

THE VIEWS OF LONDON

A BEHIND THE SCENES
EXPLORATION OF
VOICEOVER
FINSBURY PARK

By young people from Shpresa Programme



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INTRODUCTION



We are a group of students from Shpresa Programme, an organisation supporting the Albanian speaking community in the UK, and we have produced this publication documenting the VoiceOver Finsbury Park project at the Museum of London.

Over a number of months we worked with and interviewed photographers, curators, exhibition and graphic designers to find out how exhibitions are made and about everything that happens in a museum, and this is what you will find in this booklet.

We started by sharing our own experiences of London, how we would describe it and what opportunities it offers. We then visited **The City is Ours** exhibition, part of the **City Now City Future** season, which intrigued us because it was interactive and educational. We then met the curators, artists and exhibition designers who were creating the VoiceOver Finsbury Park project and display, which uses technology to allow neighbours in a tower block to communicate with each other in new ways.

For many of us, this was our first time visiting a museum and our experience helped us become more confident to explore museums around London. We think about museums differently now because of the people we have met. We also see London differently and know we can visit lots of museums and see different displays.

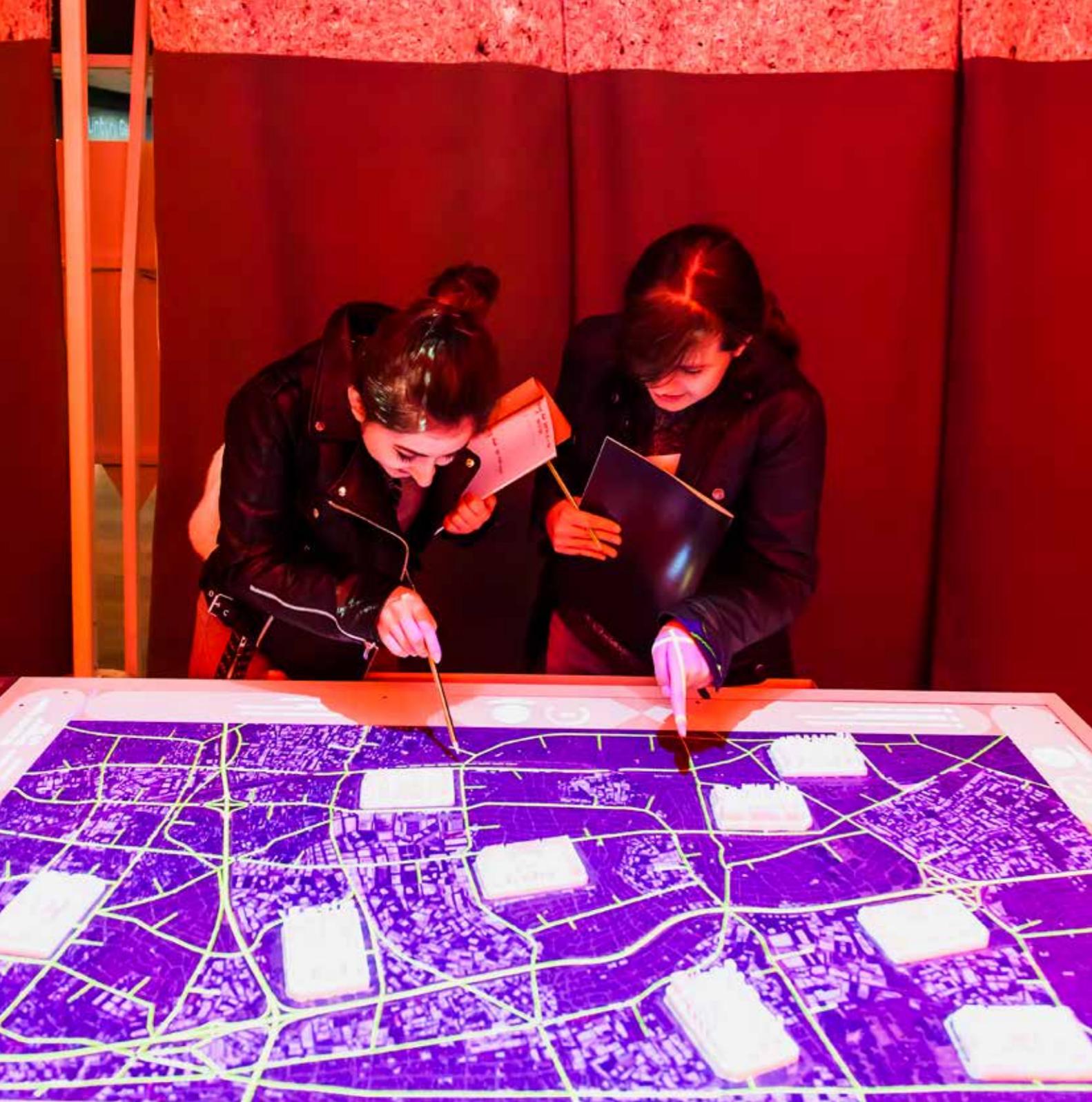
Ne jemi një grup studentësh pranë Programit Shpresa, te cilët kemi punuar për të realizuar një botim që dokumenton ekspozitën “VoiceOver” Finsbury Park në Muzeun e Londrës.

