

Making The Cardboard 'Shop'

'Shop' was a year in the making. A few of my friends and I when we were in our first year studying Fine Art at the AUCB formed a collective called OutsideIN with the intention of making work together and getting it out into the public. We noticed the empty shops around Bournemouth and we got excited about the idea of using one of them as a place to exhibit, especially because it would give us an opportunity to engage people who don't go to galleries. We all agreed that we wanted something that was both free and completely removed from the gallery context, made from cheap or found materials to create an experience of art that would be accessible to anyone. That ethos and the desire to address the use of an empty shop is what led us to the idea of creating a pretend shop from cardboard. It would be an interactive performance set inside a kind of general store, loosely based on Woolworths; offering an array of satirical products that visitors could buy with the fake money we had given them. We wanted to engage people with our work and our ideas by simply asking them to do what they would normally do in a shop.

It took us a year to design all the various elements, to collect the cardboard from local shops, print everything and build up support for the project. In that year, Project 'Shop' took on a life of its own, occasionally to the detriment of ours. Along the way, we organised supporting events; things like workshops in silkscreen printing and product design and although we weren't interested in making money it became necessary to fund the project, so we applied for grants, printed and sold t-shirts and threw a huge fund-raising party in a house of cardboard, even so we ended up funding most of the project with our own money. It was difficult at times, there were points when we all became stressed and angry at the project and each other, but it was also rewarding to see what we could accomplish together. Getting a shop turned out to be the most frustrating part. For a year we didn't know if we would ever get a shop. Everything depended on the space and towards the end it was especially hard when we had done so much work and it felt like we were soldiering on with nowhere to go and with only a few weeks until our deadline and no shop we were starting to admit defeat and began half-heartedly developing contingency plans.

Luckily, two weeks before we opened we made a deal with letting agent, Ellis & Partners who gave us the use of a shop for free and for that we're still really grateful. In those two weeks we built our set up our exhibition. They were the most exhausting weeks of the entire project; most days we wouldn't leave until three in the morning but somehow we got everything ready in time and opened 'Shop' on the last day of April. That first day was intense; like everything else we were learning as we went. At times the place was so busy I thought all our products would go on the first day, as it was we had roughly 500 visitors and 'sold' over 300 products on day one. With the exception of a few people we knew, everyone who came in on the first day was just passing by and wasn't expecting to find our shop. Some people loved it straight away, while most people didn't know what to make of it. Most commonly they wanted to know what it was for, who we were and how we were making money. I think their idea of the experience changed when we explained that we were doing it for its own sake and no one was making money, and that our aim was simply to challenge the way people think about shopping and the effect it has. Additionally they were surprised to learn that all of the cardboard used was waste that we had recovered from real shops.

We constantly streamed live footage of 'Shop' on our website, outsideincollective.com. The benefit of the live broadcast was that people who stumbled upon our exhibition while on break from work would then go back and show it to their colleges, also visitors would call their friends at home and tell them to log-on to see 'Shop'. It was really encouraging when people came and said they had been told, encouraged or even dragged by friends to come see 'Shop' and it was especially satisfying to see people come back more than once.

A few people joined in with the performance; one kid asked for a job, to which at first we said no, stating that he needed a cardboard CV, so he bought one of our products and left, but he didn't give up so easily and returned after taking his product apart and writing a CV on it! Naturally we gave

him a job. During the four days we experimented with the performance, changing things and introducing new elements such as live product demonstrations.

At the end of our final day we held an open artist led discussion to talk about the project, with the MP for Bournemouth, the president of the Bournemouth Chamber of Trade and Commerce, the head of Fine Art at AUCB, the head of Bournemouth Creatives, fellow students and members of the general public. We were able to bring all of these people together to talk about the issues surrounding the work, in particular, the use of empty shops as temporary spaces to showcase art and ways we could build on what we had done. We are now working with the Bournemouth Chamber of Trade, the Arts University College Bournemouth, SCAN, and other interested parties to create an annual festival of arts in Bournemouth, part of which will utilise empty shops to exhibit art, films, music, theatre, etc. We're doing this because we want to make a difference and share with other people the art and the spaces for it.

- Patrick Collier- OutsideIN Collective

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