

BOSTIN NEWS



WELCOME TO BOSTIN NEWS

There is no denying that 2020 has been a challenging year. It's strange to think back to the start of the new decade when the *Creative Black Country* team had been planning our expansion into Dudley to complete the final piece of our Black Country jigsaw.

The team had been busy meeting people and chatting through ideas over countless cups of coffee in cafes, community centres and libraries.

We all know what has happened since March, and for some people, it has been a very difficult time, while for others it has been a time

to reflect and look for new opportunities or develop new practices.

As a *Creative People and Places* programme, the team are always looking at innovative ways to solve a problem, and while we recognise a global pandemic is a little bit out of our reach, we strive to support our local communities where we can.

Social distancing and lockdowns have caused many of us to think about how we can bring communities together while keeping people safe. We pondered many ideas and asked you to help us. And as always, our creative community came up with some amazingly inventive ways to connect people.

Since Lockdown 1.0 we have commissioned over 20 new projects, worked with over 100 creatives, connected with thousands in the community, produced hours of content and supported people to write, film, make, listen, watch, act, paint, sing, drum and photograph.

When times are tough people get creative, and so Bostin News was conceived as a means to spread some positive stories. When we were allowed to go on our daily walks, enjoy an hour of nature, sunshine and exercise, we wanted to share that not all news has to be bad news.

We tasked four content editors to commission fellow creatives to produce work that we could share online and offline. There were no rules, other than the people commissioned had to be from, connected to, or currently living in the Black Country. Over the next 23 pages, you will find poetry, interviews, features and photography as well as a positive poster to colour and put in your window.

Whatever happens in 2021 with restrictions, postponed events and cancellations, let's continue to fill our windows with art, let's remember to go outdoors and be inspired by our beautiful Black Country, let's share our creativity with neighbours, and let's stay Bostin!

Meet the Content Editors

We asked: Why did you want to be a Content Editor? Here's what they said.

Aneka French

As an editor, curator and artist professional development expert, a key priority for me is in allowing diverse voices to be heard – encouraging and nurturing talent through support, critical feedback and brokering further professional relationships wherever possible. This is especially crucial at this time of crisis. As an artist/writer, the position additionally allowed me to test new ways to share my work with audiences online and in print.



Louise Bloomfield

I think Bostin News is a brilliant idea - a wonderful way of showcasing creativity across the Black Country, and by using local Content Editors I knew the work commissioned would uncover and promote local gems! I wanted to be a part of sharing the amazing work that's going on around us that we might not know about.



Tim Brinkhurst

I liked the idea of the freedom to create something original in the setting of my local manor. Everyone can have an epic thought, we all, at some point notice beauty and, in our heads, put together images and ideas that, if they were expressed, would be art. I wanted to speak the inner thoughts of people who perhaps don't think of themselves as artists and juxtapose them with people who definitely are.



Heather Wastie

It was an unusual job which gave me the chance to work with artists across the region as well as writing new pieces of my own. It was my aim to choose artists covering Wolverhampton, Sandwell and Walsall. I would then write about Dudley. This helped me narrow down my search when there are so many great artists to choose from! I also wanted a range of artforms and was looking for artists who engage with other people in their work.



Eve Orford

I wanted to help publicise some of the wonderful projects that have happened during lockdown. Each project was different from the other, demonstrating the variety of activities taking place during the pandemic.



You can find out more about each editor by visiting: creativeblackcountry.com/bostinnews



Milcote Assembled

During lockdown residents of a street in Bearwood woke up one morning to find a package had been left on their doorstep. 175 bags were left outside 175 households on Milcote Road to invite them to be part of Milcote Assembled. A simple instruction asked people to text a number to be part of the project and the operation began.

The project aimed to get people to connect with one another through a series of small 'operations' over the course of a few weeks, and all done through anonymous communication.

The fun started one sunny morning when the households received their bag containing a small gift and an invitation letter to text 'Bear with us' to a mystery number.

An unidentified figure known as Bear lead the communication with local residents to take part in a small number of operations on a 'Play as You Go' contract.

Operation Home Front invited people to have a photograph taken on their doorsteps by photographer Nikki Cooper.

Operation Few of My Favourite Things asked people to share their 10 favourite things including favourite songs, food, colour and favourite things about where they lived. The answers were collated and turned in to posters that were displayed on the street.

Operation Express invited people to turn the road into an outdoor exhibition of artworks and creativity.

Feedback from residents was overwhelmingly positive. "It was an imaginative way of bringing the Milcote Community together and we appreciated it enormously." Said one resident.

While another said: "Intriguing. A flash of excitement and wonder amidst the lethargy of lockdown."

It just proves that with a bit of imagination, a thoughtful neighbour with a mighty fine bear outfit and a WhatsApp group you can spread creativity without getting up close.

Find out more about the project here: milcoteassembled.co.uk



Content editor - Tim Brinkhurst

BLACK MAGIC - FOKA WOLF

If something's right in front of you you're forced to look at it. If I go out there and keep putting fake posters around then hopefully it brings questions in people such as, if that's fake what else around me could be fake? And if that has tricked me, what else in society has tricked me?

Advertising is black magic. I do think there is beauty in the city. It's dirty and it's grimy, but it's got the remnants of people, their public spaces, and I like that. Somewhere that's not a public space is clean and sanitised; I like to see wear and tear, where people have been, where people have touched stuff and the energy people leave behind.

I don't really like when people argue about the work I produce. But when it creates an energy, people sharing it and it popping up in random places on the Internet, that to me is a success. When people send me links to

places where it has been shared, I like that it comes back full circle, round to me. I think it's a bit magic.

Sometimes people will be at a low point in their life and they'll be hit with something, like an advert, that will draw them in, a piece of art that will make them go out and buy the product. Advertising is black magic. Using art to trick people into buying sh*t.

People should go out and experiment and see how far they can push it. Opposite traffic lights and on walls, I'll pick (the spot) so that people have to spend a certain amount of time walking along and taking the information in.

I like to bang ideas out as quick as I can and move on to the next one. Everything I do is instinctive. I don't think about anything. Sometimes I regret it but I don't regret regretting it.

It's not an aggressive act. I'll usually have picked the spot

beforehand. There's no specific time. Sometimes I'll do it in the middle of the day with a hi-viz jacket on. Sometimes I'll do it at night just because I probably had other things to do.

The only true belief you should have is your own reality. Even then you don't know what way you've been pushed around. You think your views are your own but they could just have been planted there.

Primarily I'm an illustrator but, since having a baby, I haven't got time to sit around and draw stuff.

But I have got time to sit around and think of stuff.

Now more than ever I've discovered just how much I love people and it doesn't matter who they are or what they are, I love all of them. I want them near me and I want to be in a place with them. Chatting sh*t and sweating on me. When my daughter was born I realised that everyone at some point was a baby. Instead of looking at people and hating them before they spoke I went in the opposite way and ended up loving everybody. We are definitely all in this together.



POSTER POSITIVITY

Poster Positivity was designed to increase unity and wellbeing in Sandwell by sharing images of hope and happiness around the community. The project, commissioned by CBC during lockdown, is run by artist Foka Wolf, who uses posters in his work to tackle serious issues with humour.

Foka Wolf has created his subversive art for over a decade, working across mediums including murals, illustration and street art paste-ups. He tackles big issues by mixing serious social and political commentary with lots of humour and a big dollop of surrealism. His street art has garnered national attention and featured in media including *Time Out*, *Channel 4* and the *BBC*.

The idea for *Poster Positivity* was born when Foka spotted hand-painted and coloured rainbows in windows around Sandwell during his government-mandated hour's exercise. He found these window displays made him and his family feel a sense of hope and oneness with their neighbours, something which the project aimed to increase, capture and disseminate.

During the project Foka Wolf connected with audiences using social media, curating an online gallery of posters, window displays and public art dealing with the Covid-19 crisis. Works submitted using the hashtag #posterpositivity were shared on Instagram and Twitter. You can download your own posters for free at megacorpglobal.com/downloads/



PHYSICALLY

KAYE

DISTANCED

OBJECTS

WINWOOD



Artist Kaye Winwood met Anneka French on Zoom to discuss a new body of work titled 'Physically Distanced Objects' – a series of drawings made by Kaye that imagine a range of tools, equipment and furniture designed for sensory experiences in socially distant contexts. Kaye's artistic practice responds to the paraphernalia associated with eating, usually exploring ideas of intimacy and togetherness in an 'expanded dining' context of food-based performative events for live audiences. Lockdown has afforded her opportunities to consider her work with fresh eyes and two-metre-long spoons.

AF: You've sent me a host of beautiful drawings of tables, seats and tools for dining – your 'Physically Distanced Objects'. I don't think I've ever seen any of your drawings before. Do you always start your thought processes with drawings?

KW: When I devise an idea I tend to draw it but I've never shown the drawings before. I often work collaboratively and as we talk through ideas I draw things out. If I'm designing a plate of food, a table configuration or a dining environment, I make loose sketches.

AF: What prompted the change in style?

KW: Just before lockdown I joined a life drawing class. Unfortunately, I only attended two classes before they had to close but I relished the opportunity to start drawing again, and to lose myself in the process of observation. I use drawing to think through ideas and to sketch out physical space so it's always been integral to my work, although not a visible part of my process.

AF: Has that viewpoint changed now? Tools can't yet be produced or activated so easily at the moment.

KW: Yeah, working from home, as you are, I don't have the facilities or the skills to develop and progress much of the work I was planning over the last few months. Having to rethink some of my ideas in a controlled drawing has been a real challenge but has moved my thinking forward. Drawing is relatively easy to manage in these current circumstances – balancing being a mother and being an artist is hard to juggle on a daily basis – and lockdown exacerbates this. Drawing is a process that the children can understand and I don't need so much space to work, so it functions on a practical level for me.

