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Public Art for Riverside Park prompts conversation about biodiversity and social isolation



View down the River Itchen at Mansbridge, 2022. Photograph courtesy of local photographer Damian Cook

Southampton based independent visual art producer Katie Daley-Yates of Host Productions is pleased to announce the commissioning of two public art projects for Riverside Park and the surrounding neighbourhoods by local artists Sarah Filmer and Deborah Gearing. Principally funded by Arts Council England, Abri, The Southampton Collective and Three Rivers Rail Partnership.

The projects emerged from a year of research and development in 2021 when Katie was funded by Arts Council England's Developing Your Creative Practice grant, made possible thanks to National Lottery players, to focus on her independent curatorial practice and develop a commissioning approach for the local neighbourhood.

Katie said: "I am thrilled to have secured funding to develop my first independent public art projects in Southampton. I was drawn to working on my own doorstep because the neighbourhood is vibrant, supportive and home to many brilliant local artists of different disciplines. Through my commissioning approach I will demonstrate that public art can take many different forms, take place outside of city centres and provide alternative ways into discussing sometimes difficult and complex issues. I'm grateful to Arts Council England who have supported my creative journey to date and look forward to contributing to the development of public art practice in Southampton."

THE EEL RUN by Deborah Gearing

Local playwright, printmaker and poet Deborah Gearing will investigate how a public art project can raise awareness of endangered species, specifically here the European eel – 'Anguilla Anguilla', which was formerly abundant in the River Itchen. Over the next year the project will celebrate this iconic and threatened species through story and memory collection, new poetry and printmaking workshops with the project culminating in summer 2023 with a celebratory event.

Deborah will be working with Southampton Archives and Local Studies, local primary schools, community groups and associations connected to the River Itchen.

Deborah said: "I first became fascinated with eels when I wrote a play set on the chalk stream rivers. I met a river keeper and he told me about these marvellous creatures, which used to be so common in the Itchen years ago. When I investigated further, I was shocked to realise they are a red list species, and highly endangered. When I was asked to develop a project for Riverside Park, I knew straight away that I wanted to make work about the eel. I hope that lots of people will be part of my process. The first step is to collect stories and memories of eels to preserve them for future generations, to make sure local people know about this wonderful fish. I want to celebrate the eels in the Itchen with words, printmaking and performance. There are still some eels out there, hiding in the murky water – but they won't thrive if we don't do our best to keep the water clean."

Drawing on the Outside by sarah filmer

Local visual artist sarah filmer will lead a 9-month programme of fortnightly creative workshops in Mansbridge for men who experience isolation to come together, make and reconnect with their local community and spaces. Working closely with Abri, one of the South of England's largest housing providers, as a partner and funder, the workshops have been designed principally for men who live in single occupancy housing in Abri's properties in Mansbridge, but are open to any men who live locally who want to reduce their social isolation. Themes of each workshop and what the group creates will be decided together through a collaborative process. The outdoors will play an important role providing inspiration and materials as the group explores their individual and collective creativity.

During the project the group's making process will have public moments at October Books Community Space in Portswood, God's House Tower on Town Quay Road and Swaythling Train Station.

sarah said: "I spend a great deal of time in Riverside Park and the surrounds. I see men sitting on benches alone. One man, one bench. Covid has reduced all of our social skills, but those who were already isolated have suffered more than most. This project will aim to gently entice people out of their own space and back into shared spaces to experience the power of creativity in a collective and supportive environment, which I hope will make a real difference to the men who decide to come along to the workshops."

Phil Gibby, Area Director, Arts Council England, South West, said: "We are pleased to support Public Art for Riverside Park through Arts Council National Lottery Project Grants, a fund that helps to bring greater access to cultural experiences to people across the region. This project produced by Katie Daley-Yates has a strong focus on engaging communities in Southampton, including men living on Abri Housing Estate in Mansbridge and with school groups through collaborative workshops and public installations. Exploring local issues with co-created activity helps achieve our ten-year vision set out in Let's Create, especially in relation to our Inclusivity and Relevance investment principle which is all about providing cultural opportunities for people from all parts of society. We look forward to seeing the exciting outcomes of the project unfold."

