

WELL LIT



NINA  
EDGE  
Liverpool

## Well Lit

Text by Nina Edge

### **Igniting the prime sites**

Just how artistic and cultural participations affect individual and collective experience in the public realm must depend on who you are, what you've got and what you want. The term 'public realm' is taken to mean maintained and designated public space – not abandoned land that the public are neither excluded from nor encouraged to use. Such wild lands can be places of cultural activity produced by the people that live nearby. Informal, invisible and un-curated incidents come and go on areas called wasteland. Not unimportant, just unannounced.

In 1996, Visual Stress, Liverpool's re-known activists, met on Upper Parliament Street's Rialto corner. The grassy rubble had once been at the epicentre of civic unrest, triggered by the arrest of Leroy Cooper in 1981. We went there, after the Toxteth fires, but before subsequent redevelopment, to perform an Urban Vimbuza. A ritual dance. This plot had, within living memory, been a dance hall, cinema, furniture store, globally reported riot, and locally remembered uprising. Photographs of police lines in front of the blazing Rialto had served as the seminal image of urban dystopia in the UK, blighting Liverpool's image for years. There are few photos of our visit. It wasn't a cultural product for commodification by its makers or to uplift land values. The space was available because it was abandoned. This visit and others like it, at Exchange Flags, Gambier Terrace, and Albert Docks attempted a reconciliation of energies. However difficult that might appear to be.



Visual Stress Zong Exchange Flags 1997 Photograph courtesy of Sean Halligan

## The public of public opinion

The body of people referred to as ‘the public’ is selective. It doesn’t mean everyone, but tends towards people with clean clothes, mobility, money and the means to house themselves, rather than people for whom public space is the place where they sleep, eat, trade or work. Street vendors, tour guides, cleaners and the operatives fining people £80 for dropping litter are somehow outside the definition. Neither people serving the public nor those involved in public unrest may be called ‘the public’.

For the purpose of big public events, further exclusions include people who might need the loo, to sit down and rest, or access to transport. The road closures and diversions that come with big events have seen people stranded when the show is over, so younger, older and disabled people can find themselves excluded from some events.

The public, however defined – be it as all-citizens, all-taxpayers or all-of-the-audience – are rarely in the role of initiating and contributing to what actually happens, as control of public culture belongs to someone else: a professional class of culture-maker. The public may come to see culture, provided they're not subject to any of the exclusions above. They are the consumers: the destination of something from elsewhere, delivered when fully-formed. Participation or community-group inputs will necessarily have been controlled externally, and the audience for events is also filtered by the physical capacity to arrive, stay safe and depart without expending too much cash, time, energy or goodwill.

### **Public private partnerships**

If 'the public', as courted in Urbanist practice, means a group of visiting customers – then 'public space' seems to mean specific spaces that the public can access, according to certain standards of behaviour, even when the space is in fact private. Spaces such as the Albert Dock Village and Liverpool 1 are privately owned and maintained spaces. Private spaces such as these are "areas where the Englishman is allowed as a privilege and not as a right"<sup>1</sup>

Liverpool 1 (L1) comprises 34 private streets in which every square inch is covered by security cameras. It is said that the entire budget arising from Section 106 planning gain<sup>2</sup> was spent on security cameras. There is little danger of privacy for the public, who are allowed to spend time and money there as a privilege. L1 and Albert Dock are shopping, residential and leisure complexes with cultural programmes ranging from water-borne events on the dockside, to carnival tasters and piano music. Both are award-winning schemes of considerable architectural merit: one old and one new. Their regulated environments are calculated to engender feelings of safety appropriate to the clientele they hope to attract – so no begging, no photographs, no leafleting, no protest. This culture of cleanliness that supports the feeling of safety is paid for via increased footfall and spending. The Duke of Westminster's L1 shopping mall is designed to be as free from the evidence of societal tension as it is free of litter.



