

I am Tower of Hamlets, as I am in Tower of Hamlets, just like a lot of other people are

I am sitting in my studio looking at this object I made several years ago now. I spent so much time on it that it now seems amazing to me that I could be looking at it in yet another way. I am asking myself how can an object be turned into an event? How can this object happen somewhere else? How can it gain a life of its own? Who will care for it?

I remember the school pet in 2nd grade, and how exciting it was when it was my turn to take it home. My poor dog felt a bit displaced. There was something so different about taking care of something for a limited amount of time. I also remember 'The Mary'. It was only an object, plaster shaped to represent the Virgin. Members of my local church in the Patagonian Desert would pass it from house to house, and host it for one day at a time. My family was not part of this tradition, but I would have liked to host The Mary. Not for religious reasons, but I wanted to host IT, as if there was something about its' thingness that would inundate the house. It occurs to me now that just as I did then - I believe in the power of objects. I believe they can make things happen. But I wouldn't have wanted to have IT forever. There was something about having what other people have had and what other people would have after me, to be part of something bigger by holding this thing which had become so much bigger than itself, simply by being in all these different places. I only ever saw The Mary in the final procession, the day it came back to church. I was skating on the street and saw it going inside. I wished to know all the places it had been to. Did IT collect memories of those places, from homes that were just front doors to me?

The French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty once wrote that memory is contained in the objects themselves. They do not trigger memories but actually store them. I am not sure if I agree, but one thing is true: knowing The Mary had been in so many different houses expanded my ability to imagine those places and their inhabitants. What makes this memory so strange is the question as to whether remembering the things I imagined counts as remembering at all.

Being invited as an artist to develop a project for a specific area immediately makes me feel out of place. It is like being invited to observe life as it happens to other people and come up with something that relates to it. Except this time the area is my own area. I cycle through Tower of Hamlets every day. I shop in Tower of Hamlets, I walk along the canal in Tower of Hamlets, I go to my studio in Tower of Hamlets, I go to see art exhibitions in Tower of Hamlets, I meet up with friends in Tower of Hamlets, for dinner, for lunch, for coffee, for chats, to gossip, to work. So life also happens to me here.

But what makes an area? - Is it its buildings? Is it its history? Is it its people, every single one of them? Is there a way to talk about them without naming them all? When working with the students as part of 'A Sense of Place' we tried to answer this question. When prompted to think about Tower of Hamlets, frequently the borough's iconic landmarks would be mentioned, for example Canary Warf, Victoria Park, East London Mosque, The Museum of Childhood, The Olympic site, The O2 arena. However, these landmarks seem so far removed from the students' daily lives and described little about what felt like home about the area to them. When asked what is their favourite place in Tower of Hamlets, their first answer would usually be 'my room'. These young people are growing up in an era concerned with security. They are not allowed to wonder on their own. What makes Tower of Hamlets home to them is their home.

For this project I decided to ask the residents of Tower of Hamlets (friends, friends of friends, friends of Chisenhale Gallery and people in the local community and those in the schools) to host my sculpture in their homes for a week at a time. In this sense the project values a high level of commitment from a reduced number of people, relying on an existing network of

friends and people engaged with the gallery as well as expanding to incorporate people who may not frequent contemporary art institutions such as Chisenhale Gallery.

This exhibition will happen behind closed doors, just like life does here for a big part of it. Hosts will be asked to fill in a lending card, which will become an evolving document tracking the sculpture's itinerary throughout the area. The invitation to host the sculpture will be by open call, but also through personal invitation and through friends of friends. The sculpture's means of transport will be determined in consultation with Chisenhale Gallery taking into account which options seem feasible and efficient. It could either be by asking the host to drop off the sculpture at the home of the next person in line or couriered by the artist or gallery staff.

The sculpture will be travelling in the area for a full calendar year, starting in July 2011, and ending up at Chisenhale Gallery for one week when an event to celebrate the end of the touring exhibition will be held.

The sculpture itself is a plant, hand-carved in pink granite, which is a very durable and resistant stone. The design is based on an individual plant, which I studied in Kew Gardens and then reproduced in stone with its own base, which can be seen as a pot or base, as well as a means to bury the base in the soil to act as a root.

The plant is an Echeveria, which is a miss-spelling of the surname of the 18th century Mexican botanical artist, Atanasio Echeverria y Godoy. Many Echeveria species are popular as garden plants. This suits the domestic nature of this project. Echeveria is a generic name for succulents in the Crassulaceae family, which are native to South America.

They are, just as the sculpture is, drought-resistant, although they do better when cared for. Their high tolerance to extreme weather conditions, being desert plants, has made them very adaptable to different environments and they are now quite popular all over the world. They have proven to be good migrants. In English they are better known as Hen and Chickens.

Incidentally my school pet was a small yellow chick.

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