



People's Air Gallery final report

Background

In 1996, Sunderland City Council commissioned a unique collection of hand painted kites which became known as the European Air Gallery and is now curated and held by North East Kite Fliers. In celebration of the 10 year anniversary of this successful project and with funding from the Culture 10 programme, Sunderland City Council contracted Infinite Arts to develop a new project - the People's Air Gallery. This project had two main strands which came together in a final exhibition on the site of the Sunderland International Kite Festival in July 2006. The project also received sponsorship from Sunderland ARC.

The People's Air Gallery aimed;

- to provide opportunity for local people to have the chance to make kites from everyday materials.
- to provide opportunity for artists and kite-makers to work together to make new and exciting kites to fly and exhibit at the festival.
- to exhibit the process and results of the workshop sessions.

The overall theme for the project was 'recycling' – and kites have been made out of recycled and everyday materials – confirming that kite-making is a very accessible activity. The underlying concept of the project is that anyone can make a kite and it can be made from almost anything – even things we usually throw away, hence the title – the People's Air Gallery.

The project was developed by Infinite Arts - an arts consultancy based in the North East of England and working throughout the country, bringing together a variety of skills and experience to support the arts and creativity in education. The project was directed by Frances Anderson, Pauline Taylor and Lucy Harland.

The project was well received by participants and public alike. Almost one hundred people took part in the community workshops and learned how to make kites from simple materials. Fourteen professional artists and kite-makers combined ideas and expertise to design and make new kites during the symposium and hundreds of kites made by the community groups and the professionals were exhibited at the Sunderland International Kite Festival to an audience of many thousands of people.

"The People's Air Gallery really enhanced the Kite Festival's programme this year and was really accessible to a wide range of people, from complete novices to professional kite fliers and everyone in-between. The project encouraged new audiences to get involved in the Sunderland International Kite Festival and to be creative through designing and making their own kites, flying kites or simply watching, for the first time, the wonderful variety filling the skies during the two day festival."

Jessica Bell, Sunderland City Council

"The People's Air Gallery was a truly magnificent exhibition of kites made from recycled or household materials such as bin liners, plastic bags, bits of old sheet, shower curtains..... no matter that some might not have flown too well; it was wonderful to see the variety of imagination of art that can be made by ordinary people from everyday materials."

John Dobson, Chair North East Kite Flyers.

a Community Outreach programme

The community based outreach project was lead by Frances Anderson and was delivered to 9 community groups, engaging 85 participants over a six week period and creating over 100 kites which were displayed at the Sunderland International Kite Festival. Participants ages ranged from under 2 to over 70 and included some adults with learning disabilities, adults with mental health issues and children with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The groups involved were:

- Age Concern Sunderland
- The Art Studio Sunderland
- Arts Centre Washington (children's arts group)
- Usworth School
- St Robert of Newminster School
- Children Who Foster
- Bridge Women's Group Sunderland
- Pennywell Youth Project
- Pennywell Neighbourhood Centre

Key outcomes and benefits from the community work included enjoyment, fun, learning new skills, meeting new people. People also had the chance to share skills, to share memories, to achieve things they never thought possible and to see their work in a public exhibition.

The team of workshop leaders was led by Frances Anderson and included Vicky Riley, Gill Laverick and Joy Sanders.

Community Programme - benefits

- Participants enjoyed the project, had fun and learnt new skills.
- Participants had a chance to meet new people.
- People had the chance to share skills, to share memories, to achieve things they never thought possible.
- People saw their work in a public exhibition.
- The kite artists and assistants who led the work were given a challenge and were able to develop their skills further.
- The community enthusiasm inspired other people not already involved in the project to fly kites and even drew in new groups organically through seeing what others had achieved.
- Groups appreciated and were challenged by the recycling theme.



Participants' thoughts

"You have broadened my outlook today"
Age Concern

"It feels very, very nice. It's not always perfect but you get to make changes to your kite"
Arts Centre, Washington

"I enjoyed flying the kites it was really exciting. It was real fun and I have learnt that if it spins around you add more tail."
Age Concern

"I feel young again."
Bridge Women's group

"I went home and made kites with my grandchildren"
Age Concern

"I thought kites were really boring, but they are mint".
Pennywell Youth Project

"I have finally achieved something."
Bridge Women's group

What do you feel you achieved?

b Kite-Art Symposium

For four days leading up to the Sunderland International Kite Festival, a Kite-Art Symposium was held at the Arts Centre Washington involving five international kite-makers, five local artists, one recent fine art graduate, one student teacher and one engineer. All the above will be referred to as artists in the report, unless specific reference is required.

- Kite-makers Robert Trépanier from Canada, Anna Rubin from Austria, Anke Sauer, Kisa Sauer and Ulla Bebko from Germany, Harry Peart from UK
- Artists Paula Turner (dancer), Joy Sanders (performer) Stuart Ward (film-maker / visual artist) and Jim Roberts (sculptor) Frances Anderson (textiles)
- Graduates Ariane Jackson (Fine Art) Pip Yates (PGCE student teacher)
- Engineer Alan Norris

Everyone worked together using recycled and everyday materials to make structures and kites using the materials provided and sharing ideas. The symposium set out to provide a challenge to existing artistic practice, an opportunity to share ideas, a chance to try new materials, and a series of constraints within which to be creative. The symposium was hosted by the Arts Centre Washington who provided use of the theatre space, a storage space for materials and a break-out space for the team.