Outside Liverpool 1 Kelly's Tent  
 Photograph by Nina Edge, 2018



Inside Liverpool 1, Tickle Pianist  
 Photograph by Nina Edge, 2018

## Taking the Piss

Surfaces are washed daily – well nightly, actually – and this shine is part of the cult of late capitalism, with its enclaves that appear safe and clean. Cleanliness as a cultural behaviour measurably imparts confidence and impacts collective experience. The difference between this intensive cleaning regime, and the less frequent cleaning of other city centre districts, is marked. In the Ropewalks and Dale Street areas of Liverpool, the difference is acute, in part due to the mix of daytime and night-time economies. When responding to an artist's brief in the Ropewalks district in 2012, my proposal to provide mobile pissoirs at weekends to service the needs of late-night drinkers in town was laughed down. I delivered a screening of Bea Freeman's *Timepiece* nightclub film with a dance session in Ropewalks Square outside the Foundation for Art and Technology (FACT) instead. This was part of a series of city-wide commissions focused on visitor perceptions. Behind FACT is Arthouse Square, a seated area rendered unfit to sit due to the aroma of street urination. FACT's emergency exit, which opens onto a side street between the Ropewalks and Arthouse Squares, is plagued by the same problem. Pissing in the street is place-taking.



FACT staff wash down their emergency exit. Photograph by Nina Edge, 2018

The zoning out of alcohol consumption on the lower floors of L1 and the resulting absence of street urination, means that we can tell where we are because we can smell where we are. Some shop-workers in the public streets start their day at 8am by sluicing down their vomit-encrusted thresholds and stepping over rough sleepers. Those in the private areas arrive to see the windows and floors being hosed and polished. Yet, the lack of public toilet facilities is not an issue for serious public debate nor seen as an important cultural issue in the UK.

The opening of L1, coinciding with the advent of Liverpool as European Capital of Culture, was the laying-on of hands. It converted a place with dire perceptions nationally and internationally into the very model of city rebranding. Creative public practice is the gift that keeps on giving. It attracts investment, raises land prices, supports businesses, explodes tourism and enhances the way that everyone feels about the place. If it is a miracle – does it come with a curse?

### **Places on fire**

Culture in cities is now *de rigueur* – as essential as a cathedral to confirm city status. It has made Liverpool the fifth most visited city in the UK. As well as hard landscaping, this can mean anything from Royal de Luxe's blockbusting *Giant Puppets*, to a dozen pianos left for passers-by to tinkle on, and everything in between. Rural communities see these distant urban events in late-night news items – tantalising tasters that might inspire a day trip or a city break. There is a perpetual rolling calendar of cultural opportunities, often involving joining a crowd of strangers, seeing the sights and being seen out, and then sharing the joy via social media. Cultural events are pervasive. They exist as promotional material in the host city and neighbouring areas; as the activities themselves, and as the mobile digital iterations captured by audiences. Photos are communicated immediately – and everywhere there is Wi-Fi. So, everywhere.



Royal De-Luxe Giants in Liverpool. Photograph by Nina Edge, 2014

## Private pictures as public spaces

Mercurial picture messages provide instant feedback to event promoters and eventually form part of a competitive toolbox of lifestyle transmission for people who socialise on social media. This forms a virtuous circle for event producers, who can evaluate the impact of the work in real time. Visual installations designed to give the public a background to selfie themselves against, pop up. You can hold a rainbow broly beside a Lego Gromit in Bristol's Cabot Circus – a corporate space complete with a pay terminal for charitable donations. You can even wear the Liverbird Wings in Liverpool's so-far independent Baltic District.



