

Above:  
Leif Stregell, Lauren Sagar, Kate Matthews and David-Thomas Crawley, 2002. Courtesy: Training for Real. Photo: Roger Sinneck.  
Light was used to outline the shape of the new community centre to be built at Hetherlow Towers, Walton, Liverpool. This attempted to indicate the changes ahead to reinforce a sense of community at the Towers.

NAVIGATING PLACES

# Creative learning curves

Jane Watt looks into professional development initiatives available to artists working in the public domain.

**Fifteen** years ago Malcolm Miles initiated a debate around the importance of public art practice in art education<sup>1</sup>. He was particularly interested in the differences between fine art and architectural training, and noted that: “whilst most fine art students work very much on their own, creating unique objects out of singular experience, architecture courses involve team work. Projects may begin with a group briefing, end with a group criticism, and in between involve delegation of tasks within a cooperative effort.”<sup>2</sup> He highlighted that around this time, the majority of artists who had completed an art college training were well

versed in a practice that was rooted within “a model of solitary confinement in the studio”<sup>3</sup>. However, a scattering of degree courses in public art and environmental art had begun to emerge,<sup>4</sup> no doubt fuelled by the increase in public art commissions available to artists, as well as the general shift towards site-specific and engaged practice. These new style courses encouraged students to work outside the studio, to collaborate, to develop and site work in the public realm. They also began to highlight the types of skills that Miles identifies as ones addressed in architectural training, namely co-operation, delegation and

team work.

The trend to encourage a wider range of skills and experience has continued as fine art students now routinely work on live projects outwith the university or college, and in collaboration with other organisations. Public Arts, a public commission agency based in Wakefield, recently developed the Higher Education Project with Leeds Metropolitan University to support students to propose, make and site work at the commissioning agency base, The Orangery.

Concurrent to the growth in developing live projects for students in further and higher education, there has also

been a growth in training and support available for artists outside formal education who wish to develop their work in the public domain. The Irwell Sculpture Trail's 1st Out Bursary (currently under review)<sup>5</sup> is aimed specifically at new graduates in the north west of England. This particular programme assists emerging artists in several ways. It enables them to win their first public art commission and addresses the age-old question 'how do I get my foot on the ladder?' It also supports the artists from the proposal stage to the realisation of their work through a combination of mentoring and training days. Chrysalis Arts in North Yorkshire have extended their established public art training workshops to include a more intensive programme of live training for artists called Training for Real. Like the 1st Out Bursary, the emphasis is on support through the whole process of a real commission. Training for Real's first project supported six artists to make temporary public art works for Malham in the Yorkshire Dales National Park at the end of the foot and mouth epidemic. The second project, Lighten Up, supported a further six artists to work within an urban residential community in Liverpool to produce temporary light installa-

tions as a public art strand to the Liverpool Biennial. Support was given to the artists in terms of mentoring and tailor made training. Although, as Christine Keogh of Chrysalis Arts points out, this type of support requires significant investment in each artist, it usually provides a much deeper level of learning, understanding and experience of the process for the artist involved. Consequently, it is an area of professional practice training which Chrysalis Arts are using as a model for further projects.

In the West Midlands, The Public (formerly Jubilee Arts) has also embraced integrated training and support for artists in a three-year programme called Social Inclusion to the Creative Economy (SICE). This scheme, funded by the regional development agency Advantage West Midlands, supports individuals and groups in the creative sector in Sandwell, Dudley and West Birmingham with training, mentoring and peer critique on live schemes. As part of this programme, The Public recently worked with the local artist group Sozo Collective on Re:location, a project which temporarily transformed a disused former Commercial X-Ray factory into a space in which local artists



**Left:** Sue Bates, *Reflections*, 2003. Courtesy: 1st Out Bursary. Photo: Sue Bates  
Sue Bates worked closely with five women from a social centre for the elderly in Ordsall, Salford. During her weekly meetings with the women she recorded their personal stories about the area. Fragments of these reflections were selected by the women. These were then written on windows around Ordsall which Bates had covered with face powder. This temporary work could then be viewed through compact mirrors which the artist gave out.

could make and exhibit artwork. The emphasis was on a supportive structure and environment which Re:location curator Dave Pollard describes as "a unique experiment in combining art with urban regeneration, community building and new ways of living and working together".

