

Cultural Mapping Project: Green Routes fact sheet

Demostaph

(Plinth) Soar Lane, Riverside, Leicester

Installation: April 2005

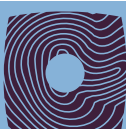


Artist

Alberto Duman

Biography

Alberto Duman is a conceptual and site-specific installation artist who uses a variety of media including sound, light, still photography, and moving image video/film. He has worked in diverse contexts including heritage sites, museums, billboard advertising spaces, and the A13 artscape; he has held artist residencies and is also a lecturer.



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Statement

Demostaph stands for an architectural, half celebratory object, which attempts to analyse, criticise and at the same time spring forward ideas of democracy and representation, and their manifestation in socially shared spaces. The name Demostaph was made by inserting the root demos (democratic) onto cenotaph (memorial), thereby suggesting a form of memorialising of democracy.

Alberto Duman

Project Brief

The brief provided an opportunity for artists to create site-specific, distinctive, interpretative artworks that are located in or integrated at strategic points along the Riverside. Artworks should contribute to the aim of developing a Riverside journey which reveals, celebrates, and offers citizens and visitors the opportunity to experience Riverside in a new way. Artworks should enhance and promote the uniqueness of the location and the ecological and heritage aspects of the area. Artists were able to choose a site from those designated by the commissioners as prime locations for artists' interventions, and were required to demonstrate a commitment to community engagement in their submission proposals. Community engagement is integral to the **Cultural Mapping** public art programme, ranging from consultation to participation, in varying degrees and stages of the artworks' creation, and interaction with the sited artworks.

Community Involvement

In this project community engagement is primarily focussed on and through interaction with the sited artwork. **Demostaph** is designed to be a meeting place and an enabler of community and individual expression. The artist's intention is for the work to facilitate discussion and debate about their common future, and to serve as a local 'Speaker's Corner'.

Other types of involvement took place during the artwork's research and design development, whereby the artist raised awareness of and involved suppliers and fabricators in, the potential possibilities of using recycled aggregate in different and new ways and contexts.

Purpose/Function

The work is both a symbolic and a physical plinth, which also functions as a viewing platform, overlooking the urban industrial canal side and the horizon line of the city's skyline, giving viewers a new perspective on the area. The plinth is also intended to be a place where people can come together to share ideas about their common future. The artist's use of recycled materials is also a metaphor for the changed use of the site.



Site/Location

An archaeologically rich and historic site the river and canal separate at Soar Island, previously a hub of industrial activity. The artificially raised Soar Island mound is created from site infill. The mound is located next to Evans Weir at the intersection of the towpath and the National Cycle Route, the Great Central Way (which heads southwards) and the Forest Way (west). Both cycle ways were former railway lines. Nearby are traces of the city's Roman heritage, including remains of the old town boundary walls. The adjacent neighbourhoods of Woodgate, Newfoundpool and Fosse are accessed to/from the city centre via Frog Island, Northgate and Highcross streets, Soar Lane and Sanvey Gate.

Special Features/Points of Interest

- Inspiration for this work grew from the historical and physical geography of the site, including the Leicester codex by Leonardo da Vinci.
- It is a prominent landmark site especially when viewed from the south. The area in which the plinth is located is rich in archaeological heritage, which includes the Roman walls of the old town.
- It was the location of a former mill and railway interchange, the Swannington Railway, also known as the Rally, West Bridge and Great Central Stations. There is a distinctive concrete works adjacent which was previously the site of cattle pens.
- The eighteenth-century Friar's Mills is crowned with a golden ibex.
- The **Demostaph** plinth is environmentally friendly, using a variety of recycled materials. It is assembled from pre-cast concrete slabs using reclaimed aggregate, generally used for road infill, and reinforced concrete. The steps have been cut from recycled oak railway sleepers.
- The artist worked with a multidisciplinary team which included a bridge engineer (Leicester City Council) structural engineer (Price & Myers Consulting Engineers) and specialist concrete casters (Castle Concreters) to transform his designs and ideas into a reality. The site was prepared and the pre-cast artwork was assembled, on site, by construction engineers (Newline Engineers).
- The **Demostaph** plinth is 2.5m high x 3.5m long and 2.5m wide.
- The sculpture required, and was granted, full planning permission.



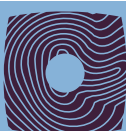
Possible Focus or Point of Engagement for Learning

- How many railway sleepers and concrete slabs have been used in the plinth? What are their dimensions?
- How many colours, textures and types of recycled materials have been used to construct the plinth?
- Which other contemporary artists use recycled materials and why? Where might you see their work?
- A bridge and structural engineer translated the artist's concept designs into fabrication and construction drawings. Do you think this is important and if so why? What considerations did the engineer have to take into account? Who might use these drawings and why?
- What health & safety considerations do you think were taken into account before, during and after the construction of the artwork?
- When you are standing or sitting on top of the plinth, draw a 360-degree view/horizon line of the city. Where is the cathedral spire located? Which other landmarks can you see?
- Using historic maps / plans draw the City's changing skyline through the ages from the Romans, to the present day.
- Using the plinth and site location history as a starting point, devise a performance piece or musical score which describes a time-line/journey from the past to the present-day waterway user.
- Canals were an important part of Leicester's growth as transporters of goods and people. What modes of transport are favoured today and why? What impact might this have on our natural and built environments?
- The plinth's slabs were pre-cast in a cement casting factory, using custom-built moulds. In which other industrial, arts or crafts work might this process be applied and why?
- What clues/links can you find in the plinth artwork to local industry?
- Leicester was designated the first Environment City in England. How does this artwork contribute to this principle?
- Why do you think the artist has given a Greek-inspired name to this work?
- Leonardo da Vinci was a very important artist. Do you know what else he did?
- If you were the artist, what actions would you take to engage the community in the design, development and after-care of a public artwork?

For More Information

www.leicester.gov.uk/publicart

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