UP PROJECTS

What's the Point?

A case for art in the public domain

Contents

Custom House is Our House (2019), part of a series of artworks entitled *Making Space* by Jessie Brennan commissioned by UP Projects. Image by Thierry Bal.

Introduction by Emma Underhill, Founding Director, UP Projects

At UP Projects, we have always been interested in what happens when the work of artists meets with people in everyday public contexts, be that a street corner, park, housing estate, shopping centre, newspaper, website or social media platform. Since I founded UP Projects in 2002, public art has evolved significantly. Monuments, statues and landmark sculptures are making way for a more integrated approach with opportunities for artists to join design teams for urban developments, lead participatory projects that support positive social outcomes, or create temporary projects that leave little physical trace but have a long-lasting impact on the people that encountered them.

As public art curators and producers it is essential to consistently question our role, as well as evaluate our methodology when navigating the complexities and constantly shifting landscape of the public domain. *What's the Point? A Case for Art in the Public Domain* is an example of us doing just that. Whether this question is asked out of genuine interest or from a place of scepticism, it is a question that as public art curators and commissioners we are all too often asked. Therefore, what follows is a series of texts that lead - at least in part - towards an understanding of why we do what we do.

The texts featured in this publication are a mixture of interview transcripts, newly commissioned pieces of writing, and excerpts from longer texts written nearly 20 years ago that are still relevant today. Collectively they highlight how a question such as *'what's the point of working with artists to create new work for public spaces?'* cannot be answered with a simple or single response.

Through the voices of artists, architects, curators and neuroscientists, we present the multiple ways in which we can consider the presence and impact of art located in the public domain. Many of these contributors have also collaborated with us on the project examples that we have included and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their collaboration and contribution.

Working in public contexts can pose many challenges for artists, who, stepping outside the relative safety of their studios, are often required to perform a variety of roles ranging from listener, interpreter, negotiator, visionary and everything in between. Their success also relies upon the support, openness and willingness to take a risk from a range of stakeholders who may not ordinarily encounter the work or methodology of artists. When the conditions are created to enable artists to infiltrate, question and influence the design and evolution of our public realm, extraordinary things can happen, and better places can be created as a result.

Expanding Imagination: The Potential of Art in the Everyday

Moira Lascelles, Deputy Director, UP Projects interviews Justine Ludwig, Executive Director, Creative Time

ML—What do you think happens when art is placed beyond the walls of the gallery in the public domain?

JL—When you are working in the public sphere you are inserting art into the continuous rhythm of people's lives. So, when located beyond the white cube – where encounters with art are intentional and expected, given the space – the work instead takes hold in the everyday.

The other aspect of placing art within the public realm is that it calls for a much more nuanced understanding of audiences and communities. The work really has to reflect and respond to the site in which it is situated. It calls for a different kind of communal buy-in and collaboration between the artist, site and audience. This participation changes the way that people process and respond to art and also augments their sense of ownership and involvement with the work as a whole.

As someone who has been based in different parts of the United States throughout their career, I would say that there are different kinds of art-goers and different kinds of public art. What I find as a common through-line however is that public art can offer an experience of wonder or something unexpected – creating moments of rupture, joy and reflection.

ML—Your projects have often looked at tackling tough issues that our society faces today. Why do you think art is so powerful in raising awareness and bringing about change?

JL—Art has the ability to challenge the way we look at the world and even engender different perspectives. Often, when dealing specifically with the presentation of challenging social justice issues, artists offer personal reflections. This entry point is a radically different approach to reading about these issues as news items. It allows us to engage with pressing issues in a deep and intimate manner that privileges personal perspectives.

Alternatively, artists can help us envisage the world of tomorrow, creating projects that serve as a dry run for what could lie ahead of us. The arts provide spaces that allow for expansive imagination. It is a strategy for facing not only our issues today, but also those that we will face in the future.

By way of a tangible example, perhaps I can speak to a project that wasn't formally a public art project, but was something that I worked on before I came to Creative Time. This was a project with Nadia Kaabi-Linke in Dallas, Texas titled *Walk The Line* as part of a solo exhibition by the same title. In the piece, community volunteers collectively walked the length of the border between Texas and Mexico within the confines of the exhibition – unravelling spools of thread in the process and wrapping them around two columns in the gallery. What began as an abstract line drawing in space slowly built up, over two months, to become a thick wall of thread.

Each of the individuals who volunteered had a very personal connection with issues of immigration, in some cases specifically between Mexico and the United States. The project became this powerful reflective moment – in some cases defiant, in others, healing. Participants had the opportunity to treat the walk as they wished, so their involvement could be personal; they could be very quiet and reflect inwardly or they could have the opportunity to speak with the general public. Therefore, it became an opportunity where individuals that were walking – maybe in honour of someone who had be deported or in celebration of their family history of immigrating to the United States – were able to have conversations with people in the community who maybe held radically different views on immigration or the potential of building a wall between the United States and Mexico. Therefore, the work ended up creating these deeply intimate and generative discussions.

I find that art and projects like Nadia's have the ability to create a safe space where people are willing to engage in challenging dialogues that in other settings could be volatile. Through artistic intervention a space of understanding and exchange is often created that can be really powerful. And often those exchanges unfold on an intimate, one-on-one level, so they can lead to ripples of small-scale change. Often the power of art exists in the fact that it creates a space for dialogue between two individuals.

More recently, at Creative Time we inaugurated our emerging artist open call program with Risa Puno's *The Privilege Escape*, an escape room that distils the complexity of privilege by placing it in the context of an exciting game. Upon arrival, participants found themselves the subjects in a study conducted by a cutting-edge institute and were split into two groups, based on the arbitrary factor of their date of birth. The two groups faced the same tasks under different conditions, one being significantly more challenging to overcome.

Projects like these directly implicate audiences. Puno's aim was to use this disarmingly playful environment to create pathways of exchange and understanding around social inequity. Under the guise of an interactive game, audiences first learned to dissect issues of privilege around a shared experience, and then – after unpacking the project in a conversational debrief with an 'Institute Researcher' – consider their own experiences with social inequity.

Top – *The Privilege of Escape* (2019) by Riso Puno commissioned by Creative Time. Image by Talisman Brolin, courtesy of Creative Time. Bottom – *A Subtlety* (2014) by Kara Walker commissioned by Creative Time. Image by Jason Wyche, courtesy of Creative Time.

ML—Are there any projects you have experienced that you feel particularly showcase how art can be a tool to move and engage with people?

