



CONSENSUS GENTIUM ON TOUR

LESSONS FOR TOURING IMMERSIVE
WORK BEYOND ARTS VENUES

MAY 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report details the findings and offers a toolkit based on the 2024 tour of Consensus Gentium, an interactive film by artist Karen Palmer, to 11 shopping centres across England.

Consensus Gentium, which uses facial detection and AI to explore themes of state surveillance, was presented on mobile phones via a specially designed pop-up installation. The tour, supported by Arts Council England and delivered by Crossover Labs, aimed to demonstrate how exhibiting immersive work outside of arts spaces might attract younger and more diverse audiences, specifically those aged 14 to 24 from global majority and working-class backgrounds who are less likely to engage with conventional arts venues.

The Consensus Gentium tour demonstrates a viable model for extending the reach of immersive art to new and diverse audiences by situating experiences in more accessible environments. This toolkit underscores the need for thoughtful adaptation of both the artistic experience and the exhibition model to suit these unconventional settings and the specific demographics they attract.

KEY FINDINGS

AUDIENCE REACH AND DEMOGRAPHICS

1,421

visitors successfully engaged.

Approximately 70% were within the target 14-24 age range.

And over 40% identified as being from the global majority.

Crucially, at least 50% reported they would not typically visit arts or cultural venues, indicating the tour's success in reaching new audiences.

AUDIENCE REACTIONS



The interactive format was popular with many, though some younger viewers desired more frequent or explicit interactivity.



The physical pop-up installation was practical for touring, but the hard stools proved uncomfortable for the 20-minute experience, and placement in busy thoroughfares sometimes led to distractions.

EFFECTIVENESS OF TOURING TO NON-ARTS VENUES

→ Shopping centres proved effective locations for reaching a young, diverse demographic. The novelty of encountering interactive art in such a setting was a positive surprise for many.

MARKETING AND OUTREACH

→ Nearly all attendees were walk-ups. Traditional flyering and direct social media marketing by the project or venues had minimal impact on attendance. Word-of-mouth and engagement through trusted local networks or influencers could potentially be more effective.

CORE LESSONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE TOURS

TARGET AUDIENCE



Content and interactivity levels may need tailoring for different age groups within the target demographic.

LOCATION STRATEGY



Prioritise venues accessible to target communities. Consider the specific placement within the venue to balance visibility with comfort and minimise distractions.

INSTALLATION DESIGN



Balance portability and ease of setup with audience comfort and creating an inviting, relaxed atmosphere.

LOCAL ENGAGEMENT



Forge connections with local communities and organisations to tailor marketing and make it relevant for local audiences.

ADAPTABLE MARKETING



Rely less on traditional pre-event marketing and more on point-of-contact engagement and leveraging local networks.

INTRODUCTION

While there are long-established models for touring more orthodox forms of entertainment and art, work with immersive media has evaded any singular pathway for distribution and exhibition in the UK.

The boom in artists making work with immersive digital media started just over a decade ago with what has come to be known as the '[third wave](#)' of virtual reality (VR). At that time, the only way to experience immersive media projects was at festivals, such as Sheffield DocFest, or through access to expensive desktop-tethered VR set-ups.

Since then, we have seen initiatives to attract and grow immersive audiences, including touring [VR programmes to libraries and pop-up VR cinemas](#). Location-based immersive media experiences – often with support from the BFI or Arts Council England – have tended to find a natural home within museums and arts spaces, demonstrated by the [research](#) done on the exhibition strategy of Common Ground and the sold-out tour of [In Pursuit of Repetitive Beats](#). One of the most prolific UK immersive companies, Marshmallow Laser Feast, has found success in creating large-scale immersive experiences in galleries and major museums, including most recently [YOU:MATTER](#) at the National Science and Media Museum in Bradford.

The opening of venues dedicated to immersive and interactive experiences, like [Bocs](#) in Cardiff and [Undershed](#) in Bristol, further indicates the maturation of the ecosystem for exhibiting immersive work. Even the term 'immersive', when applied to digital media, has expanded beyond VR headsets to encompass AR, audio and a myriad of multisensory and interactive interfaces, both large (projections) and small (mobile devices), that help create a sense of presence in a storyworld for the audience.

