

the lost o: temporary artworks for ashford – artists inspire urban transformation

Artworks which include cows being herded through streets, the reinvention of road signs and graffiti on pavements are part of The Lost O, a dynamic programme of temporary public art by international artists taking place in Ashford this July 7-8 2007 as the Tour de France passes through the town.

The Lost O, funded by the Art Plus award scheme for Art in Public Places and the local Channel Corridor Partnership, has been created to celebrate Breaking Boundaries, an innovative scheme led by Kent County Council currently underway to replace Ashford's one-way ring road with a pedestrian and motorist 'Shared Space'. The Lost O – whose name alludes to the removal of the ring road – is project managed by artist Michael Pinsky, who has selected the works to reflect the benefits of the principle of Shared Space, where pedestrians and traffic are given equal priority within a highway. The Lost O is itself a component of the Breaking Boundaries art programme for the ring road, devised and managed by art consultants RKL.

Kent County Council is taking the unprecedented step of removing the ring road in its present state, replacing it with a two-way 'quality street' jointly designed by sculptors, artists and engineers. Breaking Boundaries is financed primarily by the central government Department for Communities and Local Government.

Art Plus is a competitive award scheme led by Arts Council England, South East and the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) which seeks to improve our environment - whether streets, schools or other public spaces – by including the creativity of artists in their design.

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Streets and Patterns: The Structure of Urban Geometry

Participating artists

Michael Pinsky (UK) www.michaelpinsky.com

Curator Michael Pinsky takes the combined roles of urban planner, activist, researcher, resident and artist. Pinsky responds site-specifically to physical and sociological space. He explores the future of signs and symbols once they become redundant in the modern world. When a company collapses or changes its name, what happens to its logo? When signage is removed from the new area that will become Ashford's 'Shared Space' streetscape, where will the unwanted traffic lights, poles and symbols go? As a memorial to Ashford's lost ring road, Pinsky will gather the redundant road signage to create a sculptural form. The Lost O sculpture will not be defined through construction, but through displacement.

Akay (Norway) Young Stockholm artist, Akay explores the creative use of public space, creating installations such as swings hung from bridges, building small houses on ignored pieces of land and creating a "shadow zoo" for commuters alongside a highway. For The Lost O, Akay will be expanding on two projects I am Sorry and Traffic Island.

I am Sorry uses simple materials such as white boards arranged in public spaces to form simple texts. Traffic Island documents areas that would once feel like a safe haven in a cityscape but are now under threat of disappearing.

Bryony Graham (UK) www.bryonygraham.com Bryony's work fuses the unlikely worlds of construction and bric-a-brac. For The Lost O she will take up residency in a customised Portakabin (26 February – July) adjacent to the Ashford roadworks so that she can live and work alongside the construction team on the ring road. Going out with the workers in the small hours, working in their male dominated environment and helping them get the construction programme underway, she will become immersed in their world and be able to do what she likes best – steamrolling trinkets and embedding them in tarmac.

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Thomson & Craighead (UK) www.thomson-craighead.net Renowned for their work at the interface of art and technology, Thomson & Craighead will attach cowbells to dairy cattle to be herded through Ashford town centre during the Tour de France weekend of 7-8 July. The bells will be tuned to the C minor diminished seventh chord, the penultimate note in a composition. The poignancy of this unresolved chord and the infinitely random tune that the cows will echo the infinity of the circle, The Lost O. The cow herding suggests Ashford's origin as a market town, before the ring road turned it into a traffic island.

Simon Faithfull (UK) www.simonfaithfull.org Simon's work often takes him on journeys that he maps and relays back, aware that his audience will be once removed from the experience. Orbital No 1 is a first person perspective of three circular journeys completed and recorded as real time videos. These are screened as three concentric rings of continual movement – from the Circle Line, the North and South Circular and the M25. They give a glimpse of the dizzying energy states that define the contemporary city spinning outwards in roughly circular zones centrifugally pinned to the epicentre of the city.

Gary Stevens (UK) www.artsadmin.co.uk Gary will draw on his experience as a performance and video artist to commandeer a group of twenty to thirty Ashford locals, training them up to move as a single living amorphous mass. The group will suddenly run off into the trees, in response to the behaviour of spectators or some internal dynamic, like a startled herd of animals, or explode in all directions like a firework.

Brad Downey (USA) Brad stakes a claim for the individual's interpretation of the signals and systems that govern the urban environment and imperceptibly determine our movements around the city. He takes advantage of the fact that because we're so accustomed to these signs, their subtle manipulation can be overlooked. Some of his more provocative re-workings of street signage will be installed to disrupt, temporarily, people's experience of Ashford's public space.

Dan Griffiths (UK) Increasingly known for his subversive appropriation of billboard design, Dan will work with a graphic designer to help parody the local council's publishing style. The project will be called Rebel Learning, a provocative advertising campaign promoting skill learning. Dan's work has been shown as part of the East End Academy at the Whitechapel Art Gallery and as part of I.D.E.A. at the ICA in London.

Olivier Leroi (France) Olivier's previous work includes Les Arbres, a performance piece in which local school pupils dressed as trees bowed to greet passing cars and their passengers, drawing attention to the destruction of indigenous vegetation to make way for highways. Ashford's Shared Space scheme will reverse this general trend; reintroducing planting to what is currently a bleak urban landscape.

Mark Prier (Canada) www.markprier.com Nomadsland is a border-less, land-less country for people who want to be part of something more than a plot of land. Anyone can become a citizen and get a passport. All you need to do is fill out a form, partake of the ceremonial hug and repeat the oath 'Everything is going to be OK'. Mark describes Nomadsland as an independent State of Mind. It has no borders and encompasses the entire world as a network of diverse people and language. Citizens of Nomadsland learn to understand what it means to become a Nomad by studying the history, values, rights and responsibilities of citizenship. Mark will set up a passport issuing office for Ashford locals and visitors who are interested in joining up.

Peter Gibson aka Roadsworth (Canada) www.spacing.ca The grey area between graffiti and vandalism is more than theoretical for Roadsworth: his controversial street images have turned pavement into politics in his home city of Montreal and rekindled the debate about the nature of public art. His aim is to 'accentuate the absurdity inherent to certain aspects of urban living, urban space and public policy'. Gradually his street images have become a form of civic and environmental critique: cyclist symbols spray-painted on the road protest at the lack of bike lanes; pedestrian crossings are turned into giant footprints. Roadsworth's imagery will draw attention to the triumph of the pedestrian over the car in the new Ashford scheme.

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