AF: I guess you can pick the drawings up and put them down quite easily if there are interruptions. That's how I'm trying to write around my two-year-old.

KW: My children are aged eight and thirteen, and they've spent time looking through all my drawings and told me which ideas they do and don't like. And my partner too. Drawing hands isn't so easy and I've been getting feedback from them aesthetically and conceptually – about perspective and about what

might or might not function. It's been a family effort!

AF: Maybe they are your new collaborators.

KW: Maybe. That's really interesting. I hadn't thought of it like that before. I do find this period of isolation difficult creatively because I like to bounce ideas off people. I also like to see my work progress, and having to carry my work from room to room around the house in a bag over the last few months has proved challenging. I've taken over the spare room temporarily as my work is moving beyond the sketchbook into larger drawings and I really need the space. I've spread all my drawings out so I can see them together, which I haven't been able to do working in the living room or kitchen.

AF: Could we talk about some of the drawings more specifically? There's a lot of humour in them and they put me in mind of children's inventions, although some of the humour is quite dark. The lifeguard-type chair, for instance, has something slightly sinister about it – voyeurism maybe as well as threat and protection.

KW: I didn't mean it to be sinister

but I understand completely why you've read it in that way. I was thinking about how to use different aspects of space, including vertical space. I modelled it on a tennis umpire chair that has been constructed for observation and alternative furniture models that might enable us to be isolated whilst also being part of a group. Sitting up there would certainly be uncomfortable – simultaneously watching and being watched. But part of the idea behind this series is that I want the ideas to be fun, emphasising that it's not about social distancing but more about physical distancing. There's a huge difference between those terms and I want to make these pieces interactive and bring people closer together although there is physical space between them.

AF: Are all the tools you have in mind things that could be made or are there some that are more fantastical – that are impossible to make or to function?

KW: I'd like to think that they are all possible. I've been looking at the illustrator William Heath Robinson's inventions – best known for his elaborately complex and funny machines.

sterilise larger areas, e.g. human bodies. I've used things like this in previous work and adults and children equally enjoy unusual approaches to eating and the misuse of objects. It's quite mischievous and I often find that adults engage well given the opportunity to misbehave and have fun – it's something that conventional dining doesn't afford the diner – to play with your food has always been frowned upon.

AF: I really like the drainpipe drawing. I used one as a marble run as a child.

KW: It reminded me of a marble run as I drew it. I like the simplicity of its form and action. And also, if wine was poured, for instance, I'd like to imagine that it could aerate it as it runs down. It serves a purpose.

AF: When did you first start thinking about and drawing these tools?

KW: Late March. Even though I have used some of these ideas in my event-based work previously. Tools is a funny word. Maybe apparatus or paraphernalia is more appropriate? The series was made in response to the term 'social distancing'. It's quite a worrying phrase which I don't think is necessarily indicative of the current situation. I think the pandemic has, in many instances, made people inherently more social and convivial. Talking to neighbours and phoning people to check in on them is about physical distancing, not social separation. And I hope that there are ways people can still have sensory and shared experiences whilst being physically distanced from each other.

AF: Tell me about the two-metre drawings you've been working on.

KW: The two metres relates to the required distance between individuals. The drawings are slim and start with a hand holding a handle that unfolds to reveal an apparatus at the end. The apparatus are replaceable and interchangeable and could be a more traditional utensil such

as a spoon or fork, or a claw for grabbing or hand for holding.

AF: How do you feel about showing the drawings in an exhibition context? What are your ambitions for their future?

KW: I think there's something quite magical about some of them as drawings that might not translate physically. I'm really influenced by Fluxus and instructional drawings. I've been thinking about translating them into scores or short verses, and exploring them within the realm of collage too.

AF: I wonder if there is scope for sound? Especially if you encounter these on screen with a pop or splash.

KW: Yes, or something that could be filmed in slow motion could be beautiful. This notion of slowing down seems particularly pertinent at the moment.

AF: Yes, and it could make works that much more accessible beyond only live experiences. You can certainly taste tastes by hearing sounds or looking at images. It leaves scope for imagination and anticipation.

KW: Yes, I agree, much of the work is multi-sensory and relies on the collision of senses. Online space is increasingly important to us, and I'm also interested to think about developing a toolkit which would be presented online or as a physical item.

AF: Screens are going to be so crucial to how we make and share from now on.

KW: I am enjoying online interaction (although it kind of terrifies me) because of the possibilities for muteness and invisibility – being present without being seen suits my mood. I think postal services as a distribution tool and online presence are really interesting propositions and mirror work of the 1970s in terms of how artists were starting to use methods and technology to distribute their work. I wonder how the scale of work will be affected in the future. There are some artists using studios, but so many are having

to work from home, especially women with children. We won't see the full impact on artistic and critical practice until later but it's sure to be an interesting juncture in art history.

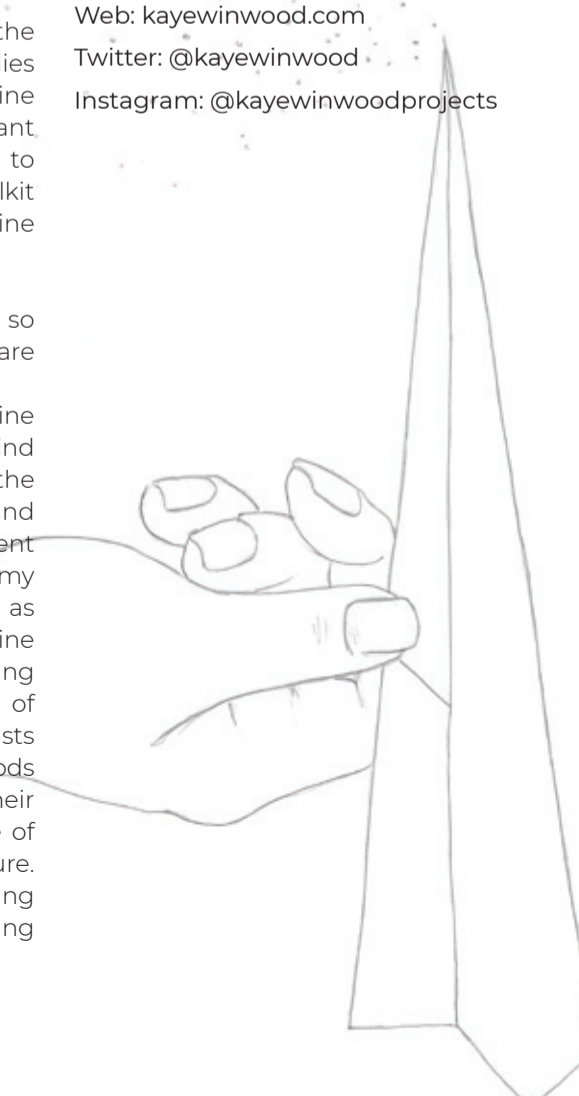
AF: I hope there will be some positives too. I have a lot less time than I did pre-lockdown but at the same time, my lack of personal space means I want to make and get lost in my own small worlds because that's the only place I can go. So there is, for me, an expansion of ambition and desire to make and write at the same time as a compression.

KW: We can't do anything about the situation at the moment so we just have to think creatively about what we can and can't do. My main obstacle is time. When I can, I've started to burrow down into ideas to explore them further, such as a possible series of paper aeroplane pieces. I am quite slow at making the drawings even though they are quite simple. I want to sharpen the focus of the drawings further. I've only just scratched the surface.

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JOHN MYERS

John Myers is a landscape and portrait photographer and painter. Between 1973 and 1983 he photographed mundane aspects of everyday life within the Dudley borough and captured a stunning series of monochrome portraits of ordinary people within a short distance of his home in Stourbridge.

His black and white photographs of electricity substations, garages, TVs, and new-build houses became known as his 'boring photographs'. Although his work is entirely English in mood, Myers was a contemporary of, and can be sympathetically compared to, American Landscape photographers including *Stephen Shore*, *Lewis Baltz* and *Robert Adams*.

Myers has a remarkable archive of photographic images produced in the 70s and 80s of life, people and the barren emptiness of Thatcher's Britain. Mostly focused around Stourbridge and Dudley, the images that Myers crafted have a sombreness about them, and his empty streets, solitary characters and living rooms seem to unintentionally echo the social distancing of these strange days we are living in now, as well as echoing conceptual minimalist themes.

In addition to the photographs' minimal purity, they also epitomise a wonderful nostalgic and evocative perspective of the Dudley region in the early 1970s.



What influenced you when you started taking photographs?

Prior to the expansion in photographic book publication in the mid-1970s source material could be hard to obtain. *Camera*, *Creative Camera* and *Art Forum* were monthly magazines that kept one abreast of some developments. *John Szarkowski's* publications at M.O.M.A. such as *The Photographer's Eye* and *The Photographer* and the *American Landscape* were useful introductory anthologies. My major influences were *Diane Arbus*, *Eugène Atget*, *E.J. Bellocq*, *Walker Evans*, *Lewis Hine*, *Timothy H. O'Sullivan*, and *August Sander*.

What qualities made you want to photograph a subject and what were their reactions to being photographed?

I took my photographs in silence... I never worked with anyone else in the room – no distractions. The process wasn't about talking – or putting the sitter at ease – and I began to realise that the fairly lengthy experience did certain things to people. They began to inhabit their own skin – the animation and gesture of the moment gave way to something that was inherently about themselves and their direct involvement in the process.

