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& Social Arts Practice:
The Heart of Glass
Research Partnership
2014–2017

A study by the
Psychosocial Research Unit

Alastair Roy, Lynn Froggett,
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Assistant Producers

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The structure of the report

This is a report based on the first three years of the Heart of Glass programme. It presents findings from a qualitative evaluation. In response to the idea that Creative People and Places (CPP) is an action research project, findings have been fed back to the Heart of Glass team iteratively throughout the first three years. In this report, we draw together those findings, presenting a series of detailed case studies of commissioned projects, interviews with key stakeholders and Heart of Glass staff. We have used a range of methods which we introduce below.

The structure of the report aims to help readers find routes through it according to their interests and priorities:

- An **executive summary** – synthesises the key themes and findings from the report.
- Section 1: **Introduction** - provides information about the context of St Helens, the aims and objectives of the CPP programme, information about the formation and development of Heart of Glass, as well an overview of the research methodology.
- Section 2: **Case Studies** - develops five detailed case studies which reflect important models of working, which we have identified in the first three years of working with Heart of Glass. Not all of these models are settled or firmly established, and some of the projects are ongoing, however, in the report we evidence the Heart of Glass commitment to learning from experience, which suggests that over time these models will be developed and honed into a distinctive model of practice.
- Section 3: **Project Pen Portraits** - provides brief overviews of the other 10 projects we have looked at in the research, but which are not the subject of detailed case studies. These offer much shorter presentations of the projects, in terms of overview and commentary.
- Section 4: **Discussion** - considers the findings of the research under a series of key themes that address Heart of Glass' programme philosophy, models of practice and the programme's sustainable effects and impacts.
- Section 5: Sets out our main **Conclusions**.
- **Appendices** - includes additional information on the methodology and references.





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Executive
Summary

HEART OF GLASS

Heart of Glass is a national agency for collaborative and social arts practice based in St Helens, Merseyside, UK. Made possible by an initial investment of £1.5 million from Arts Council England (ACE) through the Creative People and Places (CPP) programme, the programme is supported by a local consortium including St Helens Rugby League Football Club, Helena Partnerships Housing Group, FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology), St Helens Council, St Helens Arts Partnership (Platform Arts, The Citadel Arts Centre and The World of Glass museum). The programme has defined a set of principles focused on partnership working and it is undertaking a series of projects with the local authority, through which it seeks to embed arts and arts-led commissioning into the borough's strategic decision-making.

In its first three years the Heart of Glass programme has worked with communities and institutions in St Helens to embed itself in the life of the town. It recognises that the people in St Helens possess the necessary resources to collaborate and co-produce art. It has built on local cultural practices and traditions, and has commissioned artists capable of re-interpreting and reframing these with local people, in order to give expression to new experiences and perspectives on the contemporary culture of the town, set within the wider cultural field.

In the first three years of the programme, Heart of Glass has established a presence and a platform to carry forward its 10-year strategic plan, now endorsed by Arts Council England, which in June 2017 approved its application to become a National Portfolio Organisation. The main objective of the Heart of Glass programme is now to develop St Helens as a national centre for socially engaged collaborative arts practice.

CONTEXT

The Heart of Glass programme takes place within the specific post-industrial context of St Helens, which includes economic challenges, and drastic reductions in public sector funding. Once an industrial centre of some note, especially famous for its glassworks, St Helens has suffered social fragmentation; a depletion of industrial identity and sense of belonging; an increase in poverty, unemployment; and poor health and wellbeing.

The political context of austerity has led many local authorities to question whether they will be able to invest funding in the arts in the near or even distant future. In St Helens, which has strong vernacular cultural traditions and is home to the Citadel Arts Centre and The World of Glass, the council has, for the first time in 2017, identified the promotion of culture and art as a central aspect of the town's identity and purpose. This recognises the significant contribution made by the Heart of Glass programme in its first three years.

THE HEART OF GLASS PROGRAMME AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

Heart of Glass has supported artists and communities to make ambitious new work through novel collaborations that have opened up new cultural spaces and activities. It has committed to a number of long-term artistic residencies, which have stimulated the development of ongoing conversations, through which trust can be built and utilised as part of shared explorations. Taken together, the artworks commissioned by Heart of Glass have opened up spaces in which artists can work with partners and audiences, in ways which allow people to make interventions in the public realm, exploring its significance and meaning. All the residencies are marked by their relationship with the Heart of Glass producers who ensure a consistent and flowing connection between artist, community, partners and place. An example is the work undertaken by Studio Morison on the Skate Park project, in which a space is created to explore issues related to young people, civic space and the role of public institutions (such as the police and the council). In this project, a process is underway in which it's possible that previously antagonistic relationships between skaters and public institutions, and the town centre, might be reconfigured around an artwork in which their own cultural desires and forms are central. In this way, the project contributes to the re-constitution of civic life in St Helens through art and culture.

In order to operate at the forefront of the socially engaged arts, Heart of Glass has committed to the action research imperative of CPP, which includes gathering and sharing learning and insight, both locally and among its sector peers, and to the development of an evidence base for collaborative practice. It has begun the process of disseminating best practice through its conferences, publications and conversations with the wider arts and cultural network. It has committed to strengthening the development of sector skills through its support of The Faculty of Social Arts Practice, and to developing new methodologies in partnership with the Psychosocial Research Unit at the University of Central Lancashire. The aim is to facilitate learning from the programme, and to disseminate

these findings locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

The first phase of Heart of Glass has established a solid basis on which to build a reputation for St Helens as a national centre for socially engaged arts practice.

RESEARCH

This research and evaluation has been commissioned in order to explore the different elements of Heart of Glass and what the programme as a whole delivers for St Helens. It incorporates methods specific to each project which are designed to capture the distinctive nature of the process, activity, effects, outcomes, Legacy and sustainability. In accordance with aims of the programme, the research questions are:

- Are more people from St Helens experiencing and inspired by the arts, as a result of the programme?
- To what extent has the programme aspiration for excellence of art and excellence of the process of engaging communities been achieved?
- Which approaches to engagement and excellence have been most successful and what lessons have been learned?
- To what extent has the arts and cultural sector experimented with new approaches to engaging communities?
- Have new and sustainable arts and cultural opportunities been created? To what extent has the programme encouraged local civil and artistic partnerships?

CASE STUDIES

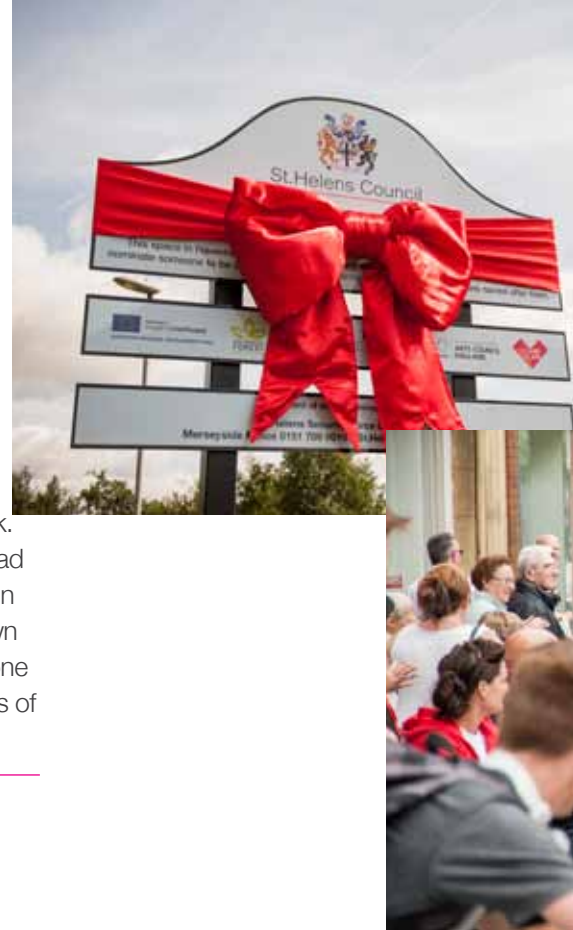
This report aims to demonstrate the breadth of the programme, while also providing some detailed case studies which illustrate its diversity, show how its principles are being implemented, and support the conceptualisation of its distinctive model. The following summaries are detailed within the full report.

Case Study 1

Your Name Here (Joshua Sofaer)

A town-wide invitation to cultural engagement.

This competition for Ravenhead Greenway Park to be re-named, sought nominations for someone with a strong connection - historic or recent - to St Helens. Commissioned at an early stage of the programme, it expressed a fundamental value and principle that has informed much of its subsequent work. More than 500 written nominations were received. The project generated a broad conversation on recognition and public value among a cross section of people in the town, as well as providing a test bed for a strategic partnership with the town council. The eventual winner, local resident Vera Bowes, was chosen as someone whose story reflected endurance and hope in the face of the trials and tragedies of an 'ordinary' life.



Case Study 2

Take Over Fest (Scottee)

A queer festival programme.

This newly conceived interactive festival aimed to 'take over' spaces in the town for people to engage with the arts, as well as reanimating existing cultural venues. For example, it opened a temporary arts café in the town centre, providing a site for conviviality and cultural interaction. The 'queering' of vernacular forms such as music hall traditions was a potentially risky move for a programme that was still in the process of establishing itself as a vehicle for the town's cultural voice. For most people, Take Over Fest managed the fine line between creative provocation and offence, and the interest and goodwill it generated was noted. Audience numbers were very good, however, the overall legacy of the project has been to challenge assumptions that are widely held about St Helens' provincial social conservatism, demonstrating how culture can whet appetites for fresh thinking, self-appraisal and critical engagement with the world through culture.



Case Study 3

Baa Baa Baric/Rainford High Technology College (Mark Storer)

Transformation through creative space.

Storer's intervention at a local school aimed to provide freshly and creatively constructed spaces to challenge the status quo. In particular, the project questioned assumptions about roles and hierarchies, and the nature of the school as a community of creative practice, rather than merely an institution designed to ensure verifiable educational outcomes. Teachers were challenged to see imaginatively and creatively, beyond standard expectations of high-quality exam results at all costs. School routines dependent on fixed hierarchical structures between staff and students were temporarily changed so that students were able to offer teachers what the building's architect could not: a staffroom. Through the physical, social and psychological transformation of the school space and working with idea of what is 'civilised', staff and students were challenged to reflect on what they wanted from the school as a community of practice and place, and how they might model 'civilisation' based on human exchange and care rather than achievement and competition. The project made a distinctive contribution to realising the aims of the programme by fostering a sense of what it might mean to be a citizen of the future in a town like St Helens.



Case Study 4

The Prototype Projects

Developing social practice in St Helens.

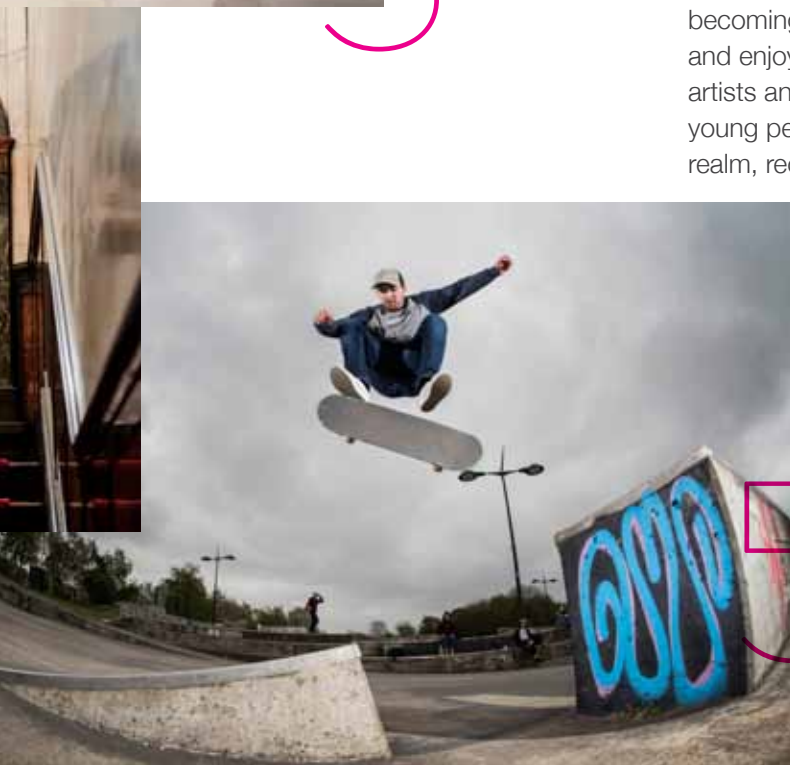
This programme of small commissions offered local artists the opportunity to bid for £50-£2000 to realise a Research and Development initiative or full Prototype Project. It has contributed to the programmatic aim of supporting an infrastructure of emerging artists to acquire skills and confidence in socially engaged arts practice. Artists with little experience were able to try out ideas within the context of an ambitious professionally delivered programme. It has been a learning process for artists and programme commissioners alike, in that some artists required more intensive developmental support than was originally foreseen. The experience has prompted Heart of Glass to reflect further on the nature of the producer role and its importance in this often challenging new field of practice, and this will help it refine its commissioning model and allocation of resources in the future. Hence, the Prototype Projects, which have in themselves produced mixed results, have been incorporated into Heart of Glass' action learning cycle.

Case Study 5

The Skate Park (Studio Morison)

Public art and the civic space.

The Skate Park, a partnership between with the council, police, a skate business and more than 60 people from the local skate community, is directed at the needs of young people and their relationship with the town. It has directly addressed an area of persistent low-grade friction in many urban centres which exists between youth, who may feel they have little role in civil society, the public who are anxious about what they see as disruptive behaviour, and the police who are called on by different groups to restore order. The Skate Park as artwork is becoming a material exploration of how young people's energy and enjoyment can become a cultural asset in the town. The artists and Heart of Glass have opened out spaces in which young people themselves have a voice and a stake in the public realm, reconfiguring relations between skaters, the police and the local authority so that the police become guardians of the common good rather than of perceived social disorder. The Skate Park is a test bed for the strategic role of Heart of Glass in the civic redevelopment of the town and is emblematic of its commitment to the civic life of St Helens. The reanimation of public space it achieves is intended as a physical manifestation of a relational legacy.



THIRD SPACE AND NEGATIVE CAPABILITY

Heart of Glass employs a wide range of artistic expressions and this report sets out to provide a sense of how the relational and aesthetic conditions of creativity are developed through the use of 'third space'. By 'third space' we refer to a space of generative potential that exists in the actual environments in St Helens where creative development is occurring. It arises in the interactive situations that are formed between people, programme and town as a result of the artistic social practices realised by the Heart of Glass programme. The particular power and relevance of the third space is its function as a container of uncertainty, allowing participants to accept the unknown, at least temporarily (because this unknown is secure within the newly created third space) and, hence to engage in shared explorations.

THE PRODUCER ROLE

Heart of Glass supports commissioned projects through experienced, knowledgeable and committed producers, who take on personal responsibility when assigned to work with artists, taking into account their needs and the environments in which they work. The producer role ranges from complex negotiations with communities that are not used to arts interventions, to supporting the artist with materials, feedback and discussion, and brokering or mediating relationships with partners. It is psychologically, emotionally, and practically containing work, which helps to reduce the difficulty and anxiety of working in challenging contexts that often demand capacities and abilities not conventionally thought of as part of the artist's skill set. The Heart of Glass producer accepts a range of responsibilities that might in other programmes be assigned to different roles, for example community workers, project managers, or curators. This report shows that the success of the programme is partly related to the programme's activation of the producer role.





AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

The Heart of Glass approach to audience development is core to its philosophy and way of working. It has produced events that have attracted large scale audiences, and worked intensively with particular groups in smaller, and often more intimate, settings where it has privileged quality of experience.

Heart of Glass acknowledges the ways in which the programme benefits from the work it undertakes with communities, reversing the more traditional notion that there is a responsibility to ensure that communities benefit from programmes in receipt of public subsidy. This approach maximises the potential for learning, by taking community members who participate and co-produce projects seriously, as people capable of generating new knowledge. It works with existing levels of experience, understanding and skill in the audience, and is prepared to take risks and accommodate failures, reflecting on these and thus transforming them into a learning opportunity.

LEGACY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Heart of Glass aims to embed itself in the communities of St Helens. The whole programme and the attitude of the staff speak to local commitment, and much of its vision is long-term. Heart of Glass has a ten-year plan with a clear philosophical basis through which the town will be reanimated through art, with the process researched and documented. Realised mainly through forms of dialogic practice, in the first three years Heart of Glass has developed a mature approach to arts programming, which aims to ensure a lasting legacy for the town. The present study shows how this is being built through a fine-grained local knowledge of people and place and by supporting an accumulation of locally sensitive and inspirational cultural experience.

EXCELLENCE IN ART AND ENGAGEMENT

This report records how taking part in projects has affected communities in a range of ways: increasing people's sense of connection to others around them and to the town, and encouraging a desire to take part in similar projects in the future. This is beginning to establish a shared sense of cultural citizenship, most visible in the constituencies that develop around different projects. The Heart of Glass programme has successfully managed to combine excellent art with local engagement, developing cultural capacity and involvement, raising artistic ambition, and changing perceptions about St Helens as a culturally vibrant place.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

- Heart of Glass has commissioned artists capable of making and co-producing art and culture out of the resources of local people, drawing on existing sources of energy and opportunity, as well as developing new ideas and forms of creativity, and supporting previously unimagined cultural expressions among people in the town.
- The ten-year plan written by Heart of Glass in 2016, acknowledges the local context it is working in, and the fact that achieving lasting change takes time. By rooting itself in communities, it has been able to develop a contemporary take on traditional and vernacular cultural forms, expanding the sense of possibility, critical awareness and appreciation for contemporary collaborative arts.
- The Heart of Glass approach to producing supports the creation of spaces of imaginative potential which foster the psychological and social conditions of creativity. The producers attend to the process with care and this is at the heart of the work, and of providing a high level of support for the artist, the community, the audience and other partners.
- The first three years have provided a strong foundation to realise the organisation's ambitions, in the process fostering new relationships and interchanges between people. It has contributed to the reanimation of public space and a growing sense of civic awareness, pride and cultural citizenship in St Helens.



Section 1

Introduction

LOCAL CONTEXT

St Helens is a large town in Merseyside, England. The area developed rapidly in the Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries into a significant centre for coal mining and glassmaking. It was also home to a cotton and linen industry that lasted until the mid-19th century as well as salt, lime and alkali pits, copper smelting and brewing. Glassmaker Pilkington is the town's one remaining large industrial employer. Previously the town was home to Beechams, the Gamble Alkali Works, Ravenhead Glass, United Glass Bottles, Daghish Foundry, and Greenhall's brewery.

It is the largest settlement and administrative centre of the Metropolitan Borough of St Helens with a population of 102,629, while the entire metropolitan borough had a population of 176,843 at the 2001 Census. Census data identifies St Helens as the Whitest and most Christian town in Britain, being more than 98% White British and more than 80% Christian.

The industrial decline of the town has been accompanied by a decline of trade unionism and a decline in leisure opportunities, including closures of pubs, sporting facilities and working men's clubs, as well as the demise of associations and some thinning of vernacular cultural activities. Hence, many communities have experienced social fragmentation, loss of collective identity, pride, belonging and solidarity. Social and community cohesion attached to historical forms of work have been undermined to some extent by poverty and unemployment, and the town has high levels of disability and physical and mental ill health.

St Helens is located 11 miles from Liverpool and 23 miles from Manchester and has direct transport links by road and two main railway lines. Its centralised location has formed the basis of the local authority's promotional literature and is central to development plans in the logistics sector. A major redevelopment of St Helens Central train station was completed in 2007 at a cost of £6.2 million, which the council hoped would encourage further investment, create more jobs and improve the gateway into the town.

Like many areas, St Helens has had to cope with severe cuts to public funding in recent years. The council produces a quarterly publication called St Helens First, which is delivered to every address in the borough. In the spring 2017 edition it set out what it describes as its 'budget challenges'. These include the fact that St Helens has lost significant funds from its local budget since 2010 and will have to make additional savings in the next three years. The council has lost more than 1600 staff and has dramatically reduced the number of services it provides. By 2020 the money provided to St Helens Council by central government will be almost nothing. This is all happening at a time when St Helens is experiencing a large and growing need for services. Alcohol specific deaths are double the national average and male life expectancy is several years below the national average. In the next 20 years the number of adults of 90 years of age is expected to triple, from 1,400 to 4,200, and St Helens has one of the highest proportions of looked after children and young people in the North-West.

St Helens First also sets out how the council is funded:

Figure 1: Council funding sources for St Helens

	2010		2016/7		2020	
Business rate	10%	£19 m	17%	£23m	38%	£50 m
Council tax	26%	£52 m	45%	£62m	54%	£71 m
Government grant	64%	£127m	38%	£53m	8%	£11 m
Total	£198m		£138m		£132m	

This shows an overall reduction in available funding between 2010 and 2020 (equating to £66 million) and very heavy swings in the sources of local government funding away from central government grants and towards business rates and council tax.

As part of the reaction to this changing economic situation, in 2015 the council appointed Mike Palin as the new Chief Executive. He replaced Carole Hudson who had held the role for 21 years. Palin had previously been Chief Executive of Liverpool City Region Local Enterprise Partnership and had also held senior positions at the North West Development Agency and social, economic and management consultancy SQW¹. The appointment of Mike Palin seems to signal a recognition of the need for a different form of leadership for the council, one he describes as ‘a place shaping and policy advising role, rather than a delivery of services role’ (Mike Palin). When Mike Palin was appointed, St Helens Council leader Barrie Grunewald said:

Mike will be bringing a wealth of economic development experience to St Helens at a key stage of the borough's ongoing transformation. ... He has exactly the sort of credentials we've been looking for. His leadership, vision, contacts and experience will serve us all well as we continue to unlock the borough's economic potential.
Liverpool Echo – 14th January 2015

In an interview for this research, Mike Palin described how St Helens needs to ‘reposition itself in terms of how it is seen locally’. One project undertaken since he became Chief Executive has been to employ Thinking Place consultancy to undertake a process based piece of work around developing a new narrative for the town. Thinking Place had previously undertaken similar projects in Hull (prior to the City of Culture bid), Burnley, Doncaster, Knowsley, Nottinghamshire, and various London boroughs. Palin told us that the consultants had found St Helens had ‘the most negative perception of itself of anywhere they had done this in the country’. He goes on to say,

We have just begun a piece of work about changing the narrative of the place, with culture being a key component of that. So, there is a letterhead which says ‘St Helens, Culturally Centred’ which is a recognition that we have cultural assets and we have Heart of Glass and we have a history and tradition of culture that we have not played up enough and we need to grab hold of this and promote it.

For Mike Palin, the role of the council is to respond to the economic context to identify the markets in which the town can operate, and to invest in those likely to reap rewards for the town. In 2017 it set these out under three themes:

St Helens – culturally centred

This captures the recognition that the town’s cultural resources, including Heart of Glass, can play an important role in its future development.

St Helens – industry to ingenuity

This illustrates the need to recapture the self-belief the town had during its industrial heyday, and to target its investment in areas in which it is strategically well placed and which are likely to generate income and employment for the town (e.g. logistics).

St Helens – the educated choice

This demonstrates the fact that 93% of the schools in St Helens have been rated by Ofsted as good or outstanding, and that academic attainment levels are high.

Historically, the proximity of St Helens to the major urban cultural centres of Liverpool and Manchester has been a mixed blessing. These urban centres have attracted most of the cultural investment in the region. Hence, the council hopes that the relatively generous funding invested in St Helens through the CPP programme can help develop a sustainable cultural infrastructure and help drive the regeneration of the area.

¹ <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/st-helens-new-chief-executive-8449395>

CREATIVE PEOPLE AND PLACES

CPP is a national programme that takes place in areas, where research has shown that people are less involved in arts and cultural activities than elsewhere in England. Developed by Arts Council England (ACE) with investment of £37m from the National Lottery, the programme has funded work in 21 areas of England for an initial three-year period. Different areas of the country have developed consortia, which have responded in different ways to the programme. ACE sets out the following aims for CPP:

- More people from places of least engagement experience and are inspired by the arts.
- Communities take the lead in shaping local arts provision.
- The aspiration for excellence is central - this covers both excellence of art and excellence of the process of engaging communities.
- To learn from past experiences and create an environment where the arts and cultural sector can experiment with new approaches to engaging communities.
- To learn more about how to establish sustainable arts and cultural opportunities and make this learning freely available across the cultural sector.
- To encourage partnerships across the subsidised, amateur and commercial sectors.
- To demonstrate the power of the arts to enrich the lives of individuals and make positive changes in communities.

Such activities and aspirations represent a step change from what went before in each of the CPP-funded places.

ACE intends the investment in CPP to make a lasting impact in the 21 areas. Two of the findings that ACE promotes on its own CPP website are as follows:

- Between 2013 and 2015 over 1 million people attended arts events or participated in arts activity in their local community as a result of CPP.
- In 2015 90% of our audience were from lower/medium-engaged groups. These segments make up 78% of the English population; so lower-engaged segments are over-represented in the CPP programme compared to their distribution in the population as a whole.²

When the CPP programme was announced nationally, ACE suggested that each local programme should be conceived as an ‘action research’ project in its own right. This appeared to instigate, at the outset, a recognition of the programme’s potential to stimulate new knowledge through relationships established in the course of working with communities in areas of historically low arts investment. This emphasis on action research was widely welcomed. As Laura Dyer, Executive Director at ACE conveyed in 2015, it also signified a desire to elicit evidence of value and effect of the programme³.

Hence, one of the important elements of the analysis in this report, is the extent to which the arts programme in Heart of Glass can be conceived as an action research project, as well as a discussion about what forms of value the programme might be able to articulate and evidence. However, this report is also in itself a contribution to action research insofar as the researchers have included immersive ethnographic research methods that are intended to assist in the future development of the producer model and practice of Heart of Glass as an organisation.

² www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/content/our-aims

³ www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/blog/creative-people-and-places-journey

THE HEART OF GLASS PROGRAMME AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

In 2014 Heart of Glass received an initial investment of £1.5 million from ACE through the CPP programme, to support a programme rooted in collaborative practice and the principle of partnership. The CPP programme is supported by a consortium which consists of St Helens Rugby League Football Club, Helena Partnerships Housing Group, FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology), St Helens Council, St Helens Arts Partnership (Platform Arts, the Citadel Arts Centre and The World of Glass museum).

