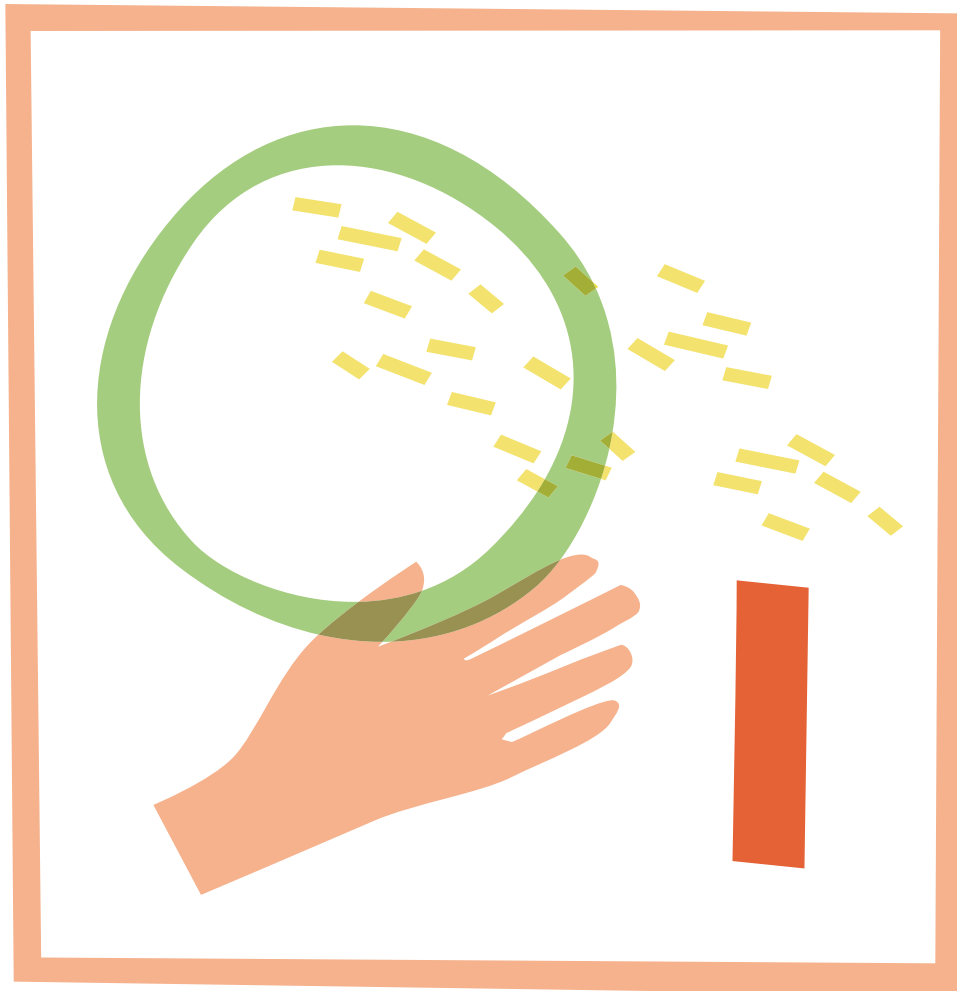


Sensing Spaces of Healthcare: Rethinking the NHS Hospital

Exhibition Impact Report

By Bridget Morgan, with Victoria Bates, Rebecka Fleetwood-Smith
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Exhibition Impact Report

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1. Background

The Sensing Spaces of Healthcare exhibition showed at University College London, Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health, Link Gallery, April 2023 – July 2023. The Link Gallery is a corridor and temporary exhibition space used by GOSH and UCL staff. The exhibition was then installed at the Maternity Department, Southmead Hospital, North Bristol NHS Trust, August 2023 – January 2024. The works were reconfigured for each exhibition space. Rebecka led the process of planning and producing the SSOH exhibition in consultation with artist and exhibition consultant Sofie Layton and Fresh Arts and GOSH Arts.

