Pleasure you can measure

Visitor responses to the *Warren Cup* exhibition

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This is an online version of a report prepared by MHM for the British Museum. Commercially sensitive information has been removed.
Pleasure you can measure

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Warren Cup drew record proportions of visitors. They stayed for longer and were engaged for longer than in any previous Room 3 display.

The exhibition surprised and delighted visitors with its resonant theme, cross-cultural approach and contemporary relevance.

The 'object in focus' approach enabled visitors to gain a deep understanding of the objects and theme in a short space of time.

The challenge now for the museum is how to learn from the successes of Room 3 to improve the overall visit experience.
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Warren Cup

Warren Cup: Sex and Society in Ancient Greece and Rome was held in Room 3 at the British Museum from 11 May to 2 July 2006. Admission to the room was free.

This small exhibition offered a close focus on the Warren Cup, a Roman silver drinking cup decorated with sexual scenes showing two pairs of male lovers. The exhibition placed the Warren Cup in its cultural context, examining the wider theme of sex in ancient Greek and Roman societies through the use of supporting objects, text and images. Warren Cup also set this main content within a cross-cultural perspective, using images from a variety of other cultures. The exhibition marked the publication of a new book on the cup by Dyfri Williams, which was advertised in the exhibition and on sale in the museum shop.

Scene setting

Room 3 is used as a test bed by the museum to trial new methods of display and interpretation. Each exhibition in the space is visually different and employs different display and interpretation schemes.

2.1 Objectives of the display

The *Warren Cup* exhibition took an ‘object in focus’ approach, using a single exhibit (the Warren Cup) as a way in to help visitors engage with larger themes and narratives.

Taking the Warren Cup as a starting point, the exhibition examined the theme of sexuality in Ancient Greek and Roman societies, using supporting objects to help visitors understand how sexuality and sexually explicit objects fitted in to everyday life in these cultures.

The exhibition also hoped to help visitors understand attitudes as a continuum across cultures and eras, and allow visitors to draw parallels with the present day.

The themes and content were presented in a non-linear way, with key messages repeated on several different labels and text panels.

2.2 Presentation and interpretation scheme

The interpretation scheme was deliberately designed with no intended order of use, other than that visitors should start by looking at the cup. The message of the exhibition was repeated in different ways in each exhibit, so that it did not matter where visitors started or if they only used a few elements of the exhibition.

The exhibition contained a central plinth with text panels on all four sides, four side cases, two wall panels and four graphics panels in the back area of the room. Large blow-ups of detail from the Warren Cup were displayed floor to ceiling on the reverse of the side cases.

The central plinth held the Warren Cup, carefully lit to make the detail easier to see. The plinth also contained two introductory panels to the exhibition, explaining the focus and appeal of the cup. Each side of the plinth featured a text panel, encouraging visitors to look closely at the detail on the cup.
The four side cases each had a large text panel to one side. These all started with a question in large type, and highlighted an aspect of sex and society in ancient Greece and Rome. Each case contained two or three objects, with detailed object labels describing the objects and what they tell us about the theme.

Case 1, entitled *How did the ancient Greeks view sexuality?* contained a storage jar showing a complex male courting ritual, an oil jar showing an intimate female relationship and a terracotta statuette group. The supporting object labels highlighted what these objects tell us about love between men and love between women in ancient Greece.

Case 2, entitled *How did the Romans view sexuality?* contained a pottery cup, fragment of a glass cup (with reconstruction drawing) and terracotta lamp. The supporting object labels highlighted what these objects tell us about love between men and love between women in ancient Rome.

Case 3, entitled *Sex, magic and religion* contained a bronze wind chime depicting a winged phallus and a small pottery jar. The supporting object labels detailed what these objects tell us about the use of sexual symbols in ancient Greek and Roman religious beliefs and rituals.

Case 4, entitled *Was the Warren Cup ever used?* contained two Roman cups and a German glass cup. The object labels highlighted what these objects tell us about dining in ancient Rome.

A large wall panel *Why is it called the Warren Cup?* detailed the provenance of the cup. Behind this, four panels were used to explore the theme of changing attitudes to homosexuality across cultures and eras. This included a still from *Brokeback Mountain*, *Two Young Men, 23 to 24 years old* by David Hockney, an image of Kabuki actors by Utagawa Kuniyoda and a Dutch print warning against homosexuality. These were all accompanied by short labels.

As shown in the schematic diagram below, this display took a very different approach to *Rembrandt* by making full use of the capacity of the room, pushing cases to the side and creating a zone at the back of the room to explore the theme more widely. The room looked lively, full and attractive from the door, with many of the exhibits visible and the title of the exhibition visible at several points.

The display was designed to encourage visitors to compare the supporting exhibits to the Warren Cup. The style of the interpretative text was deliberately conversational and straightforward.