The *Gandolfi 5 x 4* camera that I used had to be assembled and erected on a tripod, the lens inserted, position of camera and focus of lens established.

All of this was partly conducted from under a dark cloth whilst looking into the back of the camera – where the image could just about be seen. The image was of course upside down and back to front. Then the lens was set, the dark slides inserted and slide cover removed... Then I was ready to take the photograph.

I preferred working indoors using the available natural light, no flash, so exposure times could

What was it that was so appealing about suburbia as a subject matter?

However much I may, at the time, have admired the skill of *Ansel Adams* and *Edward Weston* or the pastoral quality of *Fay Godwin* – they were photographing another world.

When I opened my front door I was confronted by Tarmac (asphalt), houses, a telegraph pole and a substation.

I never deliberately made a decision to photograph the 'overlooked' or the mundane. This is the world I live in. And that was why I photographed it – because

IT'S THE HARDEST THING IN THE WORLD TO TAKE THE MUNDANE AND TRY TO SHOW HOW BORING IT IS.

be quite long. It was hardly a social occasion, and I can't really recall that I ever said anything. I must have done of course – up to a point – but I never gave instructions about what clothes to wear, pose to adopt, or what they should do with their hands or feet.

The only thing I always said was to describe the sound the shutter would make as the photograph was being taken (a click and a purr) ... and that I would be obliged if they would refrain from blinking. I suppose it was an arduous, rather exacting experience for many of the subjects.

there was nothing else.

Can you tell us about your style and how you choose the spaces and places to photograph?

The photograph with the best title is: *'Lift Doors Waitrose'*. We used to do the shopping every Friday at the local supermarket. The photograph was taken in available light and at eye level to give the impression that you are the first person to come across the lift doors.

It is not a special place, no crime – so far as I am aware – occurred here and no event is about to unfold from beyond the edge of the frame.

The image can be summed up in one short sentence: this is a photograph of the lift doors at Waitrose.

What is your favourite photograph that you produced?

'Female brick worker' was taken on Valentine's Day 1983. The low drying sheds were cold, lit by a single electric light, quite gloomy and almost deserted. I took two shots of the brick worker. I can recall the 'mountain' of clay with the finger marks and the coronation cup. That's how it was! Nothing was added or moved.

Her working process is encapsulated in the image: the pile of clay, the flattened slab about to be inserted in the mould and the scraper to clean the waste clay away. And I recognised instantly the link/reference to *Arthur Munby's* photographs of nineteenth-century pit brow workers.

Only the weak electric light, the plastic pinny, bucket and coronation cup locate the photograph to 1983 and not 1883.

Is there anything that you have learned about human nature through doing photography?

Most people find it difficult to stand still for longer than half a second.

Your series of work that have subsequently become known as the 'Boring photographs' seems very ahead of its time. What was the thinking behind this group of work and how was it received at the time?

The American photographer *Eve*



rrbphotobooks.com

“ THIS IS THE WORLD I LIVE IN. AND THAT WAS WHY I PHOTOGRAPHED IT – BECAUSE THERE WAS NOTHING ELSE. ”

Arnold said that: "It's the hardest thing in the world to take the mundane and try to show how special it is."

I think *Eve Arnold* got it wrong... it's the hardest thing in the world to take the mundane and try to show how boring it is.

My photographs in this series were taken in flat light that gave imperceptible shade. The angle of view was also important; eye level, nothing fancy, deadpan. Taken just as if you were the first person to come across the *Dual Carriageway*, or the *Lift Doors* at *Waitrose*.

The deadpan aspect of these photographs does not just refer to the way the images look, it also describes a way of encountering the world and the refusal of this environment to offer up a visual or narrative engagement. The absence of people was quite deliberate. Why would I include pedestrians, or children playing in the street in a photograph of a house, or a substation? Introducing figures would add a narrative and turn the photographs into 'conversation pieces'.

These are landscapes without incident. But unlike a painting by *Edward Hopper* – with its sense of foreboding and events just beyond the frame – in these photographs there was no hidden story.

John Myers was interviewed by *David O'Coy* for the *Dudley People's Archive Project*.

Find out more and contribute your images at: dudleypeoplesarchive.com



LOU BLAKEWAY

A WALK THROUGH MY LOCAL HISTORY

I am an artist and tutor from *Old Hill*, where I have lived since I was five. Although I only lived a ten-minute walk from the canal, I have visited it perhaps once or twice in childhood during school trips and only within the last five years started walking or running along it regularly.

Although grounded in the traditions of observational art, my work is primarily concerned with form, space, colour and line. I also experiment with materials and processes, making works from the objects I collect during my walks.

The enforced lockdown allowed me time to focus on my own work and to further explore my immediate surroundings, which on first impressions may not seem that interesting.

I began by drawing things in my immediate vicinity – my family, myself, chimneys and abstract shapes I saw in the garden or through the window. I also participated in a weekly life drawing class through Facebook.

I started walking more frequently as the leisure centre was closed. I had noticed, during a previous walk, the remnants of an old factory by the *Gosty Hill Tunnel*. I had photographed it last autumn as I was intrigued by its shapes and cavernous spaces, its vastness, its dominance, its presence and, in turn, its absence. It was across the canal, out of reach, unexplorable and so it intrigued me even further. And then I forgot all about it...

Until lockdown when I came upon it again one evening, on one of my first lockdown walks. I wanted to know what it was and what had happened to it.

There is a hand-painted sign fixed to the remains that informed me that this was the site of the former *Stewarts and Lloyds Tube Works* which was in operation from 1903 until it was nationalised to become part of *British Steel* in 1968. It closed permanently in 1990 and was then demolished in 1992 to build a business park.

I knew that I wanted to explore the site's environmental and cultural processes and its histories so I spent time exploring, observing, collecting and documenting. I made drawings and notes, took photographs and collected objects and materials I found on the ground.

I also researched the site's history: from the purchase of the land in 1860 by *Lord Lyttelton* to its subsequent demise in 1990.

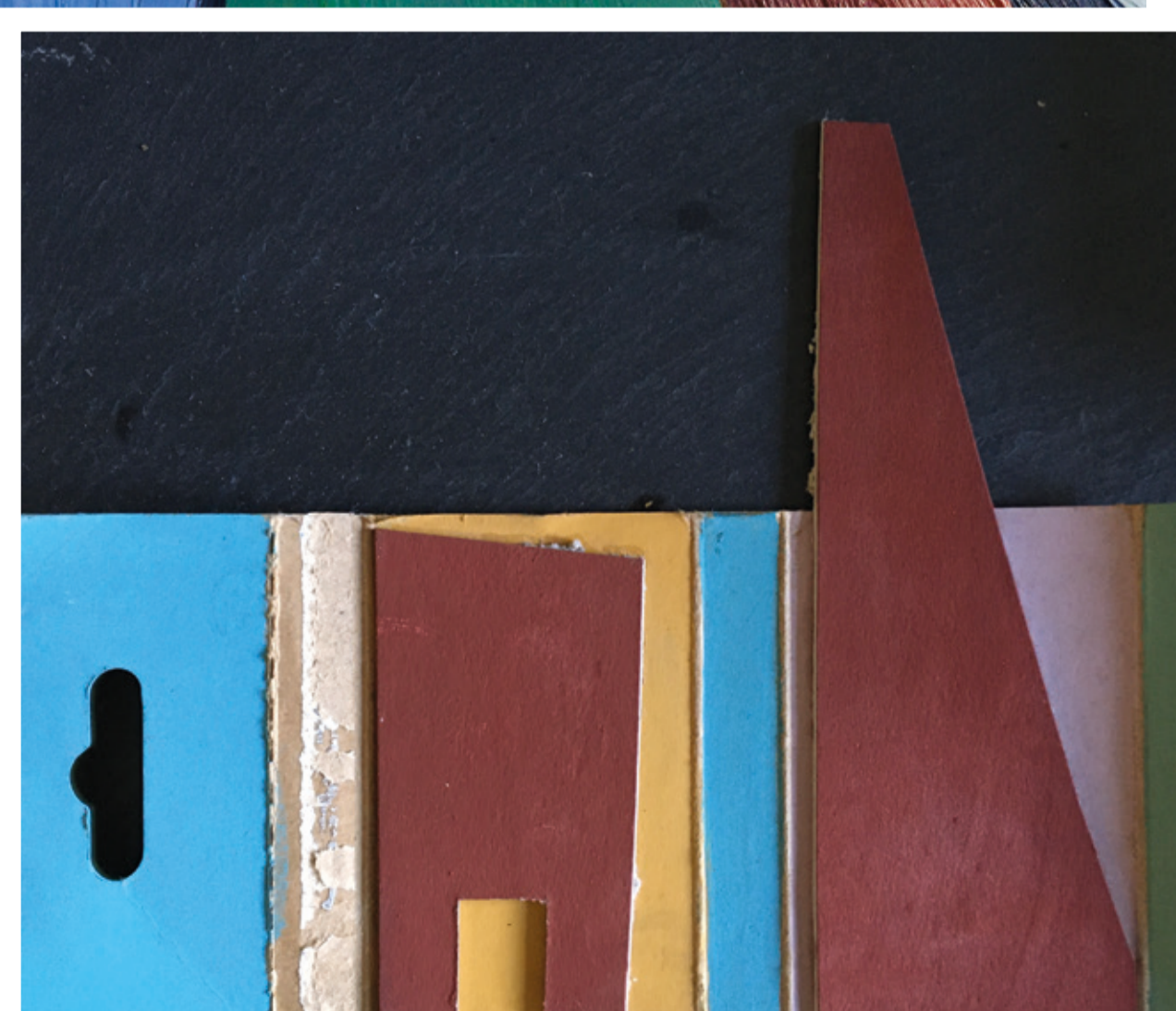
During this time, I was also reading a novel called *How I Killed Margaret Thatcher* by *Anthony Cartwright*, a writer from Dudley. The story is set in Dudley during Thatcher's reign and depicts the demise of local industry, unemployment and its knock-on effects to families who lost their homes or resorted to crime to earn a living. This resonated deeply with my own family's experiences of unemployment in the 1980s due to the closure of the *Round Oak Steelworks* (although I don't recall anyone resorting to crime).

