

Next We Change Earth

This exhibition, a bold and unique undertaking, features contributions from a range of artists with past, present or ongoing links to the East Midlands city of Nottingham. The artists represented in Next We Change Earth are: Said Adrus, Elshaday Berhane, Michael Forbes, Harjeet Kaur, Samson Kambalu, Hetain Patel, Keith Piper, Nazir Tanbouli and Andrew Wright. The exhibition also features a collaborative work by Gary Stewart, Trevor Mathison and Obinna Nwosu.

When credible histories of Black visual arts activity in England come to be written, Nottingham will be cited and acknowledged as having played a significant role in these narratives. Central to this role has been the part played by various artists, organisations and individuals concerned with the practice and profile of Black artists' work in the city over a period of several decades. Another important factor central to Nottingham's role in these narratives has been Trent Polytechnic (as it was, prior to becoming Nottingham Trent University) in offering places on its Fine Art courses to students such as Said Adrus and Keith Piper, from the early 1980s onwards, through to enrolment and graduation by Black students in more recent years.

The artists represented in this exhibition have a variety of links with the city of Nottingham. As mentioned, a number were students at Trent Polytechnic or Nottingham Trent University. These artists come from a variety of backgrounds. Some were born and/or brought up in the UK, while others came to Nottingham having been raised in countries such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Malawi, and Uganda. The artists represent the multiple histories of immigration and settlement that are reflective of so many people in contemporary Britain. Simultaneously, these artists embrace and pursue a broad range of approaches to their practice, oftentimes eschewing (or moving on from) perhaps more conventional media such as 'painting', 'sculpture', 'printmaking' and so on. Loosely, we can describe much of these artists' practice as 'mixed media', but on closer inspection, we can ascertain that what more importantly characterises these artists' practice is a desire, a determination to utilise a broad range of materials and approaches, in the making of their contributions and in the telling of their stories. The artists' multiple histories of immigration and settlement referred to in this text are important for several reasons. These histories tell us something of why and how each of these artists pursues their interests. Because within the work of these artists, history is everything. History, identity, geography and location. These are the four cornerstones of these artists' practice, but it is a sense of history, a (re) reading of history and a critiquing of history, which unmistakably dominates, and most characterises what they do. History is (the) key to us availing ourselves of the fullest understandings of these artists' practice.

The period of the mid to late 1970s through to the early 1980s was without question one of the most politically, culturally and racially charged periods of Black British history. It was the time in which children of the pioneering generation of African, Caribbean and South Asian immigrants came of age. These immigrants came to the UK through a variety of routes and for a variety of reasons. In the case of Caribbean migrants, who comprised one of the biggest single groups of new post-war arrivals, some – a few - came to pursue and take up professional positions. The vast majority though, came to fill vacancies in manufacturing, healthcare and the service sectors. Broadly speaking, African and South Asian migrants came for much the same sorts of reasons, though South Asian communities were to be distinguished or characterised by entrepreneurial elements amongst them who undertook to work in the retail, restaurant or manufacturing sectors. There was one other important factor that characterised the pioneering South Asian presence in towns and cities across the UK. That is, South Asian immigrants had, for a variety of reasons often come via East African countries such as Uganda, Kenya and (perhaps to a somewhat lesser extent) Tanzania.

The children of these immigrants – for the most part either British born or raised in this country – found themselves coming of age in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The lives of these teenagers took a variety of routes. Then, as now, unemployment affected a disproportionately large number of Black people. Some headed for the Labour Exchange. Reggae group, the Cimarons, were responsible for one of a number of songs lamenting the effect and experience of unemployment of Black British youth. Pointing the finger at society, the group sang “You got me living on the dole...” Other youth took whatever jobs and apprenticeship opportunities they could find and got by as best they could. Aswad memorably summed up the route of delinquency and petty criminality taken by a few: “Problem time like this I've seen youths who've turn to crime/They looking a way to keep their head above the water...” Some youngsters (such as Said Adrus, Keith Piper and Donald Rodney) went into further or higher education.