A sign outside the room alerted visitors to the sexually explicit images in the exhibition, using a cartoon to emphasise the point.
Schematic diagram

Pleasure you can measure

How did the Romans view sexuality?

How did the ancient Greeks view sexuality?

Changing attitudes

Why is it called the Warren Cup?

Warren cup

Case 1

Course 2

Case 4

Case 3

Utagawa Kunisada image

Was the Warren Cup ever used?

Sex, magic and religion

Sponsors

Book advert

Sign

Hockney image

Broadsheet image
What we did

The following primary research took place over five sessions between 21 and 30 June 2006.

3.1 Sequential visitor tracking

We tracked individual visitors during their visit to Room 3. We recorded their usage of each case, image and text panel, the order in which they used them and the time they spent.

This data allows us to identify patterns of visitor behaviour, which is essential for understanding how visitors are responding to the design of the exhibition. We are able to tell how deeply visitors engaged, and relate this to the assumptions about visitor behaviour which were built into the design of the space. This also allows us to identify any ergonomic, interpretative or display problems affecting engagement.

89 visitors were tracked using sequential visitor tracking.

3.2 Meaning making observations

Using observation, we classified visitors’ behaviour into three modes: browser, follower and searcher. Visitors were observed throughout their visit to the room and their dominant behaviour mode noted. This gives a measure of how engaged visitors were with the display as a whole.

89 visitors were classified into meaning making modes.

3.3 Engagement matrices

We recorded visitors’ levels of engagement with the exhibits using engagement matrices. Visitors' behaviour was mapped according to their depth of engagement and usage of interpretation. This technique allows us to identify how successful the exhibits and surrounding interpretation are at engaging visitors.

613 engagement observations were carried out.
3.4 **Mini survey**

Visitors were asked a short series of questions to determine: group composition; motivation; knowledge of the subject; prior awareness of the exhibition and intentional visiting; levels of repeat visiting to the museum as a whole and to Room 3; and impact of the visit.

This information provides a basic segmentation of visitors to the Room 3 exhibitions, and allows for comparisons against all visitors to the British Museum over the evaluation period.

85 *mini surveys* were completed.

3.5 **Post it notes and vox pops**

Respondents were given a pencil and pad of post it notes, colour coded according to their group type (families, first time independent adults and repeat independent adults).

When visitors addressed an exhibit, they noted down any comments, questions or responses they had. This was followed by a short interview with our researcher, where they were asked to give more detailed responses to aspects of the exhibition.

This exercise produces a rich source of qualitative data on visitors’ responses to the exhibition.

31 *post it notes* and 10 *vox pop interviews* were collected.

3.6 **Entrance observations**

Visitors were observed as they passed the entrance to Room 3 to determine the ratio of visitors ignoring, rejecting or entering the exhibition. Visitors who approached or looked at the exhibition but chose not to enter were asked why they did not enter.

This exercise provides a benchmark for the relative attractiveness of this exhibition against the last and future exhibitions, as well as a gauge of visitors’ responses to the warning about sexually explicit content.

100 *entrance observations* were carried out: 50 with visitors on their way into the museum, and 50 with visitors on their way out.
4 Who visited?

4.1 Motivation

Visitor motivations

Based on extensive previous research with gallery visitors, Morris Hargreaves McIntyre has identified the range of motivations that people have for visiting galleries. The model below, the *Hierarchy of motivation*, is a useful way of segmenting visitors by the type of engagement they need and seek from a visit. The model shows the needs that a visit can fulfil for different types of visitors: from a nice time with friends and family, to deep spiritual sustenance.

*Hierarchy of motivation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>See museum as a...</th>
<th>Have this driver...</th>
<th>And they seek this from a visit.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHURCH</td>
<td>SPIRITUAL</td>
<td>Creative stimulation and quiet contemplation, they see museums as an opportunity to escape and recharge their batteries, food for the soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPA</td>
<td>EMOTIONAL</td>
<td>May have a personal connection to the subject matter, want to see fascinating objects in an inspiring setting, seek ambience, deep sensory and intellectual experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARCHIVE</td>
<td>INTELLECTUAL</td>
<td>Keen to encourage their children’s or their own interest and knowledge, may have professional interest in the subject, seek a journey of discovery, to find out new things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTRACTION</td>
<td>SOCIAL</td>
<td>See museums as an enjoyable place to spend time with friends and family, seek ease of access and orientation, good facilities and services, welcoming staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These drivers are hierarchical. In moving up the hierarchy from *Social* to *Spiritual* motivators, visitors experience increasing levels of engagement with the gallery and its contents. The further up the hierarchy visitors move, the more fulfilling and rewarding their visit. At each point on the hierarchy visitors have different needs, they are only able to move up the hierarchy if their needs at the lower end are met.

*Meeting these needs is the visitors’ primary motivation* for visiting and is also, therefore, their minimum expectation of a visit.
The columns below compare Warren Cup visitors' main motivations for visiting the British Museum to the results for previous Room 3 exhibitions and those of all visitors.

