Europeana Case Study
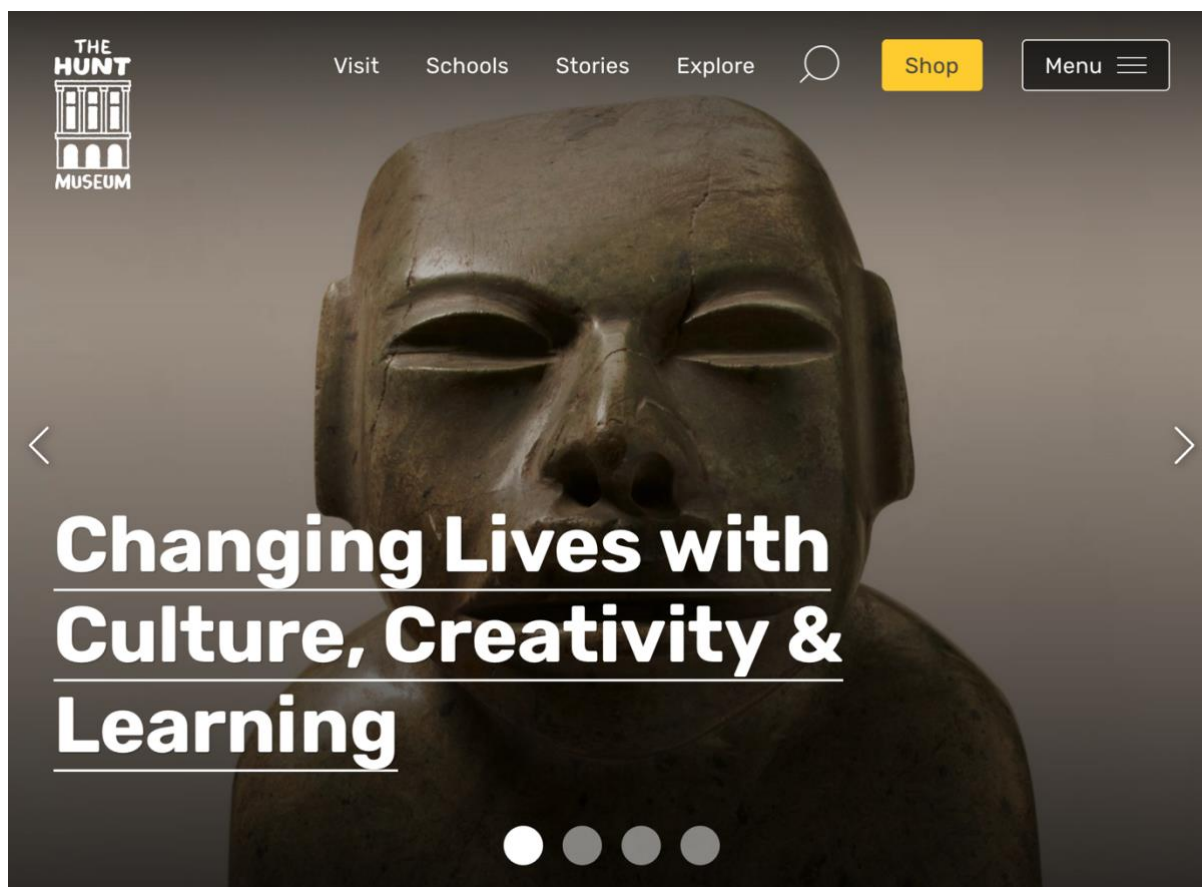
Digitisation, Education and Engagement at the Hunt Museum

Sian McInerney, Hunt Museum

July 2022

Table of contents

Introduction

The potential of using 3D digitisation of historic buildings, monuments, sites and collections for tourism, education and exploration is well recognized. This case study shares insights from the Hunt Museum.

