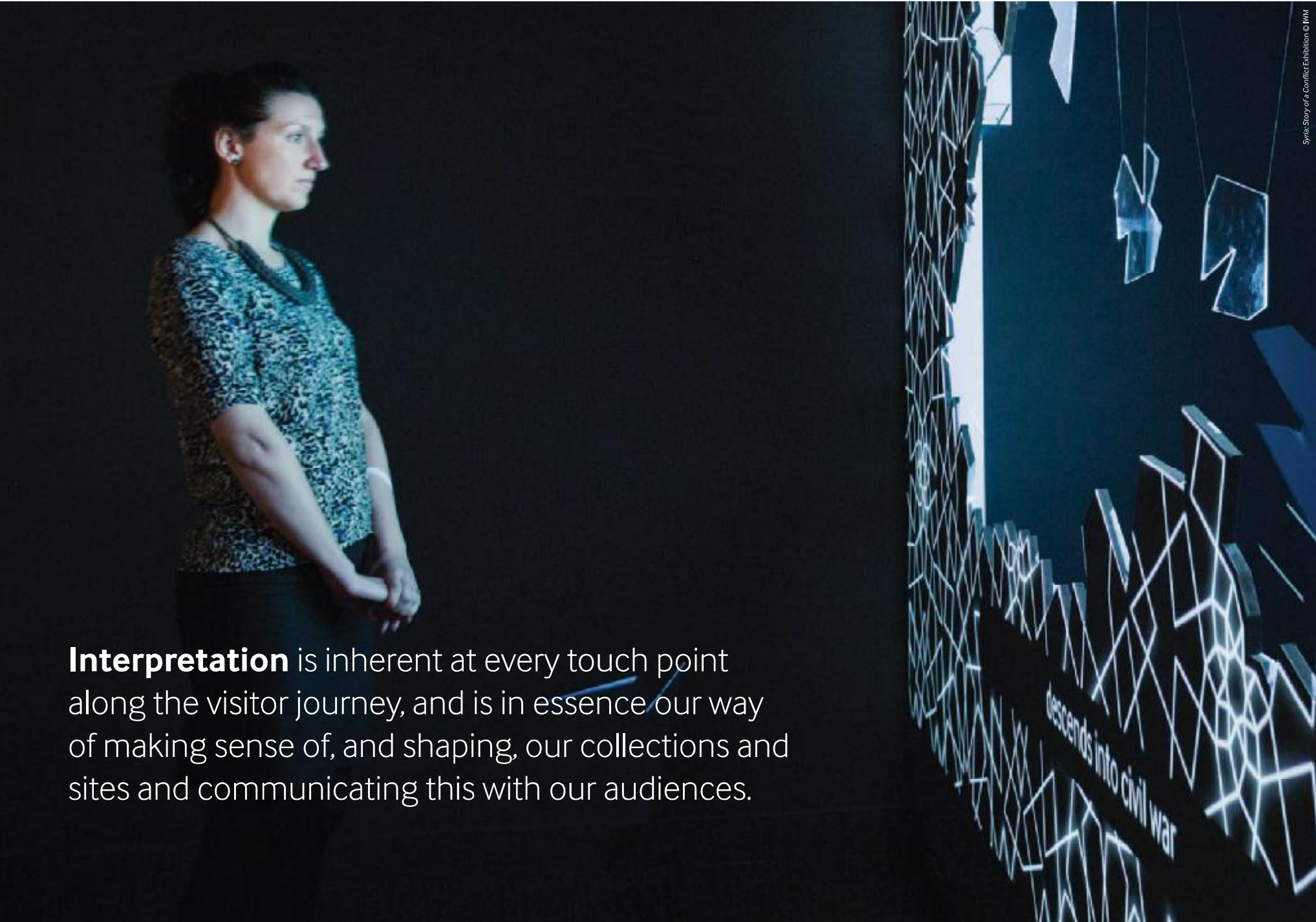




# Interpretation **Approach**





**Interpretation** is inherent at every touch point along the visitor journey, and is in essence our way of making sense of, and shaping, our collections and sites and communicating this with our audiences.