One central concern of the programme has been to embed itself in local communities, where it can build on and help to reimagine existing local cultural practices and traditions, in order to become a national agency for collaborative and social arts practice. Hence, Heart of Glass describes itself as ‘made with, of and for St Helens: rooted in its heritage, its socialist principles and its history of innovation and experimentation, and of making life-changing contributions to the world through technological and pharmaceutical advances.’ (Tiller and Fox, 2016)

In 2014, the Heart of Glass programme was initially hosted in Langtree Park - the home of St Helens Rugby Football Club – which signalled the ways in which the cultural traditions, habits and inclinations of the town provided an important starting point for developing a programme of ambitious and provocative contemporary art. However, working in this context also produced challenges in trying to develop an artistically ambitious programme. In line with the objectives of the CPP Programme, Heart of Glass has sought to get more people from St Helens involved in the arts. More than 150 separate activities were delivered in the first 18 months – between July 2014 and January 2016 - where there was a focus on establishing recognition of the programme as broadly as possible across St Helens, as well as seeking to create engagement opportunities for a broad cross section of people from the town. Large scale public events such as And, On That Note as well as projects like Your Name Here (the subject of a detailed case study) -

which involved flyers being sent to every address in St Helens in addition to a large neon sign being erected on the Town Hall - are indicative of this programmatic intention.

As the programme developed into its second year, in 2015, it began to embed itself in the town and started to evolve its own distinctive model through which it sought to collaborate with artists prepared to respond to its distinctive philosophy and vision. It set this out under four interwoven strands of artistic activity, through which it sought to address the wider objectives of CPP:

Strand 1

Warming Up: tasters, small projects and experiments: a test-bed programme which ran through the first three years of the project, with the aim of providing a low-commitment, light-touch, first point of access to arts activity. This has supported programme objectives around engagement, building community interest, identifying those with a more sustained interest in the arts, animating St Helens spaces in new ways, and testing out approaches to engaging people who were arts-resistant.

Strand 2

The St Helens Commissions worked with the varied communities of St Helens to co-produce a contextually relevant and locally driven programme of work. The commissions were to evolve from the culture and identity of the town: the collective experiences of the crowd and community created by rugby; and the rich and complex labour history of the town’s industrial heritage.

Strand 3

Team games: partnerships and access across the region intended to develop strong reciprocally beneficial relationships with a number of key venues and organisations in Liverpool and Manchester in order to stage exceptional tours and co-productions in the town. These programmes aimed to provide more than just a first taste of activity, but to stretch people’s perception of what is possible, accessible and enjoyable in the town.

Strand 4

Raising our game: the building of an arts infrastructure and audience development was designed to support St Helens arts organisations to achieve their full potential. A budget was allocated for local organisations to support strategic partnerships and programming. This work has the twin purposes of building financial resilience while establishing aspirational, and sustainable programmes of high-quality work.

This model balanced different stands of work including small introductory projects (e.g. Family Art Club); work with a very broad reach and appeal (e.g. Your Name Here); commissions with local partners (e.g. the Skate Park Project co-commissioned with the Merseyside Police, Crime Commissioner and local authority); work which aimed to develop a sustainable arts infrastructure in the town (e.g. The Prototype Projects); responses to sector needs for critical dialogue about social practice (e.g. conferences held in 2016 and 2017); and work which involves collaboration with strategic regional partners (e.g. FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology) and Open Eye Gallery).

In 2016 Heart of Glass published a Development Plan, which renewed its commitment to developing 'New ideas, collaborations and partnerships' as central to its strategic vision for development (Heart of Glass, 2016). This conveyed an intention to create and foster a deep and integrated relationship with St Helens, through the development and co-creation of artworks, which recognise communities of place and interest as untapped resources rather than communities in need. The development and maintenance of partnerships and collaborations form the basis for continued growth and innovation.

In the plan, the organisation renews its commitment to being a 'non-venue based organisation', which allows it to be 'operationally fleet-of-foot'. In the next 10 years it intends to continue to explore this 'nomadic' approach to delivery, working across the borough in multiple contexts and with diverse communities, and to scope out further partnerships across the North-West region and beyond. This will see it building on its existing partnerships with

FACT, as well as collaborations with organisations which include The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Tate Liverpool, Merseyside Dance Initiative, Homotopia, DaDa Fest, Contact Theatre, Live Art Development Agency and Wunderbar, to seek out and bring in a broad range of learning, expertise and the development of excellent arts practice.

The primary objective set out in the development plan is to develop St Helens as a centre for socially engaged artistic practice. At the time of writing Heart of Glass has just received the news that its application to become a National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) has been successful. This potentially offers a longer-term platform for the development of its mission. It also conveys Arts Council England's interest and excitement in Heart of Glass project. Heart of Glass has also secured its second-stage funding for round two of CPP, and the continuation of that programme until 2020.

The Heart of Glass strategic vision, which formed the basis of its application for NPO status, is set out around four key tenets as follows:

1. Collaborative commissions: art and civil society

Collaborative arts are seen as fundamentally based on principles of participation and democratisation. Hence the vision for the programme centres around engaging the people and communities of St Helens and every community in which they work in the co-development of the Heart of Glass programme, recognising the expertise and experience of these people, and commissioning artists capable of working productively with this. Priority is given to taking time in the development and production of these artworks, in order to see what unfolds between artists, communities and partners.

There is a recognition that the creation of the work itself can help build an audience, one that might not otherwise engage with the arts. In this way Heart of Glass wraps its commitment to audience development into its overall philosophy of collaboration.

2. Take Over: common ground cultural programming and partnership

The commitment to Take Over builds on the legacy of Take Over Fest in 2015 (subject to a detailed case study in this report), offering a model of collective working which engages local people, communities and artists as co-producers of works and performance, and which embeds art and artistic practice within the psychological and physical fabric of the town. The nature of Take Over and its repurposing of the dialogue between artist, community and audience is a key driver in audience development. The programme offers the opportunity for people to engage with it as co-curators, co-producers, volunteers, visitors, audience members, observers or passers-by, and to mix-and-match those options at will.

3. Residencies: time and space, space and time

Heart of Glass supports artists and communities to make ambitious new work, and initiate interesting and exciting collaborations to realise and develop that work in diverse social contexts and settings. The programme seeks to sustain a number of longer-term artistic residencies, allowing the development of ongoing conversations between artists and communities that are built on trust. This also establishes a powerful platform through which to embed the arts and arts-led commissioning into the borough's strategic decision-making process.

4. Criticality: dialogues and perspectives

Heart of Glass intends its programme to operate at the forefront of socially engaged artistic thinking and practice and is committed to gathering and sharing learning and insights locally and among its sector peers, as well as disseminating best process and practice through the wider arts and cultural network. This involves an ongoing commitment to developing appropriate methodologies, which facilitate learning from the programme, and the dissemination of findings locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. The overarching intention is to build a demonstrable and evidenced reputation for St Helens as a national centre for socially engaged arts practice.

THE RESEARCH

Overview

A detailed methodology is contained in the appendix of this report. Here, however, we identify the key principles that have informed our research collaboration with the Heart of Glass programme between 2014 and 2017.

The research and evaluation proposal from the Psychosocial Research Unit (PRU) aimed to collaborate in the production of a methodology which would study the programme through selected strands and project case studies, as well as taking an overview of the programme's strategic development, partnership and commissioning as it evolved its philosophy and model. As the programme has unfolded, its various foci have been clarified and particularly its approach to developing and implementing cultural infrastructure in St Helens. These are all central components of the Heart of Glass objective to become a centre for socially engaged practice.

Theoretical concepts

In our previous work (Froggett et al. 2011) we have illustrated the concept of 'third space' and its importance in characterising the models of practice in socially engaged arts projects. What is distinctive about the third space of the artwork is that on entering its ambit, preconceptions about others who exist outside of this space are put aside in favour of an ability to reach out and see where the new encounter may lead. In the words of D.W. Winnicott (1971) it is the space where notions of 'me' and 'not-me' are suspended, a space full of potential in which one can discover for oneself what was there to be found, whether this was located in other people, or places, or things. In the pleasure of such a discovery one can then form relationships that have a particular vitality, by virtue of the fact that they involve an encounter with otherness that also surprises or challenges.

Third space is therefore an intrinsically creative space. It is both a locus of culture and a state of mind achievable in the everyday lives of individuals and communities. Artists - particularly those working in the public realm - have a practical role in opening up third spaces, and the function of a

programme like Heart of Glass is to open up these spaces – which sometime means ‘holding the artists’ as they work within these newly constituted spaces. In this way people can make best use of them, thus contributing through art to the creative invigoration of communities and their environments, civil society and the public sphere.

Hence, third space can be defined as the space that an artwork - conceived as a social practice - is able to open up, and this can be done in a variety of ways: across the whole town (e.g. Your Name Here – Joshua Sofaer); within and between communities (e.g. Maze of Displacement – Claire Weetman; Rainford High Technology College – Mark Storer); between a community, its context and an artist (e.g. 2020 Vision – Sophie Mahon); or between a community, the police, and the local authority (e.g. The Skate Park Project – Studio Morison).

This report uses the concept of third space to explore the generative potential of the actual environments of Heart of Glass projects, to ephemeral and relational situations that are created between people, which we exemplify through the case studies. We demonstrate through the examples, how the particular power and relevance of the third space is its function as a container of uncertainty, allowing participants to accept the unknown, at least temporarily, because this unknown feels secure within the newly created (third) space. In this way, we demonstrate how Heart of Glass projects – following the work of Wilfred Bion on ‘negative capability’ – allow people to accept uncertainty and doubt as part of a shared process of inquiry. This is particularly relevant to the long-term project ambitions of Heart of Glass, in the sense that many of the new social and creative spaces being created for the town can feel strikingly different and unknown. An example of this negative capability occurring in the third space of an artwork is Mark Storer’s work at Rainford High, where the structural status quo of the day-to-day running of a successful school is brought into question through the creation of new and uncertain spaces of exchange between pupils and teachers.

Research methods

The research reported here was undertaken in the period from December 2014 to July 2017.

The research design incorporates methods specific to each project that are designed to capture the distinctive nature of the process and activity, together with methods common across different types of event which will facilitate comparison. We have used rapid capture and narrative in-depth modes of interviewing with artists and audience members, visual ethnography, photo-ethnography, non-participant observation of cultural processes and events and the visual matrix, a form of collective participative feedback. Regular informal meetings and periodic formal review meetings with the Heart of Glass team have enabled us to feed back our emergent findings both formally and informally.

In the spirit of action research, we have used these methods formatively to provide a sense of the developing arc of the programme. We describe the ways in which artists have developed projects in relation to and in collaboration with communities in St Helens, the experience and reception of these projects and events in the town, and the impact on local artists and art infrastructure.

By combining a methodology which addresses the overall programme with a case study based approach, we have been able to document the development of projects which have:

- celebrated people, place and culture (Another Place; Your Name Here; Take Over Fest; A Maze of Displacement).
- honoured local people and their achievements (Your Name Here).
- appealed to diverse audiences (Songs of Hope and Joy; Family Art Club; Take Over Fest; Brass Calls; In Your Place; The Fabric of Light).
- animated or reanimated St Helens spaces in new ways (Duckie 21st Century Music Hall; Silent Night, Brass Calls; Haunted Furnace).
- supported the development local artists and producers (Prototype Projects; Haunted Furnace).

- created a cultural mix (A Maze of Displacement; Take Over Fest; Duckie 21st Century Music Hall).
- produced artistically excellent events in treasured local venues (Camp; Prototype Projects; Duckie 21st Century Music Hall; Family Art Club; Before I Die).
- challenged the mode and meaning of existing establishments (Mark Storor; Take Over Fest; Duckie 21st Century Music Hall).

Research questions

The research addresses the following questions:

- Are more people from St Helens experiencing and inspired by the arts, as a result of the programme?
- To what extent has the programme aspiration for excellence of art and excellence of the process of engaging communities been achieved?
- Which approaches to engagement and excellence have been most successful and what lessons have been learned?
- To what extent has the arts and cultural sector experimented with new approaches to engaging communities?
- Have new and sustainable arts and cultural opportunities been created? To what extent has the programme encouraged local civil and artistic partnerships?
- Have there been any significant unexpected outcomes?

Data collection target groups

Data collection in phase 1 of the research was targeting four main groups:

- Key members of programme team (i.e. Director, Deputy Director, Programme Producers, Programme and Operations Assistant, Marketing and Communications Officer, Documentation Associate, and Assistant Producers).
- Artists commissioned to deliver projects within the programme.
- Staff from partner organisations (e.g. housing organisations, local arts organisations, the council, Saints Community Development Foundation, Rainford High).
- Participants and audience members who attend or take part in commissioned projects (e.g. theatre shows, festivals, community art events, family arts days).





Section 2

Case Studies

In this section we develop detailed case studies of five projects we have looked at in the research, which we see as emblematic of Heart of Glass' approach to realising its work. The five examples also speak to the objectives of this research and the programmatic themes we develop in the discussion.

Case Study 2.1

Your Name Here

Joshua Sofaer: a town-wide invitation to cultural engagement



“

We need more parks to name!

Introduction

In 2015 Heart of Glass commissioned Joshua Sofaer to realise a project called Your Name Here. The project offered the residents of St Helens an opportunity to nominate a local person for a park to be named after. In May 2015, a three-metre neon sign with the words 'YOUR NAME HERE' was placed above the doorway of St Helens Town Hall signalling the launch of a new public art project, and flyers about the project were delivered to every postal address in the town.

Conceived by artist Joshua Sofaer, Your Name Here encouraged the people of St Helens to nominate a person whose name they felt should be recognised, along with their reasons why. It was a competition for Lyons Yard, Ravenhead Greenway Park to be re-named after someone with a strong connection - historic or recent - to St Helens. Those putting someone forward were asked to explain this nomination through a story, drawing, painting, video, photo, sound recording or even an object. More than 500 entries were submitted in the course of the project.

A judging panel was convened to select a winning nomination. The panel included, St Helens Council Leader Councillor Barrie Grunewald, comedian and actor Johnny Vegas, Saints' player James Roby and artist duo Yellow Door Artists. The panel selected Vera Bowes who had nominated herself under her childhood name of Page:

I am nominating myself as a child.

I can't forget the little girl who thought she wasn't wanted and how it affected my life.

My real Mum died when I was a baby. My Dad didn't want me after he re-married. So my Grandma brought me up with the others, but she died when I was four. After that my Aunt Rose looked after me. I called her Mam, thinking she was my mother. But at 15, she had to tell me the truth, because her husband didn't want to keep me.

I married and had five of my own children, but lost two of them. My husband knocked me about and I suffered a nervous breakdown. The nurses had to teach me to walk and talk again – I'd gone completely.

People tell me to forget the past, but they don't know what those years did to me.

(Vera Bowes)

Vera Bowes had attended one of the oral history reminiscence workshops that accompanied the project in the communal lounge of her sheltered housing. It was at this meeting that she shared her story. Her story of an ordinary St Helener's 'steadfast endurance in the face of tragedy,' deeply moved the panel, who found in it, 'an inspiring soliloquy of strength against adversity for every one of us.' One of the judges commented:

We were greatly touched by Vera Bowes' nomination of herself as a child under her birth name Vera Page. For a project with the title, Your Name Here, it is wonderful to see someone who has tried to imagine what it would mean for them personally to have a park named after them, and to think of the opportunity as a way of confronting demons of the past. Vera's story of abandonment, despair and hardship may resonate with many of us; it is also uniquely her own. We want the naming of Vera Page Park to stand as a symbol for all of us who need to acknowledge the hurt of the past in order to heal.

As she took her place for the renaming, along with more than 500 other nominees, families and friends whose stories have created this living portrait of St Helens, Vera spoke about her pride in being selected:

It's like a dream. I keep thinking I'll wake up in a bit, I'm just an ordinary person. Fancy wanting my name for a park in St Helens. I'm proud, so proud.

The official renaming of the park included a day of celebration at the park, with the St Helens Male Voice Choir performing a piece of music, and also included workshops by local artists along with garden games, food and a chance to take part in rugby drills.

Artist and programme ambitions

Sofaer describes how he is interested in making work that is thinking 'at its heart, about what it means to participate and engage.' This strand of his practice began in 2005 with a series of projects under the name Scavengers including one at the Tate Modern, in which members of the public were asked to scavenge the city for objects from which he would make an exhibition. Your Name Here is the fourth in a series of naming projects Sofaer has realised. He describes a common thread running through this work as being 'to give people hope, or the imagination, that they can change the fabric' of the places in which they live. For example, in an earlier project in Porto, Portugal, many of the discussions around selecting someone – in that case to have a street named after them – were

preoccupied with the question 'is the city going to allow it?' This reflected something important about a context in which the gap between state and citizen felt very large and Sofaer hoped to help people to imagine that they might be able to change things, even in small ways.

Sofaer describes how the idea of the project in St Helens came about:

When I was in LA, on the way to the airport, I saw this massive hoarding over this building, I mean huge, and it was horrible plastic, and it said 'Your Name Here'. And I thought, 'how incredible', I mean, that's really addressing the spectator, to imagine their own name there. And I thought 'if only it can be shifted slightly out of this advertising business context.' So, it seemed to be a shorthand for a lot of the things that I was interested in.

In St Helens the idea was to try and draw a portrait somehow of the town. One thing in St Helens was that we got almost no celebrity nominations. We got some local rugby players. But we got no non-local celebrities. No Madonna, or Beyonce.
(Joshua Sofaer)

Heart of Glass Director, Patrick Fox, had wanted a project that people would hear about, and that would be visible and known, both by generating engagement and broader awareness of the programme, including through 'column inches' in the newspapers. However, he also wanted a genuine involvement of local people with the project, as well as for local artists to get involved. Sofaer described this as a 'major leap' from his previous naming projects, the idea that the 'whole town could know about the project'. This resulted in a flyer about the project being delivered to every household in St Helens.

And what's really exciting about that was that there were conversations going on about it around the town. And the neon sign (on the town hall) led to people saying 'well, what is that?', and then the sense that people are making the imaginative leap to think about how they can change the fabric of the place.
(Joshua Sofaer)

Process – mode of engagement

Part of the brief had been to develop a project that would allow a broad cross section of people in St Helens to hear about Heart of Glass. In addition to the leaflet distribution and the neon sign on the Town Hall, six associate artists worked on the project: Claire Weetman, Angela Wilkinson, Alison Kershaw, Michelle Wren, Jane Barwood and Jeni McConnell. Joshua ran a development day for these artists, explaining the principle of the project and what the invitation was (celebrating the everyday, the ordinary). The associate artists ran art form specific workshops in a range of community venues. More than 500 people took part in workshops in schools, libraries, sheltered housing, clubs and societies. There were 17,000 visitors to the website, and more than 500 people submitted proposals.

As Sofaer explained, the simple and appealing premise of the project allowed him and Heart of Glass to institute a number of processes through which messages could be disseminated to a broad cross section of people in St Helens: a clear, simple, coherent and tangible opportunity to engage the council; a photo call in front of the sign with the leader of the council; a flyer delivered to every postal address in the town; news in the local paper about the call; a series of workshops with different communities that took place to gather the proposals and deepen the appreciation of the project; ways to involve local artists in the process, as well as libraries and the involvement of a community of well-known local people from St Helens as a selection panel. In this way, the project helped meet some of the formal CPP expectations, which included meeting certain goals in terms of public visibility as well as demonstrating engagement and involvement with the programme. However, Your Name Here altered the fabric of this sense of responsibility, through the way people understood and appreciated the creative offer of the project. Hence, apart from the success of the project in generating broad awareness, its true impact can be seen, not in its breadth and reach, but in the depth and quality of the nominations received. As Sofaer points out

... when you read the nominations you realise there is also something intensely personal going on there.

The lack of celebrity nominations in Your Name Here, seems to indicate that St Helens residents were open to the creative invitation of the project, and, also, that they understood and appreciated the idea behind it. Sofaer talked about this in terms of the idea that residents might have more power to 'take control over their environment and leave their mark on it'. It is an example of how Heart of Glass has successfully commissioned artists able to develop an appropriate language, which speaks to the distinctive imaginations, interests and desires of the town.

Legacy and sustainability

The project successfully developed a participatory form of cultural activity, which provoked an engagement with questions of place, time, memory, appreciation and recognition. The project generated stories of people who had given to their communities in ways that had been forgotten, tributes to loved ones, memorials for local sportswomen and men whose achievements had been overlooked, and people who nominated themselves for very different reasons (including two young women who wanted to celebrate their friendship).

The process of selecting the final winner involved creating a forum in which these very different contributions could be aired, compared and contested. The selection panel was held in the boardroom at St Helens RFC. Joshua chaired it and started the session by setting out the principles behind the project. The panel talked through each nomination, taking time and allowing for important conversations about local identity and recognition in St Helens. The selection of people for the panel was felt to be well judged, as Mark Dickens - Senior Assistant Director Development and Growth, St Helens Council suggested:

They set up a panel. So, some rugby league players, Johnny Vegas was on it, the council leader was on it. So, it was again people didn't think 'oh, this is elitist'. These were people that they talked about from St Helens and everyone put their suggestions in.

The involvement of someone from the council, but also a range of different local people – sportspeople, artists, and a local celebrity – conveyed an interest in the project. For artist, Joshua Sofaer, the stories submitted for the project have created a sort of portrait of the town.

St Helens is full of people that have stories. It was marked that people got the project. The fact that we got no 'Rhianna' or whatever else. The fact that people were nominating their mum, or dad, or best friend, and they could hold the worth of those individuals within that nomination was really striking. And I thought that the quality of nominations was quite high. St Helens is extremely proud I would say. There is very little griping or moaning, which given it is considered to be an area of deprivation is perhaps important. ... There is a lot of kindness and a considerable willingness to do the project. I mean, putting a neon sign on the town hall, that would be impossible in London. You would not be able to put up that sign for a community project.
(Joshua Sofaer)

The comment about the neon sign reflects Sofaer's experience of trying to realise similar projects in different places, where local councils have been obstructive. In St Helens the council was excited by the idea behind the project, wanted to play its part in conveying its support for it and promotion of it; and, it was impressed by the way it celebrated ordinary lives.

It was great. I think that it showed that everyone can be engaged, and I think that was part of it. It was making sure that people realised that St Helens is for everyone, and that Vera Page's nomination was just a really good example for it.
(Mark Dickens, Senior Assistant Director Development and Growth, St Helens Council)

The project was well documented in the local press, in a series of articles in the St Helens Reporter and St Helens Star, as well as single articles in the Liverpool Echo and the Knutsford Guardian. The press described the ways in which the project had captured the interest and imagination of the town, and had seen nominations for unknown people for personal and emotional reasons, rather

than celebrities. For example, the Liverpool Echo led with a headline 'Unsung heroes of St Helens celebrated in art competition'⁴

The project received an especially warm reception in the St Helens Star, under the headline 'Your Name Here arts project gathers pace'⁵; and on 10th September 2015 the St Helens Star published an eight-page document, which presented a small number of the nominations received.

Outcomes

- Your Name Here formed a test bed at an early stage in the programme for a strategic partnership with the local authority, which provided enthusiastic support.
- It raised public awareness of the programme and mobilised broad involvement.
- Public conversations were initiated around sense of place, identity and heritage, and how these could be a basis for cultural value - a first step in the recognition and building of cultural capital.
- By selecting a local person whose life had been hard, rather than a celebrity, the town symbolically affirmed that the injuries of the past could heal so that post-industrial St Helens, could build a new future from its own people and resources.

⁴ www.liverpooecho.co.uk/news/unsung-heroes-st-helens-celebrated-9607208

⁵ www.sthelensstar.co.uk/news/12974932.Your_Name_Here_arts_project_gathers_pace/





Image of Vera Bowes

Conclusions

The project is emblematic of the skill Heart of Glass demonstrates in commissioning artists able to introduce practices that can speak to the distinctive imaginations, interests and desires of the town. The project generated stories of people who had given to their communities in ways that had been forgotten, tributes to loved ones, memorials for local sportswomen whose achievements have been overlooked, and people who nominated themselves with very different reasons. Crossick and Kaszynska (2016) argue that the value of culture begins with 'actual experience', arguing that there is 'something fundamental and irreducible' about this. The 'actual experience' of a project such as Your Name Here emerges from the way it provokes an imaginative leap in people's sense of place, time and citizenship. The reasons that this might be important to a programme funded by CPP are largely self-evident. However, it's also worth pointing out that the health and wellbeing effects of community connectivity and solidarity are well documented in research (Wilkinson 2005 and Putnam 2000). Projects such as Your Name Here have tapped into existing networks and relationships, and have also provoked new stories and conversations in and about the town, founded on the pleasures of a shared cultural identity. Indeed, many people were both surprised and delighted by the eventual winner and Joshua Sofaer described Vera Page's nomination in St Helens as an 'imaginative leap'.



Case Study 2.2

take over fest

Scottee: A Queer Festival Programme

“

My work always has an agenda which is underlying it, and then a top line. Some people only get the top line ... but others get both.

(Scottee)

Introduction

Take Over Fest was a newly conceived interactive festival developed and realised by Scottee in collaboration with Heart of Glass and Homotopia in 2015. It featured three months of events. In some cases, Scottee was also the artist in these events, and in others he co-commissioned the artworks with Heart of Glass providing support. Take Over Fest included the following elements:

Hunt & Darton café – a pop up touring project which took over an empty shop space on the edge of one of the central shopping centres offering a fully functioning café along with tableside performances and take away art, performed by Hunt & Darton

Le Gateau Chocolat – offered an intimate night of opera at The World of Glass, performed by an internationally acclaimed opera singing drag artist, who also offered confessional tales about how he can never be out to his parents.

Camp – was a variety show at the Citadel Arts Centre in which lead artist Scottee brought his award winning ‘gang of weirdos ... fat singers, drag queens eating hot dogs and some naff magic’ to St Helens in a show which addressed homophobia as well as exclusionary aspects of gay culture (‘no fats, no femmes’).

Haunted Furnace – co-commissioned by Scottee and produced by Marissa Carnesky, Caroline Smith and Victoria Edgerton this involved a frightening walkabout performance dealing with women’s histories of labour in the town, performed by a group of young women from St Helens, in the Hotties Furnace at the World of Glass building.

Fraff – was a night of stand up poetry for people who don’t like poetry, presented in partnership with Cultural Hubs ‘compèred by Kim Jong-Un lookalike Scottee. It’s a fun night out. It’s not for fans of Pam Ayres’.

Come Ride with me – people from St Helens were encouraged to take a ride in a taxi with artist Jack Rooke, whose performance dealt with ‘life, death and Geri Halliwell’.

Kids Rave – was a morning rave for kids, with music, balloon modelling, drag queens, face painting, cereal and orange juice.

