
COMMUNIQUE TWO

SUMMER 2020

INTRODUCING: DO IT YOURSELF!

EDITED BY ANNEKA FRENCH, RYAN HUGHES,
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WELCOME

This second issue in our series of communiqués, leading to Coventry Biennial 2021: HYPER-POSSIBLE, is a self-contained exhibition of newly commissioned artworks for the age of physical (not social) distancing.

While we are still not able to visit museums and galleries, and certainly while those visits look and feel very different, we have been working with artists to imagine how their practices can still reach audiences and to explore the ways that audiences can continue to take a key role in making, activating and co-creating with artists.

For DO IT YOURSELF! We have commissioned four female and non-binary artists who have all lived, worked, studied or practiced in Coventry to create sets of instructions for anyone to be able to follow, so that anyone might be able to make these artworks in their homes, gardens or neighbourhoods.

Across these four innovative artworks are common themes or explorations of sharing,

communication, caring and attempts at togetherness highlighting the role and impacts that artistic practice and thinking can have in our communities, our relationships and on our mental or physical health.

Included in this communiqué is a short text by our Artistic Director, Ryan Hughes, followed by brief introductions to the four artists that we have commissioned:

Ania Bas
oho_co
sirens
crossing
melissandre varin

Their instructional artworks are included at the rear of this publication, or are attached as a separate series of Appendices so that anyone might be able to use them flexibly. We hope that you will use these artworks with your friends and families, that you will enjoy this exhibition format which is very much a response to the times that we are living in, and that you enjoy what these four artists are so generously offering.

WHY DO IT YOURSELF?

BY RYAN HUGHES

Cook books. Cocktail books. Guides and manuals. Rules for board games. Suggestions for things to do with your body. Workshops, classes and other approaches to pedagogy.

Within the art world there has been an instructional turn. Artists are relinquishing control of the production of their work. This represents the politics and aesthetics that we need right now, during a global pandemic where many individuals are lacking agency and craving creative activity. These kinds of artwork change audiences into participants, they make cultural production more democratic and accessible, and support what Sarah Shalgosky, curator at University of Warwick's Mead Gallery describes as the "journey towards criticality". What is also crucial about many of these instructional works, is that they make art fun without blunting any critical or political commentary intended by the artist.

During the Covid-19 lockdowns we have seen a

rise in creative activity of all kinds: gardening, cooking, hairdressing, painting and as those who are home schooling have been becoming increasingly desperate to keep children stimulated and entertained (or at least distracted) art institutions have been releasing family friendly activity packs. In many cases these activities have been hastily designed and are somewhat generic in nature, including collage, junk modelling and abstract painting. These are all worthwhile and meaningful actions and processes but these institutions have forgotten their largest asset. They have forgotten what makes them unique and what gives these processes their power. They have forgotten artists.

Throughout lockdown, while unable to visit galleries, museums or biennials, I have been using instructional books by artists to continue engaging with their practices, ensuring that the works, ideas and outlooks of artists continue to make life richer, more varied and



PERFORMANCE DOCUMENTATION

sirencrossing
citysited/1 – UCL Urban Laboratory
2012

IN LONDON

PHOTOGRAPH: CAROLYN DEBY

interesting, and ensuring that art remains embedded in everyday life, where it belongs.

Many of these artists' instructions are vague or at least leave a lot of room for interpretation but they also provide frameworks for shaping all kinds of solo and group activity. These are the kinds of artwork which institutions could be using to introduce real artistic value, use and fun into people's lives.

Food has been a common thread throughout my engagement with these kinds of artwork over the past few weeks. *Bastard Cookbook*, for instance, explores the relational effects of globalisation through smashing together Finnish and Thai foods. Rirkrit Tiravanija and Antto Melasniemi are particularly fond of *Fish Sauce Ice Cream*. They also highlight that “*One should always cook and live without fear*”.

There are of course many artworks of this kind that don't include food.

Predating the current emergency, in 2017 I recall Instagram being full of people contorting their bodies to follow Erwin Wurm's instructions as they used his *Performative Sculptures* in his show in the Austrian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

As with many innovations in the contemporary art canon, the thinking behind this way of working can be traced back to the 1960s. A group of artists produced *Fluxkit*, an attaché case filled with scores, texts and games which are playful and encourage interaction. Others like Sol LeWitt produced instructions for wall drawings and Dan Graham wrote schematic poems as generators of text to be realised by his collaborators and editors at various journals. Andy Warhol even produced colour by numbers, a series that he called *Do it yourself*.