The exhibition was not a way to communicate research findings but acted as a provocation, that invited audiences to re-engage and re-consider the hospital environment and explore understandings of what future healthcare spaces could be. We looked to the project's creative research methods and the development work underpinning them, to inform the commission of new artworks. We selected practitioners Gawain Hewitt, Rosa Nguyen, Clarke Reynolds and Jonathan Van Beek to create new works. Over approximately six months Rebecka held regular workshops, drop-in sessions, hospital site visits, and meetings with each artist. The exhibition was made up of four pieces of work. Rebecka created a series of artworks alongside the selected artists. The work with braille artist Clarke Reynolds changed during the development process and, rather than create a physical artwork, he worked with each artist to devise creative audio descriptions of the works. The creative audio descriptions were created to promote a creative, accessible way in which to engage with the works. Due to the reception of the works, some pieces have been acquired by the respective hospital arts organisations. Jon Van Beek's and Rebecka Fleetwood-Smith's works are now part of Fresh Arts permanent collection. Rosa Nguyen's works are now part of the GOSH Arts permanent collection. The soundscapes Gawain Hewitt created are now part of the Wellcome Collection's archive.

This report explores the impact of the exhibition on artists, visitors and hospital teams. In particular, it shows the ways in which the project has changed perceptions about the hospital space and generated new ways of thinking about the relationship between art industries and health sectors.

See appendix for images taken by Dan Weill Photography of the exhibition installed at GOSH.



2. Artists' Intentions

Following the exhibition, three out of four of the artists commissioned for the project were interviewed about their experiences. Due to her role as Research Associate on the project, Rebecka was not interviewed about her artwork.

Responses provide insightful and sensitive reflections on the intentions of the project to transform the hospital space and develop creative methods.

2.1. Fresh perspectives

Artists described how their own and others' experiences of navigating hospital spaces led them to develop new perspectives, which informed their artworks.

One interviewee shared that 'it was important to me to represent' the 'chaos and violence' of a hospital space for staff through sound, in order to highlight 'how people can be abusive and you're really at the front line of need there'. (Artist 2)

Another interviewee was struck by the 'lack of [warmth] that we see in hospitals on a day-to-day' and shared that 'I chose to use timber [in the artwork] [...] because of its like warm, natural quality'. (Artist 3)

A third interviewee described how their experiences as a patient informed their artwork by allowing them to 'soa[k] up the atmosphere literally through all my body'. (Artist 4)

'I remember there was a lady who'd had the same operation as me who's trying to describe to a whole group of surgeons the feeling of her hernia, and she just said, "Oh, it's just heavy. It feels like a turnip," and I thought how wonderful way of describing something that is so abstract to us, is our internal organs that we can't feel or touch'. (Artist 4)

2.2. Reimagining the hospital

In making themselves more aware of the hospital space and its sensory impact, the artists developed ideas on how to reimagine the space through creative methods.

One interviewee shared that they aimed to emphasise the hospital space by drawing upon recognisable aspects, such as 'referenc[ing] colours that were very much the artificial colours of the hospital' in their artwork. (Artist 4)

In contrast, another interviewee described how they aimed to re-think the hospital space entirely in their artwork.

‘I wanted to develop this kind of mapping idea and, kind of, create a sense of an object or a building that had kind of like multiple or endless possible configurations in the way that it was sort of stacked and rotated. And I wanted to open it up, and I wanted visitors to be able to look through it and have a bit of distance from it and be able to navigate it in a way that you can’t typically in a hospital building’. (Artist 3)

The artists hoped that their artworks reimagining the hospital would produce an emotional response in viewers and encourage them to alter their relationship with the space.

‘[T]he pieces that I would make, would be play pieces but would have that sense of something that you could hold and really put power, you know, of visualisation, and prayer, and hope, and positiveness, or whatever, thought, into it for a good outcome’. (Artist 4)

2.3. Changing hospital staff’s perceptions of the space

Artists also shared their specific aims in shaping hospital staff’s perceptions of the space through their artwork.