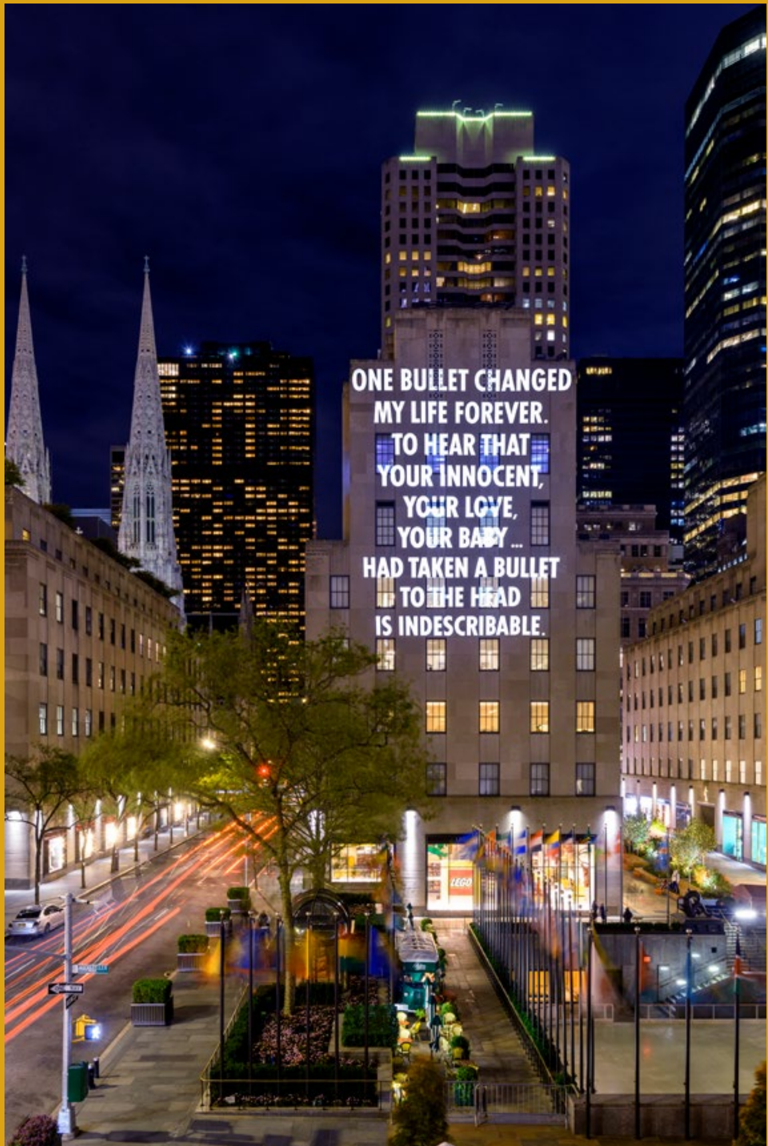
JL—Creative Time's project *A Subtlety* by Kara Walker is a really good example of this. It is a work that dealt with the legacy of labour and slavery within the context of the United States. Walker created a giant sugar sphinx that was constructed within the former Domino's sugar factory in Brooklyn, New York. Due to the project's popularity, in order to gain access to the project you had to wait in line.

The project happened before I was part of Creative Time, and I travelled to New York expressly to experience it. What I found so interesting was that while you waited in line, you started having conversations that you wouldn't normally have with anyone else in any other context. You started talking to the person standing next to you in the queue and you started unpacking the issues that the project was addressing. You had this instant sense of community – it reminded me of a term that is normally associated with pilgrimage, 'communitas'. You immediately became part of a group of people who were collectively experiencing and engaging at the same time with the same thing. It was those conversations, in line before even experiencing the project, that ended up being truly profound and really challenging. For me, this is a beautiful example of the kind of conversations that art can lead to.

ML—How do you feel art can be used to reach audiences or communities that might not usually engage in 'the arts'?

JL—Quite simply when art is sited outside a traditional art-going space, it radically changes your audience and your community reach. Right now, especially within the context of the United States, we are questioning just whom cultural institutions are for and whom they serve. You pull yourself outside of that conversation as soon as you place work within the public sphere and site projects in unexpected spaces. It makes you think differently about the work and at the same time allows you to connect with a radically different audience.

Creative Time's most recent project, Jenny Holzer's *VIGIL*, shed light on gun violence by foregrounding the voices of those directly affected by this issue. For three nights these new projections took over Rockefeller Center with text from *Bullets into Bells: Poets & Citizens Respond to Gun Violence,* stories from *Moments that Survive* collected by Everytown for Gun Safety, and poems by teens who have grown up in the shadow of mass shootings. *VIGIL* emphasised the unique human toll of gun violence. It was an intentional shift away from statistics that have come to dominate the news and our understanding of the national devastation wrought by gun violence. The intention was to serve two simultaneous audiences, the one that came intentionally to experience an artistic intervention and another that just happened to be at the New York City landmark.



VIGIL (2019) by Jenny Holzer, presented by Creative Time, Rockefeller Center, New York. Text: *Response to 'Shotguns'* by DeAndra Yates, © 2017 by the author, from *Bullets into Bells: Poets & Citizens Respond to Gun Violence*. Used with permission of the author. Image by Filip Wolak.

The result was a surreal silence overtaking the usually cacophonous plaza. Holzer's project transformed a tourist attraction into the projection screen for a work of art. While many audience members came to the area with the intention of viewing the work, a number of viewers encountered the work unwittingly. Holzer was able to spark conversations around this issue by those who were not even expecting it, underscoring how fundamental this issue is in all of our daily lives.

ML—How important do you feel it is for people to trust creatives and is the role of the curator in this instance important?

JL—I have found it to be very important to trust creatives. As an organisation, Creative Time is very mindful of our collaborators. We bring in people who have a sincere and deep connection to the issues that they are addressing in their work. They have a proven commitment to what they are speaking about.

As to the role of the curator, I often see their responsibility as serving as translator and producer: supporting the artist to realise their greatest dreams, while also making sure that there is a strong understanding of, and connection to, the community and audience that is going to be engaging with the work. It is also the responsibility of the curator to facilitate that safe space in which the artist can create at the highest level.

I find that there is a beauty and strength in establishing spaces in which individuals can truly dream on the larger scale. That is precisely what we aim to do at Creative Time.

ML—Do you ever get asked to justify the value of public art, and how do you tend to approach this if or when it comes up?

This isn't exclusive to the context of public art, but rather the arts at large. People want to understand what the direct return is, or what the outcome is in a very tangible and straightforward manner. Yet that is in direct opposition to what is so powerful and poignant about the arts. So, yes, it is something we experience and when we do, we cite the value of engendering spaces for productive thought and exchange, creating moments of wonder, and allowing for transformative moments – these are things that go beyond financial value. It isn't possible to assign a monetary value to the impact that this kind of work can have upon the world.

ML—If you could come up with a manifesto for why we should work with artists today – what headline points would you include?

In a deeply fraught sociopolitical moment, art has the ability to serve as both burn and balm.

Through public art and the vision of artists, we are able to foreground challenging issues that in any other context would be deemed simply too divisive.

Artists enable us to challenge the status quo.

Art allows space for poetry and transcendence even when confronting the most difficult subject matter.

Artists can help envision a better tomorrow.

Making Space

Making Space (2019) by Jessie Brennan commissioned by UP Projects. Image by Alastair Fyfe.

MAKING SPACE BY JESSIE BRENNAN

UP Projects was invited by the Greater London Authority's Royal Docks team to curate and produce a new public artwork in four 'gateway' sites across the Royal Docks, London – an area undergoing rapid regeneration. Artist Jessie Brennan was commissioned based on the strength of her practice, which explores the inter-relations between people and places, informed by their social and political contexts. Brennan met with communities based near the sites to discuss their experiences of living in the Royal Docks as well as historic and economic factors that have impacted it.

From these meetings, conversations and workshops, four visually bold text-based works were created that drew from her experiences of imagining a future for the area with the local communities. The statements and slogans could also be interpreted as a call to action that invites people living in and travelling through the area to consider who London's regeneration is for, and to engage with the future of the Docks ahead of its imminent redevelopment.

