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Folkestone Triennial- Tales of Time and Space

Folkestone, Kent
14 June - 14 September 2008

On a sunny day in June, some friends and I left busy London for a day-trip to explore the seaside and the Folkestone Triennial. Two hours later we found ourselves equipped with neon safety jackets, biking along the sea front, feeling a refreshing breeze and listening to sound pieces created by 9-11 year old pupils from Folkestone as part of Kaffe Matthews' The Marvelo Project. The bikes are furnished with loudspeakers along with a GPS tracking system, which is linked to these sound collages and guiding instructions around the Triennial.

22 artistic projects sparked throughout the charmingly run down, historic sea-side town's winding streets. The curator Andrea Schlieker invited well known and emerging artists including Tracey Emin, Tacita Dean, Heather and Ivan Morisson (who perhaps related to the specific site, as they have lived close by), as well as artists from the rest of the world such as Ayse Erkmen from Istanbul, Sejla Kamerlic from Sarajevo or Patrick Tuttofuoco from Milan. The public artistic projects range from pure performance to permanent installations and reveal in full variety the contemporary notion of sculpture. Many of the commissioned site-specific works originated from local collaboration or necessary participation. Their subjects explore current social and economic changes and struggles as well as compelling histories embedded with the Kentish town. Once a blossoming harbour

city, facilitating the continental traffic to Bolougne as a gateway to France and additionally hosting a railway including the Orient Express, Folkestone is currently facing high unemployment and crime rates consequently leading toward social deprivations engendering racism as well as high teenage pregnancy.

Robert Kusmirowski's Foreshore echoes the veteran fishing industry. He installed a fish market on the harbour's sea ground, which is only fully visible during low tide. Found materials such as shelves covered with algae carpets, rusty iron plates and an oven, fishing nets and ropes suggest a market that has been there forever. The coming and going of tides reflect on time and convey that things are not as they used to be. The once primary and flourishing fishing industry provided the crucial foundation to build Folkestone and to sustain its residents for nearly a thousand years. In 1066 the fishing industry was so important to Britain that Folkestone's settlers were freed from customs. Tracy Emin's Baby Things draws attention to high teenage pregnancy. Within the coastal town, she collected forlorn baby items such as a mitten or a shoe, cast them in bronze, coloured them originally and placed them so carefully throughout the city that they can be easily overlooked. A government report in 2004 revealed the above average high teenage pregnancy in seaside resorts and Tracy Emin's installations act as its permanent reminder. A large immigrant population and its subsequent social impact is touched upon in Richard Wentworth's installations Racinated. Blue enamel signs provide the name and a short description of a nearby tree, originally stemming from outside the UK, which has now rooted in Folkestone. This non-native tree population, which is now fully acclimated, can be read as metaphor for immigration and suggests a familiarisation of the alien through their rooting and growing within the existing social structure as well as their approval of their contributions.

As an integral part of Folkestone's large-scale redevelopments, the Triennial will take place every three years for three months. Foster + Partner have been commissioned



Folkstonomy (2008), Public Works
Courtesy of Folkestone Triennial
Photos: Public Works

to create an ambitious master plan for the redevelopment of Folkestone's seafront. A glance at it uncovers a focus on educational and cultural initiatives, beside the general redevelopment of the area: a new Folkestone Academy, a concentration on adult education and the extension of an already emerging Creative Quarter recruiting new creative enterprises. The man behind these enormous developments is the Creative Foundation's chairman, Roger De Haan. As former chairman of the Saga Group Ltd, De Haan initiated substantial re-investment in the area.

Two of the Triennial's works address issues on cultural

planning and its implementation in gentrification processes and its production of a cultural space. Kites with the slogans 'Hipsterization Strategies' and 'Uneven Development' are sold at the Kiosk 5: Kite Kiosk. The replica of the 1937 Lubetkin kiosk from Dudley Zoo is part of the growing kiosk project realised so far in Amsterdam, Venice and Bregenz by Nils Norman with Gavin Wade mit Simon & Tom Bloor. The kiosk's notion of contributing joyfully to life by providing news and refreshments is here extended and stands in for a utopian future and progressive ideas, tracing Berthold Lubetkin as he pioneered Britain's modernist design. Backed up with the harbour master's plan one recalls the early modernist

attitude, the unrelenting demand for change. Nils Norman's kites, bearing his counter argument of 'Uneven Development' to Richard Florida's 'Hipsterization Strategies' contribute to the debate around arts-based urban development strategies and the creative class as a driving force. The counter argument follows the Marxist approach, as capitalism transforms the world as a whole in various ways, it develops its productive and social forces in some areas, but restricts or distorts growth in others as part of the same process. Folkestonomy the project by Public Works analyses and visualizes the Triennial's production of the emerging cultural space. The mobile mapping station, a transformed dairy van, equipped with signs and tagging symbols referencing the semantics of traffic signage, invites both, locals and visitors to contribute with their story and create their own map. Folksonomy, as an Internet-based method of

collaboratively creating and organizing tags produces here an index along with mapping processes. Narratives and images are feed into a database embedded within this existing and continually growing indexical structure. (online: <http://www.folkestonomy.net/>). The aim is to visualize the production of the Triennial's cultural space as dialogues, collaborations, formal and informal networks that are hardly visible. Artistic works are used as both tools and catalysts for urban developments but also respond and analyse these processes, cultural planning and its implementation.

Finally as Triennial tourists, our day trip to Folkestone ended in a local pub discussing the ongoing culture-led redevelopment process amongst ourselves, yet refusing to take part in the pub quiz, and I must ask: Did we participate in an expanded cultural sphere?



Images: Folkstonomy (2008), Public Works
Courtesy of Folkestone Triennial
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