One artist commented that the exhibition in the Link Gallery at University College London, Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health, ‘absolutely transformed’ the space. They expressed ‘I think it should always be like that’ because ‘it’s almost like street art [...] the corridor is a corridor and people walk through really quickly, coming from place to place’. (Artist 2)

Another interviewee stated that changing the sensory environment of the link corridor could encourage hospital staff to become more reflective of the hospital space.

‘It’s a working space where doctors, and surgeons, and nurses, and medics are going through on their way backwards and forwards from meetings, from the canteen. And so, they don’t always have time to stop, and observe, and take things in, but at the same time, having something in that space can also transform their day, and can give them a different way of interacting and looking’. (Artist 1)

The artists felt that it was important to alter the sensory environment of the hospital to improve staff wellbeing in a way that would not normally be possible.

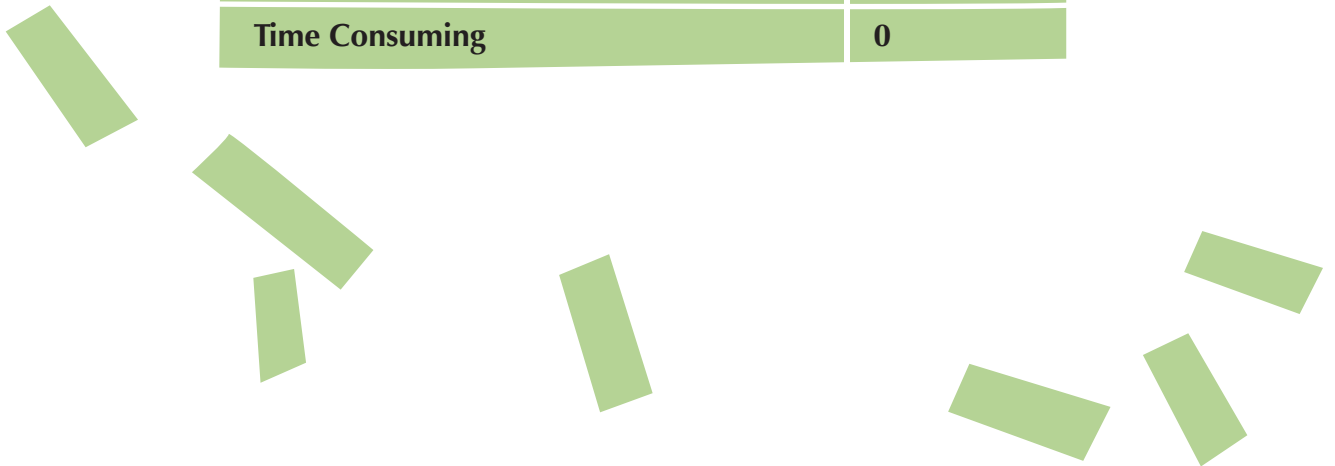
‘[P]eople on their day-to-day are able to experience the work and interact with it, and sort of benefit from it in a way that if it was in, you know, an underused, you know, exhibition space at the other end of the building, that just wouldn’t be the case’. (Artist 3)

3. Impact on audience

Feedback from the exhibition was gathered through interviews and evaluation postcards. Four visitors were interviewed and 44 people completed evaluation postcards.

In the postcards, people were asked to reflect on their thoughts and feelings about the artworks by circling provided adjectives or by adding their own descriptions. The responses illustrate that most visitors left experiencing a change in their emotions. Most visitors circled the words 'Meaningful', 'Creative', 'Enjoyable', 'Stimulating' and 'Calming'. This shows that many people felt positively inspired to think about the hospital space in 'Fun' and 'Rewarding' ways after visiting the exhibition. A minority of visitors thought the exhibition was 'Confusing', 'Boring' or 'Difficult', with no visitors describing the exhibition as 'Time consuming'.

'What was it like visiting the exhibition?'	Total
Meaningful	26
Creative	24
Enjoyable	22
Stimulating	22
Calming	18
Fun	14
Rewarding	9
Confusing	3
Boring	1
Difficult	1
Time Consuming	0



Sensing Spaces of Healthcare Exhibition: Evaluation Postcard

By completing this evaluation postcard, you agree that this anonymous data may be used in publications and presentations: these may include books, articles, conference presentations, public engagement events, and impact statements.