## OUR **VISION**

Our vision is to create coherent and consistently relevant Interpretation of the highest quality which responds directly to IWM's cause and is inspiring, accessible and appealing to our audiences.



A woman with long brown hair and glasses stands in a museum gallery. She is wearing a patterned blouse and a black skirt. To her left is a large wall display of numerous newspaper clippings arranged in a grid. The floor is dark and reflective, showing the woman and the wall display. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.


# 01

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY INTERPRETATION?

Our approach to Interpretation is at the heart of everything we do. It shapes every choice we make about the material culture we collect; how we conserve and record our collections; the context in which we choose to display them and what we chose to say about them.

Our Interpretation approach informs which conflicts we cover; what we say about those conflicts; whose voices and viewpoints we represent; and the narratives we chose to prioritise in our historic spaces.

Interpretation is both the selection of stories we chose to tell, and how we chose to tell them. The how is as equally important as the what.



'This is the most  
amazing exhibition'

VISITOR TO LEE MILLER

Our visitors are active in constructing their own knowledge and every individual's personal experience and perspective shapes their own learning journey.

Recognising our visitors as individuals who are active agents in their own personal experience is at the heart of our approach.

Our challenge is to find ways to engage every individual with our stories, collections and sites in a way that meets their needs and challenges their expectations.

We take a constructivist  
approach to learning.



The background image shows an exhibition space. On the left, a large, faint peace symbol is projected onto a wall, with the words "FIGHTING FOR PEACE" and "PEOPLE POWER" visible around it. To the right, several vertical panels display various protest signs and photographs of people. Some signs include "EAR RACE", "THE APPEASER", "STOP TRUMP NUCLEAR ARMS", and "STOP IN AIRM". Two people, a woman with dark hair and a woman with red hair, are seen from behind, looking at the exhibition panels.

02

## IWM'S 11 PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

The following **principles**  
underpin our approach  
to Interpretation at IWM.

'I left this exhibition with  
a feeling of hope'

VISITOR TO PEOPLE POWER



*DX17: An interactive sound installation created by artist Nick Ryan © IWM*

## 01. Personal discovery

We ensure visitors have the freedom to take charge of their own journey. To set their own pace and explore subjects to the level of depth that interests them, using whichever tools we provide that appeal to them. We allow visitors to make meaning in their own way.

## 02. Dialogue not didactic

We invite visitors into a dialogue with us. Our intention is to inform, not lecture. We encourage visitors to draw their own conclusions.

## 03. Sensory engagement

By telling our stories from a sensory perspective our approach acknowledges that conflict is a physical lived experience.



*The Big Picture Show © IWM*

## 04. Layer cake

Within a narrative structure of an exhibition or site, we will add depth and nuance to our primary message by layering information about a historic site or object.

## 05. Story led, people focussed

Storytelling provides context, draws out relevance and has the potential to bring objects and places alive. Finding the human element of a story helps people make sense of complex abstract ideas.

We leave gaps, ask questions  
and provoke debate.

## 06. Rigorous research

Everything we do should be rooted in accurate robust curatorial research. This lends weight to our authority, but it also gives us the license to enter into debate with our visitors and be honest about what we do not yet, or cannot know. We can harness our research to find new ways of exploring old subjects, to create new Interpretation tools and ground our design approach.

## 07. Multi-modal

We will become experts in skilfully weaving stories that visitors can explore across platforms. We will take them on a journey of discovery that plays to different learning styles and provides a physical, visual and intellectually immersive experience.

## 08. Social experience

Many of our visitors come in a pair or a group. Typically group visitors are socially motivated, they may have varied levels of subject knowledge, different levels of interest and different learning styles. We will consider how we can cater to these different needs, whilst facilitating a sociable experience.

## 09. Design appropriate

Authentic, appropriate design is a critical component of our interpretive approach. Within a historic environment, the design choices we make now are as important as those that were made in the shaping of that environment originally. Seamless Interpretation can create powerful experiences and lasting memories.

## 10. Imagination

However we tell our stories, acknowledging the space in between the story, space or object and the visitor is critical. It is within the space that visitors can fill in the missing pieces and create deeply personal, powerful impressions. We will leave room within our experiences for visitors to use their imagination.