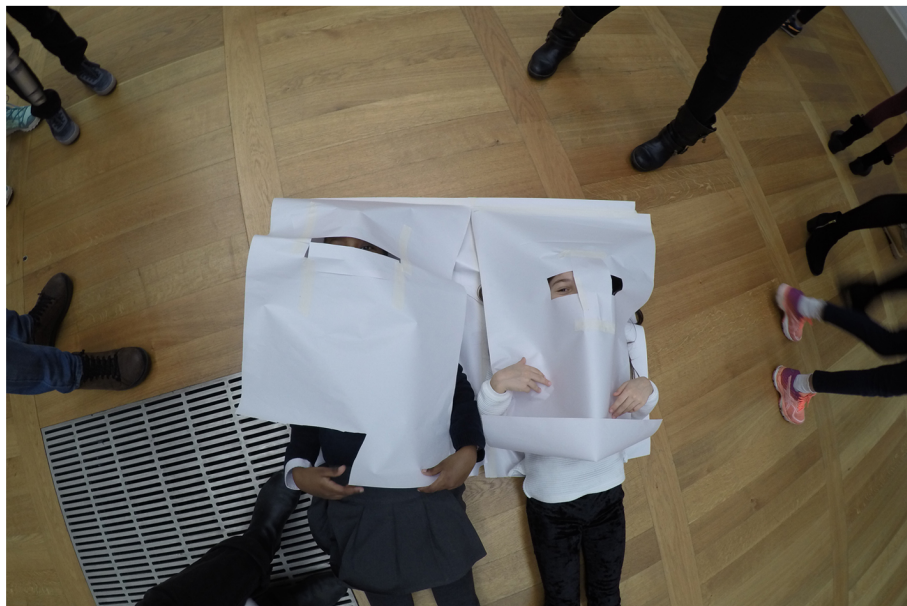
This 1960s moment, of course, has huge local significance, resonating through Art & Language who formed, taught and

practiced while at Coventry Polytechnic (now part of Coventry University). We will be exploring the resonances of Art & Language as one of our three primary research strands in Coventry Biennial 2021.

These instructional works, as I've highlighted throughout this text, radically change the relationship between artists, their audiences and the institutions who broker and maintain these relationships.

This kind of artistic practice has the ability, in the context of Covid-19, to support communities and facilitate meaningful and personal experiences with art while ensuring the continuation of critically engaged practices.

This kind of artistic practice has the ability, in the context of Covid-19, to change the (art) world.



WORKSHOP DOCUMENTATION

ANIA BAS
FAMILY ART SCHOOL
2019

AT TATE BRITAIN, LONDON

PHOTOGRAPH: TATE LEARNING

ANIA BAS

Ania Bas is an artist, writer and arts programmer based in Warwickshire. She works across text, performance, publishing and often uses collaborative, discursive and co-created approaches when making her artworks.

For DO IT YOURSELF! Ania has made a short story, influenced by her personal experience of the Covid-19 lockdown. Throughout this work are a series of footnotes which instruct you, the reader, to undertake particular activities that encourage walking and a deeper engagement with nature.

Ania has previously been commissioned by and has exhibited at Tate Britain, London, Whitechapel Gallery, London, Whitstable Biennial and has worked in programming roles at PEER, London and Eastside Projects, Birmingham.

She is also a co-founder of The Walking Reading Group, an innovative project that facilitates knowledge exchange in an intimate and dynamic way which has been

active since 2013.

When commenting on the participatory nature of DO IT YOURSELF! she said:

"Times are strange but it is great to see that creative approaches flourish".

Ania's DO IT YOURSELF! artwork, titled *Footnotes, Outdoor Activities* is presented in Appendix One.



PERFORMANCE DOCUMENTATION

oho_co
BREAKFAST ELSEWHERE
2017

IN NEW YORK CITY

PHOTOGRAPH: AYODAMOLA OKUNSEINDE

oho_co

oho_co are nomadic performance-makers curious about food, migrant-memory, and belonging. They often make and serve foods in participatory settings to initiate discussion around the socio-political and philosophical meanings of meals and other subjects.

They have described their practice by saying that:

“the work grows from meshing the ordinarily simple with the complex and unreckoned, often using food, dialogue, strangeness, and being-with as media”.

For DO IT YOURSELF! oho_co have produced a score that guides small groups of friends or family through a shared listening process that encourages dreaming. This comfortable, discursive, and meditation-inspired dream-speaking practice aims to exercise our imagination, courage and belief that a just world is possible.

oho_co have previously made performances in a range of cities including New York,

Detroit, Copenhagen, Belgrade, New Delhi, Singapore and Washington, DC. They have been artist-in-residence at Leadworks, Plymouth, UK; HIAP, Finland; Loviisa AIR, Finland and Playhouse, Detroit, USA among others.

oho_co's DO IT YOURSELF! artwork, titled *Dream Loops (A Score in Marginalia)* is presented in Appendix Two.