As shown above, visitors to Warren Cup were slightly more likely to be motivated by emotional and spiritual drivers and less likely to be motivated by social drivers compared to general British Museum visitors. These results are consistent with the overall pattern for Room 3: attracting a large proportion of the British Museum's more engaged, highly motivated, proactive visitors.

However, Warren Cup visitors were more emotionally (and less spiritually) motivated than visitors at previous Room 3 exhibitions. This seems to be because of the cultural, historical proposition of the exhibition: in particular, Warren Cup attracted larger proportions of visitors whose main motivation was ‘to get a better understanding of other people / cultures’ (14%) compared to general British Museum visitors (8%) and Rembrandt visitors (6%).

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1 Figures taken from June rolling survey
5

What did visitors do?

5.1 Usage

Usage of exhibits

The chart below shows the proportion of all visitors to Room 3 who used the various areas of the exhibition.

*Percentage of visitors using each exhibit*

- **Warren Cup**: 80%
- **Case 1 Greeks**: 58%
- **Case 2 Romans**: 71%
- **Case 3 Sex, magic, religion**: 64%
- **Case 4 Was cup used?**: 51%
- **Wall panel**: 46%
- **Book advert**: 21%
- **Large images**: 7%
- **Back area**: 11%

As the chart above shows, the Warren Cup and the area behind the wall are the most popular exhibits in the exhibition. However, given the ‘object in focus’ status of the cup, it is surprising that one in five visitors did not visit the cup at all. The least used aspect of the exhibition was the blown up details of the cup, which were only visible from the back of the gallery and were seen simply as wallpaper by many visitors.
Usage of cases

Visitors to Warren Cup visited 3.27 cases (where the Warren Cup is included as a case) on average. This is compared to previous Room3 displays in the table below.

**Average proportion of cases visited**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Display title</th>
<th>Number cases</th>
<th>Avg number viewed</th>
<th>Avg % viewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Made in Africa</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views from Africa</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samurai to Manga</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rembrandt</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren Cup</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results are consistent with the trend identified in the last report: the fewer objects and cases in a room, the more likely visitors are to look at a higher proportion of the exhibition.

**Number of exhibits used**

The chart below shows the number of exhibits used by visitors to Room 3. This includes all those elements in the above bar chart.

As the results show, all visitors to Warren Cup used at least two exhibits. Significantly, all visitors used at least two exhibits in the room, suggesting that the larger capacity created by pushing cases to the side and using the full floorspace available has eased problems of overcrowding slightly –
visitors are now able to look at some of the exhibition and make the informed decision to stay or go.

On average, visitors looked at 6.03 exhibits in Room 3 – this means most visitors looked at the majority of the exhibition.

Usage of case interpretation and text panels

The chart below shows the percentage of visitors who read the supporting text panels, comparing this to the percentage of visitors who visited each case where relevant.

As the chart shows, the percentage of visitors reading the large panel texts and object labels next to cases remains fairly stable, even when the percentage of visitors looking at the cases fluctuates. The exception is Case 2, where a greater proportion of visitors read the panel text – this might suggest that visitors were drawn to this case by the headline 'How did the Romans view sexuality?'.
These results represent success for the interpretation scheme, which was designed to draw visitors to the objects, then encourage them to read the labels to understand the key points. The panel texts were designed to reinforce the main points of the exhibition and provide a ‘title’ for the cases. It is therefore a positive result that visitors read the labels more than the panels.

Just under half of visitors (43%) did not read any of the big questions at the start of the panels. Only 2% of visitors read all the large questions.

Usage of back area

80% of visitors visited the back area of the gallery. The chart below shows the percentage of all visitors who used each element in the back area.
Usage of the Warren Cup

The chart below shows the percentage of visitors to *Warren Cup* who looked at the cup exhibit from each side and the percentage who read the text on each side.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Side</th>
<th>Looked at Cup</th>
<th>Read Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Front</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The front side of the exhibit is, surprisingly, not used by a quarter of Warren Cup users. Again, this is probably due to crowding.

The front and back of the cup were slightly more used than the sides, probably because these sides showed the sexual images more clearly than the left and right sides. However, the usage rates for the left and right sides are still relatively high, indicating that visitors were having a good look at the cup as a whole: on average, visitors viewed 2.5 sides of the cup.

The interpretation panels on the front and back of the cup were also slightly more popular than the left and right sides. This suggests that the placing of the introductory text panels on the front and back interpretation panels was successful as visitors were more likely to view the cup from these sides.
5.2 Circulation

Start of visit

The diagram below shows the percentage of visitors starting their visit to Warren Cup at each exhibit.

*Proportion of Room 3 visitors starting at each exhibit*

Because the full area of the gallery has been used in this exhibition, there is less evidence of visitors being forced immediately to the back of the gallery due to crowding (as happened in *Samurai*): 4 in 5 visits began by looking at the cases immediately obvious from the entrance.