Left – *The People's Plan* (2019) part of a series of artworks entitled *Making Space* by Jessie Brennan commissioned by UP Projects. Image by Thierry Bal.
Right – *Take Your Place* (2019) part of a series of artworks entitled *Making Space* by Jessie Brennan commissioned by UP Projects. Image by Thierry Bal.

'I am a member of PEACH (People's Housing Alliance Custom House) which we set up to build strength in our community, so we can have a say over decisions which affect us. Therefore, Jessie's work is really relevant to the way we are looking to make changes and be involved in those changes. On a personal note I encounter Jessie's work at Custom House on a daily basis and feel that it is a great improvement to our area. I often see passers-by admiring it too!'

Angela Fields, Local Resident and Member of PEACH (People's Housing Alliance Custom House)

Debated Territory: Towards a Critical Language for Public Art by Suzanne Lacy, Artist and Professor

This is an abridged and lightly edited version of an essay from *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1995

Whether through art made for galleries and museums, or art made for a broader popular audience (often called public art), today's artists afford a higher degree of public visibility than in earlier decades. What artists 'do' and what they 'ought to do' constitutes a territory of public debate in which we seek a broadened paradigm for the meaning of art in our times.

Public art has become a highly competitive alternative to the gallery system in which artists are thrust into contact with a broad and diversified audience, each group bringing its own contributions to the debate. Our curiosity has been stimulated: just what is public art, how does it get made, by whom and for whom?

The diagram on the facing page represents a continuum of possible roles for artists to help us better understand what a public artist might be doing with respect to the public sphere. At any given time, an artist may operate at a different point on the spectrum or may move between them.

a. Subjectivity and Empathy: Artist as Experiencer

In August 1991 I sat for seven days in an abandoned hospital room at Roswell Park Cancer Center in upstate New York, charting the private conversations I had with patients, nurses, doctors, scientists and administrators. The artwork was located in the interaction between me and the members of the hospital community, framed by the hospital room and fueled by the human need to reflect on the meaning of one's life and work. In this and other works that take place mostly within the domain of experience, the artist, like a subjective anthropologist, enters the territory of the 'Other' and presents observations on people and places through an empathic projection – an amalgam of her observations and of her

PRIVATE				PUBLIC
Artist as Experiencer	Artist as Reporter	Artist as Analyst	Artist as Activist	

own interiority. In this way the artist becomes a conduit for the experience of others, and the artwork is a metaphor built out of the relationship.

Although we tend to pigeonhole subjectivity as nonpolitical, one of the major contributions of feminist thought is that individual experience has profound social implications. Experiencing has been manipulated in the service of advertising and politics, for example where products and politicians are infused with desire. We have lost an authenticity in the public sector that art could, at least symbolically, return to us. To make oneself a conduit for expression of individuals within an entire social group can be an act of profound empathy. When there is no quick fix for some of our most pressing social problems, there may be only our ability to feel and witness the reality taking place around us. This empathy is a service that artists offer the world.

Left – *Cancer Notes* (1991) by Suzanne Lacy. Image by Suzanne Lacy.
Right – *Underground* (1993) by Suzanne Lacy and Carol Kumata. Image by Richard Hurst.

b. Information Revealed: Artist as Reporter

In the role of reporter, the artist focuses not simply on the experience, but on the recounting of the situation in its context; that is, the artist gathers information to make it available to others. She calls our attention to something. We might divide this practice of presenting information along lines of intentionality. Some artists claim simply to 'reflect' what exists without assignment of value; others 'report' implying a more conscious, less random selection of information.

Reporting implies a conscious selection, though not necessarily an analysis, of information. In *Amazonia*, performance artist Rachel Rosenthal dramatises the destruction of the

South American rainforest and the slaughter of its inhabitants. The strength of this soliloquy is its inexorable rage, conveyed in a theatrically choreographed incantation of the names of the native peoples, trees and animal species rapidly becoming extinct. No answers are posited (indeed, is there any appropriate response other than STOP?), save the artist's belief that after experiencing, revealing information is the next compassionate step.

c. Situations and Solutions: Artist as Analyst

From reporting, or presenting information, to analysis is a short step, but the implied shift in an artist's role is enormous. In the first two modes of working, experiencer and reporter, we see an emphasis on the intuitive, receptive, experiential and observational skills of the artist. As artists begin to analyse social situations through their art, they assume for themselves skills more commonly associated with social scientists and cultural theorists. Such activities position artists as contributors to the development of knowledge, and shift our aesthetic attention towards the shape or meaning of their theoretical constructs.

In the mid-80s a group of international photographers found themselves moving naturally from reporting environmental disasters to political theorising. In 1986 they formed the Atomic Photographers Guild to pursue projects related to nuclear issues. For example, Richard Misrach's *Bravo 20: The Bombing of the American West* presents a tongue-in-cheek proposal to convert a test bomb site into a national park.

When an artist adopts the position of analyst, the visual appeal of imagery can be superseded by the textual properties of the work, thus challenging conventions of beauty. Such analyses require theoretical contexts that suggest broad political and thought alignments.

d. Building Consensus: Artist as Activist

The last step along the proposed continuum is from analysis to activism, where artmaking is contextualised within real situations and the audience is an active participant. Martha Rosler explored New York City as an artist-analyst, but her work could be said to cross over into activism. *If You Lived Here…The City in Art, Theory, and Social Actions*, an assemblage of exhibitions, symposiums, photographs and writings sponsored by the Dia Art Foundation in New York, amassed the work of artists and activists dealing with the current crisis in American urban housing policies. The works considered how artists have found themselves squarely in the midst of real estate speculation and short-sighted housing policies.

Analyses of housing and homelessness were punctuated by proposed and actual interventions that served as models for activism.

In seeking to become catalysts for change, artists reposition themselves as citizen-activists. To take a position with respect to the public agenda, the artist must act in collaboration with people, and with an understanding of social systems and institutions. Entirely new strategies must be learned: how to collaborate, how to cross over with other disciplines, how to choose sites that resonate with public meaning and how to clarify visual and process symbolism for people who are not educated in art. In other words, artist-activists question the primacy of separation as an artistic stance and undertake the consensual production of meaning *with* the public.

What *do* public artists *do*? Inevitably we must come to understand this art's relationship to what is called 'real life'. Art that is taught in art schools and created in private studios for display in galleries and museums can raise problems for the very different kinds of audiences found in public places. Alone in her studio, the artist creates through a struggle that at various times pits the individual against nature, culture, society or the art world itself. It could be argued that this heroic tradition serves the integrity of an intensely private studio practice, which might still have some value in maintaining the pure, individualist expression that enables artists to serve society from a vantage point of outside observer. But in the studio of the public sector, in the culture of visibility, such conventions of artistic practice are challenged.

At the very least, the extensive body of artistic work from the past three decades expands artists' repertoires as a preface to a more intimate and engaged relationship with different audiences. At the most, it illustrates that the modernist model is no longer viable in a multi-cultural and globally interconnected world, that visual artists are, as theorist Suzi Gablik suggests, struggling to find new roles more appropriate to our time.

