

PRESS RELEASE:

Pitt Rivers Museum features on Armchair Gallery, a new app for older people

Embargoed until Monday 22 October 2018

- **Free app allows people with dementia to enjoy great art and culture**
- ***Armchair Gallery* features art and artefacts from 7 world-class arts and heritage venues**
- **The app contains instructions for tried-and-tested creative activities that you can do with the people you care for**

A new app offers people with dementia the chance to enjoy some of the UK's greatest cultural collections, from the comfort of their own home. *Armchair Gallery* is specially designed for people living with dementia. It is available today on both iOS and Android.

Article 27 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states that "Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits". However, old age and dementia present major barriers to visiting galleries and museums. In addition to the increased likelihood of physical health problems, people can suffer sensory overload in crowded public spaces. Loss of confidence and lack of companionship are common. *Armchair Gallery* was developed with the aim of addressing these issues.

Last year an All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry Report, *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing (July 2017)*, explained that the arts have a significant role to play in meeting the major health challenge that dementia presents. It states that participation in the arts by older people can have an effect on health comparable to giving up smoking, and "*Arts engagement can boost brain function and improve the recall of personal memories; it can also enhance the quality of life of people with dementia and their carers.*"

The app showcases artworks and artefacts from the collections of seven of the UK's leading cultural venues. They are Chatsworth House, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, The Lowry, Dulwich Picture Gallery, Pitt Rivers Museum, Mr Straw's House and Newstead Abbey. Users can enjoy video tours presented by gallery and museum staff. Through the app's 18 playable activities, people can interact with the artworks and artefacts. For instance, they can colour a *Canaletto*, design a *Hepworth*-inspired sculpture, and take a selfie with *Lowry's 'Head of a Man'*. The app comes with a comprehensive set of instructions for creative activities that family members and carers can do with the people they care for.

Chris Connell, aged 61, has been diagnosed with early onset dementia. He has been using the app throughout its development:

"The Armchair Gallery sessions have been a highlight of my week. I've been using it as part of my memories group. We all experience dementia differently and the app is brilliant because it lets people take part at a range of different levels. I've been inspired by artworks I wouldn't otherwise be able to enjoy."

Jane Connell is Chris' wife and carer. She has been using the app with Chris as part of a dementia support group in Newark, North Nottinghamshire. She said:

“The app helps the group to reminisce. The artefacts it features bring back so many shared memories. We all leave feeling really relaxed and absorbed. We attended the sessions for Chris, who has dementia, but I look forward to them every week. It takes me away from the day to day stresses of being a carer. I can’t wait to use it at home.”

City Arts (Nottingham) created the app. A leading community arts organisation for over 40 years, City Arts has a long history of working with older people. It recently led the *Imagine* project, an acclaimed programme designed to bring art and culture into Nottingham’s care homes.

Kate Duncan, *Programme Director – Wellbeing* at City Arts and manager of the *Armchair Gallery* project, said:

“Armchair Gallery is a ground-breaking app that we hope will inspire people living with dementia and improve their lives. Over 4 years, we’ve collaborated with hundreds of older people, care staff, artists and cultural venues. We are delighted to be able to share what we have learned with everyone.”

The app’s development was funded by the Nominet Trust (now *Social Tech Trust*) and *The Baring Foundation* through their *Digital Arts & Creative Ageing* fund.

David Cutler, Director of *The Baring Foundation*, said:

“The Baring Foundation is very proud to have been a funder of the development of the Armchair Gallery app along with our partners the Nominet Trust and Arts Council England. It is a work of art in its own right and has been created with a lot of love and respect for the residents of care homes with which City Arts has been working. It is a major step forward in showing the potential and relevance of digital arts for older people. The Foundation has been privileged since 2010 to fund many wonderful arts projects working with older people, but Armchair Gallery is the one with the potential to have the greatest reach.”

The app is available as a free download for iOS on the Apple App Store. Android users can download it from the Google Play Store. It will be publicly launched at **Antenna, 9A Beck St, Nottingham NG1 1EQ**, at **4-6pm on Monday 22 October 2018**. Press are invited to attend the launch.

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

Social Media & Website

Armchair Gallery is on *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *Instagram* using the handle @armchairgallery. The accounts will become active on the day of the launch.

We will be using the hashtag #armchairgallery.

The app website is <http://armchairgallery.co.uk>

Photos

Photos of the app in use are available here: <http://bit.ly/2CJ19I2>

Image credits are noted in their file name. We can provide them in higher resolution on request.

Interviewees

The core Armchair Gallery team is available for interview. They are Kate Duncan, Tim Chesney and Robin Shackford. Chris Connell and Jane Connell are also available for interview.

About City Arts (Nottingham)

Founded in 1977, City Arts is a vibrant cultural hub, which produces art made collaboratively between the artists and communities of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. Through its work in the visual arts, the performing arts and the written word, City Arts promotes inclusivity and access to great art as a basic human right.

The organisation has been working in the areas of arts, health and older people for many years. It ran an acclaimed *Arts on Prescription* project, and led on the Nottingham-wide *Imagine – Arts and Older People in Care* programme. *Armchair Gallery* is the organisations first digital product.

City Arts is funded by *Arts Council England* and *Nottingham City Council*.

<http://city-arts.org.uk>

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