

The Public Art of Conversation

Public art and design works for Sunnyside, Sunderland

A family of site-specific works by internationally acclaimed artists and designers Bill Fontana (USA); Charlie Davidson (Stockholm/UK); Kapok (Berlin) and S-DNA (London) have been completed, as part of major improvements to key streets in the Sunnyside district of Sunderland. The siting of the works on St. Thomas Street has been guided by the *Meridian Masterplan*, the interactive street design concept developed by Berlin-based design team Kapok. The masterplan defines a network of 'urban energy lines', and 'pressure points' which stimulate exploration, and encourage pedestrians from the City Centre into Sunnyside, the historic core being regenerated for a mix of residential and commercial uses.



Image © P. A. Knox 2011 - *St. Thomas Pulpit* (granite), *Streetwalk*, stools and litterbins and *Helionimbis*, light poles.

The five artists and designers were commissioned by Sunnyside Partnership, Sunderland City Council, and One North East to collaborate with Robinson Landscape Design (Newcastle) as part of an innovative programme to link the Sunnyside area of Sunderland to the City centre. The artists and designers collaborated to embed the artworks into the public realm, so that they become not only artistic ornament, but also an integral part of the everyday streetscape. After being de-cluttered of existing furniture, bollards, railings and signage and realigned to create a clear strong perspective, St Thomas Street has been re-populated with the integrated family of artworks, lighting and seating. The four pieces are clustered together at three Pressure Points, creating spatial conversations with the context and each other, to activate the spaces and encourage their informal inhabitation.

Bill Fontana's *Sonic Channels* sound sculpture overlaps found sounds from the sea and surroundings with the existing acoustic backdrop of the city down the street, making street visitors question where they are - are the seagulls they can hear, real or recorded? During the day, visitors are welcomed by dappled sunlight reflected onto the street and buildings from Kapok's gyroscopic astronomically inspired *Helionimbus* lighting poles, that guide them to clusters of Charlie Davidson's *Streetwalk* stools, to pause watch and listen to the urban theatre, or Kapok's granite *St.Thomas Pulpit*, which offers a silent invitation to speak! At night, the discussion is joined by another story, S-DNA's digital projection, *Alice in Sunderland*, wherein Sunderland's people and places are gathered and framed in surreal landscapes stirred by the movement of the white rabbit's watch. In the evening, the movement of passers-by activates the changing coloured reflections of light from the *Helionimbus* poles and the conversational lighting of the stools, creating a playful interactive animation of the street.



Image © P. A. Knox 2011 – *Helionimbus*, light poles.

The street is brought to life not by the individual pieces, but by their interaction with each other and their surroundings. This approach to embedding art within the public realm represents a new exemplar of collaborative dialogue in urban regeneration, where unity of purpose and diversity of medium, content and expertise are brought seamlessly together around a contextual, conversational methodology.

Project team and investment: part of a 2 million investment by One North East to make streets in Sunnyside (Sunderland), safer, more pedestrian friendly and improve connections to the rest of the City. Led by Sunnyside Partnership with: Robinson Landscape Design (Newcastle upon Tyne); Lightfolio (Midlothian) and contactors, Lumsden Carroll.

For more information, images or interviews, please contact: Julie Crawshaw 07989 502 190; Julie.crawshaw@virgin.net

Notes for editors:

"The collective desire of the entire design team for a unified, contextual, embedded solution to the integration of art and streetscape, supported by a visionary client body, enabled to turn the idea of an Urban Meridian into a unique, dynamic reality. By embedding the media and elements of abstract art - light, sound and the projected image - into the bustle of the city to create a informal new places along St. Thomas Street, the project shows how public art can make visible the poetry of the everyday life of the street." Robert Slinger, Kapok (Berlin).

Bill Fontana - *Sonic Channels*, a sound sculpture of found sounds.

He has worked for the past 30 years creating installations that use sound as a sculptural medium to interact with and transform our perceptions of visual and architectural settings. These have been installed in public spaces and museums around the world including San Francisco, New York, Paris, London, Venice, Sydney and Tokyo. He uses hybrid listening technologies of acoustic microphones, underwater sensors (hydrophones) and structural/material sensors (accelerometers).

Charlie Davidson – *Streetwalk*, stools and litterbins.

Technology, processes, materials and nature are the inspiration source for Charlie whose philosophy is 'Design it simply, make it beautifully and be sure it' necessary. Charlie Davidson Studio has participated and awarded in various exhibitions around the world including Frankfurt, London, Milan, New York and Tokyo. His work style is hard to define as it continuously transforms through new influences from different areas.

Kapok - *Meridian Masterplan*, streetscape concept; *Helionimbus*, light poles; *St. Thomas Pulpit*.

A trans-disciplinary design practice based in Berlin, established in 1998 by architects Claire Karsenty and Robert Slinger. 'Our projects enable people to re-read their built environment, provoking new, previously unimagined ways of using space', Robert Slinger.

S-DNA - *Alice in Sunderland*, video installation of 10 minute footage every hour of the evening.

S-DNA explore techniques of interaction within public spaces, using emerging technologies and unusual presentation media. Their interdisciplinary approach, integrated site-responsive installation and live performance, aims to widen the scope of digital art. They have developed and presented art, audio visual installation, performance and interactive public art for museums, fashion labels, city councils, musicians and many more.

IMAGES AVAILABLE: All images © P. A. Knox 2011

4805 - *St. Thomas Pulpit* (granite), *Streetwalk*, stools and litterbins and *Helionimbis*, light poles.

4806 - *St. Thomas Pulpit* (granite), *Streetwalk*, stools and litterbins and *Helionimbis*, light poles.

4812 – *Alice in Sunderland*, video installation.

4814 – *Alice in Sunderland*, video installation.

4827 – *Helionimbus*, light poles.

4834 – *Helionimbus*, light poles.

4851 – *Helionimbus*, light poles.

4946 – *Helionimbus*, light poles.

4982 - *Streetwalk* and *Helionimbis*, light poles.

5003 - *Streetwalk* and *Helionimbis*, light poles.

4993 - *Streetwalk* and *Helionimbis*, light poles.