

Polly  
Richards  
Interpretation  
Masterplanning  
Exhibitions

July 2022

## Polly Richards

Polly Richards is an experienced interpretation and masterplanning consultant with over 20 years' experience in the sector. During this time, she has worked client side as a senior interpretation manager for major museums and cultural heritage organisations, and independently as a freelance interpretation and masterplanning consultant. Polly has the skills and expertise to help guide your project team through the detailed development and delivery of any exhibition, museum or heritage redevelopment project and has a passion for telling inclusive and diverse histories in ways that are fully accessible to all.





Polly Richards: Interpretation Consultant

## Profile

Training in theatre design at Nottingham Polytechnic from 1987–1990, I worked for 8 years as a freelance theatre, exhibition and film designer and gained a PhD in African art before moving into the museums and heritage sector. For the past 20 years I have worked as both a freelance interpretation and masterplanning consultant, and client side, as a permanent member of staff for major cultural heritage organisations. My unique combination of skills and expertise enables me to bridge the communication gap that often exists between academics and designers, and to envision and deliver audience-focused projects in a range of museum and heritage settings.

From 2014–2018 I was the Creative Programming and Interpretation Manager for Historic Royal Palaces, based at the Tower of London. Here I spent two years leading a large inter-departmental team and facilitating over 70 workshops with internal and external stakeholders at all levels to produce the Tower Core Story: the first Interpretation Strategy for this infamous castle. Interpretation projects at the Tower of London included the re-presentation of the Bloody and Beauchamp Towers and the redesign of the visitor map and cross-site wayfinding. I also worked with Royal Armouries to deliver *Armouries in Action*, a new interactive gallery for families which opened in 2017. In the same year I championed a cross-palace, cross-departmental team to deliver *Palace Pride*:- Historic Royal Palace's first LGBT+ programme. This included my leading the delivery of the Tower's first LGBT+ tour (May 2017) and this tour has now become embedded in both the permanent daily and commercial offer.

From 2011–2014 I was Exhibitions Interpretation Curator at the Royal Museums Greenwich where I delivered projects of all scales including a master plan study for the Royal Observatory Greenwich; interpretation for the Great Map and Neptune Court Re-display; and the interpretation for *Ansel Adams: from the Mountains to the Sea*, a special exhibition in the Sammy Ofer Wing.

From 2005–2009 I worked at Ralph Appelbaum Associates (RAA) as Senior Content Developer on both public and private sector museums, galleries and exhibitions. Projects during this time included the re-development of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter; a Master-plan Scoping Study for the Royal Cornwall Museum in Truro; development of the Interpretation Strategy for the Black Cultural Archives in London; and the concept development for the redisplay of the Horniman Museum's Natural History Gallery. I also delivered the Interpretation Strategy for the Olu Obasanjo Presidential Library in Abeokuta, Nigeria.

Since going freelance in 2018 I have worked for museums and heritage sites in the UK. Projects and clients have included delivering the Vision for a new Science and Industry museum for Birmingham Museums Trust; the Interpretation Strategy for Chelsea Physic Garden's glasshouses; the site-wide Interpretation Strategy and new interpretation for Salisbury Cathedral; an experimental project for The National Gallery's Innovation Lab; the Vision for Clendon Park's visitor experience for The National Trust, and new exhibitions and galleries for the Royal Museums Greenwich, The V&A Photography Centre and The Science Museum. In all projects I have worked with project teams with an enormous range of experience and expertise: mentoring and guiding both curators and volunteers through every stage of the project process and enabling them to communicate their research in a manner that is accessible to the widest range of audiences.

