

The Floating Cinema Documentary Transcript

0:00 Audio

[Music]

0:31 Emma Underhill

The *Portavilion* programme which launched in 2008. It's really about commissioning contemporary artists and architects to create temporary structures for parks, green spaces, public spaces. And *The Floating Cinema* is the sixth project in that series. The project was actually commissioned by the Olympic Delivery Authority and it's been funded by the Arts Council England. And we were very much connected into the Create 2011 Festival and looking at the Olympic Park, and what really kind of connected the outside to the inside were the canals, which are the sorts of arteries that run through the centre of the park. So that's really where the idea of *The Floating Cinema* came from.

1:18 Sarah Weir

I've never been here tonight where I'm sitting now, I've lived in London all my life, and that the fact that you have this hidden river, I love that and integrating that with film footage, with archive footage, a new film, local filmmakers, young people, professionals, and also, they seem to have met pretty much everyone that lives on the river now. Who, as I say, can't be part of the Olympic Park yet, but we hope that post-games, projects like this will encourage people to think that this park is for all of us. And we're going to be here - we're going to be there after the games.

2:06 Emma Underhill

But the project really has become a collaboration with many other partners as well and also individuals. So, every event that we've done has been connected into different kinds of initiatives such as the Shoreditch Festival, or the Hackney Wicked Festival, and the Angel Canal Festival, but vital sort of part of the kind of collaboration. And this has really been a collaboration of lots of different partners was the involvement of Somewhere - Nina Pope and Karen Guthrie. And we invited them initially to look at the sort of programming of the cinema space, but their role has become much, much bigger than that.

2:42 Nina Pope

We showed a lot of work that we were aware of made by artists in the area prior to the Olympics and during the changes. We commissioned new work to kind of talk very directly about that that was part of the reason for taking people into the park. And then we looked for other content like Under the Cranes or Utopia London, which we felt talked about London more broadly, but was somehow very much linked to what we saw was happening around the park and around the area. But the boat would be.

3:12 Laura Harford

We've been running a whole variety of different events, tools, talks, workshops over the summer. So not only have we been doing sort of drop in open Thursdays, where we've screened films relating to the local area where we've been moored or working with different film festivals, for example, Eastern Film Festival. We've also done about three or four really large outdoor screenings, because of course, you can only fit a certain amount of people onboard the boat. So we really wanted to reach kind of as many different kinds of audiences as possible. Very successful one was at Three Mills in Bow, where we screened Fantastic Mr. Fox, which was made actually in Three Mills studios.

3:51 Audience Member

I'm really excited, I love it. It's my favourite. See this smile? Yeah. *[Laughter]*

3:57 Karen Guthrie

And actually being able to just spread the commissioning budget around getting new work made by other people. It was actually in a way a chance for us to meet quite a lot of people whose work we had admired for a long time. It was actually a highlight, wasn't it? Ian Sinclair is a writer that we both loved for many decades. And Richard Madely be the nature writer who's writing I love and was fantastic to get him to talk about the, you know, something in a way as every day as the vegetation in the East End of London, but he made it really magical, I think, for people that were on the boat.

4:31 Nina Pope

And we worked with the live art development agency to commission a new performance as well at Canary Wharf, which was really amazing to be in that very, very strange space. We took the boat along the Thames and came in through this enormous dock into that space. But there was some really nice juxtaposition

between this sort of very acoustic small performance with handbell ringers and somebody's singing unaccompanied on the boat and the sort of really dramatic surroundings of Canary Wharf and there's something very nice about our little boat, sort of very do like in this sort of huge surroundings.

5:04 Ian Giles

When I went to visit the boat during the proposal period, it made me really, really excited because the boat was so amazing and such a great colour and just kind of had a real kind of warmth about it. It was nice to make a piece of work where I perhaps didn't know who the audience was also know that I was going to show to a mixed audience, not necessarily always an art-going audience. So many public art projects are huge, and really, really accessible to the masses. And it's quite fun to also have something that was free, but also kind of unique and a bit of a treat.

5:35 Audience Member

It's lovely. It's really nice experience.

5:37 Audience Member

It's wonderful. I really think that more people should invest in ways to see art like that - it's a really great way to incentivise.

5:42 Emma Underhill

So we invited Studio Weave who are Hackney-based architects practice to work on the design of the structure for *The Floating Cinema*.

