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MEDIATING HISTORICAL LEGACIES AT MUSEUMS:
THE *REFRAMING PICTON* EXHIBITION AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM
CARDIFF

Master's Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how Amgueddfa Cymru critically addresses the contested legacy of Lieutenant Thomas Picton in the *Reframing Picton* exhibition at the National Museum Cardiff. Situated within the broader context of decolonisation and anti-racism practice, this research explores how curatorial strategies, co-curation, and educational programming challenge the perpetuation of Picton's military achievement and British colonial glory in the museum space. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research examines how the symbolic authority of the portrait of Thomas Picton at the National Museum Cardiff is disrupted, how co-curation practice shapes the museum's ability to mediate social tensions, and how historical discomfort is ethically navigated to support transformative learning.

The reflexive thematic analysis reveals a complex interplay between institutional and collective memory in shaping historical consciousness and a national reckoning. As the dominant narrative of Picton is challenged, the museum became a contact zone where individuals engaged in affective and intellectual dialogue (Clifford, 1997; Schorch, 2015) to construct a more nuanced understanding of Picton's colonial legacy and his role in perpetuating imperial violence in Trinidad. By foregrounding these dialogic encounters, this study contributes to the field of museum education and public history by demonstrating how museums can serve as safe spaces for negotiating historical discomfort and fostering reflective engagement. Ultimately, this thesis concludes by posing a critical question: *in a world where no historical figure is exempt from their contributions to systemic colonial injustice, what stories do we choose to believe?*

Keywords: decolonial practice, posthumous commemoration, co-curation, contact zone, narrative framing, collective meaning-making.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Introduction

When asked, “Who is your hero?”, I could easily name historical figures who significantly contributed to Indonesia’s independence and nation-building. For most people, including me, it feels natural to associate a hero with individuals whose stories are marked by courage and noble accomplishments. I accepted this idea of heroism, and it remained unchallenged for a long time until I visited the Netherlands for my third semester.

In the Netherlands, I encountered numerous commemorations of Dutch historical figures, including Jan Pieterszoon Coen, who is celebrated for his role as Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies in expanding the Dutch monopoly on the nutmeg trade. He is also known for the establishment of Batavia (now known as Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia). However, for Indonesians, especially Moluccans, the Governor-General is remembered as one who was responsible for the genocide of the whole population of the Banda Islands in 1621 (Loth, 1995; Alwi, 2005). This stark contrast in commemoration was unsettling, but it prompted me to a deeper reflection on how heroism is constructed. A *hero* has never been a neutral label because it always reflects the political and cultural values in which those historical figures are remembered.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2025), a hero is defined as “a man (or occasionally a woman) distinguished by the performance of courageous or noble actions, especially in battle.” However, my experience in the Netherlands had made me aware of how this labelling often simplifies complex historical legacies into digestible stories of national pride and fails to account for the political and cultural forces that influence this process. It is inherently selective because a large social group constructs its collective identity through symbolic practices that are relevant to the interests and ideologies of those in power (Assmann, 2006b, p.216). So, in this context, the commemoration of a historical figure is always politically mediated and reflects specific agendas of the dominant ideologies.

This tension is particularly evident in museum spaces, which have deep historical roots in colonial practices and narrative building. Museums as memory institutions are deeply implicated in the process because they provide a physical connection to our understanding of the past and present (Robinson, 2012, p.421). Through their curatorial strategies, museums can

contextualise material evidence of history and ultimately influence the development of historical narratives in ways that can either uphold or challenge the prepotent interpretation of history. Especially in a postcolonial context, museums face increasing pressure to revisit their inherited legacies and engage with contested histories embedded in their collections.

I position this study as an empirical inquiry into how the valorisation of historical figures is negotiated within a museum space. As an Indonesian, I inherit a historical trauma shaped by centuries of colonial rule, primarily under Dutch rule (1800-1942), with brief periods of British (1811-1816) and Japanese (1942-1945) occupations. The awareness of my colonial past has influenced my decision to examine the *Reframing Picton* exhibition at the National Museum Cardiff as the case study in this thesis. I do not approach this subject as a detached observer, but rather as someone personally invested in how colonial histories are remembered, reinterpreted, and communicated. This positionality allows me to critically engage with the ways in which the museum constructs historical narratives of Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Picton. By analysing their curatorial strategies, institutional frameworks, and visitor responses, this thesis seeks to understand how museums can function as a space for negotiation, where heroic representations of national figures are re-contextualised to promote historical consciousness in a postcolonial context.

2. Status Quaestionis

At the end of 2023, I visited the *Reframing Picton* exhibition at the National Museum Cardiff. The experience was both personally memorable and intellectually enlightening, as it challenged me to rethink the concept of heroism through a lens I had not previously encountered. The museum directly challenged the symbolic material culture of Thomas Picton's legacy by recontextualising his portrait with two artworks by Trinidadian and Trinidadian-British artists, which, in this context, represented the victims of Picton's colonial violence. However, rather than simply condemning the recognition of Picton as a heroic figure in Welsh history, the exhibition invited me to reflect and critically engage with the construction of heroism itself, especially in how historical narratives are shaped, what is at stake when individuals are celebrated in museum spaces, and how such commemorations can obscure complex and uncomfortable truth.

The portrait I referenced above is the two-metre-tall portrait of Lieutenant-General Sir Thomas Picton, a distinguished British military leader who died at the Battle of Waterloo in

1815. The portrait, painted by Sir Martin Archer Shee in 1812, was first exhibited at the Royal Academy of Art in 1816 and was later donated to the National Museum Cardiff in 1907 by the Earl of Plymouth, Robert Windsor-Clive (Amgueddfa Cymru, n.d.; Scheer, 2022; Myrone, 2018). Since then, it has remained a prominent part of the museum's collection and has been on display for over a century.



Figure 1. Lieutenant-General Sir Thomas Picton, c.1812, oil on canvas by Sir Martin Archer Shee. Collection of Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales. Accession number: NMW A 473. Available online at <https://museum.wales/art/online/>.

In the *Reframing Picton* exhibition, the museum challenged the symbolic authority of Picton's portrait in valorising Picton's legacy, while at the same time, obscuring his colonial violence. Picton's achievement in the Battle of Waterloo earned him national recognition, which has long been well commemorated in Wales through the naming of streets, monuments, statues, and portraits. However, Picton's legacy is deeply contested because of his accounts of Atlantic enslavement and brutal repression as the first British Governor of Trinidad from 1797 to 1803 (Epstein, 2007; Epstein and Palmer, 2025). The *Reframing Picton* exhibition exposed this side of Picton's legacy by shedding light on the story of a 14-year-old **free** mixed-race girl,

Luisa Calderón. In 1801, Luisa was accused of theft, and Picton signed off on her confession using a method called *piquet*, which involved suspending her by one wrist while forcing her to balance her weights on a sharp spike illustrated in Figure 2 below. By authorising this military punishment for Luisa, Picton was convicted and went to trial at King’s Bench in 1806 (Epstein and Palmer, 2025, p.158), and later this technique of torture was referenced by a prosecutor, William Garrow, as *Pictoning* (National Library of Wales, 2021). Picton was found guilty during the trial, but the verdict was eventually overturned because the judges learned that the British had agreed to loosely adhere to Spanish law at the time of the event (Epstein, 2007, p.719; Candlin, 2012, pp.135–136).



Figure 2. The torture of Louise Calderón, Trinidad, 1801, c. 1806, coloured etching by J. Swaine. Collection of the National Army Museum. Accession number: NAM. 1969-10-254-1. Available online at <https://collection.nam.ac.uk/detail.php?acc=1969-10-254-1>.

Although the trial of Thomas Picton marked the first case where a colonial officer was held accountable for acts of violence under imperial rule (Epstein and Palmer, 2025, p.161), his scandal continued to stir public debates. Press coverage at the time and in subsequent decades often portrayed Picton as a victim of political slander, such as the *Newgate Calendar*

in 1825 (National Library of Wales, 2021), and the *Pembrokshire County Guardian*, which suggested that Picton's proceedings on the alleged torture of Luisa Calderón were driven by personal vindictiveness (Owen, 1900, p.7). Ultimately, Picton's reputation was restored, and his achievements in the British military during the Peninsular War (1808-1814) further cemented his status as a national war hero.

This posthumous recognition of Thomas Picton underscores how the stories of Luisa Calderón and others subjected to violence under his governorship in Trinidad have historically been pushed to the periphery of Picton's legacy. Therefore, the *Reframing Picton* exhibition sought to readdress this imbalance by foregrounding Luisa and other victims' stories while at the same time, interrogating the mechanism through which imperial violence has been sanitised in public memory (The Reframing Picton Project Group, 2020; The Reframing Picton Project Group, 2022b). The exhibition offered a tangible example of how museums can confront the colonial legacy through the perspectives of those who were affected by colonial rule. The project team emphasised that the exhibition's goal was never to censor the history (The Reframing Picton Project Group, 2022a), but to foster a safe space where visitors could engage with the complex and uncomfortable legacy of Picton.

2.1. Amgueddfa Cymru, the National Museum Cardiff, and the Reframing Picton

In the previous section, I mentioned that the *Reframing Picton* exhibition, which opened on 1st August 2022 and runs until 31st March 2025, is situated at the National Museum Cardiff. The National Museum Cardiff is a branch of Amgueddfa Cymru—Museums Wales, a national organisation responsible for managing a network of seven museums across Wales. This relationship indicates that, although the exhibition physically takes place at the National Museum Cardiff, its curatorial practices, funding, and policies are shaped by the broader institutional commitments of Amgueddfa Cymru. Therefore, recognising this connection helps to understand the curatorial choices, exhibition strategies, and cultural objectives influencing how the exhibition is curated and presented to the public. Throughout this thesis, I will use the term "the museum" interchangeably to refer to Amgueddfa Cymru as the overarching organisation and to the National Museum Cardiff as the exhibition venue, depending on the context.

Amgueddfa Cymru has publicly addressed a shift away from traditional museum models as the sole gatekeepers of history. Following the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020,

the museum declared that it “belongs to anyone”(Amgueddfa Cymru, n.d.), which reflects an institutional reckoning with Wales’s role in the British Empire and dedication to removing barriers that have historically excluded certain groups from Wales's history narratives. This approach aligns with a sector-wide decolonisation shift in the UK, such as those promoted by the United Kingdom Museum Association (2021), in which museums are called to critically re-evaluate how they represent and engage with communities whose histories have been shaped by colonial rule (Ariese-Vandemeulebroucke and Wróblewska, 2022). This involves revising interpretive labels that perpetuate Eurocentric viewpoints, as well as fostering meaningful dialogue and collaboration with indigenous peoples and nations that were subjected to imperialism.

Empowerment becomes an essential component of the *Reframing Picton* project, as the museums created space for underrepresented communities to retell their stories and gain control over their narratives within colonial history. From the start of the *Reframing Picton* project, the museum has maintained a close collaboration with the Sub-Saharan Advisory Panel (SSAP) to develop this as a youth-led initiative under the Amgueddfa Cymru Producers. The museum invites individuals aged 16-25 across Wales and those involved with the SSAP Youth Leadership Network to co-create this project. Their involvement, which began in 2020, plays a significant role in the curatorial decisions to decentre Picton’s historical narratives, artworks commissions, as well as designing exhibition space that could encourage critical reflection on the intergenerational impact of colonialism in Trinidad and Tobago (The Reframing Picton Project Group, 2022b).

3. Research Questions

This thesis aims to critically analyse how museums in a postcolonial context navigate their historical legacies through educational and curatorial practices, with particular focus on the *Reframing Picton* exhibition at the National Museum Cardiff as a case study. This study explores how Amgueddfa Cymru engaged with Thomas Picton’s colonial legacies by reinterpreting the symbolic commemoration in its collection through a collaborative practice.

By analysing this exhibition and the broader social and political backdrop that influences the project, this study seeks to understand how museums can serve as spaces for critical reflection and ethical engagement with the Welsh imperial past. Furthermore, this research aims

to contribute to the broader discussion about decolonial practices in museums by identifying strengths, limitations, and transferable approaches that can inform future curatorial work.

To achieve this, the research is guided by the overarching question: “How does Amgueddfa Cymru examine the celebration of Thomas Picton’s portrait at the National Museum Cardiff and address his contested historical legacy?” This central question is further developed into three sub-questions that guide the technical and analytical focus of the study:

- a. How does Amgueddfa Cymru navigate and deconstruct the symbolic authority of Picton’s portrait in the museum space?
- b. In what ways has Amgueddfa Cymru navigated its ethical responsibilities amid social tensions surrounding the reinterpretation of Picton’s legacy?
- c. How does Amgueddfa Cymru navigate historical discomfort in the *Reframing Picton* exhibition and facilitate critical museum learning in museum space?

4. Outline of thesis

In this chapter, I have illustrated my interest in the idea of heroism in a postcolonial context within a broader decolonial practice in museums. I also provided an explanation of the significance of the *Reframing Picton* exhibition in addressing the contested historical legacy of Thomas Picton within the historiography of Wales and Trinidad and Tobago. Additionally, I have clarified the institutional context of the exhibition and articulated the objectives of this study, which aims to explore how museums engage with the contested history of their collections and create spaces for critical reflection on imperial legacy.

The remaining chapters are organised as follows. Chapter 2 contextualises the study within the relevant literature and theoretical framework. Chapter 3 provides an account of the research methodology and details of the use of Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Chapters 4 to 7 examine the results and interpretations derived from Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Finally, Chapter 8 presents the conclusion, including a synthesis and reflections on the findings, as well as discussing some limitations of the study and implications for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Drawing on interdisciplinary literature from museum studies, museum education, and memory studies, this section explores the position of museums in the public sphere and critically examines how museums, as public institutions, have responded to and been implicated in broader processes of historical reckoning, identity formation, and post-imperial transformation. It situates the thesis within recent studies or literature, offering both the conceptual foundation for this research and a framework through which its findings can contribute to emerging debates on museums and decolonial practice.

1. Museums and the Construction of National Identity

Nations are built through shared narratives which bind citizens to each other across time and space. Benedict Anderson's (2006) concept of nations as imagined political communities provides a foundational lens to understand this process. In this context, *imagined* means that members of a nation may never personally know most of their fellow citizens, but are connected by a shared image of unity and a sense of horizontal camaraderie (Anderson, 2006, pp.6–7). Therefore, the community is a social construct created through shared stories, symbols, and rituals that unite individuals into a collective.

In a postcolonial context, the emotional and political engagement with memory is inherently connected to the construction of national history. Researchers in memory studies, such as Aleida Assmann (Assmann, 2006b; Assmann, 2008; Cammack, 2016), argue that national histories consist of political memory that is actively curated to bolster affection for the nation. As noted by Assmann (2006b, pp.216–217), political memories are institutionalised and transmitted through media such as museums, textbooks, and commemorative practices to cultivate a collective identity and belonging. This memory process inherently reflects the authoritative power over the nation, meaning it is most likely to benefit those in power, where memories related to acts of violence are often omitted, and achievements are celebrated as national pride (Assmann, 2006b; Assmann, 2008; Cammack, 2016).

Assmann's memory theory offers a framework for understanding the role of museums as memory institutions (Robinson, 2012) in shaping national consciousness. Museums embody

historical experiences, as they provide curated environments where visitors engage with material culture, visual storytelling, and spatial design that reflect collective memory and institutional agendas. This reinforces earlier research in museology by Hooper-Greenhill (1992), which demonstrated that in their contribution to knowledge creation, their classification and display most often reinforce the dominant scientific and cultural paradigms. While this research was pioneering in questioning the neutrality of knowledge creation, it missed the dynamic aspects of museums. Subsequently, scholars such as McLean (1998) and Crane (2000) tried to fill this gap by examining how curated narratives in museums could influence the construction of collective identity and thus portray museums as active mediators of memory. This shift in scholarship illustrates a broader movement in museum studies toward critical engagement, where memory is not only preserved but actively constructed within museum spaces.

In societies dealing with historical trauma and reconstructing their postwar identity, the tension that comes with museums' roles in shaping collective memory becomes clearer, as they must manage the complex legacy of colonialism alongside ongoing generational trauma. Museums become sites of negotiation between personal and institutional memories, where they engage in deliberate action of selecting and omitting archival material to create a broad symbolic representation of shared historical experience. This process involves an active mediation by historians, curators, and artists to produce public knowledge (Assmann, 2006a, p.271). While exclusion in this process might be seen as forgetting some aspect of the past, Thomas (2000) argues that deliberate exclusion in museums does not necessarily imply a loss of history. Instead, it reveals how museums navigate conflicting desires and political sensitivities.

This tension between the presence and absence of memory emphasises that the construction of historical consciousness in museums occurs not only through the chosen symbolic memory but also through what the museums decide to leave unspoken. Mycock (Mycock, 2017, pp.401–402) highlights how debates over colonial legacies and national memory coalesce in what he terms the 'history wars'—particularly evident in post-colonial countries such as the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and France—where narratives about national identity and the colonial past compete in both history curriculum and public discourse.

As politically charged spaces that actively construct and disseminate dominant narratives, museums bear the responsibility to influence how communities understand their

relationship with the past. In this light, museums are not only symbols of collective memory but also function as spaces of historical negotiation. Their role in constructing national identity is therefore dynamic and often contested. In post-colonial societies, this negotiation is particularly complex, as museums must navigate their institutional authority and the legacy of imperialism with contemporary demands for justice, representation, and inclusivity. Consequently, museums are uniquely positioned to foster historical awareness, where collective memories are interpreted, critically examined, and reshaped within the museum setting.

2. The Politics of Representation in Museums

Museums have long been perceived as custodians of knowledge and culture, yet their origins are deeply intertwined with colonial and imperial ventures. Emerging prominently in the 18th and 19th centuries, many Western museums were established during periods of aggressive expansion and conquest, serving as repositories for objects forcibly acquired from colonised territories. These institutions were historically constructed to reflect and reinforce the ideologies of empire, where the act of collecting, classifying, and displaying artefacts was closely tied to Enlightenment ideals of rationality and control (Hooper Greenhill, 1992). This positions European powers as the arbiters of global knowledge. As argued by Bennett (1995), museums functioned as a tool to legitimise colonial dominance and shape public consciousness.

Museums' authority has been historically reinforced through their close ties to elite power structures. For instance, Watson (2019) demonstrates how public museums like the British Museum were established through parliamentary and royal endorsement, thereby embedding them within the ideological apparatus of the nation-state. This example of elite backing not only legitimised the museum's authority but also influenced curatorial priorities and interpretive frameworks. Collections were frequently assembled through systems of patronage and diplomatic exchange, with the display of objects often curated to support a dominant political agenda, affirm national identity, and project imperial prestige.

As a result, the experiences of subaltern social, cultural, and ethnic groups are likely to be excluded and often dismissed as 'false history' (Smith, 2011). This label, however, does not simply suggest that marginalised groups' histories are untrue. Instead, it pertains to historical negotiation (Sibley and Liu, 2012, p.599), where the injustices experienced by marginalised communities are demobilised to assert particular political and ideological agendas. The

institutional authority of museums thus became a mechanism for validating selective histories, often presenting Western civilisation as the universal standard and relegating non-Western cultures to the periphery. This process of legitimisation through elite endorsement established museums as gatekeepers of historical meaning, perpetuating a hierarchy of representation that continues to shape public understanding today.

The legitimisation of selective histories within museums has profound implications for how societies remember and relate to the past. By privileging dominant narratives and omitting or distorting those of marginalised communities, museums contribute to a form of historical negation that shapes collective memory and identity (Assmann, 2008). They actively project authority and elite dominance through symbolic space design and a monocultural perspective that reflects nationalistic or sovereign power (Bennett, 2017, pp.7–8). When histories of oppression are omitted in museum space, the structural inequalities are likely to be sustained. This erasure contributes to intergenerational amnesia, where younger generations inherit a distorted or incomplete view of history, thereby reducing their ability to critically engage with the legacy of injustice.

In response to growing critiques of their historical authority and exclusionary practices, museums have increasingly embraced participatory approaches that seek to democratise knowledge production and representation. These approaches challenge the traditional top-down museum practices by inviting historically and culturally marginalised communities to help shape exhibitions and stories. Collective-meaning-making has become a crucial approach to addressing the power dynamics within museum practices. Simon (2010a) argues that participatory practices have the potential to alter the power balance within museums, creating opportunities for a wide range of voices to contest, reinterpret, and enrich historical narratives. This reorientation not only promotes inclusivity but also enhances the relevance and ethical accountability of museums in contemporary society.