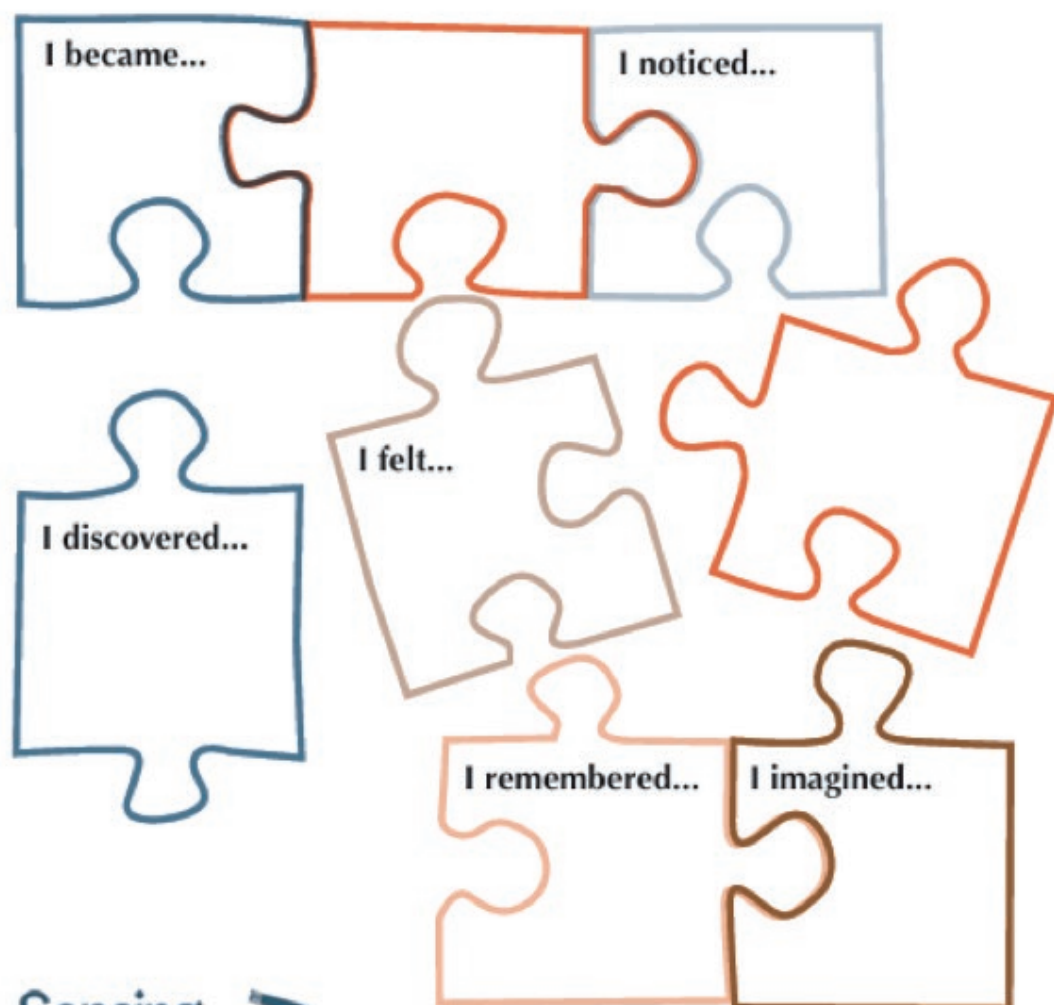
What was it like visiting the exhibition?

Circle one or more speech bubbles or complete an empty speech bubble to tell us how you found the exhibition.



How did the artworks / exhibition make you think about the hospital environment?

Complete one or more of the jigsaw pieces or write your own to share your thoughts.



Now, please post your card in the Sensing Spaces of Healthcare postbox

3.1. Changing emotional responses to the hospital space

Feedback responses reveal the exhibition impacted visitors' emotional responses to the hospital space.

