

18.08.2021

Public Statement with regard to the Cloud Studies Exhibition

Cloud Studies Exhibition

We recognise the Cloud Studies exhibition, by Forensic Architecture raises complex issues with widely differing views across different communities and, as a university and gallery, we are also mindful of our role in creating spaces for debate and in academic and artistic freedom.

The exhibition, and particularly a written statement by the artists displayed at its entrance, has led to some serious concern from a number of people and organisations, including local community groups.

Having considered these issues carefully with various stakeholders, we concluded last night that it is important for the exhibition to remain open in full at the Whitworth and we expect this to occur later this week. The University, as a non-political organisation, has tried to balance extremely complex issues raised by the exhibition, but we believe that the worst outcome for all parties concerned would have been to close this exhibition for an extended period of time.

The exhibition, expresses the views of the contributing artists, who have perspectives that come from their own experiences and the experiences of the communities and organisations who commission them. They do not necessarily represent the views of The University of Manchester and have been strongly contested by some. The case studies address complex international issues.

The Whitworth, is mindful of artistic freedoms and the various duties which apply across the work of the gallery, including rights around freedom of speech and expression and academic freedom. These rights must be considered alongside other rights and obligations, including those under equality laws as well as reflecting on the challenges of such deeply divisive issues as those covered by the exhibition.

Importantly, the Cloud Studies exhibition is shown in the protective and academic environment of a University gallery, and within the context of a history of art that has always encompassed provocation and challenge. Museums and galleries have traditionally been a space of experimentation and challenge, and the Whitworth is a place where we may be able to debate, discuss and disagree well, within a safe and empathetic environment.

Cloud Studies was produced by the Whitworth, The University of Manchester and Manchester International Festival.

What we are changing

We recognise the concerns raised, in particular about the inclusion of a written statement by Forensic Architecture, expressing their own views, displayed at the entrance to the exhibition. That's why the Whitworth has developed a space which gives voice to different perspectives on the issues raised by the exhibition and help contextualise them. It will be displayed prominently in the gallery.

Whitworth Governance Matters

We have also been asked by a number of stakeholders about changes to our governance. Considering the Government's proposals to expand further, through legislation, the rights of freedom of speech and expression and academic freedom amongst institutions operating in the higher education sector, the need for a governance review was identified and agreed. This is entirely separate from any discussion regarding this exhibition and follows a major external review of the University wide governance.

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