The turn toward participatory and co-creative practices in museums is underpinned by critical museology and postcolonial theory, both of which challenge the presumed neutrality of cultural institutions. These frameworks argue that museums must confront their colonial legacies and the epistemic violence embedded in traditional curatorial authority. An increasing number of scholars (Peers and Brown, 2003; Kreps, 2008; Phillips, 2011; Golding and Walklate, 2019) have advocated for collaborative ethnography and community-based museum practices. This exemplifies a broader shift in critical museology, focusing on decolonising

museum spaces, redistributing curatorial authority, and centring community voices in knowledge creation.

This theoretical shift has inspired practical transformations in museum practice. For instance, Wilberforce House Museum in Hull actively engages with local people of colour and members of the Black community in its activities (Stephenson, 2023; Museums Association, 2024b). They are encouraged to participate as volunteers or paid advisors in various projects and have received training to develop their own exhibitions. Similarly, Amgueddfa Cymru has actively engaged with Welsh and diasporic communities to reframe narratives around empire, resistance, and national identity. In initiatives like *Reframing Picton*, the museum has collaborated with artists and community members to critically interrogate colonial legacies and promote healing through creative interpretation (Owen, 2022; The Reframing Picton Project Group, 2022b). At Buxton Museum, efforts to decolonise collections have involved working directly with source communities to reassess the provenance and meaning of artefacts, shifting the museum's role from custodian to facilitator of dialogue (Museums Association, 2024a). These case studies demonstrate that participatory approaches are not merely symbolic gestures but can serve as meaningful interventions that redistribute power and advance more inclusive forms of representation.

While participatory and co-creative practices offer promising avenues for addressing historical imbalances in museum representation, they are not without challenges. One of the most pressing concerns is the risk of tokenism, where community involvement is superficial or symbolic rather than meaningfully integrated into institutional decision-making. Museums may invite participation without relinquishing curatorial authority, thereby reinforcing the very hierarchies they seek to dismantle. Furthermore, institutional inertia, limited resources, and bureaucratic constraints can hinder the sustainability of participatory initiatives. Consequently, Lynch and Alberti (2010) argue that genuine collaboration requires a fundamental re-evaluation of institutional values, which includes an ethical imperative to prevent co-produced narratives from exploitation or overburdening marginalised communities. Moving forward, museums need to establish long-term, mutual relationships with communities based on transparency, accountability, and shared authority. Such ongoing efforts are essential for transforming museums into spaces that promote ethical representation and social justice.

3. Museum as Contact Zone

Building on the previous sub-chapter's exploration of the politics of representation, this section shifts focus to how museums function as contact zones, where diverse and often conflicting narratives, identities, and memories intersect. Adapted by James Clifford (1997), the concept of the contact zone reframes museums not as neutral repositories of knowledge but as sites of encounter, negotiation, and power distribution. This framing is particularly relevant in postcolonial and multicultural contexts, where museums are increasingly called upon to confront their colonial legacies and democratise their structures and practices.

Tony Bennett's (2005) notion of the museum as a *civic laboratory* offers a compelling framework to understand this transformation. Rather than imposing authority, the civic laboratory model positions the museum as a space of cultural experimentation, where knowledge is negotiated and social values are tested. This aligns with the principles of critical museology, which interrogates whose stories are being told, by whom, and for what purpose (Macdonald and Morgan, 2019). Critical museology challenges the assumption of neutrality and calls for reflexivity in curatorial practice, recognising the museum as a site of ideological contestation and civic engagement. Viewing museums as civic laboratories also highlights their role as technologies of governance, linking expert knowledge to broader programmes of social management. This epistemological and civic function positions the museum as a key actor in shaping public discourse and collective identity.

Within this broader transformation, participatory museum theory (Simon, 2010a) provides a practical framework for reconfiguring institutional authority. The participatory model advocates for shared authorship between institutions and communities, extending beyond audience engagement to a strategic redistribution of cultural power (Simon, 2010a; Gurian, 2020). Participation is not merely a method of inclusion but a political act that challenges hierarchical structures and enables more equitable forms of cultural production. These shifts underscore the museum's emerging role as a space of dialogue, negotiation, and social agency. This reconceptualised public role provides a critical foundation for understanding contemporary approaches to museum education, where learning is no longer transmitted but co-created in context with diverse publics.

Museums are increasingly recognised as nonformal and informal learning environments (Dudzinska-Przesmitzki and Grenier, 2008; Holmes, 2011; Callanan et al., 2011) where the boundaries between education, leisure, and personal development blur. As museums

shift away from didactic transmission models, learning is reconceptualised as a socially mediated, dialogic process. Visitors engage with exhibits not as passive recipients but as active participants who interpret, negotiate, and personalise content in relation to their own experiences (Falk and Dierking, 1998; 2000; 2016; Hein, 2002). The Contextual Model of Learning (Falk and Dierking, 2016) emphasises the dynamic interplay between personal, sociocultural, and physical contexts. Learning in museums is therefore not defined by discrete outcomes but understood as a continuous, evolving process shaped by multiple, overlapping factors.

The physicality of the museum—its architecture, spatial layout, and multisensory environment—plays a pivotal role in shaping how content is encountered and interpreted. The museum space becomes an active agent in the learning process, mediating the dialogue between institutional narratives and individual or community values (Bourdieu, 2002; Crooke, 2008; Lynch, 2011). This dialogic encounter fosters not only learning but also the potential for reconciliation, affirmation, or reconfiguration of identity and memory. This asserts that museums operate as relational spaces, where co-creation of meaning involves both intra-personal reflection and inter-personal interaction. The act of moving through the space enables an embodied negotiation, where personal narratives and cultural memories intermingle with institutional interpretations.

In this sense, museums act not simply as sites of cultural display but as public domains, where values are not only represented but reworked through affective and cognitive engagement. This dialogic potential is especially significant in contexts of contested heritage, where museums must navigate public backlash, ‘culture wars,’ and ideological contestation (Macdonald, 2013; Sandell, 2007). Strategies for managing contentious heritage often involve fostering dialogue, empathy, and critical reflection, rather than avoiding discomfort. Museums that embrace their role as contact zones are better equipped to handle these tensions, offering spaces where difficult histories can be confronted and reimagined.

4. Co-Curation as Activism Practice in Museums

Museums are increasingly recognised as active agents in shaping public discourse and historical consciousness. This re-evaluation has given rise to *curatorial activism*, which seeks to redress historical exclusions and systemic inequalities within the museum and gallery sector (Reilly and Lippard, 2018; Grindon, 2023). At its core, activist curation involves employing

curatorial strategies to challenge dominant narratives, amplify marginalised voices, and encourage critical engagement with socio-cultural and political issues such as racial and religious discrimination.

Reilly and Lippard (2018) define curatorial activism as a deliberate curatorial strategy in which institutions acknowledge their ethical responsibility to represent diverse cultural producers. This framework is particularly significant for understanding activist curation as both a critique of institutional power and a call to action to decentre heteronormativity and Eurocentrism in museum practice. Activist curation also intersects with broader movements for decolonisation and social justice in the cultural sector. It recognises that museums are not neutral spaces but are embedded in histories of colonialism and exclusion. As such, activist curators seek to disrupt these legacies by reimagining curatorial practice as a form of ethical and political engagement (R. Sandell, 2007; Message, 2014; Janes and Sandell, 2019).

The idea of memory activism provides a useful perspective for understanding activist curation as a form of institutional memory work. Memory activism refers to the deliberate intervention in public memory to challenge dominant historical narratives, often in response to injustice, erasure, or trauma (Gutman and Wüstenberg, 2023). While memory activism is frequently associated with grassroots movements, its principles are increasingly informing curatorial practices within museums, particularly those committed to decolonisation, reconciliation, and social justice.

Museums, as custodians of collective memory, are inherently implicated in the politics of remembrance. Activist curators engage with this responsibility by reinterpreting collections, reframing exhibitions, and collaborating with communities to surface silenced or marginalised histories. As Lehrer (2023) argues, curatorial activism can be understood as a form of memory activism that operates within institutional frameworks. It involves not only what is remembered, but also whose perspectives are legitimised in the process, as well as how the memory is mediated through objects, narratives, and spatial design. Rigney (2023) further expands this discussion by emphasising the role of materiality in memory activism. Her idea of mobilising materialities emphasises that monuments, artefacts, and museum displays are not merely static symbols but active agents in memory struggles. Decommissioning or recontextualising these objects becomes a political act as it undermines the museum's authority as the sole voice of remembrance, instead promoting diverse, critical, and dialogic ways of remembering.

A compelling example of institutional memory activism can be found in the work of Amgueddfa Cymru, particularly at St Fagans National Museum of History. As Hughes and Phillips (2019) observe, the transformation of the museum from a traditional ethnographic institution to one grounded in activism reflects a broader commitment to ethical representation and community engagement. Their study documents how curatorial practices at St Fagans have evolved to include co-produced exhibitions, critical engagement with colonial legacies, and a redefinition of the museum's role as a civic space.

Central to this reimagining is the concept of the museum as a contact zone (Clifford, 1997), where the museum is no longer a detached observer of history but a space of encounter, negotiation, and contestation. As Schorch (2015) argues, the contact zone facilitates a shift from authoritative to dialogic modes of interpretation, enabling multiple perspectives to enter into meaningful cross-cultural dialogue. The examples from St Fagans demonstrate how museums can function as contact zones in practice. These are not abstract theoretical spaces, but lived, human environments where identities are actively negotiated, historical narratives are critically evaluated, and new forms of collective meaning are co-produced.

Within this framework, co-curation is not an adjunct to activist curation, but a practice inherently embedded within it. It provides the methodological tools through which museums can enact their ethical and institutional commitment in redistributing institutional power, fostering shared authority and collective meaning-making. As museums continue to confront their colonial legacies and contemporary responsibilities, activist curation offers a critical framework for institutional transformation and the creation of more inclusive cultural spaces.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has critically examined the evolving role of museums as sites of memory, identity formation, and political engagement. Drawing on interdisciplinary literature from museum studies, memory studies, and postcolonial theory, it has traced how museums have shifted from being perceived as neutral repositories of knowledge to dynamic spaces of negotiation, contestation, and transformation. Concepts such as museums as a contact zone (Clifford, 1997; Schorch, 2015), museums as memory institutions (Assmann, 2006b; Robinson, 2012), and curatorial activism (Reilly and Lippard, 2018) have provided a conceptual foundation for understanding how museums actively shape public historical consciousness and mediate power through inclusive curatorial practice.

These frameworks are particularly relevant for understanding how the *Reframing Picton* exhibition interrogates the contested narrative of Picton's legacy embedded in institutional practice and public memory. While the exhibition has garnered attention in public discourse and in scholarly work that foregrounds its thematic, legal, and artistic dimensions (Epstein, 2007; Hoskins and James, 2024; Epstein and Palmer, 2025), existing literature remains largely descriptive. Current studies focus on reinterpreting Picton's legacy and highlighting voices such as Luisa Calderón's. However, they often overlook an analysis of the curatorial process itself, specifically, how decisions are negotiated, implemented, and contested within the museum's institutional framework.

Currently, empirical knowledge about ethical engagement at the *Reframing Picton* exhibition is limited; therefore, the affective and pedagogical impacts of activist exhibitions on diverse audiences remain underexplored. By offering a process-oriented and reflexive analysis, this research contributes to the empirical study of participatory museums and decolonial studies by documenting curatorial strategies as forms of activist intervention, evaluating their ethical and educational dimensions, and positioning national museums as vital mediators for reshaping historical consciousness.

Chapter 3: Methodology

1. Research Design

This thesis adopts a qualitative research approach, which is grounded in main research question: *How does Amgueddfa Cymru examine the celebration of Thomas Picton's portrait at the National Museum Cardiff and address his contested historical legacy?* And three sub-research questions: (1) *How does Amgueddfa Cymru navigate and deconstruct the symbolic authority of Picton's portrait in the museum space?* (2) *In what ways has Amgueddfa Cymru navigated its ethical responsibilities amid social tensions surrounding the reinterpretation of Picton's legacy?* (3) *How does Amgueddfa Cymru navigate historical discomfort in the Reframing Picton exhibition and facilitate critical museum learning in museum space?*

The *Reframing Picton* exhibition was selected as a case study due to its distinctive engagement with the reframing of a contested historical figure in a museum setting. It offers a compelling example of how museums can navigate their institutional authority to address colonial legacies and promote historical consciousness. The geographical proximity of the city of Cardiff to its English neighbour Bristol situates the *Reframing Picton* exhibition within wider regional and national currents of historical accountability. In this light, *Reframing Picton* constitutes a responsive curatorial intervention, reflecting the growing public demand for inclusive representation and ethical reinterpretation of Britain's imperial past within cultural institutions.

This project unfolded within the exceptional circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, with research conducted between 2020 and 2022 and the exhibition running from 2022 to 2025 (The Reframing Picton Project Group, 2020; The Reframing Picton Project Group, 2022b). This period introduced unique challenges and opportunities, as museums were compelled to adapt to a digitally driven society amidst widespread social and technological disruption. Such unique context adds a critical layer to the study, highlighting the evolving responsibilities of museums in navigating public engagement, historical accountability, and digital resistance during times of crisis. Consequently, the Reframing Picton stands as a particularly timely and relevant study for exploring how museums manage historical discomfort and institutional authority within a digitally mediated society.

Adopting a case study method in this research provides a focused and contextually grounded approach to examining a complex and situated example of museum practice. As Cohen et al. (2017, p.376) suggest, case studies are particularly effective for capturing the intricacies of real-life situations, offering a lens through which researchers can explore the lived experiences of individuals and institutions within specific settings. Within this thesis, the case study approach enables a detailed investigation, and a nuanced understanding of how curatorial decisions, institutional dynamics, and public engagement intersect to influence educational practices and historical representation in the *Reframing Picton* exhibition. This methodology facilitates an in-depth examination of the social, spatial, and historical factors involved in the museum's response to contested narratives and colonial legacies of Thomas Picton in museum settings.

2. Data Sources

The empirical material collected and documented for this research comprises a diverse range of data sources, each contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the *Reframing Picton* exhibition. These include semi-structured interviews with four participants, including staff from Amgueddfa Cymru and Amgueddfa Cymru Producers who were directly involved in the development of the exhibition. These interviews provided insight into curatorial intentions, institutional challenges, and the collaborative processes behind the exhibition's creation. In addition, I conducted non-participant observations within the exhibition space on three separate occasions between February and March 2025. These observations enabled me to document the spatial dynamics, interpretive strategies, and visitor engagement to understand how the exhibition was experienced in real time. The exhibition texts, visitor reflection entries, and glossary content of the *Reframing Picton* exhibition were also documented to identify the museum's strategies in framing Picton's contested legacy and communicating its curatorial intentions to the public.

Together, these varied sources provide rich, contextually grounded insights into how the exhibition was conceptualised, experienced, and received. Notably, this diversity of data supports triangulation, which strengthens the analytical depth and credibility of the research. In this study, the inclusion of multiple perspectives is not solely intended to validate individual data points, but rather to provide a robust foundation for both data and interpretation (Flick, 2007). With this approach, I can carry out a more thorough exploration of the personal,

collective, socio-cultural, political, and institutional aspects inherent in the *Reframing Picton* exhibition.

3. Sampling

This research employed purposive sampling to identify individuals directly involved in the *Reframing Picton* exhibition and capture diverse perspectives from key stakeholders, including museum professionals and members of the Amgueddfa Cymru Producers team. Purposeful sampling is particularly suitable for this research as it seeks to gain rich, contextual insights into the Reframing Picton exhibition. As Emmel (2013) argues, this approach enabled me to select participants who are exceptionally knowledgeable in relation to the exhibition under study, thereby supporting a deeper understanding of the mechanisms, contexts, and outcomes of social processes behind the project.

Initial contact was established through the Amgueddfa Cymru Producers network in January 2025, where the museum referred me to a staff member who subsequently became both a research participant and the primary point of contact throughout the study. The museum staff facilitated further recruitment by introducing me to a colleague in the museum's learning division and a member of the Amgueddfa Cymru Producers who was involved in the *Reframing Picton* project group. This recruitment process developed into a snowball sampling strategy, which proved particularly effective in reaching individuals who may not have been easily accessible through formal channels. As noted by Morris (2015), snowball sampling can be a powerful recruitment method, particularly when working with tight-knit or specialised groups, as it helps identify individuals who may not be easily accessible through formal channels. However, it also carries the risk of producing a homogeneous sample, where participants may share similar views or institutional perspectives. To address this limitation, I independently contacted artists involved in the *Reframing Picton* project to diversify the sample and include voices that were not directly connected to the museum's internal networks.

4. Data Collection

Data collection for this study involved non-participant observation (February-March 2025), structured interviews, and curated visitor responses. In total, four participants were invited for interviews. The first interview took place on 27th March 2025 at the National Museum Cardiff.

It was initially scheduled as a one-on-one conversation with the Learning Manager to explore the educational workshop developed for the *Reframing Picton* exhibition. On the day, however, the Learning Facilitator, who had been giving me an educational tour beforehand, also joined the interview, which naturally turned it into a group interview. Although this change was unplanned, it gave me the opportunity to gain insights into both institutional planning and practical fieldwork of museum learning at the National Museum Cardiff. The second interview was conducted in person with the Exhibition and Interpretation Manager at the National Museum Cardiff on 6 May 2025. The third interview took place online via Zoom on 22 May 2025 with a member of the Amgueddfa Cymru Producers. A fourth interview was scheduled for 12 June 2025 with Gesiye, one of the commissioned artists for the *Reframing Picton* exhibition, but it did not proceed due to conflicting schedules.

Structured interviews were informed by Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) and Seidman (2019), whose step-by-step guidance helped shape the interview design. This format was shaped by early trial interviews, where I found that using a structured approach helped maintain focus and reduce repetition. It was crucial given my position as a non-native English speaker because language and phrasing could affect both the clarity of my questions and the depth of responses. I was aware that using structured formats could potentially limit participants' responses, so I incorporated open-ended questions to encourage depth, flexibility, and elaboration in participants' answers (Albudaiwi, 2017). This hybrid approach ensured consistency across interviews while still allowing participants to elaborate, clarify, and expand on their perspectives. By encouraging participants to speak in their own terms, I aimed to reduce interpretive bias and foster a more inclusive dialogue, especially when discussing sensitive topics such as race, memory, and colonial legacies.

In addition to interviews and field observations, visitor responses were collected with the assistance of the collections staff at the National Museum Cardiff. They provided curated feedback cards already categorised into two sentiment groups: 36 cards reflected positive responses, while 17 expressed negative or critical views. These responses offered insight into public engagement with the exhibition and were used to complement and contrast institutional perspectives. Together, these data sources provided a layered understanding of how *Reframing Picton* was experienced, interpreted, and contested by both museum professionals and visitors.

5. Ethical Considerations

To maintain the confidentiality of all participants and uphold ethical standards in handling personal data, pseudonymisation was applied immediately after data collection and before analysis began. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym (e.g., Young Producers A, Educator B) to replace any personally identifiable information in the dataset, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Assigned pseudonyms for interview participants.

	Interview Format	Ethnicity, Nationality	Role	Code
Participant 1	In-person (group)	White, British	Learning Manager	LM
Participant 2	In-person (group)	White, British	Learning Facilitator	LF
Participant 3	In-person	White, Germany	Exhibition and Interpretation Manager	EM
Participant 4	Online via Zoom	Black, South African	Amgueddfa Cymru Producer	YP

While complete anonymisation was not feasible due to the need to retain professional context, pseudonymisation allowed me to balance ethical responsibility with analytical depth. Pseudonymisation was therefore applied to safeguard participant privacy while allowing for meaningful interpretation of their roles, such as curatorial decision-making or educational practice, within the institutional setting. This approach was agreed upon by all participants, with the limitations regarding anonymity clearly outlined in the consent form.

This strategy was crucial for interpreting how individual positionalities shaped engagement with the *Reframing Picton* exhibition and its decolonial and anti-racism aims. Among the four participants, three identified as white—two British and one German—and one identified as Black South African. These identities informed their perspectives in distinct ways. One British participant reflected on their discomfort in addressing colonial terminology within museum education, highlighting the challenges of navigating institutional language (in-person interview, LF). In contrast, the German participant openly embraced the discomfort of presenting complex histories, viewing it as a necessary part of ethical curatorship (in-person interview, EM). The South African participant, a member of the Amgueddfa Cymru Producers, actively participates in the anti-racism movement in Wales and brought a critical, community-oriented lens to the conversation (online interview, YP). These varied positionalities enriched the data and highlighted the complex ways in which personal and

professional identities intersect with curatorial practice, which informs my analysis in Chapters 4 to 7.