Most people experienced a positive emotional response to the artworks, with many people describing the exhibition as 'Hopeful', 'Warm' and 'Uplifting'.

People frequently highlighted feeling 'calmed' by the exhibition: 'It made me feel calm', '[I felt...] calmed, soothed, like a child again!!', and '[I became...] calmed by the beautiful shapes'.

Others reported feeling 'curious', 'free' and 'engaged' after visiting the exhibition, with one person describing that '[I became] distracted [...] Taking me away from being in the hospital'.

Some people reported feeling 'confused' as to how to respond emotionally to the artworks.

'[I felt...] unsure how to understand the hospital re-imagined piece'.

'[What was it like visiting the exhibition? Difficult...] because the sounds were challenging / quite unsettling 'I long for silence' as they are for patients, staff and visitors!'.

'[What was it like visiting the exhibition? Confusing...] I long for Silence and Hospital Reimagined'.

3.2. Greater awareness of sensory experiences

Regardless of visitors' emotional responses to the exhibition, they all agreed that more attention needed to be given to improving people's sensory experiences of hospital spaces.

People reported feeling inspired by the 'Colourful' artwork and eager for 'more'. They felt the exhibition led them to realise that hospital staff 'deserve a bit of colour', with one commenting that the artwork made them 'engaged and curious and able to focus away from the hospital environment' in a positive way.

The exhibition led people to develop a greater understanding around the role of the arts and creativity in supporting patients' wellbeing and enhancing treatment experiences. Visitors felt that the exhibition captured patients' experiences of navigating the hospital space. Some people stated that the exhibition 'Embodies life', while three people labelled it as 'Sensory' and one as 'Life enhancing'.

One person left with a greater understanding of the role of art in communicating patients' experiences.

'[I discovered...] the connection between artist and patients - amazed by artists bringing patients' voice and imagination to life'.

This led some people to become motivated to include art in hospital environments. One person stated that '[I became...] inspired to encourage clients to commission bespoke artworks for health environments'.

3.3. Changing perceptions of the hospital space

There is also evidence that the exhibition altered people's perceptions of hospital spaces, with nine people describing the exhibition as 'Inspiring' and three as 'Thought provoking'.

Visitors felt challenged by the exhibition and reported feeling encouraged to think about the hospital space outside of their own perspectives. One person commented 'I've never thought in these terms, right. So, you know, I'm beginning to see beyond my own horizons, beyond the ways that I've seen hospitals'. (Visitor 3)

Visitors were challenged by the different sensory lenses through which the hospital was explored in the artworks, which brought to life other people's experiences of navigating the hospital.

'[S]ound installations bring things to life as well. So, it's quite, you know, wonderful to hear him talk about how he based it on the fact that when you were in a hospital, it's like a maze'. (Visitor 1)

For some people, this made them feel validated that sensory experiences were being recognised in the hospital space.

'[I felt...] reassured and happy that it is acknowledged how important the physical / aesthetic environment of the hospital is'.

'I think it's very inspiring. It's very in keeping with the lovely sensory spaces type ethos and that all the work feels very engaging, tactile, visual, auditory. So, it's great to see and often quite simple concepts, but really done well'. (Visitor 2)

Other people felt surprised by the extent to which the exhibition altered their perceptions of the hospital and introduced them to different perspectives.

'[Y]ou've got things like the different room layouts which are unexpected because you got the bed on the side and that, so maybe just thinking about what we assume should be where and why it's there'. (Visitor 4)

For one visitor, the exhibition led them to realise 'patients can feel overwhelmed by confusing corridors'.

Ultimately, visitors felt that the exhibition made a long-lasting impact on their perceptions of the hospital space, with one person feeling that the exhibition has changed the designing of sensory environments, stating they felt 'positive for healthcare spaces in the future'.

4. Impact on artists and hospital teams

Following the exhibition, three of the artists commissioned for the project were interviewed, alongside the project's art consultant, as well as two representatives from GOSH Arts and Fresh Arts who were involved in producing the exhibition.

Their responses provide rich and generative insights into the impact working on the exhibition has made to developing their artistic methods, as well as forming new pathways of work between art industries and healthcare sectors.

