



Figment Arts Story Maps Project Evaluation

Bright Culture
July 2025



BrightCulture

Project Overview

Story Maps was an 18 month project to work with learning disabled, autistic and neurodivergent (LD/A/ND) artists to explore Sussex myths and folk stories through creative approaches. It was a collaboration between Figment Arts and three museums in East and West Sussex.

Over the life of the project, Figment Arts worked with LD/A/ND artists to learn about myths and folk stories of interest to them, and to re-tell these through visual arts and storytelling. The project ended with an exhibition at two locations in Newhaven (the Marine Workshops and Newhaven Museum), artwork on display in Hastings Museum and an exhibition to be held in Worthing Museum when it re-opens in February 2026.

Over the life of the project it has:

- supported 14 LD/A/ND artists through 32 studio sessions to create work around myths and folk stories;
- facilitated site visits and museum visits around Sussex for the artists;
- produced 13 large communal paintings and is now distributing 5000 illustrated booklets with the Story Maps trail;
- run 33 public workshops at venues such as Highdown Gardens, Hanningtons Lane and the Marine Workshops;
- exhibited artwork as part of the Sussex Modern exhibition and The Sheds installation at Brighton Fringe Festival, 2025.
- held exhibitions at Newhaven Museum and the Marine Workshops, and Hastings Museum, seen by 1700+ visitors, with an exhibition planned for the reopening of Worthing Museum in 2026;
- helped to cement the partnerships between Figment Arts and cultural organisations across Sussex, including Worthing Museum, Newhaven Museum, Creative Newhaven, Culture Shift, Highdown Gardens, Sussex Contemporary, Lifesize CIC and Level3.

Public Engagement

The project has engaged over 3000 people with the myths and folklore of Sussex, through its workshops, exhibitions and the Story Maps booklet. This will continue to grow as the booklet is circulated and with planned exhibitions in 2026.

In addition to the general public, 14 Figment Arts Artists, the Parchment Trust participants in Hastings, and a small group of volunteers have worked intensively on the project, visiting sites, learning about folklore and creating a substantial body of collaborative and individual art work.



Approved Purposes for the Grant

The National Lottery Heritage Fund's Approved Purposes for the project grant are listed below. While these don't measure the impact of the project, they do provide a structure to monitor project delivery against.

Figment Arts has delivered to all of the approved purposes with some minor amendments to the delivery timetable.

National Lottery Heritage Fund Approved Purposes	Progress
Distribute 3000 accessible heritage trail guides.	On-going, part of the legacy of the project.
Four online evaluation and sharing sessions for staff, volunteers and artists.	Achieved.
3 x 3-month exhibitions.	Achieved in Newhaven & Hastings; Worthing in 2026.
37 supported sessions for artists, supported by Figment Arts volunteers.	Achieved. 40+ studio sessions were delivered
Six new volunteers recruited and six new LD/A/ND artists	Achieved
Appointment of three project support workers, Community Engagement Worker & Evaluator	Achieved.
4 visits to museums and 4 to local heritage sites for artists and volunteers.	Achieved. 12 visits to museums & sites.
Six local heritage sessions for artists.	Achieved.
Four community workshops for a minimum of 64 people.	Achieved. 20 workshops held with/for the public.

Evaluating the Project

Esther Gill from Bright Culture Consultancy was commissioned to support the evaluation of the project in March 2024. The evaluation was designed to be light-touch, supporting the collection of monitoring data at events, and gathering feedback from workshop participants and exhibition visitors. Esther visited three studio sessions to talk with Figment Arts Artists about the project and their perceptions of it. She also attended a community workshop, participated in a communal painting and visited the exhibitions at the Marine Workshops and Newhaven Museum.

Project Activity

The Supported Studio

At the heart of the project were the supported studio sessions held in Hove at the Lawrence Art Studio. These regular sessions provided the artists with the space to develop their own work, discuss ideas, get advice from the Figment Arts Team and discuss forthcoming Story Maps events.

The studio sessions were where the co-curation process started: members bringing their own ideas about the meaning of myths and how to explore them creatively. The Figment Arts Team created a relaxed and inclusive environment in the Studio, where ideas were freely discussed and the Artists could explore their own experience, while also getting expert advice.