This research was ethically screened by Radboud University, and a full review by the Ethics Assessment Committee for Humanities was deemed unnecessary. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, with clear information provided about the study's aims, procedures, and use of data. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

6. Reflexivity & Positionality

I acknowledge that my interpretations are situated and subjective, rather than neutral. Rather than striving for neutrality, my perspective as an active participant, as argued by Finlay (2002) and Braun & Clarke (2021; 2023), will enrich the meaning-making. My position as an “outsider” of Welsh cultural identity allowed me to notice implicit norms and assumptions that may be taken for granted by those embedded within the community and institutional settings. Therefore, this perspective helped me to critically engage with how power and representation operate within curatorial practices in the *Reframing Picton* exhibition.

Throughout the analysis, I kept a reflexive journal to record my emotional responses while analysing my research data, as well as to capture my evolving understanding of the method and content in this thesis (Etherington, 2005, pp.127–129). One of the main reasons I maintained a reflexive journal throughout the research process was to navigate the challenges posed by language. As English is not my first language, I am constantly aware of how meaning could shift in translation, particularly during the interview process. This awareness shaped how I engaged with my research data and prompted me to document moments of uncertainty, miscommunication, and my emotional response when they happened.

7. Reflexive Thematic Analysis

This study employed Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2019; 2021), to analyse qualitative interview data. RTA was chosen for its conceptual flexibility and its emphasis on the active role of the researcher in meaning-making. The aim of using this method was to identify patterns of shared meaning across the dataset and interpret how these patterns relate to broader cultural, political, and institutional narratives.

My approach to the data is shaped by a critical realist ontology and a constructivist epistemology, situated within a broader Big Q' qualitative research paradigm (Braun and Clarke, 2013; 2023). I take the position that while colonialism legacies exert real effects in shaping experience in cultural institutions, our knowledge of these structures and experiences is always partial, mediated, and constructed through discourse and positionality. In this context, meaning is not simply discovered in data but actively produced through reflexive and thoughtful engagement with my data. Utilising RTA in this research means that it allows me to interpret the meanings produced in participants' accounts while acknowledging the ways in which my own values, assumptions, and theoretical commitments shape that interpretation.

In the sections that follow, I outline how I applied the six phases of Braun and Clarke's (2006, pp.87–93) Reflexive Thematic Analysis framework in shaping both the development of themes and my evolving understanding of the research context. In this analysis process, coding was approached as a fluid and iterative process, allowing themes to emerge organically through deep engagement with the data. While initial codes were documented and refined throughout the analysis, the emphasis was placed on interpretative depth rather than categorical precision. This approach aligns with the epistemological stance of the research, which prioritises reflexivity, researcher subjectivity, and the evolving nature of meaning-making.

The analysis began with a thorough familiarisation phase, involving immersion in a diverse set of empirical materials, including observation notes, interview transcripts, visitor reviews curated by the National Museum Cardiff collection staff, and the glossary of *Reframing Picton*. Interview transcripts, initially generated using the Revoldiv application, were carefully reviewed for accuracy, then edited and shared with participants for feedback and clarification. Only transcripts that had been verified and approved by participants were used in the analysis to ensure ethical rigour and interpretive validity. Alongside textual data, I used visual tools such as SketchUp and illustration software to transform my fieldwork data into visual diagrams (see Appendix II). These visualisations provided early insights into interpretive design and visitor experience in the museum space.

Following familiarisation, initial coding was conducted using NVivo, where text-based data sources, interview transcripts, visitor reflections, and glossary content were analysed inductively and semantically. This reflexive approach allowed the analysis to remain close to the data's meaning while identifying emerging patterns. Interviews revealed tensions and positionalities, while visitor reviews highlighted emotional responses and critiques of the

exhibition. Recurring themes such as discomfort, safeguarding, and polarisation were tagged to map the complexity of responses across the dataset.

The coding process progressed into constructing candidate themes by grouping related codes to capture overarching patterns across curatorial strategies, visitor responses, and spatial dynamics. Connections were drawn between curatorial tone and visitor interpretation, while spatial context was examined to understand how object placement and display choices shaped the exhibition's narrative. Reflexive notes and spatial diagrams supported this analysis, helping to trace how meanings evolved through repeated engagement with the data. Themes were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence and representativeness across data types, with distinctions made between concepts such as "intervention of the painting" versus "storyline," and "perceived" versus "actual" responses to better reflect the nuances of public engagement.

This iterative process led to the development of four refined themes, which were justified in relation to the research questions and the study's epistemological stance, ensuring alignment with the overall analytical framework. For instance, *Intervention on Picton's Portrait* was refined to *Challenging Symbolic Authority* to emphasise how the portrait's display embodies contested power. Similarly, *Co-curation and Institutional Negotiation* became *Co-curation in Contentious Terrain*, highlighting collaborative activism within a polarised context. These refinements reflect a shift from surface-level description to deeper analytical interpretation, culminating in four final themes that structure the findings chapter: (1) co-curation in contentious terrain, (2) challenging symbolic authority of Picton's portrait, (3) *Reframing Picton* as a site of historical conscience, and (4) navigating historical discomfort in museum learning.

Chapter 4: Co-curation in Contentious Terrain

In this chapter, I will highlight the socio-political tensions that arose during the development of the *Reframing Picton* exhibition, which I refer to here as contentious terrain. The term captures how polarised opinions shaped the projects and further highlights why co-curation was critical in bringing the *Reframing Picton* to life. This chapter explores co-curation not only as a collaborative method but as a situated practice which unfolds within a landscape of historical discomfort, polarised public reactions, and institutional responsibility.

Co-curation in the *Reframing Picton* exhibition involved more than shared authorship; it also entailed strategic navigation of power, memory politics, and emotional labour. In this context, the Amgueddfa Cymru Producers, SSAP, and artists were not merely co-authors of the exhibition. They were also situated within a contested field of representation, where their identities, voices, and safety were significant concerns, especially amid polarised and intense reactions of the public. Therefore, this section aims to show that co-curation practices go beyond being just a tool for inclusion; they also serve as a form of activism, care, and ethical negotiation.

1. Navigating a Politicised Landscape

The creation of the *Reframing Picton* exhibition began during a period of political and cultural upheaval, shaped by the global influence of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. In 2020, this movement gained significant momentum in the UK, particularly in Bristol, where the BLM movement marked the peak of decades of anti-racism campaigns (Bristol M Shed, 2024), and the removal of the Edward Colston statue from Bristol Harbour became the symbolic turning point of the UK's reckoning with its colonial history. This momentum in Bristol triggered a wave of public reflection and created a moral and political imperative for Welsh museums to reconsider who they commemorate in their spaces and why.

This shift, however, did not happen without resistance. As museums in the UK started to actively confront their legacy of imperialism and structural racism in their collections, they faced increasing accusations of participating in a so-called culture war that aims to erase British history (Adams, 2021; Abrams, 2022). This rhetoric was not confined to fringe voices, as it

was also echoed by media outlets and political figures—ultimately contributing to a polarised public discourse. Therefore, Amgueddfa Cymru’s involvement in decolonisation and anti-racism through the *Reframing Picton* project made it a lightning rod for political backlash. One participant confirms this:

At the time, we were very aware of the detractors to anything of... black led, an African community-led. But more to the point, a lot of the detractors would say, “it's woke.” And “it's this woke generation kind of activism,” which is one of the things that we were aware of, just by virtue of the people that were recruited onto the project. (Online interview, YP)

This public reaction highlights a tension between the responsibilities of institutions and audience expectations. In this context, the role of museums in identity construction, as argued by McLean (1998), acts as a double-edged sword. Public dismissal of the *Reframing Picton* exhibition reveals underlying discomfort that arises when the shift in heritage interpretation challenges their perceived collective identity. When the museum addresses Picton’s legacies, which are rooted in colonial violence and racial injustice, it challenges the identity narratives through which many British, or in this context, Welsh, understand themselves and their contributions in British history. Consequently, when this occurs in a politically charged environment, it makes the exhibition inevitably susceptible to misinterpretation, with some members of the public potentially viewing the exhibition as ideological impositions.

Various members of the public directly expressed their criticism with the proposed changes and positioned themselves as defenders of British heritage and tradition. This perspective was especially reinforced by detractors such as the Save Our Statues movement, a loosely organised right-wing group that formed in 2020 in response to the BLM movement and the removal or reinterpretation of contested monuments. One participant reflected on the Save Our Statue reaction to the *Reframing Picton* project.

We certainly heard from the people, you know, particularly the more extreme, Save Our Statues Brigade, that they were not happy with this. And if you are whitewashing — quite a funny term in that context — history and trying to hide history... They hadn't read the point where we said, we're not just removing this, but we're going to re-display it. (In-person interview, EM)

The intense reactions expressed by some community members could be understood as a reaction to identity rupture. This can be understood through the lens of *white melancholia*, a defensive emotional response to the perceived loss of cultural dominance (Little, 2016, pp.91–93). In the context of the *Reframing Picton* exhibition, the museum challenges the long-standing symbolic order that museums uphold, and thus, white melancholia manifests as defensive reactions to this decolonial and inclusive curatorial approach. This discomfort is also evident in visitor comments like “Learn from history, don't destroy it!” or "Disrespectful and wrong," expressing a mournful attachment to a version of national identity that is being reshaped through ethical collaboration and historical accountability.

This dynamic also aligns with Sandel's (2007) identification of prejudice in museums, which underscores the vulnerability of cultural institutions in politically sensitive contexts. In the *Reframing Picton* exhibition, this cultural counteraction reveals the underlying structures that influence critical engagement. This once again highlights the importance of those who have the authority to narrate the nation's history and whose memories are recognised. Co-curation serves as a disruptive intervention that challenges the British dominance over the public memory of Picton's legacy. It transforms the museum into a space of ethical engagement where the shared identity is negotiated, and the discomfort it causes symbolises the beginning of a more inclusive and reflective engagement with the legacy of Thomas Picton in Welsh history.

2. Museum Practice in a Digitally Volatile Environment

In 2020, the museum's decision to temporarily remove the portrait of Thomas Picton sparked significant controversy on social media. One participant reflected on the intensity of the public reaction, “When we announced, ‘we were going to take the portrait down,’ we had a whole big press *hoo-ha*, we had a lot of social media [debate] around it” (in-person interview, EM). One of the most prominent critiques came from former BBC broadcaster Huw Edwards, who publicly condemned the museum's decision as an attempt to censor British history (Brown, 2021; Nation.Cymru, 2021; Turner, 2021; Jones, 2021). His opinion, which he shared on his social media account, Twitter (now known as ‘X’), widely circulated across social media and was covered by national outlets.

Edwards' critics on his social media account sparked the digital memory debates over Picton's legacy. The emphasis on historical censorship to frame the museum's decision as an

attempt to sanitise the past resonated widely across digital platforms. Based on my observation, this discourse was not limited to elite voices; a number of general users also expressed similar views regarding the museum's attempts to move the painting and confront Picton's legacy in what became known as the *Reframing Picton* exhibition. Although many of these tweets are no longer available, some traces of the conversations can still be observed, illustrating their contribution to the digital discussion about the project.

There were also examples where critical remarks appeared in the comment sections of the museum's main communication channel. For instance, on the Amgueddfa Cymru YouTube channel, particularly under the video titled *Thomas Picton gan Ameer Rana Davies*, released in November 2020, several users expressed strong disagreement and made racially discriminatory threats that lacked civility and nuance. These examples support the argument made in the first sub-section, where individuals feel a sense of grievance and discomfort when their longstanding understanding of their historical identity is challenged.

One participant highlighted an interesting observation regarding the difference between digital responses and actual physical engagement within the museum setting.

[The] gallery wasn't even open to the public pre-pandemic because of various building works going on. So, you know, a lot of people who would never have actually bothered to come and see the portrait got very hot under the collar for this. But, that's the way it goes. Particularly with social media liking to do that. (In-person interview, EM)

In this digitally mediated context, Picton's portrait becomes less a physical object and more a symbolic space for ideological contestation, showing that the idea of a museum as a contact zone (Clifford, 1997, pp.192–193) could nowadays transcend beyond physical space into digitally shared realms. The discrepancy shown in the participant's remark indicates that any criticisms and initial reactions to the *Reframing Picton* project are not necessarily grounded in direct engagement with the artwork, but rather in a broader account of nationalism, identity, and historical belonging. Consequently, individuals may feel compelled to defend Picton's legacy, even when their understanding of the object is mediated entirely through digital representations and second-hand commentary.

Although this social media debate does not necessarily reflect public opinion in general, it remains significant as an example of how digital interactions could foster real-time

negotiation of meaning and actively contribute to the construction of historical consciousness. This finding supports Birkner and Donk's (2020) study, which suggests a broader pattern where digital platforms could empower public resistance to institutional efforts. In this context, the museum's curatorial decisions became flashpoints for public anxiety over cultural loss and historical revisionism. Therefore, digitally mediated debates could amplify opposing voices, such as those who oppose the museum's efforts on Picton's portrait, and their objections to what they perceive as historical censorship.

The disappearance of these digital critics also reveals the transient nature of digital discourse. Unlike traditional media like print, social media dialogue is fluid but fragile; its participatory nature makes it susceptible to deletion, moderation, or algorithmic suppression. While it can amplify alternative voices and create positive impacts, it can also, in the worst cases, exacerbate dissent and reduce complex historical negotiations to binary oppositions—revealing how volatile the digital environment can be for museum practice. Particularly in the *Reframing Picton* project, where both young collaborators (aged 18-25) and community members are involved, the sensitive nature of the subject made safeguarding measures essential and urgent to maintain ethical standards and foster constructive dialogue in a digitally driven society.

3. Safeguarding Measures and Ethical Collaboration

As indicated earlier, there was an urgent need to implement safeguarding measures to protect all the collaborators involved in the *Reframing Picton* exhibition, particularly due to the genuine threats that emerged from social media. One participant recounted an incident where a young contributor was directly approached by detractors (online interview, YP), illustrating how risks can extend beyond digital spaces and highlighting the vulnerability of these collaborators to threats from opposing voices. The Museums Association's Code of Ethics (2016) further reinforces the responsibility of Amgueddfa Cymru to provide safe boundaries for their young collaborators to express their ideas without any discrimination. Therefore, the museum implemented four key safeguarding strategies: anonymising Amgueddfa Cymru Producers, developing a social media strategy, providing support contacts, and establishing visitor feedback mechanisms.

One of the most significant measures taken by the museum was the decision to anonymise the names of young producers in promotional materials to minimise the risk of

further potential harm, given the physical contact that had already taken place. It was a strategic necessity since there were fewer than seven individuals involved in the project (online interview, YP), making it relatively easy for detractors to identify each of them. By withholding personally identifiable information, the museum lessened the risk of targeted harassment, especially at the beginning of the project in 2020, when the decision to remove the portrait sparked social media dissent.

This measure not only acknowledges the potential for emotional and psychological harm that can stem from digital scrutiny, but it also grants participants a level of agency regarding their involvement in the project without fear of exposure or harm. This protective measure was implemented during the early development of the *Reframing Picton* exhibition from 2020 to 2022 and stayed in place until the first month of the exhibition, allowing time for intense reactions to subside (online interview, YP).

Another vital component of the safeguarding measures is the availability of emotional support contacts for the young producers. Emotional support is necessary to create a safe space, especially when they engage with distressing materials, such as Picton's trial on the torture of Luisa Calderón.

We had a couple of people from the museum whose specific job was just to mediate for us... if and when we felt uncomfortable about something, so that we can talk to them... There was a lot of like just really ugly stuff that we found... and ultimately, it was just about having somebody that you can talk to who knows the struggle. So, it's not that you have to explain the thing before you explain why it's traumatic. You could just explain the trauma. (Online interview, YP)

This practice aligns with trauma-informed principles (Amstrong, 2023), where the museum considers emotional safety and creates the conditions for them to process and regulate their emotional responses to distressing findings. By doing so, the museum enables young producers to engage with the research material in a safe manner and to navigate discomfort throughout the project without being retraumatised by the findings.

The third aspect of the museum's safeguarding strategy was its intentional approach to social media engagement. This aligns with ethical principles of editorial integrity and inclusive engagement (Museums Association, 2016). By centralising digital discussion through the

museum's official channel and restricting the visibility of young producers and community members involved in the project, critics could only interact with the institution itself rather than with individual collaborators. This strategy shows how digital ethics and safeguarding should work hand-in-hand to foster ethical collaborations while ensuring transparency and dialogue with the public.



Figure 3. A small reflection box for visitors is positioned to the left of Picton's portrait.

The final aspect of the safeguarding strategy is installing a post box instead of a traditional visitor book. This system allows visitors to reflect privately and leave feedback without the pressure of public exposure, encouraging deeper engagement while maintaining anonymity. By promoting private reflection, the museum fosters meaningful dialogue while sidestepping the potential anxiety associated with open criticism in a public forum.

This practice marks a significant departure from conventional visitor engagement strategies that often prioritise feedback in overtly public formats, which can be daunting for both artists and audience members. The concept of viewing feedback as a more personal, introspective experience aligns with modern movements toward psychological safety in environments where vulnerable topics are discussed, allowing for richer, more constructive engagement.

4. Implications

The safeguarding measures in the *Reframing Picton* exhibition, as outlined above, reflect a significant shift in how cultural institutions ethically engage in co-curation. In this example, the museum is no longer a passive provider; instead, it has become an active collaborator in encouraging the agency of its co-curators as well as a caregiver in ensuring well-being throughout the project. Therefore, this institutional repositioning definitely has a tangible effect on the public perception of the exhibition. The *Reframing Picton* exhibition received constructive coverage from mainstream Welsh and British media, such as the UK Museum Association (2022), BBC (2022), and the Guardian (2022), and the anticipated controversy largely dissipated. As one participant noted:

Funnily enough, once we opened the exhibition... far less controversy. It really died down. None of our front of house reported anybody being, you know, argumentative about it. We actually have front of house saying, 'oh, you know, we could put a visitor book in there.' They didn't realise we already had a respond area anyway. (In-person interview, EM)

Museums play a vital role as facilitators of critical dialogue. Therefore, their influence goes beyond physical spaces across the digital landscapes, where public memory is actively negotiated. Building on the principle of participatory museum (Simon, 2010), museums today must also acknowledge the emotional labour associated with the volatile nature of social media, in addition to the historical weights involved in the research process. In *Reframing Picton*, safeguarding became a key element in ensuring a safe and inclusive engagement. The four safeguarding principles were actively integrated into trauma-informed practices (Amstrong, 2023). By prioritising care and empathy, museums not only protect their collaborators but also evolve into spaces where contested histories are confronted with sensitivity. Ultimately, this shift enables all voices to be heard with dignity, transforming museums into dynamic platforms for social reflection and understanding.

Chapter 5: Challenging the Symbolic Authority of Picton's Portrait

Building on the findings in the previous chapter, this chapter examines the process of questioning and disrupting the power embedded in Sir Martin Archer SHEE's portrait of Thomas Picton, through its visual and spatial presentation. In the following sections, I explore how both Amgueddfa Cymru and the National Museum Cardiff challenged the traditional valorisation of Picton by physically repositioning his portrait and reframing his historical narrative. This intervention illustrates how curatorial choices can contest institutionalised forms of reverence and respond to broader anti-racist and decolonial critiques.

1. Contested History and the Limits of Institutional Practice

In the previous chapter, I discussed how the removal of Thomas Picton's portrait took place amid a highly politicised environment, where the museum became a battleground for public debates and historical reflection. Following the 2020 global Black Lives Matter protests, the removal of Edward Colston's statue in Bristol became a symbol of a wider sociopolitical demand to address the longstanding neglect of British colonial violence, as embodied by many historical figures in Britain. In Wales, there were parallel debates about Thomas Picton, who remains, to some degree, commemorated for his part in the Battle of Waterloo despite his brutal governorship in Trinidad.