Take Over Fest opened out new spaces for people to engage with the arts such as a temporary arts café in the town centre. It reanimated existing cultural venues such as the Citadel, a local market, the library and the World of Glass. It adopted a number of different forms of engagement including a café space, ticketed events and a free family art club. The temporary nature of a festival was a useful opportunity to offer gentle provocations to settled and socially conservative attitudes in the town.

Artist and programme ambitions

Scottee's work is both implicitly and explicitly political and he uses his performance-based practice as a means of unearthing and exploring unarticulated attitudes, and values and raising alternative possibilities. Subjects he has addressed include elitism in the arts, attitudes to obesity, gay culture, gay marriage and working class masculinity. In the Lost Lectures series he delivered 'I've been radicalised', in which he discussed his own experience of homophobia⁶. In 2016 The Worst of Scottee, won the Total Theatre award at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Theatre critic and journalist Matt Trueman described the show as follows:

In it, he sits in a photo-booth and tells a video camera the worst things he's ever done: inventing a girlfriend's suicide, say, or stealing to satisfy an eating addiction. Gradually, the make-up rubs off and Scottee gives way to Scot Gallagher beneath. It's a considered, cathartic and deeply authentic hour. It should be self-indulgent. It's not.

In St Helens, Scottee's own personal and painful experience of prejudice and discrimination was the basis for recognising issues of difference in the town. On the surface, St Helens can look and feel homogenous, apparently living up to its reputation as 'the Whitest and most Christian town in Britain'⁷. However, Take Over Fest tapped into undercurrents and experiences of difference. Scottee described it as 'revolutionary in small ways' and when interviewed by the research team talked about his 'agenda', saying that Take Over Fest had prompted people to see the town differently:

I never went to art school, so I want art to speak to people who talk like me, to people who come from estates like me, the working class voice is still not being heard. ... Art should have difficult conversations about difficult things and when it comes to public subsidy, art should be happening in working class communities and in places like St Helens because these people pay their taxes too. I feel quite passionately about that.

... Normally when I come to a place like this, I am looking for the shit and wanting to make a pedantic response to that. And normally I'd be making a commission. But in this case, I wanted to introduce the possibilities and then come back later and make a commission.

Process – mode of engagement

Scottee designed Take Over Fest after a period of research activity in the town in which he talked to a broad cross section of people to understand their concerns. One group he was interested in was volunteers in charity shops.

You have a group of people who want to change something in a really local way, they are quiet doers, rather than the movers and shakers ... people who are thinking in a different way. Also, when you are trying to get something going, you are getting plugged into a group of people who are just a little bit further along the line of saying 'OK, I'll take the risk'.

(Scottee)

He described how after his initial research visits he felt that St Helens wasn't ready for him to develop a full piece of work, because it 'lacked a language, an audience and the infrastructure'. He felt that a take over festival would help initiate 'the start of a conversation'. Somewhat counter-intuitively the temporary nature of a festival can be 'normalizing', by stimulating psychosocial processes that serve to question existing ways of seeing the world, and allowing the development of spaces (effectively transient 'third spaces') that are neither wholly of the town nor extraneous to it in which people can play with new ideas, and cultural experiences.

So, a night at the opera involves a Black gay singer who can never be out to his parents. It binds traditional opera performed by a world-class singer with confessional tales. Camp will use a variety show at the Citadel to present a series of amusing and provocative performances to the people of St Helens. And the Kids Rave aims to normalize the presence of LGBT people in St Helens, whilst serving cereal and fruit juice.

(Scottee)

⁶ I've Been Radicalised – Lost Lectures, 15th December 2015, by Scottee https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0xD5ppyrL_c

⁷ Census data

Kathryn Dempsey from Heart of Glass was the Lead Producer for Take Over Fest, with other team members supporting different elements - for example, Suzanne Dempsey-Sawin and Caroline Smith supported Haunted Furnace. Given the intentionally political nature of Take Over Fest, Scottee was keen to ensure that his artistic propositions would work productively and generate third spaces of communicative exchange rather than simply trying to address head on the issues he was interested in, and invoking defensiveness. Hence, for example, in co-commissioning Haunted Furnace, he wanted the project to be a 'feminist horror, and not simply a youth theatre project', in this way using his influence as lead artist to keep the 'secondary audience' (the town) in mind as well as the 'primary audience' (those young women who co-produced the show) (Bishop, 2012 p.272).

The launch

The launch event in August 2015 had a very positive feel, and the mix of art verging on comedy show/panto went down very well with many people. One person, of Asian background, said he found some aspects offensive, but he said that even he would be prepared to give it the benefit of the doubt. There appeared to be an openness in the town to 'shake things up a bit' as one resident put it.

The inclusion of an artist who also works in the council in the launch event (the 'local talent', as Scottee called her) worked well, demonstrating its involvement in Heart of Glass. The panto style encouraged members of the audience to join in, alongside Scottee and others with everybody wearing a prop (scarf or tiny party hat). Drinks and pies were served. Most people were happy with the event itself and were prepared to participate and 'spread the word'. Public responses were positive with occasional reservations:

- Really good launch...
- (What most remember?) ... not one thing, in general... the lady from the council... the madness of it all...
- Entertaining, artistically as well,
- Enjoyed it more than I thought I would...
- Would go to some events in the future...
- Challenging and yet friendly...
- Feeling that we are all part of something...
- Sometimes in comedy acts they pick on someone in audience... joy to watch...
- Will go to some of the events
- Different, humour of a wide taste, difficult to get it, positive to a point, don't get offended easily, bit mocking the blind person didn't like it, in this day and age... but not put off, if it's a new thing, some of jokes... but will recommend, not fair not to on basis of one thing.
- Excellent, fun, can't wait... will spread the word, fabulous night.
- Liked the poets, the irony, all good
- An inkling that the woman from the council would perform, not completely unexpected...
- Lot of fun, so funny, didn't know what to expect, dry sense of humour.
- Good for St Helens, so different, have to shake things up, even those who don't appreciate it will wake up to some of it.

Camp at the Citadel

Camp took the familiar cultural form of the variety show and made it 'queer'. At different points the show felt comforting and familiar and disquieting and provocative. Performed at the Citadel Arts Centre, the show sold out to a largely local audience. The Citadel's Chief Executive said in an interview in 2017:

Camp was hands down the best thing I've ever seen at the Citadel in 17 years of being involved and part of the reason for that is because Camp is exactly what the Citadel auditorium was designed for in a sense. So, it felt like we were doing exactly what we should be doing.
(Fay Lamb, Chief Executive, the Citadel Arts Centre)

The Citadel was designed for music hall performances. Scottee used the intimacy of the space to explore the possibilities of queering a variety show. Camp appears to have reanimated this traditional venue, hinting at a potential for the venue beyond tribute bands and comedy nights. The Citadel staff members were open to this possibility and excited about collaboration with Heart of Glass.

Haunted Furnace

Marisa Carnesky worked with two local producers and a group of young women to produce an interactive ghost walk in the supposedly haunted Hotties Furnace, at The World of Glass. It involved a three-month collaboration with young women who came from at least seven different postcode areas in the town and a partnership between The World of Glass museum and Helena Partnerships. The show was devised, performed, and co-produced by 35 young women, working in collaboration with the internationally renowned Carnesky Productions, in conjunction with local producers Caroline Smith and Victoria Edgerton.

Many of the young women who took part had an interest in the arts and/or performance. Many also had low levels of confidence in their own artistic abilities. The Haunted Furnace was performed at The World of Glass over two consecutive weekends in October 2015, in the tunnel network surrounding an old, decommissioned glass furnace. The team built on the range of skills and interests of the young women involved, who took part in different aspects of the project from set creation and stage direction to costume, make-up and performance. The project, a feminist horror, was directed by Carnesky Productions, which works with themes of the funfair, magic illusions, horror and the bizarre. The show was performed eight times in total. All tickets were sold.

In March 2016 we asked 16 young women who had taken part to make a series of video interviews with each other about the project. These are some of the things they said:

- *I'm a lot more confident.*
- *I've met new people.*
- *I have met a lot of new people, and worked with people I don't know, because I have only ever done theatre with people in my own school or college before, or with people I know, so it was quite interesting to see how other people approach theatre... It's given me a lot of confidence in my writing and given me ideas of what I want to do in the future.*
- *For experience, it's something different; it's not something I've done before, so to get different experience doing a project I wouldn't normally do.*



Four main themes that emerged from the interviews conducted by the research team were:

Friendship – this seemed to be very important to the enjoyment of the project and the satisfaction derived from it. There was something distinctive about the friendships in this project because they involved collaborating on a professional theatre project (see below).

Confidence – confidence grew from realising that they could develop a show and perform with people they didn't know, building a set of transferable skills, for example in specific elements such as writing or performing.

Professionalism – taking part in a professional production involved being challenged by the director and producer. Participants responded differently and developed a sense of shared

responsibility, which they valued. Many of the young women described how they had enjoyed the feedback from the audience, being so close to the audience, seeing and feeling their responses. As one young woman put it 'I had one woman in tears!' Another said that she was very unsure that the project would work and she only really started to believe in it after it had been performed and people responded so well to it. This seemed to imply that she had been stretched beyond her comfort zone and enjoyed the feeling of achievement that this brought and could trust a process that would push her more in the future.

History - Many had been drawn in by an interest in 'things like make-up' but had found themselves drawn into writing and performing. This included researching their characters, which led to unexpected learning and a subtly altered sense of the town.

Hunt & Darton Café

Hunt & Darton Café has visited up to 10 different UK cities and opened for business for a month in each location taking over empty shops. The approach is intended to encourage more activity to happen in spaces that people can stumble upon, equipping people with the tools, knowledge and confidence needed to make this happen.

The project in St Helens was a temporary installation realised in the town centre right on the edge of St Mary's shopping centre. Situated at No 6 Church Square, it offered a functional pop up café that blended art with the everyday, a temporary social and artistic hub, where spontaneity and performance were offered alongside food and drink. Open for three weeks, the Hunt & Darton Café encouraged playful participation, transforming a former shoe shop into a gallery, theatre and public/private building. In this way, it tapped into concerns, which emerge in other areas of the programme, including the question: Is maintaining the sites of civic life a public or private concern?

Legacy and sustainability

By whetting the palate for the unusual, unexpected, unplanned for, and outrageous, the irreverence of Take Over Fest functioned as an operational principle, tweaking a cultural nerve in a way which was carefully pitched and respectful, but also deliberately political and provocative. The work sought to create interruptions, questioning existing behaviours, expectations and exclusions, disrupting existing notions about public space, public art, public buildings, civic life, as well as creating spaces for unplanned things to emerge⁸.

For example, in Haunted Furnace, we saw how young women worked with women's histories of labour in the town and started to question their own working aspirations and entitlement to cultural citizenship (although they would not have used this term). Subsequently they have formed into a semi-independent group, which has articulated its aspirations for future projects. In Camp and Kids Rave, what has previously been invisible or at best a background noise – the rights of LGBTQ people in the town – was given form and recognition. These examples demonstrate the kind of political effects that Take Over Fest was able to realise, because these artworks interrupted and dissented from what had been seen as 'naturally given'⁹. Scottee's language of 'engagement with an agenda' involves enacting a politics which aims to reconfigure relationships. It is here that the work of Take Over Fest assumes its meaning.

However, the project is also emblematic of the ways in which the Heart of Glass approach supports the development of the arts sector in St Helens. This is captured by the Citadel Chief Executive, Fay Lamb, who describes it as follows:

The Scottee events here, so, there is that kind of, (feeling that) Citadel wouldn't have been able to achieve those things on its own. It is a Heart of Glass kind of effect ... we've (the Citadel) been able to think differently about our programme and think differently about what we do, so there are thoughts now about how we take our work out of the Citadel so that we reach more people, ... we're beginning to be a lot more ambitious in our programming aspirations and actually a lot clearer in our own minds about what it is that we do and what our programme is. ... which has enabled the Citadel to say okay these are our strengths within this and this is our place within this.

⁸ The New Rules of Public Art, Situations (2015)

⁹ see Rancière, cited in Bishop (2012)

Outcomes

- The festival subverted taken for granted and socially conservative attitudes with a carefully pitched degree of provocation that for most people offered a ‘just right challenge’. As a result it extended the boundaries of ‘acceptable’, politically inspired work (with a small p) that the town is willing to accommodate.
- It took aim at exclusionary views and practices in relation to marginalised groups such as LGBTQ people, recovered awareness and pride in working class culture and labour history, and built confidence and skills among participants.
- In doing this through a cultural form, recognisable in some cases because it is rooted in locally resonant music hall traditions, it represented a step in the building of cultural citizenship.

Conclusions

This idea expressed by Matt Trueman (on page 46) of something that ‘should be self-indulgent but isn’t’, captures the productive aspects of Scottee’s work. His soul-baring honesty, which draws on his own anxieties and insecurities serves to unearth socially unconscious values and prejudices in his co-producers and in the audiences. Scottee used his persona as a gay artist in Take Over Fest to encourage the people of St Helens to view the ‘queering’ of these shows as contributing to a cultural change in the town. By using the tradition of panto and variety show and infusing this with queer art, Scottee was able to suggest queerness as an unacknowledged entertaining aspect of the town’s history. At a time when Tate Britain is hosting a major exhibition on Queer British Art¹⁰, St Helens partook of these concerns showing leadership in the region. According to Clare Barlow, the curator of the Tate Britain exhibition:

In the past when LGBT stories have been explored (in galleries) there’s been an emphasis on erotic artworks. But what’s interesting about this, given that it’s a period of oppression, with jail potentially a consequence, is that it feeds into every aspect of these artists’ lives.

(Quoted in The Independent, see source in footnote 10)

In the case of St Helens, queer art has been taken out of the gallery and into the streets and local places. In this process, Scottee has – like the Tate – steered away from a concentration on erotic queer art and instead made an art that can be relevant to all.

Ranciè describes how the value of artistic practices lies in their potential to intervene in and question existing ways of apprehending and partitioning the world. In Take Over Fest we see that things that have previously been unacknowledged are given space to emerge (for example, the histories of women’s labour), interrupting and dissenting from what is seen as naturally given. The value of these artistic practices lies in their potential to intervene in and question existing ways of apprehending and partitioning the world in St Helens. In this respect, the idea of a temporary festival has proved to be an effective way to introduce the unusual into St Helens, and one the organisation is keen to explore further.

¹⁰ www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/queer-british-art-tate-britain-lgbt-a7669581.html



Case Study 2.3

Rainford High Technology College

Mark Storor: Transformation through creative space

“

*It was like we made a community or a town
and a government, making decisions...*

Introduction

Mark Storer is working with communities across St Helens over a period of 12 years. He began in October 2015. The work he focuses on includes older men, the police, primary school children, young carers and the students and staff at Rainford High Technology College (Rainford High). The work is long term, during which various areas may interweave and overlap. Like most of Storer's work, the outcomes are unknown until they actually emerge, with an emphasis on collaboration and process. This case study concentrates on Storer's collaboration with Rainford High.

Mark Storer was commissioned to work at Rainford High between October 2016 and May 2017. During this time, he would creatively engage with the students and staff at the school, culminating in an arts event at the end of May. Storer's way of working is loosely planned according to emerging participants' contributions, which are facilitated by the artist. This modus operandi was a challenge for the school.

Mark, being an artist saying 'it might be this ... It might be that'... and I am thinking, 'Hang on a moment!'... you know, schools are structured places... How do staff respond to that? Staff are very busy, and you don't want to lose staff because you've thrown this bizarre idea into the ring..
(Principal)

Mark explained the work, but generally but not specifics, wants to not lead it too much, doesn't want an outcome at the end decided before. To me that was difficult to do because when we are teaching we always want to know what our outcome is, we always want to know.
(Head of Art, Design and Photography)

The school found it easiest to perceive the project as being connected to a mental health and wellbeing project, (linked in with a Public Health 'Mental Health Transformation Group' around a project for Emotionally Healthy Schools promoted by St Helens Council) which ran concurrently with the project; for Mark Storer and Heart of Glass, the overall aim might be very loosely described as introducing creativity into the school.

Mark Storer began by getting to know the school, visiting staff and students as they were attending their classes, and including non-teaching staff such as caretakers and catering staff. Staff and students were then invited to workshops to be held in a drama studio. There was one staff group and several student groups whose members were between the ages of 12-15. The main activities described in detail below were framed around the following structure:

- Introduction to the activity by the artist.
- Discussion and creation of life-size self-portraits for each participant.
- Exhibitions of the portraits.

- Use of self-portraits to create poems through self-reflection and interpretation.
- Developing a final project.
- 'Outcome': planting of an 'occupy' camp in the middle of the school, including a large 'staffroom' tent in its centre.

Artist and programme ambitions

The Rainford High project is ensconced within an overall project commissioned and produced by Heart of Glass, called Baa Baa Baric: Have You Any Pull? A Quiet Revolution. Baa Baa Baric is a twelve-year undertaking by artist Mark Storer in collaboration with communities and groups in St Helens. The Mark Storer project is a prime example of the Heart of Glass philosophy and programme for St Helens, with its roots in collaborative practice and local community partnerships, where co-production and the active participation of local people, from whatever walk of life, are key to the production of art that makes a difference. This mode of working is typical of Storer's past and present work. The intention behind the twelve-year duration of the project is to integrate and embed deep cultural change in the town, as opposed to short-term impact projects and make this difference a lasting reality.

Storer poses the general question 'Is the most brutal act of barbarism civilisation?' The project challenges the status quo of what can be interpreted as 'civilisation' in a town like St Helens through harnessing people's natural creativity, imagination and potential. The span of the artwork juggles with the significance of 12 years for the participants: for the children, it is twelve years of transition into adulthood; for the older men, according to the life expectancy figures for St Helens, it is 12 years in a transition towards death. Some of the men may have passed away before the end of the project, and they are fully aware that any artworks that they are involved in may live on after them.

In Rainford High, Storer challenged the accepted norms, systems, structures and hierarchies of civilisation as represented by a proud and high achieving school in one of the 'better' parts of

town. He probed the meaning of what is lost in the 'bettering' of a place. This paradox is hinted at in some of the staff comments. For example, during the final event, in conversation in the temporary 'staffroom', one of the members of staff described the difference between the standard discipline procedure for students within the school and the difference created by the experience of entering the newly created tent spaces. A student who was in 'internal exclusion' (part of the school's disciplinary procedures) was brought to the tent area and the fact of entering this different space helped him to 'open up'. This emphasises how the new physical space in the school can act as a new container for the anxieties and difficulties of a student in need and potentially become a 'space' for the mind. In this example, the 'civilisation' of sanctions within the school system, is compared in its effects to the potential of a changed space in the school. In this way, the Rainford High project adds to and mirrors the overall and ongoing paradoxical question posed by Baa Baa Baric: How can 'civilisation' paradoxically make us more 'barbaric' and what can be done to change this?

Process: mode of engagement

The following description, presented as a narrative, of Storer's workshop process describes elements of his mode of engagement. The scene is a drama studio at the school, where all the workshops took place. Each workshop included 10-15 students, the artist and the Heart of Glass producer. Sometimes there would also be a Rainford High staff presence. The Heart of Glass producer is present throughout but acting independently of the group, making preparations, organising and planning in ways that demonstrate full support for the artist's work and the necessary knowledge and dedication to play an autonomous supporting role.

The workshop

Mark Storer has arranged newspapers on the floor, in a spiral, around which the children are sat. There are eight boys and four girls, and also Suzanne, the producer from Heart of Glass, and a technician from the school.

Mark sets the scene by saying,

It's ok that we don't know, that we keep an open heart, that we are defined by who you are and who we are together... We are here to make a work of art, there's always a grain of truth and reality at its centre, taking something from real life and turn it into something else using the imagination.

He continues to create a space for the imagination that takes the students away from the 'civilisation' represented by the school. The students are invited to reimagine themselves in new contexts:

The imagination is the most important aspect of us because nobody can police your imagination. Even in dark moments people are able to go on because you can imagine elsewhere or something else.

In the first part, Storer relates a narrative that draws the students into a new world that is described as an island partly represented by the newspapers on the floor and ending up in the joining together of the students as they cling to each other and help each other remain on the 'island'.

On the other side of the room, while this is going on, the Heart of Glass producer and the school technician are both helping to tape together long bits of paper for the next session.

In the next part, students are asked to keep their eyes closed for the whole of this time and reject the temptation to open them. They are asked to lie on the floor, given a paper and pen and asked to work with their mind's eye. In other words, Storer works to bring the students out of their 'real' world and into another world of the imagination. They are asked to 'see' themselves in this way, imagining their toes, feet, legs, and so on, from bottom to top. Having worked through this inner imagining, they are asked to sit up and draw themselves on paper but with their eyes closed all the time. Storer asks for reactions to what they can now see with their physical sight.





In the third part, the students are asked to imagine what vegetable would best represent them, followed up by other imaginary comparisons, what element, colour, building, furniture, animal, plant, and book represents you?

Next, Storor asks a volunteer to lie on the paper and draws that person's trace on the paper. The students then draw each other's silhouettes and then populate them with their imagination, using ideas from the previous parts of the workshop.

On another day, the participants are asked to interpret the portraits and then write a poem about them. First, they have a general discussion about each portrait in turn; then in the end the artist of the portrait talks about it from his/her point of view.

When they have finished the round of commentaries, Mark then asks each person to 'write your portrait', using your own words and those of other students. While they are doing this, there is a sense of profound calm.

The students are then asked to come and sit in a circle and bring their writing with them. Space is created for whoever wants to read out their poem. About half of them read theirs out. Storor suggests that this is how we can see the school in a different way, that we might just create something together. He also points out that they are writing thoughts like poetry, that there is no right or wrong in making art for transformation in the space between the personal and the public.

The staff went through exactly the same process as the students, and had their portraits displayed for themselves and their colleagues and governors, and later as part of a joint show with the students, where it was impossible to tell which portraits belonged to the students and which belonged to the teachers. This process was more than a simple exhibition, it emphasised a shift of relationships between staff and students and was a way of reassessing the entrance space of the school, when covered in self-portraits. The entrance hall was temporarily transformed into a space of creative imagination where the staff and students came to the forefront as representing the essential human activity of the school.





I don't think they realised that some of these were teachers... It adds value to it in their eyes, [She describes the case of a student with low self-esteem who when she walked in said to her:] 'I'm so embarrassed because mine's up', and I said to her 'well so is mine', and she went 'Oh!!!'... And suddenly the value of it starts to rise... I could see it... (Teacher)

The final event was the culmination of Storor's residency and consisted of a tent 'occupation' of a central space in the school, consisting of a little square of green that was rarely used. The idea came from the students in discussion with the artist.

Symbolically, the camp represented a way of presenting a different view of 'civilisation' for the school, created by the students for themselves but also, critically, for the teachers, in such a way as to suggest that through the imagination, hierarchical roles could be reversed for the common good. The idea of a 'common good' allowed staff and students to reassess the received wisdom and status quo of the school structures and the resulting sense of power and control exercised by adults over children, which may threaten to blind the Rainford school community from the fact that we all share a common humanity and that there may be other – more emotionally focused, creative and imaginative - ways of structuring our day-to-day co-existence. There are banners and slogans on the walls of the tents, but these are words and poems that have been created by students during the workshops. There are two of the self-portrait-poems flapping against the tents.

The big tent in the middle is a 'staffroom', which brings out the fact that there is no general staffroom

in the school. Inside, it is warm and inviting, the light is tinged with canvas yellow; there are comfortable chairs and a sofa that surprise you because they are not office furniture, more like the kind of furniture you would be happy to have at home. The floor is half tracked by wood chips. In one corner of the room there is a table with several, surreally delicious looking cakes. Directly in front of you is a table with coffee and tea served to you by someone from Heart of Glass.

I meet three teachers in the staffroom. It's unusual for staff from different areas of the school to get together, I am told. Other teachers tell me about the noticeable effect on the staff, especially with the tents outside...

'chance to get together'... 'that break away from everything'... 'de-stressing'... 'fantastic to just bring the community together'... 'we don't have a communal staffroom here, we're in our own departments'... 'great to speak to people you wouldn't normally speak to'... 'and with the children, all to be together'... 'the kids have been talking about it, it's brought that dialogue with the kids more', '... we got to meet other staff'... 'It's such a nice place to actually engage with other people'... 'you feel as if you've been away from the building, you're outside as well, weather helps,' ... 'it's nice to be outside and away from all the madness that goes on in there'... 'it's so nice to chill'... 'and the coffee is fab...' 'really nice coffee'... (Teachers)

Outside the staffroom, the students are close by, sitting on blankets provided by Storor, in among the tents during the lunch break. During lesson time, various classes come out to enjoy this new space.

Legacy and sustainability

Storor's intervention at Rainford High has shown the school community how paradoxically the safe environment of the community that surrounds Rainford High has led to a form of unconscious complacency. The danger of this is that the school community, including the parents, view the school's most important mission as being achieving the highest possible exam results, which turns the school into a service provider as opposed to a human community.

Students noticeably reacted and behaved differently in the new 'occupy' spaces and felt better supported by the change of culture. They naturally respected the teachers' 'staffroom' tent, without being issued any rules or instructions about intruding upon the teachers' privacy.

Storor was at pains to include the whole school community in the work, meaning that students' ideas about how the school could be changed – ideas which could otherwise have been deemed to be mainly the responsibility of staff - were as important as the learning experience of the teaching staff. In order to understand student feedback on the former, we conducted a visual matrix - a method for allowing thoughts to be expressed in images rather than through discussion - with them. In this visual matrix, students expressed a yearning for relationship and co-operation rather than competition:

- *Reminds me of my own brother and the relationship we had.*
- *Reminds me of my friends, like, we used to draw and do competitions between us, like who was the best, but here when we did it you do your own thing.*
- *Feels very warm and loving moving out of competition and into relationship.*
- *When we were practicing with the tents in the quad, everyone was working as a team, there was not one person leading, it was teamwork.*
(Students)

The idea of building something out of nothing, (i.e. out of the imagination), was also expressed alongside positive and enthusiastic reflections on the new possibilities that were opened out through the experience with the arts:

- *Building something out of nothing, turning into a community camp.*
- *Feels like home, safe, warm, and you have people, like who help and protect.*
- *Going to staffroom tent and feeling really happy, the light, a completely different place, switch off, feeling warm.*
(Students)

And finally, the students were able to evoke a sense of revolution – by being empowered to make the change, take the decisions and 'occupy' the official space - which reminds us of the 'quiet revolution' that is part of Baa Baa Baric and suggests the potential for real and lasting change in minds and hearts:

- *It was like we made a community or a town and a government, making decisions...*
- *Freedom: it was up to us what we do and how we design and how we done the art bit as well.*
(Students)

We see how the creation of space for reflection is seen to have significant implications for the way the school is run. Storor's intervention has ignited the interest and even the emotional desire among the staff for a cultural change. Unsurprisingly, some members of staff find it difficult to believe that cultural change would really happen after Storor left, and the following comment highlights this attitude, and emphasises the nature of the task ahead for senior management:

- *Yes there is a danger that this project could feel like a one-off. Mark has said from the get go that the final outcome is not going to be a mural or a sculpture, to be there forever, it's going to be some sort of experience, and it's just affecting the people who are here at any particular time... it won't last ...*
(Teacher)

However, the Principal was under no doubt that the effects of Storor's residence was something to be developed in the school, both by positing the idea of creating an actual staffroom but also by reflecting upon the meaning of relationships between teachers and among the student body. Whether this change actually occurs in a sustainable fashion remains to be seen.

