GLoW Illuminating Innovation: Impact Generation & Evidence Gathering

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AN AHRC RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT & ENGAGEMENT FELLOWSHIP PROJECT

GLOW3

About GLoW3

The home page of the GLoW3 project website.

PROJECT SUMMARY

The GLoW: Illuminating Innovation: Impact Generation & Evidence Gathering initiative saw Professor Sarah Atkinson (Department of Culture, Media & Creative Industries) collaborate with artist Urban Projections (Rebecca Smith), Mark Mulligan (Department of Geography), Zoran Cvetkovic (Department of Engineering), King's Culture and King's Digital Lab. They collaborated on a project aimed at hosting and examining the impact of a digital art installation held at St Mary le Strand.

The GLoW: Illuminating Innovation exhibition was an important output of the larger GLoW3 project, an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) fellowship which seeks to foreground and interrogate screen-based media and art created by women, non-binary and trans people. The GLoW Illuminating Innovation Impact & Evidence Gathering initiative focused specifically on the evaluation of a digital installation named 'Second Nature', created by Urban Projections (Rebecca Smith).

Second Nature featured dynamic light displays designed to complement the physical environment of the church, accompanied by an atmospheric immersive spatial audio soundtrack. Shaped by real-time environmental data taken from sensor stations on the Strand Aldwych, it aimed to create an abstract performance piece inspired by systems of nature as well as critically engage with issues of climate change and the democratisation of data.

HOW DID THE PROJECT COME ABOUT?

Rebecca has a longstanding interest in creating art that fosters reflection on the natural environment and our place within it. She is particularly interested in exploring how digital technologies can meaningfully question and critique the intricate relationships between technology, the environment, and the human-centered perspective, especially within the context of the looming climate crisis.

Second Nature was one of four brand new artworks commissioned and funded by the GLoW3.0 project, through which the artists underwent a 6-month development programme led by Prof. Atkinson in collaboration with King's Digital Lab.

Second Nature was envisaged, above all, as an interrogation of the local environment and unforeseen dialogues that happen on a daily basis between people, place and the natural world. A central premise of the work was that live and historical data sets, focused variously upon temperature, air quality, humidity, signal pollution and wind, would shape visualisation and aural patterns of the piece. Creating a distinctive installation, consisting of colours, movement, speed, position, and complexity shaped by the datasets above, offered a transitory immersive space to inspire audience reflection and contemplation.

Photo by Sarah Atkinson (2024).

WHAT HAPPENED?

During September 2023-February 2024, Rebecca, alongside the three other GLoW artists, engaged in a development programme that enabled them to advance their art works with King's colleagues and researchers.

In late 2023, early 2024, work focused on the curation and design of the multi-sited GLoW: Illuminating Innovation exhibition. Sarah, along with King's Culture engaged in several crucial impact pre-planning activities, including designing questionnaires for attendees and recruiting Exhibition Assistants and Data Collectors.

The GLoW: Illuminating Innovation exhibition opened on International Women's Day, March 8th and ran until 20th April 2024, across multiple sites on the Strand in London. The launch event held on 7th March in King's College London, entitled Women's hidden role in tech: Illuminating innovation, was chaired by Julia Gillard, and featured GLoW's curator, Sarah Atkinson, alongside artist Tamiko Thiel and journalist Nonny De La Peña, whose works featured in the exhibition. The exhibition featured a wide array of artworks and a 6-week programme of activity, encompassing the four brand new commissions and 25 events hosted in venues across the Strand.

The 'Second Nature' installation, one of these four commissions, was exhibited at St Mary le Strand on the 11th, 12th & 13th March. It attracted a total of 879 attendees, with attendance averaging out at 293 per day over the three-day period.

A catalogue providing insight into the exhibition, the artworks and the artists including further information on the 'Second Nature' installation, was published in 2024 and is accessible online.

Photo by Roger Eaton (2024).

WHAT WAS THE PROJECT'S IMPACT?

Second Nature produced several important impacts.

It was invaluable firstly, in capturing and celebrating Rebecca's contribution to advancements in digital creativity. In offering funding and a distinctive space in which to situate her work, GLoW Illuminating Innovation contributes to combatting stark inequalities which urgently need to be addressed in the creative digital sector. She offered the following reflection while musing on her experience crafting the installation:

Working with data from an urban environment has been a really interesting process. Like many people, I have often thought that numbers and big data sets are confusing and not for me. But there's a real beauty in the patterns that they create and the narratives that they tell. I'm interested in how we can experience and meaningfully connect with this.

The GLoW 3 artist programme provided a valuable opportunity, allowing Rebecca and others to form new connections with artists and others seeking to engage with myriad socio-cultural issues associated with emerging digital technologies.

Second Nature attendees positively evaluated the installation, emphasising its worth as an engaging and thought-provoking work of art. According to the 138 returned questionnaires completed by the 879 overall participants, 94% of visitors thought St Mary Le Strand was a great venue for the piece, while 95% of those who attended recommended the event to others. Attendees, reflecting on their experiences, offered a range of positive recollections of the installation. One attendee, for example, favourably comparing 'Second Nature' to other digital art exhibitions they attended, stating that they 'liked this one better…it felt almost like a spiritual experience because of the sound'. Another, reflecting on their memories of attending the exhibition, recalled that 'the rainbow prism effect on the inside of the Wren church was quite magical!'.

GLoW: Illuminating Innovation also gained some media traction, being featured in an article written by XRMust, a digital publication focused on immersive storytelling.

SARAH'S TOP TIPS FOR IMPACT

1.Engage with and include collaborators from the outset of your project. This inclusive approach helps with planning early on and fosters a sense of shared ownership when it comes to the project and its goals.

2.Seek opportunities to collaborate with academics in other disciplines where your work could have impact. Their expertise will enrich and inform your approach and could enable you to access new impact funding opportunities and help widen the appeal of your project.

3.Work closely with the professional service colleagues who are supporting your project and keep them up-date on your plans. Their advice and foresight on administrative processes will be invaluable to ensure you avoid delays and disruptions down the line.

FURTHER READING

Sarah Atkinson & Vicki Callahan, *Mixed Realities: Gender & Emergent Media* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2024)

Sarah Atkinson, *Glow: Illuminating Innovation: Exhibition Catalogue* (London, 2024).

Ida XR Studio, Leah Kurta, Gabriella Pernice, *A Silenced Sector: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Challenges in the Immersive & Virtual Production Industries* (London, 2024).

Photo by Roger Eaton (2024).

For further information:
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Or visit: www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/research/impact