Then, as now, only the comparative few from the country's Black communities venture into higher education and within this small number, only a comparative few undertake Fine Art courses. It is for researchers of the future to establish precise patterns of enrolment on the country's Fine Art courses by Black students, but the formidable impression exists that students such as Adrus, Piper and Rodney - plus those who had gone to other colleges before them – were truly breaking new ground in entering institutions of higher learning to study Fine Art (such as Trent Polytechnic).

The early 1980s were intense, heady and potent times for Black people in England. They had by now established a particular and highly charged presence in various neighbourhoods and communities across the country, the districts in which they lived becoming synonymous with a sometimes fractious but nevertheless unmistakable sense of place, space, and presence.

These districts had, during the course of the 1970s, come to symbolise demarcated territory that represented the unmistakable emergence and presence of Black Britain. Within the local and national media, these areas would constantly be cast as quarters of menace, criminality and dysfunctionality. But to many Black people, these districts were, quite simply, home. London had Brixton and Ladbroke Grove ('the line'); Birmingham, the second city, had Handsworth; Leeds had Chapeltown, Bristol had St. Paul's; and Nottingham had Hyson Green. As mentioned, these areas were, home to many people from the Commonwealth countries, and to their British-born/raised children. Significantly these districts had all achieved – to varying degrees - 'frontline' status.

A number of elements characterised the existence and presence of Black Britain. Although the word was not fashionable at the time, there was a tangible sense of diaspora (with its multiplicity of attendant narratives, such as Black Power, Rastafari and the 'Dreadlocks' culture) and a feeling, or belief that Black youth were experiencing racism and disappointment, disaffection and what one sociologist poignantly referred to as 'endless pressure'. Within the Hyson Greens and the Brixtons of the country, racism, educational under-achievement, unemployment, inter-generational conflict, homelessness or poor housing, and conflict with the police were all experiences which, to varying degrees, characterised young Black Britain. Time and again within their art practice, Adrus, Piper and Rodney would make work that referenced not only these troubled and vexatious conditions and experiences, but the variety of responses they evoked and provoked.

The frustrations relating to these troubled and vexatious conditions and experiences were vented and given form in the 'rioting' that erupted during the mid 1970s and a few years later at the turn of the decade.

It was in these heady days of the early 1980s that the first of a number of exhibitions by younger Black artists, such as Keith Piper, took place. Within a short space of time of meeting Piper, Rodney was to join him and others, in contributing his work to these 'Black Art' exhibitions. For Piper, Rodney and the other exhibitors still in further or higher education, the art school was as much a site of struggle as anywhere else. They took the view that Black art students could not afford to and should not insulate themselves from the more pressing realities of Black existence. The group often titled their exhibitions The Pan-African Connection and their position was effectively summarised in the catalogue introduction for one such exhibition, taking place in Nottingham: "The exhibition title, THE PAN-AFRIKAN CONNECTION, has been used by the group since their second show as an expression of the solidarity which the artists feel with the struggles of all oppressed peoples of the world; be they in Africa, the Third World in general or the ghettos of the capitalist West. Despite the fact that they are physically isolated from the centre of that struggle, insulated as they are within the liberal arts school system, the group feel themselves to be connected to those struggles in so far that as

long as international capitalism continues to use race as a basis for exploitation, then, all black people will remain its potential victims.”

Between 1981 and 1984, the group of young artists and art students with which Piper and Rodney exhibited had shows and organised symposia across the towns and cities of Birmingham, Bristol, Coventry, London, Nottingham and Wolverhampton. As mentioned earlier, the group exhibited in Nottingham, [The Pan-African Connection took place at the Midland Group, 24-32 Carlton Street, in the city centre, January 15th – February 12th 1983] and subsequently organised ‘Radical Black Art: A Working Convention’, which was held at the Ukaidi Centre, St Anns, Nottingham on 28th March, 1984. Amongst his brief comments included in the Midland Group catalogue, Piper stated: “Understand also that we are not racists simply because race remains a factor in our analysis. A dialogue on racism will remain an issue in our struggle as long as its application remains a factor in their (or dare I say your) resistance.” With characteristic forthrightness, Rodney opened his contributions with the following comment: “The work you shall see is fresh and cutting and black. The colour of our skin is the reason you are here; the colour of our skin is the reason that keeps us together and it is the colour of our skin that has made us produce this work.”