Figure 1: The Hunt Museum

The Hunt Museum is in Limerick in the west of Ireland. The museum preserves and exhibits the original artefacts from 'the Hunt Collection', an eclectic collection of approximately 2,000 works of art and antiquities gathered by antique dealers and collectors John and Gertrude Hunt over their lifetime. This diverse collection contains artefacts from Greece, Rome, Egypt and the Olmec civilization as well as an important collection of Irish prehistoric archaeological material ranging from Mesolithic through to the Iron Age and artistic works from artists like Pablo Picasso and Jack B. Yeats, among others. Described as a 'cabinet for the curious', the Hunt Museum is dedicated to enriching lives with culture, creativity, and learning.

Figure 2: Hunt Museum activities

The Hunt Museum Strategy 2025[1] aims to widen the interaction with the Hunt Museum's collections through physical and virtual platforms including [Europeana](). With the diverse range of objects in the collection the opportunities that the museum has for digital engagement are quite high.

The role of digitisation at the Hunt Museum

The Hunt Museum believes that the modern museum operates across three platforms:

- the human - the community;
- the physical – the building itself and the collections; and
- the virtual – the web environment and digital content.

Digitisation allows the physical collection of the museum to be connected to our audiences and communities. The museum's reason for digitising is quite simply *"we need to open up our cultural heritage, we need to make it accessible for everyone"*[2].

---

[1] https://www.huntmuseum.com/about/governance/strategy/
[2] https://www.myminifactory.com/it/stories/interview-with-the-hunt-museum
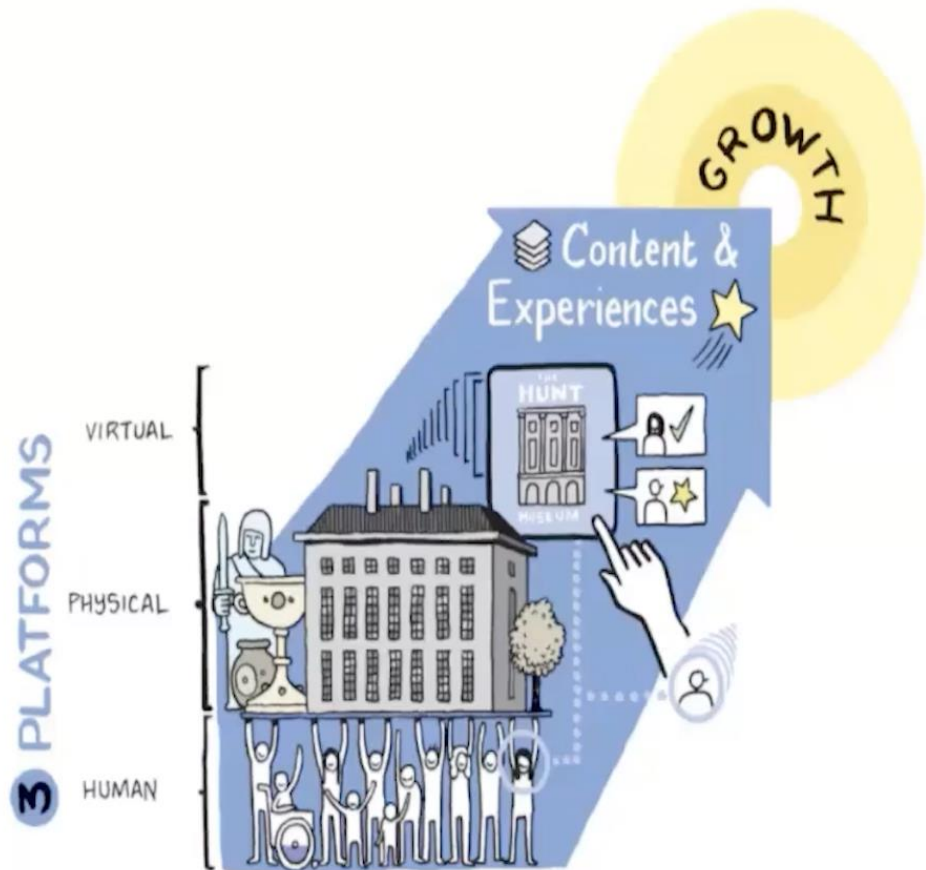
Figure 3: Human, physical and virtual platforms

The physical platform for museum activities is the historic building in which the collection is held and the collections and objects themselves. The museum ensures that both the collections and the building are actively researched, preserved and secured for our community, and the visitors of the museum. But its model for a modern museum considers the role that the virtual platform has in engaging educational audiences and the general public with the physical collections.