Myth and Folk Stories

The focus on myth and folk stories has proved to be particularly fruitful, bringing together heritage, landscape, historic stories and contemporary interests. It is a subject that is accessible to audiences, but also to artists, for whom it offers many creative routes.

One artist felt that myths were helpful for him in expressing thoughts around his disability: 'Myths are a way of looking inwards as well as outwards. A lot are based on real worries, and this reflects my own worries'.

Another artist commented that 'animals are important in myths and also for lots of autistic people'.



Without imagination and creativity,
life doesn't have any flavour.

Figment Arts Artist

Myth is powerful. Your own life is a
myth. Being able to paint here and
co-create, you can make your life
magic. Thank you.

Visitor to a public workshop



The Artists' Words

I enjoy the fact that the stories of the Story Maps are timeless. Everybody can enjoy them.

Through this group I have learned to use the Ipad, Procreate and Folklore. Figment Arts has broadened my horizons on doing other art topics. Another great thing is that I have sold 3 prints and this is the first time I have ever sold anything.

I like going to places and making art inspired by the places. I find reading difficult and so for me it's much better to visit places or to see pictures, than to read about them. I really enjoyed the visit to Chanctonbury Ring.

We go to different disability groups to show how fun art is and we do massive collaborative pieces with them which we will show in our exhibitions. Learning disabled and autistic people need a space where they can go to, where they can be themselves and have fun.

I arrived today wanting to sit quietly at a separate table with my headphones in and not speak to anyone. I've had a stressful week. The lovely people running the session were mindful in knowing this and gave me space to myself.

Figment Arts has given me the chance to help facilitate workshops for other community groups which gave me the confidence to apply for a job working with adults and young people with learning disabilities and now I'm working!

I love going to the Figment Arts Studio because I can have fun and be messy. It's good for my mental health because I get to see all my friends, catch up and have a fun time.

Figment arts is the excuse I have to go out, meet friends and work on creative projects. The atmosphere is almost always positive and your given tons of freedom to collaborate or work independently.

Public Workshops

The project delivered 20 free public workshops, hugely exceeding its target of four. These workshops proved to be very popular with both the public and the organisations hosting them. As with the supported studio sessions, Figment Arts created a supportive and inclusive atmosphere that encouraged people to join in with the communal paintings and to have a go.

The primary outputs from the workshops were a set of 13 large, communally-created, landscape paintings exploring Sussex myths. People were invited to learn about the story and add their bit to the painting. The paintings have a huge impact, clearly engaged people in the creation and were very popular in the exhibition at the Marine Workshops.

The workshops were held at venues across Sussex: Highdown Gardens; Worthing Museum; Marine Workshops, Newhaven; Beach Green, Shoreham; Hastings Museum; Denton Island Community Centre, Newhaven; the Unitarian Church, Brighton; and 2 Hannington Lane, Brighton, as part of 2024 Brighton Fringe Festival.

Walked in attracted by the vibrant colours and the big paints. We love art and often use it to relax. We really enjoyed our short experience here, it is a beautiful concept.

Visitor to a public workshop

Lots of fun and great to contribute to something as a collective. Thanks for encouraging me to get involved.

Visitor to a public workshop

Thank you so much to Debbie, Darren and David who delivered this painting workshop today... And to the rest of the Figment Arts team who joined each of our 2024 Discover Days. Your free and accessible collaborative art elevates the experience of our events. Can't wait to see the work exhibited in 2025 at the Worthing Museum!

Worthing Museum



A painting in progress, Hannington Lane, Brighton, May 2024

Story Maps Exhibition

The Story Maps exhibitions were planned as the culmination of the project, the opportunity to show the work created and to cement the relationships with the participating museums. The exhibitions were originally going to be hosted at Worthing Museum, Newhaven Museum and Hastings Museum, however this plan shifted as the project progressed.

The main exhibition opened in June 2025 at two sites in Newhaven: the Marine Workshops and Newhaven Museum, and has been extended at the Museum for longer than originally planned. A very successful opening evening, brought people together for folk music and story-telling alongside the artwork, and a total of c.750 have so far visited the exhibitions.

Worthing Museum is currently closed, re-opening in early-2026, so the exhibition there was not able to happen. However, Figment Arts and Story Maps will now be part of the opening programme in February 2026, with a major exhibition that will extend the Story Maps legacy and further cement the relationship between the two organisations.