Gjatë disa muajve ne punuam me fotografë, kuratorë, dizenjues grafikë dhe të ekspozitave për të zbuluar se si organizohen ekspozitat dhe çdo gjë tjetër që zhvillohet në një muze dhe kjo është çka do të gjeni në këtë libër.

Në fillim ne ndamë me njëri tjetrin përjetimet tona të Londrës, si mund ta përshkruanim dhe çfarë mundësish ofron. Më pas, ne vizituam ekspozitën **The City is Ours** (Qyteti është i yni) që na intrigoi sepse ishte interaktive dhe edukative. Pastaj u takuam me kuratore, artistë dhe dizenjues të ekspozitës të cilët krijuan projektin dhe ekspozitën Voiceover, të cilët përdorën teknologjinë që tu jepnin mundësinë fqinjëve në një kullë të lartë banimi që të komunikonin me njëri tjetrin në mënyra të reja.

Për shumë prej nesh, kjo ishte hera e parë që ne vizitonim një muze dhe përvoja jonë na ndihmoi që të fitonim më shumë besim për të eksploruar muzetë përreth Londrës. Tani kemi një këndvështrim tjetër për muzetë në sajë të njerëzve që kemi takuar dhe si rezultat i këtij projekti ne gjithashtu kemi këndvështrim të ndryshëm për Londrën dhe e dimë që mund të vizitojmë shumë muze dhe të shohim ekspozita të ndryshme.





CITY NOW CITY FUTURE SEASON

City Now City Future is a year-long programme of over 100 events taking place at the Museum of London from May 2017 until April 2018, from exhibitions and displays to large-scale festivals, workshops and panel discussions. The programme explores how we live in cities today and what cities might be like in the future, the initiatives that are taking place and how we can all be part of making our cities better.

At the heart of the **City Now City Future** season was a ground-breaking, interactive exhibition **The City is Ours**, which took a look at the huge changes happening to cities across the world and how city dwellers are adapting in response. The exhibition highlighted ways in which individuals, communities and governments across the world are working to improve city life, from reducing food waste to creating cleaner air and better transport systems. It also featured a range of grass-roots community initiatives that are improving London specifically.

In May 2017 the museum launched a pioneering open call competition with **Thirteen Ways** to invite creative ideas for how to make London a better place. **VoiceOver Finsbury Park**, created by Umbrellium in partnership with Furtherfield, was selected as the winning idea.

Lauren Parker, Senior Commissioning Curator, Museum of London



MEET THE CURATORS

ABOUT VOICEOVER FINSBURY PARK

What is the VoiceOver project?

