

Cultural Mapping Project: Green Routes fact sheet

Water Platform

(Viewing Platform) Holden Street Bridge, Riverside Park Leicester
Installation: September 2001



Artists

Juliet Bidgood, MUF Architecture/Art

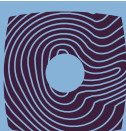
Binita Walia, architectural glass artist

Jagdip Singh, construction designs

Biographies

Juliet Bidgood was a founding member of MUF Architecture/Art. Since 1996 MUF have established a reputation for pioneering and innovative projects that address the social, spatial and economic infrastructures of the public realm. The practice philosophy is driven by an ambition to exist at the intersection between the lived and built environments. The creative process is underpinned by a capacity to establish effective client relationships that reveal and value the desires and experiences of varied communities.

Binita Walia creates site-specific architectural glass and mixed media artworks for public and private commissions and collaborates with architects and designers in public art, landscape and architectural projects. Her influences include architecture, light and space, perception, philosophy, landscape, identity, place and metaphor. Her glass installations can be seen in various locations ranging from St John the Baptist Church and the International Youth House Project in Leicester to Salisbury District Hospital and Nuffield House, Harlow.



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Statement

“The aim of this installation is to create a special place where people can spend time by the river. We have focused particularly on the western bank where the river is most hidden from the nearby places where people work and live.”

Juliet Bidgood

Project Brief

For artists to create site-specific and 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. The focus for this project was to create an artwork for the Belgrave Riverside, Holden Street footbridge/Ross Walk site, which highlights, reveals and draws on the unique characteristics of the Riverside and its vicinity. This commission resulted from the Public Art Plan for the Belgrave Riverside (1997), a detailed study and strategy document commissioned by Leicester City Council with the purpose of kick-starting an artist-led refurbishment programme which would contribute to the area’s visual enhancement and increase access to the riverbank.

Community Involvement

The **Water Platform** site was prioritised by the local community and users of Belgrave Riverside during research and development of the Public Art Plan for the area. The community (local residents, professional agencies, interest groups, schools and waterway users), participated and contributed in a variety of ways throughout the research and development of the Plan during 1996–97, including artist residencies in local schools, ‘planning for real’ and patch walking initiatives, vox popping and visual questionnaires. The research revealed that local people wanted

- the Belgrave Riverside to be accessible in the broadest sense, visually, physically, culturally, psychologically, intellectually and spiritually;
- the Riverside to be well used, enjoyed and protected by local people and visitors and available for future generations;
- future artworks to build on the existing strengths of the area and to enhance, maintain and promote the Riverside’s uniqueness by bringing its past into the present for the future; and
- future artworks to enhance, reveal and draw inspiration from the built and natural environments and the cultural diversity of the local people, as well as the area’s historical, social and economic qualities.

Purpose/Function

The purpose of the **Water Platform** installation is to make a connection with, and increase physical and visual access to the waterway and Riverside, and to provide seating.



Site/Location

This stretch of the Riverside, referred to as Belgrave Riverside, is located three and a half kilometres north from Leicester city centre. Holden Street footbridge is the main pedestrian entrance on the east side of the River Soar, and provides the main access point across the river to the west bank, home to the National Space Centre, Abbey Pumping Station Museums and north-west Leicester. The east bank of Belgrave Riverside nestles within a diverse environment which includes a conservation area, old Belgrave village, Belgrave Hall & Gardens, social mixed housing, and a community from a wide range of cultures and beliefs with a combined Asian population of 48.1%. Nearby is Belgrave Road, where reputedly the largest Diwali Festival of Light and Navratri celebrations in Europe takes place every autumn.

Special Features/Points of Interest

- The **Water Platform** was pre-cast from stone aggregates, visually akin to Portland Stone. The finest of these, Lee Mores Fines, sparkles in the light.
- The pre-cast concrete (Cambridge Architectural Precasters Ltd.) is supported by foundations which were designed by a bridge designer / structural engineer (Leicester City Council).
- The **Water Platform** has inlaid, hand-cast glass blocks in a design which is based on and inspired by the constellation of the stars, making a connection with both the stars in the sky above and the National Space Centre, located diagonally on the other side of the River Soar.
- The glass blocks in plan view are plotted according to the Northern Hemisphere's constellation map. The choice of stars shown is based on aesthetic and practical considerations.
- The glass blocks in elevation view are plotted from north to south, connecting with Polaris, the central star in the Northern Hemisphere. Again the choice of stars shown is based on aesthetic and practical considerations.
- Polaris is represented on the central step of the platform.
- Each glass insert was hand-cast and individually created for each step and finished by hand (Binita Walia with Transparent, London).
- The **Water Platform** site is located on a flood plain.



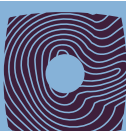
Possible Focus or Point of Engagement for Learning

- How many seat / steps are there?
- When you are standing or sitting on the **Water Platform**, what can you see and hear of the Riverside? Document and record this in different media.
- Locate the constellations on the steps and then match these to an astronomical map of the Southern and Northern Hemispheres. Why do you think some stars were left out?
- In the past, why was knowledge of the stars important to travellers, especially sailors?
- Why are observatories generally in out-of-the-way places?
- Which other artists use science and technology as inspiration for or mediums in their art? What links are there between science and art? Do you think this is important and why?
- Lots of other cultures are especially interested in the stars. Can you name any? Does this inform their way of life, and if so how?
- Rivers and water have significant meaning in many cultures. Can you explain why?
- Do you think this is a good location for a work of this kind, near a river and abutting a footbridge?
- What do you think the maintenance issues might be?
- Do you think this kind of public art is sculpture or good design? Does this matter? if so why?
- The design team included a bridge designer / structural engineer. How important do you think it is to have that expertise involved?
- Imagine yourself as an artist or a commissioner. What actions and considerations would you take to engage the community in the design, development and after-care of a public artwork?
- So that all members of the community can use and enjoy the **Water Platform**, what access and health & safety issues needed to be considered by the project design team when designing and building a project like this?
- What would your starting point be to design a new footbridge or a water platform? How would you as an artist begin to involve different sectors and interest groups in the neighbouring area and waterway users of the Riverside in an 'integrated' public art project?

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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