## 11. Palimpsest

Our sites are a palimpsest. We will give visitors the tools to peel back their layers of history. From standing on the spot where great moments happened, to creating moments of time-travel, Interpretation brings the history of our spaces and the people who inhabited them to life.



Show, don't tell.





# 03

## INTERPRETATION IN CONTEXT

'You've created something special in the preservation and exhibition of this important time'

VISITOR TO CHURCHILL WAR ROOMS

Our aim is to provide visitors with the tools to unlock meaning and find personal connections with our sites and collections.



## Interpreting our sites

Unlike an exhibition space, our historic sites, HMS *Belfast*, Duxford, Churchill War Rooms, are not neutral spaces. By their very nature they are authentic, immersive environments. Our challenge is to unlock meaning in the historic environment by choreographing an experience that brings the sites to life and reveals its past through the clues available to us in the present. This manifests itself by employing Interpretation tools and a design approach which should find roots and inspiration in the historic environment – this is critical to ensuring we do not allow the Interpretation to overwhelm the site and create a barrier to the site resonating with visitors.

## Interpreting our collections

Interpreting our collection, by contrast, requires us to provide context for visitors to make sense of objects. We invent narrative environments in which to display those objects, creating a dialogue around and between one or more objects. For many of our exhibitions, we create the narrative and use objects to illustrate it.

When we conjoin the two – placing historic objects in a historic environment – the results can be incredibly powerful, providing authentic context for the object and a human connection for the site.


‘The audio and the visuals are incredible’

VISITOR TO THE BIG PICTURE SHOW



# 04

## IWM CORE VALUES



All **Interpretation** should actively contribute to delivering IWM's cause. Our vision is to be a leader in developing and communicating a deeper understanding of the causes, course and consequences of war. This vision is underpinned organisationally by our core values.





**COURAGEOUS:** we're confident and have the courage to challenge the established wisdom; championing debate and innovative approaches.

We will be courageous in both the stories we tell, and the way we tell them. We recognise the importance of both what we say, and how we say it. This means thinking laterally about how we prioritise and present our stories, subjects and sites. It means taking risks in how we present those stories and challenging the received wisdom about the traditional form an exhibition takes. Looking outwardly both within and beyond the museum sector we can cherry pick new forms of communication and forge new approaches to telling our stories at IWM.



**EMPATHETIC:** we're sensitive to people's emotions, respecting different points of view and the deep significance of our collections.

Interpretation provides our historic sites and our collection with a scenography and a coherent narrative environment in which stories can unfold. Within this narrative environment, we prioritise people stories, providing a human focus through which we can examine the wider political and contextual story.



*My Country Map* by artist Hanaa Makallah, exhibited in *Age of Terror: Art Since 9/11* Exhibition © IWM

**RELEVANT:** we strive to make everything we do relevant to contemporary society, while maintaining a balanced and impartial viewpoint.

Starting with the contemporary, we will draw out the personal, national and international relevance of our subject. Relevance is subjective. A better holistic understanding of our audiences and an ongoing dialogue with them will help us shape relevant content. To be truly relevant, we must ensure we embed diversity and equality within our concept development.

We will approach our subject both directly and laterally, thinking about conflict – both historic and contemporary – in its widest possible sense to ensure that both the causes and consequences of conflict are considered from all angles, from different perspectives for a broader range of audiences to engage with our subject matter.



HMS Belfast Bell, located on the Quarterdeck © IWM

**AUTHORITY:** our deep and dynamic knowledge of our rich collections makes us the first port of call on the history of modern conflict, and sets standards of excellence in everything we do.

We are a trusted voice and authority on historic conflict. We will work towards developing a distinctive and trusted voice for contemporary conflict.

We will continue to ensure all of our Interpretation is underpinned by rigorous academic and audience research. This gives us the license and courage to be able to present challenging narratives and alternative viewpoints with conviction. It also gives us greater freedom in the way that we present our stories, sites and collections.

We are courageous in  
both the stories we tell,  
and the way we tell them.



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