

'Orphans' - a photographic installation

Acklam Village, 4 - 8 Acklam Road, (Off Portobello Road), London, W10 5TY

Opening Night - Friday October 17th 2014, 6pm until late.

Steve Mepsted 2014

Kindly supported by



'Orphans' - a photographic installation

Proposal for an art work at Acklam Village, October 2014. Steve Mepsted.

About Me: I am an award-winning Freelance Documentary Photographer with a special interest in Social Documentary Photography and Portraiture. My work draws upon my previous experience in Fine Art and explores themes in Documentary Photography, Portraiture and Photojournalism. I work both on location and from my studio in N. Kensington. You can visit my commercial website here: www.stevemepstedphotography.com and my blogs "On Reflection" here <http://stevemepstedblog.wordpress.com/> My e mail is stevemepsted@gmail.com and my Tel no. is 07813 021 355. I have already published local history work based on the area: "The People and Histories of the West Eleven Housing Co-op" can be seen here: "The Portobello Album" <http://theportobelloalbum.wordpress.com>

Background and History to the Proposed Project: The Westway Motorway (A40M) was built to run 2.5 miles between Paddington Green and White City. Building works began in 1964 and the Motorway was opened in July 1970. The motorway cut a swathe through much of the housing and streets in the area and caused much controversy at the time for the effects it and the vehicles it carried had upon the local community and the environment. After completion a vast corridor of wasteland remained below the motorway. The North Kensington Amenity Trust (now Westway Development Trust), was founded in 1971 to reclaim and develop this land for local community use. In the summer of 1966, the first people to realise the potential of the land cleared by the motorway were the London Free School, (started by John 'Hoppy' Hopkins) who got temporary permission, in early summer 1966, to run a playground on the rubble of the houses there destroyed for the later building of the motorway. In the wasteland of Acklam Road (a river of rubble, wood, metal and earth, scrambled over daily by children with no other recreational outlets) Adam Ritchie, a local photographer and activist left a hammer, a saw and a large bag of nails. Returning a couple of days later he saw that the kids had begun construction on the first adventure playground in the area. The creation of these improvised play-spaces gave rise to the North Kensington Playspace Group (NKPG) who were also inspired by examples of community action in New York. The original objective for the group was to have some of the space under the coming motorway designated as a play area for the community children. The elevation of the motorway, at its time the longest continuous concrete structure in Britain, created a long corridor of derelict space beneath it. The proactive, spontaneous activities of the London Free School were soon joined by other groups who began to draw up plans for these spaces and the North Kensington Amen-



ity Trust was born in 1971. Now known as the Westway Development Trust it became responsible for the 23 acres of empty land under the A40.

It has been argued that the Westway exists in a "heavily connected network of narratives that have led us to the situation as it exists, the most significant of these narratives are 1. the community involvement, 2. the elevation of the road itself, and 3. the 'cut' that was made through the area allowing it to be built" *Giles Smith "Living Infrastructure - The Vital Occupation of Non-Places under London's Westway"*. Interspersed and intertwined within these narratives are complex and countless histories, in my work I wish to explore a small part of these narratives via the creation of a photographic installation which utilises archive imagery - people extracted from photographs of the local area in 1969-70 and photographs of the original 'Free School' playgrounds from 1966-9.

A quick personal note: as a kid of 10 years old in 1973 I would play in the NPKG playground built in the Acklam Road bays. This is the very site in which I plan to make my installation. I was a merely a visitor to the area at that time, travelling each Saturday morning from Redbridge in East London to help my mother on her market stall situated on the land now covered by the market tent. I returned to live permanently in the area at the age of 22; my decision to do so in no small way informed by my instant love of the area when I was a child.

The Project: The Raw Materials: During the years 1969-1973 several sets of photographs were made by the Royal Borough Council, these photographs formed a record and survey of the

streets and shops within North Kensington, see examples below. At the time of their making the photographs were not intended to be

of any particular artistic significance, their function was as a surveying tool, a record of the environment at a given point in time, but through this very rigour, via their dogmatic presentation they are a reminder of the ongoing everyday life of the Portobello area as the Westway was being built and immediately after it opened. Scans of these images have been donated to me by the Local Studies department of RBKC Libraries. I have extracted certain individuals from these scenes, isolating them. Children, old men, young women, shoppers on Portobello Road: a cross section of individuals, removed from their original pictorial context, appear to float - dislocated in a timeless white digital space. Originally appearing as small elements within a larger photographic frame, the figures have the potential to become epically proportioned, freed from any scale-reference to a specific environment, they will roam the walls of the space as if 'time-warped' from history and materialised under the very structure that cut through their lives 45 years earlier.

Adam Ritchie a local photographer, took photographs of the Free School Playspaces that he had helped to instigate and build under the derelict land created by the elevated road. These photographs are a visual echo of the space. Aspects of the original blank walls of the bay can be glimpsed amongst the scaffolding and structures built by the children of the Free School. The images are full of life and

vigour; children at their best.



The Project: What will happen? The photographs of the individual extracted figures will be installed at larger-than-life-size across the walls of Bay no. 59, one of the original sites of the play area. Individual extracted figures will also be installed in the Acklam Village Bar (Area 58) itself. The figures in the original photographs are caught going about their daily lives, playing on the adventure playground, walking along Portobello Road, shopping on the market, chatting on the corner as the Westway is built around and above them. I bring them forward 40 odd years and intentionally rearrange them to reappear in a new comparative historical context: on the walls and under the roof of the Westway; the very structure that cut through the area, marking a point in time and changing it forever.

The figures 'come home' and inhabit the space once again. The narratives are of course reinforced by the interaction of the audience for the work, standing before the photographs the audience becomes a physical part of it, filling in the spaces and sparking potential narratives in the liminal space between photographic image and history. It is hoped that members of the audience who are local to the area may stand before and recognise an individual on the wall, and be able to share stories of that person. The figures will be arranged in such a manner to suggest narratives in the liminal space between photographic image and history. My blog, 'The Portobello Album' will publish the project and provide a platform for stories and memories.



The Project: Why should it happen? Local history, community history, reminiscence and public art can help cement local identity and the ownership of public space. Isolated parts of the community can feel more connected to their environment when it reflects their lives and the life of their immediate surroundings. Local histories can give marginalised people a voice, and help all residents understand better the richness and complexity of their community. The arts can be a tool for community development and civic

engagement and can engender a sense of pride. In this manner our roots and sense of home as a community of individuals can be defined by the culture of time and place.

My project will be a shared experience achieved via blog and print form: self-maintained platforms through which I intend to publicise the work. I am happy to engage in dialogue about the ideas behind the work. I would welcome the opportunity to present at Local History talks and schools, therefore promoting the values mentioned above.

My work will be shared with the community and with visitors to RBKC including businesses, thereby helping to promote the reputation and values of Kensington and Chelsea as a place of creativity and innovation. I hope

that this proposal clarifies intentions for the project. The costs and time factors have been kept to a minimum and are outlined below, any offer of funding is gratefully accepted! Please do not hesitate to contact me for further information on the project and intentions.

