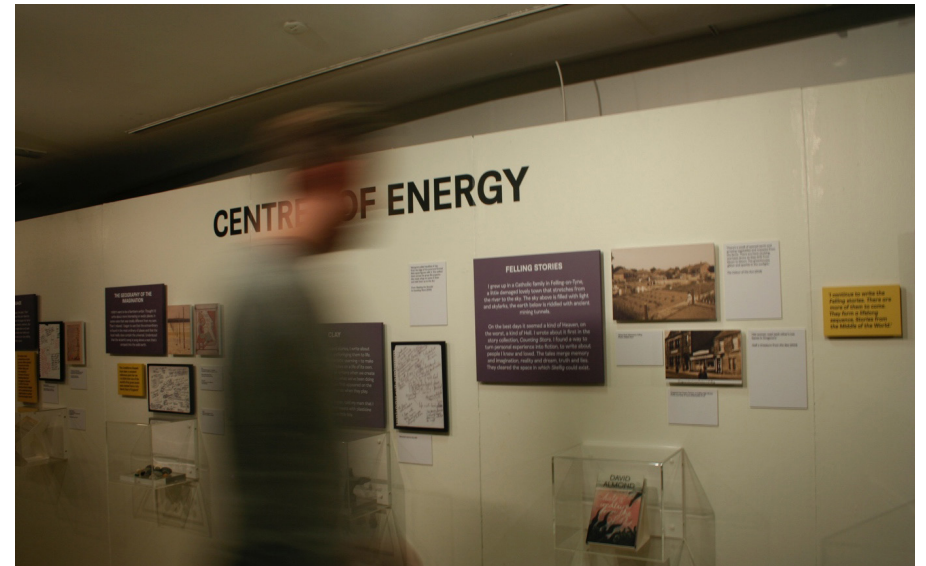
A gallery entitled 'Centres of Energy' contextualises major influences on the authors writings, from feathers and flight, to the street and house he grew up in along with other artefacts that occur and influence his writings.

Finally at the end of the exhibition an opportunity to sit within the writing space of the author, an opportunity to sit and read the collection of stories by David Almond on display whilst surrounded by the original art works from the cover on his many books.



Fig 29_ Facilitator interacting with a theatrical abstract performance of 'Skillig' with a school group.

Fig 30_ Hidden Gallery displaying pages from David Almonds original manuscripts.



above

Fig 31_ 'Centre of Energy'
charting major influences of
David Almonds' writings.



right

Fig 32_ David Almond sat within
the exhibition.

12. Dissemination

'Where Your Wings Were: Journeys with David Almond' exhibition opened to the public on 22nd June 2018, on the first day of The Great Exhibition of the North, England's largest event for 2018. It was one of the leading attractions out of the 537 events that formed The Great Exhibition of the North. Open to the public for the duration of the 80 days of the event. Over 3.8million visitors were recorded attending the event. The popularity of the 'Where Your Wings Were' ensured the exhibition's continued success and became the headline exhibition for the Museum, being open to the public until May 31st 2019.



Fig. 33_ Poster promoting the exhibition, Newcastle City Centre.

The 'Where Your Wings Were' exhibition and Great Exhibition Winged Tails of the North trail, which was inspired from the findings of the exhibition, was extensively showcased on local and national media. From local television and newspaper articles to interviews on BBC Radio 4. David Almond said of the exhibition *'My hope is that the exhibition will give children and families the chance to explore their own imaginations and creative forces'* (ref Chronicle Live 26th June 2018)

In addition, to public viewing and exploration of the exhibition, the content and its interpretation lent itself to numerous bespoke events. Learning and CPD events for authors, teachers and academics around the themes and content within the exhibition. It initiated school visits raising questions and debates around the complex themes contained within the exhibition. In addition, numerous visits by Key Stage 3 students from schools across the region attended the exhibition due to *Skellig* by David Almond being a key text contained within the UK Curriculum.

The exhibition was designed to be relocatable and storable. Seven Stories has been touring its exhibitions since its inception in 1996 and its touring programme is one its many means of secondary

income but also an important aspect in the promotion of Seven Stories and its works. Enquiries have been received nationally and, more recently, internationally with the prospect of the exhibition going to Japan post Covid-19.

'Where Your Wings Were: Journeys with David Almond' marked a significant change in direction for Seven Stories, moving away from traditional image question answer based interpretation to a much more interactive exploratory approach to museum exhibition interpretation. This in its own right produced publicity within the museum world context. The success of the exhibition and its Research by Design approach led to the design team being further commissioned to masterplan the Seven Stories first permanent gallery 'Where Stories Come From', similar approaches both within analysis and interpretation applied in 'Where Your Wings Were' were adopted for the masterplan exercise for the permanent gallery. This resulted in securing funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, The Wolfson Foundation, The Foyle Foundation, The Rackham Foundation and the Catherine Cookson Foundation for this project. 'Where Your Wings Were' has been cited as exemplar within museum exhibition interpretation and has led to a number of further creative partnerships with The National Museum of the Royal Navy, Hartlepool, The Jewish Museum, London and most recently the approach has been adopted by The National Science and Media Museum, Bradford part of The Science Museum Group for a project to form basis of their new gallery to open in July 2021.