4.1. Expanding artistic methods

The artists and art consultant involved in the project described how working on the exhibition developed their creative practice and made them more mindful of experimenting with ways to enhance the sensory feel of their artwork in the future. One interviewee shared that the sensory theme of light is 'something that I'll use within my own art making'. The exhibition led them to become more interrogative of their own artwork: 'So, it's like how do I heighten it? How do I transform it, and to bring that into it?'. (Artist 1)

Interviewees reported that the exhibition's unique positioning in the link corridor at GOSH made them more aware of 'space' and led them to 'think about how you work with it, and how we encourage people to pause and to stop in those spaces'. (Artist 1) Artists became more mindful of the need to work with the needs of hospital spaces when creating an exhibition, with one interviewee emphasising the need to adapt artworks to 'work for infection control, because it will be in the hospital environment'. (Artist 1)

In developing their creative practice, artists also felt that their artistic interests had broadened as a result of working on the exhibition. One interviewee commented that the work has 'left me with lots of questions which I don't think is a bad place to be in at this stage in the process, and I'm definitely looking forward to, you know, exploring some of those a bit more further'. (Artist 3)

4.2. Expanding working relationships between art industries and healthcare

The representatives from GOSH Arts and Fresh Arts described that the exhibitions at GOSH and Southmead Hospital made a 'really big and meaningful impact' on their skills as arts managers, as well as on the art sectors' ability to build strong working relationships with universities and hospitals 'beyond' what it is today. (Arts manager 1)

Both art managers shared that working on the exhibition was ‘fantastic’ and ‘amazing’ but that the scope of collaboration across academia, arts and healthcare sectors was something they had not done before. One interviewee stated that ‘I’ve never sited an exhibition in ((Women’s and Children’s)) – and that area was new and more challenging to work with as there was no precedent for exhibiting artwork in this area (although there was appetite from staff to have exhibition areas). I’ve never tried to create something like the prototype – and I wouldn’t have known the route map through how to do that’. (Arts manager 1)

They report, however, that the University of Bristol’s role in the project offered integral additional support to GOSH Arts and Fresh Arts when working with hospitals in London and Bristol, which developed the skills of both arts managers.

One interviewee, for instance, described that working with the University of Bristol was a ‘dream scenario’ and that ‘I wouldn’t have had the capacity to do that on my own – so you’ve brought capacity and skill. I’ve got to know the ((Women’s and Children’s Teams)) as well – it’s given a real purpose – and I wouldn’t have had that purpose within the portfolio of projects that I ran, otherwise’. (Arts manager 1)

Both interviewees state that in developing their own skills as art managers, the project opened new collaborative working relationships for GOSH Arts and Fresh Arts, particularly when thinking about ways to bring ‘people from outside of the hospital’ into the hospital.

One interviewee described that the project ‘has given us that opportunity to work with a completely new team in ((Women’s and Children’s))’, as well as to ‘get a lot of teams on-board’, such as ‘Health and Safety and Fire and Infection Control teams – and they’ve really taken that journey’ into arts and healthcare research. (Arts manager 1)

By establishing new collaborative working relationships, the interviewees describe how the capacity for the art sectors to produce rigours academic research has become a reality.

‘It’s pretty much every focus project that [we do] is Creative Research, but it hasn’t got the academic length – and I think it’s a really powerful thing to be able to say, ‘This is research, but it isn’t situated within academia [...]’. That has been a really powerful leverage point for us’. (Arts manager 2)

This interviewee reported receiving positive feedback from colleagues recognising the originality of the project in bringing together different groups in the arts and healthcare outside of an academic setting.

