

Cultural Mapping Project: Entrances fact sheet

Lotus Flowers

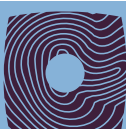
Belgrave Gate/Burleys Flyover, Leicester**Installation:** October 2002

Artist

Anuradha Patel

Biography

Anuradha Patel is fine art trained and has worked extensively on public art commissions. These have involved working with communities and in collaboration with local residents, schools and other design professionals as a member of design teams. The commissions take the form of sculpture as well as functional design. Anuradha works in many different media including stone, metal, glass, ceramic, light and colour; the choice of material is often determined by the concept and the location/site. The projects are often developed in consultation and in collaboration with architects, landscape architects, engineers, specialists and contractors. Her work can be seen throughout the UK in places ranging from a children's hospital, Centro Stations and the Jewellery Quarter, Birmingham; A13 Artscape, Barking & Dagenham and Tooting High Street, London; through to Banbury Town Trail and Blackpool promenade.



Public Art Leicester
cm cultural mapping



Leicester
City Council



Statement

“The theme of the Lotus flower has potential to link cultural traditions and provide invigorating physical and spiritual uplift to the area and the community.”

Anuradha Patel

Project Brief

A two-stage project to begin to indicate and contribute to establishing a visual identity along the main north-eastern entrance route into the city along a significant path, comprising a number of roundabouts, flyovers and pedestrian areas. The public art project was integrated within the Belgrave Corridor Project (2001), which was essentially a transport-led physical improvement scheme. This came about as a response to community research and requests to improve infrastructure, transportation, lighting in the area, including road safety and conditions for pedestrians. The Belgrave Corridor scheme received a funding contribution from the Single Regeneration Budget 4 programme (SRB4) and the Leicester Transport Plan (LTP).

The public art commission was conceived to demonstrate the contribution art and artists can make if they are integral members of a project design team at the outset. The artist's brief was (1) to work as an equal member of the Belgrave Corridor Project design team on the creation of a Belgrave Corridor Landscape Masterplan (2001), with an integral Public Art Plan; (2) to devise and develop to installation one integrated artwork/scheme for an identified priority area. The key objectives were to develop visual references and links, reinforcing the identity of the city, while maintaining local distinctiveness; to improve the visualisation of the city for local people and visitors; to highlight the unique local characteristics; and to make a visual connection between the city centre and Belgrave.

Community Involvement

Critical to the development of the project was for the artist to engage and involve the community in the arts project's development with the aim of engendering a sense of ownership. Using the Belgrave area's Gujarati Asian population as a starting point, the artist took a holistic, all-embracing approach to the commission, which considers many aspects within the Belgrave Corridor, including the current usage of public spaces, disabled access, the road and footpaths, street lighting provision, street furniture, shop frontage and signage.



Community Involvement continued

The artist researched ways in which artwork schemes could be implemented to make the area more characterful and individual. Drawing on the legacy of the city's textile industry and the rich and diverse cultural tapestry of the area's recent past and present population, to begin to shape and create an identity for the future. There was an extensive and wide-ranging artist-led community engagement programme at each main stage of the project. The artist used a variety of consultative and participatory processes as a starting point for developing conversations and generating ideas, discussions, and reminiscence work, including:

- presentations and discussion sessions with local businesses and community organisations;
- a series of short artist placements and 'planning for real' sessions in neighbourhood community centres and schools, which combined patch-walking and photography projects with elders, students and youth groups, in tandem with
- visual presentations of the artist's creative practice and work ethos, together with practical traditional and culturally specific arts and crafts workshops (drawing, paper cutting and clay work).

Purpose/Function

This Entrances project functions on a number of levels, strategic, operational, practical and cultural. It aims to demonstrate the need for engaging local people and involving artists and creative interventions at the earliest planning stages of any public realm / environmental regeneration scheme. The main focus of this project was to incorporate the artist as an equal member of the Belgrave Corridor Project design team which included a Landscape Architect and engineer ; working with local people in devising an integral Public Art Plan, a practical legacy and working tool for developing future arts projects and programmes. The aim was to kick-start and demonstrate the usefulness of the Public Art Plan strategy through the creation of one artwork at a priority site, resulting in the **Lotus Flowers** on Belgrave Gate/Burleys Flyover. The **Lotus Flowers** sculpture symbolises prosperity, wellbeing and welcome, and aims to visually and symbolically reconnect Belgrave with the city centre.

