

the Whitworth

Podcast transcript

A Walk In The Park - Episode 3

A Walk In The Park is a podcast series from the Whitworth. A university gallery, set in parkland in central Manchester. Hosted by the Cultural Park Keeper Francine Hayfron, each episode takes a look at what is happening inside and out at the Whitworth.

EPISODE 3 *A Walk In The Park*, focuses on how the gallery works with young people, and our recent exhibition, *Utopia*. We meet the Whitworth Young Contemporaries and curator Leanne Green, along with the Artist-in Residence Annabel Taylor-Munt.

All of the episodes are available to listen to at:

<https://www.mixcloud.com/TheWhitworth/playlists/a-walk-in-the-park-podcast/>

Social tags:

Instagram – @whitworthart @whitworthcpk1 @foldedwinguk

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Hashtag – #AWalkInThePark #TheWhitworthAtHome #GalleryInThePark

A WALK IN THE PARK

EPISODE 3 - SPEAKERS

Francine Hayfron (FH) - Cultural Park Keeper at The Whitworth, The University of Manchester.

Alistair Hudson (AH) – Director of The Whitworth Gallery Institute and Park at The University of Manchester, and Director of Manchester City Art Gallery

Annabel Taylor-Munt (ATM) – The Whitworth’s Emerging Artist in Residence

Sally Thelwell (ST) – Youth Engagement Coordinator at The Whitworth, The University of Manchester

Liz Pugh (LP): Creative Director at Walk The Plank

A WALK IN THE PARK

EPISODE 3

<Music plays in background: Bonobo- Second Sun>

FH: Hello and welcome. You’re listening to A Walk in the Park – a podcast series from The Whitworth.

I’m **Francine Hayfron** - Cultural Park Keeper at the Whitworth, and your host for the next 30 minutes.

In this episode, we’ll hear from our director on how corona virus is impacting life here at The Whitworth.

AH: *“I’m mean it’s certainly true that this moment makes us look at the world differently and that’s sort of what art does as well.”*

FH: We’ll also look at how The Whitworth works with young people from a group called the Whitworth Young Contemporaries to the outdoors arts training programme Park Pioneers.

ATM: *"It's been really interesting to work with a group of people that don't all come from the same backgrounds, and to see how they get excited about the work we're doing, makes it really special."*

<Background noises of cheering & clapping>

LP *"It's been really exciting working with 16-25 year olds who are clearly already interested in art but haven't thought about how they might take ideas and techniques into the great outdoors."*

FH: And we chat to Sally Thelwell who is responsible for coordinating the young people's programme.

ST: *"They get to know the collections, the gallery and the staff here and they feel ownership over the space and so that young people feel invited and welcome into the gallery."*

UPDATE FROM ALISTAIR HUDSON

FH: First an update from The Whitworth's Director Alistair Hudson on how life has changed since the gallery has closed to the public, and how you can still make use of the wonderful park...

<Music plays in background: Talk Talk – Eden>

AH: I'm just out for my daily exercise, my daily walk around the fields, around my house. It's been a week in quarantine now, so every bit of air outside helps refocus a little bit. I'm actually just out here in the woods close by, picking some wild garlic, which I will explain a little bit more about later on.

So we're now shut at The Whitworth. About a week ago we took the decision to close and everything was locked up and put into safety. All the paintings that needed to be in safe conditions were put away into the store, and the team did a herculean effort, a very stoic effort to put the Whitworth to bed really. Although we are still working behind the scenes and keeping things checked over. We had to close the building, the park at the moment is still open for exercise with a 2 meter distancing policy in place, and the play grounds of course aren't in operation but it's there for a bit of exercise and if people need it.

So we're thinking now about how we put our work online, about how we can still operate. Our old motto from 1889 was "For the perpetual gratification of the people of Manchester" and we've got that perpetual idea in place so even if our doors are closed we're still working and making programmes and trying to do our bit, to keep people entertained, or relaxed, or put in a frame of mind, or stimulating people in their homes through the things we can put on our website. That includes maybe making features of works from our collection, it might also be with our education team creating online programmes for things for children who are off school to do at home, maybe with their parents, or for activities to do with our health and wellbeing programme, which might be for example things of therapeutic value, or looking at works from the collection, or just kind of taking a moment to think about things differently.