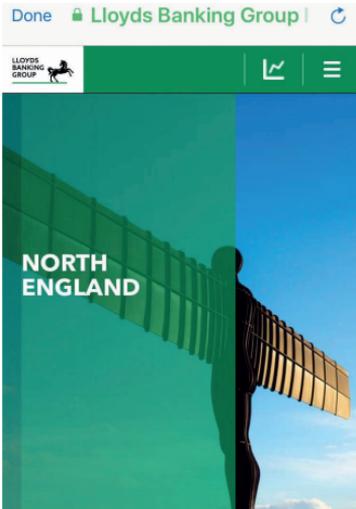
Paul Curtis 'For all Liverpool's Liverbirds' © L. Carlisle, P. Caton, C. Kent, J. Johnston, R. Scott

The refreshing of public squares with hard landscaping consumes the bulk of the capital invested. This forms a backdrop for image-conscious visitors. A honed self-image and fashionable façade are core elements of everyday visual cultural frameworks. After the hard landscaping come honeypot artworks, performances, projections and fireworks, drawing crowds who can be professionally photographed by the organisers. Organisers who will capture their cities, thronged with people, preferably smiling and waving their arms in the air – a marketing staple for the economies of culture-catalysed cities. This is how perceptions are changed.

As urban centres vie to sell visitor experiences that are unique yet familiar, edgy yet safe, action-packed yet relaxing, it is as if the magical essence of regeneration will rub off and rejuvenate us too. So audiences, or the public themselves, become part of the marketing toolkit for the promotion of the next event, in a virtuous circle of image-making. And it's no small cheese. The 800,000 visitors who arrived to see the Giant Spectacular in 2014 apparently brought £32 million into the city. Quite a return on the £300,000 local government spend that seeded the event. Groups and couples tilt their chins upwards, pout and smile in front of iconic buildings, waterfronts and assorted visions. Artwork is specifically produced for people to selfie-pose in front of. People recording themselves in front of the culture-scape confirm the value of place, by putting themselves in the picture. All of this sells the visitor experience to foreign markets, suburbs, rural areas and rival home cities. Those with the financial and physical freedom to travel, thirst for unique, spectacular, increasingly high-status productions. The city needs to continually harvest happy audiences, who look to be having the most fun in the best place, and who will ping their pleasure to others. Culture, or at least the culture of capital (as they call it in Liverpool post-2008), is dancing on the re-paved streets.

### **Picture perfect**

These pictures show an unassailable good news story – one that challenges persistent renditions of cities dogged by dangerous deprivations. The process of de-industrialisation that floored Northern cities, along with the collapse of Empire, religion and social stability, is inevitable. Yet despite the huge differences in life expectancy, education, opportunity and health between the wealthier South and the impoverished North, the magic wand of marketing does its equalising work. The image of Gormley's *Angel of the North* on a Lloyds Bank briefing document reinforces the idea of culture as a civilising and repositioning tool, whilst simultaneously recognising the imbalance in the UK economy. Does having an iconic sculpture signify industrial collapse? Does the North have a hot steel logo, but cold furnaces and no product?



Lloyds Bank Constituency Factsheet.  
Screenshot: Nina Edge, 2018



Culture is like a face-pack. It peels back perceptions of inner-city poverty and rinses off residual hysterias around racial difference. Somehow, smiling pictures dispel full-on fearful dystopias. The face of the city is reformed by the slap of culture. The crime, violence and vandalism embedded in the rural psyche by the papers and the telly are powdered over. Dirty streets are replaced with extravagance, shopping, foreign food, a night in a hotel, the possibility of alcohol and chance encounter. Like meeting a stranger in a public place. At the very least, for rural visitors, the sobering need for a named driver to return them safe to their beds, is replaced by the intoxicating freedom of walking back to a hotel. Intoxicating freedom. The freedom of the city. Anonymity.

## **Public disgrace**

So public perceptions are steadily altered by the skilful work of City Hall and their cultural departments, partner venues, galleries, festivals and production companies. The resurfacing and relighting of public arenas using the best-quality materials is followed by marketing departments who distribute images of unstained environments. Then come the events that animate. All scanned for scandal.