What does digitisation mean for our museum and what does it look like?

The digitisation strategy is demonstrated in the everyday operations of the museum. Firstly, it means the museum is digitizing its collections and placing the majority of the content into the public domain. This allows, or encourages, access to the world – and encourages new research and active participation with the collection.

Projects like [Europeana Archaeology](#) (EA)[3] and [Art of Reading in the Middle Ages ARMA](#)[4] have allowed the museum to increase its digital capacity and improve its ability to share its cultural heritage with a wider audience. Projects also allow the museum to learn from other institutions and project partners, their collections and especially from their expertise.

The Hunt Museum contributed 150 objects in 2D format and 50 objects in 3D format, and enriched the information on those objects, during the lifetime of the Europeana Archaeology project. Over 50 3D objects have been published on Europeana as part of the ARMA project and many more have been digitised under other museum projects. The Museum used the [Share3D dashboard](#) with support from [CARARE](#) to share metadata for its 3D objects with Europeana.

Here at the museum, we can see the benefit of publishing digitised collections on platforms such as Europeana through projects such as EA and ARMA and using data such as EDM when we see that our objects are found and used in Europeana editorials and printed 3D models downloaded by users of Sketchfab and Scan the World.

3D digitisation

3D digitisation at the Hunt Museum was started after the museum was awarded funding through the Heritage Council of Ireland to deliver training to its staff and volunteers in photogrammetry and 3D post-processing. This project was called *Limerick3D*, which allowed the museum to start digitising its collections with a team of volunteers. The project works on the idea of a symbiotic volunteer programme whereby professionals in the digitisation sector train staff and volunteers in the methods. Volunteers gain valuable experience in digitisation and applicable skills in post-processing and the museum gains by increasing the amount of the collection which is digitised.

The main goal of the Limerick3D project was to reach as many people as possible, by digitising their collection and making the content publicly open data. The project evolved into a permanent 3D strategy in the museum and the museum to continue to digitise the collection in 3D and to involve volunteers as much as possible. 3D models are integral to educational activities and the museum shares 3D models via Sketchfab and also as 3D printable models via Scan the World.

---

[3] https://europeanaarchaeology.carare.eu/
[4] https://pro.europeana.eu/project/the-art-of-reading-in-the-middle-ages-arma

3D digitisation is now fully embedded into the Hunt Museum strategy for engagement and education and was therefore focused digitisation continued for projects such as EA and ARMA providing excellent models of objects from our archaeological and medieval collections respectively.

Using digitisation for engagement

The Hunt Museum uses both its digitisation project and its digitised collections for engagement. It engages with its community by running short 3D digitisation days for groups. These are a form of outreach and encourage engagement with the museum, and they have also resulted in a large number of objects being 3D digitised and published on Sketchfab, connecting to platforms is the first step, and communicating it is the next. Social media is vital to the Museum's successful engagement and communication activities. A lot of its high-quality digitised objects are used across our social media platforms. We also use social media to create conversations by placing material online with information on our objects.