Lauren: In May 2017 we ran a competition and invited artists, designers, architects, technologists and filmmakers to come up with creative ideas about how to make London better in the future. We received over 70 ideas which ranged from building fruit orchards across buildings or rebuilding London's sewer system to creating different schools around London that celebrate our open spaces. A judging panel selected the winning proposal – VoiceOver Finsbury Park.

Umbrellium and Furtherfield won the competition with an idea for a social radio project. They are working with the residents of a tower block called Park House and are inviting people who live there to take part in the project and build a kind of community radio station. The residents have been given a colourful antenna and box and every Sunday people have been broadcasting their stories, songs, or whatever they like, onto this network. Over the course of the weekly broadcasts, people who might not know each other have been able to communicate and create these performances and have been able to build a new community and closer connections with their neighbours, which has particular resonance following the Finsbury Park mosque attack in 2017. This is one of the reasons why we are so pleased to have this project as part of our **City Now City Future** season.

MEET THE CURATORS

ABOUT YOUR JOB

An interview with museum curators



What is a curator?

Lauren: This is an interesting question because it's something that we ask a lot ourselves as well so it's a good place to start. Danielle and I are both curators but we both do very different things.

Danielle: I am the Curator of Making which is quite new and unusual because usually when you're a curator you are a curator of something but making is quite vague and broad. My job is very object focused.

Lauren: What makes museums special are objects and these objects hold stories. They hold stories about history and particularly here they hold stories about everyday lives in London. Where my role really overlaps with Danielle's is that, as a curator, I tell stories but my stories tend to be about what's happening now, what it means to be a Londoner and what it's like to live in the city. I work with artists and designers to create new work around these stories.



What does your role involve on a day-to-day basis?

Lauren: It's a very difficult question to answer because every day is really different. I deal less with objects in the collections. If you imagine that there is a triangle – the triangle between the museum as a place and the collections we have in it and then our visitors – my part of the triangle is looking at the relationship between the museum and our visitors.

A lot of what I'm doing is about trying to encourage lots of different people to come to the museum, to find out more about what we do, learn more about themselves and be able to share their stories as well.

How far ahead do you plan collections?

Danielle: Quite far ahead because when possible we try not to acquire one off, random things. When we are spending the museum's money on something, we like to have a collecting strategy so we won't just acquire anything. We'll try and acquire a series of things that fit around a theme and sometimes that can be planned a year or more in advance. Another thing we need to think about is when we acquire something we don't just want to lock it away in our store cupboards, we want it to go on display, so we have to plan our collecting in the context of what galleries, exhibitions and displays we are planning. These things need to be integrated and considered together.





WHAT IS A CURATOR?

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YOUR ROLES?

WHAT DOES YOUR ROLE INVOLVE ON A DAY-TO-DAY BASIS?

DO YOU COLLECT OBJECTS FROM A VARIETY OF CULTURES?