Gone are the people who occupied the spaces before, those who survived the hard times, but for whom the re-imagined city has no quarter. The public arenas in poor, especially Northern cities no longer the places where people with the least money go, but the places where people with the most money go. The magic has been wrought even, and especially in cities where relentless poverties prevail. Where precarious low earnings, austerity, ageing and ailing populations live in dire and abject need. Even Manchester, Salford, and Gateshead have generated fantastic footage of family fun on £200-per-square-metre granite sets, which almost allay accusations that the UK is not really one nation. Not really one, but several: divided from North to South, by race, class and culture, by income, by Leave and Remain. In the post-Brexit analysis, we encounter ourselves as a nation in two. One half primarily rural, right-leaning, wealthy and white, the other half primarily urban, with mixed incomes and identities.

Modern city marketing, with its varied cultural offers, brings divergent groups into single spaces at mass events. This enables rural communities to see, if not accept, otherness. City-breaks interface populations despite difference. Opposing orthodoxies are suspended amongst the lights and the sights, and the buzz of associating with strangers on foot. Certainly, in order for rural populations to access their share of cultural public spending, they are forced into town where venues, events, facilities and transport connections are concentrated. The rural visitors are like the rest of us primates when we visit the countryside. Opting to stay within friend groups, while enjoying being part of a crowd. Not quite meeting – in fact actively competing – with strangers in public spaces.

## The sea slammed shut



Man sitting outside the Bold Street Oxfam Shop. Photograph by Nina Edge, 2018

But it wasn't always like this. In the UK's once dandy, densely populated cities of Empire, in places like Manchester, Glasgow, and Cardiff, imperial extractions are evident everywhere in the fabric and people of the city. The Empire that laid the golden egg is gone, leaving buildings too big to maintain, around grandiose spaces where crowds once cheered troops away. All long gone. New cultural economies have bedded in, especially in cities where creative behaviour and new models of trade were already thriving. Cities like Liverpool, where in the 1980s and the 1990s, Urban Splash heralded the conversion of abandoned industrial architecture for housing. Where Merseyside Moviola and FACT forecast all our digital futures, Urban Strawberry Lunch made music on gas pipes, and Earthbeat were predicting free music events in Liverpool parks. The Black-E was inventing a blueprint for community art, the club scene was legend. In amongst all this, young artists, myself included, benefited from the scale and density of creative boom.

## Public to public

Imagine being here before the renaissance. A post-Militant Liverpool singled out by Margaret Thatcher for 'managed decline'. The survivor turning a corner, thanks to Hezza's [Michael Heseltine's] love of the city and his gift of the Tate Gallery to Albert Dock. Still suffering some of the keenest poverty anywhere in Europe, still demonised and derided. The Liverpool of Hillsborough, of solidarity, of Eleanor Rathbone, of radicals, of racism and uprisings. Imagine being there then and imagine seeing this: *Sold Down the River: A post-betrayal ritual for a post-industrial city*.<sup>3</sup>

A street event built from overheard conversations, in a loose allegiance with each other, coalescing around the notion of betrayal, specifically: betrayal and Liverpool. The project achieved fabled status among the communities who provoked, informed, collaborated and participated in it. It was made by its public: dancers, poets, singers, drummers, dribblers, cooks, musicians, makers. Organisers who stuck together for about six weeks to build it. We collected trails of betrayals and worked them into a procession from the city centre to the docks, and down onto a pontoon where a clay effigy was submerged in the water. Supported as a Bluecoat Live Art Commission, *Sold Down the River* involved about 160 people from all over Liverpool who became the artwork, and was watched by hundreds more. It resonated. People wanted to be in it, add to it, see it, record and recount it. Fifteen years later when a film of the event was shown, participants regrouped to watch it. It told a story recognised by the people in it, but for many years denied in mainstream narratives. More hard reality than soft marketing opportunity. One of the tourism lead funders withdrew their support in kind when they suspected this was a political action, rather than jolly (or at least harmless) set dressing for the Mersey River Festival. Picture this: painted performers burning cash, the bread heads, in sugar-filled cocaine wraps flicking white powder. Dust-faced walkers carrying a sedan chair, its occupant a masked figure cradling a horse whip, riding across town, down to the river. A line-up headed by African descendants, accompanied by the Blind Fool begging, and an initiated Chimbuza presiding over a ceremony for Liverpool. A ritual cleansing, an Urban Vimbuza for the River Mersey. Dancers floated sari-clad