I discovered how the company had valued the welfare of its employees through the creation of recreation grounds, thrift clubs, housing and educational schemes and assistance during sickness and old age. There was also an institute at *Coombeswood* which was used for dining and entertainment. This made me think about and question today's working practices and whether there are still companies who provide such benefits for their employees. I'm hopeful.

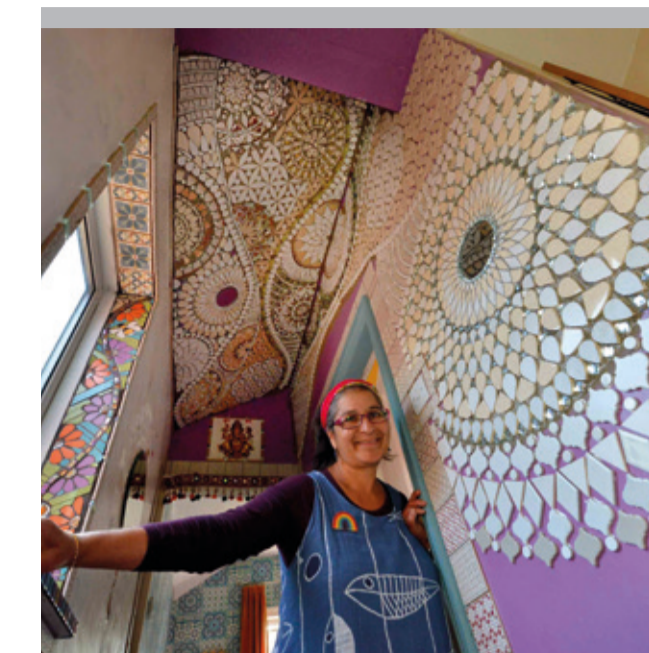
The site directly alongside the canal is now home to a variety of wildlife – birds such as Canada geese, mallards and their chicks, moorhens and coots; herons, butterflies and fish. There is also an abundance of wildflowers – I noted meadow buttercup, groundsel, stinging nettle, water dock, red campion, dog rose, cow parsley, wood forget-me-not and ribwort plantain. I'm always in awe of how quickly nature reclaims sites which were once a source of pollution and noise.

I consider myself very lucky to live where I do. It's not beautiful in the conventional sense, and there is a problem with poverty and degradation in the area, but there's so much to see and explore if you only take the time, and the canal is a great place to start due to its industrial heritage and its recreational future.

Lou Blakeway was commissioned by content editor Heather Wastie



CAROLINE'S HOUSE



"I need to bounce off someone to get to the nub of what I'm trying to say. To get to the real truth of my thoughts.

Especially now that we are all self-isolating. I could argue that I'm still thinking the same way I thought three months ago. Because we've been forced to stay in one place, whereas before I chose to stay in one place. And it's going to have an impact. And it has had an impact; I feel like I've been forced into agoraphobia.

What is the point? That is an interesting question. You have to say to yourself, if you won a million, would you still do the thing you're doing right now? And for me, without any hesitation, I would say yes, I would still be doing it.

I'm creating an artwork out of my home. By mosaicing the front wall, the walls, the garden, the soil itself, the plants... I'm just driven to do it. You're like a machine making these identical shapes...

There's a flow when you're cutting in silence and making a mosaic in silence... And the next day as I was going up the stairs with a cup of tea I saw it and it was as if I had forgotten I had put it up.

There's joy in it, there's love in it, people respond to it.

I'm using old crockery that people respond to, from their own memory, from their own past. The texture, the relief, the three-dimensionality of it all. The look of a flowing pattern and how your eyes glide over it, it does something to your mind, the whole repeat pattern and how it flows across.

These tools are important to me. I think it's important to use manual tools as opposed to power-driven ones. The noise bugs me for a start, and you can't think when you're cracking away with ear defenders and goggles and whatnot...

It's really difficult to say to yourself 'I'm really good' or 'I really like this, it works for me'. There are people out there who say, 'Oh wow, I love your work,' and you go, 'Yeah, yeah'. I don't believe it sometimes, or you are delighted and thank them, but for myself to look back and think, that's really good...

This (house) is an affirmation. This house; creating, it drives me because I'm in the actual process of creativity, it's enough for me. I could say that I'm egotistical to create something so big. Who knows, when I die, maybe it will all get skipped outside...

... When I'm gone."

Caroline was interviewed by sound artist and producer *Tim Brinkhurst* for a series of Podcasts for *Bostin News* which you can find at creativeblackcountry.co.uk/bostinnews

RUPI DHILLON



Content editor - Anneka French



Performance art can be uncomfortable, but not always! It depends entirely on what the artist is trying to achieve.

Rupi Dhillon is a British Indian artist currently based in the Black Country. In her work she explores relationships between (wo)men and their environment, exploring how culture is connected to belonging. Her current work reimagines cultural experience through participatory performance, collaboration, gifting and found objects.

Rupi reflects here on the genre of performance art via five myths commonly associated with it, alongside her recent body of work 'Participation in Isolation', made throughout April 2020.

PERFORMANCE ART IN THE BLACK COUNTRY

Let's talk about performance art. Many of us may be wondering what on earth is 'performance art'? Dance, drama, theatre – the performing arts, surely? Some of us might have a general idea of performance art or perhaps think that it's for failed painters and sculptors.

I am hoping by the end of this text we can reach an understanding or perhaps even a build a new opinion of performance art. We'll work together on debunking five of its common myths and talk

about some of the possibilities and functions of performance art as an art form with reference to my recent project 'Participation in Isolation'.

In April, during the early stages of lockdown, I set a thirty-day challenge on Instagram. The task was simple: use your government-sanctioned one walk a day to do a performance. Artists realised the potential in both outdoor and indoor domestic spaces to make performance art and as a result, Instagram's online virtual platform became a type of gallery space. All artists had to do was perform an action and document it. Using the hashtag #ParticipationInIsolation multiple online audiences were able to follow the artworks made by myself and others as they progressed over the course of the month.

MYTH 1 – PERFORMANCE ART IS THEATRE

The performing arts and performance art are often confused. The two terms, however, are completely different. 'The performing arts' suggest

that art is being performed, where as 'performance art' is a type of art. In the latter, we mean performance is used as a medium in and of itself. Where a painter uses various types of paint as a medium, or a sculptor uses various tangible materials such as wood, clay and metal, a performance artist uses their body or live action as a medium. This could include the act of walking, talking, eating, writing a list of actions to be performed by another person or anything performed by the artist or those taking part within the work.

The 'Participation in Isolation' project is an example of how everyday activities can become performance artworks. Activities from participants ranged from walking the entire perimeter of a room, shaving their head, going shopping, planting a tree, eating a *Cadbury's Creme Egg*, playing instruments outdoors, collecting herbs, making collages, taking a bath and kicking a can. Performance art is performing these actions, and taking the time to reflect mindfully and appreciate how our surroundings and own ideas affect the action.

MYTH 2 – PERFORMANCE ART IS PRETENTIOUS

We often fear that which we do not understand. It is only through understanding that we begin to learn and appreciate that which we fear. Performance art was originally formulated to challenge the status quo and traditional hierarchical systems within art. Artists were able to reach audiences directly rather than through signs and symbols present within paintings and sculptures.

The 'Participation in Isolation' project is also a good example of how performance art, for the most part, is anything but pretentious. April's month of performances documented on Instagram saw both artists and non-artists use spaces around them to perform walks, tasks, drawings, gestures and more, sometimes including family members and if not, then at the least engaging with audiences virtually. Project participants were able to connect through the platform and just have some good old non-serious fun. This brings us to our next myth.



The 'Participation in Isolation' project can be followed via the Instagram hashtag #ParticipationInIsolation and if you don't have Instagram you can also access the works created as part of this project online via [instagram.com/explore/tags/participationinisolation/](https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/participationinisolation/)



'Isolation' challenge, artists often took days for rest as a performative action. I also indulged in this. As I lay on a bed of grass, I was able to pause. I could hear the birds and gently observed the clouds that passed over my head.

MYTH 5 – PERFORMANCE ART IS HARD TO CONNECT WITH

The pandemic itself is a useful example of how people can come together during times of crisis. Performance as a medium was exactly the catalyst I needed to help facilitate connection online. With our contact with one another limited, the medium has allowed for connection like none before.

'Participation in Isolation' has linked audiences and artists from as far away as Germany and India with those in the UK. Whilst we may have been social distancing, one could argue that we have never been as close as we are when we are together virtually.

Performance art allows for connection and discourse. A static piece of sculpture or painting cannot do this in the same way. We are forced to interact as an audience when we encounter performance art and interaction and participation arguably leads to a collective understanding of the work.

MYTH 3 – PERFORMANCE ART IS SERIOUS AND BORING

The simple fact that there is live action being performed shows that performance art is anything but boring. Unlike more traditional works of art, artists and audiences are able to engage in actions happening right before our eyes. Moving images, anticipation and potential are a huge aspect of the entertainment of the work.