Piper and Rodney may well have felt themselves to be “physically isolated from the centre of [Black] struggle”, but they were certainly living in the heart of the Black community. Their address was 3 Lindsey Walk, part of a modern housing development in Hyson Green meant to solve (or at least address) the housing needs of cities such as Nottingham. It was the sort of place that aptly fitted Bob Marley’s memorable description of the ‘Concrete Jungle’. “Concrete jungle, where the living is hardest...” By the mid to late 1970s Black people’s urban existence was oftentimes characterised by having to live in problematic concrete environments such as Hyson Green.

We can start to get a sense of Trent Polytechnic’s early significance as a destination for some of these artists when we look at the ways in which the art school is remembered and talked about by Donald Rodney. Rodney, one of the most important and accomplished artists of his generation, is not represented in this exhibition, though he is, (with Keith Piper), to be the focus of one of The New Art Exchange’s forthcoming exhibitions. After completing a Foundation Course at Bourneville School of Art, Rodney went on to his Fine Art degree at Trent Polytechnic in Nottingham. He quickly fell in with Piper, a fellow Brummie, who like Said Adrus, was a second year student in the year above Rodney (Piper had undertaken his Foundation Course at Coventry Lanchester Polytechnic) and he and Rodney were to become lifelong friends and occasional collaborators. On one particular programme from Channel 4s 1987 series State of the Art, Rodney suggested that it was Piper’s influence – plus the apparent influence of one or two other Black art students - that steered him away from his early practice of what Rodney

himself described as “flower-painting” towards a more politically robust, Blacker form of art practice.

Upon meeting Piper, the most prolific and accomplished figure of the 'Black Art' movement of the early 1980s, Rodney found himself being readily persuaded of the importance, validity and urgency of the Black Art/Black Power argument. In the course of several interviews – one of them for television (the State of the Art programme mentioned earlier) – Rodney made mention of Piper's profound effect on him, as Rodney himself explained: " When I got to Trent [Polytechnic] I met Keith [whose] work was about the experience of being Black... I suddenly became aware of what I wanted to say and who I wanted to say it to."

[Though not himself an art student, mention should be made of Gary Stewart, currently inIVA's Head of Multimedia and one of the artists exhibiting in Next We Change Earth. A close friend of Piper's, Stewart, also from Birmingham (born there in 1961), went to Trent Polytechnic at the same time as Piper and Adrus. Stewart received his BSc in Electronics and Computing from Trent Polytechnic in 1984.]

Since the now distant days of the 1980s, Nottingham galleries have hosted a number of exhibitions of work by Black artists, and the city has seen the development and establishment of a number of dedicated visual arts initiatives, leading up to the creation of APNA Arts and EMACA (East Midlands African Caribbean Arts), the former with a remit to cater to the needs of artists and audiences of South Asian background, the latter with a similar remit, though its focus was to be on artists and audiences of an African and African Caribbean background. These two organisations joined together to develop the New Art Exchange, which is presenting, as its debut exhibition, Next We Change Earth.

This exhibition consists of contributions by early – mid 1980s Trent Polytechnic graduates, plus contributions from a number of more recent graduates of the same institution and other artists with significant links to Nottingham. The artists' contributions take the form of new commissions and recent work. It seemed to the exhibition's curators - David Schischka Thomas and Michael Forbes – that the assembled artists' proposals were reflective of several overlapping themes and ideas, namely: time and space, home, culture and identity. In considering each of the artists' contributions, we can get a sense of how and why such themes and ideas might present themselves within the work of Said Adrus, Elshaday Berhane, Michael Forbes, Harjeet Kaur, Samson Kambalu, Hetain Patel, Keith Piper, Nazir Tanbouli, Andrew Wright, and the collaborative installation by Gary Stewart, Trevor Mathison and Obinna Nwosu.