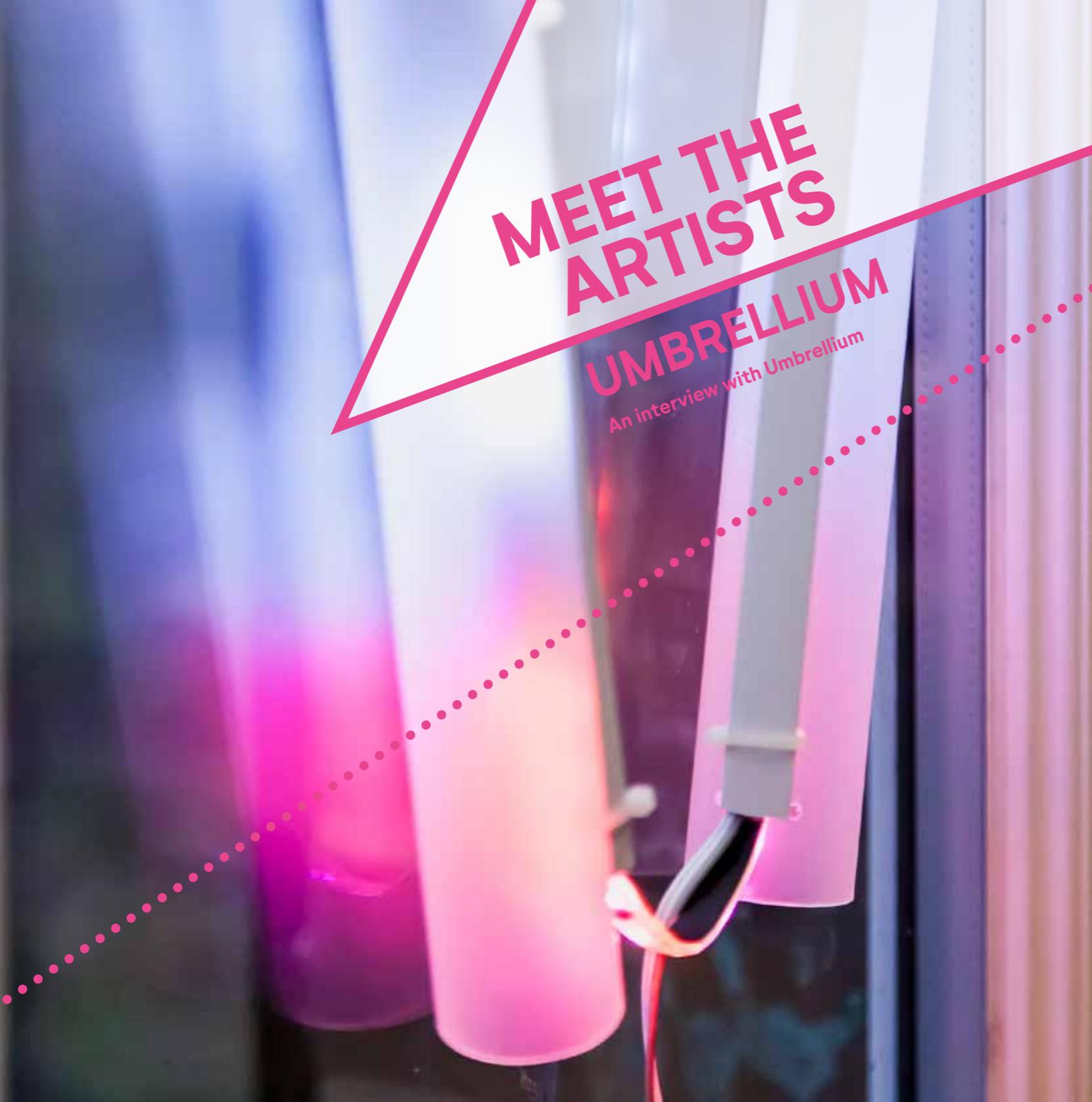
When you collect things how much do you get?

Danielle: This is an interesting question because there is often a much wider range of objects that you could collect but for reasons of storage or because you can't afford it all, you only take a sample. Sometimes we have to make an informed decision about how much of a bigger thing or a collection we can take, as long as in doing so we are properly reflecting the breadth and the reality of what has been made available to us.

Lauren: When we collect an object or objects, we don't just collect that one thing, we try and collect all of the information that we might be able to gather about it. One of the nice things about this museum is that because a lot of the objects are everyday ones, we are able to make the ordinary extraordinary and we can tell a really interesting and rich story about life in London through one or a number of objects.

Why is it important for you to collaborate in your job?

Danielle: Curators do their job better when they collaborate. The things we produce are better when we work with other people, because we get perspectives, resources and knowledge that we couldn't get on our own. It's not just about making things run smoothly but actually producing something that is better, more informative, more accurate and reflective of who we are as a city when we don't just rely on our own knowledge and assumptions.



MEET THE ARTISTS

UMBRELLIUM

An interview with Umbrellium

What is Umbrellium?