Notes

1. Susan Snodgrass, 'Culture in Action', *Art Papers* 17, no. 6, November/December 1993, pp. 7-11.

2. Roland Barthes, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein', in *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

3. *If You Lived Here…The City in Art, Theory, and Social Activism, Discussions in Contemporary Culture no. 6*, eds. Martha Rosler and Brian Wallis (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991).

4. Arlene Raven, 'Doing or Making Good', *The Village Voice*, May 3, 1988.

Left – *Code 33: Emergency Clear the Air!* (1997-1999) by Suzanne Lacy, Unique Holland, and Julio Morales. Image by Kelli Yon.
Right – *De tu puño y letra* (2014-15) by Suzanne Lacy. Image by Christoph Hirtz.

Constellations

Constellations workshop led by Davina Drummond (2019-20). Image courtesy UP Projects.

CONSTELLATIONS, ARTIST DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Constellations is UP Projects' research and development programme for artists who are working with socio-political issues, community-oriented practice and in a public context. The programme supports artists who are interested in further developing their practice, collaborating with others, and accessing new networks.

Constellations is produced in collaboration with Flat Time House (FTHo), drawing on its history as a site of experimental art education and its founder, John Latham's participation in the Artist Placement Group (APG). Constellations responds to the historical precedent of groups like the APG, who were radical in their approach to artists working in a social context, as well as the current rise in socially engaged art practice across the UK.

A working group of eight artists from across the UK are selected through an open call to come together and collaborate in monthly workshops, with the opportunity to study and research at FTHo between monthly workshop sessions. For the duration of Constellations, artists experiment with and refine existing models for co-creation and social practice or propose different models altogether.

Left – Constellations workshop led by Helen Cammock (2017-18). Image courtesy of UP Projects.
Right – Constellations workshop led by Rosalie Schweiker (2019). Image © Edwin Mingard.

‘There was a real sense of generosity in Constellations…This is what I wish art school was like…I think there is an element of letting go, relinquishing control, being present, which makes these environments so nourishing.’

Jasleen Kaur, Artist / Constellations Workshop Leader 2017-18

CONSTELLATIONS, ARTIST DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

‘Having a socially-engaged art practice means that many times the concerns of your practice sit outside both artistic and social/activist work. Constellations bridges this very important gap by creating space to discuss what it means to work with people as an artist.’

Gal Lesham, Artist / Constellations Participant 2017-18

The Artist as Public Health Practitioner by Andrea Mechelli, Professor of Early Intervention in Mental Health, Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience, King's College London

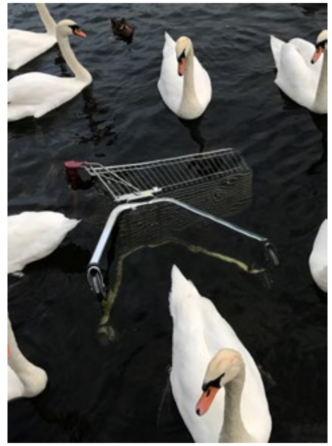
Mental health issues affect one in four people at some point in their lives, and are a leading cause of ill health and disability both in the UK and globally. Traditionally, we tend to see these issues as the responsibility of the medical profession. In other words, mental illness is something that is only spoken about and addressed behind the closed doors of the doctor's surgery.

This traditional view has, in my opinion, become outdated for several reasons. While pharmacological and psychological treatments can be of great help to people with mental illness, a meaningful and well-balanced life beyond the walls of the doctor's surgery is the key to long-term mental health. In fact, it is the case that most factors that cause mental illness actually originate from our built and social environments. In addition, mental illness is not an all-or-nothing phenomenon – all of us are on a sliding scale of strengths and vulnerabilities and can experience highs and lows depending on our circumstances.

A counterpart to the traditional approach of viewing mental illness as the sole remit of the medical profession, is the notion of viewing mental health issues as a 'collective responsibility' involving all areas of public life, including education, employment, social care, human rights and urban planning and design. And it is here where the input of artists to create new work for public spaces comes in. From scientific studies, we know that the design of public spaces can have a profound impact on our mental health and wellbeing. In fact, the Urban Mind project, a citizen-science research project on the impact of the built and social urban environment on mental health and wellbeing produced in a cross-disciplinary collaboration between clinicians, neuroscientists, artists and architects, has shown that people experience improvements in mental wellbeing when natural features such as trees, plants and birds are integrated within their environment. However, being in close contact with nature is not in itself a silver bullet; people also need to feel welcome and safe in order to benefit. In other words, we need to pay attention to both the physical as well as the social architecture of a space. This raises the question; how can we create physical and social environments that support the mental health of local communities?

Artists can play an integral role in answering this question, by bringing historical, social, ecological and political perspectives into the planning, design and realisation of public spaces. These perspectives are vital if we are to move away from the current one-size-fits-all approach that is causing a proliferation of ill thought-out public spaces across our cities. Artists are able to tap into the genius loci of a place to create unexpected interventions that can acknowledge past and present histories, helping generate a sense of meaning and belonging.

Artists can also create frameworks that empower people to critically engage with their social, environmental and economic context and take ownership of their everyday decision-making.



In a sense, therefore, the artist can be seen as a public health practitioner, who has the potential to support and nurture the mental health and wellbeing of local communities through their work. The challenge for the future is to ensure that the mental health benefits of this work are adequately measured and acknowledged.

Left – *Rapple Fizz and Elder Twist* created by Company Drinks with students from Barking Technical Skills Academy and Northbury Primary School, with Square Root Soda. Label Design by An Endless Supply (2016/17). Image by Jennifer Balcome.
Above – Urban Mind is a citizen-science research project on the impact of the built and social urban environment on mental health and wellbeing. The project is a collaboration between clinicians and neuroscientists from King's College London, artist-led foundation Nomad Projects and landscape architects J&L Gibbons. Image by Michael Smythe.