Like a number of the other artists in this exhibition, Andrew Wright has a keen concern for issues of identity – though not just an individual's received, evolved or declared identity. In his work, Wright is engaged in a process of critiquing imposed or presumed identities. He is

mindful of the ways in which negative and problematic racial attitudes affect not only those who perpetrate them, but also affect those on the receiving end of them. One of his recent bodies of work undertook to explore the image of the 'golliwog' and speculated on how this grotesque caricature contributed to the culture and climate of racism he saw himself as growing up in. Wright's assertion - that we are, to some extent, products of our environment - is given an international dimension in this new work, in which he explores his relationship to Africa. It could be argued that little has changed since the Victorian framing of Africa as the 'Dark Continent'. Within much of the media and elsewhere, the image persists of Africa as a deeply dysfunctional, inherently backward-looking and technologically inept landmass, in which its numerous tribes and language groups are paradoxically perceived as being indistinguishable from each other and, simultaneously, perpetually at war with each other. Troubled by the negative media stereotypes that so often depict Africa as a continent synonymous with the scourge of AIDS, famine and political and military conflict, Wright set out to see part of the continent for himself, and undertook a recent visit to Gambia, in West Africa. Through this journey, this pilgrimage, like other artists before him, he is engaged in the process of understanding, of making sense of Africa, and its complex relationship to himself as someone of African descent, growing up and living in the UK. The paintings he has contributed to this exhibition explore these ideas.

Michael Forbes is also exorcised by the notion that history has bequeathed Black people a troubled and problematic state of marginality and invisibility. Marginality because the legacy of slavery has, it could be argued, created and sustained a culture of racism that sees Black people as having less ability and less humanity than others within British/Western society. Invisibility because the presence and contributions of Black people have the unmistakable appearance of having been studiously erased from the shared sense of 'British' history held by the vast majority of white people in this country. Most people in this country would concede, or accept, that the African-Caribbean immigrants who made their way to Britain in the decades immediately following World War II created an unmistakable and irreversible Black presence. But comparatively few would accept, or even know, that the Black presence in Britain stretches back to Roman times. Within this new work, 'Coloured Black', Forbes attempts to challenge not only the vindictive erasing of Black people from British history, but also the attendant self-image of cultural, historical and social superiority held – consciously or unconsciously – by white Europeans. The factors responsible for this are multiple and varied. We can blame history books, or the ways in which history has been taught in our schools. We might also blame the media, or at least, parts of it. Forbes has used the perhaps unlikely object of the china figurine in his attempts to critique the ingrained cultural sense of superiority that accompanies the pointed exclusion of Black people from Britain's history. He has bought, collected and acquired hundreds of porcelain figurines, symbolic of a fictitious, but deeply held sense of a glorious, cultured and refined period of European greatness. Each gaudy figurine has then been repainted, the previously white skin of the ornaments becoming instead decidedly blacker. In

so doing, Forbes, at a (brush) stroke, (re) creates an historical Black presence and creates a series of poignant and arresting narratives arising out of absence and presence.

Heta Patel, like a number of the other artists in this exhibition, has a pronounced interest in issues of cultural (that is, group or inherited) identity. His work for this exhibition is reflective of the process of critiquing the received or presumed identity of his Indian background. As the artist himself says "My practice took its beginnings from wanting to understand my Indian heritage. Not so much a factual historical timeline but rather through fighting the impossibility of being able to fully understand a mindset of a different context to the western one I was born and raised in.

When my parents immigrated to the U.K in the 1960's they brought with them an ideal of India. And as India continued to develop, this romanticised ideal is the one which was passed down to me. This is of course a common story amongst British born generations of immigrants. The dislocation of Indian culture naturally does not sit well with my British sensibilities. However it is these very sensibilities that I wish to challenge. If the western influence of my birthplace is embedded in my way of thinking and the physical mannerisms of my body, is it possible to retrain these ways of understanding the world with an Indian code. [?]"

Like many other British artists of South Asian background, Patel is engaged in the critical and intriguing process of exploring cultural sensibilities which, whilst seemingly in conflict with each other (i.e. 'Indian-ness' versus 'British-ness') nevertheless coexist within the structure of his being. To an extent Patel is of course in his own way, reflective of the mixed-up-ness, which is so much a part of how we all are in contemporary Britain in particular, and indeed, in the wider world as well. Nevertheless, Patel is keen to critically engage with what he calls "Indian signifiers" such as decorating his body with the sorts of pigments traditionally used in Hindu rituals, and learning to play the Indian tabla drums. In so doing, he creates mechanisms through which he can consciously engage with Indian culture (rather than leaving unchallenged the often unspoken assumption that cultural identity is fixed, inherited and transferable from one location to another.)