Umbrellium designs and builds urban technologies that support citizen empowerment and high-impact engagement in cities. We work with communities, organisations, urban developments and city councils to develop urban technology projects and products. We collaborate on building engaging cities (rather than ‘smart’ cities) that put people’s needs first. Our methodology gets people involved in design activities, decision-making and defining project goals. Our aim is for participants to develop a shared sense of technological enfranchisement and ownership in civic outcomes.

When people act together, they are more effective.

Can you tell us more about the VoiceOver project?

VoiceOver Finsbury Park is a participatory audio-visual communication infrastructure deployed in Park House, a block of flats on Seven Sisters Road, Finsbury Park. Made up of a series of kit-of-parts each consisting of a Light Antenna and Radio Box installed in participants homes, it forms an interactive light and sound network that everyone can listen in on and that everyone can see – a radical public speaking and listening platform for the digital age. It gives neighbours who have never spoken to each other before an excuse to talk, ask questions and share stories.

How you have been working with Furtherfield?

The way that the project was designed meant that Furtherfield led on the aspects of the community interaction – identifying the Finsbury Park community, inviting participants to take part and commissioning a writer to work with the residents. Umbrellium designed and developed the technology (radio units and lights) that would be in each participant’s home and the foyer of Park House.

What was your vision for the display? What do you want the audience to experience and take away with them?

The exhibition at the museum documents the project, process and the people who have taken part in it and will play back the audio created during the Sunday broadcasts. We hope that it can be a call-to-action and inspire other London communities to use VoiceOver.

MEET THE ARTISTS

FURTHERFIELD

An interview with Furtherfield

What is Furtherfield?

Furtherfield started online in 1996 as the web was just becoming a global public platform. We created our own platforms to connect and collaborate with people all around the world.

Now, through exhibitions, events and discussion we connect people to new ideas and critical thinking about arts and technology. We bring together international artists, technologists and researchers with people from all walks of life to explore today's important questions.

In 2005 we opened London's first gallery for media arts, and in 2012 we opened Furtherfield Gallery in Finsbury Park.

Where did the idea for the VoiceOver project originally come from?

The idea for the project was originally developed by our partners Umbrellium and was called VoiceOver East Durham, commissioned by East Durham Creates and produced by Forma. The idea was to involve people in the development of a local communication infrastructure for a community and in a place that was not well served by the internet.

Why is this project based where it is?

It is based in Park House for a number of reasons. In London people tend not to know their neighbours. People think of digital devices as ways to communicate with people who are a long way away. We thought it would be interesting to reverse both of these effects. We observe that the very devices that are intended to link us to each other often serve to isolate or even segregate us from the people standing right next to us, sometimes with horrible consequences. With VoiceOver Finsbury Park we hope to recreate a local, communal communication space for people to trust their neighbours with their dreams. We hope that it will make Londoners feel differently about the tower blocks in the city, to imagine all of the amazing and different lives that are taking place in them, and to think about what we might achieve if we dream together.

How is the project going to benefit you and your gallery?

At Furtherfield we are currently developing a new four-year programme called Platforming Finsbury Park.

The idea is to extend our work from the gallery and the lab venues, taking over the whole park as a space for imaginative experiments with

new technologies, for park users to work with artists, technologists and researchers to create new artworks that work across physical, natural and digital layers in the park.

VoiceOver Finsbury Park provides the focus for Furtherfield to meet and work creatively with many local people, to find out what is important to them and their communities, about the locality and more generally. We benefit from their imagination, diverse experience and generosity.