Look on me and be renewed

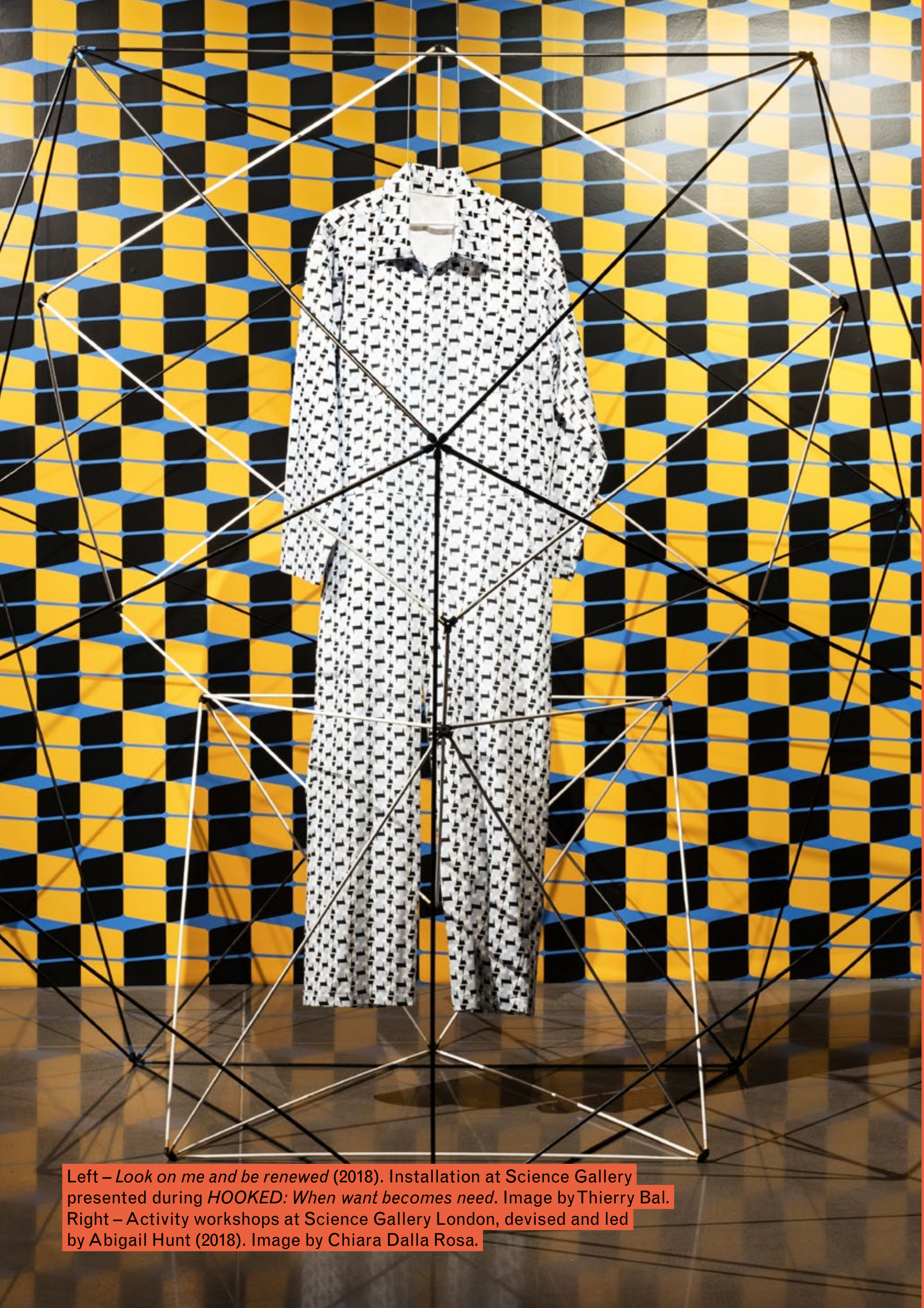
Look on me and be renewed (2018). Installation at Science Gallery presented during *HOOKED: When want becomes need*. Image by Thierry Bal.

LOOK ON ME AND BE RENEWED BY MARK KING IN COLLABORATION WITH DR JOHN MARSDEN

Devised by artist Mark King in collaboration with Dr John Marsden, Professor of Addiction Psychology at King's College London and Changing 7, a group of people with lived experience of treatment and recovery from substance use, *Look on me and be renewed* was developed through a series of process-led workshops where the group explored the presence of visible and invisible patterns in our daily lives.

Reflecting on the interplay between human beings, objects and environments, the project highlighted how visual prompts from our surroundings are connected to the behavioural patterns and rhythms that determine our decisions and experiences. Workshop sessions with the group included garment customisation, a photography field day in London Bridge and an analysis session that considered the cognitive impact of the built environment.

Through the content gathered with Changing 7, six patterns were created by the artist and presented as a multi-faceted artwork in the Science Gallery London's *HOOKED* exhibition. Five of these were exhibited within the museum's Georgian windows; reminiscent of stained glass, they were visible from both inside and outside the building. These interventions created an important threshold between the interior environment of the Gallery and the external public realm, ensuring the patterns were re-connected with the environment that inspired them.



Left – *Look on me and be renewed* (2018). Installation at Science Gallery presented during *HOOKED: When want becomes need*. Image by Thierry Bal.
Right – Activity workshops at Science Gallery London, devised and led by Abigail Hunt (2018). Image by Chiara Dalla Rosa.

LOOK ON ME AND BE RENEWED BY MARK KING
IN COLLABORATION WITH DR JOHN MARSDEN

'What we wanted to do was involve people with lived experience in a meaningful way in a community project which we believed had real value. For us, the creative element really interested our service users...having the opportunity to bring their creativity and their experience together, in one project...was really meaningful.'

Partner: Michael Huck, Peer Mentor and Volunteer Manager for the Drug and Alcohol Wellbeing Service, and National Programme Lead for Peer Mentoring at Turning Point

People Need Public Art and Public Art Needs People by Maria Amidu, Visual Artist

edge/threshold/brink by Maria Amidu first exhibited in a group exhibition curated by Karen Alexander for *Dream Time: We All Have Stories* during Nuit Blanche Toronto 2018. Image courtesy of Maria Amidu and Nuit Blanche Toronto.

The manifestation of public art has certainly changed over the years, but the social need for it has not. Throughout history societies have marked the significance of events and those responsible for them by commissioning artists to create weighty, commemorative monuments. This endeavour has been about ensuring victors and pioneers never go unremembered. We encounter these unavoidable, permanent objects everywhere we go; invariably they find us rather than us finding them, and we respond to them consciously or unconsciously, aloud or in our heads, in conversation with strangers and friends.

And then there are the contemporaneous forms of public art, which often move slightly away from tradition, are lighter and can sometimes occupy a more temporal reality. We tend to encounter these forms of public art in a constructed context. Take Art Night London or Nuit Blanche in Paris and Toronto where public artworks are available to us from dusk to dawn, where the art deliberately makes itself seen, and shows off who and what has made these places, and we go to be delighted and bear witness to these fleeting transformations. Or projects such as the Fourth Plinth, in Trafalgar Square, London, where the lifespan of each commission exists long enough for the public to get to know an artwork, miss it when it is gone, and anticipate what is next to come.

Either way, these artworks matter. They matter because they help us say something about who we are as citizens and as meaning-making beings. They make our relationship with ourselves, each other and the civic tangible.

It is impossible for public artworks to exist without comment from us – very few people will observe a public artwork and think or feel absolutely nothing. The reaction could be as mundane as like/dislike or as profound as returning day after day because the work has touched the returnee in some way.

Fundamentally, people build relationships with public art. Sometimes we forget how important these relationships are because the physicality of the work can dominate our focus, which of course is not a bad thing – why commission an artist to make an artwork if not for it to be seen? But there is always something else, something more discreet going on in parallel with the looking, and this is where the magic happens. People need public art. We need it to sit beside to mull over a dilemma, we need it as a landmark to meet by, we need it to pause from business as usual and remember the significance of an historical anniversary, we need it to understand how we fit into the narrative of the places we traverse every day and we need it to acknowledge the sheer wonder of our human existence.

Our built environment cannot only be about the necessities: architecture, street mapping and amenities. These artistic markers, otherwise known as public art, help us make sense of our material and emotional world, help us document the particular mood of a moment in time – moments in our shared social and cultural history.

I mean, what if public art did not exist?

Newham Trackside Wall

Prototype visit (2019). Image by Julian Robinson, courtesy of Crossrail.

NEWHAM TRACKSIDE WALL
BY SONIA BOYCE

UP Projects has been working in the London Borough of Newham since 2016, curating and producing a mile-long artwork by Sonia Boyce for the Elizabeth line trackside wall that runs through three distinct neighbourhoods. Commissioned by Crossrail and working closely with Atkins, the artwork has been developed through an intensive period of community engagement and is due to launch in 2020.