In addition to the planned exhibitions, Figment Arts also got the opportunity to exhibit during the 2025 Brighton Fringe Festival as part of the SMART Sheds installation on the edge of the Downs and just a stone's throw from Devil's Dyke, site of one of the Sussex stories. Figment Art's 'Story Shed' was wrapped in reproduced work from the project and sat amongst sheds created by other artists. This was a very popular event and the installation as a whole won the 2025 Fringe Festival Exhibitions Award. Over the life of the installation c.500 people visited and saw the Story Shed.

Well done on a superb exhibition- it was great having it across two venues. I thoroughly enjoyed both.

Exhibition visitor

Amazing and inspiring art work - it is brilliant to see it all displayed!

Exhibition visitor

This was a great exhibition, really glad I went along. Loved seeing all the hag stones.

Exhibition visitor

It's been great to connect with a community of artists and really interesting to see which objects in our collection inspired them.

Dr Jenny Flood, Curator, Newhaven Museum

I seriously think you've created something magical with Figment Arts and I feel privileged to be invited to be part of the Studio sessions. The sense of connection, support and acceptance is uniquely unprecedented in visual arts circles.

Colin Hambrook, Founding Editor, Disability Arts Online



Museum & Heritage Partnerships

The partnerships with the three museums and Highdown Gardens have been mutually beneficial. They gave the Figment Arts Artists the opportunity to learn about local museum collections, explore a range of artefacts and hear from local experts. It is enabling the museums to build their relationships with a wide creative community who may not have traditionally engaged with the museums.

The opportunity provided by the grant from the National Lottery Heritage Trust has also enabled Figment Arts to build relationships and leverage other support from the Chalk Cliff Trust, Cass Arts and Brighton Fringe Festival.

Disseminating the Stories

In addition to the project booklet, which contains 13 images and a map showing the locations of the key stories, Figments Arts has maintained an active blog about the project and about the folklore that it is exploring. The website now hosts an interactive map linking to information on specific folk sites, audio recordings of some of the stories, all the collaborative paintings and links to relevant research.

One of the Artists has worked as the Digital Content Producer for Figment Arts, running the newsletter and social media accounts. This has allowed them to develop their skills, working on a project with very visual content and lots of stories to tell that play well on social media.



Part of the *La Belle Rosalie* communal painting

Successes

Story Maps has been a hugely successful, creative project, that has:

- Demonstrated the potential of folklore and myth to engage people with the heritage and stories of places across Sussex in an accessible and creative way;
- Received an enthusiastic response from the public, especially from those taking part in the communal paintings, and has exceeded its targets for public engagement;
- Created a communal and supportive environment for 14 learning disabled, autistic and neurodivergent artists to develop their skills and careers;
- Successfully developed an approach to co-curation that has allowed the artists to follow their interests, while steering and creating a project around a central theme;
- Provided opportunities for the Artists to learn new skills, gain new experiences and see their work in professional settings;
- Enabled Figments Arts to cement its position in the cultural landscape and to grow relationships with museums and organisations across Sussex, especially in Newhaven;
- Enabled Figment Arts to leverage additional support from other grant-funders and arts organisations, thus supporting organisational resilience.

Challenges

Challenges that arose during the project were generally mitigated with revised timetables or amended plans, such as the Worthing exhibition to take place in 2026. The more fundamental challenges were:

- The live storytelling and work with two storytellers didn't work as planned. The Artists were not keen to be involved and did not necessarily feel that their artwork required additional layers of storytelling. In the end the storytellers supported an artist in her visual storytelling and performed stories at the opening of the exhibition, which was well received.
- The partnership with Lifesize CIC in Hastings was harder to realise than anticipated. In practice, the physical distance was too great to enable Figment Arts to create and support a similar studio model in the town. However, the partnership between the two organisations has strengthened and will be maintained, and both have been able to provide additional skills and expertise to each other's work.
- The potential for a partnership with the Chichester Centre for Fairy Tales, Fantasy and Speculative Fiction hasn't developed as planned. However, it is hoped that an article about Story Maps will be accepted for the Centre's journal, Gramarye.

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This report was produced for Figment Arts to conclude the evaluation of the Story Maps project.

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