

Cultural Mapping Project: Entrances fact sheet

Three interrelated Artworks:

Millennium Cones Listening Thrones HumberStone

Hamilton District Centre, Hamilton, Leicester
Installation: March 2001

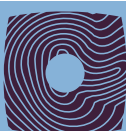


Artist

Jonathan Fairfax

Biography

Since 1995 **Jonathan (Jo) Fairfax** has worked as a public artist: he lights buildings, makes sculptures and integrates poetry and holograms with etched and slumped glass. He trained at the Royal College of Art and learnt how to make holographic films at the Holocentre, New York, and was awarded the NESTA Dream Time Fellowship to develop virtual reality as a public art form. Jo's innovative work can be seen around the UK. Current projects include holographic film portraits of Holocaust survivors for the Holocaust Centre, Laxton, and holographic films and virtual artworks that form part of G108, a virtual mapping of British cities.



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Statement

“The inspiration for the works came from the history of the site, local legend and Roman archaeological remains found on site. The intention is to create a distinctive gateway and entrance to this new eastern suburb of Leicester. I hope that these pieces add to the local character and create distinctive urban reference points. The classical structures echo the existing architectural forms such as the church spire seen in the distance behind the cones from the link road.”

Jonathan Fairfax

Project Brief

A two-part commission to create 1) a distinctive and site-specific ‘entrance gateway’ for the main route leading into the new eastern Hamilton District and District Centre, and 2) an entrance feature incorporating seating for the main eastern pedestrian/cycle entrance and access point into the District Centre. In the creation of these artworks the artist had to take into consideration the archaeology and future function of the site, to consult with the current users of the District Centre and with the new and established communities living in the adjacent estates (Netherhall, Thurnby Lodge) and Humberstone Village.

Community Involvement

The general and specific community consultation, which preceded fabrication, was an integral part of the artist’s whole design process. Information was conveyed by various community groups, which the artist responded to and tried to incorporate within all the artwork designs. The artist conducted a number of practical sessions in the local primary school, inviting the children to be artists for a day and to take visual surveys of their immediate environment. Special needs and disabled focus groups provided viewpoints that informed the detailed design of the **Listening Thrones**. The active Humberstone Village Community Forum conveyed the significance of local legend and the local ‘Humber stone’ and hosted an ongoing display of the artist’s designs in their temporary village shop. Tesco staff and shoppers were invited to respond to the artist’s design proposals, which were exhibited in the Tesco District Centre store.

Purpose/Function

The three interrelated artworks are a focus at points of entry and exit to the new Hamilton District and District Centre. They assist residents’ and visitors’ orientation and act as a point of reference. The artworks reflect and enhance the local community environment by drawing on local cultural references, history and diversity.



Site/Location

Hamilton District is a newly created suburb east of Leicester city centre, with a major development plan for the provision of over 4,000 new dwellings by the year 2006. There was no centre or focus to the area, hence the creation of a District Centre which today comprises mixed-use facilities including a Tesco store, petrol station, small shop units, health centre, library, public open space and grassed area. The major developer of the District Centre is Tesco Stores Ltd, who recognised the important links they have to develop with the communities they serve. With this in mind, Tesco have incorporated a greenway pedestrian and cycle route through the District Centre site, to make their development an integral part of the community.

The neighbouring new housing estates have a diverse community with a high proportion of residents of minority ethnic, particularly Asian, origin. The established Humberstone Village, and adjacent estates of Humberstone, Netherhall and Thurnby Lodge, is a mixture of privately owned and local authority council housing. A high proportion of this community are white, and have a strong sense of community commitment.

The District Centre site has significant archaeological remains. Excavations by the Oxford Archaeological Unit revealed traces of a middle to late Iron Age farmstead, with at least three recognisable phases. It seems likely, on present evidence, that the settlement was occupied at some time in the third century BC to the mid-first century AD. The farmstead would probably have been inhabited at the time of Julius Caesar's expeditions to Britain in 55 and 54 BC, but was probably abandoned by the time of the Roman Conquest, in 43 AD. The site lies within the territory of a British tribe known to the Romans as the Coiretavi, whose lands extended over much of the North Midlands.