However, a relatively low number of visitors (35%) started their visit by looking at the Warren Cup. This is lower than we might expect, probably because this star exhibit was often crowded with other visitors: 40% of people who visited the Warren Cup during their visit had their engagement with the cup shortened or delayed due to crowding, and one in five visitors did not look at the cup at all. The small size of the plinth, centrality of the cup to the exhibition theme and depth of interpretation provided meant that crowds formed quickly in this area. This resulted in visitors being deflected to Case 1 and Case 3.

One in ten visitors looked at the book advert first, probably due to its position on the left of the entrance (where many visitors will traditionally look for an introductory text panel). Ideally, this would have been the last
exhibit seen in the exhibition, but the placement of the board and lack of linear visitor flow through the exhibition prevented this.

**During visit**

There is little evidence of any particularly ordered visitor flow through the space. Instead it seems that visitors started at the front, visiting the exhibits closer to the entrance first, visiting the back area in the middle of their visit and mopping up any exhibits that were too crowded before on their way out.

However, one in five visitors did not look at the Warren Cup during their visit, and only one in ten visitors compared any other exhibit in the exhibition to the cup itself. This is discussed further in section 7.3 below.

### 5.3 Dwell

**Average time spent in Room 3**

Visitors spent a mean average of 4 minutes and 9 seconds in *Warren Cup* – the longest average time of any Room 3 display so far. The dwell times for the exhibition are split into cohorts and compared with results for previous exhibitions below.

#### Length of visit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average dwell</th>
<th>1-2 mins</th>
<th>3-4 mins</th>
<th>5 or more mins</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warren Cup</td>
<td>4 mins, 9 secs</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rembrandt</td>
<td>2 mins, 15 secs</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samurai to Manga</td>
<td>3 mins, 42 secs</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views from Africa</td>
<td>2 mins, 49 secs</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The time splits for *Warren Cup* are better than for *Rembrandt* and *Views from Africa*, with a larger proportion of visitors staying for over five minutes. However, there is a higher percentage of visitors spending less than 3 minutes in the display than in *Samurai* – over a third of visitors to the exhibition are having a quick look and then flitting out again. This difference could be because of the AIBO dog, which was popular and engaged visitors for a long time: 70% of visitors used it, and an average engagement lasted 94 seconds.
Average time spent at exhibits

The chart below shows the average length of time in seconds spent at each exhibit by those visitors who viewed them.

As the chart illustrates usage of the Warren Cup lasted longest, with visitors spending over a minute at the plinth. The cases are used for around 30 seconds each. These results are broadly similar to the results for *Samurai*, although the Warren Cup is not as engrossing as the AlBO dog, which held visitors' attention for an average of 94 seconds.

However, the 69 seconds spent looking at the Warren Cup in Room 3 is likely to be an improvement on the time spent by visitors looking at the cup when displayed in the permanent galleries.
How engaged were visitors?

6.1 Time spent engaging with the exhibits

Total engaged time

On average, visitors spent 183 seconds engaged with the exhibits out of the 249 seconds spent in the room. The remainder of the time is spent circulating, reading text panels and generally being in the room.

This means that on average, visitors spend 73% of their time in the room engaged with the exhibits – the highest result yet for a Room 3 exhibition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exhibition</th>
<th>Total time</th>
<th>Time engaged</th>
<th>% time engaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warren Cup</td>
<td>249 seconds</td>
<td>183 seconds</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samurai to Manga</td>
<td>223 seconds</td>
<td>160 seconds</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views from Africa</td>
<td>169 seconds</td>
<td>100 seconds</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Distribution of total engaged time

The chart below shows the relative ‘stickiness’ of the exhibits – the total engaged visitor time that each of the exhibits accounts for overall. This measure takes into account how many visitors use each exhibit and the length of time visitors spend there.

Stickiness of exhibits

The chart shows that engaged time is reasonably evenly split between the different types of exhibit, with the side cases, the Warren Cup and the images hung in the back section attracting around a third of engaged time each.
The Warren Cup takes the biggest single share of engaged time, which is consistent with its status and position in the exhibition. Case 2 (‘How did the Romans view sexuality?’) is the most sticky case, and Case 4 the least sticky.

6.2 Meaning making

Visitors were observed throughout their visit to Room 3 to determine their dominant meaning making mode. The results are shown below, alongside the results from the last Room 3 exhibition.

**Percentage of visitors in each meaning making mode**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Warren Cup</th>
<th>Three Crosses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Searcher</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follower</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Browser</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results show an almost equal split between browsing and following behaviour with relatively little searching behaviour in the exhibition compared to Rembrandt.

**Exhibition encourages visitors to make meaning**

The display style of the exhibition was ideal for hooking browsers into following behaviour: a clearly defined and resonant proposition and theme; intriguing objects, presented as aesthetic as well as historical pieces; clear, unpretentious information to give context to the objects.

