

By Jove Theatre Company's *The Gentlest Work* – Report to Funders

In June 2021 By Jove Theatre Company hosted *The Gentlest Work*, a digital installation of creative responses to the myths of Orestes and his family from queer perspectives.

Members of the company and external collaborators from the UK, USA and Hong Kong produced over 65 'fragments', including over 30 films, over 20 audio recordings, a bespoke poetry collection, and other images and text, which were based on almost three years of preparatory work with the myths and themes. These responses were installed in a page on the Padlet platform, which allows users to arrange items of media on a web page and create connections between them. This allowed the creation of 'paths' through the material, which audience members were encouraged to explore at their own pace and in any order they chose. The idea was to create an interactive 'art gallery' experiences which visitors could return to several times. Instructions were provided in the installation which explained how to explore it, and visitors were also encouraged to contribute to a response wall where they were free to post their own text and images inspired by the inspiration.

The installation was originally due to run from 7th-13th June 2021, but was then extended for an extra week to 20th June due to popular request from audience members who wanted longer to explore the installation. By Jove also hosted a live celebration event as part of the installation on Saturday 12th June. For the first half of the event, attendees were invited to join breakout rooms themed around Creativity, Compliments, or Confessions; for the second half, they joined together with company members for a Q&A about the project. Attendees reported enjoying the event greatly and that it was rewarding to have an additional sense of connection with the creative team.

177 audience members booked tickets through Eventbrite. These were made available on a pay-what-you-can basis, with over half of attendees selecting free tickets. This greatly exceeded our initial target of 100 audience members. Eventbrite does not capture location information, but anecdotal information suggests that audiences tuned in from locations across the UK and USA as well as other countries.

Accessibility was built into the installation, with image descriptions, video descriptions, subtitles, and transcripts provided for all media. Content warnings were provided for pieces which dealt with distressing themes.

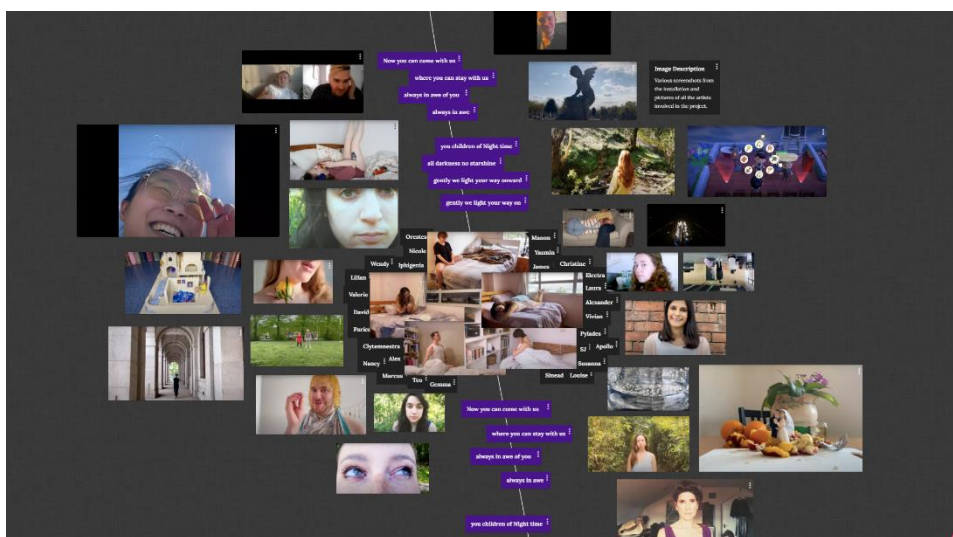
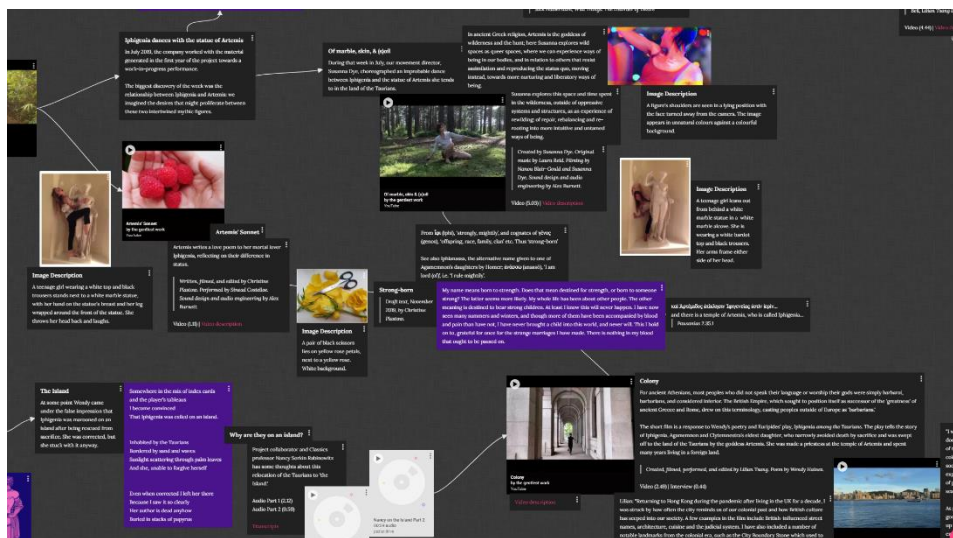
Responses to the installation from audiences were extremely positive. Here is a selection of comments from visitors:

'A lot of this is so very honest and raw and human and reflective and I know I didn't even scratch the surface. I have a strange dislike of the Greek Plays (I think it was the mundane way they were taught AT me at school) so this was a breath of fresh air that actually makes me want to revisit them.'

‘Luscious and transporting. Spares us none of the horror and cruelty of the myths, but finds tenderness and queer joy in the interstices. A brilliant approach to the fragmentary source material.’

‘The Gentlest Work invites its visitors into vulnerable and intimate visions, memories, and sensory experiences of queer love, family, identity, consciousness, wounding, and healing, through the lenses of Greek myth and Athenian tragedy. The access points to this work are innumerable, and overlain with the personal, visceral experience of those who made it. The overwhelming intention of this work is love, for anyone who experiences it.’

‘A balm after a difficult year.’



Two screenshots of the installation on the Padlet platform.

These responses demonstrate that the installation achieved its two major impact goals: to demonstrate the presence of queer stories in Greek mythology, and to encourage audiences to see Greek tragedy in a new way regardless of their previous knowledge of the genre. The project was also in line with By Jove’s aims to tell old

stories in new ways and uplift women's and LGBTQ+ voices within those stories, as well as providing a platform for women and LGBTQ+ artists.

It is By Jove's intention for *The Gentlest Work* to have an afterlife beyond this period. We are currently discussing plans to reopen the installation at a later date, as well as to make it available to individuals or institutions for set periods for teaching purposes. Future projects will also draw on knowledge gained from this project, including the benefits of working in the digital space in terms of reaching broader audiences, and the importance of embedding accessibility in a project from the beginning.

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