Site/Location

The Belgrave Corridor Project catchment included the main arterial Melton and Belgrave Roads, the primary north-east entrance into the city and a major feeder road for through traffic going north of Leicester. Melton and Belgrave Roads form a unique shopping and housing district. The area is home to one of the largest concentration of specialist South Asian shopping facilities and cultural activities in the country, attracting thousands of visitors. The Diwali lights that are displayed along these roads during the festive period are reputed to be the largest of their kind in Europe.

The **Lotus Flowers** site, Belgrave Gate/Burleys Flyover, lies close to the city centre. The central ring road passes through and over Burleys Flyover. As part of the strategy to improve road safety and conditions for pedestrians, the outer perimeter of the Burleys roundabout was reduced and pedestrian crossings were created through the centre of the roundabout.



Special Features/Points of Interest

- The artist was an equal member of the Belgrave Corridor Project design team, which included a landscape architect (Jonathan Selman, Leicester City Council) and various engineers (traffic, civil, electrical, structural).
- The artist contributed to the overall Belgrave Corridor Landscape Masterplan (2001), including the colour palette and choice of materials for hard and soft landscaping. She helped to research and devise a Public Art Plan showing how integrated artwork schemes could be developed and implemented and to contribute to make the area more characterful and individual.
- This integral Public Art Plan demonstrates a thought-out approach to public art development as a considered and integral part of regeneration strategies, as opposed to being an 'add-on' or afterthought.
- The Public Art Plan includes ideas for a range of temporary installations and an ongoing public art programme throughout the year.
- The **Lotus Flowers** sculpture was integrated into the refurbishment of Burleys Flyover and roundabout as an integral part of traffic/highways improvements and was partner funded through the Local Transport Plan.
- The physical sited artwork comprises: 10 laser-cut mild steel columns with lotus flower heads painted in vibrant red, the columns aqua blue/green. These are located in two clusters of five individual sculptures between 5.5 and 6.5m high on either side (south and north) of the roundabout (Form Fabricators).
- The **Lotus Flowers** sculpture needed and gained full planning permission.
- The **Lotus Flowers** are visible day and night time as each column has an internal light (uplighters) that is switched on at the same time as the street lighting.
- The **Lotus Flowers** sculpture symbolises prosperity, wellbeing and welcome, and aims to visually and symbolically reconnect Belgrave with the city centre.
- Belgrave Road is often described by city marketers as the 'Golden Mile' or 'littleMumbai'.



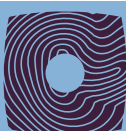
Possible Focus or Point of Engagement for Learning

- How many colours have been used in the Lotus Flowers and why do you think these colours were used by the artist?
- Lotus Flowers have a symbolic meaning. Which other flowers have symbolic meanings and why? Which other sculptors have used Flowers as a source of inspiration for their work?
- Can you tell where the paisley patterns laser-cut on the sculpture's columns originally came from? What other references to local industry and tradition are used in the work?
- What do the **Lotus Flowers** signify? In what other cultures does the lotus flower have great significance?
- For what is Belgrave famous? Which important festival takes place in the Belgrave district each year and why?
- As a starting point, the artist often draws her ideas/designs as paper cut-outs before creating detailed construction drawings on a computer. Which other artists and cultures use this form of drawing? Where else might this approach be adopted, by whom and why?
- The design team included a structural and lighting engineer. How important do you think it is to have that expertise involved and why? What are the potential longer term maintenance issues in the case of the **Lotus Flowers** sculpture and at what stage of the design process would you need to consider these?
- Aside from design and art skills, what other skills, knowledge and attributes do you think are needed by artists working on a project like this?
- If you were a commissioner what actions and considerations would you take to engage the community (for example local schools or interest groups) in the design, development and implementation of a Public Art Plan and the future management of any artwork programmes? How might this be funded?
- What access and health & safety issues need to be considered when designing and building a project like this?

For More Information

www.leicester.gov.uk/publicart

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



Public Art Leicester
cm cultural mapping



Leicester
City Council