However, a common criticism of location-based immersive work exhibited only in cultural venues and ticketed festivals is that they fail to attract diverse audiences or many people under the age of 25. Despite attempts to widen inclusion and access, many audiences for immersive and interactive media experiences have tended to be those already well plugged into the arts and cultural scene.

The tour of Consensus Gentium, an interactive film experienced on a mobile phone, was designed with this industry and audience context in mind. Artist [Karen Palmer](#) and immersive media specialists [Crossover Labs](#) understood the barriers to access that younger audiences experience with typical cultural venues.

Core to thinking about an alternative model for distribution and exhibition was the question: If location-based immersive work could be exhibited in everyday non-arts spaces, would that attract a younger and more diverse audience? Such a tour would require taking immersive work to the spaces that young people inhabit in their leisure time, rather than expecting them to enter venues that feel exclusive and uninviting, where they would not normally hang out. As a result, Palmer and Crossover Labs [began planning a tour](#) for Consensus Gentium to shopping centres around the UK.

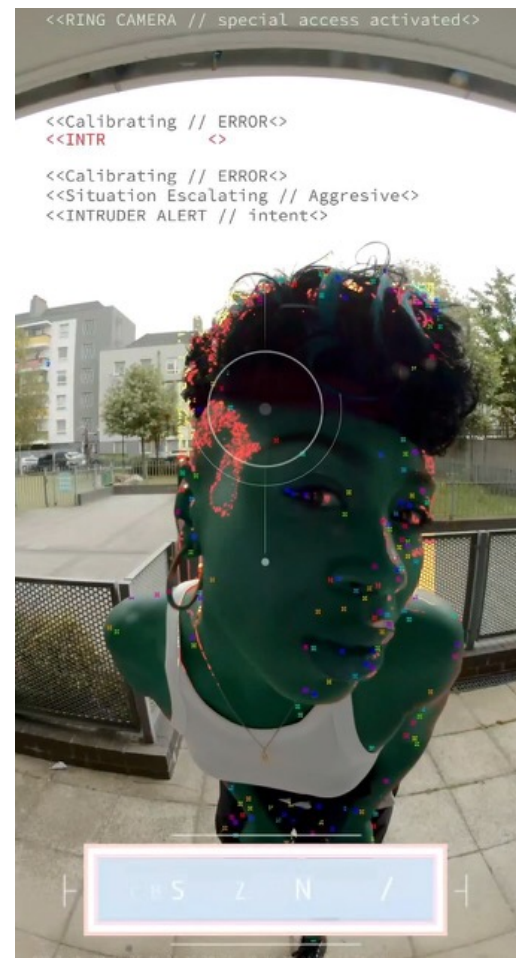
This toolkit contains a summary of the lessons learned from that tour with considerations for artists and producers looking to take immersive work beyond established arts and cultural spaces.

ABOUT CONSENSUS GENTIUM

Consensus Gentium is an interactive film in which the audience must navigate challenges in a near-future of oppressive state-level surveillance.

The experience uses facial detection and AI through a phone's front-facing camera to classify the viewer as 'dissident or compliant'. The viewer's eye gaze determines the path and therefore the ending with three potential outcomes, lasting about 20 minutes in total. Consensus Gentium offers a cautionary tale of what happens when we allow AI surveillance technologies to go unchecked – and prompts the audience to question how they might resist and change the situation today.

Consensus Gentium was showcased at prestigious industry events in 2023 and 2024, including [Ars Electronica](#) and [SXSW](#), where it won the 2023 XR Experience Competition Jury Award. It was also awarded Columbia University's Digital Dozen Breakthrough Prize 2024. On the back of the success at festivals, Arts Council England supported Consensus Gentium for its tour of 11 shopping centres around England in the summer of 2024.



The development and production of the Consensus Gentium prototype was made possible with the support of the BFI's Film Development Fund from the National Lottery, the Future Art and Culture programme at SXSW, produced by British Underground, and Arts Council England with additional support in 2023 from the British Council. The tour to shopping centres around the UK was funded by an Arts Council England Touring Grant.