Explore section, the museum website

Digitised collections have been fully integrated into our 'Search the Collection' section of the new museum website. This means that online visitors, researchers or educators can engage with photos, 3D images and information about the objects.
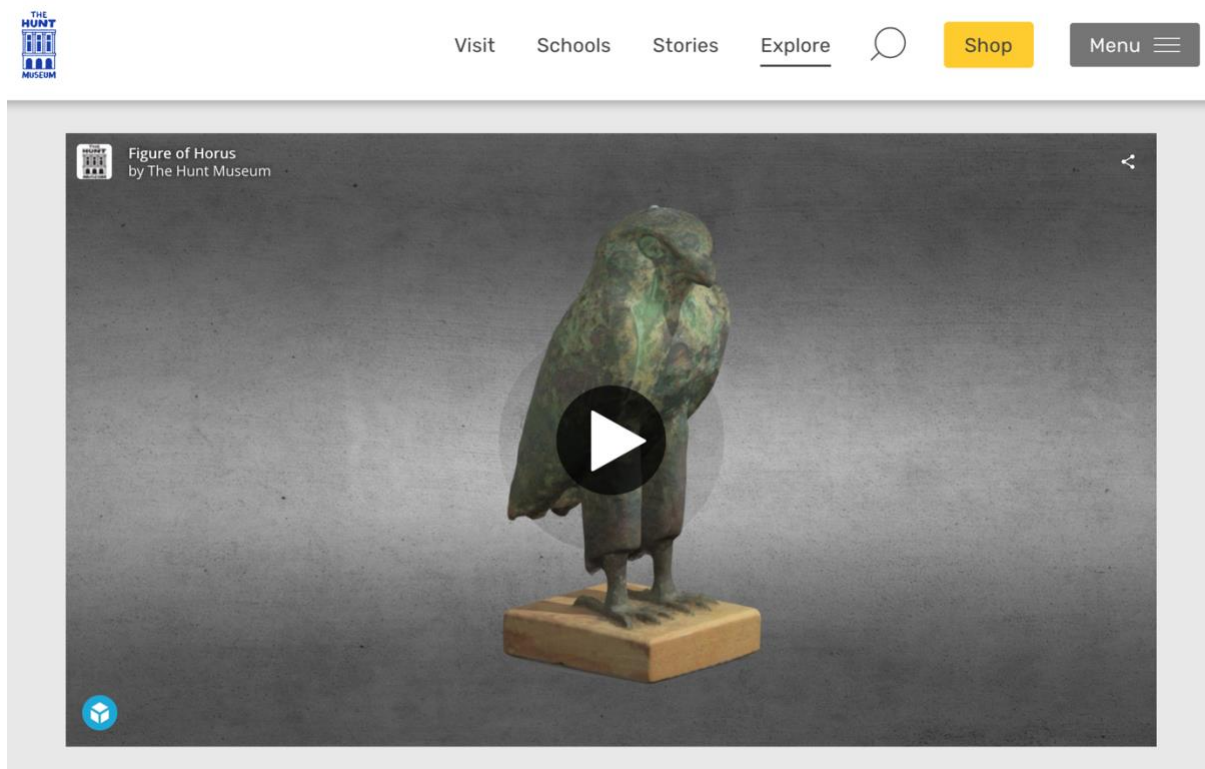

Figure 4: 3D integrated in the museum website

Museum from Home

Covid-19 restrictions and lockdowns were a challenging time for cultural institutions, and the importance of engaging with audiences virtually became more and more important. For the Hunt Museum, the task was not just to increase digital activities but also to engage meaningfully. It connected with organisations on a local and national level through the '*Museum from Home*' hashtag. The Museum geared up to increase activities online, it created new web content a lot of which leaned heavily on its digitised Collections.

Museum in a Garden

Using the technologies of 3D scanning and 3D printing, the artefacts "hidden" within the museum, are made large and placed outside the walls of the museum for play and enjoyment in our newly designed garden. Two objects have now escaped the museum and taken up residency in the garden.

Accessibility

The Hunt Museum has connected to platforms like 'Scan the World' and 'SketchFab', which it believes broaden the reach of the collections. Platforms like these and Europeana help it to bring the collections out of the cabinets and connect to people that couldn't ordinarily visit the museum.

The team has a project in mind that focuses on the idea of being able to handle museum objects thanks to 3D printing. This is seen as a great learning opportunity for everyone who wants to approach art more tangibly and for offering access to people with visual impairment, learning or other kinds of disabilities.