corpses off into the Salthouse Dock, performed on a lotus flower floating on in Albert Dock, sang, drummed, hid their faces and spoke poems to passers-by. Libations were poured for those lost to the water in the Middle Passage, for the cholera dead of the Irish Coffin Ships. This was not *Pretty Masquerade*. This was a remembrance of betrayals past and present – a dedication for the city and its river. It was performed by all comers for three hours one May evening. Literally all comers – no-one was turned away. We burned six kilos of frankincense in huge censers, in a road march that added bystanders to its number, all the way down to the river. Lead by the Blind Fool, again with Visual Stress, and a local football team, carrying a huge woman made of willow. In the pockets of her skirt she carried stories of betrayal, posted anonymously over a lead-in period at the Bluecoat. At over three metres tall, the Willow Woman had very deep pockets.



*Sold Down the River*, Nina Edge, 1995 Photos: Bluecoat, Sandi Hughes, & George

## Sing along

Images, events and practices that originate from groups nominally termed ‘the community’ by outsiders are often radically different in aesthetic, content and intention from those produced by a professionalised class of culture-maker. Community-curated culture won’t necessarily attract commercial or council support, press coverage, permissions, curatorial acclaim or future funding. But delivery against the marketing agenda, almost compulsory in cultural regeneration, is not the only course open to creative people. Not all art in cities is going to be rebranding, presumably some of it will be trailblazing.

When people present their own predicament to a wider external public, collective narratives previously obscured by mainstream or external narrators emerge. We don’t know whether or not to laugh (‘The Bike Turned into a Giant Phallus Overnight’ in *Devon Live*, September 2018) or cry (‘Art Project Representing the Names of Refugees and Migrants is Destroyed’, about *The List in The Guardian*, August 2018).

The public who involved themselves in these actions did so via word of mouth – without marketing and without payment, united by shared experience, self-awareness, common disempowerment and the universal human drive to tell their truth. Perhaps these can be called public-to-public presentations.

*Sold Down the River* fits a genre of truth-telling and survivor forms, such as political Calypso or Mummers’ winter begging plays, dating from the starvation economies of Olde England. When the tourism and knowledge-based economies move into post-industrial cities, they add market-driven and instrumental motivations to cultural practice. Do they also drive out the practice of cultural activism and resistance that precede them? Does the door on citizen-informed productions, radical proposals and disruptive visions swing shut when the lattes move in?



*The List, Banu Cennetoğlu, Liverpool Biennial overpainted by a member of the public  
Photograph courtesy of @NameOurPub, 2018.*



*Duckinfield Street over-painted with Truth Street following the result of the Hillsborough Public Inquiry.  
Photograph Nina Edge 2016*

## Call and response

In 1972, if you'd visited Liverpool's then silted-up docks, Jesse Hartley's warehouses would have been in ruins. You might have looked down into the Albert Dock and seen Liverpool sculptor Arthur Dooley on a boat with a cameraman. Dooley's vision from that day is transcribed:

There's a lot of things that could be done here. There's an idea of a marina that could be developed, there's the museums. This could be, I reckon, one of the greatest tourist centres in Europe. For me, this compares with Venice, and we could have this Venice right here in the city, and it's not just this dock you know. It would go right along. You could have the whole dock area from the Pier Head right through to the Dingle. It could all be developed with new ideas and if the people of Liverpool could have a say in it, if we could have an investment in it, if we could own and run and control it, we could do something really dramatic here, but it needs imagination. There's sculptors and artists here, and there could be a tremendous maritime museum here, a real asset to the city. People would flood in from all over Europe, or from all over the world to see this place.