Regional and local organisations including Commissions East and Space offer a range of training workshops and

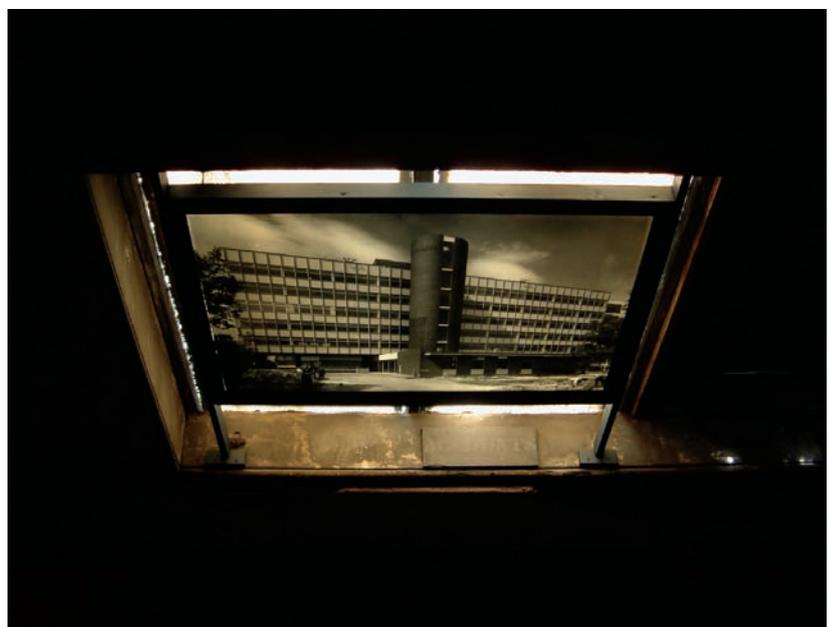
**Below:** Nicki McCubbing and Ellie Heath, *Fibre Optic Installation*, 2002. Courtesy: Training for Real. Photo: Van Nong.

McCubbing and Heath worked with Chrysalis artist Van Nong to create a series of light installations at the Clock Community Centre in Everton as part of 'Lighten Up'. The installation combined lanterns constructed using photographs of past and present residents from the area, fibre optic lighting and mirrors.



**Below:** Wayne Bartlett, *The Archive*, 2003. Photo: Graziano Milano.

New York based installation artist and member of the Sozo Collective, Wayne Bartlett, is the creative mind responsible for the X-Ray factory's archive during the project. Bartlett mentored local artist Mark Johnson enabling him to manage the archive and restore images whilst Bartlett was in New York.





**Above right:** It's About Time Productions, *Radioactive Documentary*, 2003. DVD Stills, Re:location. These stills are taken from a documentary film by Birmingham-based production company It's About Time Productions. The film charts the building's transformation and features interviews with a number of artists involved about the development of their practice.

seminars for local artists who wish to become more informed about public art commission procedures and best practice. These run in addition to their commissioning projects. The aim of the sessions is to encourage artists to have a broader understanding about the artist's role within public art projects, together with an awareness of essential skills, such as negotiation, compromise and delegation. Whilst these issues are important, the informal exchanges which take place between fellow artists, commissioning agents and guest speakers prove to be equally beneficial.

Another opportunity for artists to discuss issues relating to public art with fellow artists, public art commissioners, agents as well as other design professionals, is at Public Art Forum's (PAF) regular conferences and smaller scale events. These are held at different ven-

ues nationwide, rather than at an organisational base, and therefore reach a greater number of possible attendees. Art and Architecture (A+A) also encourages debate about public art, and as their name suggests, they are primarily concerned with collaborations between artists and architects. Groups such as PAF and A+A provide an important role, not least in platforming a range of voices, opinions and experiences in the field. However, unlike the Royal Institute of British Architects, or the now disbanded National Association of Artists, they are not professional membership bodies, and consequently do not have any lobbying power, or practical support mechanisms for artists, or indeed any other public art professionals.

Although there is no single professional advice body for artists, there is a range of online practical information on public art issues on the Public Art South West (PASW) website – [publicartonline.org.uk](http://publicartonline.org.uk) – and on a-n's online resources. Both sites have advice on commission contracts, budgeting, applying for a commission, as well as case study information on particular projects. At [publicartonline](http://publicartonline.org.uk) there is also a comprehensive section of related publications and journal<sup>6</sup>.

So, theoretically, artists can now equip themselves with information about past projects, guidelines for under-

taking a commission, best practice, negotiations skills, etc. Why then, when asked "did your public art commission run smoothly?" is the answer accompanied, at best, with a slightly nervous smile, and at worst, with a grunt and rolling of eyes?

In a review of *Art in Public*, one of a-n's Artist Handbook series from the early 1990s, Jeffrey Kastner asserts that: "however admirable the notion of educating artists in the vagaries of public art bureaucracy, the real problems with the form have less to do with the practitioners than with the inherent flaws in the institutional processes artists must negotiate to bring their work into being"<sup>7</sup>. Here, Kastner highlights the tension that exists between the artist, the creation of the artwork and the bureaucratic hoops that the artist must jump through in order to realise, and site, a work in the public domain.