I mean it's certainly true that this moment makes us look at the world differently and that's sort of what art does as well. It's interesting just coming out for a walk in the woods and fields near my house you can look at things in a different way and it makes you realise how lucky we are to have certain things, to have a visual world around us and I think you know this is a moment where we start to rethink and recalibrate. It may well be that a lot of things change permanently after this pandemic and I certainly think us thinking more in this quiet time about the Whitworth, and how it works, how we work online and how we reach people in their homes as well as people can't necessarily come to the gallery, this could all have quite an interesting effect on how we work.

<Birds singing in the background>

I'm certainly thinking now how in a way we can start to bring all our activities together. Normally you don't see our education work, our health work, all these invisible things which normally make up about 70% of a museum's programming they suddenly start to come to the fore and we start to work together in new and interesting ways, and we're still working this out I would say. But I look forward to seeing what comes online, this podcast of course being part of that. And also I think one of the points of all of this is to try and do things that are useful to people. Not just making programme online, content online in order to justify ourselves but try and do things that reach people in their homes and have use to them in their daily lives.

So I thought whilst I was out here picking this wild garlic I could give you a recipe that you could try at home, which is super cheap. Now you find wild garlic growing in parks, hedgerows and woodland, if you're out on your daily walk. It's the little green shoot that comes up, normally it has white flowers but its best to get the leaves before the white flowers come through. All you have to do really is to get a carrier bag full of wild garlic leaves, put them in a blender along with about a cup full of olive oil, some lemon juice, juice from one lemon, a bit of salt and pepper about 3 table spoons of parmesan cheese, or other cheese, a handful of nuts maybe and then just blitz it and it forms a

nice sort of paste, a pesto, which you can then put on your pasta. Its super easy, super cheap meal, but very delicious, very tasty. So there you go, there is a little bit of outdoor foraged cuisine that you might be able to try at home if you manage to get out and find wild garlic leaves.

Ok, so that's it from me. We'll keep programming online, we'll keep contributing to this podcast and we look forward to seeing you soon. Bye.

FH: My thanks to Alistair Hudson, the Whitworth's director.

WHITWORTH YOUNG CONTEMPORARIES

<Music plays in background: jus – Something STML>

FH: Just 2 weeks before the gallery closed its doors to the public I had an opportunity to take a look at the Utopia exhibition inside The Whitworth, co-curated by a group called the Whitworth Young Contemporaries. The exhibition focuses on what Utopia means for young people. Alongside The Whitworth's curator Leanne Green, the group selected work from the gallery's vast art collection. I chatted to Artist in residency Annabel Taylor-Munt to find out more about her own involvement in the exhibition.

ATM: So the process with the exhibition was really interesting so neither for me or Ruby, the other artist in residence, had curated an exhibition before so it's the first time for all of us. And we worked with quite a big group of around 20 young people, and it was really important for us that everyone's voices were heard and it wasn't just dictated by one single person. So we started off looking at key themes of utopia. We were interested in the public and the private, the imagined and the reality and then we grouped the work based around them. It wasn't an easy way to do it we had lots of disagreements lots of arguments, but it was a heated process and we all learnt a lot.

FH: So talk to me about how you selected the works with the group?

ATM: So we were lucky enough to go into the stores with Leanne Green, the curator that did the other half of the exhibition, and we basically pulled out the racks and looked at the works to see which took our fancy. We went through all the different types of art work and we had a discussion around about 10 pieces at a time and how they related to utopias.

FH: So talk us through some of these works that are here in front of us.

ATM: So one of the really interesting pieces for us when we were having discussions about Utopia was Ewan Gibbs' *Travel Inn*, which is a smaller piece that doesn't mainly attract your attention when you first see it but we were really interested in the idea of how utopias are happening in our current capitalist society. So our whole work weeks are based around this idea of the holiday and that you can go, you can work really hard and you get to have this wonderful 2 week holiday a year maybe, and if you are lucky enough you get to jet off somewhere and we thought this was really well represented in a Travel Inn.

FH: Any others?

