

## Central Saint Martins Project 2008

BA Fine Art students at Central Saint Martins are asked to consider what contemporary art practice is, and could be, through their dialogues with staff and their peer group and, most importantly, through their work – both as audience and makers.

The challenge for them, then, is to test how their work and ideas stand up within the widest context of Fine Art practice; from the space of the art college (the white cube, rarefied and sympathetic) to external spaces both local and global and to respond to the complex set of relations that impact upon their work.

Gunpowder Park has once again proven to be a rich testing ground for a group of these students. Not least because of the peculiarities of the site with its odd rural urbanism; a plot of 'countryside' locked between the M25, a massive haulage distribution centre, farmland and a system of canals; but also because of its remit as a testing site for, among other things, 'creative exploration ... of national and international significance'. Students explored the site in the broadest sense; engaging with its history, its topographical features, its local people, its vegetation and wildlife, and the wider cultural context of an area of 'common ground'. Their responses were provoked by the additional challenge of making work in the very wettest of Mays here in the South of England.

The students found themselves working in the public domain with both a local audience of walkers, cyclists and dog owners, and a global audience of international cultural, political and creative practitioners who were at Gunpowder Park to discuss how the arts, architecture and design impact on our interdependent political and cultural destinies. They were also lucky enough to have input from artists Will Cobbing, Alice Anderson and Elaine Tribley, and two members of their peer group who worked at Gunpowder Park last year, Angela Conway and Bruce Freestone.

This year the students have once again surprised and delighted us with their challenging and playful interventions in the site and their ingenuity in how to engage an audience with their work. The works ranged from discrete or startling interventions in the park to critical reflections on the historical and contemporary uses of the space. Some of the works will remain in situ until time and the weather erase their presence. Others were performative or temporary installations but will, nonetheless, remain with those who experienced them for a long time. The works also have a second life through this website which in turn links to their works on (or as) other sites. These students have truly experienced an alternative context for art practice in the very richest sense.

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