As mentioned earlier, within the work of these artists, history is everything. History, plus the accompanying elements of identity, geography, and location. History informs our sense of what and how our identity is constructed, and what and where we call home. In 21st century Britain it is of course possible for each of us to embody multiple identities and to locate and regard several different places as being home. And of course, the sense of displacement that some of us carry with us (coupled with the realities of economic migration) might mean that belonging is an elusive state of being and we ultimately have little or no substantial sense of home – whether that be country, city or dwelling.

For Harjeet Kaur, home is not so much a place of solace and comfort, but more an unsettled construct. Our migratory and at times nomadic lifestyles can often lead to not only a questioning of the idea of 'home', but also a questioning of our memories/experiences of 'home'. Within her work, Kaur sets about the task of examining the ideal of 'home', through images that are both unswerving in their focus and evocative, in the responses they elicit from the viewer. As viewers we are required to draw on, and question, our own sense of 'memory'.

Notions of home and memories of childhood are of course inextricably linked and in this new work Kaur sensitively explores this coupling. Each of us has our own memories but Kaur's work allows each of us the possibility, the chance, to explore/critique notions of home, particularly as and where these notions intersect with 'cultural identity': "One of the ways in which we are identified is through the idea of 'home', which is used to perpetuate the myth of 'home sweet home'. I will examine the issues of identity and self through recovering past histories from our idea of home and its links to identity..."

As mentioned earlier, a number of these artists were born and/or brought up in various parts of the UK, including right here in the East Midlands, while others first came to Nottingham as adults having been raised in countries such as Malawi, Ethiopia and Egypt, Ethiopia, Malawi and Uganda. It is from Egypt that Nazir Tanbouli began a journey that brought him to Nottingham, as an accomplished artist whose work had been shown throughout Egypt and internationally, in countries such as Austria and Argentina. One of several painters in *Next We Change Earth*, Tanbouli's distinctive paintings in some ways depict home as a space and place of tension, discomfort and unease. In effect, Tanbouli's work disrupts and unsettles the notion of 'Home Sweet Home'. The figures that occupy his paintings are decidedly and singularly strange. Oftentimes not quite human, not quite animal, the characters, even when embracing, present themselves to us as elements of a bad dream. The surreal aspect of the tension, discomfort and unease in Tanbouli's paintings is heightened by the highly decorative ways in which he renders and depicts the furnishings, walls and floorings of the domestic interiors in which the cast of characters exists.

As writer Judith Palmer has noted "Here is a space where a freakshow of fantastical imaginings and down-home ordinariness co-exist in an uneasy truce. A snoring woman nods off on the sofa, oblivious to the snarling reptile padding across the lino. A man sprouts the head of a braying donkey, and his kitchen companion merely raises a polite eyebrow. Hemmed in by too-close walls and too-big personalities, the characters push against the edges of the paintings that struggle to contain them. All boundaries seem permeable and subject to collapse, as animate and inanimate objects exchange identities. The sitting room reptile adjusts to its surroundings by camouflaging its skin to match the chintzy cushion-covers. The armchair looks livelier than the catatonic woman slumped in it."

Perhaps one of the most unusual contributions to this exhibition comes from Samson Kambalu, whose work has contributed to the titling of Next We Change Earth. Kambalu's work is characterised not only by its wit, but also more importantly, by the ways in which it obliges us to question things through its use of the familiar. In this regard, perhaps his most celebrated work is Holy Ball, a football covered in pages from the Bible. The work is particularly poignant, loaded and open-ended in its meanings and readings. Football as a sort of new religion, religion as a sort of plaything, desecration coupled with consecration, the word of the referee having the finality and the status of the word of God. In the artist's own words Holy Ball, like the rest of his art, is "a question of how we create meaning for ourselves."