Over the course of eight months, Boyce dedicated herself to meeting over 300 community leaders and residents that live and work near the trackside wall. Connecting with people by organising a series of creative engagement events including a pub quiz and poetry workshops, she also attended numerous pre-existing community-led events and gatherings. Boyce documented and recorded personal stories, memories, hopes and fears for the local area. The stories she collected – ranging from honest, moving, funny, nostalgic and angry – were then transformed by Boyce into a collage of quotes layered over a pattern of local foliage and digitally reworked images of houses, shops and landscape that mirror the wall.

Both – Sonia Boyce community consultation, Shipman Youth Centre (2017). Images by Benedict Johnson.

‘It was a great learning experience, not only in the sense of realising that a wall doesn’t have to be painted to be transformed through art…but – in realising some of the possible ways art happens in and with the community…that our journey mirrors the exact same kind of art practice – that us being there was a sort of part of the artwork.’

Ambassador, discussing a research trip that Sonia led with a group of Ambassadors to Liverpool

Negotiating Public Rights
Elisabeth Del Prete, Learning Curator, UP Projects interviews Torange Khonsari, Co-Founder and Director of public works

EDP—How do you define yourself and your practice?

TK—I trained as an architect and became disillusioned with the professional practice of it. Architectural education is very different to architectural practice. The education allows for much more fluidity with the skills and role of architecture, but the profession is much more rigid due to a lack of experimentation in practice and an inherent focus on form. I don't know if I would call myself an artist because I didn't train as one, but I definitely work in the art context. What this has allowed my practice, public works, to do is to work outside disciplinary norms and focus on how culture can impact rights over the city and claim a different arena. We are passionate about communities with all their conflicts and problems. It's very challenging, but I suppose for me what is fantastic about art practice is that it is open enough to allow different disciplines to operate within it. This openness allows for experimentation, exploration and invention of new ways that our society can evolve.

EDP—As commissioners we are increasingly being asked to demonstrate the 'value' of commissioning contemporary art in public spaces. Could you tell me a bit more about the different types of capital that you believe creative practice can bring?

TK—When you work in the public realm in a neoliberal context such as the UK you need to understand the economic lingo. What business promotes is economics as financial value, but economics in its true sense is made up of human capital, social capital, natural capital, cultural capital and financial capital. I hate using the terminology 'capital' but it's a language our society understands. Most of the time artists speak a different language and thus there is no arena for negotiation or productive conflict. If you don't speak the same language you can't discuss value.

I will just quickly explain these different forms of capital: human capital is about education, social mobility through training and skills. Social capital is about your wider community network, your social connections and structures of support. Traditionally cultural capital has been seen as the accumulation of knowledge, behaviours and skills that one can tap into to demonstrate one's cultural competence. The sociologist and philosopher, Jean Baudrillard talked about highbrow culture creating class distinctions associated with status. However, according to Marxist theory, this can be challenged by today's socially engaged art practice, which often mediates high and community art. Natural capital is obvious: land, environment, ecology, biodiversity, air and so on. Financial capital is only one of the five forms of capital, and if the neoliberal system sees capital as value, then it's important to situate that value amongst its family. By primarily focusing on financial capital we narrow society to financial beings rather than human beings. I think that we need cultural practitioners to remind people to not only focus on the financial. Our 4,000-year-old civilisation was not developed by focusing on money; rather money was a means to develop our culture and society.

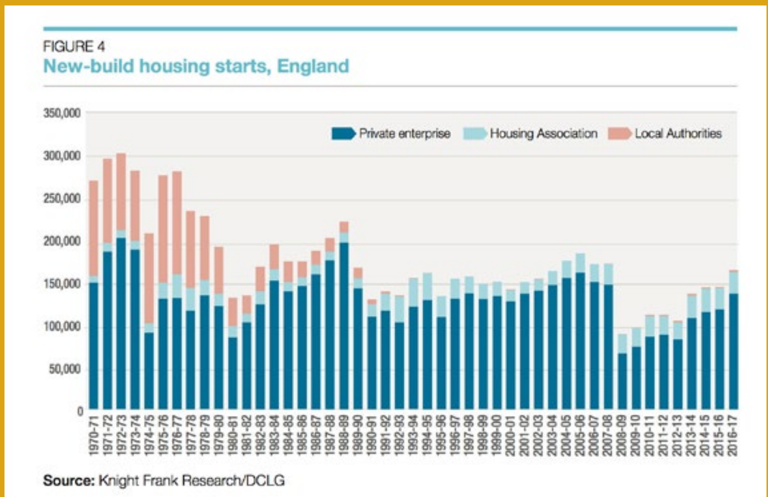
EDP—Could you tell me a bit more about the 'economy for the common good' that I believe public works uses for every business plan it designs?

TK—Economy for the common good is not something I am an expert in to be honest. I work with a network of economy for the common good organisations in the UK. I myself am learning through working with them. They have developed a matrix, which looks at a more holistic economic system that includes all those values I have just described. I intuitively feel they are really important. I have done quite a lot of research, and they are part of a whole network that is pushing for an alternative economic model than the one we are presented with at the moment.

We are living in a context where the dominant exchange value and medium is money. In our current context we have to understand it. I don't mean like a banker understands it, I mean understanding its origins; what level of extraction and manipulation is it part of and can you as a practitioner ethically evaluate its use. I am personally interested in small steps towards systemic change, and spend a huge amount of time strategically ensuring projects move towards that. I don't ever take on projects funded by extractive businesses that damage our society and climate. You just need to judge the ethics and be innovative in forms of practice that allow for criticality rather than dependency.

Yesterday in Rotherhithe as part of our Rotherhithe Public Living Room project (see pages 44 to 47) working with UP Projects, we had a resident who hadn't engaged with us before and said, 'Now you are selling me art as a way for developers to make money.' I know where she is coming from and I completely understand her, but after years of not touching projects with private developers, we decided to see if we could make a long-term difference especially considering that at present 90% of new homes in England are being built by private sector developers. Is non-engagement ethical? Perhaps I can tell you this in a few months time as our project in Rotherhithe unfolds.

The reason I created the Design for Cultural Commons MA is to start talking about a different model of



Top – Our Emerging Community Proposals event at the Rotherhithe Public Living Room by public works (2019). Image by Monika Szolle. Bottom – New-build housing starts, England. Source: Knight Frank.

practicing with criticality. Trust and social relations have been broken by our current system. Art projects, if thought through properly, have the potential to start to build back some of this trust between institutions and society through acts of generosity and care. Some people might say we just have to let the system break; but then what? I personally believe you have to understand how to work with the existing system to create systemic change – that's what is important.

