

Cultural Mapping Project: Neighbourhoods fact sheet

Sacred Spaces

Evington Place, Highfields Leicester

Installation: December 2002 – LED display updated as required

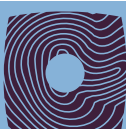


Artists

Said Adrus & Bhajan Hunjan

Biographies

Said Adrus & Bhajan Hunjan are visual artists working in a variety of media. They collaborated on this project, combining their expertise and diversity of skills. Between them they speak six different languages. They have worked extensively, both individually and in partnership, on art and community projects in various contexts around the world.



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Statement

“With so many different people and languages ... we considered the overall theme of Sacred Spaces, text and script – the idea of 'paradise gardens' which have existed throughout civilisation.”

Said Adrus and Bhajan Hunjan

Project Brief

A two-stage project: for artists to consult with local people to

- 1) devise a Public Art Plan to ensure an integrated approach to the inclusion of artworks in the overall Urban Design Plan;
- 2) produce from concept design through to installation a scheme for a community identified and specified priority site within the neighbourhood.

The purpose of the Public Art Plan is to provide a framework for a holistic and planned approach to the inclusion of art and artists' work in the public realm. It allows scope to reinterpret the area, making connections specifically between and within the network of public open spaces, pocket parks, community meeting places, visually important bridge abutments and entrances into the area. The Plan aims to incorporate the community's hopes and aspirations.

In their application submissions artists were asked to demonstrate a commitment, and outline their approach and strategy, to community engagement, an integral dimension within the Cultural Mapping public art programme, ranging from consultation to participation in varying degrees of the artworks creation, and interaction with sited work.

Community Involvement

There was extensive community consultation and participation at all stages of the development and delivery of this project. The project was partnership funded through the Highfields Single Regeneration Budget 2 programme (SRB2) and supported by the Highfields Area Forum and the SRB2 Physical Sub Group. Representatives were involved in the development through to delivery of the project, including: consultation on the artist's brief, selection of the artists, providing practical support, local knowledge, encouragement and advice where needed.

The Highfields Public Art Plan (strategy document) researched by the artists identified the communities' priority site and the inspiration for the **Sacred Spaces** roundel artwork. **Sacred Spaces** was designed as a community landmark, a point of contact, information, aspiration and dialogue. The comprehensive and intensive engagement programme took place over many months and continued throughout the life of the project. It included consultative and participatory creative design and ideas generating workshops in a variety of contexts, through short artists' placements in schools, the library, health, neighbourhood, general community and culturally specific centres. The artists deployed a vast range of techniques and processes, conducted oral history, storytelling, discussions with and visual presentations for residents' and tenants' associations, professional service providers, young people and elders; distribution of questionnaires to targeted groups and individuals; visual analysis, vox popping in a variety of public locations including the local shopping centre, pocket parks and public



Community Involvement continued

seating areas; an ongoing press and media campaign, presentations and displays of design progress and developments. The community continues to be involved in the sited artwork to this day, by providing poems, proverbs and cultural information for the changing programme on the **Sacred Spaces** electronic LED display board.

Purpose/Function

The Highfields Public Art Plan (strategy document) researched by the artists provides a framework for further public art interventions and opportunities in the area. The Plan highlighted one priority site identified by the community, which inspired the **Sacred Spaces** roundel sculpture. The Sacred Spaces artwork is designed to reflect the diversity of, and has the capacity to be used as, a community notice board, with a changing programme of text provided through an integrated LED display board.