This idea – of creating new meanings for ourselves – is central to this new work, which consists of an installation, The New Art Exchange Creative Index. The work will be made of a number of bound volumes each containing hundreds of computer-generated anagrams of the words 'The New Art Exchange'. It may well be in the nature of anagrams, but I'm struck by the potential of the words generated to create new and powerful meanings and sentiments that at once tie them to, as well as liberate them from, The New Art Exchange and the multiplicity of things it represents. The anagram 'Next We Change Earth' is evocative of the exalted aspiration (articulated by the African-American poet Lucille Clifton) "to make things happen and make them better". Another anagram 'Next Teacher We Hang' seems to me to be evocative of Pink Floyd's powerful sentiment, reflective of true anarchy, that "we don't need no education..."

Collectively, these bizarre, funny and poignant anagrams can be seen as a form of digital fortune telling in which the anagrams are reflective of a range of signifiers, as unpredictable as the artist's practice itself.

Like a number of other artists in this exhibition, Elshaday Berhane secured her degree from Nottingham Trent University. Originally from Ethiopia, Berhane came to Nottingham by way of London, where she had completed a foundation course at Camberwell Art College. I had earlier made mention of the ways in which notions of home and memories of childhood are inextricably linked in the new work by Harjeet Kaur. We might in some ways advance the same sentiments in discussing this new work by Berhane, which seeks to explore childhood dreams by creating distinctive pieces of sculpture utilising broken and discarded toys found on the streets around her home.

In so doing, Berhane establishes a working relationship to her neighbourhood, her area, her district, of inner city Nottingham. In this sense, location is of immense importance. In the artist's own words "While living in Hyson Green and Forest Fields, a highly multicultural inner city area of Nottingham, situated within a small distance of the New Art Exchange, I collected bits of toys that were discarded by children playing on the streets. I will be incorporating some of these found toys in the sculpture. These are often found in crowded inner city areas where families

have very little space in the home and children often play outside on the streets. I will use these broken and discarded pieces of toys, to inspire the forms I make. These toys are the leftover ghosts of a world imagined by a child's daily play, reminder of dreams, fantasy and escapism."

Through this process of salvaging the discarded debris of broken toys, Berhane introduces critical (and critically important) ideas of class and its intersection with race. In Berhane's work, a broken toy becomes a signifier of "no backyard for the children to play". Within this work, perhaps more than other contributions to this exhibition, disadvantaged social and economic stratification comes to the fore.

In *A Cemetery in Ilford* (a chapter in the Bookworks publication *I'll get my coat*) Sukhdev Sandhu makes the telling observation that "It is hard to escape the thought that immigrants are never so deep a part of the English landscape as when they die." Said Adrus' latest work takes as its starting point the Muslim Burial Ground in Woking, Surrey. The Muslim Burial Ground is a Grade II listed site located in a corner of Woking's Horsell Common. Enclosed within ornate brick walls, the cemetery has a domed archway entrance reflecting the design of the nearby Shah Jehan Mosque, said to be Britain's first purpose built mosque, established in 1889.

The Muslim Burial Ground was apparently built during the First World War to receive burials of Indian Army soldiers who, having fought and been wounded fighting for the British Empire, died at the dedicated hospital established for them in Brighton Pavilion. During the 1960s, the bodies of the fallen were exhumed and reinterred in the Military Cemetery at Brookwood, about 30 miles from London. According to Adrus, the work exists, in part at least, to highlight "issues about War, Empire, and Islamic Architecture in the South East of England and notions of contemporary landscape in the Home Counties."

I mentioned earlier that history is (the) key to us availing ourselves of the fullest understandings of these artists' practice. As much as with any other artist in *Next We Change Earth*, we can apply this idea of history to Adrus's practice. We learn from him that "my own father had been part of the British Army in Kenya during the Second World War." Within this work, Adrus creates his own 'memorial' – not just to the often forgotten and overlooked soldiers of the colonies who gave their lives fighting for the interests of this country, but also a memorial to history itself, and the multiple ways in which history impacts on our contemporary lives.