**Some barriers to engagement**

However, the ergonomics of the display may have prevented some visitors from following and searching. The four side cases were designed so that only one or two visitors could view objects at a time, and crowding around the Warren Cup meant that visitors weren’t able to look at it as often as they would have liked. Furthermore, there were no overt instructions for visitors.
to compare contents of the side cases to the Warren Cup, even though some of the label and panel texts referred to the cup. However, this was not a barrier to engagement in itself as the other elements of the exhibition were successful in delivering the key messages of the exhibition without repeated viewing of the cup itself.

**Few routes to deepen engagement**

There was also little in the exhibition to help visitors deepen their engagement further on leaving the exhibition. The exhibition provided few clues for visitors wanting to find out more, leaving many to guess that the museum was planning to stage a larger exhibition about sexuality in the future (see section 8 for more details).

However, the visitors we spoke to were more interested in deepening their knowledge about the broader themes of the exhibition: the changing attitudes to sexuality across cultures and eras (see section 8 below). Suggestions on where to find out more in the British Museum (pointers to relevant galleries, trails or tours) or suggested websites would have been useful for these visitors.
7 What did visitors engage with?

7.1 Depth of engagement with individual exhibits

The chart below shows the percentage of visitors addressing each exhibit who successfully engaged.

The dark blue columns show the percentage of users who engaged with the exhibit, and the light blue columns unsuccessful engagement.

The chart also shows how these results compare to our benchmark rates of success for engagement. These benchmark rates were established according to engagement results on a variety of different types of museum exhibits, looking at clusters in the range of results. There is potential for these rates to be revised or benchmarked specifically for British Museum exhibitions in the future.

*Rates of successful engagement with exhibits*

The Warren Cup is the most engaging exhibit, falling into the 'succeeding' category. Cases 1, 2 and the back area are all 'performing', with Case 3 at the very top of 'struggling'. Case 4 is the least engaging case - probably because it lacks the sexually explicit content of other exhibits, looking at an aspect of the cup which is peripheral to the main theme of the gallery.
7.2 The role of interpretation in engagement

Visitors’ use of interpretation at each of the exhibits was recorded on the engagement matrices, and the results are shown in the chart below.

- **None**: the visitor did not use any interpretation
- **Reference**: the visitor referred to written interpretation alongside the exhibit
- **Human**: the visitor spoke to someone about the exhibit – either staff or other visitors

Interactions which used both reference and human interpretation were recorded as ‘human’.

![Chart showing visitor interactions](image)

We know from previous studies that, whilst visitors have an inherent interest in the objects, it is the interpretation that facilitates engagement by enabling visitors to make meaning from objects. However, the chart shows high proportions of visitors not using any interpretation – particularly on the Warren Cup and Case 4.

The engagement matrices for these exhibits show that visitors who read the text panels on the exhibits were far more likely to reach discovery and immersion levels of engagement than those who used nothing. This is confirmed by results from the exit survey: 88% of visitors felt that the information in the room ‘made me look at the objects more closely than I might otherwise have done’.
Whilst visitors can and do reach a deep level of engagement without written interpretation, this relies on the visitor having an existing knowledge of the subject to contextualise and understand the exhibit, or a very self-explanatory object. The Warren Cup was more accessible for visitors who did not use interpretation than the side cases (28% success, compared to 0-5% for other exhibits), possibly because visitors could see the well-lit object from all sides and they knew what the object was from the title of the exhibition. In contrast, engagement levels for Case 4 suffered because a large proportion of visitors did not use interpretation, but the objects themselves were not intrinsically compelling.

**Foreign language**

As discussed in previous Room 3 studies, the high proportion of visitors not using any interpretation is partly due to the high proportion (70% of survey respondents) of overseas visitors to the exhibition. It is likely that there would be high demand for translated booklets of labels available in the gallery – from the first full year of rolling research, we know that approximately 24% of visitors do not have a sufficient level of confidence in English to respond. Even overseas visitors who do speak some English might prefer to read interpretation in their own language.

**7.3 Engagement with the Warren Cup**

The exhibition was designed to engage visitors deeply with the Warren Cup. The side cases, wall panels and back area were all supporting elements, designed to interpret and contextualise the ‘object in focus’. The museum therefore hoped that visitors would compare the other exhibits to the Warren Cup, and engage with the themes through the cup.

**Most visitors engage with the cup and with the theme**

As discussed in the above sections, the Warren Cup is the most used and most engaging exhibit in the room (80% of Room 3 visitors used, 55% of Room 3 visitors engaged). On average, users looked at the object from 2.5 sides.