It is not clear whether Mark Storer will return to the school, even though this would be welcomed by the Principal. Certainly, Storer and Heart of Glass see their role as facilitators of process, not as props. One of the central messages of Storer's work is to realise the creativity and imagination in each person that can autonomously sustain creative thinking for future developments.

Outcomes

- The work shifted the whole school community's perceptions of the nature of the physical spaces in the school and the contrast between these spaces, and the 'third space' of the imagination.
- The status quo of the relationships between teachers and students and among teachers themselves was brought into question.
- The school management has been given an opportunity to evaluate the nature and role of creativity at school and will consider how to use this to provide a better balance between exam result achievement and school community wellbeing.
- The Principal is seeking to repeat the experience of an artistic intervention in the future.

Conclusions

Mark Storer's Rainford High project provided a new space for processes of thought and feeling and their expression through collaborative art. Teachers were challenged to see imaginatively and creatively, beyond the task of teaching and learning to exam results. Students articulated the change of culture that was incited by the project, and in particular they identified qualities of co-operation, and care for each other as qualities of a culture that could be placed against the current culture of competition.

In these processes, teachers and students were able to perceive potential where none had been perceived before, leading to direct and potential change, as acknowledged by the Principal. Although some members of staff struggled at first to abandon the idea that Storer's work should be understood in the context of their current teaching and learning paradigms, (for example in terms of improving the school's standing in the light of OFSTED inspections), there was an

overwhelming sense that the palpable difference of the emergence of a 'staffroom' made a significant difference beyond the curriculum.

From the artist's perspective, the idea of what it means to be 'civilised' was evoked through the creative transformation of space, a space that was both physical and imaginative, where other manifestations of the idea of 'civilisation' were made possible.



Case Study 2.4

The Prototype Projects

Developing Social Practice in St Helens

Introduction

The Prototype Projects provide an opportunity for local artists to bid for £500-2000 to realise a small Research and Development initiative or full Prototype project. Since 2014, the programme has offered artists an opportunity to test, explore and develop a new, innovative idea, ideally one that cuts across different art forms. A part-time programme producer¹¹ was appointed to help upscale the ambition of local artists who are commissioned to develop new audiences, and to help artists to explore how the arts can be embedded within people's everyday lives. Heart of Glass has been especially keen to support local artists keen to develop and explore new ideas in collaboration with local communities. The focus is on

local artists who are just beginning to be given some money and resources to be able to try out something creative amongst their local community.
(Emma Fry)

The Prototype Projects have been commissioned over five rounds so far, with 39 projects commissioned in total. The fact that the programme has run over several rounds since 2014 makes it possible to explore and plot the reception, development, and modification of this approach over time. Originally referred to as the Micro Commissions, Programme Producer Emma Fry explains the idea is to:

provide artists and/or communities with an opportunity to test, explore and develop new, innovative ideas. Prototype Projects can involve any art form and can take place in a diverse range of social and community contexts.¹²

The Prototype Projects contain two award types: research and development awards (maximum £500) and full prototype awards (maximum £2000).

Programme ambitions

The programme ambition for the prototypes was to create an opportunity for emerging artists to embed their work within the local community including with vulnerable and marginalised groups. Heart of Glass envisaged that the programme would provide a model of working that would enable artists within communities to try something different, to take a risk and potentially open up new opportunities for future working¹³. However, the Programme Producer described being very conscious that there were limits to the amount of support that could be provided to the artists in the context of the resources available. Heart of Glass has found that many of the artists who have applied for Prototype Projects are at the stage of their development where they need regular support and guidance in order to achieve good quality artistic outcomes. This reflects the fact that most emerging artists in the town have limited experience of these forms of practice and this creates a gap between the Heart of Glass mission to support local artists, and its programmatic ambitions vis à vis social and collaborative practice.

¹¹ between 2014-2016 Debbie Chan and between 2016-2017 Emma Fry

¹² Heart of Glass Website – Prototype Projects 14/09/2015

¹³ Heart of Glass Website _ Prototype Projects 14/09/2015

[We have been] very conscious that the artists are crying out for help, but the kind of help we can give is restrained ... which means that we can only do certain things. It is a conundrum for Heart of Glass to work out, in terms of how we offer professional support for artists that they clearly need, but we have to do it within the framework that Heart of Glass exists within. That is where the tensions arise. But if we can't offer it? Who is going to do it?
(Emma Fry)

A number of the initial applications received over the three years have been of poor quality, and quite a lot of artists have missed the programmatic commitment to collaboration, initially bidding for projects with a significant emphasis on personal development.

Perhaps we have encouraged an emphasis on them and their personal development and this needs to shift to encourage an appreciation that this is a different sort of opportunity and not one you bring a finished idea to.
(Emma Fry)

Hence, in many projects there has been limited success in developing a socially engaged focus to the work, and where this has been present, some artists have not found it easy to value these co-creative elements, tending instead, to seek and value the more traditional markers of arts projects, such as exhibitions and objects.

It [has] also been important to make a distinction – to those who have taken part – between process and outcome. By process I mean the moment that the artists and those participating experience in the moment, in the act of doing. That space, that moment, when connections are made, emotions expressed, a sense of enjoyment felt. I am not sure many of the artists got that.
(Emma Fry)

However, given the apparent local need for this sort of programme and the long-term nature of developing a local arts infrastructure in the town, it is important to recognise that it will take time for accumulated impact of this approach to manifest and the programme will probably need to consider the sustainability of this element. It was

perhaps overly ambitious to expect these projects to bridge the gap between 'no previous funding' and 'applying for G4A' (Grants for the Arts). It may be that under the auspices of Heart of Glass as a National Portfolio Organisation, the prototype strand can have two levels to it, which would provide a better means of bridging the gap. It's also possible that a more informal and discussion-based initial application process may facilitate the development of more collaborative proposals.

Four case examples

The Maze of Displacement

Claire Weetman

(Research and Development Grant £2,000)

Claire Weetman was awarded a research and development grant in September 2016. She is an established artist in St Helens who has participated in the Heart of Glass workshop called This Will Never Happen, where she worked with the audience to create a wall of hands that could communicate and express the feeling of displacement among migrants. Her aim was to build on the theme of displacement and to explore the experience of migrants in St Helens. As she put it,

A Maze of Displacement will be a maze whose walls are made of people who are creating emotive gestures with their hands and bodies, a maze whose walls shift, opening and closing passageways for an audience to explore and experience. Eventually, the maze will be formed of 3000 people, and it will be performed in public spaces throughout the UK and Europe, moving south from St Helens.

Claire realised that the initial aims were too ambitious and that this could be the second phase of larger a bid. Hence, she

set about finding out about those who had experienced displacement in St Helens, refugees, asylum seekers. Working with the body. So, then that was the starting point, it took a while to get going, then it was about the ethics and making stuff with people who had stories that were not mine to tell. How do you do that well, authentically and respectfully?
(Claire Weetman)

The aim for the artist was to engage with refugees and asylum seekers in St Helens on their own terms, where as far as possible they felt they had choices, control and creative contributions to make to the process. She intended to co-create art, but to be critically aware of and sensitive to the experiences of those migrants who chose to participate in the process.

...but going there into that space, there was kind of another wall, so many barriers, language, precarity of belonging ... How do I do anything?
(Claire Weetman)

The ambition was to tell a story. The story of people in all their heterogeneity and through all their pain and struggle in their quest to find another place, only to be displaced into a new space.

The artist was able to see the process and model of engagement as more important than any tangible creative outcome. Demonstrating a sensitivity to the harrowing and painful experiences migrants and asylum seekers had endured to arrive in St Helens, the artist built up a working relationship with them over a period of nine months. She used the idea of the body and visual art to depict the experience of displacement. This involved negotiating with the local cleric to gain access to the Welcome Café at the Beacon Centre. Through attending ESOL

classes on a weekly basis she was able to very slowly build up a level of trust between herself and those migrants and asylum seekers. Gradually, she persuaded some who attended to permit the pattern of their hands to be drawn to form a circle of hands. However, the process was deliberately slow, as Weetman understood that the people that she was engaging with had been through the most traumatic of times. And, it was this growing - felt - awareness of the pain and despair of the migrants and asylum seekers from every corner of that world that made her realise that it was the process of the artwork, rather than the outcome that mattered.

There is a range of asylum seekers from Syria, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Argentina, from African descent, Malaysia, Vietnam, quite a lot of people who identify as Kurdish. At least fifty people who attend. And the families include children who you don't see because they are at school.

(Claire Weetman)

Weetman invested much of the time developing the relationships and conversations through word, hand and art with migrants who attended the Welcome Café. It was this awareness of the migrants as individuals, all with stories, many who did not want to tell and some who did that created the space for expression, through communication and affirmation of common humanity.



The other thing I focused on in that space, were the journeys, place to place. I found quickly the idea of mentioning journey is a really traumatic thing to bring up Being stuck in a dark truck and the experience, and coming across in boats. How do you support someone who has been through that?
(Claire Weetman)

The space opened up in the project became a delicate place where when treated with great care, sensitivity and appreciation, the recognition of the precariousness of some migrants very being, very existence, could be brought about. Communication, art and the chance to experience something new created the conditions in which optimism could grow. At first it was some of the men, but gradually over the months the women also participated in the artwork, the hands, the shapes, the contrast between white hands on black backgrounds. It was during one of the weekly sessions that the artist learned to appreciate the tangible meaning of artistic exchange in a way that challenged yet ultimately enhanced her understanding of the powerlessness of the migrants and asylum seekers.

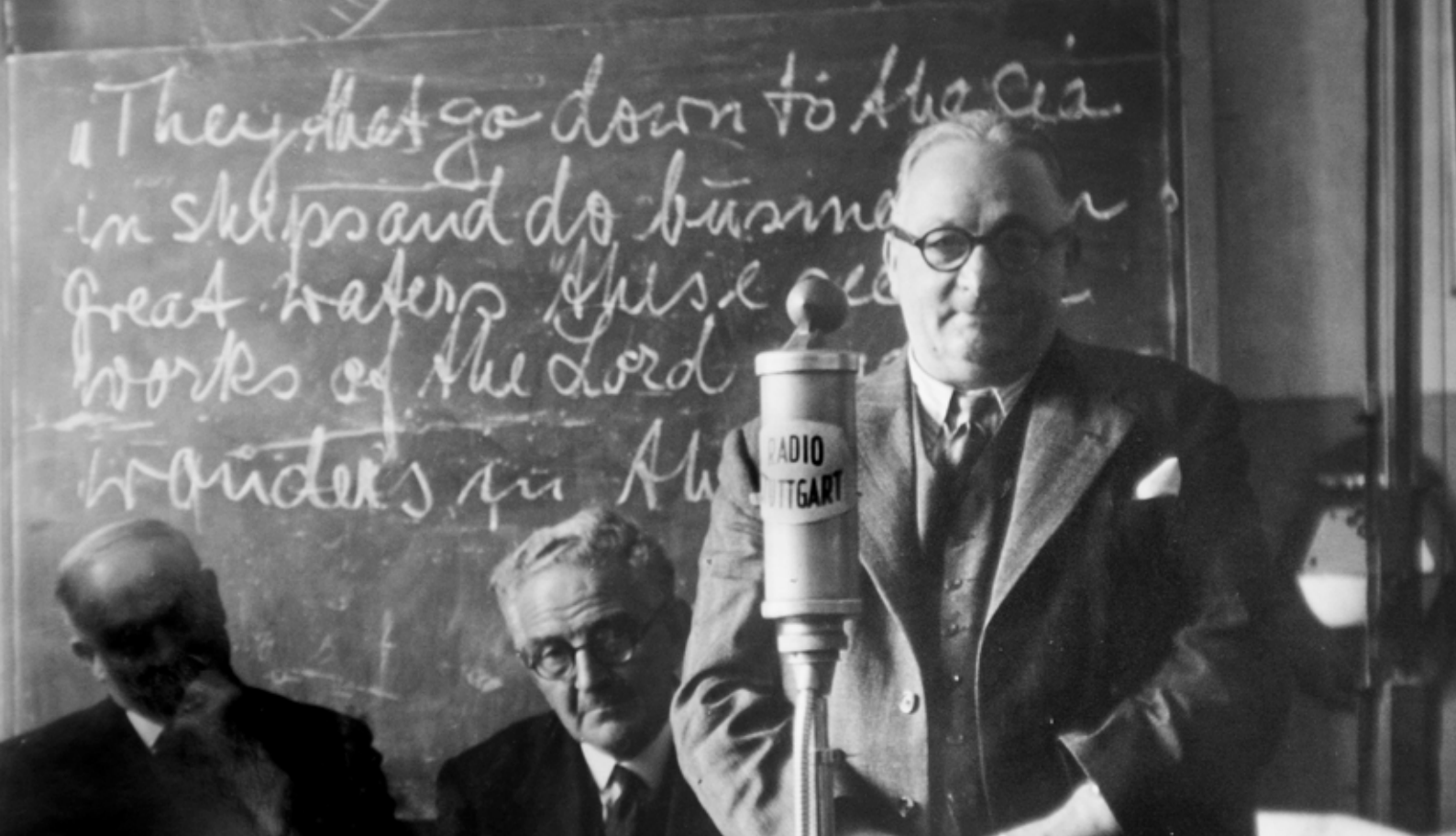
One of the ladies at the drop in asked the volunteers if they could take it (the image of the hand) and I said yeah that was fine. But it came as a shock, but then in that exchange, I cannot ask for it back, ... to be honest who better to have it than one of the people who had experienced their journey. Then the next week somebody else wanted one, and I had mentally prepared for it and that set me up with the idea that you can make things and exchange things.
(Claire Weetman)

In many ways, it emerged that this was the perfect model of exchange, as the barriers of language, ethnicity and culture were transformed through the enjoyment and fulfillment of creating and owning something in that space of safety.

It just felt that somebody did want it ... exchange - the idea of linguistic conversation is difficult, apart from having no idea how to speak all the different languages, the idea of exchanging what we had made through their experiences was good. There is something about negotiating something through respect, because ultimately, I do want something from them.
(Claire Weetman)

This project is still ongoing and Weetman intends to sustain these relationships with the migrants and asylum seekers and develop a larger funding bid to continue to work on the theme of displacement. As Programme Producer Emma Fry explained:

Claire is one of the more established artists locally and what she has been able to do with the opportunity and the work with the Welcome Café is important in terms of the ambitions of Heart of Glass and the objectives of the Prototype Projects. She has trusted the process rather than simply pursuing an outcome. It shows a confidence to say 'I am happy that I have got to a point and I am happy with that'.



Project Zei

Yellow Door Artists, Rhyannon Parry and Naoise Johnson Martin
(Full Grant - £2,000)

Yellow Door Artists was successful in gaining a commission in September 2016. Rhyannon Parry and Naoise Johnson Martin are two young artists who have emerged through the local artistic community in St Helens. The aim of their project was to

build and develop an artist exchange between St Helens' twin and partner towns to develop creative connections overseas and enhance cultural experience on an international level.¹⁴

The name of this project was initially Another Place, but through time, reflection and the artists' awareness of a changing world, and a changing Europe through Brexit, it was renamed Project Zei. The original plan was to visit the city of Chalon in France, which is twinned with St Helens and undertake a cultural exchange of art that engaged with the history, people and places of both towns. However, after several months of trying, it became apparent that a creative cultural exchange with Chalon was not feasible, as they were not able to generate sufficient enthusiasm or commitment from partners there. As a result Yellow Door Artists

has now made contact with students and artists in Stuttgart, a town that is also twinned with St Helens and progress has been made in confirming a cultural exchange. This will involve them visiting Stuttgart, co-creating art with students and artists and inviting those they worked with to a reciprocal arrangement and to visit them in St Helens. The Prototype Project has focused on the research and development phase, after which they intend to use various forms and methods of art to communicate and cultivate relationships with students in Stuttgart including audio and video recordings, blogs, drawings and paintings.

We are going out to Stuttgart to touch base and do some work and then next we are going to exhibit what we have produced here in St Helens.
(Rhyannon Parry, Yellow Door Artists)

While there is undoubted creative talent and enthusiasm with these artists, it may be that their ambition has not been planned in a pragmatic and deliverable way. This project is an example of the inherent tensions in the Prototype Projects as it is evident that the Heart of Glass programme needed them to be able to deliver on the aims and outcomes that they had set in their funding application, yet, as emerging artists they have needed ongoing structured support to realise their project.

¹⁴ Yellow Door Artists Prototype Evaluation

The Fabric of Light

Wendy Mumford

(Research and Development Grant - £500)

Wendy Mumford was awarded a research and development grant that she intended to use as a socially engaged artist working with people in the community who experience mental distress.

This project provides the opportunity for me to experiment with diversification of my arts practice and to continue to develop links within the community with agencies who support those with mental health difficulties.¹⁵

(Wendy Mumford)

She explains that she has not had a traditional art education but has been self-taught. Her particular commitment is working with people who experience mental distress.

The project gave me the opportunity to do some art, anything they wanted, at Addaction. It is new for me, as I am not from a traditionally educated artist background, but I wanted to do work with people that I understand that may make them feel good as well.

(Wendy Mumford)

It was important to the artist to develop socially engaged practice that provided an experience for people who may be vulnerable to try out some artist practices and learn to be creative and do art. Mumford was conscious of the positive feelings people felt by just participating.

When some people said to me I cannot draw, I can't do art, I said everyone can, art is what you want it to be. And they did, they joined in, and it was not so much what they made, but how good they felt because they had done so ... it was the moment.

(Wendy Mumford)

Mumford's way of working with the participants was to slowly build relationships with them in the doing, the making of art and creating the space to have conversations with them. Mumford believes that she has learned a lot from this project and as a relatively new artist was appreciative of the support provided to her by Heart of Glass and her mentor Claire Weetman. She has now been commissioned by Change Grow Live to provide a long-term arts provision within the local treatment service.

¹⁵ Wendy Mumford Prototype application



Songs of Hope and Joy

ADM Productions, Katie Musgrove and Alexander Douglas
(Full Award - £2,000)

The project by ADM Productions was entitled Songs of Hope and Joy and was a collaboration between St Helens Gospel Choir and Alexander Douglas, a professional composer/conductor. The choral project aimed to deliver a series of gospel music workshops, leading to the composition of new music and working towards a final performance in St Helens Parish Church.¹⁶

Musgrove explained that as artists they had connections with the local gospel choir and felt that they could work with the local community to create and develop a performance that the community could own. ADM Productions' focus was to work with different musical genres and cross-pollinate them, for instance, jazz with gospel, or classical with jazz. The ambition of this work was to be creative and innovative with musical form and to engage and excite local community groups.

With this project we had some connections with St Helens Gospel Choir that exists. So we went along with St Helens Gospel Choir and thought yes, we can definitely do something with these guys. We could see that they would not only go on a developmental journey musically, but they would be open hearted to involving other members of the public and maybe more vulnerable members of the public as well.
(Katie Musgrove)

The project commenced in October 2016 and over the following months ADM managed to galvanise partners and participants who attended these workshops as part of St Helens Gospel Choir. The choir and ADM took their singing to Addaction and performed in public venues in St Helens.

We went to Addaction and did a number of closed workshops with the gospel choir and workshops in Central Library. So they were public with members of the choir. We also did closed workshops with Addaction, which were well attended, and the hope was that they would come to the public workshops. However, there needs to be more workshops in terms of building the level of trust with Alex and myself to come away from the centre and the public space.
(Katie Musgrove)

While ADM believes it was successful in its aim of engaging the public in gospel singing workshops, it was also surprised at the reticence of some people to get involved in the singing. Addaction was very supportive and some of the service users were keen to participate in the workshops. ADM believes this was the most rewarding outcome. The relationship that ADM developed with St Helens Gospel Choir was also a positive outcome as Musgrove explains,

One of the legacies we have is that we will be looking to work with the gospel director and maybe and as that relationship can continue we will be looking for it to go to Songs of Praise gospel choir of the year.
(Katie Musgrove)

Legacy and sustainability

The programme has provided a foundation for local emerging artists to further develop their skills to sustain a career in the arts. Wendy Mumford and Yellow Door Artists are examples of local artists who appreciated the opportunity and support provided by Heart of Glass. However, the level of local need for artist training and development is high. This may explain the poor quality of many of the initial applications for awards in the programme. In the future it may be necessary to create two different levels to the awards reflecting different levels of experience and expertise. Those with little experience of social arts practice are likely to need higher producer input.

Nevertheless, the Prototype Projects programme has provided some artists with an opportunity to engage with those in the community who are marginalised and not visible. For all of the Prototype Projects the legacy of supporting emerging artists to develop projects in their local communities provides a model for the future.

The programme also enabled a support network of local artists to develop and if further financial support were to be forthcoming this would support the development of the local arts infrastructure. The four artists who are discussed in this case study have all worked with or supported each other throughout the duration of their projects.

Outcomes

- Artists with low levels of confidence – some who struggled to think of themselves as artists - have been supported, and have benefited from the opportunity to discuss their practice with other artists.
- Information sessions were provided and afforded an opportunity to discuss ideas and arts practice in a group setting
- In some cases groups of artists who were commissioned established a Facebook page in which they posted project updates, information about upcoming events and requests for support, input or ideas.
- The ongoing appeal to artists in the area suggests it meets a need for those looking for support, development and immersion in a community of art practitioners.
- The programme has provided a platform for local artists to engage and work with the marginalised communities in St Helens. In the best examples, processes of reciprocal exchange and learning have emerged between artists and communities.
- A plethora of new and creative artistic performances have been experienced by the communities of St Helens through this funding.
- The programme has given some of the artists the impetus to take their work a stage further and develop another bid for a larger project based on a similar theme. For example, ADM Productions plans to take its gospel singing workshop across the north of England and Claire Weetman is submitting a second bid to work with asylum seekers and migrants on the same theme.

Conclusion

Given the long-term aim of developing a local arts infrastructure in the town, it is important to recognise that it will take time for impact to build and sustainability to be assured. It was perhaps overly ambitious to expect these projects to bridge the gap between 'no previous funding' and 'applying for G4A' (Grants for the Arts). It may be that under the auspices of NPO status the prototype strand could have two levels to it, to provide a better scaffold for emerging artists at different levels of development. It is also possible that a more informal and discussion-based initial application process could facilitate the development of more collaborative proposals.

For the more experienced artists, the projects delivered on their intended aims and outcomes and produced co-created art with vulnerable and marginalised groups in the community. Where artists lacked the confidence, experience, or understanding of the meaning of socially engaged art, these projects appear not to have been an entirely effective vehicle to support their development, or effect participation and change. Future programme funding will need to consider the tensions between supporting and enabling fledgling local artists and those more established and independent in their practice. While the programme's aims of supporting a local infrastructure of artists to develop and encouraging socially engaged artistic practice are not mutually exclusive, it is evident some who participated in these projects required more intensive developmental support than was foreseen.



Case Study 2.5

The Skate Park

Studio Morison/Heather Peak Morison and Ivan Morison: Public art and civic space

“

St Helens to get a skatepark would mean more tricks and getting better at skating for us... I'd meet new people and we'd become a community again.

Josh - 18

Introduction

Studio Morison are collaborative artists who make art as an active engagement with materials, histories, sites and processes and are well known for producing architectural structures that work with notions of escape, play, shelter and refuge, as well as the transformation of civic spaces¹⁷.

Originally developed by Merseyside police and the council, the Skate Park project is being part funded through the Proceeds of Crime Act. The original motive for the police and the council to bring Heart of Glass into the project was to help with the physical design ideas for a new skate park in the town, as Mark Dickens explained in an interview with the research team.

Myself and Louise, Superintendent of Police, we brought Heart of Glass in [to the bid to the Chief Constable]. And I think that made us different to everyone else [who was bidding for this money]. It wasn't just the police putting a bid in with the council, because we had Heart of Glass to provide art and design input.

(Mark Dickens, Senior Assistant Director Development and Growth, St Helens Council)

Since Heart of Glass became involved the team has also secured funding through the Collaborative Arts Partnership Programme (co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme and the European Union) as well as allocating funds through CPP. The development of a skate park was seen by the council and the police as a means to address concerns in the town about different forms of antisocial behaviour, which have included skating and which has been covered in the local newspapers.

There were reports about these Public Space Protection Orders. Should we have one in the town centre to stop begging, skateboarders, particularly skateboarders? Because there's been an antisocial behaviour issue in the town. [And] there was a close incident in the town centre of a skateboard going past a veteran...

This will give them their own locality, which is not where all the shoppers are but close enough to the shopping centre for them to feel safe, because they are quite a disenfranchised group. They're quite bullied. They can be victims of crime....
(Mark Dickens)

As well as working on the physical design of the skate park, Heart of Glass and Studio Morison have been interested in exploring other issues that the project was generating, seeing it as a means to explore a series of important questions about who has access to civic space and how it should be used. As Patrick Fox, Director of Heart of Glass, explains,

¹⁷ <http://www.morison.info>

I think it's really important to have those discussions because then things start to join and they start to connect, and there is a potential to go forward and to go deeper. The skate park for me is a really symbolic project, in the sense that that it could simply have been a response to a perceived need by the police that we reacted to. And, what would have happened by now, had we not been involved in that project, is it would have been an off-the-shelf skate park bought and installed. That would not speak to any of the concerns [that were the real provocation for the project], and I think what we've managed to do there is hijack something...and now it will also ask a lot of questions that will be quite difficult as well, but that's where the real potential of the project is.
(Patrick Fox)

The project is still ongoing at the time of writing; as a result we are not in a position to comment on neither its final outcomes nor the sustainability of any change processes it has set in motion.