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14. Illustrations

Fig. 01_ Dixon, P. (2018) Mumuration of words. Video installation inspired from quotes from David Almond. Digital Image, Northumbria University, Newcastle.

Fig. 02_ Couture, B. (2018) Raft, a gravity defying interactive that takes participants on a flight over a flowing river. Digital Image, Jardine Couture, Hexham.

Fig. 03_ Couture, B. (2018) Raft, a gravity defying interactive that takes participants on a flight over a flowing river. Digital Image, Jardine Couture, Hexham.

Fig. 04_ Couture, B. (2018) Interactive theatre installation made from illustrations undertaken by 7-14-year olds from their imaginings of what Skellig represented. Skellig by David Almond. Digital Image, Jardine Couture, Hexham.

Fig. 05_ Promotional vinyl's on the windows of Seven stories.

Fig. 06_ David Almond original manuscript, Seven Stories Collection.

Fig. 07_ Couture, B. (2018) 3D hologram of flame. Artefact to trigger response to fire and the dancing of a flame. Reference to 'The Fire Eaters by David Almond. Digital Image, Jardine Couture, Hexham.

Fig. 08_ Couture, B. (2018) Initial mark making by the designers in replicating David Almonds creative process. Digital Image, Jardine Couture, Hexham.

Fig. 09_ Hidden gallery beyond the event space.

Fig. 10_ Couture, B. (2018) Participatory methodology. Utilising young producers as subject experts to document their imaginings of the character Skellig. Digital Image, Jardine Couture, Hexham.

Fig. 11_ Dixon, P. (2018) Sketch plan of exhibition an event taking place within the gallery. Digital Image, Northumbria University, Newcastle.

Fig. 12_ Couture, B. (2018) Location Plan for the gallery. Digital Image, Jardine Couture, Hexham.

Fig. 13_ Couture, B. (2018) Axonometric sketch of gallery. Digital Image, Jardine Couture, Hexham.

Fig. 14_ Dixon, P. (2018) Discussions with the curator and the author about the gallery design. Digital Image, Northumbria University, Newcastle.

Fig. 15_ Dixon, P. (2018) Marking making and notes from David Almond's manuscript. Digital Image, Northumbria University, Newcastle.

Fig. 16_ Couture, B. (2018) Initial mark making by the designers with references to flight, movement and darkness and light in replicating David Almonds creative process. Digital Image, Jardine Couture, Hexham.

Fig. 17_ Dixon, P. (2018) Discussions with David Almond and the Design and Client team around the exhibition interpretation and the creative process adopted by the author. Digital Image, Northumbria University, Newcastle.

Fig. 18_ Dixon, P. (2018) Client and Design Team meeting. Digital Image, Northumbria University, Newcastle.

Fig. 19_ Dixon, P. (2018) Entrance to raft interactive and The fairground event with Candy Floss smell station and obscure infinity mirrors. Digital Image, Northumbria University, Newcastle.

Fig. 20_ Couture, B. (2018) Pink light makes reference to the entrance to the events space and signifies and interprets meaning of light. Digital Image, Jardine Couture, Hexham.

Fig. 21_ Dixon, P. (2018) Mumuration installation - Introduction area. Digital Image, Northumbria University, Newcastle.

Fig. 22_ Edwards, G. Murmuration. Digital Image, 2020VISION.

Fig. 23_ Couture, B. (2018) Murmuration - Introduction area concept sketch. Digital Image, Jardine Couture, Hexham.

Fig. 24_ Dixon, P. (2019) Catching a murmuration. Child interacting with moving image. Digital Image, Northumbria University, Newcastle.

Fig. 25_ Briggs, J. Mumuration - initial animation. Digital Image, Field Design, Sheffield.

Fig. 26_ Couture, B. (2018) The designers facilitating participatory session with 'The Young Producers' to interrupt text and readings from 'Skellig' in which the illustrations of young producers were animated into an immersive abstract performance piece. Digital Image, Jardine Couture, Hexham.

Fig. 27_ Dixon, P. (2019) 'The Young Producers' view the first animated sequence of their interpretation of 'Skellig'. Digital Image, Northumbria University, Newcastle.

Fig. 28_ Couture, B. (2018) Facilitator interacting with a theatrical abstract performance of 'Skellig' in which the illustrations of young producers were animated into an immersive abstract performance piece. Digital Image, Jardine Couture, Hexham.

Fig. 29_ Dixon, P. (2019) Facilitator interacting with a theatrical abstract performance of 'Skellig' with a school group. Digital Image, Northumbria University, Newcastle.

Fig. 30_ Dixon, P. (2019) Hidden Gallery displaying pages from David Almonds original manuscripts. Digital Image, Northumbria University, Newcastle.

Fig. 31_ Couture, B. (2018) 'Centre of Energy' charting major influences of David Almonds writings. Digital Image, Jardine Couture, Hexham.

Fig.32_ Seven Stories (2019) David Almond sat within the exhibition. Digital Image, Seven Stories, Newcastle.

Fig. 33_ Dixon, P. (2019) Poster promoting the exhibition, Newcastle City Centre. Digital Image, Northumbria University, Newcastle.