Qualitative feedback from visitors suggests they found it easy to engage with the theme (see section 8 below) and gained a good grasp of the subject from the exhibits and interpretation. The fact that visitors spent longer on average in Warren Cup than any previous Room 3 exhibition, looking at an average of six exhibition elements indicates an interested and relatively engaged visitor group.
Ergonomic problems prevent engagement with 'object in focus' approach

However, the relatively low levels of searching and high levels of browsing behaviour in the exhibit suggest that visitors have not deeply engaged with the interpretative approach of the gallery – rather, the subject matter is so intrinsically compelling that visitors have engaged anyway.

1 in 10 visitors compared another exhibit in Room 3 to the Warren Cup – one of the desired behaviours, and something that would definitely indicate engagement with the theme and a searching style of meaning making. This happened despite the lack of explicit instructions to encourage visitors to compare and contrast the cup with other exhibits.

45% of Room 3 visitors did not manage to have a successful engagement with the cup, with one in five visitors not looking at the exhibit at all during their visit, and 31% of users not becoming engaged during their interaction with the cup.

Our findings indicate that this may be due to the small size of the room. 40% of visitors who looked at the cup had their engagement with the object hampered by crowding at some point in their visit to Room 3. This meant that 1 in 5 users of the cup only looked at the plinth from one side.

However, the qualitative research shows that the vast majority of visitors take away a good understanding of the key theme, because it is reiterated throughout the exhibition and doesn’t rely too heavily on repeated reference to the Warren Cup.
How did visitors respond to the exhibition?

8.1 Room 3 fits well within the British Museum visitor experience

From previous Room 3 research, we know that there is a small core of motivated repeat visitors who make the effort to return to Room 3. However, the room also attracts a large number of more general, infrequent visitors. The changing Room 3 exhibitions – and Warren Cup in particular – appeal to visitors for a number of reasons.

Room 3 reflects the richness of the collections

Repeat visitors feel that Room 3 displays are a good way of highlighting different aspects of the collections to visitors, and help visitors navigate the overwhelming mass of galleries and objects in the museum as a whole:

‘I think the fact that the museum is able to draw on such a vast collection and rotate the collections over a long period of time means that people like myself who only come to the UK every few years can always spend some time here and we can find something new and something interesting that we haven’t seen before. It is part of the richness of what is offered by coming here.’ Vox pop

‘The British Museum I find is a more difficult museum. There is too much of it ... You go into a gallery and there is so much you find that you get tired before you’ve done: you have to be very, very selective in the British Museum, whereas a lot of others you can walk through ... but there is just so much crammed in I think it needs a bit more modernising in some way.’ Vox pop

Room 3 adds to the richness of curatorial approaches

Visitors recognised that the exhibitions in Room 3 are very different in style to other galleries in the museum. However, this was seen as complementary rather than contradictory – visitors want a variety of voices and experiences within a visit:

‘It is very different. There is an art exhibition ... which is very different to this and it is very different to the Egyptian exhibition, but it is very nice to see a variety.’ Vox pop
Room 3 acts as a taster

Visitors to Warren Cup were very interested in seeing more on the themes covered, having had their appetites whetted by the exhibition. Whilst this has many positive implications, this may also have set up expectations about future programming or changes to the permanent displays. These expectations need to be managed carefully by the museum to avoid disappointment.

'I feel like it maybe suggests like a more thorough exhibit to come – like a beginning of a question, but it was really interesting.' Vox pop
'I would even have expected to see a bit more.' Vox pop

8.2 Overall, a positive reaction to the theme

We know anecdotally from staff that there have been rare negative reactions to Warren Cup from visitors:

'It has been amazing to see the reactions from all the visitors. They either love it or they hate it with a passion. Who doesn’t like a little bit of controversy?' Warren Cup gallery attendant

All the visitors we spoke to responded positively to the exhibition – visitors who were not interested tended to leave the exhibition quickly and were therefore not keen to comment. In general, visitors were very receptive to the British Museum staging Warren Cup.

Confounds some visitors’ expectations about the British Museum

Many visitors were surprised that any museum – and particularly the British Museum – had chosen to tackle this controversial topic in such a modern way. This was at odds with some visitors’ perceptions of the organisation, and of museums in general.

'It was pretty unexpected.' Vox pop
'It is not shocking, but I guess it is something different that what I expected.' Vox pop
'A little more scandalous [than the rest of the museum].’ Vox pop

Visitors welcomed this progression

The majority of visitors were pleasantly surprised by the exhibition, and many thought the subject matter was entirely appropriate for the British Museum as it reflects modern society and the interests of visitors. If anything, visitors wanted to be more shocked and challenged by exhibitions!
‘I liked the exhibit! It is refreshing to find a topic such as sexuality being explored in the British Museum.’ Vox pop

‘I guess you think of more classical sculptures and things and this seems a more contemporary topic. I quite like it though. Yes I do.’ Vox pop

‘[I was surprised] because of the subject. It is quite provocative for a museum. That is good.’ Vox pop

‘An “about-time” display.’ Repeat adult post-it

‘Probably not 20 years ago, but now why not.’ Vox pop

‘It is very unusual and I think that they should have had an exhibition like this a long time ago.’ Vox pop