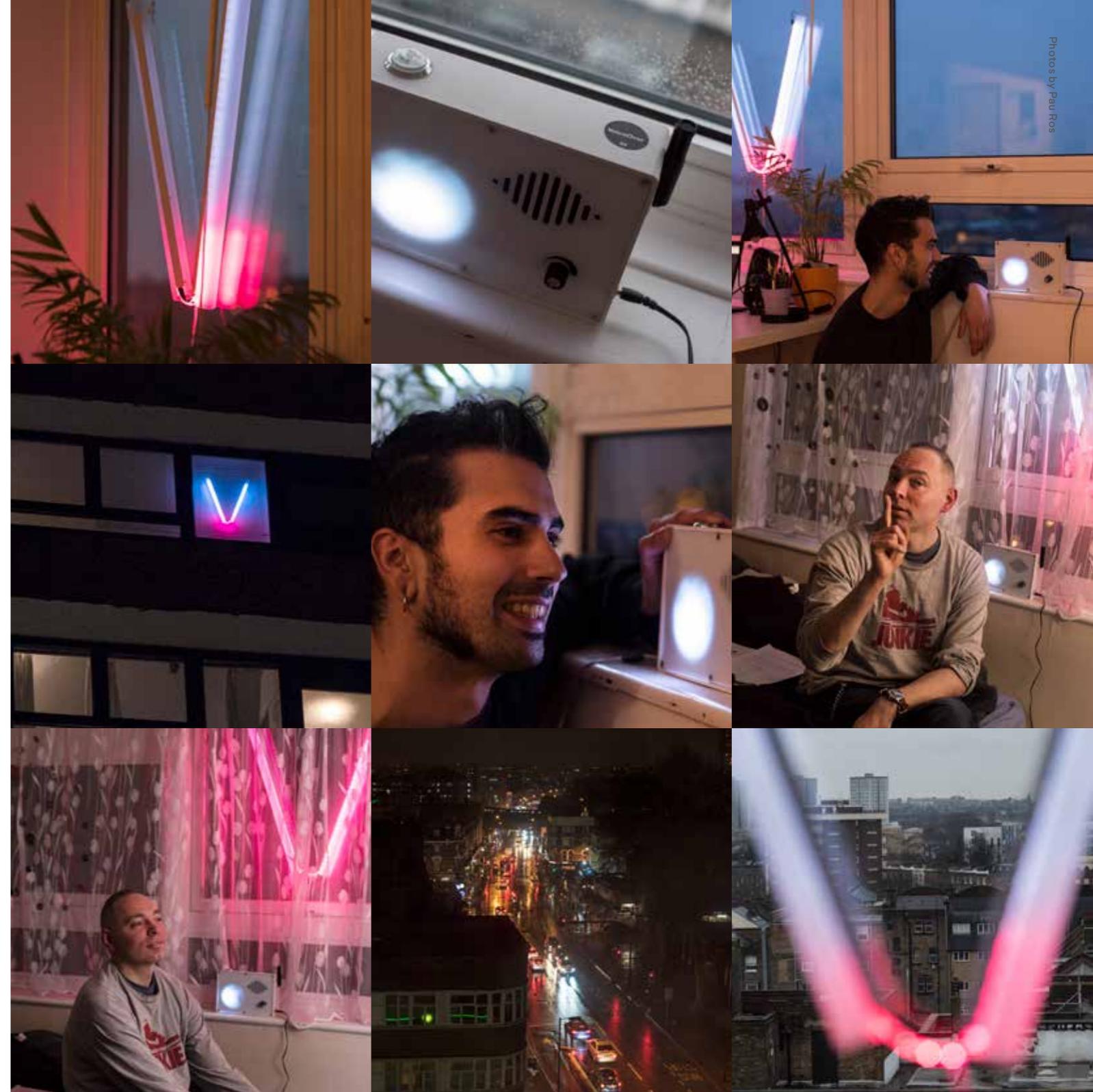
For over 20 years we have been devising experimental artworks that involve the participation and collaboration of people from very different backgrounds. This is important to us because we believe that the old idea of the individual, isolated genius artist is out of date and makes no sense in the age of digital technology, if it ever did. We think that we need to rethink the role of artists, and for artists to be more involved in other settings. People understand the value of citizen science for building shared knowledge about our physical environments – organising to gather information about pollution in a local area for instance. We are interested in exploring what citizen art might be, and what happens when people explore, reflect, imagine and dream together. The display at the Museum of London offers a space to share these ideas with visitors from London and all around the world.

