

Reimagining Reality's hovering ball exhibit is made from a cable drum and car vents. Visitors can change the direction of the air and hover more than one ball at a time. Credit: Discovering42

This interactive exhibition engaging audiences with science and sustainably won Sustainable Project of the Year at the Museums + Heritage Awards 2022.

The project

Reimagining Reality, created by Discovering42, is a hands-on exhibition that invites children and adults to learn about science and sustainability through play.

It was important to co-founders Natalia and Roy Jones to create the exhibition in an environmentally friendly way. Reclaimed doors were used to segment the space into sections and form a one-way system through the exhibition. All the exhibits are made from waste materials, giving unwanted items a new lease of life.

One exhibit is an interactive record player which visitors can activate by pedalling on a bicycle. They can choose to play the music fast or slow, depending on the speed at which they pedal. The record player is powered by a reclaimed washing machine motor.

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Drew Bennellick, Head of Land and Nature Policy at the Heritage Fund

Natalia Jones said: “It is crazy the amount of perfectly good stuff that ends up going to landfill, from food to electronics, especially when there are so many in need and with our ever-expanding demand on resources that causes biodiversity loss and climate change.

“It feels good to make use of things and it can be a wonderfully creative process to deconstruct used objects into functional parts, shapes and patterns and to see the potential and beauty in unwanted things. I really enjoyed taking old window blinds, embracing their imperfection and playing with their patterns to make the backdrop for the sand pendulum exhibit.”

Two children play with the sand pendulum exhibit. The backdrop is made from reclaimed window blinds arranged in

The sand pendulum exhibit's backdrop is made from window blinds arranged into decorative shapes and patterns. Credit: Discovering42

The organisation

Discovering42 is a community interest company (CIC). Natalia and Roy Jones set up the Reimagining Reality exhibition as a pilot for a permanent science and art space in Cornwall.

The exhibition was created on minimal funding through a FEAST grant, Arts Council England project grant, crowdfunding and matched funding by Cornwall Council through the Carbon Neutral Fund, Creative Cornwall Calling Fund and Community Chest Fund. Discovering42 also received sponsorship from local businesses.

Bodmin Town Council provided six months’ use of Narisa Hall, set within Priory Park, to house the pilot exhibition. It includes around 20 exhibits, including commissioned and donated works from artists.

Remote video URL

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The award

The Sustainable Project of the Year Award recognises a project for its commitment to environmental sustainability.

Drew Bennellick, Head of Land and Nature Policy at the Heritage Fund, said: “We were particularly impressed by how sustainability was the focal point of every stage of the project, from sourcing otherwise unwanted waste materials and using electric vehicles to transport them, to sparking the imagination of visitors to start conversations on climate issues."

Previous winners of the Sustainable Project of the Year category were Penzance's Jubilee Pool and the Museum of Oxford’s Queering Spires: a history of LGBTIQA+ spaces exhibition.

A person is standing in a scrap store looking through barrels of recycled items.

Using waste materials found in a scrap store. Credit: Discovering42

The results of winning the award

Winning the award opened doors for new collaborations and partnerships.

At the Museums + Heritage Awards ceremony Natalia and Roy networked with staff from the Design Museum. This led to a partnership between the two organisations to deliver workshops based on the museum's recent exhibition Waste Age: What can design do?.

The workshops will be themed on rethinking our relationship to everyday items and challenging our throwaway culture.

The award has also resulted in Bodmin Council extending the lease on the building used for the exhibition. This has enabled Reimagining Reality to remain open for the foreseeable future. There are also plans to expand the size of building, which has already been developed to include a café decorated with food packaging.

The future

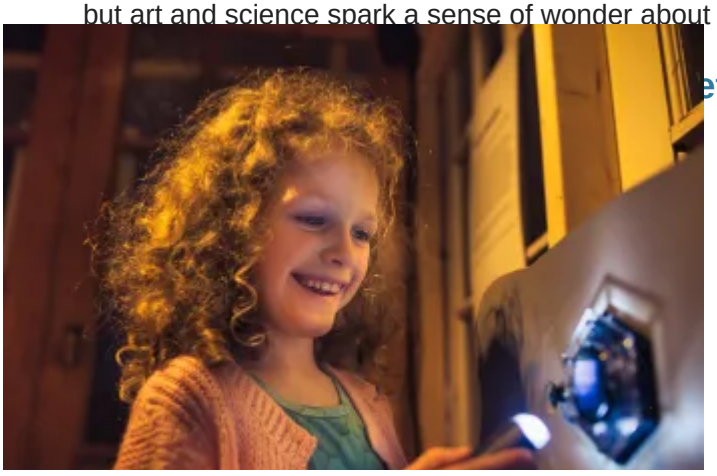
Natalia says the long-term plan is to form a larger permanent centre that merges art, science and sustainability to inspire creative and innovative solutions to the climate crisis.

Discovering42 will stay at their current venue in the meantime and continue to offer hands-on activities to experiment, explore science, encourage people to learn new skills and realise the potential of waste. They are currently looking for funding to add new exhibits and expand the range of workshops they offer.

Top tips

Natalia shares her top tips for other small organisations looking to develop a sustainability project:

- When developing a project concept, consider what sustainable alternative materials you can use. Look for second-hand objects or materials from your local scrap store, or see what new sustainable materials are on the market – but beware of greenwashing!
- Collaboration is key. It is an excellent way to bring in new ideas and ways of doing things.
- Working with local artists that are already pushing the boundaries in sustainability is a great way to ensure that the project is bold and relevant.
- Art, science and sustainability are a powerful combination – sustainability on its own can seem a distant concern, but art and science spark a sense of wonder about what is possible.



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Case study: Queering Spires - a history of LGBTIQA+ spaces in Oxford