

Cultural Mapping Project: Green Routes fact sheet

Watermead Ecology Park Sculpture

Watermead Ecology Park, Riverside Park, Leicester

Installation: December 2003

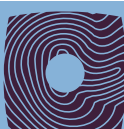


Artist

Richard Harris

Biography

Richard Harris is an artist of international acclaim. He has work in the Grizedale Forest Sculpture Park in England, and in Australia, Japan and Germany. His work is always related to the location or site and is rooted in the belief that people activate the work, and that his sculptures do not exist in isolation but are part of, and responsive to, the environment around them.



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Statement

“My intention in this work is to visually and physically join two neighbouring wetlands. The narrowness of the channel will highlight the differences in plant life, colour, texture, atmosphere of the riverbank and wetland. You will be travelling alongside this ribbon taken out of its natural context yet connected to its two sources.”

Richard Harris

Project Brief

For artists to create site-specific, distinctive, interpretative artworks that are located 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 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 the artist led consultative presentations for a wide range of people, and participatory 'sculpture workshops' with local schoolchildren. As a starting point for these the artist introduced his work, processes and creative method, raising awareness about his practice and work ethos. The practical sculpture sessions specifically aimed to encourage young people to explore their immediate surroundings and use 'found materials' to create temporary artworks, simultaneously expressing and heightening their awareness of the natural environment. The artist created a to scale, three-dimensional plaster model of the site and proposed sculpture, which aided understanding of the complexities involved in the creation and siting of the artwork.

Purpose/Function

The sculpture functions as a visual and symbolic link between the Watermead Ecology Park and the river and waterside. People can experience the sculpture by moving over it. The purpose of the work is to raise awareness of and respect for its environment and over time to become wholly integrated within its site.

Site/Location

Watermead Ecology Park is in the northern section of Leicester's Riverside and is an environmentally protected nature conservation area adjacent to a flood plain. The entrance to the Ecology Park is at the bottom of Oakland Avenue next to the children's nursery. Follow the gravel and dirt pathway towards the river. The sculpture is located in the coppice adjacent to the clearing near the pond.



Special Features/Points of Interest

- The sculpture's large arc is constructed from welded and bolted Corten weathering steel, which responds to climate conditions and gradually changes colour to a vivid red ochre.
- The sculpture's form is taken from an 18m radius and a 21m cord. It measures 21m in length by 1.8m in width, standing 0.50m above ground level at the highest point.
- The artist worked closely with a structural engineer (Price & Myers Consulting Engineers) and a specialist steel fabricator (Cavil Fabrications, Loughborough) who helped to translate his ideas into a reality.
- The sculpture was made in sections and transported to its prepared site where it was assembled and installed by the artist and fabricators ; this was overseen by a Planning Supervisor (Leicester City Council)
- There is a kerb of 10cm in height along both inside and outside edges of the sculpture, which is filled with a soil low in nutrients and sown with a wildflower mix.
- The artwork is fully integrated within the landscape: different parts of the sculpture are hidden and revealed depending on the time of year and so how and what you see changes with the seasons.
- The sculpture required, and was granted, full planning permission from the Local Authority together with special permissions from the environmental and waterway protection agencies.



Possible Focus or Point of Engagement for Learning

- What other man-made or natural forms in the local environment 'echo' the shape of the sculpture?
- Unlike a work in an art gallery, this sculpture, because of its setting, is difficult to find. Do you think that this was the artist's intention, and if so what do you think the reason was?
- Working in small groups gather found materials from the natural environment and create a sculpture sited outdoors in your school, club or community grounds. What impact do the changing weather conditions have on the sculpture? How does it change over time? Try to record these changes in different mediums. How might you protect the sculpture from the elements and extend its life?
- The artist made a plaster scale model of the site and sculpture, and worked with a structural engineer who made the calculations and created the construction drawings. Do you think it is important to have a structural engineer involved in making a work of this type, and if so why? Which other type of projects use scale models and 'multidisciplinary' design teams?
- Who owns this work? Does this make it a collaborative piece of work? What do we mean by collaborative? Can you think of other disciplines where this working practice is the norm? What might some of the issues and challenges be?
- So that all members of the community can use and enjoy the artwork, what access and health & safety issues do you think needed to be considered when designing and building a project like this?
- If you were the artist or a commissioner, how would you begin to engage users of the Riverside and Ecology Park in an 'environmental' public art project? Do you think it is important to include different community groups and if so why?
- The work is adjacent to a flood plain and an environmentally protected nature conservation area. Which agencies might need to be consulted and involved in the development of the work and in decisions about its site? Why is this?
- What environmental considerations do you think the artist had to take into account in the creation of the work?
- Which other twentieth-century artists have used the landscape and 'found' materials as a medium? What is this type of artwork called?

For More Information

www.leicester.gov.uk/publicart

Toolkit author Jasia McArdle with input from Steve Cooke. Image © Richard Harris 2005 for Public Art Leicester Cultural Mapping project.



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