*One Pair of Eyes*, the 1972 *Four Squares* film, shows Dooley conjuring up a maritime museum, speaking from a boat on Albert Dock, in front of a warehouse that in 1980 eventually did open as Liverpool's Maritime Museum. An unimaginable outcome for a set of structures whose demolition was opposed by the architects Quentin Hughes, Ken Martin and the Liverpool's Architecture students. The survival and repair of Albert Dock, and the resulting global tourism, seeded the professional practice of cultural regeneration, with its measurable impacts and tangible influence. Dooley died in 1994, 14 years after the Maritime Museum opened in 1980, and six years after Tate Liverpool opened in 1988. Tate opened in another of the derelict warehouses featured in the *Four Squares* film as a ruin. This puts Dooley, at the beginning of the re-imagining of Liverpool's waterfront. The re-imagining of a city that was, by 2018, to become the fifth most visited city in the UK. To visit the waterfront now is to walk through the artist's dream.

Much of the picture that Dooley paints with his words are now manifest, although the co-operative socialism envisaged has not so far emerged.

Collective experience of this space has been transformed by every possible measure – and the artist first recorded imagining that potential is a hero among Scousers, many of whom know his work, even if they haven't seen the film of him speaking from Albert Dock. It's said that he directly lobbied Michael Heseltine, the Tory Minister dispatched to Liverpool following the 1981 Toxteth riots, to promote the transformation of the waterfront. Dooley – along with many Merseyside musicians, playwrights, actors, poets and artists – became orchestrators of the public imagination.

### **Same old song**

Thirty years after the opening of Tate Liverpool we are here again amid boarded-up and filthy streets. Shops, pubs and houses, empty or semi-occupied, overrun with rats, fly-tipping, drug dealing and dog shit. This time it's outside the city centre in the inner suburbs, where neoliberal economic theory has come home to roost. Literally into people's homes to roost. The defunding of vital organisations, still known as public, despite their steady privatisation, is palpable. In a context of beleaguered public services, PFI-crippled hospitals, flailing prisons, unrepaired homes and cash-starved schools, grotesque insecurities are normalised. Low-cost social housing has taken a terrible hit. Communities have been scattered following a public private partnership – the euphemistically named Housing Market Renewal (HMR) scheme – left thousands of homes on Merseyside empty and decaying. Many of them just half-an-hour's walk from the city-centre miracle.

Most visitors won't see the sobering sight of street after street of boarded-up houses – unless they sign up for a tour of the tinned-up houses, which of course is now a thing. Over 13,000 houses were threatened with HMR demolition in the city between 2004 and 2011, when housing campaigners eventually halted the bulldozers. This left thousands of empty houses, amongst which hapless populations, myself included, still live.

Liverpool Biennial engaged with the tale of the terraces, or the tale of two cities, as it became known throughout. They ran artist commissions as part of their international programme in Anfield (Jeanne van Heeswijk & Homebaked), Granby (Arseny Zhilyaev, Alisa Baremboym, and Mohamed Bourouissa) and The Welsh Streets, where I live and work (Lara Favaretto and Rita McBride). Liverpool's own creative community defended the ghosted-out neighbourhoods. Places under siege. Tabitha Jussa, Liverpool Lantern Company, Dingle Community Theatre, The Anonymous Poet, 20 Stories High, Rough Edge, Trick Films and numerous TV, companies generated a steady flow of creative responses. As did I. All of it un-funded, un-permissioned and un-curated. These cultural participations became a long-term reply to our collective experience of failed regeneration.