ATM: So another really interesting piece for us was the Richard Hamilton's - *Just What is it That Makes Today's Homes so Different?* And we had lots of conversations around this piece because it was a collage, which has different elements of home and what was happening in the world at the time when it was created in 93. So there's a microwave with fish and chips, there's a woman body builder holding a stop sign for children to cross the road, there the picture of the Gulf war and there's an aids poster on the wall. And we were having conversations about what is it that's important that's external to the home but influences us every day.

On the centre of another wall we have Stephen Willats' *In Relationship to Another*, which where the basis of ideas of how we curated the Utopia's exhibition came from. The piece is a photograph of high rise flats and out from it is a diagram of the different people that live in it, with labels such as harmony, disconnect, confidentiality and guidance. And we were really interested in how these buildings don't represent the people living in them and this art works try's to describe that through these diagrams. And we deliberately put this in the centre of the exhibition with a mind map around it in a similar style describing all the different themes in which utopia houses. The Young Contemporaries came up with the themes of the public space, the imagined, the fantasy, the collective, the reality, the individual and the private space. This wasn't a quick process. We took many different themes and many different ideas, but when looking through the works these were the ones that were the most prominent in the Whitworth's collection.

FH: So Annabelle, tell us about your experience of being the Emerging Young Artist this year?

AMT: So I feel very lucky to have been picked with Ruby and to be part of the Utopias exhibition. It's a great opportunity for us to learn, not just about how to curate an exhibition from Leanne Green, but how to facilitate young people which Sally has been so helpful with. It's been really interesting to work with a group of people that don't all come from the same backgrounds, whether that's like, some of them studying art, some of them are studying history, some of them are still at school and it's such a fun age range, as around 16-22 year olds have a real mixture of opinions and to see how they get excited about the work we're doing, makes it really special.

FH: And has this informed your practice as an artist?

AMT: Yeah definitely, I think it's been really helpful to see how a gallery is organised, and how work is chosen to put up. I think in terms of working with young people, which is what I hope to do in the future, it's given me invaluable insight into how to run a group session and I'm excited to see what's to come in the future.

FH: So what's next for the exhibition?

AMT: So it was really important when we were making this exhibition that it wasn't just about hanging pieces of art work on the wall and speaking about utopias, but actually trying to find a way to create a utopia in the Manchester society. So our next steps are trying to create a social engagement with the local community, to get people into the gallery and to try and make their voices heard.

We wanted it to be an active space where people could come in and create art work together, especially from different communities around Manchester which mainly wouldn't normal come into the gallery.

FH: and to find out more about Whitworth Young Contemporaries and what they are up to, you can follow them on Instagram and Twitter @WhitworthYC

<Music plays in the background: Bonobo - Second Sun>

SPOTLIGHT

FH: You're listening to A Walk in the Park podcast, with me Francine Hayfron. Each episode we shine a spotlight on another role in the gallery. Today we catch up with Sally Thelwell, who is the Young People's Coordinator

<Music plays in the background: Naty, Benjamin Zephaniah, Mala - Word and Sound>

ST: My role is to work with young people, aged between 16 and 24, to show them that The Whitworth is a space that they can access.

FH: And so what do you find are the hooks to engage young people? Are there kind of key elements?

ST: I think projects have to be fun. I think that there needs to be an environment that's not a school, you know. So Whitworth Young Contemporaries meet every Thursday 6:30 to 8:30pm at the gallery. I'm very keen not to give homework or make them feel that

they have to come every week. It's a drop in, they come because they want to come. They come because their pals are here, you know and the projects need to be exciting and something they wouldn't get to do anywhere else.

If they stay until the end of the session you know you've engaged them, that they've enjoyed it. Where as if they drift off half way through, then you've lost them. But obviously it's to do with their eyes, it's the kind of there, you know, the eyes roll back you don't think they're engaged but actually they are listening, they are thinking and really proactive. I love them.

FH: And one of the things I noticed about the Whitworth Young Contemporaries more than any of the other groups that work on stuff around the gallery is that the group is so diverse. What's the key to attracting such a diverse audience?

ST: There is no answer. No, so basically they bring friends, if they enjoy it they bring friends and you know there is this huge diversity in Manchester, you know if they enjoy it they bring their pal, they bring their other pal. Sometimes I have a really diverse group and sometimes I have a group of 12 girls, you know 12 white girls, and you can't control that.