Artist and programme ambitions

The decision to work with Studio Morison was influenced by Heart of Glass' interest in the civic life of St Helens and its existing conversations with the council about the wider redevelopment of the town centre. Studio Morison's work often addresses the ways in which 'art might rub against civic life', seeing this as an inevitable part of the context that a project like Heart of Glass is operating in. The involvement of Studio Morison in the skate park project is one aspect of a developing collaboration with Heart of Glass which will include working on a new public art strategy for the town and other elements not confirmed at the time of writing.

And so, the skate park project, it sits across all of those agendas. It's in the town centre. It's a new public square as well as a skate park. It's a new piece of permanent public art.
(Heather Peak Morison, Studio Morison)

In separate interviews Patrick Fox and Heather Peak Morison conveyed the ways in which it was vital that the project could create a series of processes and spaces in which people could be helped to consider both the 'thing we're not talking about' as well as reconsidering what is being talked about, and also for the project to pose and address questions such as 'who is able to use public space in St Helens, why and how?'
(Heather Peak Morison)

I think it addresses the nature of public space. The nature of who gets to use it and who has a right to it, whose voice or value is more important. I think the last question is about the use of public funds. I think there are questions about some of the violent crime that exists underneath the surface in this town that for some reason no one wants to talk about, but they want to talk about the fact that we need to give these skaters ASBOs. But actually, they don't talk about the predatory nature of the town centre after 5 o'clock in the evening when the shops shut. And, I think they're difficult questions and they are unavoidable questions, but they will all come out in these projects in some way, shape or form. So, I think that this project is a really important one actually because it's got all of those characteristics there.
(Patrick Fox)

Hence, the Skate Park project is understood by Heart of Glass and Studio Morison to be an initiative in which discussions can generate ideas for a new civic space for the town in conjunction with the community as a whole.

Process – mode of engagement

Heather describes how they began the work (January 2015) in St Helens in quite an open and 'passive mode', visiting all the people Heart of Glass wanted them to visit. At the end of this initial work (June 2016) they wrote a report called 'thoughts on a proposal for a project with Heart of Glass' in which she and Ivan Morison set out their ideas, processes, their experience of the town and the context, and described what had emerged in the meetings they'd had with people, setting out a number of proposals for projects that they could collaborate on. It reads like a sensory ethnography....

Excerpt from - thoughts on a proposal for a project with Heart of Glass 2016/17...

I then walked around the town centre of St Helens, it was a little after 4pm. People were drinking in the many bars and the karaoke was busy. I wandered around the charity shops, full with Primark and New Look clothes good as new. It was hot and sunny and school children were hanging out in the centre. McDonalds was full and this reminded me of an article I read in the New Yorker about how popular McDonalds are in the USA with community groups, homeless people, the unemployed and the elderly. This was because they are a neutral space (as opposed to a community space), normally very clean, cheap coffee, warm, staff are friendly and you are not moved on. I bought some cartridges for my fountain pen and then peered in the window of Tyrers, very recently closed down family owned department store. I walked to the hotel, past Aldi. It was hot and dusty. On the way back, in the taxi, the driver informed me that the money for Dream should have been spent on jobs and any new art should be about Maggie Thatcher and the miners (he was younger than me).

For Studio Morison, the purpose of the research visits was to 'look in-between', and to identify the 'blind spots'. For example, Heather intuited on the basis of her visits that the expression of public anxiety about antisocial behaviour in the town, including skateboarding, might reflect a sense of disconnection between older and younger people in the town which is felt, but not able to be explored and considered beyond the surface level expressions of upset.

As the work has gathered pace there have been a whole series of meetings with the Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner, the council, a local skate business (51st Skate), and with over 60 people from the skate community. In an early meeting with the skaters, Studio Morison gave a slide show, presenting some of their previous public work to the skaters and it was clear people were both impressed by the quality of this work, and reassured that Studio Morison had the experience to realise a large scale project in the town. There were also visits to skate parks in Stoke-on-Trent, Preston and Manchester, in which the artists and

programme team have travelled with the skaters, to talk, to hear the skaters talk about, and see them skate different parks; and for the community around the project to consider together the physical contexts these parks are in, as well as how they are run and how the organisations around them are constituted (e.g. Projekts in Manchester is a cooperative).

So as a learning for them (51st Skate), even though that's not explicit, I'd just like them to go and meet up with them (the other skate parks). But the whole organising the trip and the trip itself, being on the coach. It's all part of the research from start to finish, all of it.
(Heather Peak Morison)

On the day of the skate park trip to Preston and Manchester there were about 40 skaters on the coach. A lot of the skaters were talking about the fact that a number of skaters in St Helens had been given dispersal orders by the police in the previous week. One of them had his order with him. There was a map on the front and the proposed site of the new skate park was right in the middle of the prohibited area. There was also talk of negative press coverage about the project. Hence, while there was a tangible excitement around the visits, there was also a fear that the skate park might not happen, that the powers that be (the council, the police, the media) might intervene.

Nonetheless, the camaraderie of the young men on the day was enticing, and there was a sense of community and mutual responsibility reflected in how they held each other in check (for example, when one young man says something out of order about someone on the street, several other people pull him up); how they watched each other skate and offered support (banging their boards for a good move); in the fact that their skating seemed driven by a desire to improve and show their moves to each other, but it was not obviously competitive in the way football or rugby is; that there's a whole terminology around the moves ('blunt flip', 'wall ride', 'blunt-rock-fakie'); and that they want something for the long term (for example, people talk about how 'you need a park that takes you five years to master'). At the end of the day Heather got the group together on the coach and addressed



the anxiety in the group, reminding them that she and Ivan had done lots of public work before, that the police are involved in this project and are providing funding and support, about how projects like this always raise public anxiety (reflected in negative news coverage about the project which was also discussed), and how there is a need to listen to that anxiety and make a response to it if it's needed, but sometimes to just to let things go and not get diverted.

In the middle of July 2017, all the different groups, the police, the Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner, the council, a civil engineer, Allan Davidge and Si Fletcher from 51st Skate, representatives of the local skate community, John Haines, the MD of Projekts skate park in Manchester, Adam Cooke from New Bird skate park in Liverpool, and Heart of Glass were brought together for a charrette. Structured over three days, this included: making sessions, workshops, skate film screenings, and a reflection session. It also included a session in which different participants worked in teams to build models of skate parks using clay and paper.

Stephen King has also been brought in to support the Skate Park project as a consultant. Stephen was already working for Heart of Glass as Documentation Associate, however Heart of Glass recognised that his expertise in skating made him a natural fit to support this project. A skater since the age of 11, Stephen set up Document Skateboard Magazine in 1998 and was its Senior Photography Editor for ten years, travelling the world photographing skaters. In the Skate Park project he has contributed to a series of meetings with the skaters and also organised, supported and photographed the skate park visits. A week before the charrette, Stephen held a meeting with the skaters at 51st Skate on George Street, St Helens. About 16 skaters were there, plus the owners Allan Davidge and Si Fletcher. Stephen explained that 'the big planning meeting is coming up' (the charrette) and he wanted to encourage the skaters to 'be clear' about what ideas they want to contribute, to 'get these down' in any way they can. The anxiety seems to be that the skaters might arrive at the charrette without well thought through ideas and that this will make it less productive. He showed a series of amazing



photos from Bilbao, Bristol, Barcelona, Glasgow, San Francisco, Portland, London, Preston, Milton Keynes, of different skate structures and forms, some huge geometric shapes and others simple structures, some designed for skating and others skate-able aspects of urban design (e.g. cellar doors and steps). It's inspiring and he encourages the skaters to understand their own expertise, what he calls 'the technical aspects of skating' which 'Heather and Ivan won't know'. He asks people to consider what shapes and forms they like to skate and which surfaces they 'like to grind'¹⁸. He also points to the expertise Heather and Ivan have, which include 'architectural design', 'making sculptural things' and 'making social spaces', and says the idea for the planning events is to bring these different forms of expertise together. A few people have started to draw shapes and forms that they want included, and a few others are cutting pictures out of magazines. Allan Davidge starts putting these on the wall in the shop and says he will get people to add to these over the next week.

¹⁸ In skateboarding 'grinds' are tricks that involve the skateboarder sliding along mainly relying on the use of the trucks of a skateboard.

There is also a suggestion that the charrette might involve making a DIY ramp, that Heather and Ivan want to do this, but Heart of Glass is concerned that it might be illegal. They are looking for a site and hoping that they can make this happen. The skaters are really excited about the idea of making a DIY skate ramp and a lot of the lads ask to be notified precisely when this will happen. In an interview afterwards, Allan describes how there is a really strong desire in the skate community to make this project happen, but that the process is very new to all the lads. He explains that Stephen has been a huge help, and that because of his in-depth knowledge of skating, skate parks across the world, skate-able forms and the whole language of skating, he's been able to operate in-between the artists/Heart of Glass and the skate community and to 'translate from both sides'. Allan also points out that he has taken a lot of confidence from working with very experienced artists, who have taken them seriously, who 'bring the creative side', 'who have built a lot of things before', and who have offered 'a different idea of what can be done'.

Desirable outcomes

What we see in this project is how Heart of Glass and Studio Morison employ a model of democratic leadership, in which they seek to acknowledge and validate the knowledge of the young skaters, and the other partners, as well as the limits of this knowing. They use their own artistic knowledge and experience in a reflexive and transparent way, while also recognising the limits of their own knowing, by, for example, bringing in the expertise of Stephen King to support the work. This approach involves a capacity for recognition, but also a capacity for independent thinking, in which difficult things must be aired and confronted, and they must demonstrate a capacity to live with uncertainty, which includes a willingness to accept the possibility that some ideas, processes and opportunities might be met with resistance and refusal. So, for example, the idea to build a temporary skate ramp in a public space in St Helens as part of the creative process, which the young skaters were very excited about and motivated to take part in, caused concern for Heart of Glass because it was illegal, and hence hasn't been possible so far.



Each event or meeting is followed by extended emails and phone conversations in order that Studio Morison and Heart of Glass can reflect on what has been learned, how it relates to what happened in previous sessions, and what should happen next. Heather seeks to convey that here there is a clear connection – in process terms – between the physical making she and Ivan do in the studio and the relational work, which is central to the Skate Park project.

Heather:

When you're in the studio what you do is you begin. So, you get a material and a form and... you begin it. But you make something, you look at it, you reflect on it, you make another one. You go back. You add that one to this one and then you bring in that piece of work that you made before and then you add those two things together. You start to build something, and it makes sense. You go backwards and forwards and it starts to become this.

Interviewer:

And that's also what's happening in these meetings, in these events?

Heather:

Yes.

While this conveys something shared in terms of process, in the interview Heather also sought to convey an appreciation of how important making a physical commission might be in order to move people's thinking on.

...we knew we needed an actual physical commission in the middle of all of this, because you can do as many meetings you like. [But] the best thing for me to do is make art and show them ... To actually produce something. So, once you've physically made something like that and it looks the way it looks, and it feels a certain way, and we see people using it, you can really start to use that, [because] unless they can actually sit and feel and be somewhere and talk in a space like that, it's really difficult to get people, to move people in your way of thinking.



In this way, we begin to appreciate the relationship between saying, doing and feeling and how these contribute to bringing about a change in experience and thinking. The artist's role takes in all of these features to ensure the felt relevance and lived experience of the new public art space. For that reason, in St Helens, Studio Morison has been able to generate a series of spaces in which it becomes possible to startle, surprise, or even shift existing perceptions about the possibility and meaning of a skate park in the town, which begins to allow the project to pick at taken for granted views about skaters as a social problem. In this way, it is hoped that the artwork might become the tangible expression of what hitherto has been at best a fantasised belonging, and often not even this. The conversations, the partnerships, and the making of physical objects, all form central parts of an art work which helps to materialise an imagined set of relationships between the young people and a collective intergenerational body (Frosh, 2001).

The reason that the work is of broader significance to the objectives of the Heart of Glass programme, is that through the mediation that Studio Morison is effecting between the young people, civic space and public institutions (such as the police and the council), we see how the skaters are able to test out for themselves the ways in which

they can be part of the public realm and make interventions in it; that is, the ways in which they can acquire and enact cultural citizenship. Hence, a process is underway in which it's possible that skaters' previously antagonistic relationships with public institutions, might be reconfigured around an artwork in which their own cultural desires and forms are at the centre. If this succeeds, through the creation of new civic space with a skate park in it, the young skaters' pursuits might become integral to the new public realm rather than set apart from it (as happens in Preston and Manchester where skate parks have deliberately been developed away from the city centre), or in a state of friction (as currently happens in St Helens). A good outcome for the young people and for the town would be generalising the sense of identification and connectivity young skaters have through their peer group to the wider community so that public institutions are seen to be guardians of the public good rather than of perceived public disorder.

The hope is that the project will contribute to the reconstitution of civic life in St Helens through art and culture, which is the long-term aim of Heart of Glass. We shall follow the continued realisation of this project as new relationships develop and unfold with this in mind.





Section 3

Project Pen Portraits

In this section we briefly introduce the projects which have been the focus of this research but which are not the subject of detailed case studies (see section 2). In each case we provide summary details, identify the artists, the communities and partners involved, as well as providing a commentary on the project.

3.1 AND, ON THAT NOTE

Date: December 2014

Venue: Langtree Park

Artist: Rhona Byrne

Partners: Saints Community Development Foundation and St Helens Music Service

Overview

And, On That Note, was an evening of musical reflection and visual art linked to the anniversary of the World War One Christmas Truce of 1914. Heart of Glass described how the event was ‘symbolic of [its] desire to create unique arts experiences by fusing disciplines and initiating collaborations to make bold new work’ (Tiller and Fox, 2016). Artist Rhona Byrne created a series of visual interventions for the evening, which sought to represent individual and collective endurance. These included the following elements:

- A Moving Threshold, a fabric sculpture for which live performers provided a flexible frame.
- An Emotional Choir, performing a series of experimental choral interludes exploring laughter and obsession.
- A carpeted Landmass sitting in the darkness of the arena’s pitch until it rumbled and fell apart.
- A mass of Moving Sculptures of boulders and black clouds negotiating the terrain.

Commentary

The event was very well attended, not least because families and friends of the young people singing in the choirs attended to offer support, and this was one of the first successes in delivering on CPP objectives. Of the 50 people who were interviewed on the night, only three reported having been to any arts events in the previous 12 months, which indicated that large numbers of this audience were being introduced to an arts event, maybe for the first time, in some cases.



Many found the choir components – with its roots in local community singing – familiar, while people used terms such as ‘unusual’, ‘frightening’ and even ‘weird’ to describe the visual interventions on the pitch. As sometimes happens where the arts are introduced into a local context, there can be a struggle between the artistic intent and the local contribution. A number of arts professionals interviewed after the event had mixed feelings about it. One commented that in some ways it was ‘not especially strong artistically’, and that some of the visual elements ‘got lost due to the scale of the stadium’. This arts perspective did not, however, necessarily tally with that of the local audience who had commented positively on the visual effects.

Here are some of the audience responses gathered on the night:

It's not usually my scene, the arts, but I loved seeing my daughter in the choir and at the stadium.
(Woman 30s)

Fantastic, that was a bit different
(Man 60s)

A carol service at Saints, what's not to like!
(Woman 50s)

I came because I work for Saints and wanted to get in the Christmas spirit (Woman 40s)

My son is one of the rocks. It was unusual, but in a good way if you know what I mean
(Woman 40s)

The event was an indication of Heart of Glass wrestling with the local context, which included the scale of the stadium, and demonstrating a preparedness to take creative risks. This attitude, which allows for the possibility of failure and learning from failure, is a core feature of the Heart of Glass project management philosophy.

3.2 FAMILY ART CLUB

Date: 2014 – 2017

Venue: St Mary's Market

Artist: Platform Artist Studios

Partners: St Mary's Market

Overview

Family Art Club has provided a series of free workshops run between 2014 and 2017 in which artists share their skills with families in interactive workshops. The club is located in a corner of the busy St Mary's Market, a traditional covered market place and close to a popular café. It has also tried running sessions at other venues (for example the St Helens library, a trip to Liverpool and the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester) to see if this would help develop a new audience and see whether the existing audience would travel. The responses by participants have been positive. They have also tried reaching out to different audiences. For example, between January and April 2016 they trialled offering space for teenagers who might not want to do things with their parents. They didn't get a great response to this initiative, with only 12 people engaging, mostly on a one-off basis.

We visited the Family Art Club as part of Through the Looking Glass, a weekend programme curated by Live Art Development Agency. Artists Susannah Hewlitt (as Madame Bona – a renowned psychozoologist) and Steve Nice (as Strokey the dog) delivered a workshop for families, as a pet show. People were invited to team up with a family member and transform them into the pet they had always dreamed of, and at the end of the event there was a promenade through the market. An important additional effect of this event was seen in the responses of those in the market who did not take part directly, but became audience members, as the pets promenaded past the stalls, noticing that something interesting and unusual was happening in the market.

Claire Wheetman, Lead Artist, describes being interested in exploring a possible longer-term engagement between an artist and Family Art Club, in order to see 'what risks they could take' in order to move the work onto 'another level to what we've been doing so far'.

Commentary

The Family Art Club started with the aim of audience development and this seems to have worked with more than 1,000 people engaging across the initial three years of the programme. The club is a good example of the ways in which Heart of Glass is seeking to reanimate existing spaces in the town and to offer light touch opportunities for engagement in the arts. Claire has tried to programme a range of artists in terms of experience, art form and geography, working with experienced and emerging artists, and trying to take creative risks in terms of what is offered, with the aim of developing the ability of emerging artists from St Helens, to lead projects around their artistic practice. It's been an important test bed for emerging artists, some of whom have needed more input from a production point of view.

I've learnt that the less established an artist is, the harder it is for them to deliver a session linked to their practice as they've probably not got that all worked out yet. The four more established artists required much less input production-wise and they were also artists experienced at delivering workshops. The sessions they delivered were high-quality experiences for families, my only concern with this is that they sometimes feel safe.
(Claire Wheetman)



3.3 BRASS CALLS

Date: January – August 2015

Venue: St Helens town centre

Artist: French & Mottershead

Partners: Haydock Brass Band, composer Adam Taylor and Summer Streets Festival

Overview:

This project involved a collaboration initiated by Heart of Glass between Haydock Brass Band (one of the oldest community organisations in St Helens), a local composer, Adam Taylor, and the artists French & Mottershead. The idea of working with a local brass band naturally turned the artwork into a community project. The project aimed to capture a sense of St Helens' affairs through local phrases and tales. These were collected from local people and written on placards held and displayed at the sound of each individual fanfare. The inscriptions included locally relevant issues such as; zero hour contracts; town centre skateboarding; the removal of the Hardshaw Centre benches; and Saints, as well as typical exclamations and phrases you might hear in St Helens at any time. In this way, the thoughts and feelings of the local community became an actual feature of the artwork itself. The recorded fanfares were emitted from the top of a building in Church Square. The local composer had attempted to create an intonation in the music that imitated the words on the placards.

There was also a chance to follow the events on Twitter with the hashtag #BrassCalls and handle @theheartofglass. The project took place on Friday 7th and 8th August 2015 as a part of the Summer Streets Festival.

Commentary

The atmosphere of the festival - fairground-type attractions, an ice cream van and some very loud amplified music performances – made it difficult for the calls to be heard and some went unnoticed or were cancelled. The researcher had the feeling that in general the staging of the calls during the festival worked against the rhythm and aesthetic of the artwork. When the words on the placards were noticed, however, these were met with approval:

... the words were more Scouse written than normal English and it was good to read it and funny, rings true, and the brass band thing was good.

(Local woman and children)

Another passer-by commented:

I don't know it's just that feeling isn't it like I think what's nice is that it captures different people's thoughts from things that people say and you can relate to it like, you can relate to different parts of it can't you, so I think it touched me like a parent...

(Young woman)

However, there was an interesting moment at the end of the event when the artists decided to do one last call that was specifically directed to skateboarders. They were gathered behind the screen of the fair. Although they were at first reluctant, the placard man showed his placard and the call was played and this got their attention and a clapping of hands.

Artists, French & Mottershead, said:

The subjects we have chosen to convey in these calls are human stories about relationships to one another, to work, and the town. The calls take note of personal or public situations raised by a variety of local people during interviews and workshops.

Lisa Forbes, Contest Secretary of The Haydock Band, said:

We have enjoyed working on the project as this has taken us outside our comfort zone of traditional brass music. We have enjoyed the experience of working with French & Mottershead researching ideas and with the composer to perform a range of bugle calls relating to St Helens Town.

Comments from the brass band members included:

The project has had a major effect on how our brass bands are looking at themselves, mainly Haydock, the others are talking about it, but mainly Haydock, they've been taken out of their comfort zone, they've had to look at what they've been doing ... this has given them the idea that maybe we can work with other people, to do something unusual, and that's opened a few eyes, I think some of the younger members particularly...
(Band member 1)

The music and the words it's been composed around are, what can I say, important to St Helens, it's to do with us, the taking the benches away from the people, and the issue of allowing skateboards in the town centre, they all mean different things to different people, and the magic of turning that into a piece of composed music, and a fanfare call has been very interesting.
(Band member 2)

The staging of the calls at a time when the band were on an annual break seemed an odd choice and worked against their live involvement in the event. However, the project demonstrates a programmatic commitment to working within existing cultural festivals as well as creating new ones and demonstrates the ways in which existing groups – such as a traditional brass band – can find new forms and approaches through collaborative work of this sort. The influence that this kind of event can have on the general appreciation of art and the identity of the community of St Helens was very positively expressed by both a local artist, and the composer who worked with French & Mottershead, and the brass band:

I live in Liverpool and never had the feeling I wanted to live here (my parents live here) but now I'm starting to feel maybe I should move and live here, because it's exciting here, something's happening ... We've got a community now. I never knew any artist like I felt any connection to, there's a little art exhibition every now and again, every Tuesday there's a group of artists, and every Friday we make an art drop in relation to news story, something really emotional is happening...
(Local artist)

...it's interesting how art has been brought into the community, it's down to each individual. I think that this is just as much fun as having two grannies on shopping carts [reference to the parallel festival]. I suppose arts and music will appeal to some and not to others. It's the first time I've been involved in a live installation of art, and it's been challenging to match the subject matter of the poems to the music...
(Local composer)



3.4 DUCKIE: 21ST CENTURY MUSIC HALL

Date: November 2015

Venue: The Citadel Arts Centre

Artist: The Duckie Crew - Ursula Martinez, George Chakravarthi, Debs Gatenby, Joshua Hubbard, Kitty O'Shea, Suzie Hewlett, Steve Nice, Sam Reynolds, Katy Baird, Tallulah Haddon

Partners: The Citadel Arts Centre and Live Art Development Agency (LADA)

Overview

This event at the Citadel, was organised as part of the Through the Looking Glass Weekend commissioned by LADA. It was realised in association with Homotopia and saw the Duckie Crew from London come to St Helens to present a contemporary take on a variety show. Homotopia was launched in 2004 as part of Liverpool's European Capital of Culture and was granted National Portfolio status by Arts Council England (ACE) in 2011. Duckie has been supported by grants from ACE and the British Council, and the crew describes itself as a 'post-gay independent arts outfit'. It produces what it calls 'cultural interventions' which include club nights, performance events and anti-theatre experimentation, and the work addresses ideas and assumptions around class, gay culture and other issues related to diversity and difference. With a long-standing weekly show in the Vauxhall Tavern in London, Duckie has also performed in Berlin, Germany, Greece, Tokyo as well as the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, Blackpool Tower Ballroom and the

Sydney Opera House. The performances in St Helens included George Chakravati who performed 'Negrophilia', a dance performance in which he transformed from an ape into a chorus girl - a work which addressed histories of racism and evolution, and Tallulah Haddon who performed alongside her alter ego Susie Swallow, and local artist Kitty O'Shea, who was described as 'a bit like Cilla Black, only not as good'.

Commentary

The event was clearly quite different from the many of the usual events hosted at the Citadel, which include tribute bands and comedy nights. Ticket sales were really good and the atmosphere was lively. There seems to be a double-edged benefit to the event in St Helens. There were large groups of people in the crowd from Manchester and Liverpool. It seems likely that Homotopia and Duckie's national reputation among LGBT communities had drawn a large audience from outside St Helens. In one respect this reverses the usual pattern in which people from St Helens often travel to Liverpool and Manchester for cultural events. On the other hand, the limited numbers from St Helens in attendance reduced the sense that the event has appealed to the St Helens public in the way that Scottee's Camp show - which ran a few weeks later in the same venue - did. The distinctive contribution of Duckie and Camp, which both use a similar cultural form, is that one has drawn in new audiences from outside St Helens and the other has generated new audiences in the town.

3.5 THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Date: 21st November 2016

Venue: St Helens Town, the Citadel Arts Centre, Heart of Glass studios

Artist: Karen Christopher, Marcia Farquhar, Ian Greenall, Susannah Hewlett, Jenny McConnell, Steve Nice, Cath Shea, Joshua Sofaer, Claire Wheatman, Michelle Wren and Yellow Door Artists

Partners: Live Art Development Agency (LADA), Arts Council England

Overview

This project commissioned by LADA had many elements to it that interwove throughout two days that challenged participants to explore St Helens from a different perspective. Through *A Song for St Helens* Marcia invited all who followed her around the town to take a tour of St Helens with a difference. The artist invited people to think about the history of the canal that used to have tropical fish in it and the local guitar shop where musicians were welcoming and spontaneously jammed, playing guitar and drums with Marcia and her husband. She took participants to a local pub, a Monument to Words, a Memorial to the Wars and a Statue of Queen Victoria, and to the Citadel of Songs and Performances. All the while, the audience were asked to look and think about St Helens in a magical, inquiring and inspiring way.

During the tour Marcia and her entourage stopped off at the shopping centre to witness a Manifestal for St Helens where the Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home talked to people, passers-by and those that were there, to stop and listen as the artists stood on a bench and talked loudly to the public in a town crier style. As Marcia walked us through the indoor market she invited us to enjoy the Pedigree Chums (see Family Art Club – No. 2). Marcia's tour took the entourage to Hunt & Darton Café (see Take Over Fest case study), where slapstick scenes were played out with tea and cakes and the breaking of plates.

Then in the evening at the Heart of Glass building, Marcia joined an audience to see new artistic talent explore the impossible becoming possible in St Helens. This *Will Never Happen* invited the audience to witness Cath Shea in *Kidnap* as a cleaner explaining how she had found herself in the chief executive's meeting of the council and decided to tell

them how the university, social services, housing and parks should be run by artists. Where Jeni McConnell, in *Contesting Spaces*, invited the audience to interact with her and to move around the room in a way that was communicative and co-operative to encourage dialogue that was constructive and non-adversarial. Michelle Wren in *Ad Hack* suggested that all advertising hoardings should be reclaimed as spaces for creative learning. There was a *Festival of Failure* by Ian Greenall encouraging people to think that anything is possible if people try and if it does not work, to celebrate it; also that St Helens could be the capital of creativity and groundbreaking ideas, for a better world, a better place to reside. Yellow Door Airlines encouraged the audience to sit back and enjoy the ride to six destinations that are St Helens, and a performance by Claire Weetman called *Maze of Displacement* on hand signals and communication that stimulated people to think about the displacement of others in the town.

