Experiential Design – Rethinking relations between people, objects and environments

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Invention in action at the Museum of Childhood

• Author(s) Name:
Tom Coward

• University or Company Affiliation:
University of Kingston
AOC Architecture Ltd

• Abstract (300 words):
In 2018 AOC won an international competition to deliver step change in the visitor experience for the V&A Museum of Childhood, East London. Serving a diverse local and national community there is ambition to transform a museum ‘From Being about Something to Being for Somebody’. First opened in 1872, the building will become a museum of design and creativity for young people and families, a site where the V&A’s collections will be activated to build creative confidence in future generations.

Working with local communities AOC are shaping a vision for both an essential civic space for Bethnal Green and a physically and socially interactive museum for multi-generational and inter-cultural audiences.

Till June 2020 ‘open studio’ reveals our engagement; we have commandeered the last temporary exhibition ‘A Pirates Life for Me’ to create a shared making space inside the museum that purposefully tests the curatorial and operational norms of the institution with its various publics. Object-based enquiry and learning through play provoke challenges to traditional museum artefact accessibility. Inside ‘open studio’ visitor-shaped ideas lead to directly-made prototypes; together designers, curators and visitors trial new forms of interaction.

This paper describes; the design process for ‘open studio’; emerging findings through participatory engagement; and meaningful outcomes informing the transformational masterplan. The case study presents research exploring the performative role of conversation in making cultural meaning through physical architecture – this experiential dialogue is a participation reinforced every-day within design
provocation, the choreography of construction and in maintenance through continued use.

- **Author(s) Biography (200 words each):**

  Tom Coward is a London based architect and co-founding Director of AOC Architecture Ltd, an award winning practice of architects and designers established in 2005. Agents of Change design generous architecture that is both beautiful and socially engaged. Gaining recognition for inventive inquiry, participatory practice and characterful buildings; we operate at diverse scales for demanding clients with a reputation for high quality architecture in sensitive contexts.

  He sits on the GLA Architecture Design and Urbanism Panel for Engagement, Local Regeneration and Design Advice; currently assisting with a cultural toolkit to enhance space provision for the arts in London. He is a member of RIBA, a fellow of the RSA, a member of the Southwark, Harrow and Hounslow Design Review Panels, a Design Advisor in Haringey and Greenwich, and sits on the Croydon Place Review Panel.

  Tom studied architecture at the University of Nottingham and the Royal College of Art, where he was awarded the Alsop Architecture Prize. He has taught and lectured widely in Europe and USA, and currently leads a masters unit at Kingston University, whilst working towards a PhD by practice. In 2011 he was the Louis Kahn Visiting Professor at Yale researching public access into archive collections.