The Kite-Art Symposium resulted in the creation of over thirty kites and inventions along with a variety of attempts and prototypes. Artists used materials such as garden fleece, video tape, plastic bags, drinking straws, net curtains and practice golf balls to create their inventions. Many of the kites were fragile, ephemeral and experimental due to the materials and their rapid construction. Feedback from the artists shows that they felt the project did provide an opportunity for artistic development and in some cases has been influential in provoking a change of direction which will only be revealed fully over time.



Feedback from artists and kitemakers – Kite Art Symposium

“The project has inspired me for new kites and I am keen to do more experimentation with this type of construction but I feel it has mainly influenced my thinking about workshops. I intend using plastic bags in workshops for children/students too.” Anna Rubin

“It was a pleasure to work with such a diverse and enthusiastic group of individuals.” Jim Roberts

“I feel immensely lucky to have had this wonderful opportunity and at present I am keen to share what I got out of it, and to continue to play with whatever materials are available to me.” Joy Sanders

“I liked the idea of working together but it was too difficult to do this, because the non-kite-makers had to find out ‘what is a kite’ first. So I found myself a little lost before I found some material, and worked on my own. ...It was useful to work alongside artists from different disciplines - feeling a little easier to free my mind.” Anke Sauer

“Ultimately, it was a pleasure to work as a member of the Symposium and I experienced a great many scenarios and arenas for creative discourse that I feel have added to my broader understanding of visual culture, not to mention the very addictive kite flying phenomenon!” Stuart Ward

“You should do it again for longer, and investigate the amazing creative metaphor that kites/flight offer us – and have different practitioners lead on this.” Paula Turner

“For me the working atmosphere (with everyone in the same space) was my inspiration and the impression. I like the process of developing ideas and gradually I make the visualisation of my thoughts.” Ulla Bebko

“I liked the positive work atmosphere, working not on my own, working with friends. It helped me realise that it's worth continuing, and that I am on the right track.” Kisa (Kirsten Sauer)

“What I like and what scares me at the same time is the synergy of working in a group, the group ideas flow very quickly and in many directions.” Robert Trépanier

“I learnt a lot from the Symposium and found it a very valuable experience particularly at this time after graduating.” Ariane Jackson

“I appreciated the joy of being experimental, even if it didn't really take off.” Pip Yates

“I thought that working together was a good idea, but it was difficult – everyone seemed set on their own solo efforts (is this the nature of true artistic creativity?)” Alan Norris

“I was pleased to have the chance to work with people who had never made a kite before – a blacksmith and a cake decorator, and found the final exhibition inspirational.” Harry Peart

Kite Art Symposium - benefits

- opportunity to collaborate and work creatively together with other artists
- opportunity to extend own field of practice.
- time to try new things, new materials, new ideas, (although all found that there was not enough time to do all they would have liked).

c Exhibition – People's Air Gallery

A marquee on site at the Sunderland International Kite festival was allocated to exhibit work from the People's Air Gallery. The exhibition was designed and managed by Lucy Harland (Harland Arts) and set out to reveal the process and the development of ideas as well as the finished products which emanated from the community programme and the Kite-Art Symposium. Many of the hundreds of kites produced were exhibited in the marquee around the walls and some suspended from the ceiling in 'mock flight'. Some of the kites were flown during the festival and some wind-operated, installations made from recycled materials were displayed outside the marquee.



The exhibition also included an accessible display of information about the project and about the participants and artists who had been involved. A projection screen showed photographs taken during the making process with a soundtrack of comments. An activity area in the marquee encouraged visitors to take part in making a kite arch using old magazines. The project showed people that they could make a kite easily using recycled materials.



The exhibition provided a unique opportunity for people to find out more about kites in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere.



Visitors' comments

- "Brilliant - a nice welcome into the tent - excellent use of recycled stuff."
- "These are very simple kites yet they look so effective!"
- "It's amazing how much you can do with recycled materials! Excellent! "
- "Excellent displays - very well organized. A most enjoyable day."
- "The kites are amazing. I would love to make ones as good as these."
- "I think it's a good idea to make kites out of stuff you would throw away."
- "Fab ideas for recycling & Design Technology."

Exhibition - benefits

- The marquee provided an opportunity for people to find out more about kites in a relaxed atmosphere
- The exhibition showed people that they could make a kite easily
- The exhibition set a high standard for decoration of a festival marquee
- The exhibition boards were informative- there was always someone reading them
- The deckchairs looked good and attracted people in
- There was no damage or breakage of any kites or equipment

Photos by Infinite Arts, Pauline Taylor, Lucy Harland, Frances Anderson, Vicky Riley and Jack Flynn