



In designing the scope for this exhibition we wanted to explore the conference themes of the emancipatory city and austerity in the context of our host city, Leicester.

Conversations about disability access soon evolved into access for all whatever our age, culture, vulnerability or interests – at different times we will all find parts of the city unwelcoming, uncared for or difficult. The concept of barriers and access emerged to portray what was bad and good about the city, with still images of the former and vibrant artwork representing the support available. The finished work demonstrates the view of our urban landscape as seen by the mental health community, and inspired by personal experience and the cut paper work of Rob Ryan.

Everyday living cannot be defined in such a constrained way and it soon became evident at workshops that what represents a barrier for one may be emancipatory for another. The bus is a humble example – the park and ride removes the tensions of navigating the city roads and the cost of parking – the bus represents freedom to travel and access to areas outside the home community – the bus causes extreme physical and emotional challenges to actually getting on board.

This exhibition is the outcome of a collaborative project involving local artists and mental health service users and was largely created during a series of workshops exploring the themes. The overriding message to come out of the workshops is that, like any city, Leicester presents challenges for those with every type of disability and none – issues of access, of crowds, of noise, of obstacles, of areas we would rather not visit – but we navigate those challenges and find the safe spaces because Leicester is home.

This exhibition was created in collaboration

Brightsparks
Arts in Mental Health
Group

Helen Rowe
Photographer

Danielle Vaughan
Artist



Funded by BSA and CURA

Brightsparks – Arts in Mental Health Group

Originally run informally, BrightSparks is a formally constituted arts in mental health group. It's central principles are: to use the arts to promote positive images of mental health; social inclusion; and service user and carer involvement. It exists to acknowledge, support, and showcase the creative talent that exists within the mental health community through an expanding portfolio of creative projects. These include: The BrightSparks Annual Open Art Exhibition and Artspace.

Helen Rowe (Photographer)

A graduate in Film, TV and Theatre from Bristol University Helen attended a Brightsparks Arts Workshop at the Bradgate Unit following an extended period of ill health. She has been involved with the group ever since including being the official photographer and film maker for the annual 'Comedy Asylum.' In photographing people Helen loves to capture their energy and the essence of the moment, but she finds it stimulating to photograph landscapes too. Taking pictures of the City of Leicester has proven to be a highly pleasurable experience. I discovered an unusual vibrancy and diversity, generally with warmth and friendliness, people were interested in what I was doing. My favourite shots were spontaneous, unplanned and unannounced - people's legs under doors, walking sticks, bikes coming into frame. The benevolent universe seeming to understand our project brief, lending a hand and helping out.

Danielle Vaughan (Artist)

Within her Arts Practice, Danielle Vaughan explores sexuality, gender roles and celebrity status through her use of ripped papers, fabrics and paint. With a background in Design, Vaughan began her assemblage /collages as an exploration of her early experiences of a childhood. Vaughan plays with surprises, with 'gallows humour' and pathos at play in both images and titles. She has made appearances on both television and radio and recently appeared on Sky's 'Portrait Artist of the Year' (January 2018) where Noel Fielding chose her portrait to take home.

Vaughan has a strong desire for equality of access to quality arts experiences for everyone and has developed an extensive participatory practice alongside her own work. Danielle is a regular contributor to local exhibitions and galleries and runs popular teaching workshops including the six sessions working with Brightsparks at Attenborough Arts Centre to create this exhibition.