Visitors like the cross-cultural thematic approach

The overall theme of societies’ attitudes to sexuality was intrinsically resonant to visitors, who found it easy to follow the thematic narrative compared to other exhibitions where objects are grouped by chronology:

‘I actually liked this part the best I think [compared to other parts of the British Museum], just because a bit more of a comparison of the different cultures in one space and about one topic, rather than each culture having a different room and just like having exhibits up and so I liked that aspect of it.’ Vox pop

Parallels with contemporary society and attitudes help visitors engage

Contemporary images and interpretation drawing explicit links between ancient Greece and Rome and the present day was an extremely effective approach, helping visitors to engage with the key points of the exhibition:

‘The facts that like it seemed really relevant like to today ... like the gay marriage issues in the U.S. that are happening right now.’ Vox pop

‘Nice to see they have included changing attitudes – love the six scenes warning against homosexuality.’ Repeat adult post-it

‘The whole thing it is interesting and it makes you think nothing changes.’

Vox pop

‘It does help to see that ancient times were still a little bit the same as what is going on now.’ Vox pop

Positive reactions to display style

A welcoming, inclusive atmosphere

Several visitors commented on the open, approachable mood of the exhibition:
'Nice, polite and welcoming staff. Although it is a "homo" exhibit, I have observed a variety of visitors interested in this exhibit! Well done.' Repeat adult post-it

'Nice that you can be free to look around and not be pressurised by staff or any security guards. Nice atmosphere.' Repeat adult post-it

Whilst one person visiting with children found the frank tone of the exhibition more difficult to deal with, this does not seem to have prevented them from engaging with the key points of the exhibition:

"It is kind of intense, there is little transition to the information that a person is exposed to. It does help us see that there is little difference between ancient times and today, to see that not much has changed in sexuality and its acceptance in society." Family adult post-it

Visitors engaged with the 'object in focus' approach

Visitors liked the intimacy and scale of Warren Cup. They felt that the approach of looking at one object and its context in detail was successful in engaging them with the wider topics:

'Interesting exhibition. Use of the cup as centrepiece is a good introduction to the subject.' Repeat adult post-it

'Intimate, in both senses of the word and informative.' Vox pop

'Principally, I think the exhibition is most effective because of its small scale, allowing one the luxury of reading carefully all the sections in the display.'

First time adult post-it

'The intimacy and smallness' Repeat adult post-it

'Small exhibition but a good choice of artefacts.' Repeat adult post-it

'I really liked the intimacy of it. I liked how small it was and that you could really catch it very quickly' Vox pop

Presentation adds to the exhibition, but some ergonomic problems

Visitors felt the layout of cases and lighting of the objects was appropriate:

'The display of the objects is impressive and the lighting adds to the "sensational" atmosphere.' Repeat adult

'Lighting is very intimate – works well with the large Warren Cup prints upon the walls' Vox pop

The blown-up images of detail from the Warren Cup were useful for visitors, but some complained they were difficult to engage with due to their awkward position in the gallery:

'The detailed pictures and the pictures of the essential images from the Warren Cup. They are explained and pictured and analysed on the bigger
Visitors also complained that it was somewhat difficult to engage with the Warren Cup itself. This confirms the findings from the tracking that around one in five visitors to the exhibition did not look at the cup, with 40% having their engagement hampered by crowding:

‘The Warren Cup could have better lighting’ Vox pop
‘It was nice that they had a couple of artefacts, but they should have had a few more. The main Warren Cup it is very small. It is the main focal point of attraction and the lighting is pretty poor.’ Vox pop
‘The Warren Cup display panel impressively staged behind the cup distracts. Don’t like the blood red.’ Vox pop

8.4 Visitors loved the tone of text and object panels

The straightforward, informative style of the written interpretation was popular with visitors. The approach of contextual text panels and more detailed object labels in each case was successful in engaging visitors:

‘The British Museum continues to astonish with the richness of the collection. The displays are informative and written in plain English rather than pretentious language that excludes the casual observer.’ First time visitor post-it
‘I liked how they really explained the history of power and then it explained more than just looking at objects and it was a lot better.’ Vox pop
‘It is quite simple and quite straightforward and good.’ Vox pop

The interpretation of the Warren Cup was also praised for its multi-dimensional, multi-disciplinary look at the subject:

‘I would expect to see something like this at the British Museum] because it celebrates beauty and history and research all at the same time and I have loved every bit of that here.’ Vox pop

8.5 Wanting to find out more

A resonant and engaging theme – needs more space?