## Curriculum Vitae (Abbreviated)

### Education and Qualifications

1994 – 2003	Ph.D. (Dept. of African Art and Archaeology) Subject: Dogon Masks in the 21st century School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London
1987 –1990	B.A. (Hons) Theatre Design (2:1) Nottingham Trent University
1986 –1987	Foundation Course in Art and Design St. Martins School of Art
1984 –1986	A levels (Art, History of Art, French, English) Camden School for Girls, London

### Interpretation and Masterplanning Work

<b>2018 – Present</b>	<b>Director of my own Interpretation and Masterplanning Consultancy</b>  Clients and Projects include:
2022	Romans in the City: Visioning Consultant for the Corporation of London
2022	National Maritime Museum: Interpretation Lead for 'Poles Apart: Explore the world of the RRS Sir David Attenborough', Upper Deck Gallery
2022	V&A 'The Principles of Interpretation' Course: Course Director and Developer
2021 ongoing	Birmingham Museum Trust: Visioning Consultant for the new museum of Science and Technology; Advisor on the Bridge Gallery, Commonwealth Games display
2021	National Heritage Memorial Fund: Development of Interpretation Guidance for NLHF
2019 ongoing	Salisbury Cathedral: Delivery of Interpretation Strategy and Redisplay for the Cathedral
2019 ongoing	Chelsea Physic Garden: Digital and Interpretation Masterplan
2020	'Sensing the Unseen: Step into Gossaert's Adoration': National Gallery, Innovation Lab, Interpretation Consultant
2019 – 2022	V&A Photography Centre, Phase 2: Interpretation Lead

2020 – 2022	Technicians Gallery: Science Museum, London Lead Interpretation Consultant
2019 – 2020	Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin: Interpretation Strategy Consultant
2019	Power Hall: Science and Industry Museum, Manchester Interpretation Consultant and Advisor on gallery representation
2018	Clandon Park: National Trust. Interpretive Planning and Visitor Experience Consultant for the National Trust. Creation of the Visitor Experience Vision Statement for the new Clandon Park.
2018	Tower of London: 4 & 5 Tower Green: Interpretive Planning and Visitor Experience Consultant for Historic Royal Palaces. Creation of the Visitor Experience Vision Statement for the restoration of 4 and 5 Tower Green.
2018	Royal Museums Greenwich: Endeavour Project, Interpretation Consultant

### Past Museums and Heritage Work (Selection)

2014 – 2018	<p>Tower of London (for Historic Royal Palaces): Creative Programming and Interpretation Manager</p> <p>Main responsibilities included: Project Lead on all Tower based projects: responsible for the creation of interpretation plans, creative direction, creation of project briefs and appointment of all consultants, project management from concept through to install. Liaising with senior management regarding project scheduling and resourcing. Involvement in medium to longterm strategic thinking.</p> <p>Projects Included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tower Core Story: Project Lead on the delivery of HRP's first Interpretation Plan for the Tower of London, (2017 – 2036) ensuring that the Tower's offer will delight existing audiences, and build new audiences, whilst building relevance, coherence and quality in the next 20 years</li> <li>• Re-presentation of the Bloody and Beauchamp Towers: Project Lead, Project Manager and Interpretation Manager. (Due for completion, Autumn 2018)</li> <li>• Tower Visitor Facing Framework Study: Project Lead, using the Tower Core Story to build coherence, re-articulate and re-brand the visitor journey. The key output was a new visitor map, re-branded way-finding, new signage and a new guidebook. (Delivered Winter 2017 – Autumn 2018)</li> <li>• Pride, Power and Politics: Project Lead and Project Manager in the creation and production of the Tower of London's first LGBT+ Tour as part of HRP's Palace Pride programme (Delivered May 2018)</li> </ul>
-------------	---

- Re-presentation of the Medieval Palace: led graphic and lighting re-design and install and commissioned new chandelier installation (Delivered October 2017)
- Re-presentation of St John's Chapel, White Tower: Interpretive Planner, ensuring narrative alignment and coherence of the project within the wider context of the White Tower and Tower of London site. (Completed 2016)
- Armoury in Action: HRP's Project Lead alongside Royal Armouries to replace the former Hands on History Gallery in the White Tower with this new interactive gallery. (Delivered Winter 2017)
- Equality and Diversity Team Lead: participation in Equalities action learning set, Women's Network for Change, led workshops in accessible text writing
- Tower Access Review: Project Lead in the delivery of the Tower's Access review, (delivered Summer 2017) including my acting as advisor on the implementation of a new governance structure to ensure the action plan is delivered

