

GOOD PROJECT – WHAT SORT OF COLLABORATION?

Margaret James-Barber and buffy klama (yK) offer two complimentary points of view about 'M6-M3 Underway/Unterwegs', an artist-initiated exhibition programme for artists in NW England and Berlin, and its legacy for their own practices and future collaborations.



'M6-M3' was conceived in 2007, not on the motorway but on a train round the Cumbrian coast. It eventually achieved a four-venue, two-nation touring exhibition with two sites running concurrently, a borrowed section of the Berlin wall plus a heap of attendant activities. We can be proud of the outcome, and it is not over yet.

The South Lakes Hub of The Cumbria Network was a new group and not yet cohesive, it needed a project. We took a scenic train ride to decide what to do next and settled on a Berlin visit. Someone spoke German, the Berlin Biennial was in taking place in 2008 and we'd seen a feature in a magazine about 11 Himmel, an intriguing community project in the Marzahn district of Berlin, providing cheap bed and breakfast accommodation. Next step: apply for a NAN Go and See bursary, and go.

The initial venture needed something simple and achievable to fundraise against, to kick-start what we hoped might evolve into long-term artistic collaborations. A joint exhibition – a response to Berlin – seemed a logical end product. Later, add-on activities developed, often to fit funding criteria. It has been immensely time-hungry, our funders have more than value for money.

We trawled the web and art magazines, exploited our own networks for contacts, fired off emails, and invited ourselves to meet responding artists at their studios in Berlin. We set ourselves a gruelling pace. I still wonder what German artists made of five hot, tired English counterparts invading their space and subjecting them to presentations of our work and a barrage of questions – in English.

Eventually we invited five Berlin artists (one group of three plus two individuals), to exhibit with us in England and Berlin. They did not all know each other, and their work is as diverse as ours. Also we gained two extra English artists. We should have done many things differently, but at least we did something.

'M6-M3 Unterwegs/Underway' is project managed by the English Hub; the German artists haven't been privy to decision making processes. It is not an



artistic collaboration per se, but all the artists recognise the benefits of being involved. To get the show on the road and looking professional our own collaborations have been mostly administrative. Between us we have a wide range of skills and experience to match almost any task, but the time frame was excruciating, given life and other professional commitments.

The group dynamic shifts and changes, there has inevitably been the occasional mutter and mumble in the background, but we are either too courteous or too cowardly to voice these openly. Every project has both its low and euphoric moments.

When we transfer to Berlin in May we will be relying on the practical collaboration of the others, and who knows what will happen after that. The dynamic will change again. I look forward to sharing no fixed agenda, bouncing ideas, letting artistic collaboration happen or not, as well as having the occasional plan of action and structured debate.

I am struck by the similarities and behaviour patterns that our two arbitrary and disparate groups of artists share. I have more in common with the Berlin artists than I have with my next-door neighbour, despite language and cultural differences; their working world is identifiable with my own.

Early on buffy, I and then Anita established a rapport, and we now regularly exchange ideas and every day snippets. It has been a joy getting to know her, made easy by her command of English, and she has been particularly helpful in disseminating information to the others in Berlin. buffy asked Anita and I to hang her work as we chose, in one of the galleries, so that we had a direct input in creating her final piece. The permutations are different each time. It was really good to that she could come to the opening in Lancaster, and I look forward to her coming here again, but our next meeting will be in Berlin.

I have made new friendships and strengthened others; been stimulated by a city new to me, and know there is potential for some real conceptual and international collaboration. It is very exciting.

Margaret James-Barber

PROFILES

Margaret James-Barber was born and grew up in London. She trained as a secondary school art teacher and years later graduated from The University of Central Lancashire with a BA(Hons)Fine Art. She is both a solo and a collaborative artist, often linking work in different sites across distant geographic locations. James-Barber exhibits inside and outside the gallery, using accessible materials including food, smell, light, shadow, text, billboards, and performance, as well as more traditional media in more traditional spaces. Her work is as much concept as construction.

Prompted by the Berlin project, and her own passage from the cosmopolitan capital to rural NW England, she reflects on the transposition of lives and cultures; how diverse human experiences and backgrounds patchwork together to form an evolving pattern of shared networks, etiquette and custom.

James-Barber exhibits across the UK, and has been part of events such as 'FRED' and 'Prestival'. She has curated, created and hung many exhibitions, organised events, and delivered talks and workshops for the general and art public.