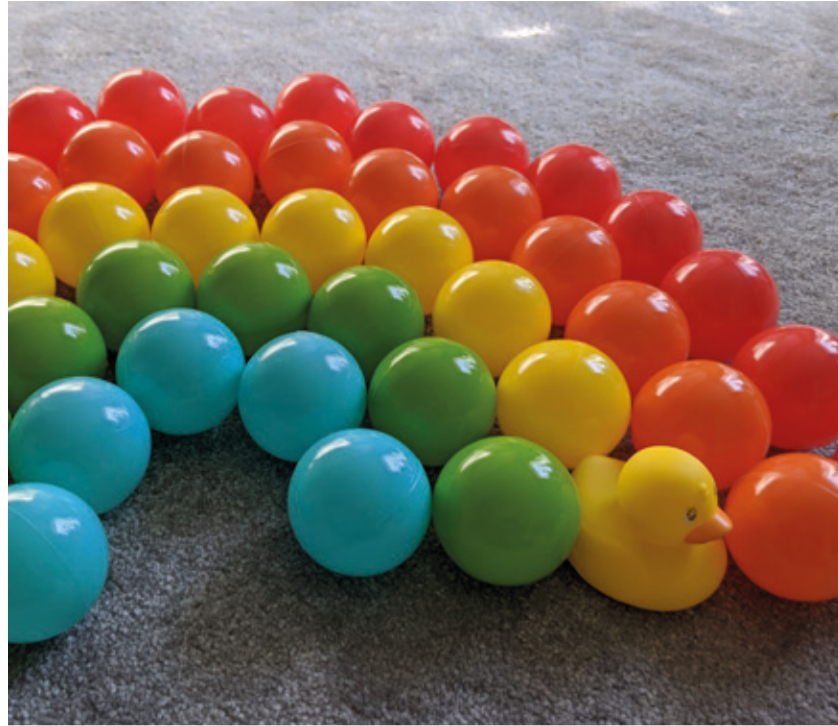
For instance, *Two Metre Rule*, performed in collaboration with artist *Fred Hubble*, was exactly that. For the entire duration of a walk Fred and I both held a two-metre fold-out ruler as we travelled through *The Million Woods* near Stourbridge, maintaining a two-

metre distance at all times, but also taking time to appreciate the ludicrous nature of the act itself. Most of all we were able to appreciate the countryside in a way that we had never imagined.

MYTH 4 – PERFORMANCE ART IS UNCOMFORTABLE

Performance art can be uncomfortable, but not always! It depends entirely on what the artist is trying to achieve. Performance art can be a guided walk, a cooking workshop, a dance or perhaps a collective yoga and meditation session. There is nothing more relaxing than meditation, surely?

Through the 'Participation in



ROSIE ELLIS NOVA AND RAINBOWS AND ME



During lockdown, when many of us wondered how we might fill our days at home, Bloom Creative Wellbeing CIC launched their 21-Day Rainbow Challenge via social media. It caught the attention of Rosie who was looking for something to do with her toddler Nova, and thought it would be great way to find a bit of creativity and fun every day. Here she tells us the story of her three weeks with Rainbows.

The 21-Day Rainbow Challenge kicked off mid-April, just as it was announced that we all needed to stay at home for another three weeks to protect each other and our NHS. The creative challenge was simple: every day, for twenty-one days, Bloom shared a word as a creative prompt and encouraged their social media followers to make a rainbow inspired by that prompt. Bloom said, 'Taking part in the challenge and being creative every day is so good for your wellbeing. Using the symbol of the rainbow connects us together even though we are apart physically. Displaying your rainbows represents your support for our NHS and key workers who are working so hard to keep us all well and safe.' It definitely

sounded like something I wanted to be a part of.

Since having my gorgeous daughter, Nova, just over fourteen months ago, it's been really tricky for me to find the time and space to be creative. I've really missed creating and making stuff (I'm an avid crafter), so this was such a nice opportunity to find that again in a way that wasn't too full on, and something Nova and I could hopefully do together.

The first prompt was: PAINT. Can you make a rainbow today using paint?

During the UK's physical distancing measures, paint had become as difficult to get hold of as flour and toilet paper. Eventually, once the paints arrived, I wrapped Nova up in one of my old T-shirts, and we went out into the garden. I dolloped some paint out on a tray on the ground. Normally I get so excited setting up what I think are super-fun activities for us but then Nova will take one look and just walk off. It was a wonderful surprise when she stuck her hands straight in, squished the paint in her tiny fingers, and made the most beautiful rainbow. I'd told

myself that I would stop if I wasn't enjoying it, or if it was too much pressure, but thankfully we got off to a great start. And Nova loved it.

There were days that were a little trickier, days I had to cheat a little, and days I didn't feel up to doing very much. In the past I might have beat myself up about that but I was able to accept it and find small ways to get some creativity in the day through little responses to the prompts. These trickier days still reminded me to take a little time for myself and reminded me of the things I like to do for me. True creative wellbeing in action.

The last prompt was: PARTY. Can you create a RAINBOW PARTY today?

I was feeling pretty down when I got up that morning, so with this idea of 'party' in my mind, I decided to dress us both up in party outfits for the day. We've all spent a lot of time in joggers and leggings recently (which is definitely the right move) but I thought it would be fun to feel just a little bit fancy.

I was feeling inspired so I made us each a rainbow-coloured party



hat, put on some music and we had a little dance party in the living room. We had such a fun day, and wearing our party outfits put us (well, me anyway) in a much brighter mood.

I really enjoyed the actual creative activities and thinking about how to respond to each prompt, but also loved photographing the things we'd created. That became a creative activity in itself; how to capture the essence of our creative work. I have created a photo series of all of our creative responses, and called it 'Nova and

Rainbows and Me'. I'm so happy I have an archive of this time in our lives. Bloom are going to do an exhibition in Dudley of all the photos their followers shared as part of the Rainbow Challenge, once we're all able to be together again. I can't wait to see Nova and her rainbows in the exhibition.

I know it might seem like a silly social media challenge, but it really did help to boost my mood at this difficult time. I don't mind speaking for everyone when I say that this has been a huge test of our mental wellbeing - in so

many different ways. Doing this challenge has highlighted just how powerful creating something can be. Everything I made or found was so simple (and with a toddler climbing on me) but it still made such a positive difference to how I was feeling.

So - here's a reminder, from Nova and me: find a little bit of creativity every day and do the things that make you smile.

Find out more about Bloom here: bloomwellbeing.org.uk

GOLD PAINT

By Anneka French

Two days before Charlie's second birthday he paints blue glyphs on bright white card as he sits in his high chair. "More", he says.

I cut paintings into pennants while he sleeps and thread with navy ribbon. Sprinkled with golden glitter and pocked with tiny stars, I festoon glyphs across fireplace.

Larger glittered stars twinkle down from cottage beams. A party for three. They are still there. I haven't the heart to take them down.

GOLDEN HOUR.

The scent of colour is hard to describe. The pennant-blue is the powdery scent of Berol Colour Tubs thirty-odd years old at least. Twelve semi-solid paint tubs in a cardboard box. Once mine – too precious to use. The paints are richly pigmented and smooth. A rush of colour. Just add water.

I paint a rainbow for Charlie and one for his pal though our palette is limited. Stock currently unavailable as children paint themselves into a frenzy up and down the country at their kitchen tables.

GOLDEN RULES.

He gets mixed-up between black and white. He can't yet say silver. But in his word-palette is gold. And pink (snack) and orange – his favourites. Blue and green (said with relish) and purp' and 'ow and brown and grey.

Like Ellmer and his elephant-coloured berries, except for that one elephant in the herd that has always been blue, not grey. And Charlie knows it too.

The artist Yves Klein loved blue so much that he made an ultramarine that he trademarked International Klein Blue (IKB). He sold invisible works of art in exchange for gold leaf. Fluttering into the River Seine – Klein stands on the bank in a black and white photograph that we see in shades of gold – sparkling, crinkling sheets of leaf in the Paris wind. 1962.

GOLDEN THREAD.

Charlie has a deep fascination for Gra's painting jumper (pain' jump') – an old navy sweatshirt slightly smeared with streaks and spots of acrylic in white, yellow and green. Nanna and Gra make a mini one for him and deliver it in tissue and red gift wrap. Now he can dress as his hero any day he chooses.

It's way past the time you should have been in bed.

I continue to unpack and tentatively hang art work and other treasures on our walls.

A canvas dipped in beeswax, city maps, postcards from San Francisco (where the Gate is red and not at all Golden) of orange groves and pelicans, riso-printed pastel houses, oil-painted portraits, photographs of flowered damsels, Bruce Springsteen, crisp pink shells, William Morris woodblock wallpaper samples and barely-there embossed prints on heavy, handmade paper.

I had a pair of golden pumps and I had silver ones too.

I had a pair that smelled of bubble gum

When I was six – it's true.

The museum continues in the new garden veg patch. Rob finds a golden coin encrusted with dirt. One Turkish lira from 2011. And a blue and white fragment from the neck of a vase, several floral shards, an intact saucer, an audio CD from The Sunday Times and a handmade nail from two hundred and twenty two years ago when Jeremiah Ditheridge built this house.

"Where do we live, Charlie?"

"Earth," he says.

He owns three books published by the British Museum. There are three gold things in Colours: Early Learning at the Museum: a gold Mummy-mask, Egypt, 100 BC – AD 100; a gold helmet, Ur, Iraq, 2600 BC; and a gold coin, Rome, Italy, AD 125 – 128.

We travel in time and space without leaving our home, journeying to faraway lands and times in search of treasure and colour. Connection and culture on our grey settee.

WHITE NOISE.