As one audience member put it:

I enjoy artistic things and often come here. But, some of the ideas on show this evening were something else. They all had something interesting to say, but I like the fact they got us involved and moved us around the room.
(Woman 60s),

Another said:

They really make you think. The hands thing (Maze of Displacement) was great, and imagining what it would be like to celebrate failure. A nice evening.
(Woman 30s)

Commentary

Through the Looking Glass was a collage of interactive events that asked people to look at themselves and the town of St Helens that they know so well through fun, humour, creativity and political insight. This was an ambitious project that had different levels of audience engagement. Marcia had a relatively small group following her around, yet local people interacted with her humour and performance as they came across her act. This *Will Never Happen* had a full audience and their genuine appreciation at the imagination and boldness of new artists encouraged them to dream about a St Helens that could be kinder, more creative and more co-operative.

3.6 A PROPER ST HELENS KNEES UP

Date: January to March 2016

Venue: Parr Mount Court, Raglan Court, Reeve Court and the Citadel Arts Centre

Artist: Eggs Collective

Partners: St Helens Council, Your Housing, and Helena Partnerships

Overview

Sara Cocker and Léonie Higgins of Eggs Collective worked over three months with some of the residents from Reeve Court, Raglan Court and Parr Mount, all of which are residential facilities supported by Helena Partnerships. For Helena, one of the motives behind the project was to address how the move to sheltered accommodation can be an isolating one for many people. At the start of the project Eggs Collective held a series of initial discussions with residents in each of the residential facilities. They were drawn to the idea of a project that 'might feel familiar' but which would 'steer well clear of nostalgia', hence the theme of 'change' was also used as a creative thread throughout the project. The programme of work included the following elements:

- 5 days of research with the groups before the workshops.
- 6 workshops with each of the 3 resident groups in Parr Mount Court, Raglan Court, Reeve Court.
- Creative planning and administration.
- A finale show at the Citadel Arts Centre.

In the workshops, a series of songs were produced which referenced important aspects of St Helens' history, and the cultural histories, experiences and identities of the town – rugby, pies, rain, Pilkington, Beechams, class, coal mining, the artwork Dream, chippy teas, Greenhall's brewery, Pimblett's pies, technology, the Sankey Canal, some of which are captured in the following excerpt from one of the songs:



Excerpt from *Hometown*
by Raglan Court and friends

*Every Friday's chippy tea
And Saturday's we watch rugby
And then what could be better than
Monday's lobbys in the pan?
Greenhall's brewery now defunct
But all those times it got us drunk
Barton's pickles and Barton's pop,
Pimblett's pies, you can eat the lot!*

*St Helens is a working class town
St Helens isn't eyes down
I've lived here for 80 years
St Helens is my hometown*

The finale show at the Citadel Arts Centre was based around the idea of a knees-up. Eggs Collective said:

When Heart of Glass asked us to make this show, we decided that we wanted to make it a show that couldn't have been made anywhere else in the world. We wanted it to be something specifically 'St Helens'. ... Something that was mentioned by everyone we spoke to was big nights out, club land, good times. Turns and committee men, and sitting at the same table in the same club with the same group of friends every week. It is these stories that have inspired the tone of this afternoon's performance. We wanted it to feel part-party, part-show, where anything goes and everyone's welcome ... of everything being a bit rough round the edges and having a welcome margin for error, that's all part of the atmosphere.



Although Eggs Collective and the residents were initially engaged by and excited about the idea of a show, as Leonie explained ‘over time it became less about the show and more about the relationships’. The relationships in the workshops emerged through the way in which the artists had been able to generate a space of communicative exchange, one in which different forms of memory – ones to be cherished and ones which were difficult – could be brought into awareness and discussed alongside current situations.

Commentary

In some ways, this project had to wrestle with a certain lack of confidence on behalf of the participants, but also the fact that Helena Partnership has its own fixed ideas about older residents, what they would be interested in and what they would be prepared to do in the project.

There was a perception from some of the partner organisations that this wouldn't work, that the participants would not do those things, they might come to the workshops but they wouldn't get up on stage, or turn up for the performance. But it ended with 25 people performing to a sell-out audience at the Citadel and they all loved it!

(Suzanne Dempsey-Sawin, Assistant Producer)

When the research team met Eggs Collective and those who took part in the project, it was at a celebratory event at Reeve Court, a retirement village with its own indoor shopping street. People's responses conveyed the way in which the project had helped people to develop new relationships, as

well as relationships with a different purpose and there was a great deal of satisfaction about this. One resident, Alf, captured this beautifully in the idea of a ‘feeling’ that people would like to have a bit more often.

I enjoyed it and I did my bit! It would be grand if you could spread that feeling and have that a bit more often. And all the family members of different ages, they loved it.

(Alf, resident Raglan Court)

The project is indicative of the ways in which Heart of Glass has been able to commission work which explores the symbiotic relationship between the past heritage of the town and its imagined future, in which, the future is not only imagined in the abstract but personified in present. In this way Eggs Collective was choosing to focus on what is already distinctive in the town, using approaches which offered a response to what is already here (O'Neill and Doherty, 2013). The workshops and the show were both intrinsic to the artwork. The workshops were a space in which ideas about ageing, isolation, history, and remembrance could be worked, reworked, unpicked and challenged and in which people's differential and common experiences could be aired, shared and brought into awareness. The show operated as a shared celebration of the work they had done together, as well as bringing this into the recognition of friends, family and staff from the residential centres.

Marvellous, I was really nervous, I was 11 when I last did something like this. Five members of my family came. It reminded me of the good old days when the audience were part of the show.

(Neil, resident Raglan Court)

I'm not going to lie, how special it felt being in that room, with the performers and the audience.

(Suzanne Dempsey-Sawin)

The project has allowed for artistic co-production through the creation of a temporary community in a specific place and time. This has created both imaginative and tangible potential and rooted in the shared exploration of the question, ‘what would happen if we put on a show?’



3.7 INVISIBLE CITY

Date: 12th November 2016

Venue: Pilkington headquarters, Alexandra Park

Artist: Tim Maughan, Deborah Strapman, Alfred Hitchcock (films), Michelle Brown (Tour), Liam Young

Partners: Abandon Normal Devices, Alexandra Park Management Ltd

Overview

In collaboration with Abandon Normal Devices and Alexandra Park Management Ltd, Artist Michelle Brown puts on a series of performances in the Pilkington headquarters. Now Thus, Now Thus invited the audience to be taken on an historical tour of Pilkington to explore the lives of the workers who worked in the company two hundred years ago and those who work there now. Michelle Brown weaves a fictional narrative with authentic interviews of current staff and ex-employees as she explores the themes of surveillance, the workers always being monitored, and the changing shape of capitalism. New and old management practices are told in a way that conjures up an image of the experience of Pilkington workers past and present. The artist takes the audience on a tour of the building, into the basement then up to the second and ninth floor. All the time Michelle embroiders a narrative, past and present about the struggles, the toils, and the daily drudge of working in a company such as this one. That, then, as now as workers in a (post) industrial society, they are always being watched, monitored and managed. As Michelle explains,

I think the main commentary is how this particular site, the company of Pilkington itself, it is interesting because it has been around since the beginning of capitalism. It is a company that shows us how the world of work has changed, but also how capitalism has changed and impacted. The way that companies are structured and automated, but also the way workers are organised, so part of me is interested in that and how this idea of observing workers and how we observe ourselves within that world of work.

What has become really clear is that there are universal experiences of people's lives around the world of work and this town in particular has a history that would resonate with some of the places in Ireland.

Those on the tour were engaged and intrigued,

It was interesting. How people used to work here in St Helens, in this place (Pilkington) and that it has changed in lots of ways, and in others not. Michelle said loads, so I need to reflect on it.
(Tour participant – Woman 60s)

I enjoyed it. It makes you proud of the heritage of this town. But, also aware of how we have relied on Pilkingtons for work, the economy. As workers.
(Tour participant – Man 50s)



After the last tour that took place the focus shifted to the drive-in movies and three films that explore surveillance. The audience had a choice between either driving through and watching the movies in their cars in the car park of the Pilkington building or watching it from an office on the second floor. The first two were short films called *Where the City Can't See* and *Hacked Circuit*. The former film follows the lives of city dwellers working in the not-too-distant-future where Google maps, urban management systems and CCTV surveillance are not only mapping our cities, but ruling them. This is in contrast to *Hacked Circuit* that depicts one person watching the every move of two others unbeknown to them as they go about their business. It provides a chilling reminder of the surveillance culture that is accepted as part of everyday life in modern industrial societies.

The headline film is Hitchcock's *Rear Window* where the audience share with James Stewart (as Jeff) his world view of all his neighbours as he watches their daily routines through his apartment window. Throughout the screening, some of the scenes from the film were also being played out by actors in the Pilkington offices and illuminated in bright colours against the backdrop of the office that they were in. Scenes of romance, dancing and danger are simultaneously performed on screen and in the offices. This gives the audience a three-dimensional experience of the film and provides another, brighter interactive lens in which to enjoy it.

As a member of the audience put it:

The film was great. Always has been, but it was a really exciting way to watch it, in the offices here, especially with the actors providing silhouettes of some of the scenes. . . .but the whole event makes you think about how we are watched nowadays.
(Audience member - Woman 40s)

Commentary

As an artistic event *Heart of Glass* and Michelle Brown have provided a performance that brings Pilkington and its workforce to life. The audience were engaged, enthralled and amused. As with the cinema performance in the evening, the event was constructed in a way that made the audience and the film feel special as they drove in and watched the movies, or watched them through the glass window of the Pilkington building with the magical ambience created. The audience broke into spontaneous applause at the end. For *Heart of Glass*, the event delivered a celebration of St Helens - symbolic of its industrial past and present - that of Pilkington, through the theme of surveillance. Yet, it is the genre of the visual experience of interactive theatre and screen performance that provides *Heart of Glass* with a unique and engaging medium of exploring it.

3.8 IN MY PLACE

Date: Spring 2015

Venue: Homes

Artist: The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra

Partners: Community members across St Helens

Overview

Run in the spring of 2015, In My Place was a project realised in collaboration with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra (RLPO) and communities across St Helens. It offered people the opportunity to host an orchestral performance in their own home for friends and family. For the programme, it responded to the questions 'Have you ever thought about turning your living room into a temporary exhibition?' and 'would you like to host a performance in your home?' People were asked to register their home for an intimate performance for friends and family.

We visited one event at Jonathan's house on Monday 13th July 2015. The performance was in the back room of his small bungalow on the outskirts of St Helens, on a warm summer evening. The performers from the RLPO were at one end of the room and chairs were arranged in rows in front and down the sides, with doors open onto the back garden. There were about 18 people in the room, friends and local people, mostly in their 50s and 60s except for two young school girls. The musicians were in their formal wear, although up close it was possible to see how faded, and even, dishevelled these were; to peek beneath the veneer. The performance began with an introduction from the French horn player, who told everyone that the tubing on the instrument was 12ft long. When they performed it was possible to really feel the vibrations of the instruments, and how these filled the small space of Jonathan's living room. After the first performance, the cellist talked about vibration, how vibrations work, for example, the lower the

number of vibrations, the lower the note. The tone was chatty and relaxed, he engaged the audience in a way that felt really informal and noticing this one of the performers said, 'it's about communication, that's why we all get into performing arts'.

Commentary

In My Place is a strand of work produced by Heart of Glass, which sought to create unique, one-off, high-quality experiences that brought performance into people's homes and workplaces. It acknowledges the many and varied barriers that can prevent people from accessing cultural

venues, in the case of Jonathan, these were severe disabilities which meant he spent the majority of life in his own home. In this way, the work addresses the practical and perceptual barriers that can prevent people from accessing cultural venues, as well as posing questions about where art is made, bringing the domestic sphere into visibility and recognition.



3.9 2020 VISION - FREE RUNNERS SHOW

Date: 21st April 2017

(date of final show, preceded by several months of work with the local community free runners)

Venue: Derbyshire Hill Family Centre

Artist: Sophie Mahon

Partners: Mandy Ladner community centre volunteer and community leaders

Overview

Artist Sophie Mahon was able to establish a relationship with the local community centre and a group of elusive and initially non-cooperative local free runners. Community leader, Mandy, was keen to make something positive out of the boys' rebellious and sometimes anti-social attitudes in the community. Mahon enlisted the services of a professional free runner, Denislav Stoynev, (Deni), from Evolve Manchester, who was able to both gain the trust of the group and train them to perform a show for the local community. Prior to this the group had been teaching themselves parkour through watching youtube channels and this collaboration gave the group the opportunity to meet someone who was doing the sport professionally and had come into it in a similar way that they had. Sophie, Deni and the group co-created a routine and narrative for the show. The show lasted seven minutes. It featured some striking, abstract coloured images that swept across the space accompanied by loud electronic music. The atmosphere was dark and exciting. There were two sides to the performance. It began with a couple of younger girls who did some movement exercises that were 'cool' in the context of the darkness and the sound. (Their mother, who had come to the event straight from her supermarket job, spoke proudly of her daughters having a chance to perform in public, and explained how this had been a unique experience for their family). This activity warmed up the audience for the free runners to get into action. Their moves took on an air of excitement that somehow belonged to them as they moved, jumped and somersaulted in the space, using the scaffolding that had been erected for them, as if they were outside. Their faces were covered and they all wore black. There was no compromise in style. Sophie came out



at the end of the show and presented each one with a certificate, which only one of them seemed reluctant to accept. This was a brilliant example of being able to address the terms of the free runners and the restrictions of community and to combine the artistic and social ends of the project. At the end of the show, the small group (about seven) stood in front of the audience in a menacing huddle and when the music stopped they took down their masks, revealing their true selves.

When the performance was over, the younger members of the audience, who were the majority and were aged between 10-14, ran up and through the space and the scaffolding as if imitating the free runners, which in itself expressed the contagious success of the event.

Commentary

Considering the deprived nature of the neighbourhood – a place where taxis refuse to go after sundown – and the rundown aspect of an unloved community centre, it was impressive to see a professional looking show created by boys who are on the edge of society and on the fringes of community. They were performing to younger children, sitting on the floor, who were clearly inspired by the piece. This was a fine example of what can be achieved through the medium of an art form that can be framed by the artist's vision in conjunction with the needs and values of the local community. It validated the efforts of local community leaders who care profoundly about the meagre resource of the community centre – which seems to be all they have – and the young free runners who bring their energy from the streets and into the community centre. They performed to the future community, the younger children. Heart of Glass is hoping that Evolve will continue to work with the family centre and hold a 'pop up' Evolve training night once a week in St Helens.



3.10 BEFORE I DIE

Date: February and March 2017

Venue: Church Square, St Helens

Artist: Candy Chang

Partners: SICK! Festival

Overview

Presented in partnership with SICK! Festival, an arts and health festival, Before I Die was a project realised in Church Square, St Helens which encouraged people to contemplate their death, reflect on their lives, hopes and aspirations, and to share these in a public place. The project has been delivered in more than 70 countries worldwide, including Iraq, China, Brazil, Kazakhstan, and South Africa. In different places it has been shown to reveal joys, anxieties, fears, struggles. The work considers the extent to which public spaces can provide moments for empathy, self-examination and exchange, which might provide moments of relief, respite and connection to others. After losing someone she loved, artist Candy Chang drew on her personal experience of grief and her depression, initially covering a crumbling house with chalkboard paint and stencilled with the prompt 'before I die I want to...'

Commentary

Presented as a black cube in the middle of the walkway in the town centre, Before I Die invited everybody and anybody to share with themselves and passers-by, their hopes, dreams and ambitions before the inevitable happened. It provided people with the opportunity to be authors, to share their thoughts with the world. Yet, these thoughts are within the sad frame that they, and those they love, will certainly die one day. There is a mixture of the lewd, rude, homophobic and poignant written on the cube. Some of the rude comments evoke sexual fantasies for their authors; some may throw up subconscious thoughts around sexuality. Some comments are moving and make one stop, wonder and think. 'I want to meet my Dad' and 'I want to make the world a better place'. These are thoughtful moving reflections that demonstrate a generosity of spirit and the strength of human love, for familiars, friends and family, for the wider world, the community and humanity.

As a spectacle, as art, it has a wide, popular appeal. Passers-by are drawn to read what others have written and some write their own thoughts on the cube. It provides an opening for anybody to contribute and contemplate humanity, life and death in all its pain, wonder and messiness. It is art that talks to people, and people talk to it.



Section 4
Discussion

4.1 DEVELOPING AND EMBEDDING A CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN ST HELENS

Responding to the local context

For Heart of Glass Director Patrick Fox, it has been axiomatic from the beginning that the programme should embed itself in local communities, where it can build on and help to reimagine existing local cultural practices and traditions. For an ethnically homogenous town¹⁹, which many interviewees described as ‘culturally conservative’, and which on the surface appears to be at ease with its long-established vernacular cultural forms, this has proved to be a delicately poised balancing act – showing due respect for ‘what is’ and ‘has been’ while setting in motion cultural processes able to prefigure ‘what might become’.

Heart of Glass has proved itself able to commission artists and to produce art and culture out of existing sources of energy and opportunity, bringing in new ideas and forms in order to create previously unimagined cultural expressions. For example, Family Art Club has reanimated the marketplace in St Mary’s shopping centre providing an important test bed for emerging artists, and light touch opportunities for accidental and deliberate engagement in the arts. In Parr, the area where the Derbyshire Hill Family Centre is located, artist Sophie Mahon brought local ‘free runners’ into the community centre to provide a show to the community using their skills. What had previously been a dangerous expression of protest and exclusion was used as the basis for engagement, and subsequently transformed into a recognisable artistic performance, which would have been inconceivable before Mahon’s intervention. In other areas of St Helens, where vestiges of cultural tradition were existent and identifiable, Heart of Glass would seek to work with artists capable of collaborating in projects that interrogated the familiar, by introducing into local culture elements of artistic practice that could surprise, scrutinise and unsettle. For example in Through the Looking Glass, artist Marcia Farquar provided a collage



of interactive events that asked people to look at themselves and the town of St Helens, with reference to a series of different perspectives. Of note, too, was the collaboration with a local brass band in the Heart of Glass commissioned artwork Brass Calls, which brought the traditional Haydock Brass Band (one of the oldest community organisations in St Helens) together with artists French & Mottershead. They described how, in the artwork, the band recorded music to accompany the expression of local thoughts, sayings and ideas, designed to ‘take note of public situations’ and ‘stories’, realised within a local festive day organised by the council.

Since these artistic processes involve acts of self-recognition, creative illusion, critical consciousness and, indeed, relationships that prefigure the possibility of reimagining the public realm in St Helens, Heart of Glass has aimed from the outset to embed itself in the town for the long term, a policy that is exemplified by the long-term commitment to some of the partnerships with artists such as idle women, Studio Morison and Mark Storor. Storor envisages retaining an artistic presence in St Helens for about 12 years.

¹⁹ Census data indicates it is the Whitest and most Christian town in England



Beginnings

Patrick Fox became the Heart of Glass Director in September 2014. At that time, partly due to the central role of the partnership with Saints Community Development Foundation, the programme team was located in the Langtree Park Stadium. The popularity of rugby league in the town, as well as the established community programmes run by Saints RFC, offered Heart of Glass vital support and recognition in the early phases, and helped them to tap into longstanding understandings of the local context in developing an initial programme of work. Also, Arts Council England (ACE) and others from the arts sector, were excited about the potential offered by a creative collaboration with a rugby league club. Coming from a background as the Head of Collaborations at FACT, Liverpool, and then Director of the national agency for collaborative arts practice in Ireland, Create, Patrick Fox has always been passionate about the role of arts in civic life.

Under the umbrella of action research, we have the opportunity to take time, to consider the role of art and artists in civil society and in the formation of new identities and realities, and to become part of the conversation by building long-term relationships with communities of place and interest.

(Patrick Fox, Arts Professional, 2016)

Langtree Park was the venue for the first major art event realised after Patrick Fox took up the directorship. Held in December 2014, *And, On That Note*, was an evening of musical reflection and visual art linked to the anniversary of the World War One Christmas Truce of 1914 (see section 3.1 for a Pen Portrait). Artist Rhona Byrne created a series of visual interventions for the evening, which sought to represent individual and collective endurance. Heart of Glass described how the event was 'symbolic of [its] desire to create unique arts experiences by fusing disciplines and initiating collaborations to make bold new work' (Tiller and Fox, 2016). The work was indicative of both the scale of this ambition as well as some of its inherent difficulties. There were different views about the success of the event artistically, but agreement that it indicated the Heart of Glass preparedness to wrestle and respond to the local context, which included the scale of the stadium, and to take creative risks. This attitude, which allows for the possibility of failure and learning from failure, is a core feature of the Heart of Glass philosophy.

The partnership with Heart of Glass was the first time the rugby club had collaborated with an arts programme and there were elements of confusion on both sides. For example, the language of Creative People and Places (CPP), which included discussions of 'action research' and even 'failure', were met with bemusement by some at Langtree Park. Nonetheless, both the club and Heart of Glass have maintained a commitment to working this out together through ongoing dialogue and co-planning activities. Gordon Pennington from Saints Community Development Foundation was Chair of the Heart of Glass Programme Steering Group until mid 2017. Over time a mutually intelligible language gradually emerged, one which recognises the distinctive contributions of sport and arts to place making in St Helens, as well as the potential for trans-sector learning which emerges from this collaboration. Writing in Arts Professional in January 2016 Patrick Fox described these issues:

The complementary and symbiotic relationship between amateur, volunteer and professional in rugby league has been particularly interesting to unpack. How do we in the arts acknowledge the contribution of the hobbyist, the volunteer, the community member and the professional? How do we do this while also differentiating between professional endeavour and voluntary pursuit, between art, the arts, participation and practice? How do we ensure this is not done as a value judgement but as a recognition of the varied roles and entry points involved in the creation of a successful art project, and in turn a sustainable and vital arts sector? ...

The greatest lesson we've learned is that what rugby does for St Helens and its people is achieved through long-term engagement, by being firmly embedded within a community and being part of its ongoing transformation.
(Patrick Fox, Arts Professional, 2016)

This conveys the way in which Heart of Glass has built its work on a recognition that the delivery of an arts programme must identify the cultural forms and practices of the people it hopes to engage, and that artists must be able to work productively with the complex cultural histories of an area, its sense of place and past traditions. As will be discussed in more detail in the section on 'the programme philosophy and models of practice', the concern about responding to the local context is in no way about the programme conceiving its role in simplistic terms as making things better, nor about an approach which pre-judges the acceptability of certain artistic ideas or interests (Bishop, 2012); rather, it is about taking on projects as shared concerns, 'paying attention to the symbolic ruptures' as well as the 'ideas and affects' generated within them, in order to appreciate the ways in which these resonate with the wider feelings in the town, the work of partner organisations (including the council) and the wider work of the programme, its principles, philosophy, practices and objectives (ibid: 26).

The Heart of Glass concern then, has been to avoid a romanticisation and idealisation of existing local cultural practices and communities on the one hand, or a deficit model in which people are

regarded as bereft of cultural assets on the other. It has been working with the complex histories of communities in the area, including the heritage of industrial labour and artisanal traditions; remnants of industrial architecture; the sporting legacy and traditions of the town; and visible and invisible diversity. Brass bands, local heritage societies and social clubs still represent important cultural forms locally and all have provided avenues for artists to work both sympathetically, and provocatively with local communities of practice and place. Additionally, however, newer forms of social space have been tapped into and indeed created, such as, for example, a drop in café for welcoming refugee and asylum seeking communities in St Helens that formed part of artist Claire Weetman's work in a Prototype Project – The Maze of Displacement; also the creation of a temporary art café by artists Hunt & Darton which formed one element of Take Over Fest in 2015. Hence, elements of the commissioning strategy have built on long existing traces, memories, traditions and cultural formations, as well as newly formed community relations; some that have survived the collapse of industry and others that have emerged more recently. Many projects have explored the symbiotic relationship between the past heritage of the town and a future not only imagined in the abstract but also personified in the work. Mark Storor's work with children in local schools is a prime example, as is Sophie Mahon's work with the free runners of Derbyshire Street, the walking tours undertaken at the Pilkington's Factory in Invisible City, and in Knees Up by Eggs Collective, which was developed with older people in sheltered accommodation.

The action research imperative in CPP and Heart of Glass

As is discussed in the introduction, ACE was clear at the outset that it wanted CPP to be seen as an action research programme, through which the partnerships in the 21 different areas would test and try out different approaches. They were open in this regard to the idea that some things would not work and this was talked about as part of the learning potential of the programme. For example, in a blog post in 2015 on why CPP came into being, Laura Dyer, Executive Director at ACE, said:

We were also clear that we see this programme as an action research programme. We want the Creative People and Places projects to test and try different approaches and really evaluate what works and what doesn't, particularly, I would argue, the what doesn't! ... It is true that we are quite demanding on the evidence and data gathering part of the programme but it seems critical that we understand the impact of what we are doing.

Action research is a term most widely used in the social sciences for various forms of social enquiry that aim to generate new knowledge designed to effect change. It often includes elements of participation. This knowledge is often used to inform programme development in iterative cycles of data collection, reflection, feedback and planning. In the course of the research, evidence is gathered on both process and outcomes. There is a lively debate about whether the process or the outcomes generated are the most important elements of action research projects (see, for example, Roy 2012). These debates neatly mirror those about social practice in the arts, such as, for example, the criticisms of social practice developed by Claire Bishop (2012: 13), who suggests that aside from the social aspect of such work, it is 'crucial to discuss, analyse and compare' it 'critically as art'.

The lens of 'action research', through its understanding of process and outcome as being inextricably linked to continuous participation, allows for an appreciation of social practice 'as art', which will be holistically assessed by taking into account all outcomes, including those where 'failure' may well be seen as a contribution to learning, depending on what it provides in terms of reflection and adjustment. This fits in with the Heart of Glass philosophy of long-term embeddedness. That is to say, the programme does not seek to satisfy spontaneous, isolated success, but rather to learn from and with communities in a process where mistakes are seen as an almost inevitable aspect of risk-taking and integral to shared inquiry. Heart of Glass has used action research to enhance programme development and social and artistic outcomes.

