

Urban Dialogues Connect: Collaboration of Artists and Academics

MINUTES

CENTRAL AIMS OF THE EVENT:

The aim of the Urban Dialogues and King's Cultural Institute event was to generate new forms of engagement and collaboration, test new ideas, stimulate new partnerships and share research and artistic expertise.

INTRODUCTION: Dr Dorian Hayes, King's Cultural Institute, Partnerships Manager

- King's Cultural Institute (KCI) aims to create an effective bridge between King's and the cultural and creative industries.
- KCI creates a distinctive first point of engagement for the cultural sector and supports the exploration of conversations and collaborations with individual artists and cultural organisations.

Welcome address from The Revd. Professor Richard Burridge, Dean of King's College London and Professor of Biblical Interpretation

INTRODUCTION: Holly Jones, Urban Dialogues Manager

- Urban Dialogues – arts programme which offers a space to contemporary artists interested in pursuing complex and challenging ideas, and particularly ideas that explore notions of faith, identity and belief in contemporary society.
- Key feature of the programme is that it acts as a lynchpin which connects artists, thinkers and audiences from widely different backgrounds and communities.
- Jones explained that the two artists collectives that were in attendance had been awarded a 2013 Urban Dialogues commission after submitting proposals which were shortlisted by curator Michael Regan, and then finalised by a selection panel including academics from King's, experts from the White Cube, artists and representatives from a number of faith based organisations.
- Jones explained that the artists were at the very beginnings of developing their proposals, and that Urban Dialogues was supporting this process by creating a forum for sharing these ideas and opening them up to a wider audience with a broad range of expertise and interests.

INTRODUCTION: Hannah Taylor, Three Faiths Forum, Event facilitator.

- The Three Faiths Forum is an a-religious organisation that encourages interfaith and intercultural dialogue and cooperation.
- Taylor emphasised the importance to these conversations, and sought to encourage the exchange of knowledge and relationship building throughout the event.
- Taylor explained the structure of the day and facilitated introductions from all attendees.

PRESENTATION 1: **Zena Edwards, poet, performer, multi-artist**

Katie Pearson, dancer, multi-artist

Cherrelle Skeete, actress, dancer, multi-artist

Rasheeda Nalumosu, dramaturg, project manager

- **Edwards** explained the parameters of the artistic project which was exploring various perceptions of women and girls anger.
- Edwards positioned herself as a poet and a black female artist whose personal and artistic journey had led her to challenge negative perceptions of women’s anger and invite individuals, through artistic exploration, to transform anger into a productive actions and choices.
- Part of the projects aims is to challenge racial stereotypes as it relates to women’s anger.
- **Edwards** explained that the Urban Dialogues commission would be used to create an interactive art installation that speaks to the connections of femaleness, fury and faith.
- The intention is to collect narratives that explore anger (audio, text, images and photography) and ‘bind’ them together to form a tree-like sculpture.
- **Skeete** explained that the art installation would be partially created through the South Asian technique of binding. Isa Suarez, who ran a project called the “Human Right Jukebox”, has donated the jukebox to the Fury Project which will be transformed through this particular technique.
- **Pearson** explained that cultural and mythology significance of trees - as a symbol of growth and rootedness. Pearson suggested that after the “completion” of their tree, they may burn it as a symbol of the release and transformation of anger.
- **They asked attendees to consider the following questions:**
 1. How can we create a new dialogue to discuss anger and locate individual responsibility?
 2. Historically women's have been physically, emotionally, verbally and politically bound. How do we readdress the balance for the future?

3. How can we shift the language about anger to reflect on its transformative power?

A POINT OF CLARIFICATION WAS ASKED:

Question: How will you present your project at the exhibition?

Answer: As a tree with bindings attached that will engulf the jukebox containing women and girls narratives. Also workshops will be run with people sitting around the tree to bind and submit their narratives – in this way the tree will continue to grow. Additionally, there will be spoken word performances looking at anger.

PRESENTATION 2: David Borrington, MA RCA, socio-political artist

Aithan Shapira, PhD, visual artist (via Skype)

- **Borrington and Shapira** talked about their art practise.
- Shapira and Borrington met at the Royal College of Art in 2006. They discovered commonalities in their life and work which included attention to hybrid cultures, borders, boundaries and examining multiple and simultaneous perspectives.
- The two artists will construct two walls, making artwork on opposite sides - one prior to viewing what the other artist is making on the opposing side, and the other wall will be made after communicating.
- To best serve the project's experimentation, the wall and artwork will have a basic set of parameters. Each wall will be 8ft square and each artist will only use black and white ink to make his side. The Atlantic Ocean will serve as their first dividing wall: with studios in the UK and US, they will each structure their first wall without seeing the other's work and only minimal communication.
- **They asked attendees to consider the following questions:**
 1. Where do we build walls? It is a boundary, or does the wall create that boundary? Different types of walls, to keep in or out, or walls bring two sides together.
 2. Walls suggest permanence, while things outside them evolve.
 3. Do we build walls with one side in mind?

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS ON PRESENTATION 1

ZENA EDWARDS, KATIE PEARSON, CHERRELLE SKEETE, RASHEEDA NALUMOSO

The artists did not talk during these discussions. This offers them the opportunity to listen to discussions of their proposals and questions.