PERFORMANCE DOCUMENTATION

sirencrossing

urbanflows: entangled in the grain of worlds, becoming
2019

IN COVENTRY

PERFORMERS: LAUREN JANE SHEERMAN AND
ANNALISE COWAN

PHOTOGRAPH: ADELE MARY REED

sirencrossing

sirencrossing is a collaborative practice that creates site-based work examining the lived experience of cities and their citizens, situating humans and non-humans within the landscape.

Nadine Meisner, writing for The Independent described their work as:

"time-travel, a strange and interesting archaeological walk down secret paths and into hidden places".

For DO IT YOURSELF! sirencrossing are continuing their exploration of screen-space, exploring the relationships which people have with their computers, phones and other devices, revealing hybrid territories of wildness and technologically reconstituted 'nature'.

sirencrossing recently completed a four year project called *urbanflows: immersed in worlds* as a part of the AHRC-funded *Sensing the City* project at University of Warwick.

They have also produced

projects in Canada, Sweden and South Korea and recently delivered a *Healthy Planet* workshop as a part of UK City of Culture's Culture Conversations programme.

sirencrossing's DO IT YOURSELF! artwork, titled *Soft Reset* is located at the back of this publication from page 16.



PERFORMANCE DOCUMENTATION

melissandre varin
Capture D'écran
2020

IN COVENTRY

PHOTOGRAPH: melissandre varin

melissandre varin

melissandre varin is an independent artist-researcher who uses her identity as a Black, non-binary co-parent to navigate through hybrid-identities, new forms of knowledge production and dissemination.

melissandre most frequently uses performance, moving image and poetry to contribute to decolonising space, body and thing, to address power imbalances and to Creolize language.

For DO IT YOURSELF! melissandre has produced a type written invitation and a related family portrait to be displayed in your home. This challenges the status of the nuclear family and encourages new relationships and co-habitation with people, including images of people that might more often be considered strangers.

melissandre has recently left the University of Warwick and University of Luxembourg to continue research, making and caring away from institutions. Before their PhD they

worked in an alternative arts space in Martinique, an overseas French territory in the eastern Caribbean Sea.

melissandre's DO IT YOURSELF! artwork titled *CORPS_RESPONDA/ENCE* is presented as a number of loose leaf sheets in Appendix Three.

COMING SOON: OTOLITH

"Earth is out of bounds for us now; it remains a planet accessible only through media".

OTOLITH, a film-essay made by The Otolith Group in 2003, originally commissioned by MIR Consortium and The Arts Catalyst, is now a part of the Arts Council Collection.

Made of historical, found and newly shot footage, conflating fact and fiction, *OTOLITH* weaves personal and public histories together to explore future female identities and separation. These themes relate to our wider research while also resonating with the impacts of Covid-19.

We're delighted to be presenting this major film-essay in the Chapter House at Coventry Cathedral from the 14th until the 20th of August 2020.

The film-essay is set in the year 2103, and is narrated by a fictional descendant of Anjalika Sagar who lives in space. The narrator looks back at several generations of women from the Sagar

family, linking her own (fictional) experiences with those of Sagar's actual grandmother, creating a complex but compelling inter-generational narrative.

The Otolith Group were nominated for the Turner Prize in 2010 and have exhibited in spaces including Transmediale, Berlin and the World Social Forum, Mumbai.

Kodwo Eshun, the group's co-founder alongside Anjalika, was affiliated with the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit at University of Warwick, highlighting another point of intersection with the research we are carrying out ahead of HYPER-POSSIBLE.

More information will be released via our website soon:

www.coventrybiennial.com



**Arts Council
Collection**



**COVENTRY
CATHEDRAL**

sirencrossing

SOFT RESET

EDITED BY ANNEKA FRENCH, RYAN HUGHES

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SOFT RESET

Before you begin, you will need:

a smart phone

an earbud or headphone
for one ear (leave the other
ear free to hear the world)

Open a link in your phone's
browser (to prepare)

<https://vimeo.com/438622049>

PASSWORD: siren

Be dressed to go outside.

This is about you and your
screen in the world going
rogue.

Position yourself outside,
somewhere that feels good.

Be ready to travel a little,
with your feet, with your skin.

Phone horizontal and image
full screen start the video on
the link.

Thanks to screen sirens:
Jia-Yu Corti, Daniel Jeremiah
Persson, Cara Siu, Carolyn
Deby

Coventry Biennial is a social, political and critical platform for contemporary art. In recent years our exhibitions, events and activities in galleries and more unusual or unexpected locations have attracted over half a million visitors including local residents, artists and art professionals from across the UK, and cultural tourists from around the world.

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