Take Over Fest organised by artist Scottee, (subject of a detailed case study section 2.2) offers a good example, through a three-month interactive festival that took place in 2015. The festival courted participation and 'failure' in an overt and risky fashion. For example, there was poetry for people who don't like poetry; a rave for the under eights; mini-cab comedy for the bereaved; knitbombing of the park; a bearded Black opera singer in drag; a camp variety show at the Citadel Arts Centre; and table performances in an art café. As an action research project, we can begin to appreciate its value, which generates unforeseen outcomes rather than being driven by targets and numbers. The festival tapped into different elements of the psycho-cultural-geography and history of St Helens by animating its vacant urban spaces – often spaces of 'failure' - and inducting local people into a performative 'queering' of the day-to-day and the disused. It risked rejection from what could be assumed to be a largely monocultural audience in St Helens, as it imported the challenging and fantastical into the familiar well-loved cultural venues such as the Citadel. The 'queer', pseudo-variety show called Camp, which was performed at the Citadel had no guarantee of success, yet, it contributed to a re-invigoration of the arts centre.

Provocation requires engaging the faculty for critical social curiosity both by the artist and those who take part as collaborators or audience members. It requires an approach that takes the town and its people seriously as co-subjects of an artistic inquiry, rather than as objects of amusement, interest or care. Artists like Scottee have contributed to the action research imperative of the programme, by being given the freedom to repress what Claire Bishop (2012: 39) has called the 'super-egoic injunction' to make things better, and, instead, to prioritise the investigative possibilities provided by pursuing their own 'gnawing social curiosity'. Take Over Fest explored and made visible, issues of difference in a town. In Camp, Scottee used the intimate performance space at the Citadel to engage the audience in the provocative possibilities of the show, and in doing so was able to create an artwork which felt at once familiar and strange, and which provoked humorous reactions that also felt edgy, and even uncomfortable at times. By whetting the palate for the outrageous, the

irreverence of Take Over Fest was used as a strategic principle, tweaking a cultural nerve in a way which was carefully pitched and respectful, but also deliberately political and provocative. The programme gained confidence in the idea of an artist's take over of the town, that 'experimental bombastic moments can reveal a hidden truth' (Patrick Fox²⁰), and has sought to extend throughout the programme, the use of new venues and spaces.

The fine line between respect and provocation implies occasional moments where judicious balance fails – such as in Scottee's launch event, where, although most of his audience were captivated, a dissenting voice from among the crowd, felt that the show had gone too far and was somewhat offensive. However, as the opinion of the Chief Executive of the Citadel attests, there are plenty of examples throughout the festival programme of how the risk of failure and offence that was felt by at least one person at the launch event, was developed into a contained risk and success as the programme developed.

4.2 THE PROGRAMME PHILOSOPHY AND MODEL

A psychosocial approach to the evaluation of Heart of Glass

Our approach to this report has adopted a psychosocial framework, which investigates experience and process as much as outcome. In the course of our analysis we have been using concepts derived from social scientists and psychoanalytic practitioners who have been concerned with the social and psychological conditions of creativity and aesthetic experience. For example, the theorist of play D.W. Winnicott (1971) who is important in our conception of the 'third space', and Wilfred Bion (1970) who particularly highlighted the importance of 'negative capability' (explained on p108) in understanding emergent experience. The concepts developed by these authors, elaborated later in this report, were not principally directed at the arts, but are illuminating in an action research context, in the understanding of audience experience and participation, and in process directed projects.

²⁰ Evaluation interview 6th July 2017

Generating third space – dealing with uncertainty²¹

At the 2017 Heart of Glass conference – WithForAbout: Art, Activism and Community – artist Mark Storor threw a box filled with jigsaw pieces and glitter into the air and said: 'there is no map for this sort of work'. This provocation supports an important distinction between the socially engaged practices of Heart of Glass and the more deliberate processes of regeneration and renewal being undertaken by the council in St Helens, which seek to impact directly on employment prospects, economic prosperity and the health and wellbeing of people in the town. Mark Storor's work with the staff and students at Rainford High Technology College required skills and attitudes that were not immediately obvious to the staff at the school: the ability to think and feel in the present rather than plan for the future (for example, future exam results); the acceptance of emotions as being as valuable as thoughts; the admittance of the existence of tacit, unexpressed knowledge, which might be later expressed through the artwork; the questioning of presently held knowledge (i.e. the knowledge held by the teachers); the encouragement of the skills of listening and allowing for emergence, as opposed to those associated with action and doing. All of these ideas are in accordance with Bion's concept of 'negative capability', (1970) borrowed from the poet Keats, that is, the capacity to be 'in uncertainties, mysteries and doubts, without irritable reaching after fact and reason'. Keats himself was making specific reference to Shakespeare's particular ability to withhold a rush to closure and judgement, thereby allowing his characters to reveal themselves according to their immanent nature. This principle of openness to what emerges and acceptance of the unknown is particularly pertinent in the work of Mark Storor and is a feature of the Heart of Glass programme's long-term evolution. For Storor, a school is a highly structured place of control and order, where everything is 'mapped' for the day. He created a space that he approached with no specific plan or strategy, without 'memory or desire' (Bion, 1970),

²¹ Froggett, L., Roy, A., Little, R. and Whitaker, L. (2011) *New Model Visual Arts Organisations and Public Engagement*. Other: University of Central Lancashire, Preston.

challenging the staff to accept this lack of structure, which went against their own interpretation of the practice of teaching and learning. This approach fosters the ability to contemplate the world without the desire for a certainty of knowledge or outcome. It involves a willingness to accommodate ambiguity, a capacity for ambivalence and resistance to resolving contradiction or paradox. It specifically rejects closed and rational systems and celebrates the action research process implied. After a series of workshops with staff and pupils in Rainford High Technology College, Storor created a new space in an unused part of the school, which brought students into supportive relationships with the teachers, thereby challenging the hierarchy and organisational norms associated with traditional education. As Mark Storor says,

It's more than the students creating something for the teachers, it is about creating a communal space... The young artists I have been working with recognise not only the need for a dedicated communal place, but the absolute value in 'real' and symbolic terms of a space to 'breathe'. A pause for thought, for reflection and permission to take that moment.

What we see in this example, is that the effects of the work may sometimes emerge through the creation of third space, which in this case was both an actual physical space and an emotional and psychological one too, as well an openness to where it might lead to and what might emerge. It is within this space that negative capability can be practiced and experienced. The focus on process in socially engaged artwork suspends preconceptions and targeted outcomes in favour of a reaching out to where the new encounter may lead. In Winnicott's terms this is the 'potential space' of creativity, a space of discovery where self-hood is transcended in an imaginative encounter with the world. Many socially engaged artworks, often without knowing it, situate themselves within this third space of potential.²²

In other examples such as Claire Weetman's Prototype Project – The Maze of Displacement (Case Study 2.4), realised as a collaboration with

refugee and asylum seeking communities in St Helens, the pleasure of discovery has allowed for the formation of relationships that have a particular vitality, by virtue of the fact that they involve an encounter with otherness that also surprises, unsettles and challenges. The space created is, therefore, an intrinsically creative space, where it is admissible to avoid the deliberate pursuit of specified objectives. It is both a locus of culture and a state of mind achievable in the everyday lives of individuals and communities.

Artists, particularly those working in the public realm, have a practical role in opening up such spaces, and the function of a programme like Heart of Glass is to hold these spaces open while also 'holding the artists' - and their anxieties and disruptions - as they in turn hold the spaces open. On a similar basis, O'Neill and Doherty (2011: 44) argue that social practice is predicated on developing spaces in which participation is a social 'process necessary for art's co-production, in which negotiations with people and places are durationally specific, yet intentionally resistant to any prescribed outcomes'.

In the examples in this report we see the ways in which some artists – for example, some of the emerging artists making bids to the Prototype Project programme - have struggled to some extent to understand and value this focus on process, sometimes placing too much value on the obvious markers of an arts project such as exhibitions and audience numbers. However, we also see many examples of the ways in which people in St Helens have made use of the third spaces created in Heart of Glass projects, thus contributing through art to the creative invigoration of communities and environments, that make and remake, civil society and the public sphere in the town. It is through this attention to process, that Heart of Glass has been able to develop spaces of communicative exchange between artists and the people who contribute to and interact with the work. The value of the Heart of Glass approach to producing is that such knowledge allows it to make interventions in the public sphere in St Helens with greater judgement and precision, and it is to this role that we turn next.

²² Winnicott, D.W. (1971) *Playing and Reality*, London: Karnac

The producer role

Deputy Director Kathryn Dempsey describes a certain distinctiveness in how the producer role is understood at Heart of Glass, when compared to some other arts organisations that also employ people in roles such as ‘community engagement coordinators’ as well as producers. In those cases the producer role tends to focus more on the technical aspects of producing, whereas at Heart of Glass four dimensions are seen as intrinsic to the producer role:

- **The point of contact with the community** and/or audience for the project.
- **The relationship with the artist** whose arts-based knowledge is brought into relation with that of the community as the work develops.
- **Support for the process throughout the project** through consistent presence.
- **Skills in the technical aspects** of logistics, risk assessment, project management and planning.

The producers interviewed for this report, described how artists bring assumptions about the town to their work in St Helens. Hence, one central facet of the producer role is to test and work through these in discussion and, where necessary, to challenge and help artists to reframe their proposals.

What we want is for artists to be able to focus on the work, so one thing is the local knowledge about how certain things might be received or interpreted, bringing that into the artist awareness.

(Angharad Williams, Lead Producer)

Communities and partners can have quite traditional expectations about artists and arts projects, which also need to be talked through, and, indeed, partner organisations can have their own fixed ideas about the communities that they are working with. This happened in the Knees Up project led by artists, Eggs Collective.

There was a perception from some of the partner organisations that this wouldn't work, that the participants would not do those things. They might come to the workshops but they wouldn't get up on stage, or turn up for the performance. But it ended with 25 people performing to a sell-out audience at the Citadel and they all loved it!
(Suzanne Dempsey-Sawin, Assistant Producer)

In this way, Heart of Glass expects its producers to initiate and ‘mind’ the relational conditions in which the work can begin and develop. Suzanne Dempsey-Sawin talked about ‘mediating trust’, a term which beautifully captures the fact that this role operates in-between the artist and the community. For example, realising the Haunted Furnace performance as part of Take Over Fest involved extensive discussions with The World of Glass about the use of part of the building for an immersive performance, which they were quite unsure about. Getting the school to collaborate in the Mark Storor project involved dealing with the fact that teachers felt ‘precarious’ and even ‘terrified’, because Storor seemingly had no plan or structure to offer during the project. Also, Suzanne Dempsey-Sawin described how people can become more anxious as a project develops, which can lead to them shifting their ideas about each other's intentions; she gave an example of a project in which someone from a partner organisation had said about an artist ‘I'm not sure what they want from this anymore?’ Deputy Director Kathryn Dempsey talked about this aspect of the work in terms of handling the ‘scepticism and suspicion’ that partner organisations inevitably have about engaging in projects that are outside of their comfort zone and which feel unusual and uncertain. The role of the producer is therefore to protect artists, to allow them to concentrate on the work in the face of reactions, which could ‘become quite disheartening’. Effectively, the producer is called upon to curate the psychic and social conditions of third space, by attending to different forms of anxiety.

This is why Heart of Glass producers accompany the project throughout, attending as many of the workshops or other processes that constitute the work, as is needed. This is partly about providing a high level of support for the artist, attending to issues that allow them to focus on the artwork, and it's also partly about a programmatic commitment to taking the communities of St Helens seriously as equivalent subjects. As Suzanne Dempsey-Sawin explained:

The artist is not the most important thing [to people] in St Helens. What's important is the offer, the form, the approach and the commitment to develop the work together ... We work with the community and we create things together.

In this respect, the role is critical to realising a programmatic commitment, that the artwork must always be 'a third thing, something neither the community nor the artist could have created independently' (Patrick Fox²³). Delivering on this commitment involves the programme taking on these projects as shared concerns and this reflects two other commitments: first, that Heart of Glass intends to be working in St Helens for the long term and hence, the connections they make with communities and partners are an important aspect of the work which needs to be nurtured and sustained; and second, that Heart of Glass views them as knowledge generating projects, in which the knowledge emerges through the process not merely in the final work. In this respect, it is only by taking part in the process, that the knowledge generated through the work can be drawn back into the organisation and form part of an institutional repository of knowledge.

I can't imagine working in an organisation where producers didn't work directly with the community and the artist. What I love about this is the magic. Sounds a bit cheesy, but it's when you see the sense of something extraordinary that comes out of people creating work together; how people can be really surprised. And supporting artists to develop this sort of work.
(Suzanne Dempsey-Sawin, Assistant Producer)

Hence, the role of the producer is to maintain an awareness of the feelings that circulate in the project and to understand the best way to dissipate destructive forms of anxiety, while allowing other difficult feelings to sit and develop as part of an artistic inquiry. In this way, the programme maintains a commitment to 'seeing the role of the artist as an agitator' (Kathryn Dempsey, Deputy Director), but, where that agitation is used to pursue a social inquiry with and not about a community. As Angharad Williams, Lead Producer, says, this involves staying 'very close to the project' and developing a 'gut instinct [which] stops things developing into problems'. Such an approach is predicated on a 'felt knowledge' of what is happening, which involves staying close to the work as it unfolds. The idea of 'mediating trust' conveys the ways in which this role involves skills such as emotional intelligence, empathy, active listening, not taking sides and providing careful feedback to different partners.

During the programme two new assistant producers were brought into the team at Heart of Glass, having previously been award holders in the Prototype Projects. The main characteristics they were seen as possessing were a 'sensitivity to working with the broad range of different partners and stakeholders who can be involved in this sort of work'. Brought in to help with Sophie Mahon's work (2020 Vision), the commitment and the difference they made was apparent in their description.

It was difficult at the beginning getting them [free runners] to listen to us, and that was down to the fact that a lot of them, a few of them don't go to school. In terms of structure, they aren't necessarily used to it, coming in from the outside and then telling them what to do, they didn't really have a lot of time for that which is fair enough. It just took time, coming back every single week and saying we're going to do this project and we're doing it well. They've been let down before by previous projects. The idea that we came back helped them to carry on, because there's the thought that we were going to leave.
(Naiose Johnson Martin and Rhyannon Parry, Yellow Door Artists and Assistant Producers)

²³ Interview conducted in 2010 at FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology)

The commitment, work and sensitivity of these assistant producers is a testament to the way the production team at Heart of Glass works to maximise the effect and success of the artists' work with local communities; as they say, working with communities who have been let down in the past.

Angharad Williams, Lead Producer, describes how this involves a necessary and shifting balance between 'letting things go' and deciding to intervene. This is something learned through the experience of doing many similar projects, and honed through ongoing informal discussion in the team. This is made possible by the way the whole team shares a single, and quite small, office and these regular team discussions convey the way in which producing decisions are held in common. And as Angharad Williams points out, they also convey a 'sincere commitment' to the work and a strong desire to see and understand what the artist is going through and to talk this through together. In the artwork, it involves knowing when to sit in the background, when to make the tea, and when to take part.

Sometimes it can also involve bringing in someone else to support a project, someone with explicit and recognisable knowledge related to the community and/or the objectives of the work. For example, in the Skate Park (see case study 2.5) this involved bringing in Stephen King who is a skater and has a background in skate photography; and in 2020 Vision, Deni was brought in from Evolve, a professional free running organisation in Manchester, to help prepare the group for the performance. Previous to this, the group had been teaching themselves parkour through watching youtube channels. Artist, Sophie Mahon, wanted them to have the opportunity to meet someone who was doing the sport professionally and had come into it in a similar way that they had. Sophie, Deni and the group created a routine and narrative together for the show, which meant that everyone involved, altered the outcome and direction through the collaborative process.

Patrick Fox, Director, explains why this approach to producing is so important to building sustainable relationships and institutional knowledge:

But what bothers me is if we were to do a project like the Morison project for example and working with those 55 skaters and we had no relationship with them. Then how can we possibly build on that knowledge based on that understanding of those sets of relationships? I'm not concerned if they know about Heart of Glass as a project or as a commission, but I'm concerned about them and what they are and who they are as representatives of their community. If Angharad or Stephen wasn't at those encounters or at those meetings and we weren't building those relationships independently and alongside Heather. Then when Heather's gone. ... We've lost it. It's gone. And that's something I really learnt from that 14 years of relationships (in FACT and Create) which then amplified certain things and I think those relationships by and large primarily sat with us as a team and I think we're doing that on a much larger scale now.

Audience development versus dialogic practice

In a published discussion with Chrissie Tiller in 2016, Patrick Fox talks about two opposing forces within the overall CPP programme nationally, between approaches defined by audience development and those which are more dialogical, seeking to ask difficult and pertinent questions and elicit thoughtful, authentic responses (Tiller and Fox, 2016). What begins to emerge in this interview is a sense of the philosophy that informs the work of Heart of Glass, which involves an attitude to the purpose of the work and the ways in which relationships between artists and communities are seen, supported and developed. Tiller and Fox make the following observations about this:

That's how I see building relationships between artists and communities... There's always a kernel of 'there must be a bigger question than this'. ... Which is why 9 times out of 10, every project has got a large or small 'p' political emphasis because it's bound up with the notion of liberation and voice and agency and how we can all work together to create better worlds – a utopian idea maybe, but I really believe that knowledge lives everywhere.

(Tiller and Fox, 2016: 8)

This conveys a programmatic belief in the potential of projects to unearth knowledge capable of informing the lives of individuals, communities and artists, as well as the future development and direction of the programme. It is an approach which takes seriously the ways in which the programme benefits from the work it undertakes with communities, reversing the more traditional notion that there is a responsibility to ensure that communities benefit from programmes in receipt of public subsidy. But, it's also a philosophy that sees the work of Heart of Glass as intricately tied up with notions of cultural citizenship (discussed in section 4.3). Operationalising this commitment, involves working on the basis of a recognition that the people in St Helens already possess the necessary generative resources to collaborate and co-produce projects, evidenced by the town's history of innovation and experimentation, as well as significant contributions to technological and pharmaceutical advances. This approach conceives the role of the programme as much in terms of 'experimentation and discovery' as 'aesthetics and curating' (Doherty 2006: 23).

Having such a clear philosophy ensures that the arts are not instrumentalised. The potential for collaborative learning is maximised through action research realised through dialogic practice. This is a mature approach to arts programming which emerges from accumulated experience and knowledge. It is only by working in this way that the populations in places such as St Helens can be engaged as 'equivalent citizens whose ideas and input are considered necessary to developing new knowledge' (Roy, 2012 p. 31). However dialogue, which is an important aspect of the Heart of Glass programme, is not primarily about doing and being done to, it is about being and being with (Benjamin, 1995). In the examples presented in this report we see how the dialogic practices in Heart of Glass allow for forms of collective improvisation, which occur in the intermediate area between being and doing – what we have characterised as the third space created by the artwork.

Hence, what an audience development approach to CPP can miss is that cultural involvement cannot be willed upon people. Here the 'social' in social practice ends up missing a proper understanding

of the person – the participant, co-producer, or audience member – as a subject; a subject with their own desires, interests and imperatives, and one with an internal world that comprises both 'real and imagined relations.' (Hoggett, 2008: 70) In the end, emancipatory messages such as those delivered at the CPP conference in 2017 about the inversion of the pyramid of involvement, need to emerge from case studies of participation in, and the effects of, socially engaged arts practice rather than through demographic story telling. It is precisely the former that typifies the processes of the Heart of Glass programme.

Democratic authority and solidarity

Another way of conceiving this difference is in terms of the difference between sympathy and empathy. Audience development might be seen as part of a sympathetic response, one that creates a dynamic in which the other person is objectified or pushed away – 'I feel sorry for you', rather than 'I feel with you'. Sympathetic responses sustain the isolation between sympathiser, in this case the arts programme, and sympathised with, the audience, elevating the sympathiser, sustaining a sense of otherness, and therefore of superiority (Malone, 2017). In contrast, empathetic responses seek to generate a position of togetherness. Projects such as Mark Storor's work in schools invoke solidarity in which the artist, young people, staff and teachers and others are united by their shared existential fate (Sevenhuijsen, 1997). Similarly, the free runners in Derbyshire Hill elicit our admiration and emotional participation through the catalyst of the artist; we do not feel 'sorry' for their fate on the streets of St Helens; quite the opposite: we admire them. The 'care-full' ethics of these practices are predicated on generating the conditions for an empathic exchange, in which the artist is a 'relational self', whose practice is embedded in concrete relationships with the other people' who take part (Bishop, 2012: 55). The value of this view is that it offers a model of democratic empowerment, which recognises the role of artist and programme. Work such as Take Over Fest and the Skate Park project and the social processes these projects initiate, emerges from professional artists using their craft. The tendency identified by Bishop (2012) to deprofessionalise arts based interventions and processes in socially

engaged contexts, is avoided. In Skate Park Heather Peak Morison and Ivan Morison employ a model of democracy in which they acknowledge and validate the knowledge of the young skaters, the police, and the local authority (as well as the limits of this knowing). They use their own artistic knowledge and experience (and its limits) in a reflexive and transparent way (Hoggett, 2008). This involves a capacity for recognition, but also a capacity for independent thinking, in which difficult things must be aired and confronted, while maintaining an openness to the possibility that these will be met with resistance and refusal. Artist expertise is legitimated when seen and understood as a form of 'reflexive' practice (Hoggett, 2008). Both the artist and the community collaborators are recognised as 'knowing and inquiring subjects' who may at the same time also be anxious about their collaboration: each is knowing but also unknowing; and it is through unknowing that a third space is created between them and creates the potential for them to work together (Froggett, 2002). In these practices there is no such thing as the generic community participant (who can be counted and/or whose experience and 'journey' can be measured and accounted for), there is only ever the relationship and the new space that that relationship inhabits, upon which dialogic practice is predicated.

Hence, the programmatic intent to create third spaces, or what Van Heeswijk (2005) describes as the 'a space of potentiality', is also supported by its commitment to work from a position of empathy, rather than sympathy, or simply as commissioners of interesting work and/or provocateurs (Kester, 2004). As O'Neill and Doherty (2011) suggest, this 'depends on commissioners' sensitivity to local political dynamics, histories and cultures and on the possibility of ongoing relationships' (p.13). As we have discussed, provocation plays an important part in many of the projects, however, provocation is predicated on establishing the basis for a conversation, or, at least, a communicative exchange. Once this is established, it becomes possible to startle, surprise, or even shift existing perceptions, which allow projects such as the Skate Park to challenge taken for granted views about skaters as a social problem. A space is opened up in which people can explore a series

of deeper issues about things such as civic space and civic life. This stimulates citizen engagement and critical consciousness. In projects such as the Skate Park, Take Over Fest and Your Name Here, it is evident that Heart of Glass has been able with varying degrees of success, to develop projects that can genuinely generate space for communicative exchange, capable of helping people to voice complex ideas, and to hear, ask and respond to difficult questions. The hope is that its approach will contribute to the re-constitution of civic life in St Helens through art and culture, which is the long-term aim of Heart of Glass.

Durational 'knowledge-forming' practice

The ten-year plan written by Heart of Glass in 2016 is, as artist Heather Peak Morison argued in an interview²⁴, a commitment to an action research project, through which the programme is making a 'long-term study of St Helens which is carried out by artists working with communities.' Because social practice is regarded by Heart of Glass as a 'knowledge-forming discipline' (Jellinek 2013), taken on through shared explorations, it needs to ensure that the learning from individual projects is consolidated. Clarity of philosophy and purpose must be accompanied by an equal commitment to follow the work as it emerges. Hence, Mark Storer's project, as well as the work of idle women and the Skate Park project, all place emphasis on leaving things open for longer periods of time through which uncertain possibilities can unfold (O'Neill and Doherty 2011).

These durational practices will trace over the long term whether there is a shift in the cultural imaginary of the town, and development of cultural capital. For example, Claire Weetman's work, which is less overtly political than that of Scottee, probes the taken for granted in quieter and more intimate ways. The durational approach in projects such as these offers spaces for the contemplation of what might be tacitly known, but not yet conceived, or brought into explicit awareness – or, what we might call, the 'unthought known' (Bollas 1987) – which remains tacit until a space of expression enables it to configure in cultural life.

²⁴ Evaluation interview 22nd May 2017

Over the next 10 years we will see how artistic experiences are implicated in what Raymond Williams called ‘structures of feeling’ in the town (1977). These arise in the gap that exists between overt political and social discourse and the potential awareness of social groups and communities. It is a useful way of thinking about aesthetic expressions of shared public affect. For example, Mark Storor’s 12-year residency, is providing a form for feeling, which helps to bring affective material into public awareness through the cultural forms it generates.

Pressures of austerity

Starting in 2013, the CPP programme was developing just as the cuts initiated by the coalition government had started to take effect. And, at the time of writing, £55 million of cuts to arts funding available through the National Lottery were announced as a result of reduced lottery revenues. This context has put pressure on ACE and Heart of Glass to demonstrate that the investment in CPP has been worthwhile.

At the annual CPP conference held in Doncaster in 2017, Holly Donagh from A New Direction (independent research and evaluation consultants appointed by ACE) opened the event by describing how CPP had begun to invert the existing pyramid of arts involvement in the areas in which it was operating. The story applied to this was that CPP was now successfully engaging many people who had never engaged with the arts before. However, when viewed psychosocially, there might be a problem with this way of viewing the effectiveness of CPP, not least because it seems to involve an approach that seeks measurable impacts, especially in terms of audience numbers. The concern to make sure that money is well spent might also be risk averse. Prioritising the metrics of involvement as a mark of achievement might be seen as a defence against the anxiety that comes through feelings of pressure and insecurity about whether value will be recognised and fears for the limits of the public purse. Indeed, psychosocially speaking, this may not be dissimilar to the measuring of students through exam results in a school and Mark Storor’s opposite insistence on creativity, art, spontaneity and the risk-taking of process, experience and research.

Splitting off those who take up art in places like St Helens from mainstream arts attenders - as captured in the inverted pyramid - may end up being counterproductive and the metaphor posits a rather simplistic ‘person good/environment bad’ way of thinking about the problems of arts involvement in areas like St Helens (Hoggett, 2008). Also, the concern to quantify involvement might implicitly convey a sense that the populace of areas such as St Helens are seen as objects of concern, in which the role of CPP is to make things better through the delivery of culture (Bishop, 2012). In contrast, the Heart of Glass programme sees the populace of St Helens as people who experience things, and who need to be given time, respect, voice and understanding. And, critically, and in distinct contrast to the metrics of involvement, convey explicit interest in their subjectivity and inner worlds, seeking to activate the personal and cultural resources that they bring and reinforcing a productive model of engagement. In support of this approach, the Principal of Rainford High Technology College, was able to acknowledge at interview that despite the costs of bringing in an artist into a school, such as Mark Storor, with no obviously measurable outcome, it was worth the investment if it only profoundly affected only one or two students.

