

## ***'Shapes of Water, Sounds of Hope', Lancashire, 2015-2017***

### **WHAT**

*Shapes of Water, Sounds of Hope* (2016) was a participatory artwork commissioned by Super Slow Way, and produced by artist Suzanne Lacy and collective In-Situ. Set in the small former mill town of Brierfield in Pendle, Lancashire, the project explored the history of the area, its Smith & Nephew Mill, and the different vocal traditions that exist here. The project was inspired by the centuries-old Shape Note and Sufi chanting: the first has its roots in Lancashire, and the second originated in the Middle East yet is practised by many Pendle residents. Over the course of 18 months, Lacy and In-Situ arranged community meetings, meals and singing sessions. The project culminated in a 500-strong community banquet at Smith & Nephew Mill, during which the film *The Circle & The Square* was made. Featuring interviews with former mill workers and their families alongside residents performing Shape Note and Sufi chanting, the film was premiered at the mill in September 2017 and exhibited at Biennale of Sydney in 2018.

### **WHO**

[Suzanne Lacy](#) is a pioneer in socially engaged and public performance art. Her installations, videos, and performances deal with sexual violence, rural and urban poverty, incarceration, labour and aging. Lacy's large-scale projects span the globe, including England, Colombia, Ecuador, Spain, Ireland and the U.S. Also known for her writing including *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* and *Leaving Art: Writings on Performance, Politics, and Publics, 1974-2007*, Lacy is a professor at the Roski School of Art and Design at the University of Southern California.



*Shapes of Water, Sounds of Hope, 2015-2017, Pendle. With artist Suzanne Lacy and partners In-Situ and Building Bridges Pendle. Photography by Graham Kay.*



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**In-Situ** are an interdisciplinary organisation based in Pendle, working between arts practice, community engagement and ecology. Founded in 2012, they form long term relationships with local residents to explore how creative practices can facilitate community, and create societal and environmental, interdisciplinary and intercultural dialogues. Their aim is to bring about social and environmental change in Pendle, addressing inequalities, lack of provision and the need to support creative development and sustainable futures. Their work takes place in many settings including libraries and supermarkets, Pendle Hill and surrounding villages, in homes and schools, on pavements and in parks.

**Super Slow Way** is an arts programme in Pennine Lancashire shaped by the diverse communities living along the Leeds & Liverpool Canal, and working alongside a wide range of local, national and international artists. Its vision is for the canal to become a vehicle for bringing communities together on a waterway which everyone shares, exploring how radical and ambitious art programming by the people of Pennine Lancashire can develop creativity, strength and connectedness across and within communities. Super Slow Way is part of Arts Council England's *Creative People and Places* programme and hosted by Canal & River Trust.

## WHERE

Brierfield, Pendle, Lancashire

## WHY

The project sought to begin to transform relations between the local white and South Asian communities who are mainly of Pakistani heritage, and to rekindle a connection with the local textile-based industrial heritage. Due to the local loss of industry and therefore common sites of employment, communities were living side-by-side with little positive communication or civic engagement in the cultural regeneration of the area.

## IMPACT

- Acknowledging barriers to inter-community exchange created a new resolve to find spaces and opportunities for collaboration and sociability.
- Local communities engaged in the cultural regeneration of the area by co-creating an artistic project.
- The project raised mutual confidence and cross-cultural understanding.

## IMPACT INDICATORS

- *Shapes of Water, Sounds of Hope* engaged diverse communities in and around Brierfield, Lancashire. More than 80 people attended each of the large meetings that shaped the project, and its concluding film was created with the participation of over 500 local residents.
- Over fifty local people were directly involved in creating *The Circle and the Square* via a process of community collaboration. The work presented a conversational community as a form of high art, formed an oral history record of Brierfield Mill before it was redeveloped for future use, and has since been exhibited internationally as well as existing as a co-created publication.

*"We ask together: how does this empty mill serve as a transitional space for reflection and questioning? How can a privatised space be a meaningful stage for collective action toward a revitalised public commons?"*

- SUZANNE LACY