LOTTERY FUNDED



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ENGLAND**

METHODOLOGY

The findings in this report and toolkit have been distilled through two phases. The first phase was focused on audience reactions and feedback from the tour of Consensus Gentium in the shopping centres. The tour producers, Soph Crockett and Ada Malegowska, recorded statistics, took photos, gathered spoken audience feedback and relied on general observation of audience behaviours and interactions with the work in every location. Consultant

researcher, Rob Eagle, conducted more extended semi-structured interviews with a cross-section of visitors in tour stops in Leeds, Bradford, Peterborough and Bristol.

The second phase of this research, granted ethics approval by the University of Leeds, consisted of extended interviews with five people involved in the development, funding and delivery of the tour. Those interviewed were:

INTERVIEWEES

Soph Crockett

Tour Producer of Consensus Gentium on behalf of Crossover Labs



Adrianna (Ada) Malegowska

Tour Production Assistant for Consensus Gentium on behalf of Crossover Labs



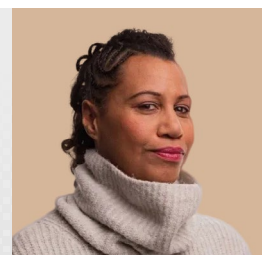
Tom Millen

Director, Crossover Labs



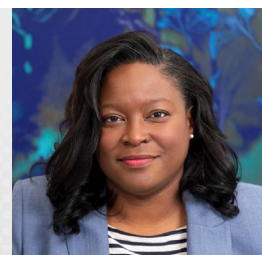
Karen Palmer

Artist, creator of Consensus Gentium



Tonya Nelson

Executive Director, Enterprise & Innovation at Arts Council England



DEVELOPING AND PLANNING THE TOUR

A key message of Consensus Gentium is that young people of colour and those from disadvantaged backgrounds will be the most impacted by increased surveillance and AI bias. For this reason, Palmer wanted to focus on distribution and exhibition for those audiences. These are also the audiences least likely to visit orthodox arts venues in their leisure time. Therefore, urban shopping centres were chosen for their demographics and role as spaces where young people are able to gather outside of home and education.

Tour producer Soph Crockett began researching urban areas with communities from global majority populations and that were most

underserved in arts and cultural engagement. Within these areas, she selected shopping centres that would be accessible for mixed demographics, especially young, working class and people of colour. From a longlist of potential locations across England, 11 shopping centres offered exhibition space, usually for three days at a time.

Palmer and Crossover Labs worked with designers to create a pop-up installation on which there would be 5 mobile phones secured with headphones and stools on which visitors could sit. This installation would need to be easy to transport (e.g. stored in the boot of a car) and assemble in each new location.

GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS

Mainly the Midlands and North of England (Leeds, Bradford, Blackburn, Hull, Bootle, Peterborough, Leicester, Bristol, Luton, Wolverhampton, London)



NUMBER OF STOPS

11

TARGET DEMOGRAPHICS

Young urban working class and POC

TARGET AGE GROUP

14-24-year-olds

TARGET VENUES

Urban shopping centres

DATES

18 July-8 September, 2024 – summer months when young people most likely to have more flexible leisure time

THE FILM THAT WATCHES YOU BACK

CONSENSUS GENTIUM

2024 TOUR DATES

FREE TO EXPERIENCE

18.07-21.07	TRINITY SHOPPING CENTRE LEEDS
22.07-24.07	THE BROADWAY SHOPPING CENTRE BRADFORD
26.07-28.07	PRINCES QUAY SHOPPING CENTRE HULL
01.08-03.08	THE STRAND SHOPPING CENTRE BOOTLE, LIVERPOOL
12.08-14.08	QUEENSGATE SHOPPING CENTRE PETERBOROUGH
16.08-18.08	HIGHCROSS SHOPPING CENTRE LEICESTER
26.08-28.08	CABOT CIRCUS SHOPPING CENTRE BRISTOL
30.08-01.09	THE MALL SHOPPING CENTRE LUTON
03.09-05.09	MANDER CENTRE SHOPPING CENTRE WOLVERHAMPTON
06.09-08.09	BRENT CROSS SHOPPING CENTRE LONDON



