Young people to explore early 20th century art revolution

07/07/2010

Some 40 participants aged between 14 and 24 will be working with professional curators at the Victoria and Albert Museum in South Kensington on a range of projects connected with the exhibition Diaghilev and the Golden Age of the Ballets Russes which is to be staged from this September to January 2011.

The Ballets Russes was a Russian ballet company between 1909 and 1929 famous for successful collaborations with modern artists, composers and designers including Matisse, Picasso and Chanel. Young people will draw inspiration from the design of costumes and sets in Diaghilev's revolutionary ballet 'Blue Train', to create their own artworks for an exhibition in Stratford's East Gallery and be trained to help lead interpretative tours of the main V&A exhibition. They will also create a website and develop learning packs for local schools.

The project is being run by social landlord East Thames Group through its regeneration charity East Potential. It was devised by young people from East Thames' Stratford Foyer Focus East 15 who were keen to explore different approaches to the arts heritage theme, based on their different interests such as design, fashion, media, IT and visual arts.

As East Thames' project partner the V&A museum helped to select the Diaghilev exhibition due to the young people's inertest in the provocative and mould-breaking aspect of the Ballets Russes' dances, costumes and music.

Blue Train: Young Curators and Designers, has been supported by the HLF under its Young Roots programme. Among those involved will be students from Rokeby & Eastlea schools in Newham, also, a number of young people provided with accommodation and support through the East Thames Group's foyer programme.

For the Heritage Lottery Fund, Head of HLF London Sue Bowers, said: "Blue Train was a revolutionary modern production when staged in the 1920s. Thanks to this project, it will again be pushing the boundaries, inspiring young people to explore this heritage which will act as a catalyst for their own original art and design."

Commenting for East Potential, Director Pamela Gardner, said: "Programmes like this help young people to broaden their horizons by experiencing the rich heritage of art and culture. East Thames delivers a number of arts programmes in east London and Essex that bring together young people from difficult backgrounds, giving them a chance to have their voice heard through artistic expression. The Blue Train programme goes that one step further, allowing participants to immerse themselves in a powerful period of art history and develop new skills that will help them build a brighter future."

For the V&A Head of Schools, Families and Young People Kara Wescombe, commented: "The project offers young people an opportunity to develop and showcase their talents in an ambitious production where their own creativity will have dialogue with the historic values of bold cultural experimentation the Ballet Russes was famous for. For the V&A it is an opportunity to work with young people who haven't visited before and learn more about how we can encourage young people from diverse backgrounds to develop their creative talents."

Notes to editors

The Blue Train was an overnight luxury train the travelled through France from Calais to the Mediterranean. In 1924 it inspired Diaghilev's Ballets Russes production which featured a story by Jean Cocteau, costumes by Chanel and a curtain designed by Picasso. Other Ballets Russes productions included music by Stravinsky and designs by Matisse and the company's work was seen as a major contribution to the introduction of Modernism.

East Thames Group is a registered social landlord and social regeneration charity. With its three operating subsidiaries – East Homes, East Potential and East Living – East Thames is the largest housing association of its type in east London and Essex. East Thames owns and manages more than 13,000 homes, and runs a range of programmes to prevent worklessness and homelessness, create better neighbourhoods, and bring communities together.

East Potential is a registered charity responsible for delivering East Thames Group's youth foyers. These provide accommodation for more than 450 young people and support, training and employment opportunities for both residents and other local young people. It is also responsible for neighbourhood regeneration programmes.

The purpose of the Victoria and Albert Museum is to enable everyone to enjoy its collections and explore the cultures that created them; and to inspire those who shape contemporary design. All our efforts are focused upon a central purpose - the increased use of displays, collections and expertise as resources for learning, creativity and enjoyment by audiences within and beyond the United Kingdom.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported 33,900 projects, allocating £4.4billion across the UK.

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