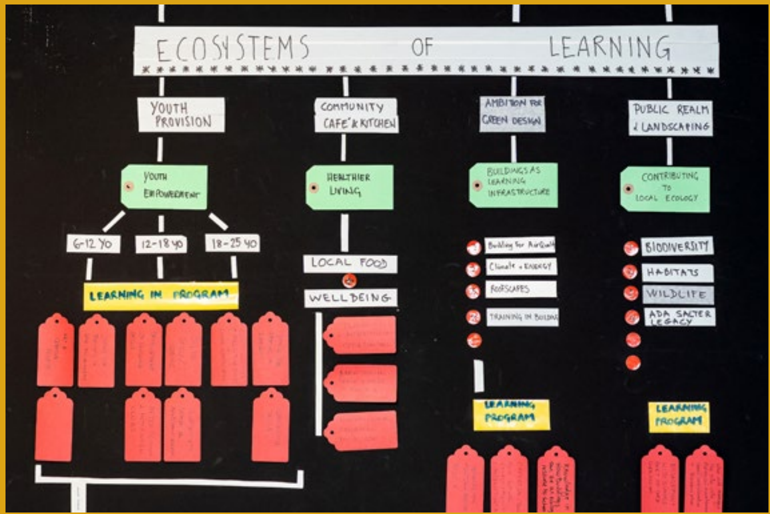
EDP—It seems to me that your approach is about compensating those values that seem to be overlooked (i.e. cultural, social and human values), and when it comes to the already predominant economic value, you are looking for an alternative.

TK—Yes exactly. And it doesn't mean that you don't have to make a profit. What economy for the common good means is that you have to take care of values other than economic to engage in best practice, and to think about the impact of your profits beyond the individual self. It's about the quality and the public good of what you offer to the world. A lot of architects and developers say yes that's what we do – we make homes. Yes, but who are these homes for? This is where the criticality, care and other values are important.

I previously mentioned trust, which is built based on care, support, generosity and human relations. People are not stupid, they can see through something that isn't genuine. The resident that I mentioned earlier feels she has been manipulated by developers many times so she is asking why is it different this time. I suppose one has a real responsibility as an artist to tread carefully. When operating in the private sector we need to shift away from thinking about community engagement as PR, which is manipulative. Rather we should engage in ways that encourage generating different value systems that are positive for the communities where these developments are happening. This can mean more work but often not more money. I am sure that what we charge as artists and cultural consultants is less than what a PR company charges, and yet the artist-led approach will lead to more tangible benefits to the community.

EDP—Your project in Rotherhithe has facilitated a community engagement framework based on ideas of commons and civic commons that encourage the local community to become its own support structure. Could you tell me a bit more about how this works and specifically how it benefits the community?

TK—The project in Rotherhithe is going really well. What tends to happen usually, and I think this is a mistake, is that developers focus on getting people's comments about a given design. As an agenda I think that that is set to fail. First of all, a design is incredibly subjective; what one person likes another person would hate. Aesthetics is personal and that's where architects struggle, because they have to create one that no one objects to – this is impossible. However aesthetics is not just something that you see. What you see is a signifier of what you bring with you, be it your cultural context, your education, your personal taste; it's all of that stuff rolled into one, so you are never going to get something that everybody likes. But if you see the process as supportive and building on what the community is already doing,



Top – A diagram showing the emerging Ecosystems of Learning strategy resulting from community engagement in Rotherhithe by public works and UP Projects. Image by Monika Szolle.
Bottom – Wallpaper workshop with local school children at the Rotherhithe Public Living Room (2019). Image by Monika Szolle.

then it can be regenerative. That is true regeneration. This process builds trust and relationships between the developers and the community, and that trust and support will yield later.

In this way the work is about relationship building, which is what a relational art practice is about. If the relationship is at the core, then the tangible material of the work is to facilitate and support those relations rather than be its representation. As designers we design the entire framework: from objects to events to strategies around facilitating positive relationships such as those between warring local groups, the council and the civic society, the residents and the developers and so on. My question here would be – could we use this process to build future commons? Nobody is familiar with this approach, so they have to buy into this collectively as a community, and trust somehow that if they come on this journey with us it's going to work.

To be honest I had sworn I would never do community 'consultation' for development. However because the developer we are collaborating with in Rotherhithe (the project I mentioned previously) seems genuine about wanting the process we are following and appears committed to its longevity I felt that maybe it's going to work. So the framework, which has also come from UP Projects, is really to listen. We spent about a month listening, and after that it's about running a programme for approximately two months to really facilitate, have the architects and developers there, and start to build relationships. Partly we have to programme based on what we heard, and partly we have to leave the space open for things to emerge from the community themselves. Ultimately it is about a framework of support and care for that community to go on a journey with us, as well as with the architects and designers, and to understand why they make certain decisions.

It's ultimately about trust building between everyone. I don't know if we will manage to get all of that right in this short amount of time. Maybe if it starts to succeed the developers will want to invest more into it, maybe we raise funds to continue, maybe we get a consortium of community groups to continue these things themselves. The thing is that you can't plan everything at the beginning; people want to see you, they have new ideas, things evolve, it's incremental, constantly in flux and one step at a time.