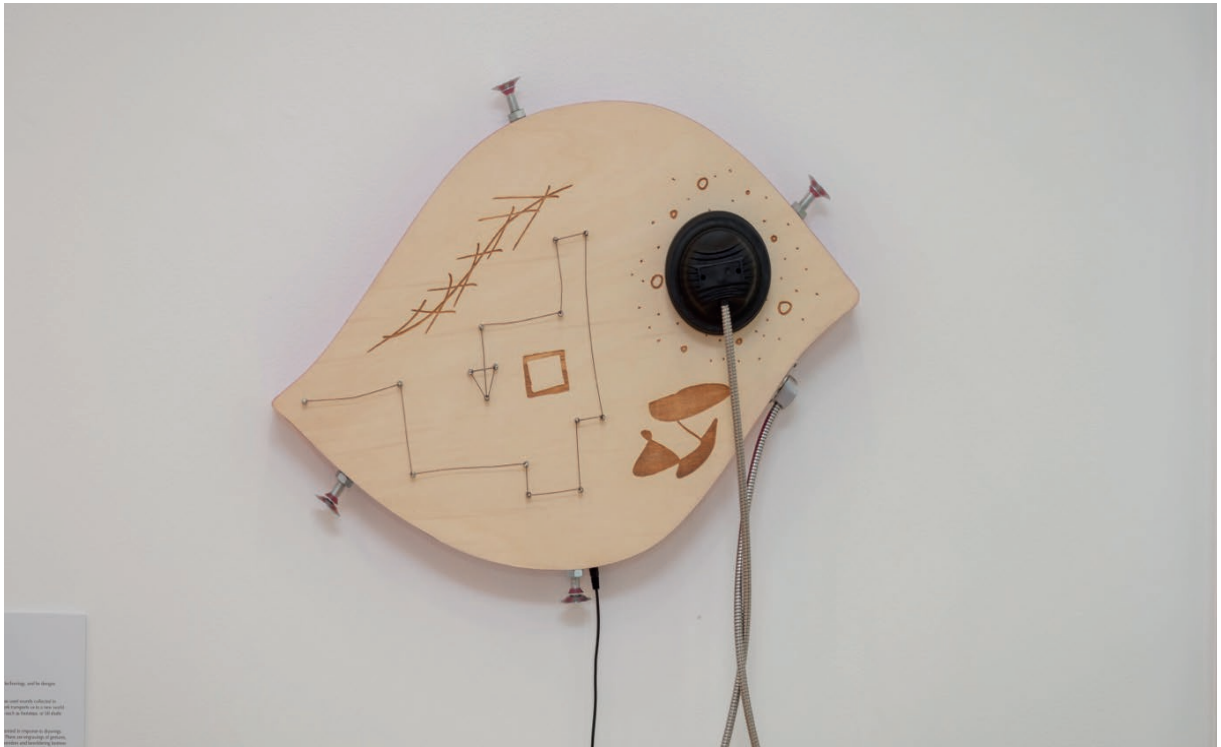
‘[F]rom an organisational point of view – that quote that we got from ... ((a senior member of staff)) – when he came to the breakfast preview of the exhibition – and sent a lovely email afterwards, saying he hadn’t realised how rigorous our programme was – and that was because of the connection with you guys that that then gave our programme extra weighting’. (Arts manager 2)

As a result of the exhibition project, the arts managers feel hopeful about the achievements of future projects between the arts and healthcare GOSH Arts and Fresh Arts are involved in.

One interviewee stated the project has 'given us kudos – that we can do different kind of projects with really positive outcomes for patients' and that it has created a change in thinking about collaborative work, stating 'I think it's just about achieving things – not in our siloed projects, but across the whole team'. (Arts manager 1)

The same interviewee also shared that 'I wish I'd dared to dream how exciting it could be at the beginning, 'cause I would have been much more excited, but I'm excited now for the next three years'. (Arts manager 1)

5. Appendix







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this artwork*

*Please touch
this artwork*





Living for Music

Living for Music is an interactive art installation that explores the relationship between music and technology. It features a custom-built circuit board with various components, including a speaker, a microphone, and a small display. The board is designed to be played like a musical instrument, with each component representing a different sound or note. The installation is designed to be played by a single person, but it can also be played by multiple people simultaneously. The installation is designed to be played in a gallery or museum setting, and it is intended to be a fun and interactive experience for visitors.

QR Code

Please do not touch this art





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Sensing
Spaces
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