

BE FE DE LA MA

the asylum and beyond

INTRODUCTION

Our mental health has many dimensions: medical, psychological, social, spiritual and environmental. While the boundaries between what is deemed as ‘sanity’ or ‘insanity’ remain elastic and widely debated, we find – or are given – our place on the spectrum: perhaps with a diagnosis, a treatment, a lifestyle change or a place of safety.

In ancient times the asylum was a space, often a religious sanctuary, where individuals could seek refuge. It was from these spiritual origins that modern mental asylums emerged. They became the places where Western ideas about mental illness were defined and different approaches to treatment evolved.

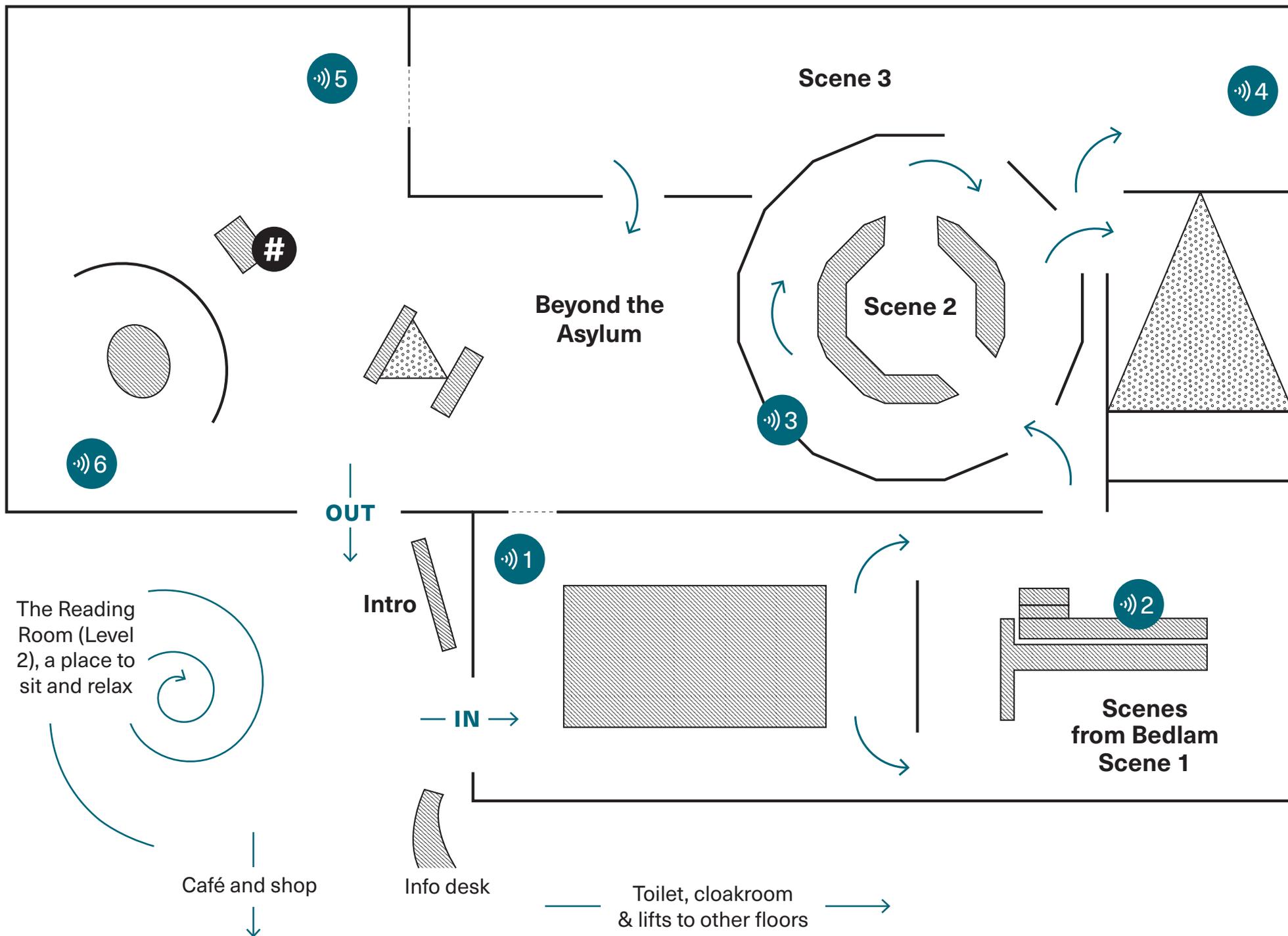
Throughout the asylum’s history these different ideas and approaches were created, challenged and reinvented by different and often opposing voices: those of doctors, patients, religious leaders, artists, social commentators and reformers. Their experiences shaped the meaning of mental illness and created today’s landscape of mental health care.

Bedlam: the asylum and beyond combines some of these perspectives by following the story of one such institution, ‘Bedlam’. The word became a general term for asylums

but it originally referred to the Bethlem Royal Hospital in London, which was founded in the 13th century and still provides mental health care today. The exhibition focuses on the lived experiences of those who inhabited asylums or created alternatives to them. It juxtaposes historical material and medical records with individual testimonies and artworks that reflect or reimagine the institution, both as a physical and a virtual space.

Today asylums have largely been consigned to history, widely regarded as outmoded, inhumane and haunted places. Meanwhile mental illness is more prevalent than ever, and our culture teems with therapeutic possibilities – yet for many there are no satisfactory options.

Against this background, *Bedlam: the asylum and beyond* interrogates the original ideal that the asylum represented – a place of refuge, sanctuary and care – and asks whether and how it could be reclaimed.



Our Voices is an audio companion to the exhibition created through a co-production project with Core Arts and artist Jessica Marlowe. Guides and more information are available at the exhibition entrance.



Empathy Deck, a new digital commission by artist Erica Scourti, is a live Twitter bot that responds to your tweets with a custom-made, unique digital card. Follow @empathydeck on Twitter.

We have worked closely with specialist organisations in developing *Bedlam: the asylum and beyond*, including Bethlem Gallery, Bethlem Museum of the Mind and Core Arts, as well as consulting a range of people with lived experience of mental health challenges.

The exhibition combines historical and medical records from collections such as Wellcome Library and Bethlem Museum of the Mind with works by artists with psychiatric experience, or whose practice engages with ideas around mental health and wellbeing, including David Beales, Richard Dadd, Dora García, Eva Kotátková, Madlove: A Designer Asylum, Shana Moulton, Vaslav Nijinsky, Erica Scourti, Javier Téllez and Adolf Wölfli.

If you, or somebody you know, would like mental health advice or support you can contact the following resources:

Samaritans

samaritans.org

116 123

jo@samaritans.org

Mind

mind.org.uk

0300 123 3393

info@mind.org.uk

A full programme of events at Wellcome Collection and Bethlem Gallery will further explore the ideas raised in the exhibition.

Wellcome Collection aims to create an inclusive visitor experience. We hope this exhibition meets the diverse needs of our visitors. If you would like to comment please email: access@wellcomecollection.org Find out more about supported tours at wellcomecollection.org

Galleries open until 18.00 Tue–Sun, Thu until 22.00

183 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE

wellcomecollection.org/bedlam

#BeyondBedlam