Red Lined and Ex'd, from *Astro Turf for Asset Strippers* Nina Edge.  
Photo: Tom Lox, 2016

## All together now

The 2016 installation by artist Lara Favaretto for Liverpool Biennial arrived in Rhiwlas Street amongst 400 or so of these tinned-up houses. Her *Momentary Monument*, in the form of a 24-tonne granite block, instilled a gravitas to the deep gloom of being amongst hundreds of condemned houses. The artwork was hollow and worked as a collection box for Asylum Link Charity, who received a £1,224 donation from the project. The idea of the sculpture generating funds in a city known for its charitable giving, was faintly undermined by a rumour that it had cost in excess of £20k to install. Dog mess was apparently posted in along with the small change in a sort of public dirty protest. But for most of the public, most of the time, visiting the site of the famous Welsh Streets housing campaign, and reflecting on the aesthetic of the empty streets was a moving and valuable experience.

The work was considered amongst the most successful public artworks in the 2016 iteration of Liverpool Biennial. It enabled visitors to leave the polished Centre Ville and journey to the pock-marked inner suburb. They would have passed the Rialto site on Upper Parliament Street, crossing the junction broadcast repeatedly in the flaming images of the Toxteth Riots of 1981. The one with the police lined up against the rioters, and the Rialto building ablaze in the background at dusk. The same site visited by Visual Stress, rebuilt as offices and shops. Biennial visitors would cross the site of Thatcher's dystopian nightmare, perhaps knowingly, perhaps not. They would continue along the tree-lined Princes Avenue that takes them to Granby and the Welsh Streets, where two residents' groups had confounded the public consultation processes presented by the authorities in their mission to bring renewal to Toxteth, by pulling it down. Granby and Welsh Streets residents cooked up new forms of cultural activism in the service of their own futures. Granby used painting, a public market, spoken-word poems, art and street planting, while Welsh Streets used films, fly-pasted lyrics, games, their windows and the press. It all encouraged visitors to see the threatened buildings and talk to the communities involved. So people visiting the Lara Favaretto *Monument* were also visiting an area branded as obsolete by some, yet defended

by others. After many years, campaigners out-challenged the council, who dropped their plans to demolish in favour of refurbishment. So when art audiences came into the terraced streets they saw a battleground on which a monument seemed appropriate.

### **Contravisionaries**

The 2016 Liverpool Biennial was accompanied by the Liverpool Independents Biennial. This included my own installation *Contravision; Wallpapers for the Dispossessed*, a time-based print work, through which I gradually sealed up my own home with images that gave the illusion of abandonment. Breeze block backgrounds carried large images such as Tipu's Tiger, a rare surviving anti-colonial artefact, robbed from Tipu Sultan's collection by the British Army in India when they eventually defeated him in 1799. Tipu's rendition eats an English soldier. Mine rides a bulldozer.

The location of *Tipu's Tiger Rides Again*, close to Lara Favaretto's *Momentary Monument*, allowed UK and international audiences easy access to both. My work drew an additional local, housing-activist, Liverpool-wide and Northern crowd, for whom the work had a different meaning. For people displaced by land clearances past or present, my 'wallpapers for the dispossessed' reflected a lived reality. For visitors it represented a new territory.

The campaigns benefitted from cultural activism over their 14-year duration; people took photographs, made films, added crochet to the railings, planted wild flowers, daffodils and Welsh poppies. Animations, poems and plays happened. So unusually, without encouragement from the authorities, the public forged a creative response to the situation they found themselves in. A situation enforced by public authorities with public funding. Very few places blighted, emptied and branded 'an urban hell' survived. Even fewer became models of urban resistance – award-winning, in the case of Welsh Streets, and in the case of Granby, Turner Prize-winning – re-inventions of pre-existing realities.



Contravision; Wallpapers for the Dispossessed: Tipu's Tiger Rides Again. Photograph By Jake Ryan 2018

“Capitalism continues to co-opt and transform public space to serve its needs, and the space to imagine real alternatives is continually shrinking. Thus, reclaiming the space of the imagination through creative disruption is a vital step in challenging conditions of subservience in a ‘control society’ and breaking out beyond the world as it is.”

