



architecture/art

muf

Chatterton on the Beach

A muf art project
commissioned by Bristol City Council
July - December 2007



Project Report
muf architecture art

Chatterton on the Beach

Development Opportunity Sites identified in the Bristol Local Development Framework, Supplementary Planning Document 3 (July 2006). Any plans for the future development of a place invariably challenge existing residents to scrutinize their often unconscious idea of occupation as ownership, not just of place but also of the idea of a place. That sense of belonging, of identity linked to territory, is a powerful component in how we visualize our futures and as such, any potential change to territory is a potential threat to identity. The urban beach, as a unique city centre public space, able to support multiple uses by a diverse constituency, made transparent the claims on territory and rendered that territory permeable. As the project site it was pivotal in the positive experience of shared ownership and in doing enhanced rather than detracted from an intact sense of identity.

Chatterton on the Beach: The strategic ambition for the project was to show, by example, how an artist can engage with the social, cultural and physical fabric of a place, in what is a diverse constituency. muf selected as project partners the Thomas Chatterton Society, the young people from Waring Underdown and Frankcombe House (WUF), a block on a local housing estate and a young local poet, Kev. muf devised a participative process to enable a quality experience and a highly resolved outcome as artwork.

The Redcliffe Wharf urban beach in the summer of 2007 created a new temporary city centre place where people who might otherwise never meet, congregated. muf used the beach as a catalyst and as a real place to explore what it takes to make seemingly exclusive cultural or social territories permeable to one another. Those territories were identified as the particular history of a place, exemplified through the work of Thomas Chatterton and the culture of local children and young people. The project began with a lecture as cook out as part of the *Think Beach* talks organised by Demos.

Project methodology : The workshops were devised by muf through dialogue with the Chatterton Society and the commissioned poet, Kev. The workshops established a relationship with a core group of eight young people from WUF through four sessions on the beach, four at the youth club and one at St Mary Redcliffe Church. The WUF children together with a further 50 participants produced poems, texts and images inspired by the work of Chatterton. These formed the basis for the final work that used a real journey around the harbour as a metaphor for those journeys of the imagination and the journey from childhood into the adult world

The role of the artist : The project enabled creative experiences between the artist and the participants and resolved these as a final art work. The artists worked intuitively and were reflexive to the social and cultural situation. To deliver the project and respond meaningfully, the artists undertook the following roles, each appropriate to the different stages of the project:
artist as project manager
artist as mentor
artist as teacher and skill sharer
artist as autonomous and intuitive creative
artist as social engineer.

*Thou hast let me see that Bristol has impress'd her stamp on thee**
The final work was a promenade performance around the floating harbour to demonstrate how the places where we live are as much made by the ideas we have of them as they are by the real stuff around us, conversely, to make the world that we want is to turn our imagination into real things. The audience was selected as an act of social engineering to bring together the different interested parties who have a vested interest in the development of the city.

Thomas Chatterton.

Audience and participants' responses:

I often ride Bristol's ferries; I know every inch of the harbour walls having sailed and canoed these waterways over many years; In spite of all this your charming boat trip was a magical experience transforming these familiar sights into something fresh and mystical. Many thanks.
Graham Balfry, Redcliffe Futures Group Chairperson

Just to say how much I enjoyed last night's unique event. So very imaginative and such fun! You put in a tremendous amount of work but it certainly paid off in the result. I know the children were thrilled!
Roger Starr, Ben Perry Boat House Scout Association

Kit joins me in thanking you for including us both in your Phoenix Wharf Christmas event. The excitement of the children added to the enjoyment of the event. Many thanks again,
Richard and Kit For Richard Pedlar Architects

"It's amazing, the water looks like it's bleeding", Shannon WUF

"Look it's me, I'm sailing next to us!" Chloe WUF

"Spot on" Ryan WUF

"I never thought it would be as great as this" Andy WUF

Key
Journey 1 : the children, from the estate to the beach

Journey 2 : Thomas Chatterton from 1870 - 2007

Journey 3 : from the real to the imaginary, art work as journey.

Thomas Chatterton School
Muniments room, St Mary Redcliffe Church
Bristol Classic Boatyard
Ben Perry Boat House
WUF Community room
Urban Beach 2007