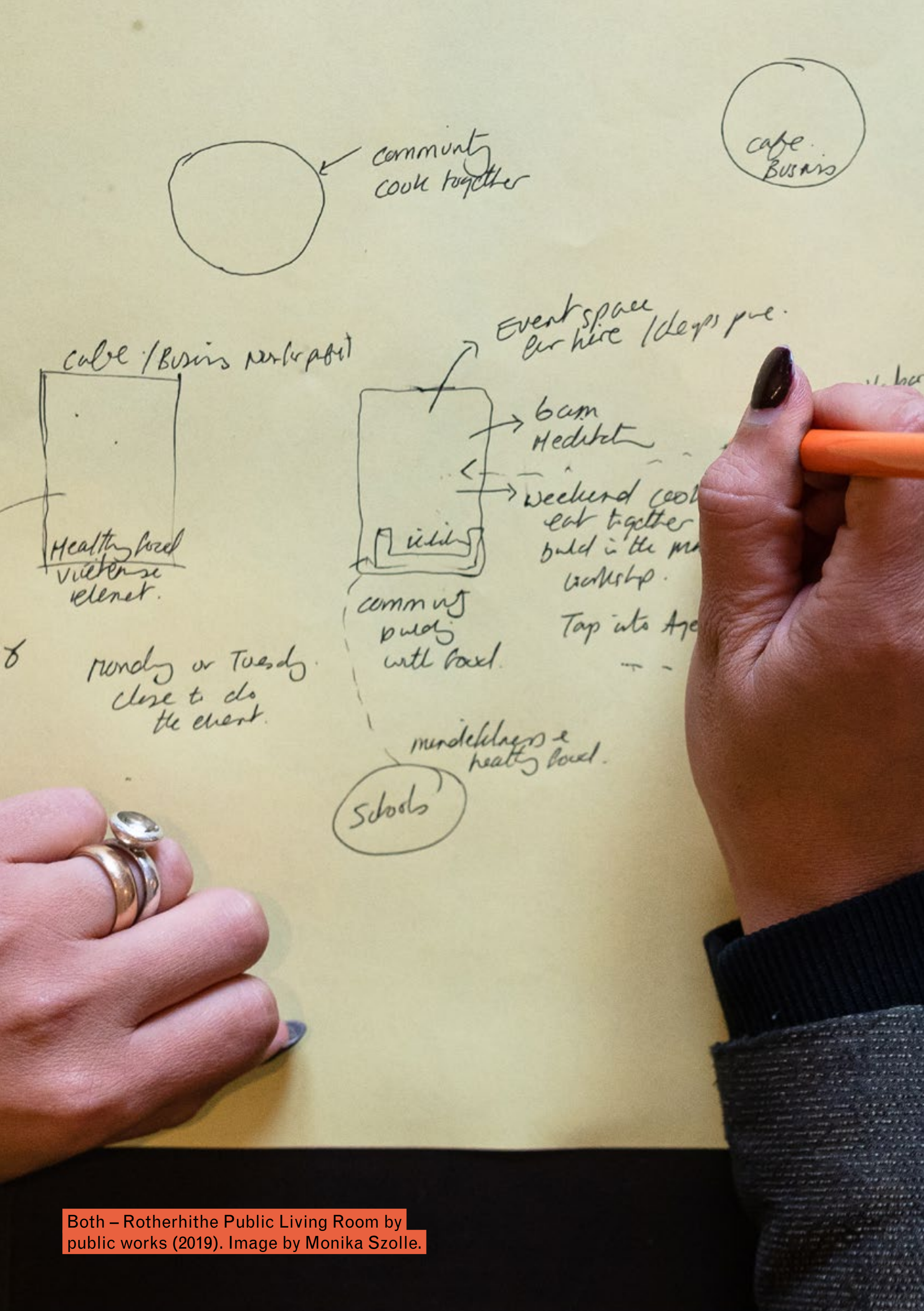
Rotherhithe Public Living Room

Rotherhithe Public Living Room by public works (2019). Image by Monika Szolle.

ROTHERHITHE PUBLIC LIVING ROOM WITH PUBLIC WORKS

UP Projects has been working with art/architecture collective public works on behalf of Telford Homes and SGN Place to develop and deliver an artist-led engagement project to inform their pre-application process for the Rotherhithe Holder Station development in Rotherhithe, London. At the heart of this public engagement piece was the aim to talk to local communities in order to inform what the long-term community offer on the site could be. The framework proposed by UP Projects and public works was developed to create a space for meaningful and productive dialogue and to build trust with local people.

The project began with a research and listening phase where the team met with key stakeholders to hear more about Rotherhithe and what they felt may be lacking in terms of the existing community offer. The second phase involved creating a temporary on-site project space called the Rotherhithe Public Living Room, which was designed and built by public works. The Living Room hosted a series of activities over a two-month period that allowed broader engagement with local residents and community members. The programme included mapping workshops, a dedicated youth strand including fundraising workshops and planter-building sessions, drop in days and design discussions to open up dialogue with residents about the emerging design proposals for the site. As a result UP Projects and public works compiled a community and culture strategy entitled Ecosystems of Learning to inform the future vision for the site.



Both – Rotherhithe Public Living Room by public works (2019). Image by Monika Szolle.

‘Our community is changing and it’s important for local people to be involved in those changes! Through the Rotherhithe Public Living Room, UP Projects and public works were able to leverage local people’s knowledge and take different opinions into consideration through their programme of engagement events hosted at their beautifully designed temporary space. The unique relationships that were forged built trust with the local community that we hope will lead to truly embedded long-term community proposals for the site should the development move forward.’

Local Resident, Rotherhithe

Working with Artists for a Public Situation by Marti Manen, Director, Index Foundation (The Swedish Contemporary Art Foundation) and former Curator at the Swedish Art Agency, Stockholm

The speed of our reality seems to give us too little space and time to create situations for the unknown, for a poetical and critical approach to reality. Some questions arise: How can we understand 'public space'? And, related to space, how can we deal with 'public time'? Can we even talk about a 'public time'? And how can we work with art and artists to make sense of these questions?

Public sphere and artistic practices are two concepts that are in a continuous dance. To include art in the public sphere means that we can mark the time for possible futures: art stays as objects and memories, art is an experience today, a sentence for our minds, a mood. Working with artists – facilitating their job within the public sphere – means that these possible futures will be part of us, and our times will be remembered. But, how can we deal with 'our times' when uncertainty permeates our reality? Art is the perfect way to deal with all the doubts, fragility, frustration, fear and desire that surround us, as art is defined by the same terminology. Artists can play with beauty, poetry and love, with rage and ironic gestures, with an incredible palette that makes complexity visible – for a second, for eternity.

I want to mention three artistic projects for the public sphere that are somehow at the limits of public art, but exemplify how art can offer enormous emotional content. The first is by Ina Hagen and was produced for Momentum10 Biennial in Moss, Norway. Hagen decided to create a specific work on a small beach in Norway that is only discovered after a walk through a forest. The walk itself defines the mood for what is going to happen; as the forest opens to reveal the landscape of the Oslo fjord, the artistic experience – and the expectation – has begun. What happens then? A closed network is opened, and visitors can use their phones to be part of a silent group chat dealing with, amongst other things, emotional communication and impossibilities. The entrance is perfect, the human silence makes every single sound important, and everything is observed through 'artistic eyes'. The resulting experience is an important one, something to be remembered and, at the same time, difficult to define or explain.

At Momentum10 we also presented a public sculpture by artist Anne de Vries, who created what seemed, from a distance, a monumental tree in a square in an industrial space. However, when observed closer you discover a horrible face and the tree becomes a character moving its arms – a sort of inoffensive horror movie character with a Disney aesthetic touch. Is it possible to use horror film aesthetics in public art? Is it possible to use 'wrong' aesthetics? And who defines the quality of aesthetics? I remember a conversation during the opening with a member of the Norwegian parliament who commented on the beauty of the tree and how she related it to trolls and her local mythology. Suddenly everything was different.

Moving on from a tree to a series of plants, in this case presented in a suburb in Göteborg, Sweden. Artist Maider López worked for two years with her neighbours who, through political action, saved the local indoor pool from planned demolition. To make the space more special, Maider López undertook an artistic public commission to produce something universal but also local; something for everyone and yet specifically for a group of women that wanted the pool for themselves every now and again. The resulting work is a system of plants next to the fabulous windows surrounding the pool. Anyone can move the plants to cover some windows or to open them to the exterior landscape; anyone can act with action to make the space a special situation. It's a permanent work, something that will surely stay but that can change at any time.

Time and action, aesthetics and emotions, what to remember and what to feel.

Left – *The Before Over Shore* (2019) by Ina Hagen, Momentum10, Norway. Image by Ingeborg Øien Thorsland © Punkt Ø.
Middle – *EX* (2019) by Anne de Vries, Momentum10, Norway. Image by Ingeborg Øien Thorsland © Punkt Ø.
Right – Hammarkullen swimming pool by Maider López, produced by Statens Konstråd, Göteborg, Sweden (2019). Image by Richard Estay.

UP Projects commissions contemporary art for public places. We support artists to make work that has social relevance, encourages learning, transforms places and activates the public realm. We believe in working collaboratively with artists, communities and partners to create extraordinary projects across the UK that respond to heritage, identity and place, bringing people together, stimulating debate, and supporting social change.

Our work has been enjoyed by millions of people, including ambitious public commissions, imaginative cultural strategies, artist-led events, educational workshops and community engagement initiatives. We strive to be relevant to the places we work in, whether towns and cities across the country, the UK's river and canal network, parks and green spaces, new urban developments or areas of regeneration.

www.upprojects.com

Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

Conceived and commissioned by UP Projects
Edited by Moira Lascelles
Copy edited by Kate Phillimore & Tamsin Arrowsmith-Brown
Graphic design by Laura Gordon
Charity number: 1170960