I think, I just try to create a welcoming space for them that they enjoy, apply them with vegan friendly snacks and then they enjoy it, they come. They get to know the collections, they gallery and staff here and they feel ownership over the space and that they are able to programme and control what happens here. So that young people feel invited and welcome into the gallery

FH: So tell us about the wider offer for young people here at the gallery?

ST: The ethos is about giving people the opportunity to lead and make decisions about what we do what we programme and how we work with young people. So a key element of that is WYC activates where we do a call out, we invite young people to submit project ideas and then we provide them with a small amount of money to make that project happen. We support them to develop that idea, to kind of think more broadly and also to put the activity on and it can be anything. So in the past we've done an open mic night so where a young guy worked with ten young men to write their own music and then perform them in the gallery. We've also done a project around student housing and the awful state that students live in.

We also offer a program on a Saturday afternoon called Park Pioneers. The idea is that young people work to build and create outdoor art works and events. So they are currently setting up for a performance that they've been working on since October to do a fire drawing, so the young people are getting you know mucky and making a right mess.

So, yeah, they just love it, they just love trying something new. So I think the programme just tries to offer something different. We also have a programme of emerging artists who we offer a kind of first step in their careers. So we pay them to come in and work with WYC and they gain the experience of working as a facilitator with young people but

also to programme events and in this most recent case they've curated an exhibition called Utopias.

FH: Lastly, tell me what is the best thing about your job Sally?

ST: I guess it's just the energy of the young people. On a Thursday afternoon I get a bit tired and a bit ready to go home, and when they come in and we have a coffee and a chat, and a laugh. That's the bit I enjoy, just getting to know all their gossip and their stories.

FH: So what would you say to attract a young person to come visit the gallery who'd never been here before?

ST: I'd say just give it a go, you know. It's a free, warm space that's open every day, there is a really lovely café. There are toilets that are open all the time. So it's a space that you can just pop in and have a brew, have a wonder round and you know it's great for dates.

<Laughter>

<Music plays in the background: Bonobo – Second Sun>

PARK PIONEERS

FH: Since October a group of young people have been working with our partners, the outdoor art specialists Walk The Plank on a new arts training programme called Park Pioneers.

The programme was designed as a way to engage younger audiences with a training through production scheme, to develop the skills and understanding around outdoor events. Using Whitworth Park and the outdoor areas the gallery as the canvas, Walk The Plank have encouraged young people to engage with the possibilities of making their own work by making and doing.

<Music plays in the background: Thundercat – Fair Chance>

I'm joined now by Liz Pugh Creative Director from Walk The Plank. Liz tell us about the importance of working with young people on projects such as this?

LP: I think for us it's been really exciting working with 16-25 year olds who are clearly already interested in art, but haven't thought about how they might take ideas and techniques into the great outdoors. So being able to give them different artists to work

with, so there has been 10 weeks of sessions, and they've probably worked with 8 or 9 different artists. They've been introduced to all sorts of different ideas, site deco through to fire drawing. So I hope what they get out of it is an expansion of their horizons in terms of what's possible and how you might make work that engages diverse communities by working in public space, like the Whitworth Park or wherever they are going to work.

FH: So can you tell us a little bit about what's happening out here on the sculpture terrace tonight?

LP: So we decided that rather than just get to the end of our 10 sessions with some nice memories and a bit of skills download, wouldn't it be great if we could show off what it is they have done, the Park Pioneers group. So we have put on display the banners that they made with a resist print technique, we've put the wind socks that they have made in one of the sessions, which of course has guaranteed that there is absolutely no wind, and the centre piece will be a fire drawing, which will burn for about 5 minutes. They use the collection as a source of inspiration for a series of designs and then they chose one of them to make as tonight's fire drawing, and hopefully they will be delighted by what they see as a result. They've not seen the result yet, and of course it's all about learning by doing and they need to see this process through from start to finish. The start was the design and the understanding of the technique and then the finish is actually setting fire to something.

FH: I know that when we came up for the idea of this programme it was about giving young people the opportunity to get involved, dip their toe in, in the outdoors arts sector because there weren't that many opportunities out there for them that was like this, would you agree?

LP: Yeah, I think knowing where to begin is difficult because the outdoor arts sector isn't even really a sector. There's carnival, there's mella, there's parades, there's community arts practice, there's participatory arts practice. There's work happening all over the country and in very diverse communities but how do you get started if your 20 and you've done some art at school or college and want to give that a go.

