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INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE

Interreg 2 Seas CROSS BORDER COOPERATION PROGRAMME (2007-2013):

Creativity without Borders presents



from Medway:an urban scenography ©fiona watt

Seeking Closure

two dockyards, two cultures, two futures ?

Fiona Watt - creative producer & curator (UK)

Seeking Closure is a piece of live, outdoor, portable performance that will take place during Medway's FUSE festival in June 2009 and at Maison D' Soubise's outdoor festival in June 2010. Celebrating the survival and growth of two communities following the closure of the dockyards in both Chatham and Dunkerque in 1984, this year's performances took place on 6th June in the planned but as yet unrealised public space on Rochester Riverside and on **13th and 14th June** on the former parade ground in **Chatham Historic Dockyard**, the site of the closing ceremony twenty-five years ago.

Exploring non-verbal as well as verbal communication, the ACCESS project (part financed by the European Union) launched at the University of the Creative Arts, Rochester in January 2009 when seventy members of the English and French communities were brought together for the first time to drum and sing.

Participants in the *Creativity without Borders* strand of the project, delivered at the New Art Centre, Chatham are collaborating with a range of visual, media and performance –based artists to create a Boites-en-valise (Suitcase Museum) . The 'museum' was shown to our partner group in Dunkerque when we made our first visit at the end of April 2009. With the assistance of an opera singer, a choreographer, a musician and a native French speaker, The Suitcase Museum became the centre of our performance piece developed from the exchanges and collaborations made during our time together.

By working across art forms and making work in both planned and existing public spaces, we hope to make a significant contribution to the development of outdoor arts.

Seeking Closure builds on existing relationships with Project Re-Ignite, Brook Lines Residents Action Group, UCA Widening Participation, Chatham World Heritage Partnership and Medway Renaissance developed on previous projects while fostering new links with Chatham Dockyard Historical Trust, the Creative Events course at the University of Kent at Medway, The Fairbridge Trust, and Kent Architecture Centre all of whom now occupy regenerated Dockyard buildings.



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A key component of the project is to build a thriving intergenerational relationship between young people and older volunteers. We are continuing a very successful 'buddying' relationship with Friends of Medway Libraries and are expanding this way of working by researching Dockyard history with members of Chatham Dockyard Historical Society. Many of the members are ex-dockyard workers and we have made those who served their apprenticeship here a particular focus of our work. In the coming year we will start to also focus on Chatham's future by continuing to involve Medway Regeneration Ambassadors in creatively facilitating workshop sessions.

In May 2009 we were very fortunate to have the opportunity to present The Suitcase Museum to a group of delegates from all over Europe. In the course of our research, we have also made connections through personal and professional histories with dockyards in other parts of the world and we are looking forward to building on these newly discovered links during the second phase of the project.

There are 24 participants in the *Creativity without Borders* company, all local people, working with 6 professionals, which on the UK side is Fiona Watt as lead artist, a second artist (this is more than one person depending on our needs over the course of the project) a Neighbourhood Inclusion Manager and an intergenerational mix of 12 participants. Over the course of the project, a number of the group will make their first trip to Europe.

Maison D'Soubise have created a new public square in consultation with the community. This project will enable professionals to work directly with the community for the first time on a piece of art that engages them in the regeneration/consultation process. Medway, planning a public square in the future, will benefit from this strand of the exchange in professional practice.

Existing strengths will be taken in new directions through collaboration, Soubise has strong community choirs, including one for deaf children, led by a professional composer and musical director. The communities in Medway have developed a strong visual arts culture. We aim to nurture an exciting interface between the two.

NOTES

Seeking Closure is being made for *Creativity without Borders/ Creativite sans Frontieres*, an intergenerational project with Maison D'Soubise, Dunkerque which will look at engaging young people in social regeneration via the animation of public space.

It forms one of five strands of **Acces** (Achieving Community Champions and Enhancing Social Capital for Disadvantaged Communities) Medway Council's joint bid with Greater Dunkerque, France under the Interreg IVA Mers Seas programme.

The project is also supported by the Community Dividend Fund and UCA.

Creativity without Borders, will be delivered between January 2009 and September 2010.

The project seeks to break down barriers between age groups, nationalities and communities, with a specific emphasis on young people taking part in social regeneration using creativity (more specifically visual arts and music) as a tool. We want to maintain and develop our track record of delivering this with the assistance of older volunteers.



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HISTORY

This project has developed from a chance encounter between members of Project Re-Ignite (Brook Lines) and the Dunkerque delegation when they visited the ‘My Space’ project at the New Art Centre, Chatham in January 2008. Using elements of the scenographic/theatre design process this project explored the journey from personal to public space using storyboarding, scale model-making, video and sound.

The two communities have subsequently discovered a shared history of Dockyard closure in 1984 and are keen to acknowledge the 25th anniversary of that event and the establishment of the Chatham Dockyard Trust in the work that we make.

*Project Re-Ignite is a Medway-wide project that aims to assist people of 16 years old and over who are economically inactive, unemployed and/or on low incomes

FIONA WATT

Fiona is a freelance scenographer based at the New Art Centre, Chatham.

This term, more widely adopted by performance designers in Europe and the US, embraces the broader range of work now being made that responds to site and ‘found’ spaces as well as more traditional performance environments.

Designing for theatre on a variety of scales both nationally and internationally, she has exhibited her work at *Time + Space* (RCA), *2D>3D* (Sheffield Millenium Galleries and UK tour) and *Collaborators : Design for Performance* (Nottingham Trent University and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

During the exhibition’s residency at the V&A, she delivered a series of workshops to school and university groups, giving them an opportunity to actively engage with the design process.

Working pre-dominantly with Scottish and Irish new writing that has a recurring theme of the relationship between people and land, she is passionate about using elements of her scenographic practice to creatively and socially engage traditionally disenfranchised groups with the regeneration process.

Having previously worked on a large-scale community performance project at the Harland and Woolf shipyards in Glasgow her interest lies in the impact of temporary performance on these spaces and the subsequent cultural memories that creates.

Seeking Closure was performed on both the site of the final closing ceremony in the Dockyard in 1984 and the site of the new public square, yet to be created, on the Rochester Riverside development.

Fiona is leading the project in collaboration with composer and musical director **Claude Vanderschueren** and choirmaster **Regis Bertin** from Dunkerque, France.

If you are interested in participating in the project as a partner organisation, please contact me for further details. There are a variety of ways in which you can chose to take part.

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