How will the project benefit your participants?

We don't know for sure yet, but our early experiments show that at least some of the participants respond positively to working with a writer and reflecting on their lives in relation to important questions about the city now and in the future. Like all of us, they seem to enjoy using their imaginations to explore new ways of expressing themselves and communicating with people. They also tell us that they are now talking to neighbours who they had lived next to for years but had never met.

Do you prefer to work independently or collaboratively?

We work collaboratively a lot. This is because when you work with new technologies, there is a lot to learn and it's good to work with people from different specialisms and backgrounds so that you have the right skills and experience in the room. It can be inspiring and exciting. It can also be frustrating and slow, with lots of misunderstandings. But like lots of things in life it's often more stimulating and takes you further when you work and play with others.



Photos by Pau Ros

BEHIND THE SCENES



Furtherfield have been working with residents of Park House to develop a series of radio broadcasts inspired by their views of London and what London might be like in the future.

Christine, the writer working on the project, created lots of questions to help them to think about their ideas. To start off the conversation, the residents were asked 'what can you see from your window?' and 'what would you like to see?'

During one of our workshops at the museum we were asked the same questions, and this is what we thought:

What can you see from your bedroom window?

I can see a road and lots of houses and lots of people that are parking their cars.

What would you like to see?

I would really like to see a beach or a really nice field with lots of flowers and trees.

What can you see from your window?

I can see the canal and big boats as well as ducks and buildings.

What would you like to see?

I would like to see the sky and perhaps a sunset because at the moment the buildings are blocking this view.

What can you see from your window?

My garden.

What would you like to see?

The world.

What can you see from your window?

I can see a garden and different flats.

What would you like to see?

In my ideal world I'd like to see the beach or the sea.

What can you see from your window?

A public garden and plants.

What would you like to see?

The River Thames and Stratford shopping centre.



Christine kept in contact with the residents through handwritten letters discussing lots of important subjects around their lives in London, but always keeping things local to Finsbury Park.

When we met Christine as part of our project, she asked us some of the same questions and this is what we thought:

What does the word 'community' mean to you?

- Having people around
- Small little family
- Friends, values
- People working together
- It is a positive word
- Coming together



How would you change your local area to make it better?

- More parks
- New houses, more shops with clothes
- Less traffic, more activities to do in the park
- A huge view, fewer people around, more food shops
- More bins, and less litter, drugs and gangs
- The corner shops should be closer to me
- More restaurants
- London should be a safer place

If you could change one thing about London, what would it be?

- Increase safety
- Cheaper travel
- Less traffic
- Nicer weather
- Lower population
- Less pollution



When we visited Furtherfield we listened to some of the VoiceOver Finsbury Park recordings and learnt more about how the nodes and antennas worked. The main theme for the project is communication, so this is why the nodes are so brightly coloured and have lights. We could see these on Park House when we visited the gallery.

Our group had the chance to record our own broadcasts so decided to sing traditional songs and nursery rhymes in Albanian and were interviewed 'live on air' by Christine. If we had the chance to be interviewed again, these are the things we would say:

'I would introduce myself to the others, tell them a bit about my hobbies, explain what my day has been like, give a good quote and play music.'

'I would talk about myself, my age, my favourite food, my favourite animals, what I did.'

'I would want to cheer people up, say something nice for other people to hear it. Sing a song to them to cheer them up, to make them feel happy.'

'Be a comedian and go on with my friends and make people laugh.'

'I would ask what they've been up to lately, get to know the person, be funny and make jokes.'

'I would say something nice if someone's having a bad day and at the same time sing a song and say a poem.'







MEET THE CREATIVE PRODUCER



My name is Ollie, I have been working at the Museum of London for six months and I work on creative commissions for displays, events, talks and workshops.