So I hope what this programme has done has introduced them to 9 or 10 different artists, all of whom whose journey and practice is quite different and I hope it's given them confidence to have a go at using some of these techniques themselves. And, I think, you know the most important thing has been that set of individuals who didn't know each other, learning to work together as a group and to support each other. It's been great having a couple of people who have worked with The Whitworth before, but it's also attracted a load of different people, who I hope will really now carry on working together. Because, long term working in the arts if it is to be sustainable requires building your own networks, supporting each other, and you know this is not a well-resourced sector, and they are going to need to find opportunities for each other as well as themselves.

FH: Is there anything you've learnt along the way?

LP: Yeah of course when you do a learning project, as one the creative produces and the trainers, actually it becomes a learning project for me as much for them. And I think one of the things I've observed is what one can do in a 2 hour session is limited by the amount of preparation time that's required and finishing time. For them to have a really positive learning experience we need to do quite a lot in advance so that in the session they get that sense of creative process from beginning to end. What we miss out of course is all the prep that is required, and I hope that tonight gives them some inkling about all of that.

What else have I learnt? Oh god I suppose I've learnt that it's really exciting working with this generation.

<Music plays in the background: Roddy Ricch – High Fashion>

FH: So guys, I just want to know what it's been like for you working in this programme.

Park Pioneer Participant 1: Feels amazing that we get to do new things, I've never done these things before so like everything it was new for me and I love everything. I enjoyed every single session.

Park Pioneer Participant 2: They gave us a new technique that I've not tried before and every session it was like OK we're going to learn something really quickly in like, how many hours? We've got like 2 and half hours per session. It's cool to like bring it together and apply it to an event that we're just hastily throwing together on this day. Yeah it's definitely like frantic but I feel like it's definitely going to pay off. I'm feeling good about lighting something on fire. I'm excited to see it happen.

FH: From this experience, it might be too early to ask, but does anyone feel like they'd like to, maybe, do more work in outdoor arts or could consider it even as a career later?

Park Pioneer Participant 2: Yeah absolutely, defiantly feel like I've bene interested in outdoor arts has since become more of a thing like I want do this. So yes. To answer your question, yes

Park Pioneer Participant 1: We want to continue until Frost Fair. Like we will all do this. We will all stick together.

<Music plays in the background: Prodigy – Firestarter>

<Announcement>

Park Pioneer Participant 2:

Everybody please listen up, ok we're going to be lighting our fire drawing in 5 minutes, sorry you're going to have to wait a little bit longer but I feel it will make the experience all the more exciting once it actually happens. Thank you for coming, thank you so much for your patience. It's going to be good. Stick around!

<Clapping and cheering>

FH: So we are now seeing a scaffolding being constructed that has the design of their fire drawing, which is actually a recreation of the Peter Blakes' *I Love You* artwork, and it's currently alit as we speak.

It looks great and there is a great crowd out here on the sculpture terrace. Loads of people have turned up to support the group and yeah, everyone is really enjoying it and you can hear Firestarter by Prodigy in the background which is very apt, which is very good and everyone seems to be having a good time but most importantly the look on the faces of the group when it was all lit, they looked dead pleased and dead proud of themselves and so they should.

<Music continues to play in the background: Prodigy – Firestarter>

<Crowd member's cheer and chatter amongst one another observing the fire drawing>

FH: So Liz we've just seen the fire drawing come alight, how does it feel?

LP: Well I am delighted that there was an audience of people who had come to the gallery and who shared that moment. Obviously for the Park Pioneers that is a really special thing and I think that sense of a little moment of spectacle at the end of that learning process is really important, and I hope that you know, they all got something out of it.

I feel really chuffed and aren't we lucky with the weather. No rain. No wind. It's perfect.

<Music plays in the background: Bonobo – Second Sun>

A WALK IN THE PARK - EPISODE 3

FH: That was recorded 2 weeks before the gallery closed its doors to the public.

Remember that the park stays open for now, so if you live local to the Whitworth, please

do make use of the space here to enjoy A Walk in the Park, and please remember to observe all social distancing guidelines

<End>

All of the episodes are available to listen to at:

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