4.3 SUSTAINABLE EFFECTS OF THE HEART OF GLASS PROGRAMME

Questions of value

Some years ago the late Baroness Tessa Jowell described the need to move beyond targets in assessing the value of culture, arguing the need for a more complex understanding of arts engagement which addressed the intrinsic value of the experience and which related it to the subjective experience of culture (Jowell, 2004). Intrinsic cultural values, she said, enable the attribution of meaning, and account for personal enjoyment and the existential significance of artworks. Such ideas have been taken up recently by Crossick and Kaszynska (2016) in the Arts and Humanities Research Council’s (AHRC) Cultural Value Project. In the introduction to the report they foreground the significance of ‘experience’ to the value of culture, suggesting:

...we need to begin by looking at the actual experience of culture and the arts rather than the ancillary effects of this experience. ...The value begins there, with something fundamental and irreducible.

We have been able to identify with some clarity in our evaluation of Heart of Glass, the elements of actual experience - a sense of place, time and connection with St Helens, as well as in some cases the wider world. It is clear that Heart of Glass has helped to build partnerships, networks and relationships founded on the pleasures and meanings of shared cultural experience. This is of interest, because, although it does not specifically address culture, there is a considerable body of research and scholarship (for example, Wilkinson 2005 and Putnam 2000) that alerts us to the positive health and wellbeing effects of social capital, community connectivity and solidarity.

Here our focus is on cultural experience and what people do as a result of this experience, and it is clear that many people who have taken part in Heart of Glass projects have been prompted to do new things either on their own or with other people. For example, the Grey Ladies, which emerged out of Haunted Furnace (one element of Take Over Fest), decided to look for a new project to undertake together with Heart of Glass. A group of young women gained confidence in their own creativity and in some cases increased their ambition and desire to participate in similar projects in the future, perhaps independently or by going to college. One of the men who took part in Mark Storer's project has begun for the first time to see himself as an artist and has successfully bid for funding through round five of the Prototype Projects. Elsewhere, we have seen numerous examples of the ways in which involvement in meaningful artistic and cultural production can open out new forms of expression and conversation (Roy and Prest, 2015). For example, 2020 Vision has set in motion imaginative processes in individuals and communities that have allowed people to establish new connections, to imagine how things might be changed in their community and even in some cases to reconsider their lives and situations.

Your Name Here allowed large numbers of people to imagine and document distinctive lives, interests and histories of the town. The project generated stories of people who had given to their communities in ways that had been forgotten, tributes to loved ones, memorials for local sportswomen whose achievements have been overlooked, and people who nominated themselves for very different reasons. The process of selecting the final winner allowed contributions to be aired, compared and contested, stimulating conversations about place, space, identity and public recognition. Vera Page, the eventual winner, presented a story which was highly idiosyncratic, but which resonated with many people. It was a story that involved revisiting the hurts of the past in order to move forward and as such conveyed something important about the town, which is also looking to come to terms with its past and envisage a new future. One of the main achievements of Your Name Here has been to unearth a sense of cultural capital in the town, because as Patrick Fox put it,

It announced the presence of the programme creatively and explored mass participation in an arts project in a way that felt real. The project combined activation and acceptance and the 500 nominations gave us a portrait of the town, not one based on the ACE monikers from the Active People survey, or health stats, but one recognisable to us and the town, one with a humanity that is absent in the statistics. We could have worked with those stories for the next 10 years.

The project generated public involvement in a whole set of questions about recognition and public value among a significant number of people, as well as providing a test bed for a strategic partnership with the town council. The legacy of this project was in creating a space for public storytelling across generations, which a very large number of people across St Helens engaged with. Also, the public voicing and recognition of private experience generated in this project, helped to ensure that the social problems and issues of inequality addressed within it could be seen as part of the material situation of St Helens, and not 'rendered cosmetic – and individual' (Bishop, 2012: 25).

Sector development – critical dialogue and development

In practical terms, the activities that support the locally discernible effects on sector development are most easily visible in the five rounds of the Prototype Projects (four of which are the subject of detailed case studies in section 3), as well as through the delivery of a series of master classes over the initial three years of the programme. The broader sector level effects are seen through the contribution of Heart of Glass to the development of The Faculty of Social Arts Practice (The Faculty). These effects overlap in the annual conferences - held in 2016 and 2017 – in which local partners and artists are brought together with national thinkers and artists. The WithForAbout Conferences are an opportunity to make contributions to the critical dialogue about social practice. The links between the local and the broader context were most visible in the conference in 2016, at which a series of locally commissioned artists presented their work.

From a research point of view, it's important to note that, of the things listed here, only the Prototype Projects have been addressed in any detail in this research. However, the research team did attend the conferences hosted in 2016 and 2017 and have read material published by Heart of Glass on The Faculty.

The idea for The Faculty developed as a result of a number of conversations between four CPP programmes in the north: Heart of Glass (St Helens), SuperSlowWay (Pennine Lancashire), LeftCoast (Blackpool and Wyre) and Creative Scene (North Kirklees), along with Chrissie Tiller, previous director of the MA in Participatory and Community Arts at Goldsmiths for twelve years, and Kerry Morrison and William Titley from In Situ, an organisation based in Pendle. These discussions raised concerns about a number of issues including: a lack of diversity and access to arts courses within higher education; seeking to develop a learning model for social practice that is a metaphor for the work itself: inclusive, experiential, non-hierarchical and collaborative.

In many ways the Faculty, then, is about creating a space where meaningful action/research into social arts practice can take place: a space to create a community of practice.
(Tiller and Fox, 2016)

The Faculty was led by Chrissie Tiller and In Situ, and the course included a series of residential weekends, online distance learning tutorials, seminars, discussions and assignments, which can be responded to in any medium.

Taken together, we see how these activities support the Heart of Glass move to becoming a National Portfolio Organisation (NPO), and its commitment to be at the forefront of thinking and practice experimentation and development in social engaged arts. Hence, the programme recognised the distinctiveness of the skill base for collaborative social arts practice and its need for further development. Its aim is to create opportunities for shared forms of learning locally, regionally and nationally.

Cultural citizenship

The concept of cultural citizenship might help us to understand why the philosophy and approach of Heart of Glass is making such a difference. Claims to citizenship must be negotiated through social and civic spaces (agora), hence an absence of such fora, or an inability to access them - for whatever reason - seriously diminishes one's ability to identify as a citizen, claim rights and to affect change (Pakulski, 1997). As Bauman (2000) suggests, 'the agora is that public/private place in which solutions are sought, negotiated and agreed for private troubles' (Bauman, 2000: 39).

Developing cultural citizenship is predicated on being able to nourish the constituents of citizenship within the lives of individuals and communities in order that people can make interventions in the public sphere (Crossley, 2001). The question becomes, what allows people to feel able to make such interventions, rather than simply to observe, or stand by, as others act around them, or, on their behalf? One way that this was done in the 2020 Vision project – with the young free runners - was to translate the energy of the young people from its uncontained expression in the streets to its

culturally contained expression for the community within the community centre. Stephen Frosh (2001) argues for a psychosocial understanding of these processes, posing a series of questions about the ways in which we relate to the communities in which we live:

Upon what is citizenship based? ... how does one imagine oneself in connection with a community, a culture, or even a nation? What is it that allows one to feel part of a social order, to take up 'citizenship', neither excluded nor excluding oneself? What emotions and fantasies insert themselves into the process of being so that citizenship is not an abstract notion, another fashionable academic category about to dissolve, but instead contains something material and 'real' inside it? If the concept of citizenship is to be more than a simple totting up of rights and duties, it needs to embrace this space of feeling and fantasy, this realm of the subjective ... To be a citizen, one not only needs to formally belong somewhere; one has to feel that this belonging is real.
(Stephen Frosh, 2001: 62)

What Frosh draws attention to are the transactions between people that give citizenship its personal resonance and through which the work of Heart of Glass is helping to reanimate the civic life of St Helens. The space of feeling and fantasy is the third space of cultural creativity we have referred to, and the idea that it is central to a sense of belonging shows that it is also implicated in the idea of a public sphere. In practice this means that the role of Heart of Glass is to help people find a voice with which to express the 'inner' life of the town, what it feels like for individuals to be to be part of it, and how the inhabitants of St Helens can imagine a future in a public space they can share.

The projects we have looked at have explored a wide range of personal, community and social issues including ageing, growing up, LGBTQ issues, seeking asylum, intergenerational learning, dementia, impending death, health inequalities, mental health, residential care, regeneration and the environment. Of course, there are other essential forms of public involvement and engagement – such as the work being undertaken by the town council around regeneration and securing financial independence post-austerity. These often engage the rational thinking subject in pursuit of specified objectives. By contrast, immersion in the work of Heart of Glass seeks to extend the capacity of individuals and communities to explore and express hitherto unarticulated lifeworlds and situations in ways which preserve their vitality and help them shape and express their aspirations.

Many people we have interviewed have described how they have 'found a voice' and even had it heard by others in their communities and elsewhere, using words such as 'authenticity' to describe what they have taken from the experience of taking part in projects. In this way, projects such as Before I Die and In My Place evoked in people a sensuous appreciation of their situations and surroundings and an embodied sense of connection with the cultural life of the town. This was often valued most strongly by those who had previously felt isolated or disconnected for different reasons. This animation, or reanimation, of the links between individuals, communities and the town through the cultural field is a valuable way in which the Heart of Glass programme contributes to a reimagining of St Helens. The art commissioned and co-commissioned by Heart of Glass has stimulated reimaginings of St Helens, and allowed the articulation of new stories, which counter and deconstruct existing stories about selves, communities and others. The value of Heart of Glass being present in the long term is that these might be held and transferred into the future. Imaginative resources such as these nourish the ability to conceive how things might be different and can ultimately support local processes of regeneration, without being merged or folded into them.



Section 5

Conclusions

Heart of Glass has commissioned artists capable of making art and culture out of what is available locally, drawing on existing sources of energy and opportunity, as well as bringing in new ideas and forms of creativity in order to co-create previously unimagined cultural expressions with people in the town. It is this commitment of the programme to seeing collaborative social practice as an arts-based inquiry in St Helens, taken on through shared artist–community explorations, that has allowed it to ensure that the learning from individual projects is grown, consolidated and shared. Heart of Glass has demonstrated an exemplary commitment to CPP's action research imperative, which has been used to enhance programme development, as well as social and artistic outcomes.

The 10-year plan written by Heart of Glass in 2016, acknowledges the local context it is working in, as well as conveying a clear philosophical basis. Realised mainly through forms of dialogic practice, the first three years' work has enabled Heart of Glass to develop a mature approach to arts programming, as recognised by its successful application to become an NPO announced in June 2017.

The artists commissioned by Heart of Glass have had an important role in opening up third spaces. Their artworks have helped people think and act in the world without the need for unnecessary certainty so that the pleasures of shared discovery can unfold. This involves a willingness to accommodate ambiguity and uncertainty, and for communities and partners, to step into the unknown.

We have documented through examples, the Heart of Glass conception of the producer role, and very clear commitment to taking on projects as shared concerns with artists, communities and partners. This approach to the producer role significantly supports the possibility of creating an authentic third space, attending carefully to the process that constitutes the work, and providing a high level of support for the artist, the community, the audience and any other partners. Heart of Glass affirms that the people of St Helens already possess the creative resources needed to collaborate and co-produce artworks – the role of the producers

is to occupy the space in-between the artist, the community and the partners and to 'mediate trust', in order for artistic inquiries to flourish and foster journeys into the unexplored territory.

Throughout the report we discuss examples of the ways in which Heart of Glass embodies a model of democratic empowerment which recognises the distinctive contributions of artists, communities, producers, partners, audiences and the programme, in the understanding that relationships don't need to be symmetrical in order to be equal. In this way, artist expertise is legitimised, seen and understood as a form of 'reflexive' practice' which supports project and programme objectives. Again, the active involvement of producers allows both the artist and the community collaborators to be recognised as 'inquiring agents' who are both knowing and unknowing. It is in this shared space of unknowing that a potential for new knowledge emerges through the work people do together.

There is considerable debate about what forms of impact are desirable from programmes such as Heart of Glass. These are more pressing given the level of Arts Council England funding invested in the CPP programme nationally, at a time in which many local authorities, including St Helens, feel obliged to withdraw investment from the arts through traditional funding models. We argue that although Heart of Glass has indeed successfully developed new audiences in St Helens, its most significant achievements cannot be measured in terms of numbers, but by quality of experience and people's renewed relationship to the place where they live, and with one another. The St Helens Council adoption of a 'culturally centred' strategy for the town reflects an awareness that Heart of Glass is making an important contribution to developing cultural citizenship. The projects we have looked at have involved a very broad cross section of people, enabling them to feel part of a public sphere, and in this way reanimating and reappropriating the civic life of the town.

This is how the programme itself can become an expert 'in the terrain' of St Helens, as well as the terrain of social and collaborative practice. A fine-grained knowledge of St Helens is developing in the passage from project to project. It is less a case of

how *much* Heart of Glass now knows of the town and its culture but how *well* it knows the town and its culture. This embedded learning can feed into wider strategic processes involving the council, planners, developers and other local, regional, national and international partners.

The transition to NPO status will bring both opportunity and risk. The opportunity comes from stable funding and a sector belief in the significance of the model of work Heart of Glass is developing. Risk comes from the danger that premature formalisation and documentation of its work could divert it from the focus on context, philosophy and practices, which constitute it. We recommend the organisation 'hold its nerve' in this regard, and fulfils the 10-year strategy that supports this.

Section 6

Appendicies

APPENDIX 1 METHODOLOGY

Overall research design

Much recent research into public art has been based on qualitative or quantitative social science based methodologies, which are better at measuring audience access, attendance, segmentation and demographics or instrumental impacts rather than artistic experience. The Psychosocial Research Unit brings together researchers with backgrounds in both the Arts and Humanities and the Social Sciences and has worked intensively on methodological development for the cultural sector. This work has been funded by research councils, Arts Council England, foundations and major charitable trusts and local authorities (e.g. ESRC, AHRC, Gulbenkian and Northern Rock Foundations, Wellcome Trust, Manchester City Council, Bristol City Council) tested and refined in empirical projects, and published in peer-reviewed journals. Hence, we have the ability to combine innovation with recognised rigour. Our projects have allowed an understanding of the contribution that the arts can make to individuals, communities, localities and regions, adapting our methods so they are fit for the particular artistic and social objects of study. We regard this as essential if we are to gauge the distinctive effects of an artwork, project or programme.

In accessing the stories of audiences and participants we follow key guiding principles, which have informed the methodological development work of the Psychosocial Research Unit within the arts and cultural sector over the last 15 years. The research questions and objectives for this research, alongside Heart of Glass' own objectives, imply the need for methods capable of capturing the process of realising different projects as well as understanding people's initial response to them and elucidating any longer term effects. We have developed an approach in which findings from research activity (e.g. good practice, learning moments, and effective strategies) were fed back iteratively in order to support learning. We have also, where relevant, positioned the projects undertaken in St Helens in relation to other similar

examples, in order to consider elements of learning which are context specific and those which are generalisable regionally and/or nationally.

A Psychosocial approach

Individuals bring to their experience of a public artwork, event or process a personal life history and disposition but this is formed within a social and cultural context they share with others and mediated through networks, communities and organisations – in this case the Heart of Glass programme. Furthermore the existence of a programme of this nature raises societal questions that bear on investment and cultural policy, about who we imagine ourselves to be and how we wish to live. We therefore developed a psychosocial approach which combined methods directed at individual artists, participants and stakeholders with group based data collection where responses to the programme could emerge in a shared setting, in dialogue with others. Hence, we put the stories of participants at the centre of the study while attempting to grasp how these different dimensions of the programme interacted, and to what effect.

The multi-level analysis attempts to grasp the complex inter-connection between projects people participated in, their own networks (both temporary – possibly project based - and sustained – family, friends, place based) which have shaped and driven them, and the wider local, regional, national and global context of which they are a part. By using these different lenses we have been able to show not only how different approaches were developed and implemented from different perspectives, but also whether and how they elicited change in individuals and communities of interest. As a result, the research took as its focal point of enquiry the interfaces between the specific projects and the individuals and wider communities who have taken part. This has allowed an understanding of the interaction between various components of the Heart of Glass approach rather than an exclusive focus on outcomes.

Third space

In our previous work (Froggett et al. 2011) we have illustrated the concept of ‘third space’ and its importance in characterising the models of practice in socially engaged arts projects. What is distinctive about the third space of the artwork is that on entering its ambit, preconceptions about others who exist outside of this space are put aside in favour of an ability to reach out and see where the new encounter may lead. In the words of D.W. Winnicott (1971) it is the space where notions of ‘me’ and ‘not-me’ are suspended, a space full of potential in which one can discover for oneself what was there to be found, whether in the shape of other people, or places, or things. In the pleasure of discovery one can then form relationships that have a particular vitality, by virtue of the fact that they involve an encounter with otherness that also surprises or challenges.

We exemplify this idea through the case studies in this report, through which we define it as a space that an artwork, conceived as a social practice, is able to open up in a variety of ways: across the whole town (e.g. Your Name Here – Joshua Sofaer); within and between communities (e.g. Rainford High Technology College – Mark Storer); between a community, its context and an artist (e.g. 2020 Vision – Sophie Mahon); or between a community, the police, and the local authority (e.g. The Skate Park Project – Studio Morison).

The artworks that make up the Heart of Glass programme take a myriad of forms and in the report we note examples which involve: sharing stories; engaging in dialogue; writing, photographing, drawing, parkour, walking or singing together; making things; provoking insight about cultural traditions and barriers; working together on a production of new civic spaces; sharing a sense of humour that pushes at the boundaries of convention and forces the emergence of different perspectives; drawing attention to the ways in which people use and move through the physical environment of the town; and realising high-quality artwork in domestic spaces.

In this report we use the concept of third space to explore the generative potential of actual environments, to ephemeral and relational situations that are created between people, for example in proposing someone’s life, name and story for the renaming of a public park.

Focus on audience and artist experience combined with critical analysis

We combine experience near research techniques with the critical distance required to understand the nature of arts experience from the inside and the outside. Hence, in some cases we aim for a close up, fine-grained appreciation of how people work together to produce art, or how a particular artist embeds her work in a local context. We then take a ‘step back’ to assess the effects on a number of factors such as relationships, identities, aspirations, skills and solidarities. We have adapted methods of panel analysis from British and Continental traditions to ensure that the tension between ‘nearness to’ and ‘distance from’ our object of study is maintained. This enables us to keep in mind what is particular about elements of an arts programme, while assessing and comparing its effects on intended audiences and drawing out the implications for decision-makers.

Case based approach to understanding forms of artistic production and reception

We have considered each artwork process and event as a complex case that develops through artistic intention, design, commissioning and production to the critical point where people interact with it and may be changed by it and its ongoing effects for individuals and community. Furthermore these complex cases take place in a cultural context of the local everyday, while invoking the interests and judgements of different stakeholders. We have worked with Heart of Glass to identify and study key cases, which we have used to furnish rich data on a range of activities and their intended and unintended effects. In the final phase of analysis we have worked across the cases to identify key issues for cultural programming, related to type of activity and short and longer-term outcomes.

Short and longer-term perspectives on changes brought about by Heart of Glass

Although the time frame and resource allocation for this research did not permit a systematic longitudinal approach, questions of sustainable effects remained important. We have developed protocols of interpretation that are sensitive to the effects of arts processes on the social imagination.

These can also be inferred from perceptions of stakeholders such as community representatives, businesses, local educational and cultural institutions, and the local authority.

METHODS

Data collection and fieldwork

Our case based approach entails a selection of methods (for use individually or in combination) in ways which can be tailored to specific events, projects or processes being studied. A one-off spectacle involving hundreds of people calls for a different set of methods, from a small process-based and co-created project. The particular methods and their objectives that we feel would be of value in addressing the objectives of this research are set out below. However, we developed a plan for data collection prospectively in order that the specific approaches could be used for each project and they were discussed and agreed in consultation.

Observation, participant observation and observant participation

Method

Researchers trained in ethnographic observation and visual methods spent periods ranging between one hour to entire days, observing the process of planning, developing, realising and/or delivering specific projects. The approach to observation and its duration depended on the nature and timescales of specific projects.

Objectives related to this project

- To gain an understanding of the operation of projects and events with a particular focus on participation and engagement, and artistic process and outcome.
- To record observational data by whatever means appropriate (observational notes, photography, digital audio and/or video recordings) for subsequent interpretive panel analysis, with particular attention to the interactions of participants with each other and with the artworks.

Visual Matrix

Method

The visual matrix (Froggett et al 2014) uses a group-based process of reflection in a public setting and is led by imagery and visualisation. It is highly participatory and usually enjoyable. Members of the matrix themselves begin the process of analysis, leading to findings that are co-produced. If convened for specific groups, it is highly sensitive to group specific interactions with an artwork and the ways in which it stimulates the social imagination. It is designed to facilitate expression of responses that people would otherwise find difficult to express. It also overcomes the well-known difficulty of group-based methods whereby the most powerful voices dominate. A visual matrix takes about two hours to deliver and is then subject to panel analysis.

Objectives related to this project

- To understand the reception and experience of an artwork by the different sections of the public aesthetically, emotionally and cognitively
- To provide an arts-based evaluation method where public responses to an artwork are expressed in a social setting, in interaction with others, thus taking into account the social conditions under which art is normally accessed and discussed.

Semi-structured and open-ended interviews with key respondents

Method

Topic-specific semi-structured and open-ended interviews were conducted with the artists and other key stakeholders. Some of these were impromptu, opportunistic, occasioned by specific experiences and recorded in note form, while others were oriented to wider institutional functions such as strategic policy and planning. These can be of various lengths depending on the reason for use.

Objectives related to this project

- To clarify areas of organisational/project functioning and the roles and views of individuals located differently within them
- To clarify responses to specific forms of arts practice as they arise.

Rapid capture interviews

Method

These short impromptu interviews were carried out on the spot at public events, or without pre-arrangement in public locations. They were employed at a range of events where audience members could be accessed immediately after engaging with an artwork, and conducted in relatively large numbers. This ensured a wide coverage as a complement to more intensive forms of interviewing, thereby multiplying the voices that are heard. Both structured and narrative pointed formats were used.

Objectives related to this project

- To capture spontaneous and unrehearsed audience responses to artworks.
- To achieve extensive interview coverage without pre-selection or self-selection of respondents.
- To triangulate findings with the more intensive-interview methods used in the study.

Ethics

The research plans and methods for this project were reviewed and approved by the University of Central Lancashire's Psychology and Social Work Ethics Committee. All potential participants were provided with information about the focus of the study, details of the bounds of confidentiality and information about data protection in advance of involvement in research. Verbal consent was taken in all cases.

Project related data

The research undertaken in St Helens to date has focused on the following projects and briefly taken the following forms:

- **The Prototype Projects** – observation of the selection process, designed a pro-forma for the collection of data at the stages of individual projects and have interviewed a series of awardees who have completed projects. Interviews with four award holders, and the two lead producers. We also completed a media analysis.
- **Silent Night** – we conducted photo-ethnography at the event, interviewed Heart of Glass staff about the project and conducted ad hoc interviews with people at the event.
- **Brass Calls** – we conducted photo-ethnography at the event, interviewed members of the band and the artists.
- **Your Name Here** – we interviewed the artist, looked at the proposals and interviewed staff from Heart of Glass. We also completed a media analysis.
- **Take Over Fest** – we undertook photo-ethnography and ad hoc interviews at a series of events (e.g. Haunted Furnace, Camp, Kids Rave, Hunt and Darton Café). We also undertook group-based work with the young women who took part in Haunted Furnace, conducted repeat interviews with Scottee as well as interviews with staff from Heart of Glass. We also conducted a media analysis.
- **Through the Looking Glass** – photo-ethnography and ad hoc interviews at a series of events (e.g. A Song for St Helens, Pedigree Chums, Manifestoval, This Will Never Happen).
- **In Your Place** – we undertook photo-ethnography at one event.
- **Through The Looking Glass** - photo-ethnography at: Marcia Farquar – A Song for St Helens, This Will Never Happen and Manifestoval.
- **Mark Storer – Rainford High** – Artist interview, interviews with Principal and Head of Art, Design and Photography, ad hoc interviews of staff, visual matrix with students, non-participant observations.
- **2020 Vision** – Artist interview, interview with free runner tutor, photo-ethnography and ad hoc interviews at events, group-based discussion.
- **Skate Park project – Studio Morison** – Artist interview, ethnographic observation of meetings and skate park visit, informal interviews with skaters, and ethnographic observation of charrette.
- **Knees Up - Eggs Collective** - Artist interview, ethnographic observation of artist-led evaluation meetings and interviews with participants.
- **Invisible City** – Gabrielle Jenks Producer AND, and Michelle Brown - Artist interview, ethnographic observation of artist performance and subsequent film shows.
- **Before I Die** – Photo-ethnographic observation

APPENDIX 2

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APPENDIX 3

IMAGE CREDITS

All images by Stephen King unless otherwise stated.

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Pg. 6, Image from Baa Baa Baric: Have You Any Pull?, Mark Storor

Pg. 9, Image from Baa Baa Baric: Have You Any Pull?, Mark Storor

Pg. 14, Top Image from The Invisible City

Pg. 14, Bottom image from Bliss Park, Heather and Ivan Morison

Pg. 16, Image from Baa Baa Baric: Have You Any Pull?, Mark Storor

Pg. 27, Image from Baa Baa Baric: Have You Any Pull?, Mark Storor

Pg. 39, Image from Haunted Furnace, Marisa Carnesky

Pg. 50, Image from For The Record, Lowri Evans

Pg. 69, Image from And, On That Note, Rhona Byrne

Pg. 72, Image from Brass Call, French & Mottershead with The Haydock Band

Pg. 74, Image supplied by Live Art Development Agency

Pg. 76, Image from A Right St Helens Knees Up, Eggs Collective

Pg. 80, Image from In My Place with The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra

Pg. 81, Image from 2020 Vision, Sophie Mahon

Pg. 82, Image from Before I Die, Candy Chang

Pg. 83, Image from With For About Conference 2017

Pg. 84, Image from Baa Baa Baric: Have You Any Pull?, Mark Storor

Pg. 98, Image from Now Thus, Now Thus, Michelle Browne