Special Features/Points of Interest

- The four **Millennium Cones** are of 1.5mm thick stainless steel construction (6.4m high, 2.2m wide) covered in green Astroturf. They resemble classical topiary forms, inspired by the archaeological history, physical nature and function of the site, gently alluding to the sense of another community having been here.
- The **HumberStone** sculpture is a cylindrical form 5.5m high x 0.8m wide, of steel construction covered with green Astroturf, with a discreet central band of blue neon light.
- The inspiration for the **HumberStone** came from the history of the site, local legend and the Roman archaeological remains found on site. The cylindrical form is a symbol of the local 'Humber stone' also known as the 'Holsten stone' sited nearby.
- The artworks refer to topiary. The roundabouts contain sprawling shrubbery, which needed to stay. The sprawling planting scheme is enhanced by counterbalancing it with these geometric, classical forms. As the seasons change and the plants change form and colour, so a continually changing relationship occurs with the cones and cylinder.



Special Features/Points of Interest continued

- All the sculptural forms fit into and enhance the existing synergy – the geometry of the roundabout and the shapes associated with traffic, roads and signage – and are non-denominational.
- There are three interlinked **Listening Thrones** along a continuous gently curved iroko wood seat, which is 9m long.
- The **Listening Thrones** have three cylindrical sound receptors of stainless steel construction. These 'capture' the sounds of the shoppers, countryside, and city.
- The receptors are located on columns 4.3m high, relaying the sound through speakers lower down in the columns.
- The artist worked with many specialists who helped translate his ideas into the artworks on site. These included a structural engineer (Price & Myers Consulting Engineers, Nottingham), steel fabricators (Jordans Fabricators, Bristol) and specialist suppliers and makers who provided the Astroturf, lighting elements and bespoke woodwork of the **Listening Thrones**.
- The sculpture needed and gained full planning permission.

Possible Focus or Point of Engagement for Learning

- How many different shapes has the artist used in the sculptures and where else in your local area can you see these?
- Where does the title **HumberStone** come from? Is it myth, fact or fiction?
- If you were an artist or commissioner what actions would you take to involve an established and a new community in the design, development and after-care of a public artwork so that there is a shared theme?
- Do you think it is a good idea to involve the community, and if so at which stage of the project and why?
- The Romans were globally influential and are also part of Leicester's specific history. What are these links from a local to a global perspective? Where else in the city might you find Roman traces today?
- What is a 'millennium'? Imagine Leicester in the next millennium. What traces and visible 'history' would you expect to find?
- The **Millennium Cones** are made of steel covered with Astroturf and echo classical architectural forms. Which other forms are considered to be classical and why?
- Which other artists or architects and in which periods of history have focused on and used geometry, science and mathematics in relation to art?
- Where else would you find Astroturf? How was this material invented and by whom? Which other synthetic materials are durable and used by artists for making art with?
- What do the **Millennium Cones** resemble? When and where was topiary first tried and why?



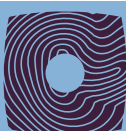
Possible Focus or Point of Engagement for Learning

- What is the artist trying to achieve with the **Listening Thrones** by amplifying the sound of the surrounding environment? Which other ways of hearing and capturing sounds are there? How can these be translated into and used as a creative medium?
- Using your local area select a site and theme and create your own entrance gateway. What is your starting point in selecting a site and theme?
- The **Millennium Cones** and **HumberStone** are sited on roundabouts. What access and health & safety issues needed to be considered in the design, installation and maintenance of these artworks?
- The artist worked with a number of other professionals including a structural and lighting engineer. How important do you think it is to have that expertise involved? Which other professional skills are needed for a project of this kind and why?
- The site/location context, local myth and archaeological history have been sources of inspiration to the artist and contributed to the final designs. Do you think this is important when making public artworks and if so why? Design a project based on your area's history or locally important myths. How and where would you start your research?

For More Information:

www.leicester.gov.uk/publicart

Toolkit author Jasia McArdle with input from Steve Cooke. Image © Axis Graphic Design 2005 for Public Art Leicester **Cultural Mapping** project.



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