Cara Headon, Community Development Officer at Abri, said: "Our research has highlighted single males in Mansbridge are isolated and face mental and physical issues. We're pleased to support these sessions through our resident-led Community Fund as they will encourage our customers to reduce isolation and get out and about in the local community, something our customers have been telling

us they want more of. Taking part in group activities like this has been shown to improve mental health as it leads to increased confidence, pride and connection to others. Group activities offer the opportunity to develop friendships and connections with other people in the community. This project offers single occupancy men the chance to meet other people in a similar situation and we hope this brings new connections and opportunities to socialise."

Rebecca Kinge, Co-Director of The Southampton Collective, said: *"Having spoken to Katie over the last few years and seeing how she operates in Southampton; we know that Katie has important skills to offer Southampton's communities. As well as her expertise around public art, we have seen someone who is truly committed to our city on a personal as well as a professional level. In our experience, it is these types of people who can make real change happen. We have been inspired by the conversations that we have had with Katie, and we are excited to be providing funding and support to make these public art projects happen."*

Mark Miller, Three Rivers Community Rail Partnership Officer, said: *"We are delighted to be working with Katie on this project which will further utilise Swaythling Station for the community. It's a great way of bringing local people and their local railway together, while providing an amazing constructive art project for everyone."*

For more information, please contact

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Notes to editors

Creative Team

Katie Daley-Yates is an independent visual arts producer who is based in Bitterne Park, Southampton. Working under the name Host Productions, which she established in 2013 her specialism lies in working with artists to produce artworks for the public realm or unconventional spaces such as medieval buildings, shops, bridge cabins and disused cemeteries to name just a few. Alongside, her producing Katie also provides access support to artists and other freelance arts workers helping them to write funding applications opening up and diversifying arts funding.

Katie began her career in Bristol at the award winning public art producers Situations (2002-2018), where she was part of the small creative team who set out to challenge global perspectives on public art and deliver ground breaking projects such as Alex Hartley's Nowhereisland, 2012 for the Cultural Olympiad. Situations has now closed but you can access the projects, research and resources that were developed over a 15 year period and continue to influence public art practice and policy www.situations.org.uk

Katie is currently Chair of 'ixia: Public Art Think Tank' supporting the reshaping and diversification of the long running national organisation with 5 other trustees, so that the organisation can continue to support the public art sector during these challenging times. www.ixia-info.org

www.hostproductions.org.uk

sarah filmer is an artist based in Southampton. She explores relationships between us with her practice, working from an inclusive feminist position to engage people through acts of public art.

In 2016 her work received national attention through the GHT: A Reincarnation project, where the artist highlighted historic gender imbalance by showcasing 700 women through performance, photojournalism, and collective art practices against a back-drop of patriarchal dominance in the narrative of medieval city walls.

A keen collaborator and interventionist, filmer uses art to reimagine public spaces, drawing on her veterinary practice for the outdoor installation, A Flock of Geese (2015) and questioning the relationship between grassroots and institutional art with The Ribbon People (2014), a mural of members of the general public outlined in ribbon against a backdrop of industrial hoardings surrounding a new arts complex.

Her project Knit the Walls uses knitting as a common thread for weaving personal stories into a city-wide initiative. Exploring the value of artistic outcomes to local communities, filmer engages with a variety of self-funding strategies including crowdsourcing as a means of financing community-centric art.

For further information about sarah's work visit www.sarahfilmer.com

Deborah Gearing is a writer, theatre maker, poet, performer and printmaker. As a playwright her play 'Burn' has been widely performed internationally and she has been a mentor on Graeae's playwriting development programme and worked on the National Theatre's New Views scheme since its inception.

www.hostproductions.org.uk

She has worked with youth theatre and taught/ facilitated in education and community groups for many years, with long relationships with mental health service users, and 'Over the Wall', a drama group for ex-offenders and marginalised women which grew out of the Winchester University prison project.

In 2012 she formed the 'Fuse' company with writer Fiona Mackie and a group of Southampton actors to produce theatre in non-theatre spaces, opening with '@Troy' a play written for the regimental dining hall of the Gurkha Regiment in Winchester. Other productions include 'Stone Soup' in 2017, a performance of a series of poems and scenes written as a response to a residency in God's House Tower, and 'The Hope' in 2019, an experimental promenade play which began in a car park and ended in a pop-up pub.