There was a real understanding because the research, like with Colston, there had always been people who said, look, Picton is not actually a role model we should be celebrating just, you know, so naively, I would say. (In-person interview, EM) Picton's symbolic presence, which has actively influenced Welsh collective memory, further emphasises the need for Welsh public bodies to reconsider how Picton is represented in their spaces. One of the most notable actions was the decision to remove Picton's statue from Cardiff City Hall (BBC, 2020b), which also took place in 2020. One participant reflected on the broader visibility of Thomas Picton's legacy:

In Wales, there was an audit by the Welsh government... which is how Picton was originally flagged up because he's got streets and whatever else named after him... But other places haven't done this... There was one time I was in Canada. Walking around Niagara... and I

went to the British quarter... And there was a Picton Street. That's how Picton's name could be retained in people's memory, because everybody who's on Picton Street, to them it's just like another name of a street. But to me, because I know the history of who he is. It's memorialising a person who doesn't deserve it. (Online interview, YP)

This reflection emphasises the lasting symbolic presence of Picton in public memory and how historical legacies endure in everyday surroundings. The quote demonstrates how symbolic presence, from street names to paintings, can foster reverence for Picton, whose legacies are marred by violence and oppression. Therefore, in the absence of essential context, such commemorations may obscure colonial crimes and silence the voices of those impacted. The participant's personal discomfort mirrors a wider public discomfort with the authority of cultural institutions used to shape and uphold a specific historical narrative about colonial figures like Picton, without fully recognising the extent of their actions on communities affected by colonialism and enslavement.

While this decision by Cardiff City Council, for example, signals a significant shift in public commemoration practice of Picton, it also exposes the complexities and limitations involved in challenging the representation of historical figures in cultural institutions. Currently the statue remains boxed and is awaiting further conservation plans required for its removal (BBC, 2020a; Seabrook, 2021). This delay reflects the persistence of institutional power structures that shape historical consciousness, where certain authoritative bodies hold significant power to determine how things should be done.

Laurajane Smith's (2006) The concept of the Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) helps explain why the intervention of public commemorations of contested historical figures cannot be done swiftly, or even could be so difficult to achieve, since it poses a direct challenge to institutional authority. Museums and heritage bodies often display what Edwards (2018) describes as a form of *aphasia*, the inability to articulate uncomfortable histories within their collections, because when museums choose to intervene in their collections, they are not simply making logistical changes. They are also engaging in a fundamental rethinking of whose histories are told, how they are interpreted, and who has the authority to speak about the past (Smith, 2006, pp.44–45).

In the case of the *Reframing Picton* exhibition, the commitment to readdress structural authority has been evident from the outset. Rather than acting in isolation, the museum

engaged in collective, deliberative processes with Amgueddfa Cymru Produces, who served as the curators of the project (in-person interview, EM). One participant reflected:

I say, this was not happening in a vacuum. We were keeping track of all the other movements... the closest one to us was Bristol, with Edward Colston... they fished it (re: the statue) out of the Bristol channel, and they weren't going to put it back up on the plinth. So, it was like, "What are you going to do then?" And so, we were keeping track of that, and the way that that developed, because this was all quite groundbreaking stuff... We keeping track of what the possibilities are of what we could do with this painting. (Online interview, YP)

As Crellin and Kirkpatrick (2022) highlight, the Colston case has become a key reference point for alternative strategies to address colonial monuments. The *Reframing Picton* project illustrates that decolonial practice can benefit from collaborative learning across institutions (Museum Association, 2021). Consequently, *Reframing Picton* emerged as a negotiated intervention and act of ethical defiance, where the museum challenges the dominant, one-sided national narrative of Picton and creates space for a more inclusive and accountable historical narrative.

To grasp the significance of the intervention in promoting historical consciousness, it is essential to critically assess the symbolic power embedded in Picton's portrait. As a cultural artefact, the painting plays a role in sustaining the historical narrative surrounding Thomas Picton. Its visual prominence and placement within a museum context confer a symbolic authority that can simultaneously uphold and interrogate dominant societal values. By examining these aspects, I can explore how such artwork functions beyond its aesthetic dimensions, serving as an active mediator in collective memory and history, as well as in the negotiation of institutional power.

2. Symbolic Authority of the Portrait

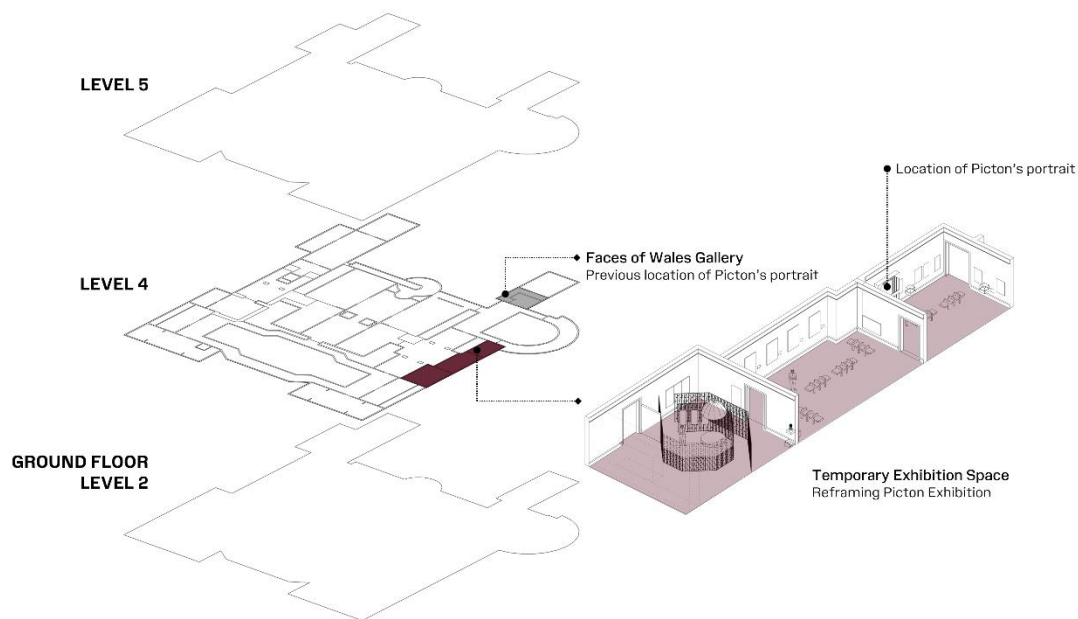


Figure 4. Location of Picton's portrait before (left) and during the Reframing Picton Exhibition (right); for a full-sized version, see Appendix II.

The original placement of Thomas Picton's portrait before the *Reframing Picton* exhibition in the *Faces of Wales* gallery is central to understanding the symbolic authority it holds within the museum. This gallery—temporarily closed for building work—has traditionally showcased artworks of prominent Welsh figures, such as Katheryn of Berain (van Cronenburgh, 1568), the granddaughter of an illegitimate son of Henry VII, who was also known as the 'The Mother of Wales' for her extensive lineage and cultural significance in North Wales, and Thomas Williams (Lawrence, 1792), a leading figure in the early Industrial Revolution and MP for Great Marlow in 1790. This gallery is presented as a celebration of individuals who have influenced Welsh identity through their roles in politics, theatre, sports, and literature. Therefore, being featured in this gallery is symbolically regarded as a mark of cultural pride and historical significance.

In this context, the display of Thomas Picton's portrait within the same gallery implicitly positioned Picton as a celebrated national figure. His portrait, painted in 1812 by Sir Martin Archer Shee, was first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1816 and later donated to Amgueddfa Cymru in 1907 by the Earl of Plymouth (Myrone, 2018; Scheer, 2022; Amgueddfa Cymru, n.d.). This detail is especially significant because the donation from a member of the British aristocracy signifies the support from cultural elites and institutional endorsement of

Picton's status as a military hero. Furthermore, one participant noted that the old display featured a caption simply reading "Waterloo Hero" (in-person interview, EM), which further suggests that his image was not only accepted but also actively valued by those with the power to influence public memory through cultural institutions.

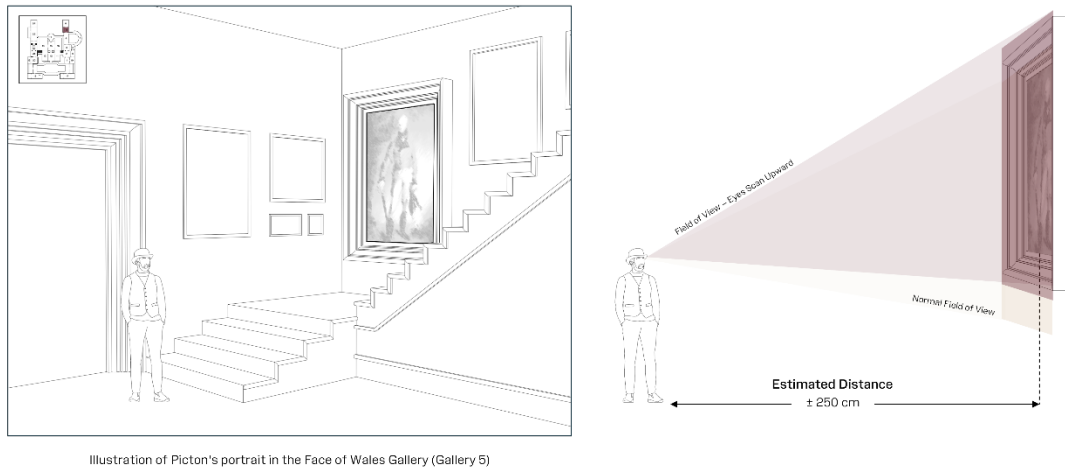


Figure 5. Illustration of the placement of Picton's portrait in *The Face of Wales Gallery*; for a full-sized version, see Appendix II.

As illustrated in Figure 6, the placement of Thomas Picton's portrait within the *Faces of Wales* gallery also significantly contributed to how visitors engaged with the artwork and interpreted its meaning. Previously positioned above a grand staircase, the portrait occupied a visually dominant location that required visitors to tilt their heads upward to view it. This elevated placement not only made the painting physically prominent but also encouraged a sense of reverence and admiration. One participant described this experience as commemorative (in-person interview, EM), suggesting that the spatial positioning itself contributed to the construction of Picton's heroic image.

This curatorial implication reflects what Kratz (2011) describes as the rhetoric of value in museum exhibition design. Kratz (2011, p.25) argues that spatial arrangement, object placement, and accompanying text all contribute to communicating implicit messages about cultural worth and significance. In the case of Picton's portrait, its imposing size and elevated position above eye level functioned as symbolic gestures that framed him as a figure to be admired and respected. In this placement, visitors were required to look up to the portrait, often from the bottom of the staircase, creating a physical posture of reverence. Later, the brief

caption identifying him as a hero strengthened this glorification, steering visitors toward a specific view of his legacy and leaving little space for critical reflection on his colonial history.

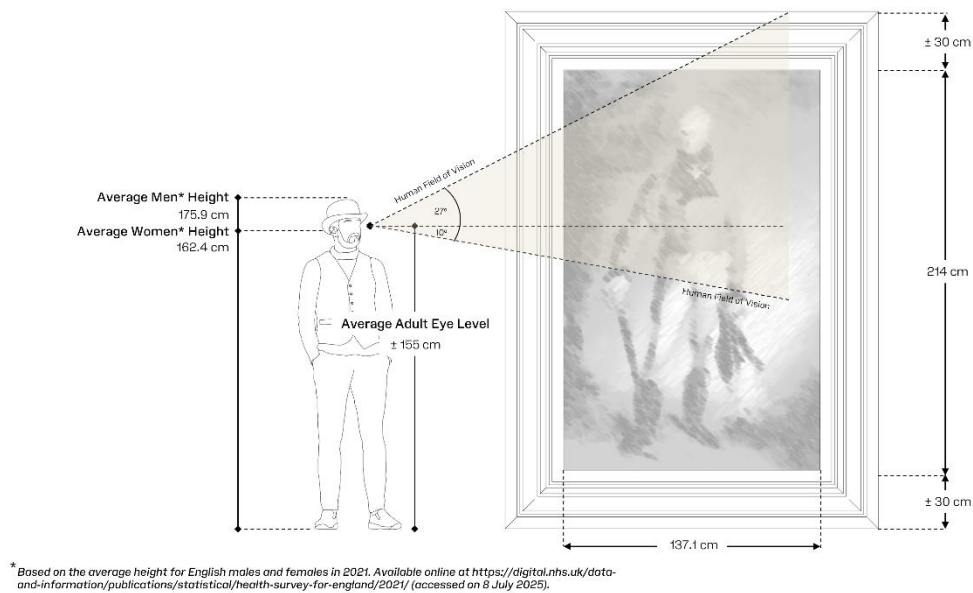


Figure 6. Scale of the individual compared to the painting, demonstrating how size could assert an implicit meaning of admiration; for a full-sized version, see Appendix II.

The framing of Picton's portrait within the *Face of Wales* Gallery demonstrates how conventional curatorial practice can serve as a powerful tool in shaping collective memory. The visual storytelling and prominent positioning reinforced a hero-centric narrative, while simultaneously obscuring the violence inherent in his imperial legacy. With the emergence of the 2020 anti-racism movement, showing his portrait in a national icons gallery became more problematic, as it endorsed a version of history that disregards colonial violence and silences alternative perspectives.

The removal of the portrait as part of the *Reframing Picton* project was therefore a necessary intervention. It signified a shift away from passive commemoration towards active engagement with the problematic aspects of Picton's legacy. By taking the painting down, the museum demonstrates its willingness to re-evaluate its institutional authority and curatorial practices in shaping public memory, which could create space for more inclusive, accountable forms of historical narration.

3. Reframing Picton's Legacy

In light of the recontextualization of Edward Colston's statue in Bristol's M-Shed Museum (Bristol M Shed, 2024), Amgueddfa Cymru and its Young Producers engaged in a negotiation process to determine the best way to challenge the symbolic power of Picton's portrait. This process reveals how participatory processes can empower individuals to interrogate historical representation and imagine alternatives, as reflected by one participant:

Once we started knowing what we wanted, we started asking a lot of questions about the possibilities... I remember one of the suggestions which was quite radical, was to put the painting in the floor by excavating the floor. So that's actually level with the rest of the ground, so that people are then walking over it, over, like, you know, solid piece of glass and stuff like that. (Online interview, YP)

The proposal to embed Picton's portrait beneath the gallery floor arose from an inquisitive examination of how Picton should be remembered. This kind of radical vision serves as a clear example of what Simon (2010b) refers to as the co-construction of meaning in participatory practice. By imagining a scenario in which visitors could walk over Picton's image, the Young Producers sought to disrupt the visual and spatial hierarchies that had historically elevated him as a national hero. The idea was not only a challenge to the reverence traditionally associated with portraiture but also served as a powerful symbolic gesture that subverted institutional authority, particularly in silencing the narrative of colonial violence, and encouraged a more critical engagement with Picton's contested legacy.

Ultimately, the team chose a practical yet meaningful approach by displaying the painting in a museum transit frame (in-person interview, EM), as shown below. This strategy enabled the museum to physically lower the portrait without any technical modifications to the building. By keeping the frame visible, the symbolic authority of the painting was disrupted, and Picton was no longer positioned as a celebrated figure but as a contested historical subject.



Figure 7. Picton's portrait was placed in the wooden box at the *Reframing Picton* exhibition. (Source: Amgueddfa Cymru, 2022b)

The visitors' responses to this intervention on Picton's portrait offer a compelling lens through which to examine the ongoing ideological tensions since 2020. As discussed in the previous chapter, when museums confront colonial violence and decentre figures like Picton, they inevitably disrupt dominant historical narratives. With the exhibition allowing visitors to engage with the material culture, the exhibition invited reflection but also provoked discomfort and resistance. For instance, comments such as "Shame to see Picton behind a crate!" and "It looks like you are trying to cover up his penis by hiding with that strip of wood. You are in fact drawing the eye to it and nothing else," suggest that some visitors viewed the curatorial decision as an ideological imposition on national pride. As a result, the exhibition acted as a space for negotiation, where public memory, emotional responses, and ideological perspectives collectively influence the construction of the historical consciousness of Picton's legacy.

Building on the exhibition's role as a site of historical consciousness, the following section explores how the *Reframing Picton* exhibition invited visitors to confront the legacies of Picton's colonial violence through a deliberately layered and critically reframed narrative. Central to this idea was the curatorial choice to display the portrait alongside two artworks by Trinidadian and Trinidadian-British artists, whose works highlight the voices and experiences of those historically silenced in Trinidad. This juxtaposition offers a rich ground for examining how museums can facilitate ethical engagement with the contested legacy of colonialism.

Chapter 6: The *Reframing Picton* as a Site of Historical Conscience

This chapter examines how the *Reframing Picton* exhibition critically engaged with the contested past of Thomas Picton, which moved beyond mere symbolic and textual reinterpretation. The exhibition employed spatial storytelling to transform the space into a site of ethical engagement, where the colonial legacies of Picton were critically questioned through a deliberate arrangement of artworks, portraits, and archival materials. The exhibition encouraged visitors to explore a layered historical narrative where Picton was repositioned as a figure rooted in a violent colonial past through the point of view of those historically silenced in Trinidad and Tobago.

1. Decentring the Narrative of Thomas Picton

The *Reframing Picton* exhibition challenged the heroic portrayal of Thomas Picton by situating his portrait in direct dialogue with material culture that illuminated the contested dimensions of Picton's legacy. The portrait—formerly a symbol of imperial pride—was deliberately placed within a wooden travel box as a means of destabilising its visual presence and historical authority.

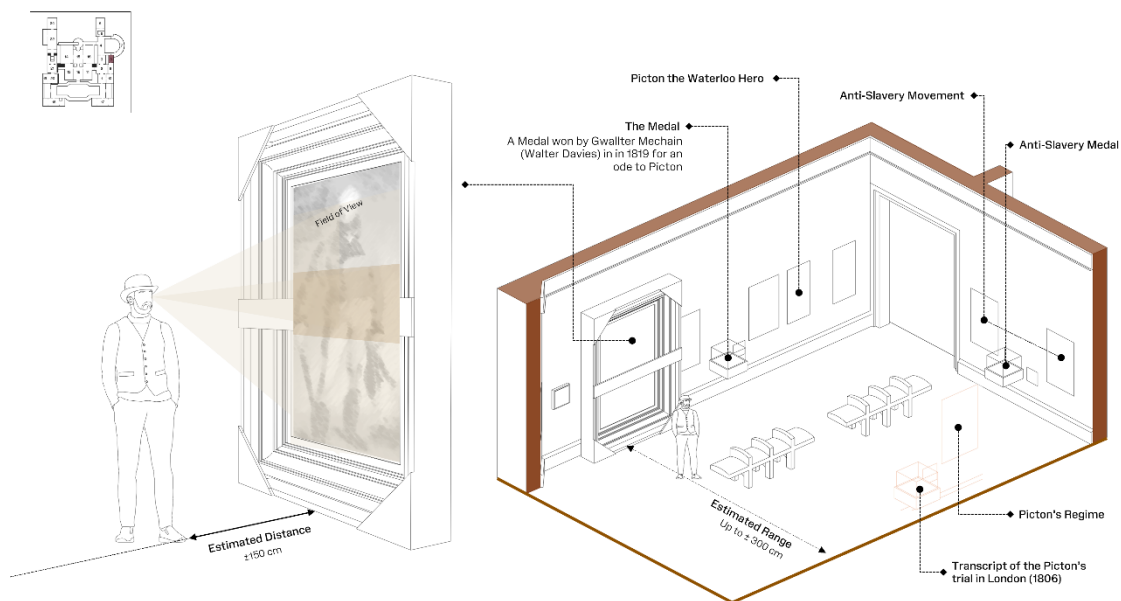


Figure 8. Object placement in the Picton Legacy section of the *Reframing Picton* exhibition; for a full-sized version, see Appendix II.

Upon entering the room, as depicted in Figure 9, visitors are immediately confronted with the dual facets of Picton's legacy. On one side, there is the commanding presence of Picton's portrait, reflecting how he has traditionally been remembered as a Waterloo hero and a celebrated figure in Welsh cultural memory. Adjacent to the portrait is the 1819 Eisteddfod medal awarded to Gwallter Mechain (Walter Davies) for a prize-winning elegy to commemorate Thomas Picton, which further emphasises the prominence of Picton's legacy within the national narrative.

On the opposite side, near these commemorative artefacts, are items that reveal the contested aspect of Picton's legacy. These include the 1806 trial transcript, which records his conviction for authorising the torture of Luisa Calderón, along with evidence of Britain's imperialism in Trinidad and involvement in transatlantic enslavement. This spatial dialogue invites visitors to reckon with the layered nature of historical memory. As one participant put it, "He (re: Picton) cannot solitarily be remembered as a war hero, while he's also guilty of these acts" (Online interview, YP). Therefore, by confronting visitors with this curated tension, *Reframing Picton* does not offer a simple resolution. Instead, it prompted a critical reflection on how material culture can both celebrate historical figures and simultaneously contribute to the silencing of layers of harm and injustice that are often omitted from public memory.