SXSW
READ & TO EXHIBIT
WINNER
WINNER
WINNER

For more information go to
WWW.CONSENSUSGENTIUM.AI

By Karen Palmer
the Storyteller from the Future



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CONSENSUS GENTIUM
The Film That Watches You Back

PHOTOS FROM THE TOUR



VISITOR STATISTICS

TOTAL NUMBER

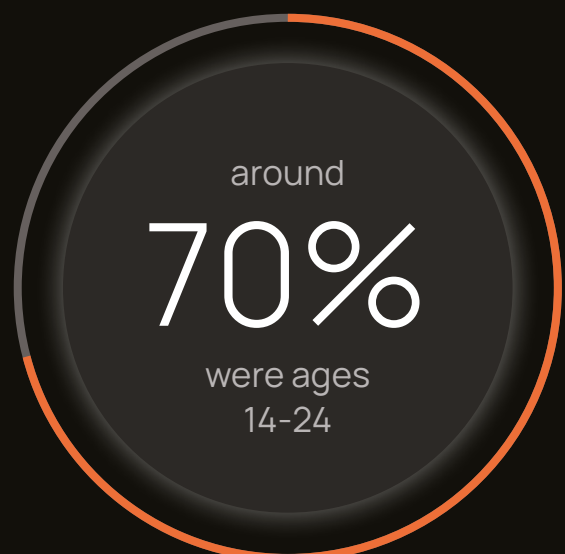
1,421

BACKGROUNDS

Over 40% were from the global majority.

At least 50% reported they **would not normally attend arts or cultural venues**, and many shared that this was their **first encounter with interactive art**.

AGE



HOW AUDIENCES REACTED

What the audience said

'I didn't expect this to be in here [shopping centre], but it was a nice surprise.'

'As I was watching it, I forgot I was in the middle of a shopping centre.'

'I loved using my eyes to change the story. I want to see more like this.'

'I feel like I know a lot more [now] than I did going in.'

'I'm very interested in technology and AI but haven't had an actual experience with it until today.'

'I do feel like I'm more able to talk about it with other people now, feel like I know something other people don't know.'

'It felt really contemporary and relevant. I liked that it was in a shopping centre with headphones, so it felt immersive ... I'd like to see more things like this!'

4 SURPRISING GENERAL IMPRESSIONS FROM AUDIENCES

1

The subject matter inspired either deep engagement or overwhelming anxiety.

Older audience members (20 years old and up) said that the use of the format to discuss AI and surveillance was a 'clever way to reflect on where we're heading'. However, younger audiences often found the topic off-putting, with many getting up and leaving in the first five minutes. Some audiences said they found the experience 'anxiety-inducing' and 'terrifying'.

Given the timeliness of race riots in the UK in summer 2024 and the number of news stories about AI, we wonder if the subject matter was too current and therefore not hopeful or relaxing enough for those audiences looking for escapism or relief from the news. Of course, this is not the case for all audience members; others found the experience an opportunity to question critically what is happening with the proliferation of surveillance technologies.

2

For a pop-up installation in the middle of a shopping centre, 20 minutes was too long.

For a young audience with no prior experience of interactive films or knowledge of the subject matter, 20 minutes was often too long. Their feedback made it clear that a simpler 5- or 10-minute piece would have been more effective.

3

Interactivity is great! Just more of it, please.

Many visitors loved the interactivity, often praising the sections in the experience that use eye tracking to control the direction of the story. With audiences so diverse in age, location, technological literacy and ethnic background, engagement might have been improved by a format that adapts more to the individual viewer. Younger audiences in particular engaged less with the linear sections; they were expecting more explicit interactivity →

from an interactive film. According to their feedback, tailoring the experience for younger teenage audiences would see better engagement, including:

- **Increasing back-and-forth interactivity**
- **Simplifying some of the complex terms**
- **Shortening linear sections where the tone is dark.**

A type of questionnaire at the start related to age range and demographics might offer a solution for tailoring the experience for the needs of different audiences.