- **Articulateness as a weapon** – do women have the language for anger? Words are powerful – they have an impact on anger. Words have the power to empower; they also have the power to create adversarial contexts (e.g. politics, courtrooms)
- **Binding** – brings things together. Links to tapestry work from last year. Everyone making work together. Particularly interesting if you do not do work that is typical for girls. Are you creating more ties by binding?
- **Moving beyond words** – interesting part of the work – binding the jukebox, movement/activity as vocabulary. Emotions cannot just be expressed in words.
- **Is the work very directive?** Will you tell people that you will burn what they are making? What are the ethical, social, artistic responsibilities here?
- **Burning – Is this transformative?** What about Hindu burials, where there is a sense of ending? Could the ashes be used to paint with?
- **Can reflection be incorporated into anger?** Does it become something else? What is an angry reflective moment?
- In Christianity, Anger is **1 of 7 deadly sins** and is unique. The other 7 are not emotions.
- There are **biblical examples** of righteous anger (Jesus smashes the temple), but also very destructive (the wrath of God), so how do we reconcile or better understand these tensions?
- The history of women's subjugation is bound by **power relations** – how do we address this and find a balance?
- How can we encourage people to better communicate and express their thoughts?
- **Reflection** – how does this relate to the spontaneity of anger and whether you can better understand it?
- **Passive anger** – can provoke anger in others – relates to Freudian ideas about latent aggression.
- **Royal Court** – Look Back in Anger – gave audiences an opportunity to observe people's anger at a distance.
- **Anger can be a political tool** – this can be very different comes from a woman as opposed to a man
- **Protest** – individual and collective anger leading to community unity and protest movements – often led by women.
- Is it possible to think of anger without its source? **How useful is it to think about anger without its source?** Are you personifying anger, giving it power?
- **Jewish feminism/feminist imaginaries** – a translated memoir of a Jewish woman and her arguments with God reveal the need to recover the history of women and anger, and the ways in which it is productive and advances empowerment.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS ON PRESENTATION 2 DAVID BORRINGTON & AITHAN SHAPIRA (VIA SKYPE)

The artists did not talk during these discussions.

Discussions explore historical/social/mythical/monumental /sacred walls, including:

- The Berlin Wall (Germany)
- Hadrian's Wall (NE England)
- Offas Dyke (English/Welsh Border)
- The Wailing Wall (Jerusalem)
- Humpty Dumpty (**what about the 3rd side of the wall?** You can sit and walk on top of walls, they act as a passage, and as a mode of transport).
- Northern Ireland wall dividing Catholic and Protestant sides with a passage in the middle
- The depiction of walls by Renaissance painters which separated the audience from the sacred, i.e., Madonna and child.
- Historical (small) walls in royal chambers; marked hierarchies.

Functions of Walls

- The Wall as a binary, two sides, right wrong
- Walls force people to make a choice
- Walls can protect and oppress.
- Walls are ghosts, memories.
- Walls create social boundaries; the idea of the wall is there, before you create the wall.
- Walls function as identity dividers – signifies national identity, rather than geographic location.
- Walls are physical and cultural dividers, and they shape behaviours and create identity.
- There are different kinds of boundaries: not all walls are negative. For England/Wales/Scotland, the water is the national boundary, as well as being a mode of transportation. Maybe in maritime times, the land was the obstacle.
- Walls are functions of power – the power to make borders, to define who is being contained and who is being protected – US/Mexico borders; proposals for an electrified fence. Walls and the history conquest and violence.
- **How might the two artists navigate a power relationship as they develop their walls? Will an exhibition audience read a hierarchy in the works – can the two sides of a wall be equal?**

Walls in the Bible

- Christ walked through walls
- Breaking down of the walls of Jericho
- Red Sea – water was divided like walls
- Walls of the tabernacle become the wall of the temple; so canvas became stone.

FUTURE THOUGHTS /CLOSING REMARKS

Dr Dorian Hayes

- **Hayes** noted that a project on “Fury” and on “Walls” were both very timely in terms of social movements and the positioning of women.
- **Hayes** described how the **Peckham Peace wall** had been put together after the 2011 riots in London. A business was destroyed in the area and people stuck post it notes all over it. These were then collated and inscribed on to the Peckham Peace wall.
- Hayes noted that there seemed to be bridges between the projects and was interested to see how this plays out in the exhibition.
- Summarising the Fury Project, Hayes noted that the Jukebox, poetry and stories were all crucial platforms in enhancing dialogue.
- Hayes stated that KCI was committed to connecting beyond other elite institutions, and would continue to work with smaller, diverse organisations/projects like Urban Dialogues.

Prof. Ben Quash

- Quash noted the relationship between the etymology of religion and the etymology of “binding” and creating ligaments.
- Religion has the power the bridge and bind – to create ligaments and transform movement.
- Quash welcomed the dialogue that was made possible by the Urban Dialogues/KCI partnerships and looked to future initiatives/projects that might include the incorporation of UD commissioned artwork on a King’s College London syllabus.

Holly Jones

- **Jones** thanked all participants and noted that bringing academics and artists together had been beneficial and useful.