Ben Parry, gallery text, *Cultural Hijack*, Prague 2018

Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> City lawyer, quoted by Minton, Anna (2009) *Ground Control: Fear and happiness in the twenty-first century city*. Penguin: London
- <sup>2</sup> Negotiated under the terms of Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act.
- <sup>3</sup> See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=37hH8YL\\_LwA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37hH8YL_LwA)
- <sup>4</sup> See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=55N9VSMiOm4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55N9VSMiOm4) [20 minutes in]



## Nina Edge

Nina Edge trained as a ceramicist, becoming known for subversive use of craft processes in shows with black British artists in the 1980s. Her work has been published in *Third Text*, *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, *Feminist Art News*, and by the *Liverpool Biennial*, and *Liverpool University Press*. Gallery exhibitions include *Virtual Duality* (Bluecoat, 1994), *Mirage* (ICA, 1995) *Transforming the Crown* (Studio Museum in Harlem, 1997) *The Fifth Floor* (Tate Liverpool, 2008), and *Turning FACT Inside Out* (FACT, 2013). Nina has made street interventions, such as *Sold Down the River* (Bluecoat Liverpool, 1995), *Habeas Corpus* (London 2013); collaborations with *Moti Roti*, *Visual Stress*, *DIY Integrated Cities*, and public realm work in Birmingham, Bootle, Cardiff, Oldham, and Salford. Her *Select Committee Evidence*, and design research produced during a housing campaign in Liverpool's *Welsh Streets* remains in use by researchers and playwrights. As *Cultural Leadership Programme Associate Artist* at *FACT* she worked on city perceptions and the social dynamics of public space. She is currently showing new work in community spaces in Granby Winter Garden and Squash in Liverpool 8.



## Claire Doherty (Editor)

Claire Doherty is an arts director, producer and writer.

Previously, Claire Doherty was Director at *Arnolfini* (2017-19) and was the founding Director of *Situations*. Over the past decade, *Situations* emerged as one of the UK's most innovative and pioneering arts producers, commissioning and producing temporary and long-term public arts projects, creating public art strategies and visions for city-wide initiatives and leading publishing and research initiatives to improve the conditions for, and skills to produce, new forms of public art worldwide. Claire has developed an international reputation as a leading thinker in new approaches to public art policy and planning, and is dedicated to engaging those for whom the arts might have seemed irrelevant or inaccessible through transformative art and cultural experiences; advocating for the social value of the arts, and finding ways to catalyse positive change in specific places.

Claire was awarded a *Paul Hamlyn Foundation Breakthrough Award* for outstanding cultural entrepreneurs, 2009, and appointed *MBE for Services to the Arts* in the *New Year's Honours List* 2016.

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## ***Where Strangers Meet***

An international collection of essays on arts in the public realm.

The urbanist Richard Sennett has written that ‘the public realm can simply be defined as a place where strangers meet’. As the number of us living in cities rises, the pressures on the shared spaces of a city will increase; the places in which our future relationships to one another are negotiated. This is particularly resonant for the British Council, an international organisation that brings people together from different cultures, countries and continents through arts, education, science and the English language. Building on its multifocal work in cities, the British Council commissioned a collection of essays to explore different perspectives on how artistic and cultural experiences affect individual and collective participation and action in the public realm.

For 80 years the British Council has worked in cities in over 100 countries worldwide. The British Council is now responding through research and programmes to the changing urban dynamics affecting citizens and institutions globally, including the impact of globalisation and technological and political change. Work in cities also forms part of our response to some of the world’s current challenges including migration and security. This collection is intended to strengthen our global offer to collaborators and audiences by demonstrating how the power of the arts and creative exchange can be harnessed to make cities more open, dynamic, inclusive and fit for the future.

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