No doubt an artist who is well informed and self-aware is better placed to make decisions about the work, together with his or her position and responsibilities within a project. The lengthy, but by no means comprehensive, list of available training for people who wish to pursue, or be involved in, public art practice is certainly admirable. However, these factors mainly emphasise the artist's contribution. As Kastner points out, the artist is only one part of



**Right:** Re:location Project, 2003. Photo: Diane Taylor. The beginning of the transformation of the former Commercial X-Ray Factory, Foundry Lane, Smethwick. Curator Dave Pollard and Sozo Collective artists Wayne Bartlett and Julian Bull assess the building.



the equation. Whilst it is important to encourage artists to take responsibility for their work and skills base, the onus cannot rest solely on their input. Surely it is as important for all parties involved in public art projects to extend and expand their knowledge, understanding and expertise in this field? If best practice in the realm of public art is to be achieved as a matter of course, all parties must be active in their own, and each other's, development and understanding of the processes and potential outcomes involved, through what Miles cites as "co-operation, delegation and team work". Perhaps then, the opportunity for collective learning and a chance for dialogue across the specialisms, need to be encouraged to take place both before, during and after projects, if we are to see, and take part in, truly informed, collaborative and integrated public art practices.

**Jane Watt is an artist based in London.**

The Navigating places, series explores and highlights artist's projects in the public domain over the course of a six-part series. Subscribers can access the previous three articles – Charting a course, July 2003 issue, Private musings: public projections, September 2003 issue and Back to school, November 2003 issue.

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[www.a-n.co.uk](http://www.a-n.co.uk)

**Above:** Martin Heron, *Shepherd's Crooks*, 2001. **Courtesy:** Training for Real. **Photo:** Porl Medlock. Martin Heron created a series of shepherd's crook installations delineating a route to Malham Cove. The temporary installations formed part of Chrysalis Arts Training for Real project which took place in and around Malham and celebrated the re-opening of the area to the public after the foot and mouth epidemic.

#### Contacts

##### Art and Architecture

70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ  
[www.artandarchitecture.co.uk](http://www.artandarchitecture.co.uk)

##### CITE

22 Lever Street, Manchester M1 1EA  
 0161 228 1400 [www.citeuk.org](http://www.citeuk.org)

##### Commissions East

St Giles Hall, Pound Hill, Cambridge CB3 0AP  
 01223 356882 [www.commseast.org.uk](http://www.commseast.org.uk)

##### Chrysalis Arts

The Art Depo, Asquith Industrial Estate, Eshton Road, Gargrave, North Yorkshire BD23 3SG  
 01756 749222 [chrysalis@artdepo.org.uk](mailto:chrysalis@artdepo.org.uk)  
 (see display ad on p.38)

##### Public Art Forum

2nd Floor, 321 Bradford Street, Birmingham B5 6ET  
 0121 622 4222 [www.publicartforum.org.uk](http://www.publicartforum.org.uk)

##### Public Art South West

Arts Council England, South West, Bradninch Place, Gandy Street, Exeter EX4 3LS  
 01392 229227 [www.publicartonline.org.uk](http://www.publicartonline.org.uk)

##### Public Arts

The Orangery, Back Lane, Wakefield WF1 2TG  
 0121 525 6861 [www.public-arts.co.uk](http://www.public-arts.co.uk)

##### Space Training

The Triangle, 129-131 Mare Street, London E8 3RH  
 020 8525 4344 [www.spacestudios.org.uk](http://www.spacestudios.org.uk)

##### The Public

Unit 1a, Overend Street, West Bromwich, West Midlands B70 6EY  
 0121 525 6861 [www.thepublic.com](http://www.thepublic.com)

For professional development opportunities, see p.38

<sup>1</sup> For several years, Miles was the Principle Lecturer and Course Director of the Design and Public Art degree at Chelsea College of Art. He has published two key texts on public art practices in Britain:

*Art for Public Places: critical essays*, (ed, 1989) Winchester, Winchester School of Art Press;  
*Art, Space and the City: public art and urban futures*, (1997) London, Routledge.

<sup>2</sup> Miles, Art for Public Places: critical essays (ed, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Notably the MA in Design and Public Art at Chelsea College of Art; MA in Public Art at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art Dundee and Glasgow School of Art's BA (Hons) in Environmental Art.

<sup>5</sup> This scheme recently completed its final bursary project in a three-year programme. The Irwell Sculpture Trail project is now managed by Commissions in the Environment (CITE). To date there is no equivalent bursary scheme, but it is hoped that a similar scheme will be set up.

<sup>6</sup> Online information has taken precedent over published handbooks, or guides. One of the few still in print is *Making Places: working with art in the public realm*, Public Art, (2001) Wakefield, Public Arts.

<sup>7</sup> See Kastner, Jeffrey, (1993) 'Art in Public - a review of Susan Jones' Art in Public: what, why, how', *Public Art Review* issue 9, vol 5, no 1, fall/winter 1993.