In *Shadow is the Queen of Colour*, a chapter in Derek Jarman's book *Chroma* (1994), he explains:

"The further colour recedes in time and space the stronger it glows. Golden memories. Not the gold of wedding rings in the High Street Ratners, but a philosophic gold which glows in the mind like the precious stones in Revelation. Emerald, Ruby, Jacinth, Chalcedony, Jasper. Colour, like these jewels, is precious. Even more precious, as unlike the sparklers, it cannot be possessed. Colour slips through the fingers and escapes. You can't lock it in a jewel box as it vanishes in the dark."

GOLDEN SILENCE.



THE BATTLE OF STOURBRIDGE

This is a tale of enthusiasts
This is the tale of a turning point
This is a tale of determination
This is the Battle of Stourbridge

Back in the seventeen seventies
a canal was dug
from Wordsley Junction to Stourbridge Town,
Stourton to Black Delph.
Hundreds of thousands of tons of cargo
passed along it every year.

By eighteen sixty six
the sixteen locks were worked
by thirty two boats a day.

Nineteen sixty saw them in a terrible state
with heavy creaking, leaking gates
and balance beams half burned away.
Priorities had changed, the future
looking bleak for waterways.

From Stourton to Stourbridge
the cut - no more than mud and rushes,
stagnant water - stirred a group of local folk
who got together, cogitating, agitating,
making a nuisance of themselves.

There's a narrow boat stuck on the Stourbridge Arm,
can't move forward, can't move back.
Big boats, small boats, all in a queue,
This is the Battle of Stourbridge.

A procession of people pulling a rope, stretched from the
stern on the towing path.
Rocking, pulling, working together.
This is the Battle of Stourbridge.

Vesta charged a wall of spoil.
Landrover, chain, power of Dane,
beat of Bolinder, churning mud.
This is the Battle of Stourbridge.

"Canals should not be stinking ditches
They could be an asset for everyone.
Clear the towpaths! Dredge the bed!"

"Not on your life," the authorities said.

And when the enthusiasts brought a dragline digger in,
a man was sent from the BTC*
wearing gum boots and a trilby hat.
He looked and said, "You can't do that!"

You're breaking the law!"
There was such a to-do.
"If the dragline bucket so much as breaks
the surface, we will prosecute you!"

The bucket was dropped
and it landed
a mention in The Times.

Blokes are lying flat on their bellies,
raking rubbish out of the cut.
Forcing a passage, a right of way.
This is the Battle of Stourbridge.

A rally of boats in '62,
three long years of muddy campaigns,
Saturdays, Sundays, summer evenings,
labouring through sun or rain.

Months and months of committee meetings,
bring and buy sales, fish and chip suppers,
exhibitions, spreading the word,
following purse strings, lobbying councillors,
not giving up until they'd won.

This was the Battle of Stourbridge.

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June 2020

* British Transport Commission

Poetry
pullout



TO THE SEA

By Anneka French

The road
to the sea
will take you places.
Silkworms and elderberries
Shells shut tight, eyes bright.
Bite gently down
full mouths, apples grow
green.
River run and sandy beach
Water, fire, linseed.
Green.
Possibilities and fields planted
within open reach.
Possibilities sellotaped for
something bigger,
Something golden.
A golden lad
and his biscuits.

STAY UP YOUR OWN END

Stay Up Your Own End was a series of six online events, each providing a platform for poets of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities to share their work. Held on Monday evenings on the *Poets, Prattlers, and Pandemonialists* Facebook page, fellow poets were encouraged to write about some aspect of life in their part of the Black Country.

Each week an established regional poet provided a prompt for their part of the Black Country, *Richard Archer* (Walsall), *Rick Sanders* (Dudley), *Roy McFarlane* (Sandwell), *Kuli Kohli* (Wolverhampton), and *Heather Wastie* (Stourbridge).

After the Walsall, Dudley, Sandwell, Wolverhampton and Stourbridge events took place there was a grand finale on 20th July. At each event a 'judge's favourite' was chosen and alongside a prize there was an opportunity to work on creating a video of their poem where they were shown at the final.

You can see the winning poem videos by heading to the CBC website and searching in the Bostin News section. Or just enjoy reading them below.

DUDLEY 2070 by Alan Glover

Fifty years hence
The people are mostly nowhere
No sign of the queue for Greggs,
No sign of Greggs
The Little Barrel is long gone
Washed out to sea like the rest

A signpost marks the site of the Market
Which long since sold its last 'nana
Now sitting maybe 50ft underwater
Like some Black Country Atlantis

The animals left the Zoo on a boat
An Ark taking them to who knows where

Divers sometimes visit to explore,
The labyrinth of underground caves and passageways
Created by Plaza Mall, The Arcade, Churchill Precinct & more
No more bargains to be looted though from what is left,
Of Poundland, B&M & Wilko

The only visible landmarks above water now are
Top Church, the Castle & New Cavendish House
Built by the council in 2030 when they couldn't decide
What else they should do with the site where the old one stood.

You can still see the top of Bottom Church when low tides prevail
And the ghostly living wrecks of the 125, 246 & 74 are visible below
Full of fish and creatures languishing in the warm tropical waters
That returned just after Covid 49 got sorted
And we had forgotten about global warming.

Dudley is just a memory now
But at least there is evidence of it's being.
Tipton, Wednesbury, Walsall & everywhere between here and the Urals
Had it SO much worse.

TACK CHAINS SADDLES COAL 1'26" by Dan Oram

I remember when all this was chimneys
A town built on Leather and Steel
It's heavy metal swagger, stood tall around me
This was the place I grew up in

I remember peering through the car windows
Passing the TAINLSS STL TBS on Green Lane
And the coal-black ground leading to the power station

I remember seeing the sidings And the trains,
Pulling coal trucks that went on and on and on and on
Food for the hungry beast in our midst,
Devouring its inky feast

I remember when all this was concrete and brick
From the ABC to the Overstrand
The Brutalist shopping centres and rain-washed streets

I remember the dizzying array of factories
Rolling Mills, sheet pressing plants,
Stamping mills and smelting foundries

Forever running day and night
It's shift clocking workers
Turing the prayer wheels of the Arcane temples
Dedicated to the Gods of Industry

And the ever-present roar of the M6...

M6, spine road, mighty motorway
Speeding bright boxy cars full of
Fast food families and Profit driven businessmen
Past our little town

Past OUR little town
Unaware of our heritage and history
Built on tack, chain, saddles and coal

ALMA MATER: KING EDWARD VI GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR BOYS, STOURBRIDGE by Paul Francis

TEACHER:
Four hundred years of history set in stone
which gets its due respect today, at last;
approved by OFSTED, sixth form and select.
Back in the sixties boys would mock
formality, the gowns, the honours boards.

A tender little shoot when he first came.
Collected stamps; into the Romans, too.
So, maybe history? Or maybe not.
His dad took him to Molineux, aged five;
he claimed he got a wave from Billy Wright.

Time won't stand still, the hormones do their worst.
He wanted to be Elvis. Grew his hair
and thought he knew it all. The weeds run wild.
I warned him, get your 'O' levels, or else:
tarmac with Wimpey, Woolworths at Halesowen.

PUPIL:
Spot on, he was, with both of them.
Assemblies, all I'm hearing is the sound
of Robert Johnson, Albert Lee
calling me out of Stourbridge, out of school.
I find my strength, grow up, branch out.

Way past the ring road - Zeppelin, Marrakech,
the buzz of being a rockstar out on stage.
Those voices took me deep inside the blues
through fifty years of passion, pleasure, work
to polls which put me up there with the greats.

NEW ARRIVALS (IN THE SANDWELL VALLEY) by Gerald Kells

from the RSPB centre we watch
flocks of sleek parakeets - they've come to join
a community of birds which thrive where
watercourses and woods, hidden behind
offices and homes, inevitably fall from the
high Black Country ridge into this valley,
a heart carved through by cut and railway,
leapfrogged by the throbbing commerce of
the M5 - they've made this sanctuary their home,
plucked up twig and tack, whatever's close,
coated temples with flags, formed festivals, sung
sweet arias - for those who caw out bigotry
stop where you are, just for a second, and listen

BULBULHAMPTAN TUESDAY MARKET by Santosh K Dary

I head to Bulbulhamptan Tuesday market,
twirling my trolley bag, moving through crowds.
Checking stalls resting by rugs and carpet,
buy fruit and veg, where it's weighed in pounds.

My friends Shano, Banti, Preeto they all wait,
at the twin bhai's stand, fabrics piled in a row.
Colours of rainbow at Tuesday's bargain rate,
I choose red silk for shalwar kameez to sew.

Finding a bench, we eat chilli paneer pakoras,
sip bottled paani, but prefer sweet masala chai.
Gup chup on our ailments, there's no cure for us,
bitch about our bahus, they just don't even try.

We tut and sigh, roll our eyes and say hai rabba,
Bulbalhamptan market, till next Tuesday subha!

Punjabi Words

bhais	brothers
shalwar kameez	suit
paani	water
masala chai	spicy tea
gup chup	chit chat
bahus	daughter-in-laws
hai rabba	dear god
subha	morning

THREE BRIDGES, FOUR TUNNELS

Inspired by three bridges in close proximity on the canal at Bumble Hole, Netherton. Netherton Tunnel Bridge spans the main route while Boshboil Arm Bridge and Windmill End Bridge both lead to dead ends. These two bridges sit opposite each other and mark the line of the original canal before Netherton Tunnel was built to bypass the congestion caused by Dudley Tunnel.

Boshboil Arm Bridge

Swirls and blobs of black and white tussle and bubble on the cut. The single shallow arch, lattice-pierced with crosses, casts its iron signature across the Dudley Number 2.