4

Physical set-up worked for the space but not for 20 minutes of sitting.

The pop-up structure for Consensus Gentium was designed to be relatively easy to transport and install within limited floorspace in shopping centres. However, the hard stools proved somewhat uncomfortable for 20 minutes of sitting. Additionally, the location in each shopping centre often meant the installation was in the middle of a thoroughfare, rather than in a quiet or relaxing setting. This added to a reported sense of distraction or unease with so many people walking around them.



TOOLKIT: CONSIDERATIONS FOR PLANNING A TOUR

ARE YOU PLANNING A SIMILAR TOUR FOR YOUR IMMERSIVE PROJECT?

Based on our learnings, here are some key points to consider:

FORMAT MOST APPROPRIATE FOR YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

Duration

What is the right duration for your target audience?

You may need to test with your target audience to see what duration suits them best.

Adaptability

How can the content and format be adapted for your target audience?

For such diverse young audiences, no interactive format is a one-size-fits-all. Consider the potential modularity and adaptability of an experience so that those who want to explore or learn more have that option, and those (especially younger teens) who want a simpler, shorter experience are also catered for.

Individual vs group experience

How do your audiences approach your experience as individuals and in a group?

It is worth considering (and testing) how young people might engage with an experience together. For an experience where there is one person per device with headphones, groups might find it isolating if it cuts them off from each other.

Onboarding and offboarding

How do you bring visitors into an experience, and how do you guide them back out?

Depending on the complexity of the format, technology, subject matter or story, a young and novice audience might need a little more guidance to enter and come out of an experience.

TIMINGS MOST SUITABLE FOR YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

Time of year

Is there a particular season that suits your key demographic?
Conversely, are there times to be avoided?

As this tour was targeting audiences 14–24 years old, the producers chose the summer holidays when schools, colleges and universities are not in session.

Days of the week

Which days see the most footfall in your location?

For touring shopping centres, the producers found that Fridays and Saturdays (and occasionally Sundays) had the best footfall. Early- and mid-week tour dates fared the worst, sometimes with only 12 visitors completing the experience in the entire day.

Time of day

How should you target your operating hours?

For Consensus Gentium, 1–3pm was the busiest time. Mornings were unsurprisingly very quiet. One pleasant surprise was how busy Friday evenings were.

LOCATIONS

Security

How important is security in your tour locations?

With so much expensive kit, security may be a valid concern. In a shopping centre (in contrast to a more exposed location outdoors), the security may help the project crew to feel more reassured in case they are targeted for theft or harassment. However, a venue's high level of surveillance and the presence of security guards may also make some young people feel unwelcome.

Placement within venues

What kind of spot are you allocated within a venue?

Even when venues are popular, not all locations for a pop-up installation are inviting or suitable. With Consensus Gentium, the shopping centres dictated where the installation should be located, and sometimes this was in the middle of busy walkways and thoroughfares. If there is little additional seating in the venue or 'hanging out spaces' (see below), audiences may be inclined to rush past the installation on their way to their destination.

This section continues on the following page.

Hanging out spaces

Where are the spaces where your target demographic hang out?

In the case of Consensus Gentium, that was a key question. [Surveys of urban environments](#) have found that the number of public 'hanging out' spaces for young people has been decreasing for decades. Even shopping centres limit the amount of comfortable seating to prevent 'loitering'. The lack of hanging out spaces proved a barrier to audiences feeling welcome to relax before or after experiencing Consensus Gentium in some of the busier shopping centres.

Cinemas

Within a shopping centre, would a space near a food court or cinemas offer a more relaxed hanging out space?

Alternatively, it may even be possible to exhibit in the foyer or open space of a cinema, as the [report](#) on the 2019 tour of Common Ground found, provided an immersive experience can be presented as a tie-in to linear cinema programming. As a place where audiences congregate and wait before and after films, a pop-up installation nearby may prove to be popular, but there is no established network or model for this in the UK.