Using digitisation for Education

From its very beginning in the 1970s the Hunts believed that the collection had huge potential for visual education and that it should benefit the people of Ireland and Limerick especially. The museum's digitisation project including 3D has ensured that the aim of visual education has been maintained in the digital world, and ultimately increased its potential by bringing the collection online. Successful education programmes have found that 3D digitisation lends itself especially well to teaching children about museum objects.

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, there was a need for virtual learning resources, luckily the Hunt Museum already had 3D models that could be integrated into new resources. An open-source 'virtual collaboration platform' called Mozilla Hubs was populated with our digitised collections. The virtual room was then used to deliver a curatorial workshop to post-primary students.

As part of the ARMA project, the museum has created a suite of learning resources for primary and secondary school pupils that use the digitised medieval collections. All resources encourage students to use and explore Europeana digitised collections. The

Figure 5: Learning resources

resources make excellent use of video-based learning tools, online games, and the standard format for learning scenarios used by Europeana Classroom[5], and all are integrated with digitised medieval objects.

The Hunt is using its digitised collection in the Three Muses Joint Education Programme. This is an education programme that spans three cultural institutions in Limerick city; The Hunt Museum, The Limerick Museum and The Limerick City Gallery of Art. Four objects from across the ceramic collections of these institutions have been digitised and are currently being used in the development of a digital teachers pack as well as in an online game aimed at school children ages 8-10 years old. Using the digitised objects in this way allows for a level of remote engagement with the collections that has not been previously experienced.

Future projects

The Museum is continuing to learn and search out new ways of expanding its digital collections and new ways in which they can be used. However, it will continue to use 3D models to help more museum objects escape the museum and take up residency in our *Museum in a Garden.*

---

[5] https://www.europeana.eu/en/europeana-classroom

Digital interactives for the museum

The museum was recently awarded funding by the Heritage Council of Ireland to create more accessible interactions for the visually impaired. The planned interactives and touch and feel elements will use 3D models and digitised collections. Going forward the plan is to create digital interactives alongside the physical collection. The digital content will be created using digitised collections.

IIIF

Through recent publications for ARMA and [Fragmentarium](#), the museum has seen the potential for IIIF. We hope in the future to be able to create IIIF manifests for our 3D models so that they can be used for IIIF viewers and exhibition apps such as [Exhibit.so](#).

Conclusion

3D and digitisation in general have been an excellent opportunity for the Hunt Museum. It has not only allowed the Museum to engage with volunteers who learned transferable skills in digitisation but also to make its collection more accessible and searchable by placing it into the public domain for resharing and reuse. 3D digitisation has also allowed the Museum to unlock educational potential by using its 3D data sets across various platforms and in tourism and education programmes and, in this way, to access new audiences.