2. Artwork as a Medium of Reconciliation and Healing

The decision to commission two artworks from Trinidadian artists arose as a necessary response to an ethical and narrative gap within the museum's collection. The museum recognised the visual and representational imbalance that exists in Picton's colonial legacy, where the voices and experiences of those harmed by his colonial violence are absent (in-person interview, EM). Therefore, the commissions were not simply about representation but also served as a negotiation of the museum's institutional authority in presenting the history of Picton's colonial governance in Trinidad.

This decision reflects a shift towards shared authorship in the museum space, where the museum recognised that it cannot represent the complete story of Picton. The full story of Picton would lack relevance without the perspectives of those connected to Trinidad and those

directly impacted by his actions. The quote from one participant, “we were not artists... we definitely need artists... somebody who had a palpable connection to Trinidad” (online interview, YP), further emphasises the importance of lived experience and cultural intimacy in storytelling. It allowed the museum to move beyond conventional museological production and into the realm of interpretive collaboration, where meaning is co-created through interpersonal dialogue across cultural boundaries (Schorch, 2015). In this context, the artists were seen not just as content providers but as interpreters and mediators of meanings that the museum alone would never be able to generate.

2.1. *Spirited* by Laku Neg

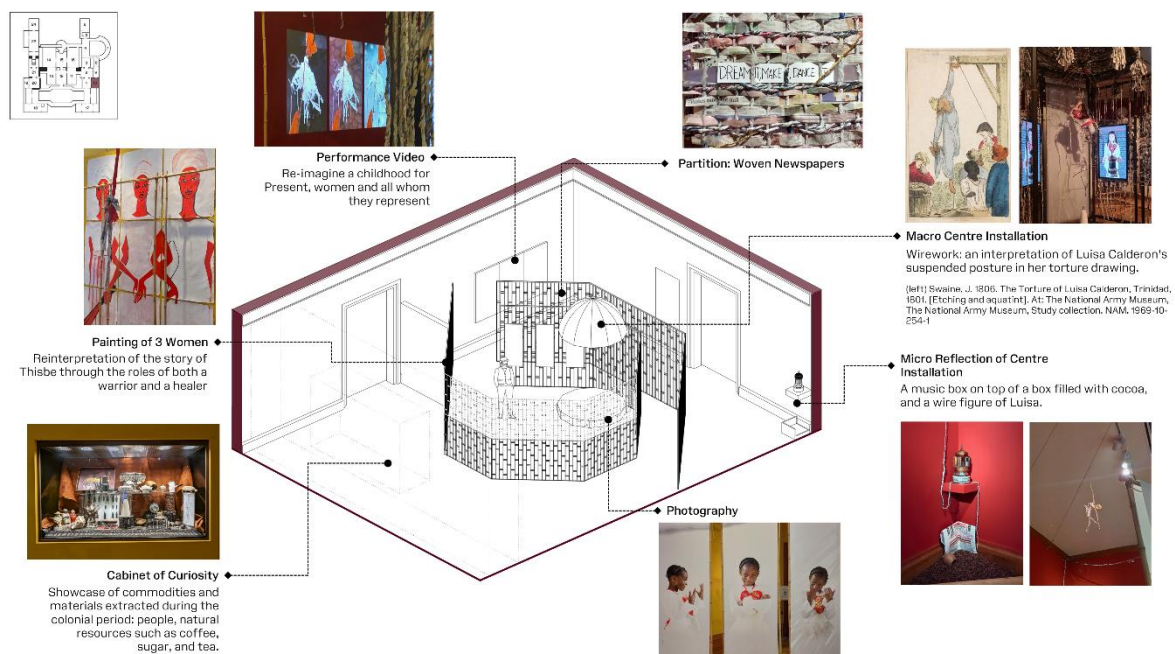


Figure 9. Illustration of object displays an element of the artwork 'Spirited' by Laku Neg; for a full-sized version, see Appendix II.

Spirited by Laku Neg stands out as a deeply layered installation that engages with the material, symbolic, and emotional dimensions of historical reckoning. Drawing from the Ol' Mas' traditions of Trinidad and Tobago Carnival (Laku Neg, 2022), the work incorporates metal sculpture, bamboo frames, twisted paper, found objects, and audiovisual elements to create a tactile and multisensory environment. These elements collectively shaped the gallery space into a ritualised space of resistance and remembrance.

At the heart of this artwork lies the performative reimagining of documented stories about three named victims of Picton’s colonial violence in Trinidad: Luisa Calderón, Thisbe, and Present. The artwork resists the colonial flattening of their identities into archetypes by foregrounding their agency, suffering, and acts of resistance. Present—a young, enslaved girl executed for attempting to escape with a black soldier (Laku Neg, 2022; Epstein and Palmer, 2025)—is remembered through speculative imagery that reimagined the childhood violently taken from her.

Thisbe was another victim of Picton’s colonial governance, who was accused of sorcery and subjected to an inhumane execution (Epstein, 2007; Laku Neg, 2022; Epstein and Palmer, 2025). Yet her story revealed more about the oppression of Caribbean spiritual practices during British occupation. As described by Epstein and Palmer (2025, p.163), Thisbe served as a hospital nurse on the estate of a prominent Trinidadian planter. Therefore, her role as a medic linked her to the African-derived spiritual practices, which British colonial authorities broadly categorised as *obeah*. This term encompassed a wide range of spiritual, healing, and protective practices that were highly criminalised due to their perceived threat to imperial order (Paton, 2015). Her condemnation as a sorceress and execution by burning exemplify how colonial fear of spiritual resistance intersected with gendered violence. In the exhibition, Thisbe is remembered through the performative elements, which honour her defiance and reclaim her narrative as both warrior and healer (Laku Neg, 2022). The painting of three women, as shown in Figures 10 and 11, evoked the suppressed histories of obeah and honoured its role as a source of cultural survival and spiritual resilience.



Figure 10. Artworks represent the story of Thisbe (left) and Luisa Calderon (right) in the ‘Spirited’ by Laku Neg (Source: Amgueddfa Cymru, 2022)

Lastly, as the centrepiece, is the wirework of the reinterpretation of the story of Luisa Calderón (see Figure 11). Luisa was subjected to a brutal form of torture known as picketing under the orders of Governor Thomas Picton. Her status as a free person of colour highlights the racialised logic of the British colonial justice, where her freedom did not guarantee protection against unjust violence and exploitation by the colonial elite (Epstein, 2007; Candlin, 2012). Even during the trial, Luisa continued to suffer from racialised and gendered framing. The archival illustrations of her punishment, shown in Figure 2, aestheticised her pain through a voyeuristic gaze, which, as Sontag (2003, p.64) argues, tend to bleach out the moral response to the injustice of her punishment. The sexualised and racialised gaze embedded in such illustrations (Epstein, 2007, pp.731–733) perpetuates her objectification and transforms a scene of illegal torture into an object of visual consumption. Therefore, in *Spirited*, Laku Neg rejected this colonial gaze and reclaimed Luisa’s agency as a figure of grace and resistance. Her suspended posture, as depicted in archival drawings, is interpreted as a dance gesture. This transformation resists the static consumption of pain and activates the artwork as a site of ethical engagement. Luisa’s presence in the exhibition through wireworks thus functions as a living memory of Luisa’s agency and the enduring spirit of those who have fought, survived, and spoken up through the silences in history.

2.2. The Wound is A Portal by Gesiye

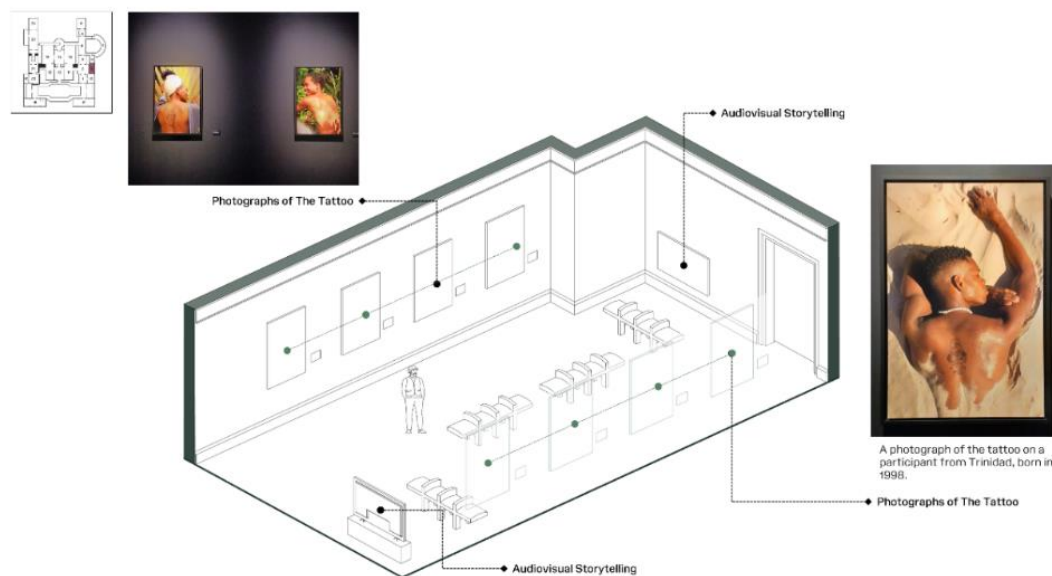


Figure 11. Illustration of object displays an element of the artwork 'The Wound is A Portal' by Gesiye; for a full-sized version, see Appendix II.

In contrast to *Spirited*, *The Wound is A Portal* by Gesiye offers a subtle and introspective interpretation of colonial trauma. This artwork comprises a series of photographic portraits, a short film, and an animation of tattoos on eight Black Trinidadians aged 20 to 78. Each participant received a tattoo that shared a common visual language inspired by Trinidad's landscape and architectural elements, yet each design remained unique to the individual. Every individual tattoo tells a story, and when it is animated, it forms a stop-motion effect that visually symbolises the cyclical nature of healing. Although the installation does not directly address Picton, it evokes the emotional and intergenerational wound left by colonialism in Trinidad. Gesiye (2022) describes the tattooing process as a ritual to open a portal, bringing body and memory into the present and reclaiming agency on collective identity.



Figure 12. Display of photographs in *The Wound is A Portal* (Source: Amgueddfa Cymru, 2022)

The artwork had a profound personal impact. Its spatial design, which situates visitors in a darkened room, fosters a reflective atmosphere and enables engagement in a form of cross-cultural dialogue grounded in shared emotional experience. While the artwork speaks to the trauma of colonialism in Trinidad, it also resonated with my own reflections on Indonesia's colonial past. This resonance did not arise from identical histories, but from the recognition that colonial trauma, while experienced differently across the world, leaves similar emotional and generational imprints. This emotional resonance enabled me to participate uniquely in the dialogue the artwork created, allowing me to contribute personal reflections and experiences to its meaning. In this way, the artwork becomes a contact zone, where cross-cultural understanding is fostered not through similarities but through shared vulnerability and the recognition of historical discomfort.

3. Narrative Framing and Storyline of *Reframing Picton*

The narrative structure of the *Reframing Picton* exhibition was carefully designed to guide visitors through a process of historical re-evaluation. Having discussed each artwork individually, this section brings them together to demonstrate how they were spatially and thematically arranged within the exhibition. The exhibition was structured across three rooms, each dedicated to a specific artwork and curatorial focus, forming a narrative sequence that guided visitors through interconnected themes of resistance, healing, and historical reckoning. The illustration below shows the sequence of how these rooms are assigned. The first room (Gallery 10) featured *Spirited* by Laku Neg, the second room (Gallery 9) was a house for *The Wound is a Portal* by Gesiye, and the third room (Gallery 8) was titled *Picton's Legacy*, where the portrait of Picton in the wooden travel crate was placed.

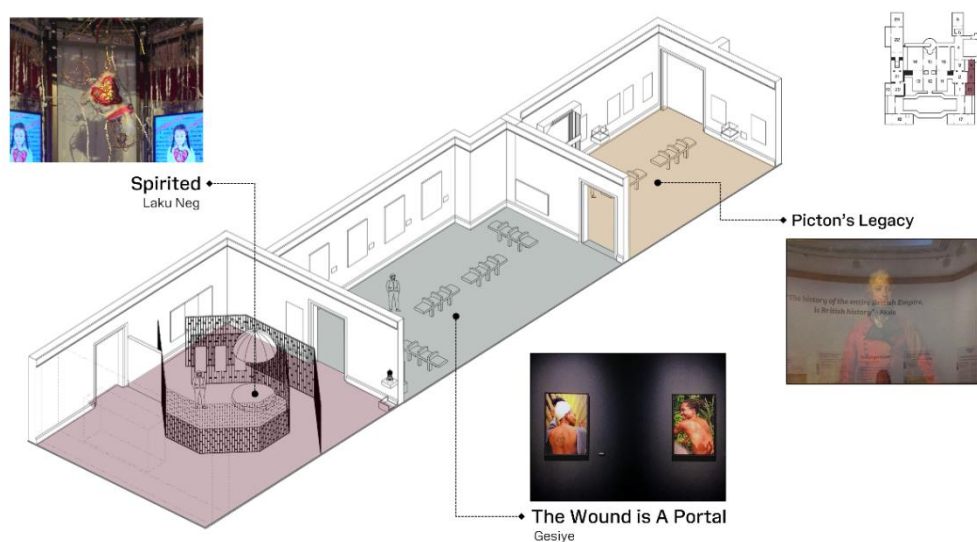


Figure 13. Illustration of the layout for the *Reframing Picton* exhibition; for a full-sized version, see Appendix II.

This spatial design facilitated multiple narrative flows by allowing visitors to enter the exhibition from different sides and experience the storyline in various sequences. Most general visitors entered through *Spirited* and began their experience with a reflection on colonialism and enslavement in Trinidad and Tobago. They then proceeded to *The Wound is a Portal*, where they were invited to engage more introspectively with the legacy of colonialism, before ultimately confronting the portrait of Picton in the last room.

In contrast to the general visitor experience, participants in the learning workshop followed a different route. Rather than beginning with the immersive installations, they started the session by engaging with historic portraits, specifically in Gallery 4, where they had an introduction to the topic of British colonialism and enslavement. During the workshops, facilitators used the portrait to initiate critical dialogue on how history is constructed and whose perspectives are represented (in-person interview, LF). The session then concluded in *The Wound is a Portal*, which allowed participants to process and reflect on their learning experience. The learning workshop usually ended in this room due to spatial limitations in *Spirited*, though it did not restrict participants from exploring the room on their own (in-person interview, LF).

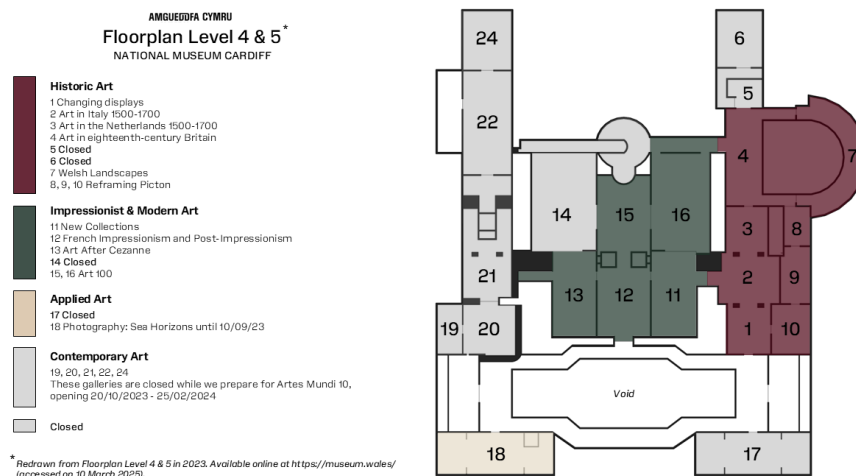


Figure 14. Floorplan for levels 4 & 5 shows the location of the *Reframing Picton* exhibition in the Historic Art gallery; for a full-sized version, see Appendix II.

Having experienced both narrative progressions, as a general visitor and a researcher, I was able to engage with the exhibition’s storytelling from multiple vantage points. Whether it begins with emotional immersion or historical framing, both pathways offer complementary forms of dialogue and experiential learning. These findings resonate with Schorch’s (2015, p.77) interpretation of the museum as a contact zone (Clifford, 1997), where meaning is constructed through the encounters of objects displayed, visitors, and cultural actors. In the *Reframing Picton* exhibition, the gallery space functioned as dynamic site of relational meaning-making, shaped by movement, interpretation, and personal reflections. One visitor observed,

The exhibition was amazing. It was very thought-provoking. My children who are of Trinidadian heritage but born in Wales found it very informative. It was emotional in some places, but also lovely to see the beautiful people and places in Trinidad.

Considered alongside my own experience of the exhibition, this visitor response highlights how curatorial spaces can exceed spatial and cultural boundaries, enabling meaningful cross-cultural dialogue. For the quoted cited, the exhibition provided a space to reconnect with their Trinidadian heritage and identity. This space exists beyond geographical boundaries and serves as a bridge for their cultural identity and the negotiation of their diasporic experience. Meanwhile, through my personal engagement with the exhibition, I discovered a profound layer of resonance, where the exhibition succeeded in mediating the complex legacy of Thomas Picton in ways that transcended any single national or diasporic narrative. Each room in the *Reframing Picton* exhibition invited me to reflect on the nuanced history of Picton's colonial legacy in Trinidad, and although I do not share the same national history, I found myself emotionally connected through the shared weight of colonial trauma.

These experiences demonstrate that historical consciousness within museum contexts is not a passive transmission, but an active process shaped through affective and interpretive encounters. Through its co-curatorial approach, the *Reframing Picton* exhibition provided a safe space where community members from diverse cultural backgrounds could engage in dialogue and navigate their sense of belonging. In doing so, the exhibition created a space that connected past and present, Trinidad and Wales, and collective history with personal memory. Every interaction within the exhibition space became part of the storytelling process and contributed to the active construction of historical consciousness surrounding Picton's legacy.

Chapter 7: Navigating Historical Discomfort in Museum Learning

This chapter examines how the *Reframing Picton* exhibition facilitated public engagement with the uncomfortable aspects of Thomas Picton's legacy. Rather than sidestepping the discomfort that naturally comes with the subject, Amgueddfa Cymru embraced it as a factor that influences knowledge production and ethical museum practice. Building on the previous chapter, I examine how the museum employed specific learning strategies that not only foster public engagement but also actively challenged its institutional authority in shaping historical narrative.

1. Museum Learning

Museums are recognised as dynamic learning environments where knowledge construction happens through dialogic, emotional, and reflective engagement between people, objects, and space (Ash and Wells, 2006, pp.51–52). It is widely accepted that learning in museums encompasses a wide range of experiences that lie beyond formal educational programmes, which often refer to a curriculum-driven set of activities.

This distinction became particularly obvious during my analysis. Initially, I approached the theme through the lens of *museum education*, where I mainly focused on the formal workshop specifically designed for school groups. However, as I reflected on the results of my broader datasets, it became apparent that there is a range of knowledge-building experiences, which are not exclusive to the formal learning program in the *Reframing Picton* exhibition. Therefore, by situating this discussion in the museum *learning* context, I can capture the dialogic, personal, and socially situated nature of knowledge construction that occurs within and beyond structured sessions.

1.1. Formal Learning Workshop

The school workshop was the main element of the museum's educational strategy for the *Reframing Picton* exhibition. As one participant explained, school groups are considered "the bread and butter" of the learning team (in-person interview, LM), which highlights the institution's priority on its learning output for this exhibition. The workshop was designed

around the concept of *cynefin*, a Welsh term that refers to the sense of place where one feels they belong (Welsh Government, 2022c). This concept is a key principle within the Anti-Racist Wales curriculum, introduced by the Welsh Government in 2021, that mandates the inclusion of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) histories and contributions across all areas of learning (Welsh Government, 2022a).