**2011 – 2014**

**Exhibitions Interpretation Curator, Royal Museums Greenwich**

Projects included:

Main responsibilities included: interpretive planning, object display, workshop facilitation, internal and external presentations to key stakeholders, report and brief-writing, exhibit scriptwriting, editing and proofing, image and A.V. procurement, tendering and appointments, management and creative management of artists, designers and A.V. consultants, monitoring budgets, and contracts

- Royal Observatory Reinvigoration project: interpretative, strategic and creative lead for the delivery of a future vision for the Royal Observatory. Delivery of the short term upgrade to both interpretation and way-finding (2014)
- Rum, Sodomy and the Lash: team lead, content developer and project planner for exhibition and accompanying programme exploring the hidden history of sex and sexuality at sea (2014)
- The Great Map: content management and advisor on design development of a giant map installation and tablet based mobile app that delivers 100 British maritime stories for a family audience (2013)
- Ansel Adams: from the Mountains to the Sea: on-site co-curator; interpretation developer and programming advisor (2012)
- Neptune Court Re-display: managed the interpretation and object display, advised on design development, audio visual production and interactive development (2011 – 2012)

## Curriculum Vitae

- 2009 – 2011** **Dogon Now: Masks in Motion: Guest Curator of a touring exhibition for the Museum for African Art, New York.**  
Scriptwriter, author of catalogue and director of A.V.
- 2010 – 2011** **Treasure and Transform: Curator of an exhibition for Bath and North East Somerset Council on the Vision for the Future of Bath**
- 2005 – 2009** **Ralph Appelbaum Associates (Museum & Exhibition Design Consultancy): Senior Content Developer.**
- Projects included:
- Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter: content co-ordination and design development on 10 new permanent galleries
  - Royal Cornwall Museum, Truro: project leader on the Museum's Master Plan
  - Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library, Nigeria: content developer, design development and workshop facilitator
  - Black Cultural Archives, Brixton: senior content developer and design advisor
  - Horniman Museum (HLF bid for a new Natural History Gallery): content developer
  - Ailsa Craig Visitor Centre, Scotland: content developer and design advisor
- 2004** **Discover Greenwich Visitor Centre, Greenwich**  
Consulted on Master Plan, assisted on concept for the design brief and overall visitor experience
- 1998 – 2001** **The Building Exploratory, Hackney: Deputy Director and Exhibition Designer:**  
Overall responsibility for the design and management of the design team, and implementation of the exhibition. Responsibilities included: financial planning, fundraising, and programming, office management and co-ordination, appointment and management of artists, contractors, and volunteers.

## Film and Theatre Design Work: (Selection)

- 1990 – 1997** **Freelance Theatre and Film Designer**  
**Responsible for set and costumes design**  
Projects Included:

## Curriculum Vitae

1997	Jo Brand: Like it or Lump it: Art Director for Vera (TV Productions)
1997	24:7: Assistant Art Director for Scala Productions
1996	B Monkey: Art Dept. Assistant for Scala Productions
1995	Macbeth and Romeo And Juliet, Costume designer for Shakespeare U.K., USA Tour
1995	The Cracked Pot: Set and Costume designer, Courtyard Theatre, West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds
1994	Days Of Pride: Set and Costume designer, Living Archive, Milton Keynes
1994	About Face: Set and Costume designer, Salisbury Playhouse
1993	The Mandrake, Repunzel and A Passion for The Countryside: Set and Costume designer, Oxfordshire Touring Theatre Company
1993	The Giraffe, Pelle And Me, Dracula and Romeo and Juliet: Set and Costume designer, The London Bubble Theatre Company

## Publications:

Forthcoming	Dogon Masks in Motion, published by Galda Verlag, Germany
2017	Introducing Dogon Masks and Mask Performances, an essay for ReCollecting Dogon, the Menil Foundation, Texas
2011	Objets d'hier, Art d'aujourd'hui, in Dogon, Téléràma hors sèrie, Paris
2006	What's in a Dogon Mask, Res, Journal of Anthropology and Aesthetics, New York
2006	Dogon Masks at the turn of the Millennium, African Arts, UCLA
2004	Les Masques Dogon au Tournant du Millenaire, in Regards sur les Dogon, (exhibition Catalogue), Ed. Rogier Bedaux, Leiden
2000	Imina Sangan or Masques à La Mode, in Re-Visions: New Perspectives On The African Collections Of The Horniman Museum, Ed. Karel Arnaut, The Horniman Museum and Gardens, London and The Museu Antropologico Da Universidade De Coimbra