Keith Piper was, as mentioned earlier, by far the most prolific and accomplished figure of the 'Black Art' movement of the early 1980s. More than any other Black artist of his generation, it was his fiery brand of racially charged and assertive images and text that announced the arrival of a new generation of Black artists, a new type of Black artist. There were many things that were new and fresh and different about Piper's work and the ways it seemed to be wholly in step with the more progressive and militant aspirations and sensibilities of Black Britain. Piper's

practice was characterised by what was, in a British context, a new attachment to social and political narratives. These narratives were expressed through the mechanisms of Pop Art, assemblage sculpture, mixed media and a variety of other aesthetic references.

For this exhibition, Keith Piper will return to Nottingham, the city in which he gained his first class degree in Fine Art, to produce a series of video studies of the landscape of Nottingham, interweaving it with a multiplicity of attendant and related narratives. In this work Piper considers the built environment of the city, and the ways in which town planners sought to retain a sense of pastoral England in the heart of an expanding urban mass. As Piper himself opined: "A key, and recurring aspect of the Nineteenth century expansion of urban space was the need on the part of town planners to constantly evoke the memory of the idyllic and the pastoral. This is true of the development of the city of Nottingham in which place names such as Hyson Green, Sherwood and Forest Fields carry with them the echo of some long lost rural idyll which has long since been bricked and concreted over with the forward march of the urban." To these fascinating considerations Piper adds an element of perhaps inevitable conflict when studiously affected urban constructs of rural Englishness run headlong into what Piper calls "the shadows cast by the contemporary mythologisation of Nottingham as a site of danger, crime and threat."

Considerations of rural Englishness are important because 'Englishness' tends to be evoked by rural, wide-open spaces, rather than by urban environments. In this sense, the centre of Piper's home city of Birmingham is not 'England' (even though it is located at the epicenter of the West Midlands) but the nearby, but altogether more rural and monocultural area of the Cotswolds is. We need look no further than the official Cotswolds web site, which tells us "Popular with both the English themselves and visitors from all over the world, the Cotswolds are well-known for gentle hillsides ('wolds'), sleepy villages and for being so 'typically English'."

Though Piper bristles against what he calls the "mythologisation of Nottingham as a site of danger, crime and threat", recent crime figures, for what they're worth, show many types of crime in Nottingham to be above the national average. Notwithstanding the current media hysteria over gun and knife crime, the reality of incidences of homicidal deaths in Nottingham and elsewhere is taken by Gary Stewart, Trevor Mathison and Obinna Nwosu as an issue of genuine concern that forms the starting point for their contribution to this exhibition. *Bitter Thickest Blood* will be what the artists have called "an interactive sonic installation interrogating the traces of evidence, meanings and conclusions formed as a consequence of teenage deaths at the hands of their peers." The work is an attempt to go beyond the predictable, banal and fleeting attention paid to incidences of murder amongst young people, and to produce a response, or a memorial which is much more textured, layered, nuanced and engaging. Emitting from speakers will be a cacophony of audio clips comprising "voice overs created from various text sources and interviews with young people, family friends, legal staff,

lawyers, police, courts, youth workers, sociologists, journalists & politicians.” In addition, speakers will emit “Extracts from memorial websites. Field recordings from the murder sites and newly created sonic soundtracks and atmospheres made specifically in response to the content and material. Fragments of selected published music and spoken word.”

This is a work which, in its own way, critiques the often trite and sensationalised media news stories of teenage homicide deaths *Bitter Thickest Blood* offers the viewer/listener a set of altogether more serious and intelligent mechanisms for engaging with sobering reality and its implications and manifestations.

Next We Change Earth offers gallery-going audiences an absorbing and engaging set of snapshots of ‘Nottingham Past, Present and Future’, as seen through the work of a range of artists with corresponding past, present or ongoing links to the city. The contributions of each artist stand in marked contrast to those of the other exhibitors. In this regard, the exhibition offers the potential to be a fascinating encounter. *Next We Change Earth* may well offer clues as to the sort of exhibition programme that residents of the city (and visitors to Nottingham) can expect from the New Art Exchange. It is for art historians and cultural historians of the future to determine the longer-term successes or otherwise of Nottingham’s latest visual arts initiative. One senses that at the present time, the great unknowable is the extent to which the New Art Exchange is willing and able to develop and maintain healthy and ongoing relationships with arts organizations and audiences across the city, beyond its supposed or presumed ‘core’ constituencies of artists and audiences.

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