And when I ask, I learn of seams of coal, black gold at Windmill End when factories and mining thrived and water in the bosh tubs hissed and steamed, cooling the coke, fresh baked in ovens, solid fuel for furnaces.

Boshboil Arm is severed now
Who's to blame, who's to blame?
Dudley Tunnel was too slow
Such a shame, such a shame
No path for horses, feet of men
Legging through, legging through
Someone saw a speedier route
Cut the queue, cut the queue

Windmill End Bridge

When planners sliced through contours to gouge a straighter, faster way and built the monstrous Netherton, the smaller tunnels sighed.

The earth itself was shaken as water wove a path between the collieries and claypits and knew the land would slide, that Brickhouse, Warren's Hall and Gawn, Oldhill, Pearson's, Eagle, Lion would soon yield to the thump of time – the clatter would subside.

From Stourbridge to Birmingham, the old worn route from Windmill End sucks in its sides at Gorsty Hill and pulls up short. Denied a passage into Lapal, it thirsts to stretch to Selly Oak and onwards into Edgbaston. Its tears have never dried.

Netherton Tunnel

Step inside the tunnel portal watch the towpaths disappear, let them draw you into darkness. Now, what do you hear?

Soaked in sound of tumbling water, whispering voices tell of light, a flame-like glow that shone inside, and men who ventured in one night, took no women, took no children, bottles of whisky in their hands, found the tales they heard were true, wanted then to understand why they'd seen a pool of daylight when they couldn't see the sky.

The tunnel voices know the answers; Ask them, and they'll tell you why.

© Heather Wastie

Linocuts by Lou Blakeway



JOHN BULMER

It was the early 1960s when documentarian and Sunday Times photographer John Bulmer set out to chronicle life in the then grey and bleak Black Country.

Inspired by *Henri Cartier-Bresson's* ethic of understanding life through photography, John captured Dudley and the lifeblood of the region with all its unflinching beauty.

When did you first know that you wanted to be a photographer?

As a schoolboy I was fascinated by mechanical things like Meccano, toy trains, etc, and then someone gave me a *Box Brownie* camera. To start with I was fascinated by the mechanics; I developed my pics and built an enlarger out of Meccano and old saucepans. Then I discovered the magic of the image and I was hooked.

Can you tell us about your process, and do you have any rules?

Look for the unusual, and remember your image needs to surprise and excite the viewer. There are no rules: the only sin is being boring.

What qualities made you want to photograph a subject and what were their reactions to being photographed?

I liked photographing people in relation to their environment. I wanted something that was a 'Decisive Moment' as Cartier-Bresson called it.

Did you ever find it difficult approaching your subjects?

Yes, I hated doing formal portraits, especially of famous people. I preferred catching people unawares in their environment. I would often talk to them afterwards, and it was rare that people were unhappy being photographed.

What is your favourite photograph that you've produced?

It's hard to choose. The picture on the cover of my book *The North* is one. It catches a moment in time that says something about a place and an era.

Is there anything that you have learned about human nature through doing your photography?

Yes, a lot. My first job was working as a news photographer on the *Daily Express*. You had to be able to gatecrash a gangster's funeral, or photograph royalty. It taught me to treat everyone as equal and fit in anywhere.

A large part of your collection documents Dudley and the Black Country, the Midlands and the North of England. What inspired you to photograph here?

This was because I was given the assignments. As I liked the people and got on well, which led to good pictures.

Did you encounter any challenges whilst producing your series of images in Dudley?

It was bleak and cold, but when I did find people to photograph they were welcoming and friendly. They were touched that I was interested in them, and did not feel that I was there to exploit them as some might feel now.



It was exotic in the way darkest Africa was exotic



You are known as a pioneer of colour photography, but your work in the Black Country was black and white. Why was this? This was because the magazines that commissioned me published in black and white. It was not till *The Sunday Times* started their colour magazine in 1963 that anyone published photojournalism in colour. They were the first in the world to do this. It was quite a challenge, as colour film was very slow and had poor latitude.

What are the lasting memories that stay with you from Dudley and the Black Country?

I felt it was exotic in the way darkest Africa was exotic. There was wonderful imagery everywhere, and despite the fact that it was cold and dark the people were very welcoming. It was physically hard but very rewarding, and I felt I have taken some of my best pictures on that assignment.

Find out more about John's work at johnbulmer.co.uk

RONNIE ACKLING

Photographer Ronnie really enjoys visiting working towns and cities, and try's to capture an honest point of view of them through the lens of his camera.

His photography generally centres around people and the built-up environment, especially the contrasts and juxtapositions between old and new, natural and unnatural and how times and people change.

Capturing time is at the heart of what he does, but he doesn't really see himself as just a 'documentary photographer'.

"Before I went to Dudley my question was: 'Is there more to Dudley than a Zoo and a Castle?' I'm still working on the answer. I recently went to Port Talbot and asked 'Is it just a Steel Works?' and the answer is no."



THE DOERS & THE CURIOUS

During 2019 photographer, **Laura Dicken** (who is also CBC's Creative Advisor for Dudley), worked on a project with the **CoLab Dudley** team to highlight a few of the people currently doing interesting projects in the town.

During 2020 Laura was due to showcase an exhibition of the images in new space; **CoLab on the High Street**, but as lockdown hit the exhibition was postponed.

Below are some of the reflections from the **Doers & the Curious** that were collected by Laura and CoLab Dudley researcher **Jo Orchard-Webb** on the alchemy that is creativity, curiosity, people, collectives and places.



Russ

The social value of representation and celebration of all the Doers & the Curious in our communities

"The Doers and the Curious of Dudley is a portrait project where I have met individuals in the community who are creatives, or use creativity in their lives to magnify their life experience and the life of their community ... [people] who want to be part of something bigger than themselves. ... It offers a safe space and vehicle for individuals to be celebrated, and it is a starting point for them introducing themselves and to speak about something they are passionate about. At a group level the individuals going through the process flags people's skills in the community and forms

connections and networks and illuminates their activity to the wider community. On a community level it is inherently positive that individuals within the community are recognised and celebrated for their skills ... it creates a sense of wellbeing in the wider community knowing that these grounded compassionate people are quietly doing this beautiful work." *Laura - Photographer / Artist*

The role of creativity & curiosity in enabling shared creations and narratives rooted in a place

"It gives us the opportunity to curate a project that comes from people and resonates with them. Something that is grounded in the environment and based on locality. It should



David & Kerry

be made 'with' rather than 'for' the people of Dudley. It needs to have engagement so that it is welcomed and understood. We can do this with experiments that may or may not work / be successful - but if they begin to make people curious, ask questions and engage at some level we will be able to better shape those ideas". *Kerry & David - Fused / Paint Dudley*

The role of creativity & curiosity in creating space for alternative futures and imaginaries to blossom

"Curiosity helps us imagine what is possible and think about alternatives to how we live at the moment." *Dan - Sign Maker / Mural Illustrator / Artist*

"It is about telling people to be free to make their own creations, ... letting kids explore, exploring the positive things in life." *Marlene - Dancer / Social Entrepreneur*

"I create a lot of waste (in my practice) but I can't chuck it knowing through my curiosity and experimenting I will find a use for that. Growing up everything I had was second hand, I didn't resent that, that was how it was, but that has instilled in me a passion for re-use, recycling, reinventing and reimagining something as something else, and there is a hopefulness in that, but if we look at it on a global scale it is essential that we do more of that. There is an element of hope but also playing and fun. I don't think anything gets achieved unless we are curious about that thing." *Rick - Poet / Maker / Social Entrepreneur*

The role of creativity & curiosity in shared learning and personal growth

"People have different ways of approaching things and being creative together is a way of sharing that information and learning from each other and creating something that belongs to that community." *Kath - Community Minister*

"I did a little art workshop and seeing people realise they can create even if they wouldn't think of themselves as artists is wonderful because they are surprised at what they have created at the end of it, they

are amazed at what they have created and experimented with." *Russ - Artist / Graphic Designer / Musician*

"Creativity helps spread my passion for people to learn BSL." *Siobhan - BSL Instructor and Advocate*

"Helping people to open their hearts & minds and letting the many manifestations of creativity into their lives is important ... once you start using creativity and curiosity on a regular basis it is a really powerful tool for problem solving in very different areas of life and it brings joy! So it is vital for communities to know about creativity and connect with other people who are curious and have safe space where they go to explore and be celebrated." *Laura*

The role of creativity & curiosity in nurturing friendships and connections

"Being creative taught me about friendships, when people ask why are you doing this I say because I was brought up like this and I was so happy, I want kids to experience being active and together" *Marlene*

"People are desperate to come [to the poetry nights] and interact and experience something they haven't experienced before ... there is a creative gap in people's lives, - the tv, the internet doesn't fill that - it needs some human interaction." *Rick*

The role of creativity & curiosity in nurturing our wellbeing

"Creative doing for me gives me time and the ability to explore my nature, that is important to me, the therapy of making, using my hands and brain, it is a cathartic experience ... it is nice to share that experience with other people through making, giving someone a bag, or reading a poem." *Rick*

"Creativity helps with letting out emotions or deep-seated things that are there." *Russ*

Creativity and curiosity can disrupt the usual high street norms by nurturing joy and positivity in the everyday streetscape via creativity in unusual places

"To create artwork that is positive, it brightened it up [the street] it is a spectacle to look at something positive to accompany them on their commute" *Dan*

"We want to give people the facilities to be creative in places they wouldn't ordinarily be creative." *Kath*

Creativity and curiosity can disrupt the usual high street norms by nurturing a reason to come together for a shared experience

"In terms of the High St everyone is living their individual lives parallel to each other but if there is a creative impetus or project it makes people stop and brings them together in ways that wouldn't normally happen in everyday life." *Kath*