By focusing on *cynefin*, the *Reframing Picton* learning workshop invited pupils to critically examine the legacy of Picton in Welsh history and reflect on their personal experiences. The workshop was initially designed for pupils aged 8-11 but was later adapted to older age groups, which fall under Progression Steps 3-5 in the Curriculum of Wales (in-person interview, LM). In this learning stage, learners are expected to develop increasing independence in their thinking and understanding of social issues (Welsh Government, 2022b). This pedagogical reason was not the sole reason for selecting an appropriate age group for the workshop, but also due to safeguarding concerns, as the museum also aimed to protect younger children from potentially distressing content (in-person interview, LF). As a result, the workshop was designed to be interactive and inquiry-based. One participant described the approach as follows:

So that's the goal of the workshop is asking particularly with the... portrait... and what information can you derive... "And now that you've got all this context, why is it important, and do you feel differently?" That idea is woven throughout the entire session. (In-person interview, LF)

This quote encapsulates the design of the formal learning activities, which incorporates both object-based and experiential learning. This combination is especially significant because the subject matter in the *Reframing Picton* exhibition requires both historical awareness and ethical reflection that can be fostered in an experiential learning environment, where authenticity, structure, and peer interaction become essential components in a subject-specific learning (Duchatelet et al., 2024, p.418).

In the context of the *Reframing Picton* workshop, these features were integrated through engagement with tangible evidence of material cultures, such as Picton's portrait (authenticity), a carefully scaffolded inquiry process (structure), and opportunities for pupils to reflect and share their interpretations (peer interaction). This design thus allows the workshop to become

a place where pupils can connect with the past, not as a distant subject, but as something that intersects with their personal values and shared understanding.

1.2. Reflective Engagement

While the museum's formal learning provision was limited to curriculum-based activities, it would be inaccurate to suggest that this restricted the overall learning experience. On the contrary, learning in the *Reframing Picton* exhibition also occurred in informal and self-led settings where visitors explored the museum display at their own pace and through their own interpretive frameworks. In fact, the minimal use of textual interpretation in the overall exhibition space encouraged a more contemplative engagement where visitors were invited to draw on their values, emotions, and prior knowledge to make sense of the exhibition.

Informal learning, in this sense, becomes a powerful form of education because the interaction of personal, sociocultural, and physical contexts in museum learning (Falk and Dierking, 2000, p.137) can provide a profound, personal, and potentially transformative experience. Visitor responses to the exhibition reflected this dynamic, with many expressing how the exhibition has prompted them to reflect on their own positionality and the broader implications of Britain's imperial past in the present day.

One visitor, for example, wrote: "Good to see this re-evaluation of Picton, difficult though it may be. I teach about slavery at primary school. My kids are well-informed, but many adults have no idea." And another said: "So nice to be able to show my grandchildren this painting and explain about slavery." These particular responses caught my attention because they show that the learning experience in the *Reframing Picton* exhibition has not only rippled outward into broader social contexts but also, more importantly, has appeared in the form of intergenerational learning.

The example reveals how intergenerational interactions exist in the museum space, where families engaged in shared interpretation, and further highlights how historical understanding was constructed through intergenerational exchange. Having personally observed and experienced the exhibition, I became increasingly aware that these socially constructed encounters actively shape emotional and cognitive responses, which range from appreciation to critical dissatisfaction. This range of responses, as evident in the visitor feedback, illustrates how personal and sociocultural factors are integral to how history is

perceived and internalised. This led me to a deeper inquiry into the dynamics of generational knowledge in shaping historical comfort and discomfort, and how such responses are expressed and negotiated within the exhibition space.

2. Historical Comfort and Discomfort

In this section, I define *historical comfort and discomfort* as the emotional and cognitive reactions individuals experience while engaging with content in the *Reframing Picton* exhibition. Regardless of whether the response is ultimately positive or negative, the underlying experience of confronting or suppressing discomfort, as well as the influence of personal background, plays a key role in how information is processed. These factors shape positionality, which in turn influences how the exhibition is understood, interpreted, and emotionally processed.

Addressing this aspect in this research is vital to uncover the layers of responses not only as an expression of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, but as reflections of how historical narratives are navigated. One participant expressed:

Personally, because I'm German, I'm very used to having a very uncomfortable history to deal with... I would always say nobody is a purely heroic. I'm actually quite opposed to the ideas of heroes... Maybe as a German, it's easier than when you grow up in Britain, where history is very much "we were the goodies"... and coming from that place of the cultural bringers of identity is not challenging. (In-person interview, EM)

Another participant stated:

I am a white-presenting person, so why do I have the authority to speak about this? You work around that and also make them aware that what you are talking about is really difficult... I have had people say things to me which they didn't intend to be offensive, but are probably quite offensive to the groups represented in the exhibition. (In-person interview, LF)

These examples illustrate how both individual and shared knowledge, which are deeply influenced by cultural and historical background, actively shape the way knowledge is

constructed in the exhibition. The first reflection, EM, demonstrates how their familiarity with confronting complex historical narratives, let alone Picton's story in the *Reframing Picton* exhibition, is shaped by transgenerational memory and prior exposure as a German. Furthermore, the second response from LF, a British learning facilitator, highlights their awareness that their positionality could bring up ethical tensions that they needed to navigate during learning sessions. This adds to Falk and Dierking (2000, pp.50–51), confirming that this collective process influences how visitors interpret museum narratives.

It's also evident that the visitor responses reveal a degree of polarisation in how the *Reframing Picton* exhibition was perceived. While many appreciated the exhibition for shedding light on marginalised voices in Picton's history, others expressed discomfort and suggested that history should remain unaltered. Some of these negative responses were direct, while others were more cautious. For example, one visitor left a comment:

I visited Picton Manor very recently and saw his beautiful estate and how it continues to give to the public. Seeing this exhibition reminds me that nothing is perfect and that we should appreciate both the good and negative aspects without becoming coerced with hate. To tear down an idol is a dangerous act and if the trend is continued, it could lead to many aspects of society dissolving. None of our idols and hero[e]s are without fault, some of them being tremendous.

This response is fascinating because it is not necessarily resistant but reflects on how this visitor internalised the exhibition through the national narrative. As studied by Mycock (2017), history education in post-colonial states often serves as a nation-building mechanism, where selective storytelling reinforces a cohesive national identity and suppresses alternative discourse.

In this context, the *Reframing Picton* exhibition elicited affective discomfort when visitors encountered narratives that conflicted with their beliefs. The emotional tension expressed in the visitors' comments, especially about “tearing down idols,” reveals a struggle to reconcile personal beliefs with contested historical truths. These responses are to be expected generally in the exhibition, where the dominant historical framework is recontextualised. However, this discomfort is not inherently detrimental; rather, it reflects a process of

intrapersonal negotiation where individuals emotionally and politically situate the past within their present understanding.

3. Glossary of the Reframing Picton

By challenging the dominant narrative of Picton's history, the *Reframing Picton* exhibition encouraged visitors to relearn and reconsider their perspectives. The emotional discomfort discussed in some of the visitor reactions indicates a rupture in the visitor's current understanding. It prompted reflection that, in the end, encourages a transformative, even reconciliatory, process which would not be possible without the museum's deliberate use of language.

Language is a powerful tool in shaping historical meaning, and the terminology used, whether in history books, museum labels, or in everyday discourse, often carries historical weights rooted in colonial legacy. Recognising this, the curatorial team behind the *Reframing Picton* exhibition produced a handout to expose and challenge the long-standing inappropriate terminology that has been used to legitimise the silence of the marginalised voice (Amgueddfa Cymru, 2022a).

This glossary was designed as a critical intervention against selective historical writing in Picton's history. It includes eight terms, several of which revisit and expand upon a key linguistic shift: replacing the term "slave" with "enslaved people". Aside from that, there are other terms which stand out for their deliberate reframing, such as "tortured" to "illegal torture" and "deaths" to "unlawful deaths". These changes reflect a conscious effort to humanise those who were subjected to slavery and redirect attention to the systems and agents responsible for violence and oppression. One participant stated:

The purpose of the glossary was to set context for the audience and explain the reasoning behind some of the changes in terminology, relative to typical sources. The glossary was the result of our research, encountering words, terms and phrases that we were uncomfortable with and consider outdated. (Online interview, YP)

This observation adds to the growing scholarly critiques of the use of "enslaved person", such as Burns (2024, pp.86–87), who proposed a mixed use of "slave" for accuracy

or stylistic variation in historical writing. In the museum context, such as in the *Reframing Picton* exhibition, this negotiation may not be appropriate since the choice of terminology is not merely a matter of linguistic preference but a political and ethical intervention. The use of “enslaved people” in the exhibition reflects the deliberate effort to disrupt passive neutrality, which is often associated with conventional museum practice.

The glossary has become a tool for decolonial engagement because it provides inclusive vocabulary to promote critical reflection on how history is constructed and communicated. As noted by one participant, “*With the glossary as another arrow in our quiver... We go through it together—asking, ‘Do you know what colonialism means? Do you know what enslaved means?’*” (In-person interview, LF).

In this sense, the glossary goes beyond being a simple list of definitions; it assumes two interconnected roles in the exhibition space. First, it acts as a site of negotiation, where visitors are invited to critically reflect on how inherited terms have shaped their understanding of Picton’s story. Furthermore, it reveals the biases and power dynamics in language use, particularly in addressing the colonial past, which often favours the perpetrators and dehumanises the victims. Second, the glossary provides a linguistic framework to bridge the emotional and intellectual gap that typically arises when individuals engage with complex historical topics. In doing so, the glossary enables visitors to navigate the topic with greater sensitivity and awareness.

While there is no publicly available evidence to confirm whether Amgueddfa Cymru has produced similar handouts for other exhibitions, the glossary developed for the *Reframing Picton* exhibition appears to be a distinctive curatorial intervention. It stands out as a deliberate effort to confront and disrupt selective historical writing in museums. Rather than treating language as a neutral conduit of information, the glossary repositions it as an active agent in shaping historical consciousness and social transformation.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Guided by the overarching question of *how Amgueddfa Cymru examined the celebration of Thomas Picton's portrait at the National Museum Cardiff and addressed his contested historical legacy*, this thesis critically investigates how museums' curatorial authority influences the portrayal of colonial figures in museum spaces and plays a significant role in constructing cultural memory and national identity. Three sub-questions further guide this inquiry to explore the interconnected factors influencing this museum practice: (1) *How does Amgueddfa Cymru navigate and deconstruct the symbolic authority of Picton's portrait in the museum space?* (2) *In what ways has Amgueddfa Cymru navigated its ethical responsibilities amid social tensions surrounding the reinterpretation of Picton's legacy?* (3) *How does Amgueddfa Cymru navigate historical discomfort in the Reframing Picton exhibition and facilitate critical museum learning in museum space?*

The Reframing Picton exhibition exemplifies how museums can address historical discomfort through ethical curation, artistic interventions, and cross-cultural dialogues. The results of reflexive thematic analysis show that the exhibition not only recontextualised the contested colonial legacy of Thomas Picton but also reimagined the museum itself as a space of historical conscience, emotional engagement, and social change.

Amgueddfa Cymru actively navigates and deconstructs the symbolic authority of Thomas Picton's portrait through a deliberate curatorial strategy that challenges conventional commemoration practice in museum displays. Once prominently featured in the *Faces of Wales* gallery, the portrait served as a visual memory aid and played a significant role in reinforcing the narrative of Picton as a national hero. In response to the growing call for Picton's historical accountability, the museum challenged the symbolic authority of Picton's portrait by removing it from the *Faces of Wales* gallery and placing it in a wooden crate on the floor, thereby diminishing its visual prominence. This curatorial intervention is further reinforced by the juxtaposition of the portrait with archival materials that invite critical reflection on Picton's violent colonial legacy.

The artworks in the Reframing Picton exhibition, *Spirited* by Laku Neg and *The Wound is A Portal* by Gesiye, bear significant interpretive weight, adding emotional and historical depth to recontextualise Picton's colonial legacy. *Spirited* embodied the story of three victims

of illegal punishment under Picton's colonial governance in Trinidad: Luisa Calderón, Thisbe, and Present. Through a multisensory installation, the artwork reclaimed agency over the colonial gaze and the suppression of cultural expressions and indigenous practices. In doing so, the artwork offers an empowering intervention in the reclamation of cultural identity in a postcolonial context, challenging dominant narratives and restoring dignity to those historically silenced. Similarly, *The Wound is A Portal* addresses intergenerational trauma through tattoo and audio-visual storytelling. The spatial design of the artwork invited visitors into an intimate space of healing, where pain, memory, and resilience spoke across cultural contexts. In doing so, both artworks have successfully transformed the museum space into an active space of reckoning, in which art functions as a medium for historical justice and facilitates cross-cultural dialogue.

The *Reframing Picton* exhibition also demonstrated how ethical and trauma-informed practice can foster meaningful engagement with complex histories. Developed over two years before its public launch in 2022, the exhibition emerged amid political resistance and social media hostility, where accusations of historical censorship were circulated widely online. In response, the museum adopted a proactive approach, including social media strategies and internal safeguarding practices to provide a safe space for all collaborators and visitors. This would allow every individual to feel empowered to express, question, and reflect on a subject without fear of exclusion or harm.

This practice signals a shift in the traditional power dynamics that have long defined museum practice as authoritative institutions. When museums commit to safeguarding emotional well-being and trauma-informed facilitation, they actively redistribute power in the construction of knowledge. In this process, museums move from being the sole gatekeepers of history to facilitators of public memory, creating spaces where multiple perspectives can coexist and be negotiated. As demonstrated in the *Reframing Picton* exhibition, both Amgueddfa Cymru Producers and visitors functioned as active agents of meaning-making, where their lived experience, emotional responses, and critical reflections became a central component of the museum's narrative. In this context, safe spaces become more than protective measures; they are ethical commitments that reflect a museum's willingness to be vulnerable, accountable, and responsive. This repositioning redefines the museum as a site of conscience, where public memory is not passively inherited but actively co-created through care, dialogue, and reflection.

Finally, the *Reframing Picton* exhibition exemplifies a critical approach to navigating historical discomfort in fostering critical museum learning. By foregrounding tools like the collaboratively developed glossary, the museum created space for learners of all ages to encounter complex histories with sensitivity and clarity. The glossary of *Reframing Picton* included rephrased terms—such as the substitution of “enslaved” for “slave”—thereby shifting attention from the imposed condition to the individual affected. This linguistic redefinition thus offered a framework in which historical narrative is viewed through a human-centred perspective.

The *Reframing Picton* exhibition challenges the tendency within traditional museum narratives to reduce lived experiences to oversimplified historical categories. Rather than presenting trauma as distant or abstract, the exhibition allowed personal stories to echo throughout the space, inviting visitors to engage with narratives that foreground the humanity behind historical events. As one visitor reflected, “This is the most sensory experience I've had in a museum. So tangible and of the earth and its people. I feel the humanity of this work.” This testimony underscores that, by centring the lived experiences of victims of colonial violence and all cultural actors involved in the exhibition’s creation, *Reframing Picton* successfully fostered deeper emotional engagement and critical reflection.

The practices in the *Reframing Picton* exhibition serve as an empirical example of decolonial curatorial work, in which historical discomfort is not avoided but deliberately engaged to foster ethical encounters grounded in human connection, shared identity, and personal memory. Rather than presenting history as a neutral and detached account, the exhibition foregrounds the lived experiences of those impacted by colonial violence and resists the erasure of their collective memory. By centring emotional resonance and personal storytelling, the exhibition encourages visitors to confront uncomfortable truths with empathy and to participate in the collective reimagining and reconciliation of Picton’s colonial legacy.

Ultimately, this research affirms that museums are not neutral spaces but dynamic arenas where memory, identity, and power are continuously negotiated. The *Reframing Picton* exhibition offers a model for how institutions can cultivate safe spaces for negotiating discomfort, incorporate multiple voices into the narrative, and facilitate meaningful public dialogue around contested histories. And so, this study ends with a question to the reader:

When there is no definitive right or wrong in recalling historical figures, in a world where no historical figure is exempt from their part in systemic oppression and injustice, which stories would you choose to believe?

1. Limitations of the Study

While this research offers valuable insights into the curatorial, collaborative, and educational dimensions of the *Reframing Picton* exhibition, several limitations must be acknowledged. As this study focuses on a single case, it allows me to provide a detailed analysis and offers a deep contextual insight into the exhibition. However, the results are inherently limited in their broad applicability. The curatorial strategies used by Amgueddfa Cymru are socio-politically unique and may not be directly transferable to other socio-political and cultural contexts without necessary modifications.

The research draws on interviews with four participants, including museum staff and an external collaborator. While their insights were invaluable, the study could benefit from additional perspectives from artists, broader community members, and external stakeholders. This broader inclusion could have offered a more comprehensive understanding of the cross-cultural dialogue and emotional resonance that shaped the *Reframing Picton* exhibition.

This limitation is closely linked to the institutional requirements for ethical approval, which influenced the research timeline. Navigating differences in institutional protocols, particularly at Radboud University, caused delays that affected data collection within a limited timeframe. As a result, an intended interview with one of the commissioned artists could not be conducted. While this limitation constrained the exploration of the perspective of the artists who contributed to the *Reframing Picton* exhibition, the research still draws on rich curatorial and personal reflections to examine the role of artistic contributions within the exhibition.

2. Suggestions for future research

This study opens several avenues for future research that could expand and deepen the understanding of decolonial museum practice. Comparative studies involving museums across diverse postcolonial contexts, for example, could illuminate how distinct socio-cultural factors shape curatorial strategies and influence efforts to engage with contested colonial legacies,

potentially revealing both supportive and challenging dynamics in the negotiation of historical accountability.

A longitudinal study examining the long-term effects of co-curation and learning strategies would also offer valuable insights into how museum interventions influence the construction of individual and collective historical consciousness over time. Such research might investigate shifts in attitudes towards colonial legacies and the affective negotiation between personal values and narration within museum spaces. In this way, museums could explore the transformative potential and broader impact of participatory museum practices in supporting anti-racism and decolonial efforts.

Finally, the glossary created for the Reframing Picton exhibition presents an intriguing opportunity to explore how language can become a powerful tool in conveying a more nuanced historical narrative. Further research could examine how selective writing and linguistic framing in museum texts and interpretive materials challenge established narratives and promote ethical engagement. Such investigations could offer valuable empirical insights into decolonial pedagogy and its role in museum education.

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Appendices

Appendix I: List of Questions

A. List of Questions for Interpretation and Exhibition Manager

1. Could you introduce yourself and describe your role at the National Museum Cardiff, as well as your involvement in the Reframing Picton exhibition?
2. How long have you been the Interpretation and Exhibition Manager at the National Museum Cardiff?
3. Could you explain how the National Museum Cardiff decided to start this exhibition project and how the museum decided to include it as part of the youth engagement programme?
4. Can you explain how this project was organised and how the Sub-Saharan Advisory Panel was chosen to be involved?
5. How were the roles in curating, interpreting, and decision-making distributed between the museum team and the community representatives?
6. How was the exhibition's narrative and storyline developed? What challenges do museums face when engaging with colonial history, and how can they be overcome?
7. Could you explain the process behind the decision to use the artistic approach to expand upon Picton's historical narrative?
8. Is there any particular storytelling approach for this exhibition?
9. The museum has released several blogs and articles about Reframing Picton. Was there a specific outreach or engagement strategy behind this?
10. What channels of communication does the museum receive from visitors, and how does the museum respond to this feedback?
11. What lessons has the museum learned from curating Reframing Picton?
12. Is there any plan on approaching similar topics (decolonisation in Welsh history) in the future?
13. Looking ahead, will there be a framework for sustained collaboration with partner communities?

B. List of Questions for Learning Manager and Learning Facilitator

1. Could you please introduce yourself and describe your role at the National Museum Cardiff, as well as your involvement in the Reframing Picton exhibition?
2. How long have you been the Learning Manager at the National Museum Cardiff?
3. How many learning staff are involved in the educational programme at the National Museum Cardiff, particularly in the Reframing Picton exhibition?
4. Was there a particular target audience the museum aimed to engage?
5. Could you explain how schools contact the museum to participate in the educational sessions during the exhibition?
6. Could you specify the number of schools reached by the exhibition over the past three years?
7. Could you mention the educational programmes that are designed for the Reframing Picton exhibition?
8. Could you explain learning strategies that cater to various age groups and educational backgrounds?
9. What strategies does the museum employ to strike a balance between ensuring historical accuracy and making challenging histories accessible and engaging for learners?
10. How does the educational team ensure that the exhibition aligns with the current formal curriculum?
11. What are the most common questions that students or teachers ask during educational sessions?
12. Have you received feedback from teachers, students, or general visitors? If so, how has it influenced the programming?
13. What challenges do museums face when engaging with colonial history, and how can they be overcome?
14. Looking ahead, are there any educational strategies that you will re-apply to the National Museum Cardiff's decolonial education programmes in the future?