Deborah's interests are social and female histories, young people's lives and the environment. A sense of place runs through much of her work: 'Burn' was inspired by young people and events along the River Itchen; the Chalk Stream Rivers are an essential part of 'Upbeat', and 'Between Wind and Water' explores the maritime labour and connections with Southampton residents. A residency with Forest Forge in the Observatory at Bucklers Hard for the 800 years of the Charter of the Forest celebrations culminated in an audio installation for the exhibition with a cycle of poems on trees, song and interviews with charcoal burners.

In 2021 she worked with Lepe Country Park to create a project for the Sensory Garden. The resulting outdoor play, 'Welcome to My Garden', introduced audiences to the poet Ethel Clifford and her progressive passion for her garden, and explored the changing face of domestic service in the 1920s.

Since working with visual artists on the God's House Tower residency in 2016/7, Deborah has been on a journey with printmaking, moving into investigating how to bring text and image together.

www.deborahgearing.uk

Funders & Partners

Arts Council England is the national development agency for creativity and culture. We have set out our strategic vision in Let's Create that by 2030 we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. We invest public money from Government and The National Lottery to help support the sector and to deliver this vision.

www.artscouncil.org.uk.

www.hostproductions.org.uk

Following the Covid-19 crisis, the Arts Council developed a £160 million Emergency Response Package, with nearly 90% coming from the National Lottery, for organisations and individuals needing support. We are also one of the bodies responsible for administering the Government's unprecedented Culture Recovery Fund.

Find out more at www.artscouncil.org.uk/covid19.

Abri is one of the South of England's largest housing providers, with 40,000 homes and assets and a turnover of more than £220 million. We work with 37 local authorities and 56 different parliamentary constituencies. As we grow, we want to re-establish our strong local presence, deepening our connection with our customers and communities and providing a really good service to more than 100,000 people.

We exist to create thriving communities and empower lives. It's our central mission and one we fully believe in. But what does that look like in real terms?

Between 2020 and 2025 it means we're investing £15 million in communities to increase employment, improve health and wellbeing and empower people to take the lead where they live. And it means building at least 12,500 new homes by 2030.

We believe everyone has the right to a safe, warm, and sustainable home, and to be part of a community where everyone has the opportunity to belong, grow and thrive. So, our priorities are:

1. build more homes;
2. invest in our homes;
3. get really good at customer service;
4. create thriving communities;
5. Make all of our communities more inclusive
6. create a great place to work;
7. manage our business to the highest standards;
8. climate crisis: creating a sustainable future

Find out more at www.abri.co.uk

The Southampton Collective is a social enterprise that was set up in 2016 to progress collaborative projects in the city. Now in its seventh year they have been involved in a number of exciting projects in Southampton, including: TEDxSouthampton 2016 and 2018, Riverfest 2017, Climate Conversations, Art in

Health, Southampton City Vision, Breathing Spaces and Growing Places. Through their work they encourage:

- Creativity
- Fairness
- Sustainability
- Resilient communities
- Grassroots-led action
- Inclusivity
- A greener and more locally-owned economy

Find out more at www.socollective.org.uk

Three Rivers Rail Partnership is a group of local authorities, local people and rail industry, working to promote our train service in Salisbury, Dean, Mottisfont & Dunbridge, Redbridge, Millbrook, Southampton, St Denys, Swaythling, Southampton Airport, Eastleigh, Chandler's Ford, Bitterne, Woolston, Sholing, Netley, Hamble, Bursledon, Shawford and Winchester. The Three Rivers Community Rail Partnership aims to:

- Encourage more people to travel by train.
- Promote services linking Salisbury, Romsey, Winchester, Eastleigh, Southampton Airport, Southampton Central, Bursledon and all intermediate stations.
- Promote its work via www.threeriversrail.com
- Encourage businesses, local communities and volunteers to become more involved in local rail stations and services.
- Promote stations as gateways to local communities.
- Publicise changes to rail services.
- Achieve joint ticketing and promotion of events and tourist attractions when accessed by train.
- Reduce traffic congestion.
- Do anything that gets more people using and thinking about rail travel!



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