5:53 Maria Smith

We've been describing it a bit like a casserole, because it's so many elements, so many different parts that are all come together to make this one thing. So we have the existing boat and the refurbishment works to that just to sort of to make it canal worthy. Then we have things like sort of putting in a kitchen and a bathroom to make kind of inhabitable. We have the interior of the cinema which has involved a textile designer, Giorgio Bossen, who's made this curtains and upholstery for the seats that Simon Jones has made the flip up cinema seats, which are sort of like cinema seats, but also quite unusual because they point you diagonally so that you can fit 12 people in a very sort of intimate space. Then we've also got the path, which is in contrast to the very thin steel, quite utilitarian, sort of steel existing boat. It's a soft quilty is soft structure that creates a semi outdoor space and kind of

spill outside space. And also signpost the boat is something that's a little bit unusual.

6:54 Je Ahn

From very small technical problems like that boats certainly have a very thick hull that we have to modify in a certain way to play something to the AVS, like the battery requirement and how we're going to project in this small space to the licencing issues, though, which is like no, we can't have more than 12 people when it's moving so does that work has that advantage or disadvantage?

7:17 Laura Harford

It was a really interesting learning curve actually working on a boat project this summer because you sort of don't realise how different is to - it's not like being on the roads being the water waves is extremely different. Not only does the boat only travel at four miles per hour, so it's pretty slow. But also yeah, there's all sorts of other things to navigate including locks. Luckily, we worked closely with British Waterways to enable us to sort out things like moorings and all sorts of things like that. We also had some fantastic skippers, Hazel and Annie, who just a fountain of knowledge, who both worked on the waterways for a number of years.

7:56 Hazel Saunders

The boat was moored up, we were halfway through doing it up ourselves as a trip boat. Annie works that stretch of water anyway for British Waterways and the project people saw our boat moored half refurbished and asked Annie if we would be interested in letting them help finish it off for us and letting them use it for three months for their projects.

8:21 Annie Myers

I think what swung it for us was because a lot of what materials for internally and windows etc. it's all recycled materials.

8:30 Will Austin

The boating history in London is hundreds and hundreds of years old. I mean, we've got one of the oldest water mills, just a couple 100 metres up the way there. The infrastructure of the canals, fuelling industrial revolution, you know, it's a fantastic way of tapping into all of this history.

8:51 Jane Hall

Everyone who was involved in doing the boat, so Will, the guy who did the refurbishment, he lives on his own narrow boat. And the people who own the boat are going to use it in the future for a boat trip. So it's got this afterlife not just being a cinema. And it's been really interesting working in a constantly wet environment and accepting that's what boats are. So trying to make this kind of quiet, comfortable space where you have the watching feature like kind of versus constantly bobbing from side to side. What's really nice about it is that if wherever you're beside a canal, you feel like you're connected to the other canals in London. It's like it's one really strange, shaped space that you feel like community. Yeah.

9:35 Laura Harford

We've met lots of other boaters along the way which has been fantastic. So Lorraine who owns the sandwich barge, she has come to lots of our events and sold her delicious food and drinks. We've also had Melissa from the herbal barge. She's great, she's stationed up in Tottenham.

9:50 Nina Pope

And there's quite a big crossover between artists and filmmakers and boaters as it turns out, so we had these two nights, Pecha Kucha, nights on the boat where people who were from that community bought work along to show that was making progress or something they'd made about boating.

10:04 Mike Wells

I think the sort of sense of community that we've got is quite unusual. Yeah, we kind of live in each other's pockets really, in and out of each other's boats, and help each other out.

10:24 Audience Member

originally, people might have come here just not as a social not as a social space, they'd have come here because it's functional. Whereas it's lovely to have it used for something to do with people getting together, I suppose.

10:37 Audience Member

I feel like it's more about a journey and discovering new places in London. I feel like it gives you a very different perspective. One that's really unusual kind of opens your eyes to kind of discovered new parts of London that are not necessarily

Central, but bringing more to the outskirts and more interesting things are happening.

10:53 Lindsey Scannapieco

I love it. I think it's actually brilliant. I think that watching a film on the waterways and I think we're very contextual in the way that what they showcased the programme.

11:04 Hazel Saunders

I just think it's brilliant. I'm actually looking at it now. Yeah. And seeing sort of people queuing up to get on it. It's just absolutely wonderful, you know, really queuing up to get on it. I know?

11:14 Karen Guthrie

There's something about two words, floating and cinema, it inspires people and makes them smile and gives them this sort of evocative idea.