C. List of Questions for Amgueddfa Cymru Producer

1. Can you introduce yourself and explain your role in the Reframing Picton exhibition?
2. How many young producers are involved in this exhibition, and how did you all find each other?
3. How did the project begin? Has Picton always been central to the idea behind the project?
4. What was the research and development process for this exhibition like?
 - a. What kind of dynamic existed between the young producers and the museum staff?
 - b. Can you tell me about the brief you created for the art commission?
5. Researching and working on a project that mediates difficult histories is challenging. How did you and the team manage the upsetting findings that arose during the research and development process?
6. The museum received some harsh comments from the public when the team released a statement about the plan for Picton's picture. Did that affect the young producers?
 - a. Were there any measures taken for the safety of the young producers?
7. The glossary of the exhibition is a powerful resource for conveying the mission of the exhibition. Can you explain how and why the idea of creating a glossary for this exhibition came about?
8. What happened after the exhibition started and your placement ended?
9. Were there any engagement events for the young producers to interact with visitors while the exhibition was running?
10. What was the main aspect of Reframing Picton that you discussed when you presented at conferences?
11. Did you receive any public reactions after the exhibition was released and was running?
12. What insights did you gain from this exhibition?

D. List of Questions for the Artist: Gesiye

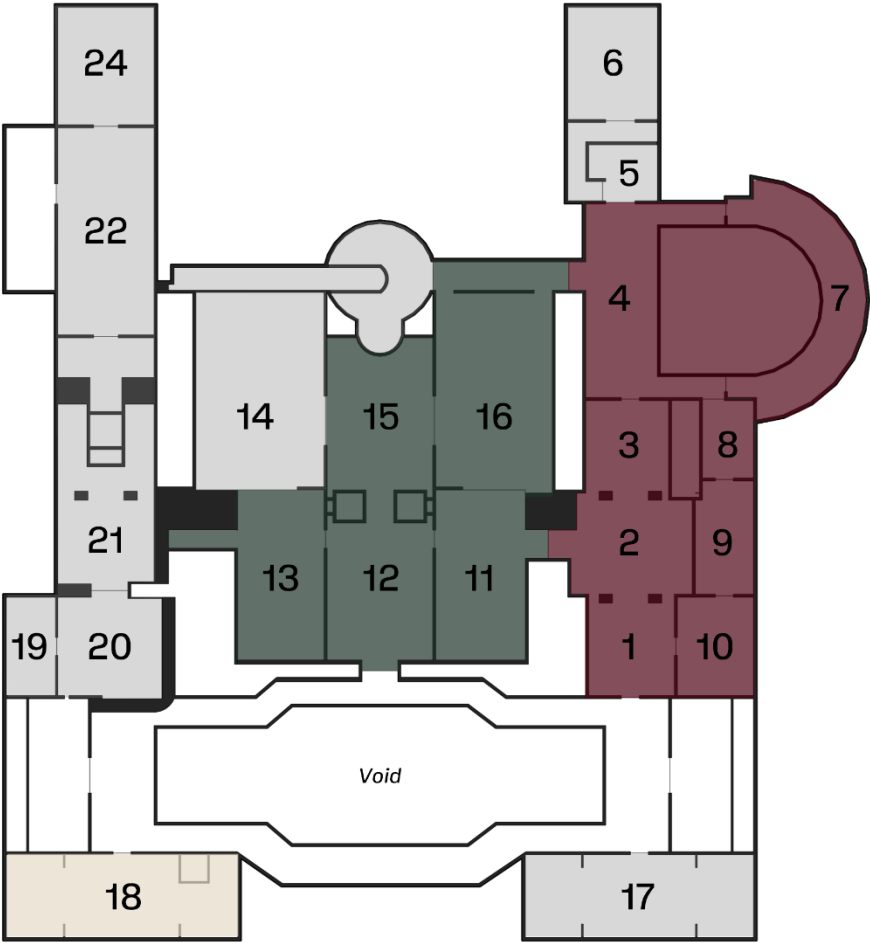
1. Can you introduce yourself?
2. How would you describe your arts or your artistic identity?
3. When the museum made an open call for artists, what made you decide to take part of the Reframing Picton project?
4. People relate to historical figures like Picton in many different ways — sometimes through formal education, other times in everyday encounters like street names or community stories. What was that connection like for you?
5. Can you tell me about the initial idea or inspiration behind *The Wound is a Portal*?

As I might quote the museum about the art commissions, they wanted to “explore narratives of ancestry, healing, transformation and empowerment, and will challenge the colonial narratives that have traditionally been told in National Museum Cardiff’s galleries by centring black consciousness, experiences, and voices.”
6. In the video introduction and article by the museum, you’ve mentioned tattoo as a way to address trauma and healing—and in the exhibition space, that unfolds further through performance and storytelling. What drew you to these mediums, and how did they help communicate what you wanted to express?
7. Are there any particular symbol or story behind each tattoo that hold special meaning, especially related to Trinidadian heritage and healing of the intergenerational trauma?
8. When you visited the exhibition and saw your work alongside the other artworks and the picture of Picton itself, how did it feel to see them collectively engaged in ‘reframing’ the story of Picton?
9. Did you have any conversations or interactions with visitors? If so, how did those exchanges give you insights of how the work was received or experienced?
10. How do you see your role as an artist in shaping historical narrative within spaces that are part of colonial legacy, in this case, museums?

Appendix II: Diagrams and Illustrations

AMGUEDDFA CYMRU
Floorplan Level 4 & 5*
 NATIONAL MUSEUM CARDIFF

- Historic Art**
 - 1 Changing displays
 - 2 Art in Italy 1500-1700
 - 3 Art in the Netherlands 1500-1700
 - 4 Art in eighteenth-century Britain
 - 5 Closed
 - 6 Closed
 - 7 Welsh Landscapes
 - 8, 9, 10 Reframing Picton
- Impressionist & Modern Art**
 - 11 New Collections
 - 12 French Impressionism and Post-Impressionism
 - 13 Art After Cezanne
 - 14 Closed
 - 15, 16 Art 100
- Applied Art**
 - 17 Closed
 - 18 Photography: Sea Horizons until 10/09/23
- Contemporary Art**
 - 19, 20, 21, 22, 24
 - These galleries are closed while we prepare for Artes Mundi 10, opening 20/10/2023 - 25/02/2024
- Closed**



* Redrawn from Floorplan Level 4 & 5 in 2023. Available online at <https://museum.wales/> (accessed on 10 March 2025).

Diagram 1. Floorplan Level 4 & 5 of the National Museum Cardiff.

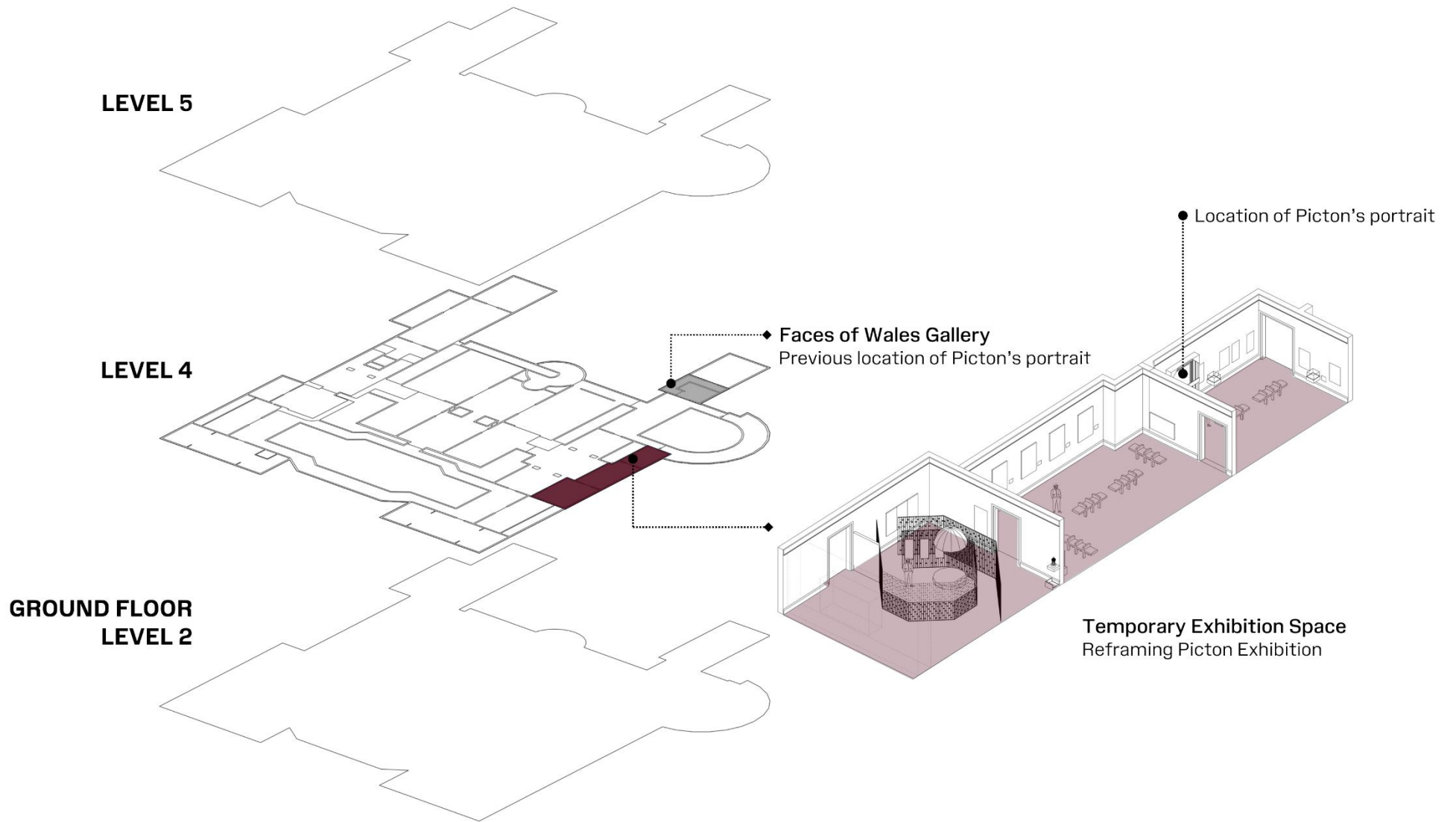
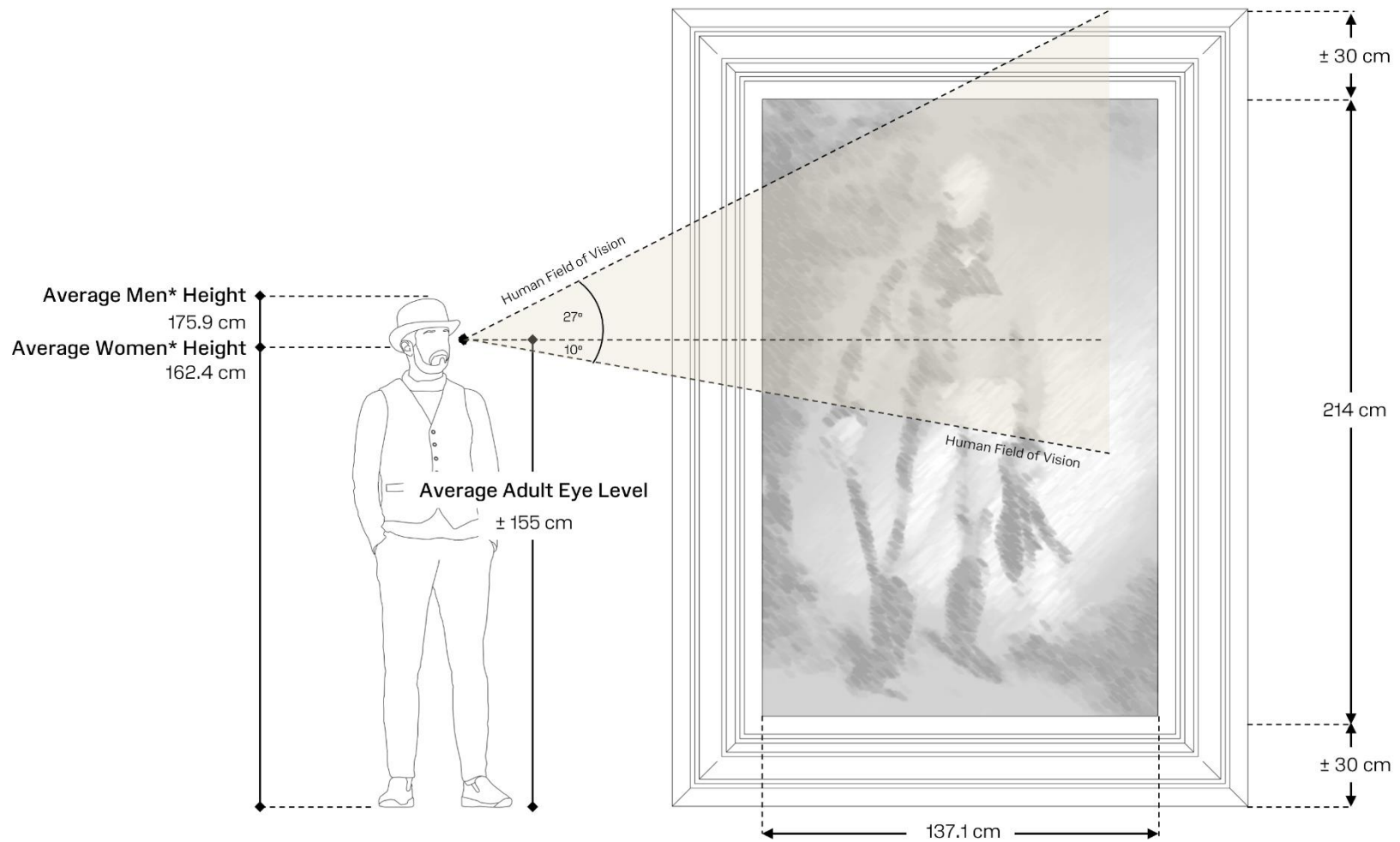


Diagram 2. Isometric diagram of the Reframing Picton Exhibition.



*Based on the average height for English males and females in 2021. Available online at <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/health-survey-for-england/2021/> (accessed on 8 July 2025).

Diagram 3. The size of Picton's portrait relative to an average person's height.



Illustration of Picton's portrait in the Face of Wales Gallery (Gallery 5)

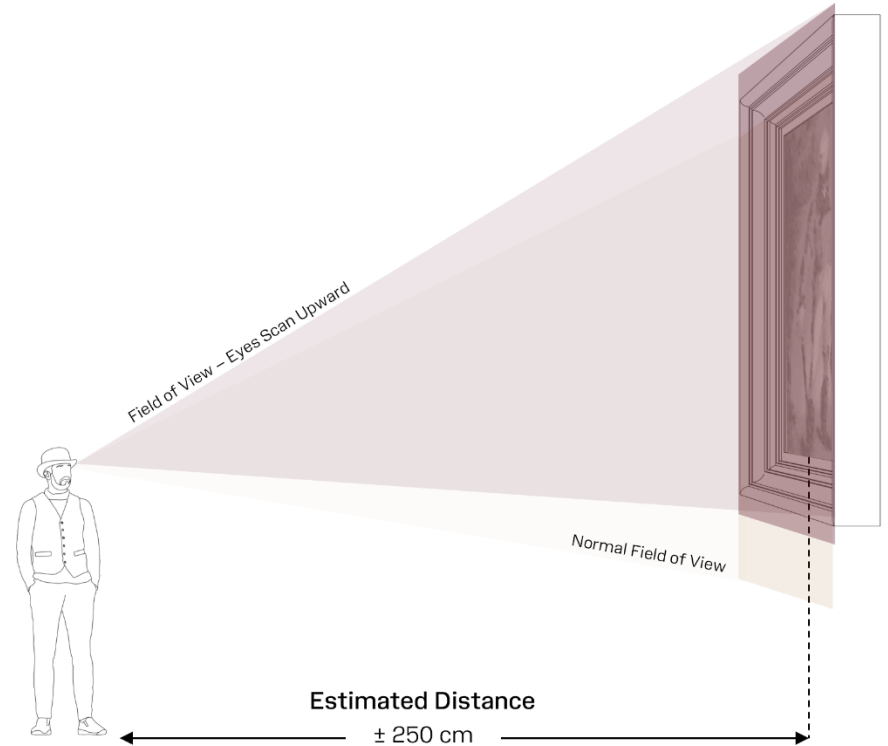


Diagram 4. Illustration and diagram of the size of Picton's portrait relative to an average person's height in The Faces of Wales Gallery (Gallery 5).

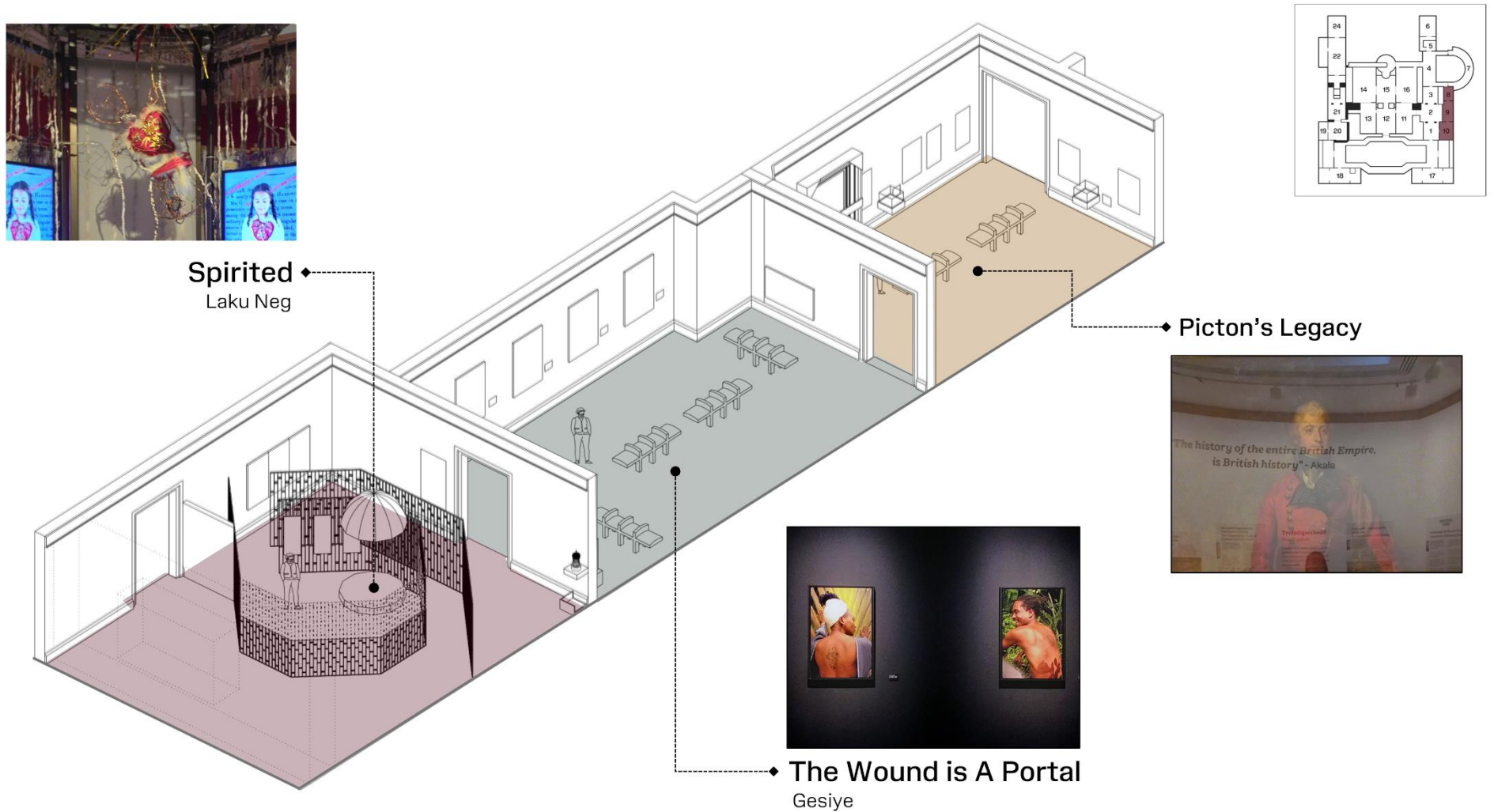
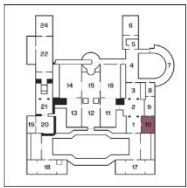


Diagram 5. The three sections of the Reframing Picton Exhibition.