Creativity and curiosity can disrupt the usual high street norms by nurturing a new relationship with your environment

"I think curiosity and experimenting is, it is like starting on a journey and not knowing where you are going, and you discover your locality and environment as you go." *Russ*

Creativity and curiosity can create new narratives of place and self that disrupt rigid and toxic narratives that can prevail unless thoughtfully challenged and replaced with more hopeful shared narratives

"Creativity in terms of sense of place allows people to explore different perspectives of where they are, there are often long held narratives around sense of place and they can be very rigid, they can be inherently positive or inherently negative. Creativity invites people to explore these narratives playfully, and curiously, and robustly question whether or not they are true or true for that individual and that is important to dismantle and dissolve unhelpful narratives to create and share new ones ... A phrase I hear too often is 'people like me don't get to do things like that', or 'that's not for us' so again rigid narratives that are potentially untrue and very damaging, and damage self-confidence and self-worth." *Laura*



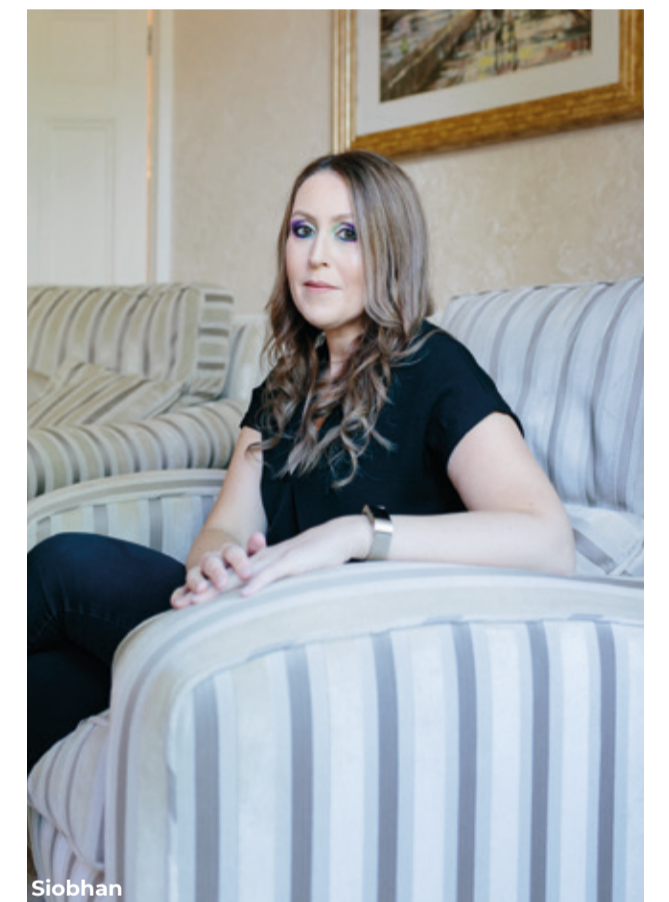
Kath



Marlene



Rick



Siobhan



Dan

Creativity helps with letting out emotions

To find out more about CoLab Dudley's projects see:
Web: colabdudley.net / doingindudley.net
Twitter: [@colabdudley](https://twitter.com/colabdudley) / [@doingindudley](https://twitter.com/doingindudley)



BOSTIN TYPE

Emily Benton, creator of the Bostin News masthead, is a designer based in the Black Country. She combines her illustrative skills and love for local accents to create bold, playful and fun hand lettered designs.

By day, she co-run's *Bostin Design*, a creative marketing studio. By night, she continues the pursuit of her passion for design and the Black Country dialect by creating illustrations and hand lettered artwork.

She explains: "Whether you love it or hate it, the Black Country accent is undeniably unique! I've always felt proud of my roots and feel our dialect should be celebrated! My current project 'Bostin Type' combines my illustrative skills and love for local accents to create bold, playful and fun hand-lettered designs.

My main goal is to show off our accent in a visually engaging way."

These lettering pieces are then turned into design-led homewares and gifts. All artwork is printed locally, where possible as Emily will always use small independent businesses to put money back into the region.

All artworks can be purchased from her website at emilycreates.co.uk.

BURIN & PLATE



Printmaker *Ella Flavell*, AKA *Burin & Plate*, grew up in *Pensnett* and her family have always lived around the Black Country and the Dudley area.

Ella started working within the medium of lino printing in 2016, whilst at the *University of York* studying Art History, taking as her subject places around the world that were close to my heart (such as New

York, Blackpool and Dudley). Her fine art prints of *Dudley High Street* and of *Sedgley Church* were made quite early on, and brought to mind Ella's childhood memories and family members back home.

Ella remains proud of her Dudley identity, and through her work demonstrates the beauty and heritage of the Black Country.

SUN PRINTS

Content editor - *Anneka French*



Caitriona Dunnett's project *Sun Prints*, one of CBC's Creative Connections commissions, sees Black Country families experiment at home with cyanotype printing, one of the earliest forms of photographic making.

Caitriona is an Irish photographer based in the West Midlands and she shares her thoughts about her artistic practice and experimental processes in the lead-up to the project.

I first studied photography when colleges were still set up for darkroom printing. My love of photographic processes comes from this hands-on approach and from the magic of seeing pictures emerge. A few years back I began making digital negatives and it was from here that I looked at alternative processes. Cyanotype, one of the oldest forms of photography, was one of the first I tried and I stuck with it because I liked its versatility.

Cyanotypes are blue but I have been toning mine with tannins – some of my first experiments were with tea, coffee and wine tannin. I have also tested Irish bog water and a variety of fruits which have high tannin content. Last year I was awarded an *a-n* bursary to explore gum bichromate printing at *Frome Printmakers* in Somerset. There I further experimented with one and two layers of gum printing over my cyanotypes. I am currently printing works from '*A Well Trodden Path*', a partnership project with *Dr Hilary Bishop* from *Liverpool John Moores University*, and am toning these prints with an Irish tea that dates back to the early years of the twentieth century. The use of this tea relates to the project's stories and heritage.

I've been working on a project called '*Mass Paths*' since 2014. Most of the photographs in this series were shot on a digital camera on location in Ireland. These were converted into negatives in Photoshop then printed out on to acetate. I coated watercolour paper with a cyanotype wash. Once dried I placed the acetate on top and then exposed it in a UV light box.

I then washed the cyanotype and left it for a minimum of twenty-four hours, re-wet the print, placed it in a bath of tea for a few hours and washed it again. This was all carried out at home in my kitchen – these techniques are very accessible.

I actually started printing cyanotypes a few years ago with my son when he was at nursery school, and we made and framed a photogram for his teacher. She was delighted with it. Since then we have made them every summer for his teachers and my daughter's too.

The cyanotype printing and toning is an integral element to my '*Mass Paths*' work. These

paths were used in penal times in Ireland to enable people to get to illegal mass services when Catholics weren't allowed to practise their religion. Outlawed priests travelled around the country and people were informed by word of mouth that these services were taking place – at hidden-away places such as rocks, fields, bushes and old graveyards. Sometimes people would walk along rivers so that their footsteps couldn't be seen.

'*A Well Trodden Path*' is a follow-on project to '*Mass Paths*'. It explores the heritage of paths made with the relaxation of the penal laws. People would have travelled five miles or more, often without footwear, across fields to attend services in newly built churches around the country. Some of these paths were still used up until the 1960s and though many have been lost to land development, others have survived and are public rights of way.

I relate the layering of the cyanotype toning process to that of the natural landscape – places which have been coated over



time by personal and national narratives, and physical changes. For the '*Sun Prints*' project, I prepared packs of pre-coated cyanotype paper and posted them out to Black Country families who were participating.

They had the opportunity to design and create their own sun prints by removing the paper from the black bag, placing an object on top of the paper and exposing it to the sun (which is also UV light) for five to fifteen minutes depending on the weather.

They could place objects on the paper such as leaves and flowers from their garden, children's toys, personal mementos, sheer fabrics or lace. 2D and 3D objects give different effects. I provided acetate so that families could print their drawings or their favourite poem or quote to layer on to the print. I also add little bags of tea and coffee so that families could experiment with toning their cyanotype prints.

There is a certain amount of control over the process and definitely an element of luck

involved within cyanotype printing – that's what makes the process exciting.

With the participatory element of the project, I was looking forward to introducing people to a very simple photographic process which is accessible and fun.

Life can often be very hectic, but at this particular point in time things have slowed down. Many of us are together at home and this moment presents a special opportunity to work in collaboration with one another. Likewise, by showcasing the cyanotypes produced on Instagram, participants in the project are able to see each other's work as it's created, as will their friends and family in the UK and further afield. I hope too that reading this will encourage people to try out the processes for themselves at home alone or with their families.

You can see the results of the Sun Prints project over at CBC's website.

Web: caitrioadunnett.com
Instagram: [@caitrioadunnett](https://www.instagram.com/caitrioadunnett)



LOOK OUT FOR EACH OTHER

A Positive Poster by Foka Wolf for you to cut out, colour and pop in your window.

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Making the most of the Black Country through arts, culture and creativity

Creative Black Country (CBC) is an action learning project funded by *Arts Council England* through the *Creative People and Places* (CPP) programme to engage audiences in areas where evidence shows people are less likely to take part in publicly funded arts and culture.

CBC work with communities in **Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall** and **Wolverhampton** to explore and develop new creative projects with local people in the places where they live.

We hope that you have been inspired by the stories in this first edition of *Bostin News*. If you would like to know more about our projects, get involved or start something creative with your community then get in touch:

info@creativeblackcountry.co.uk

To find out more about our work visit creativeblackcountry.co.uk

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