Did you always want to do this type of job?

I kind of got into this by accident, until the age of 22 all I was really interested in was photography. Then I got a job in a gallery and started working on exhibitions, and became really interested in meeting people and producing events where people would come together, talk about ideas, and build communities. This sort of led me into my role here.

How are you currently working with Umbrellium to make the VoiceOver Finsbury Park display?

They prepared the schematic design and proposed a concept to say what they would like to display and what they would like to do. Then we had to take a look at it because we know the museum a lot more intimately than they do, so I guess we give them the restrictions and tell them what they can and can't do. This requires quite a lot of different conversations with people in the museum, whether that is our facilities, conservation or technicians teams; there are so many different people that need to be brought into the conversation. It's not just as simple as having an idea and going away and doing it, there are a lot of internal and external partners, and lots of considerations need to be made.

WHO MAKES THE DISPLAY?

How do you develop the design for a display?

Umbrellium put together what we call a schematic design layout. We all met and walked through the space and we said 'you have this space, you need to display your project and everything you want needs to go in here.' So it's a blank canvas in that respect. Then they come back with a schematic design and they propose how they want to use the space and think about how the visitor is going to experience it.

How have the designs changed from the first drawings?

It was originally proposed to fix the antenna to the window. To use the windows you need to get permission from the City of London because then you are starting to look out onto the road. If you have got lights on the windows it might start shining onto the road, so we couldn't do this. What we decided to do instead was swap the antenna around and use freestanding plinths instead of the window.

If you think about something later, can you change the design?

You can never think about absolutely everything but if you make changes after you have done all the work it can be really expensive, so that is why you usually work months in advance to really think through an idea. I'm not saying that it has never happened before but you try and plan so it will be permanent, so that you don't have to change a plan once you have started.

Can you make a moving digital display?

Again, whenever you have an idea, it brings up more questions. If you decide that you want to create a moving display you need to think about where the power is coming from, for example.

Can you hang things from the ceiling?

We are planning on using suction cups on the display cabinets, but even these have a tendency to fall down, so you do need to think about if something is going to fall down and hurt visitors, and the best way to secure objects.

What other restrictions do you need to think about?

You have to think about the flow of visitors. So when you think about where you are going to put things you need to think about if it will cause a big queue and then you start to think about fire exits, and if there was a fire could people get through safely.

Is this your favourite gallery to build displays in?

The gallery is huge and it's the only one that looks out onto the road so in theory it's a really nice space, but it also has limited display space on the walls. I think the challenges are one of the most interesting parts of the job; if you can't do something you need to think about the alternatives and that's what makes it really interesting.

What things are you planning to put in the display?

There will be radio units, the v-shaped antenna and a series of films about the project. It won't be as large as some other exhibitions, so in that sense there will be more space for people to engage with things and listen to the broadcasts.





MEET THE YOUNG COMMISSIONERS



Shpresa Programme is an organisation that provides advice, help and support on education, training and employment opportunities for the Albanian speaking community in the UK. Shpresa Programme also runs a number of projects, including supplementary schools. As well as Newham, Shpresa Programme has recently expanded its work into the London Boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Redbridge, Enfield, Haringey and Hammersmith. Young people from Shpresa were recruited to take part in the project to document the VoiceOver Finsbury Park project.

Programi Shpresa është një organizatë komunitare që siguron këshillim, ndihmë dhe mbështetje në lidhje me arsimimin, trajnimet dhe mundësitë e punësimit për njerëzit në Mbretërinë e Bashkuar që flasin gjuhën shqipe. Programi Shpresa gjithashtu organizon një numër projektesh, ku futet dhe oferta e tyre për shkolla suplementare, që promovojnë zhvillimin e komunitetit të tyre. Përveçse në Newham, programi Shpresa, kohët e fundit e ka përhapur punën e saj në zonat e tjera të Londrës siç janë Barking and Dagenham, Redbridge, Enfield, Haringay dhe Hammersmith.





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