Hunt Museum on Europeana

Much of the content which was produced by the Hunt Museum has been made accessible on Europeana:
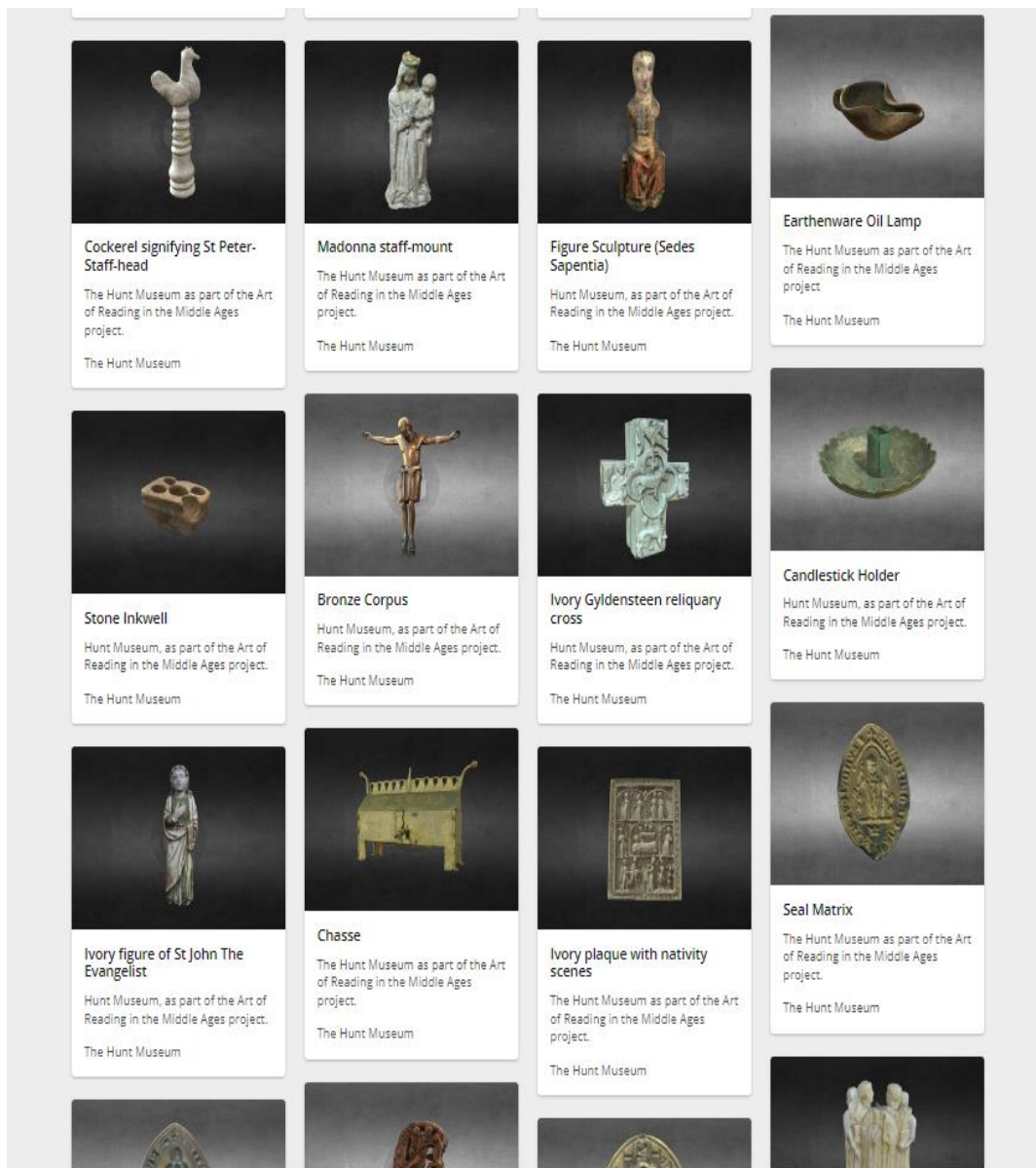

Figure 6: The Hunt Museum's collection on Europeana

Further reading

1. Hunt Museum Strategy 2025: https://www.huntmuseum.com/about/governance/strategy/

2. Interview with the Hunt Museum, My Mini Factory, 2020: https://www.myminifactory.com/it/stories/interview-with-the-hunt-museum

3. Europeana Archaeology project: https://www.huntmuseum.com/about/our-projects/europeana-arch/

4. ARMA – The Art of Reading in the Middle Ages project: https://pro.europeana.eu/project/the-art-of-reading-in-the-middle-ages-arma

5. Share3D Guide to the 3D dashboard and the 3D workflow: https://carare.gitbook.io/share-3d-guidelines/

6. Introduction to CARARE aggregation services: https://pro.carare.eu/en/introduction-carare-aggregation-services/

https://www.europeana.eu/en/search?page=1&qf=DATA_PROVIDER%3A%22Visual%20Dimension%20bvba%22&query=ename&view=grid

europeana

pro.europeana.eu

@EuropeanaEU

Co-financed by the Connecting Europe
Facility of the European Union