Place matters

In what kind of community is your venue?

Shopping centres in busy city centres may be less effective than a shopping centre or shopping park in a neighbourhood with a stronger sense of community and place. Choosing the most suitable location may require research to understand the demographics of an area and where a venue, like a shopping centre, is in relation to your target demographics. With the Consensus Gentium tour, often the most successful engagement (in both attracting audiences and retaining them within the experience) occurred in locations in smaller cities and satellite neighbourhoods. Locations such as Bootle (north of the Liverpool city centre), Blackburn and Wolverhampton saw far higher audience engagement than busier urban centres, like central Leeds or Bristol.

Make it local

How can you ensure that your experience is relevant to a local audience?

The producers of the Consensus Gentium tour found that, when they had links with the local area, audience engagement was more positive. The producers knew how to market it and use the most effective and enticing language when flyering to potential visitors. Additionally, if marketing material or even the content of the experience itself can be tailored to fit each place, rather than a singular approach, it may speak better to local audiences.

INSTALLATION DESIGN AND SIGNAGE

Design and layout of the installation

What is the most practical to transport and set up, whilst also being the most eye-catching for potential visitors?

For walk-up visitors, often the mobile phones on the stand first caught their attention. This prompted people to frequently ask if Consensus Gentium was selling something or if it was a promotion for a phone brand. The stand and stools constructed from MDF were designed to be constructed and taken apart quickly and easily, and then packed away into the boot of a car for touring. One critique from visitors was that the MDF stools became uncomfortable after 20 minutes of sitting down. The 360-degree design of the stand with visitors facing inwards.

Signage

Is the messaging in your signage clear?

The importance of clear signage cannot be underestimated. The producers of this tour tested two iterations of messaging for signage to grab the attention of potential visitors. They found the most effective signage clearly stated that Consensus Gentium is an interactive film and prominently featured the recognisable logos of the BFI and ACE, plus the accolades from international film festivals. Visitors said these logos helped reassure them that Consensus Gentium was an artistic experience and 'not someone trying to sell something'.

STAFFING AND ROLES

Roles

What are the roles of those running your immersive experience?

Ideally, such a tour would have three to four people staffing it: one person to greet potential visitors and explain the installation to them; one person to handle the devices and take visitors into and out of the experience (onboarding and offboarding); and one person in charge of location and touring logistics, including managing the relationship with the venue.

Local fixers and venue allies

Do you have a person on the ground to help?

The stress of touring can be eased when there are already people in the place who can help with selecting the most appropriate locations and tailoring any content to appeal to local audiences. A local fixer can also help with targeting marketing and invitations to key local demographic organisations and groups. For example, a digital art installation appealing to Gen Z might offer targeted invitations to local schools and colleges, community centres and popular venues. All of these organisations will have their own social media channels, email newsletters or WhatsApp groups for their members.

Flying

Does flying in advance effectively reach your target demographic?

For Consensus Gentium, when the tour organisers distributed flyers and posters in locations ahead of the installation, it had little impact on audience engagement. Nearly all audiences were walk-ups; they engaged with the installation because they happened to be in the vicinity and could spend time in the experience. No one told us that they had heard of Consensus Gentium previously through flyers, posters or social media. Flying for this kind of installation needs more research to determine the best strategy for your target demographic.

Social media

Do particular social media platforms effectively reach your target demographic?

Using social media to draw in audiences to an installation might work best via word-of-mouth or a trusted local cultural blogger/influencer. We found that the [Consensus Gentium Instagram profile](#) itself did not incite much engagement in the in-person installation, nor did being featured by the shopping centres' Instagram profiles.

Spreading the word through local networks

What local networks have you found in your tour locations that can help bring in audiences?

Any strategy for reaching your key demographic groups in each location needs to consider the specificities of that local creative ecosystem. Some cities have more established networks and audiences for interactive and immersive art (as we experienced in Bristol, for example). In most places Consensus Gentium went to, however, audiences had no previous experience of such installations. This required spending time to explain the format as 'an interactive film on a mobile phone', as well as the subject matter.

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the **FRONT**

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