Many visitors felt that the overall topic of the exhibition – societies' attitudes to sexuality throughout history – warranted a much more detailed exploration by the museum. Visitors were hoping for a much larger
exhibition on this theme in the future, or greater acknowledgement of narratives around sexuality in the permanent galleries:

‘A too short affair! The subject should be explored more deeply.’ Repeat adult visitor post-it

‘Interesting! Probably could be more information and displays. Seems to just touch on the subject matter as opposed to going into more detail. Good!’ Repeat adult visitor post-it

‘It is in an extremely small space. I believe that the subject – especially the changing views towards sexuality throughout time – could have been explored in greater depth.’ First time visitor post-it

‘Would be good to have a bigger, larger exhibit containing more points of interest. I feel a larger ‘GAY’ lifestyle/history exhibit would have been great timing with London Pride!’ Repeat adult visitor post-it

‘I like the extra information on homosexuality ‘then and now’ but it could go a lot more in depth. The theme of homosexuality could be integrated, though, with all the other exhibits in the museum as there is no extra status needed.’ First time adult

‘Intriguing! Could perhaps be more in-depth. The exhibit seems to suggest a more thorough exploration to come.’ First time adult post-it

A lack of progression for engaged visitors

Many visitors were so engaged by the content of the exhibition that they wanted to know more about specific points raised, as well as more about the topic in general. These visitors were unsure where they could go within the museum to deepen their engagement with this theme:

‘It made me more curious and like I want to learn more about it.’ Vox pop

‘The wording could have been more detailed about the history of sexuality.’ Vox pop

‘They mentioned about homosexuality in Japanese warriors but it didn’t really explain it, it just sort of mentioned it in passing and so I think there could have been a board on that, talking about that.’ Vox pop

‘Probably the internet and books, but it would be nice to see another exhibit like this inside the museum.’ Vox pop

However, some visitors mentioned that they would come back to the British Museum to see this exhibition again, or another exhibition on this theme.

‘Internet and perhaps come back here again. No, I would come back here again [even though] I haven’t been for years.’ Vox pop
Conclusions

9.1 Visitors want the British Museum to tackle relevant, controversial issues

The internal anxiety about the sexually explicit nature of Warren Cup was not shared by the vast majority of visitors. In fact, the visitors we spoke to were surprised and delighted by the exhibition – it altered negative preconceptions amongst new visitors of the British Museum as a stuffy, old-fashioned, cold and remote institution.

The theme was resonant with visitors, and the exhibition allowed visitors to make connections with attitudes and experiences in today's societies, helping visitors to engage by making the exhibition directly relevant to modern life.

Visitors loved the tone of Warren Cup interpretation and the whole approach of the exhibition – straightforward and friendly delivery of resonant, relevant themes and objects.

9.2 Visitors want the British Museum to be at the cutting edge of museums practice

Visitors were keen to see the museum engaging with contemporary debate in this way, and being brave enough to tackle potentially controversial issues so confidently.

The display style of the exhibition also engaged visitors – they recognised that Warren Cup was quite different to the permanent galleries, but were extremely positive about this change.

9.3 Visitors engaged deeply with the cross-cultural approach

We know from previous work at the British Museum and elsewhere that most visitors engage with themes and stories rather than taxonomies of objects. By drawing comparisons between cultures and eras within the theme of sex and society, visitors gained a relatively in-depth understanding of the key points of the Warren Cup narrative (how sex and society have interlinked from Ancient Greece onwards) within a relatively short space of time. Visitors were able to see the theme as a continuum rather than limited to one period of history, and to draw parallels with their own societies.
9.4 'Object in focus' approach is effective

The use of one exhibit as a start point to engaging with the theme, with supporting objects used to deepen understanding was extremely successful in Warren Cup. The non-linear narrative in the gallery, multiple start points and repetition of key points across several exhibits ensured that visitors were highly likely to understand the key learning points of the exhibition after a relatively short time in the gallery.

However, there were some problems with crowding in the exhibition – care needs to be taken that the object in focus is accessible to many visitors at the same time.

It is also essential that visitors are given suggestions on where to find out more at the end of their visit to the room, to deepen engagement with the theme (trails, tours and galleries within the museum, and external sources like websites, other museums and books).

9.5 Visitors want more 'modern' approaches in permanent galleries

Warren Cup raised expectations amongst visitors that this approach would be rolled out throughout the permanent galleries. Visitors wanted resonant themes – like sexuality – to be integrated more into permanent interpretation to aid engagement.

There was also the expectation that the Room 3 exhibition was a taste of things to come; that the modern curatorial approached would be rolled out into permanent collections.

9.6 Where is Room 3 going?

Visitors enjoy the intimate experience available in Room 3, which confounds many visitors' expectations of the British Museum.

However, at times during Warren Cup, Room 3 became a victim of its own success – with over 15% of British Museum visitors entering the gallery during their visit at the start of the exhibition run, crowding was inevitably a problem in this small space.

Warren Cup raised visitors' expectations about the British Museum and how it might develop in the longer term – people expected other, larger exhibitions expanding on these themes (sex and society across cultures and eras), and also about how the permanent galleries might develop.
museum is now faced with the challenge of meeting and exceeding these expectations.
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