She has been a committee member of The Cumbria Network and is a founder member of The South Lakes Hub. She also belongs to The Lancashire Artists Network and Plaited Fog, Preston.

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buffy klama (yK) was born in Heidelberg, Germany. She studied architecture in Karlsruhe and Berlin (University of the Arts).

After finishing her Diploma in Architecture she continued her studies at the Universität der Künste Berlin (Pedagogical Education Fine Arts). Leaving architecture she (ab)used her rapidograph (an ink-pencil to produce architectural drawings) to draw anything but engineering drawings, and discovered engraving as another technique to create lines. She scratched not only into copper plates but also into articles of daily use like packing materials, CDs, plastic tiles or other rubbish. Creating lines as an initial point she is open to all kinds of experiments such as trick film, photography, painting, printing.

Her latest works can roughly be related to these main topics: Untiere undtiere deals with creatures from any point of view; mobil bleiben is 'being underway' in any sense; and störfall/ disruption gives respect for the unexpected, non-conformance and malfunction in any way.

Since 1999 she has had many group and solo exhibitions, mostly in Germany but also in Bulgaria, Kirgizstan and recently in England. She also collaborated with different artists and groups. The exhibition sites vary from artist-run galleries, official buildings, self-initiated project locations and shops to galleries and museums.

www.buffyklama.blogspot.com

The participating artists are: Trevor Avery, Anita J Burrows, Bryan Eccleshall, Paul Clark, Karl Heinz Jeron, Margaret James-Barber, buffy klama (yK), Karsten Krause, Jill Pemberton, Ilona Ottenbreit, Mirko Tzotschew and Rosie Wates.

'M6-M3 Unterwegs/Underway' can still be seen at: PR1 Gallery, University of Central Lancashire, Preston (to 4 May) Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston (to 9 May) M3 Kunsalle, Atelierhaus Mengerzeile, Berlin (23 May – 16 June) www.hub-international.co.uk

- 1 'M6-M3 Unterwegs/Underway' exhibition.
2 Margaret James-Barber, *Platte Ist Kiez*, 2009.
3 buffy Klama, *Untitled*, print, 2009.



To write about my experience of being part of the exhibition project 'M6-M3 Underway/Unterwegs' and our way of collaborating, I have to give a personal view of course, as I cannot speak for the other Berlin artists. Since I was able to travel to England to attend the first private view in Lancaster as well as the exhibition at the Harris Museum in Preston, my impressions are still lively. To me it was amazing to see a visible result of an ongoing process that started back in May 2008 when a group of British artists visited my studio in Berlin. When I first read about British artists who were searching for connections with artists and studio groups in Berlin with the aim to plan some group exhibitions in England and Berlin I was very interested and got in touch with Hub-International immediately. I found some information about the visiting artists on the Internet, but when we finally met face to face in my studio I gained much more insight into their work. We presented our works to each other and I would describe this first meeting as very interesting and intense. It was great to get feedback and finally be invited to be part of the project with a particular series of photographs I was working on. I did not have concrete expectations, I figured the project as something developing with unpredictable results – being an open process rather than a determined idea. It was motivating to continue my photo series with the prospect to exhibit them at three different venues, two of them in the UK.

My basic idea about exchange was to involve the group members in my artistic work by handing the arrangement of the exhibits to a particular member of the group without any presetting or instruction. Revealing diverse perspectives on the series is part of the concept.

After our first meeting in Berlin I was kept up to date by email, and was also introduced to the other exhibiting Berlin artists. It was obvious that everyone in the Berlin group (including me) had roughly decided what to exhibit and there would be no conceptual exchange at this early stage of the project. Margaret and I intensified our communication and she also introduced me to Anita who visited me in my studio in January. To me, the collaboration in the sense of developing concepts can be considered as an initial approach with potential to grow. When I saw our first results at the Alexandra Gallery in Lancaster and the Harris Museum in Preston I felt we were on a good way.

This project is a great experience for me. I appreciate getting to know this group of British artists. I met them as motivated, vivid and open-minded people. Further collaborations will follow, I am convinced. Another visit to England to gain more insight into the country would be motivating, inspired by the British artists having dealt with their impressions of Berlin or Germany in their works. I'm planning to incorporate my sight on England in my forthcoming works. It is already planned as an add-on for the exhibition at the M3 Kunsthalle in Berlin.

buffy klama (yK)