## Curriculum Vitae

### Board and Committee Experience

- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| <b>2020 – Present</b> | <b>Trustee of Joliba, British N.G.O. based in the Dogon Region, Mali</b><br>Recently appointed in June 2020   |
| <b>2016 – Present</b> | <b>Chair of “Space Invaders”, a campaign for women’s equality in the Museums and Heritage Sector</b><br>Main responsibilities have included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chairing all meetings and activities</li><li>• Drafting Manifesto and Action Plan</li><li>• Events Planning and Workshop Facilitation</li></ul>  |
| <b>2015 – Present</b> | <b>Trustee of Oxford House, Bethnal Green</b><br>Supported the Director through a successful £3million fundraising campaign, redevelopment of the café, and restored 19th Century chapel (completed in 2019).<br>Main responsibilities have also included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Redevelopment Project Sub Committee</li><li>• Public Programming Sub Committee</li><li>• Advisor on Interpretation Strategy and Implementation of Heritage Project</li><li>• Trustee lead in developing Anti Racist Action Plan with the staff</li></ul> |
| <b>2003 – 2009</b>    | <b>Founder and Treasurer, Friends of Mali, UK</b><br>Main responsibilities included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Public Programming of Events</li><li>• Fundraising</li><li>• Bookkeeping</li><li>• Liaison and Chaperone for VIP visitors arriving from Mali</li></ul>   |
| <b>1996 – 2020</b>    | <b>Advisor to the Board of Joliba, British N.G.O. based in the Dogon Region, Mali</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Facilitated a 3 year award of 60k from the Sainsbury Family Charitable Trust (Ashden Trust and Gatsby Foundation)</li><li>• Successfully fundraised to extend well building and midwifery projects in the region</li><li>• Supported and advised on all Project Activities: including Dune Stabilisation, Midwifery, Agroforestry and Microcredit Schemes</li></ul>   |
| <b>1993-1995</b>      | <b>Judge for the London Fringe Awards</b>   |

### Professional Development (Selection)

- |             |                                      |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>2013</b> | <b>Clore Leadership Short Course</b> |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|

## References

Aileen Peirce

Head of Interpretation and Design

Historic Royal Palaces

Relationship: Line-Manager to Polly Richards during the final stages in the delivery of the Tower Core story and during the delivery of the first phase of works

Date: 2017-2018

Contact email: aileen\_crombie@hotmail.com

Contact phone number: 07786 331236

Sarah Lockwood

Head of Learning and Interpretation

Royal Museums Greenwich

Relationship: Head of Department when Polly worked at Royal Museums Greenwich and whilst she delivered the Royal Observatory Masterplan

Date: 2014-2018

Contact email: SLockwood@rmg.co.uk

Contact phone number: 07976 404 006

## Testimonials

Michael Day CVO;

Chief Executive, Historic Royal Palaces, 2003-17.

“Polly’s most important piece of work at Historic Royal Palaces was to lead The Tower Core Story project. This project required a great deal of consultation, understanding the physical site, how all the current interpretation functions and mediating the views of many different colleagues. It is immensely to her credit that the finished result was produced with great clarity and insight – and will provide exactly that organising framework we wanted for years of projects to come.”

Richard Harrold

Director, The Tower of London

“Polly was the creative force behind the representation of two of our most important historic spaces, the Beauchamp and the Bloody Towers. The result is a powerful and engaging evocation of the stories those spaces tell, innovative in method, accessible to all and appropriate to old and young alike.”

Polly  
Richards  
Interpretation  
Masterplanning  
Exhibitions

Dr Polly Richards  
45 Ellingfort Road  
London E8 3PA  
07866209473  
[polly@pollyrichards.com](mailto:polly@pollyrichards.com)