Performance Video
Re-imagine a childhood for Present, women and all whom they represent



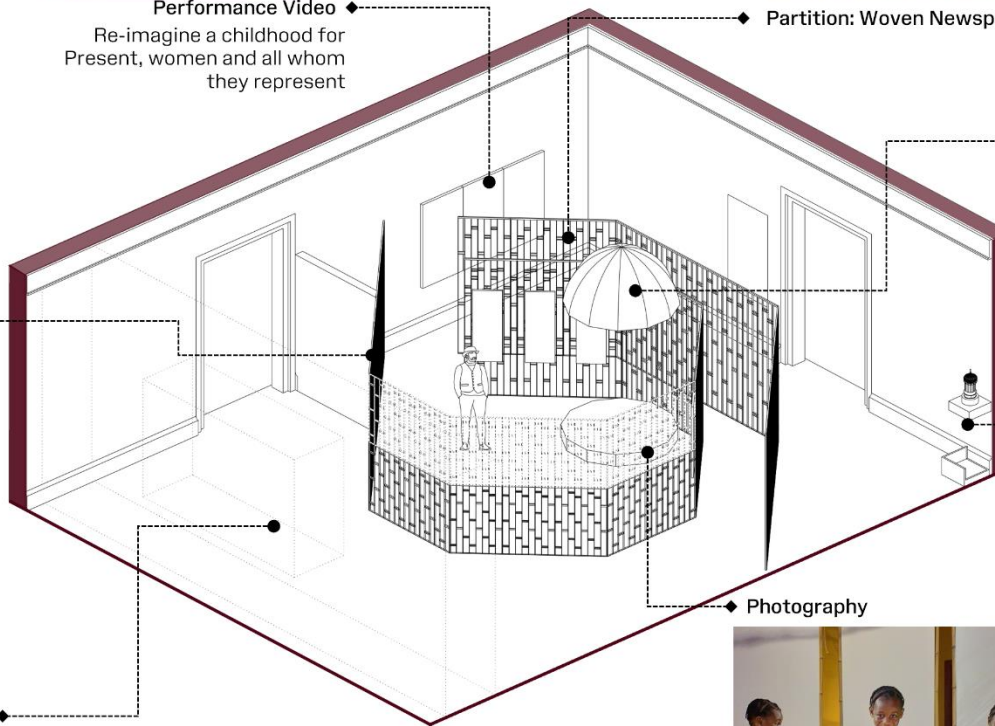
Partition: Woven Newspapers



Macro Centre Installation
Wirework: an interpretation of Luisa Calderon's suspended posture in her torture drawing.
(left) Swaine, J. 1806. The Torture of Luisa Calderon, Trinidad, 1801. [Etching and aquatint]. At: The National Army Museum, The National Army Museum, Study collection. NAM. 1969-10-254-1



Painting of 3 Women
Reinterpretation of the story of Thisbe through the roles of both a warrior and a healer



Micro Reflection of Centre Installation
A music box on top of a box filled with cocoa, and a wire figure of Luisa.



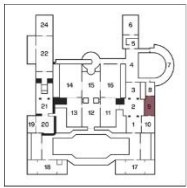
Cabinet of Curiosity
Showcase of commodities and materials extracted during the colonial period: people, natural resources such as coffee, sugar, and tea.



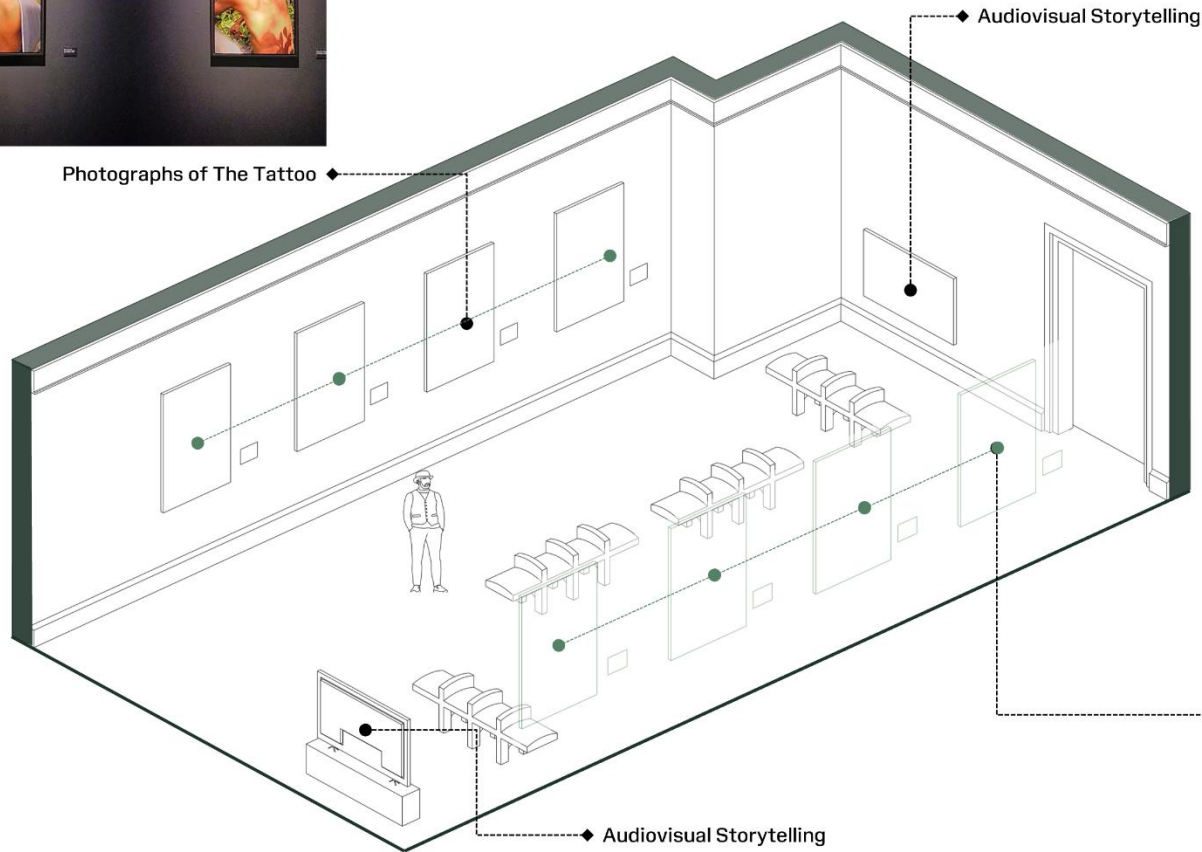
Photography



Diagram 6. Details of the display in the "Spirited" section.



Photographs of The Tattoo



A photograph of the tattoo on a participant from Trinidad, born in 1998.

Photographs of The Tattoo

Diagram 7. Details of the display in "The Wound is A Portal" section.

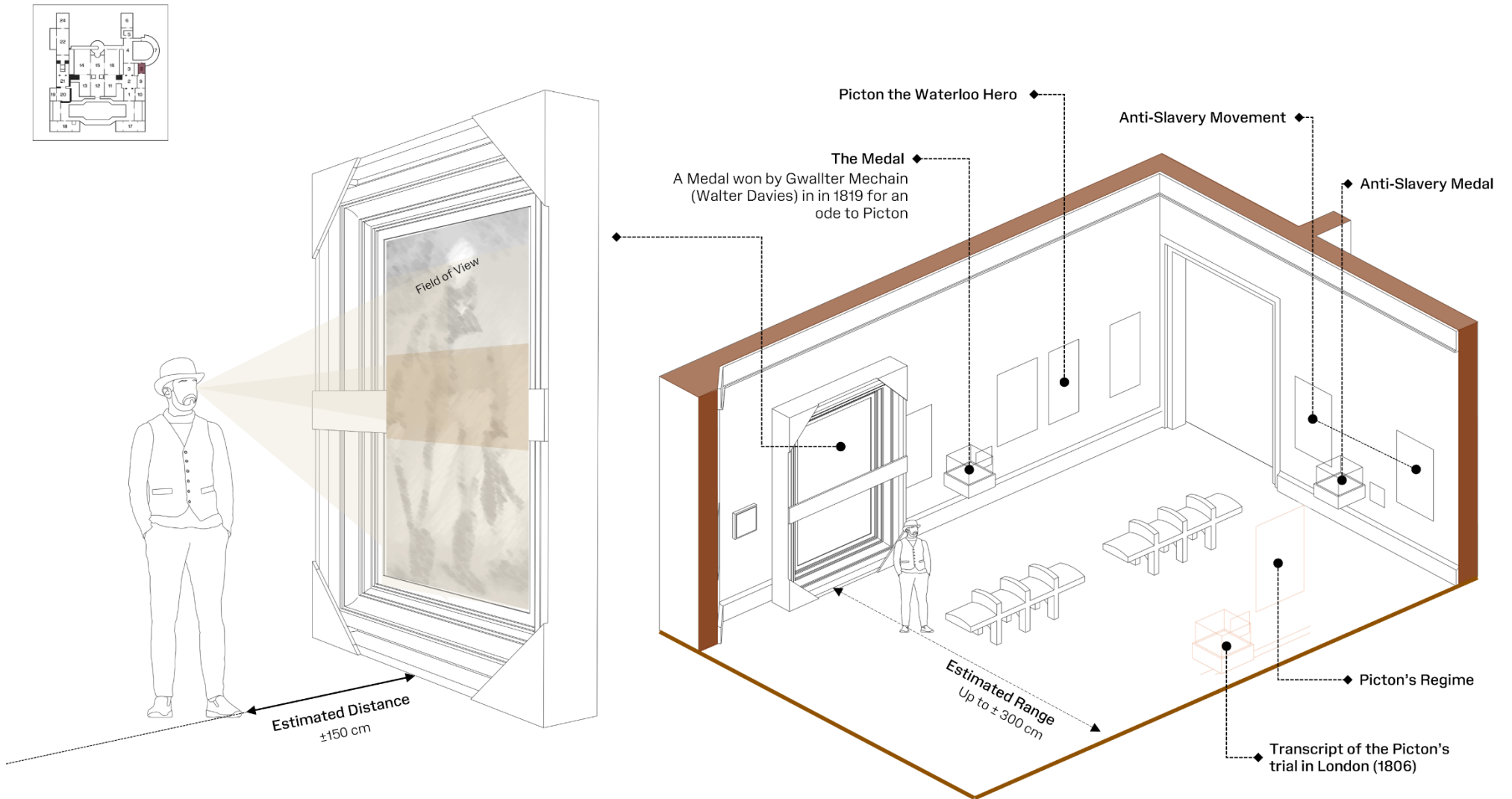


Diagram 8. Details of the display and the size of Picton's portrait relative to an average person's height in the "Picton's Legacy" section.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY

Mediating Historical Legacies at Museums: The "Reframing Picton" Exhibition at the National Museum Cardiff

Introduction

We would like to invite you to participate in a research study. Participation is voluntary. Before you decide whether or not to take part, we will give you information about the study. Please take the time to read the information carefully. If something is not clear or you would like more information, please ask the researcher. The contact details can be found at the bottom of this letter.

Outline and aim of the research study

This research explores decolonisation initiatives at the National Museum Cardiff, particularly the "Reframing Picton" exhibition. The study aims to investigate how the museum presents narratives of 'local heroes' such as Thomas Picton in relation to the British Empire, colonialism, and slavery. It also evaluates how the exhibition has transformed the museum's educational and social roles in a postcolonial context and devises pedagogical strategies for addressing colonial history in postcolonial museums.

By analysing the "Reframing Picton" exhibition, this research aims to identify the strengths and weaknesses of current decolonial practices and offers insights into strategies for more responsible and inclusive representations. The findings can serve as a model for other institutions, promoting accountability and social justice in historical representation. This research aims to yield both scientific and social insights, contributing to the understanding of decolonisation practices in museums and fostering a more inclusive approach to historical narratives.

Who is conducting the research study?

This research forms part of a master's dissertation within the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree program in Education in Museums and Heritage (EDUMaH). It is carried out by Elisa Kusuma Dewanti, who is the sole researcher, under the supervision of Ketty Iannantuono (Radboud University – the Netherlands), Kirsti Jõesalu (University of Tartu – Estonia), and Dennis Francis (University of Glasgow – United Kingdom).

What does participation in the study entail?

In this study, you will take part in a semi-structured interview where we will discuss your experiences and perspectives regarding the "Reframing Picton" exhibition at the National Museum Cardiff. The interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes and can be conducted in person at the museum or via an online video call, according to your preference. Additionally, you may be requested to review and provide feedback on certain exhibition materials. Your insights will assist us in understanding how the exhibition confronts colonial history and its effects on museum practices.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this research is voluntary. This means that you can stop your participation and withdraw your consent at any time during the study without giving a reason. Withdrawing from or stopping participation will not have any adverse consequences for you.

What data do we collect and how do we handle it?

This study will involve audio recordings made during interviews, which will be transcribed for analysis. The following personal data will be collected, used, and stored for this study: name, email address, and occupational role. To ensure anonymity, identifiable information, such as names, will be removed. However, complete anonymity is not possible, as your role and connection to the museum will be evident through pseudonymisation (e.g., Curator A, Educator B), which will be assigned immediately after data collection.

Upon the completion of the transcription of the interview recording, the original recording will be deleted, and you will be invited to review the transcript and implement any necessary modifications. Elisa Kusuma Dewanti will use this reviewed transcript in her dissertation data analysis. On the consent form, you have the opportunity to specify your permissions regarding the use of this transcript.

All research and personal data are safely stored, following the Radboud University guidelines.

Access for control purposes

Some individuals require access to your personal data. The individuals who conduct this check are my research supervisors: Ketty Iannantuono (Radboud University – the Netherlands), Kirsti Jõesalu (University of Tartu – Estonia), and Dennis Francis (University of Glasgow – United Kingdom). This access is limited to authorised individuals, and they will keep your data confidential.

Your consent

Your data may only be used for our study if you give permission for this in the consent form. You may withdraw your consent even after you have participated. You can do this by emailing Elisa Kusuma Dewanti (2921718D@student.gla.ac.uk). If you withdraw your consent, all data collected up to that point will be deleted.

Do you have any questions?

If you have any questions or would like more information about the research study, please contact Elisa Kusuma Dewanti (2921718D@student.gla.ac.uk). For other questions about this study (e.g. data processing), please contact privacy@let.ru.nl

Consent form

If you want to participate in this research study, we ask you to sign the consent form. With this written consent, you declare that you have understood the information we have provided and consent to participate in this research study.

Kind regards,

Elisa Kusuma Dewanti
2921718D@student.gla.ac.uk
Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters student in [Education in Museums & Heritage \(EDUMaH\)](#)

INFORMATION AND CONSENT DECLARATION FOR INSTITUTION FOR THE RESEARCH

Title of the research study

Mediating Historical Legacies at Museums: The "Reframing Picton" Exhibition at the National Museum Cardiff

Explanation of the research study

This research forms part of a master's dissertation within the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree program in Education in Museums and Heritage (EDUMaH). It is carried out by Elisa Kusuma Dewanti, who is the sole researcher, under the supervision of Ketty Iannantuono (Radboud University – the Netherlands), Kirsti Jõesalu (University of Tartu – Estonia), and Dennis Francis (University of Glasgow – United Kingdom).

This research explores decolonisation initiatives at the National Museum Cardiff, particularly the "Reframing Picton" exhibition. The study aims to investigate how the museum presents narratives of 'local heroes' such as Thomas Picton in relation to the British Empire, colonialism, and slavery. It also evaluates how the exhibition has transformed the museum's educational and social roles in a postcolonial context and devises pedagogical strategies for addressing colonial history in postcolonial museums.

The curatorial and education team of the "Reframing Picton" exhibition at the National Museum Cardiff will be invited to take part in a semi-structured interview where they will discuss their experiences and perspectives of the same exhibition. The interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes and can be conducted in person at the museum or via an online video call, according to their preference. Additionally, they may be asked to review and provide feedback on certain exhibition materials. Their insights will assist us in understanding how the exhibition confronts colonial history and its effects on museum practices.

By analysing the "Reframing Picton" exhibition, this research aims to identify the strengths and weaknesses of current decolonial practices and offers insights into strategies for more responsible and inclusive representations. The findings can serve as a model for other institutions, promoting accountability and social justice in historical representation. This research aims to yield both scientific and social insights, contributing to the understanding of decolonisation practices in museums and fostering a more inclusive approach to historical narratives.

Information Provision

Participation in this research is completely voluntary and focuses on curatorial and educational professionals engaged in the "Reframing Picton" exhibition. The primary mode of communication, encompassing recruitment, scheduling, and the dissemination of information and consent documents, will be facilitated by Elisa Kusuma Dewanti via formal email (2921718D@student.gla.ac.uk). Her primary supervisor, Ketty Iannantuono (Radboud University – the Netherlands), will be included in all pertinent correspondence.

To ensure informed participation, Elisa Kusuma Dewanti will distribute detailed information and consent forms to both the National Museum Cardiff and each participant. These documents will clearly outline the study's purpose, processes, and the rights of the participants.

Participants will be given the opportunity to review the information before the interview, allowing them to ask any questions they may have. Their consent will be sought explicitly, ensuring they understand they have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time and that their data will not be used without their consent. This transparent approach is designed to foster an open and ethical research environment, respecting the autonomy of each participant.

What data do we collect and how do we handle it?

This study will involve audio recordings made during interviews, which will be transcribed for analysis. The following personal data will be collected, used, and stored for this study: name, email address, and occupational role. To ensure anonymity, identifiable information, such as names, will be removed. However, complete anonymity is not possible, as their role and connection to the museum will be evident through pseudonymisation (e.g., Curator A, Educator B), which will be assigned immediately after data collection.

Upon the completion of the transcription of the interview recording, the original recording will be deleted, and the participant will be invited to review the transcript and implement any necessary modifications. Elisa Kusuma Dewanti will use this reviewed transcript in her dissertation data analysis. On the consent form, participants have the opportunity to specify their permissions regarding the use of this transcript.

All research and personal data are safely stored, following the Radboud University guidelines.

Do you have any questions?

If you have any questions or would like more information about the research study, please contact Elisa Kusuma Dewanti (2921718D@student.gla.ac.uk). For other questions about this study (e.g. data processing), please contact privacy@let.ru.nl

Consent form

I give the researcher from Radboud University permission to conduct the research within my institution.

Name of institution:

Name and position:

Signature:

Date:

CONSENT FORM

for participation in the scientific research study:
Mediating Historical Legacies at Museums: The "Reframing Picton" Exhibition at the
National Museum Cardiff

Statement of participant

- I confirm that I am 18 or older and can consent to participate in this research.
- I understand that Elisa Kusuma Dewanti is collecting data in the form of a recorded interview for use in her dissertation for the International Master's degree in Education in Museums and Heritage (EDUMaH).
- I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet for this project, and the researcher has answered any questions I had to my satisfaction.
- I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, and I can stop at any point during the research study should I wish to do so.
- I understand how the data of the research study will be stored and how they will be used.
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw my consent for the use of data from the study as outlined in the information document.

I also understand that:

- the following personal data will be collected, used, and stored for this study: name, email address, and occupation role,
- due to the nature of the study, I cannot remain fully anonymous, and my role and connection to the museum will be apparent through pseudonymisation (e.g., Curator A, Educator B),
- the recording of my interview will be transcribed, and upon the completion of the transcription of the interview recording, the original recording will be deleted,
- I will have the opportunity to review and make any necessary modifications to the transcript,
- Elisa Kusuma Dewanti will refer to this transcript, which I have checked and reviewed, in her dissertation data analysis and
- the coded research data will be available for at least 7 years for review and reuse in future scientific research.

Please tick as appropriate

- I consent to participate in the research study as described in the information document.
- I agree to the terms for processing my interview as outlined above.
- I would like the following special conditions to be associated with my interview and transcript
(optional):

.....

...

Name:

Signature: Date:

Statement of the executive researcher

I declare that I have informed the person mentioned above correctly about the research study and that I abide by the guidelines for research as stated in the protocol of the Ethics Assessment Committee Humanities.

Elisa Kusuma
Name:

Signature:  Date:

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Mediating Historical Legacies at Museums: ,
The Reframing Picton Exhibition at The National Museum Cardiff

supervised by Dr. Ketty Iannantuono, Radboud University ;
Kirsti Jõesalu, Ph.D., University of Tartu
Professor Dennis Francis, University of Glasgow

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Elisa Kusuma Dewanti

20/08/2025