Site/Location

At the time of the commission Highfields was within the Single Regeneration Budget Core Area programme in receipt of SRB2 funds. The Core Area consists of a crescent around the north and east of Leicester city centre. Highfields is contained by Humberstone Road, the main Leicester railway line and London Road, and comprises mainly Victorian terraced housing along with the 1970s St Peter's local authority housing estate. The Core Area contains one of the highest concentrations of diverse and minority ethnic people in the city, mostly from Asian, African and African-Caribbean backgrounds. There are a large number of small public open spaces, pocket parks and entrances into the area. Most of these are lacking in neighbourhood or community identity. Evington Place is a small fenced semi-planted area with recycling bins and bottle banks, and was home to an outdated community mural, painted on the end gable wall of the adjacent house in the 1980s. Many people felt that the imagery did not represent the present-day community and their aspirations.



Special Features/Points of Interest

- The 'Sacred Spaces' theme and vision of the strategic Public Art Plan proposes arts development and interventions as integral elements in the processes of environmental and social regeneration.
- The plan evolved through a community-based research programme themed around sacred spaces, the 'paradise gardens'.
- Evington Place was home to an outdated mural and designated by the community as the priority site to kick-start the visual and physical transformation of small public spaces in Highfields, within the 'sacred spaces' theme.
- In addition to the project management team, the artists worked with many professionals and service providers to realise Sacred Spaces sculpture including; teachers, a Planning Supervisor, electrical specialists and Street Lighting (Leicester City Council) a structural engineer (Price & Myers Consulting Engineers) numerous fabricators and suppliers.
- The **Sacred Spaces** roundel sculpture is a freestanding stainless steel structure (Jordan Fabrications Ltd.) which incorporates a circle and grid with a variety of symbols, representing the universal concept of the whole (community) and different individuals within it.
- The roundel stands within a decorative coloured concrete 'floorscape' (Jon English Developments Ltd.) which echoes the circular design.
- An interactive element is provided in the form of an electronic LED display unit (Scanlite Electronics International) fixed in the centre of the circle
- This LED display functions as a community information transmitter: it can be used to promote local cultural events or to display proverbs or passages of poetry, and also displays the time and temperature.
- This display unit can be updated on site, via a laptop computer using a standard industrial programme.
- The input from workshops with two local primary schools (Medway and Sparkenhoe) determined some of the visual symbols included in the final designs of the laser-cut and enamelled square panels within the roundel. (NewStar Powder Coaters)
- The children created a life size scale model of the **Sacred Spaces** roundel from fabric with stencil prints. Each of the two participating schools created half of the roundel, thus bringing children together to work on the project and nurturing co-operation.
- The individual square panel designs symbolically represent the culturally rich and diverse communities living and working in the Highfields area, and include decorative elements such as encaustic tiles, gable ends and house names taken from the surrounding Victorian architecture.
- The main purpose of the re programmable LED display panel is to give the artwork an ongoing interactive dimension and at the same time to give ownership of the work to the community.
- The sculpture required and was granted full planning permission.



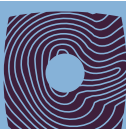
Possible Focus or Point of Engagement for Learning

- Can you recognise any of the designs used in the **Sacred Spaces** roundel? How many different colours, motifs and designs are there?
- What do those designs signify? What do they tell you about other cultures?
- What do you think the symbols and colours mean? How do they give you clues about the community living in the area? What sort of symbols and colours would you use to describe your neighbourhood or your city?
- How did the artists make the work? What kind of materials have they used?
- What other media could be used to create interactive artworks? Is there a connection between technology, science and art? How is this applied? Do you think it is important for artists to work with scientists? Research other artists who might use new technologies as a medium in public spaces.
- Using the 'Sacred Spaces Public Art Plan' as a starting point, design a Public Art Strategy for your area or school. Split into three groups with each group having one artist, one community representative and support professionals such as engineers or community workers.
- What access and health & safety considerations do you need to take into account?
- Will you need planning permission to change your school grounds? Who do you need to consult with and why is consultation important?
- The project team spent a lot of time building up a relationship with the community, starting with initial research and consultation, which continued throughout the life of the project. Do you think this is important? What strategy would you use to keep people informed of any changes and the latest project developments?

For More Information

www.leicester.gov.uk/publicart

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



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