

Sea Breeze – Resource Pack

Overview

Sea Breeze is a 2-year project exploring the Winter Gardens in Morecambe. It has involved an extended artists' presence and a wide reaching research process that has also called upon the memories of past workers in the building. As a performance piece, it attempts to bring back to life a once glorious theatre and in so doing (given the current state of the building), inevitably deals with themes of memory and decay.

Whilst the project involves making a theatrical show in a theatre, the semi-derelict nature of the building now means that working here is effectively like working in a non-traditional space- a site.

This pack contains documents relating to *Sea Breeze* and to site-responsive work more generally, written by Raisin & Willow, the lead artists on the project.

Artists' notes.

These were written during the planning for the second stage of the project and attempt to précis our feelings and approach during the research process and explain how certain artistic decisions were arrived at. (They were also part of a successful Arts Council application, which we think is an important reminder that, whilst grappling with the more mundane parts of funding applications, it is still important to present your real artistic aims and vision.)

Exhibition notes.

As part of the pilot project in 2013, we mounted an exhibition, *Sea Breeze - an archive* in the Peter Scott Gallery at Lancaster University. This document contains the texts from the exhibition display panels and a selection of images of the cabinet displays.

Notes on working in sites.

Some more general notes on researching and making work in sites.

Supplementary information

Sea Breeze was originally commissioned by Live at LICA and is a co-production with Raisin & Willow and imitating the dog.

Websites

www.raisinandwillow.co.uk

www.imitatingthedog.co.uk

www.thewintergardensmorecambe.co.uk

In early 2015 we shall be producing an open-source 'tool-kit' for working in heritage spaces, in collaboration with The Creative Exchange (<http://thecreativeexchange.org>).

Further information will be available through LICA, over the coming months.

Some notes on making work in and about sites

It is the nature of site-specific work (or site-responsive as we tend to refer to our own practice), that it is... specific. The demands (and constraints) are often unique to the place you are working and the work that you make should reflect this. But there are common threads. Starting points. These are some of the things that we have learned whilst making *Sea Breeze* that we will try to remember in the future.

Give yourself time to form your own impressions. Focus on the flavour and the scent of a place. The atmosphere. Your feelings about it. Above all give yourself time. (And still, trust first impressions. As artists we have to trust our judgments. Trust our instincts.)

Explore. Try different routes. Different modes of transport. Different times of day (and night). You must creep up on a place, see it from all sides, catch it napping (overhear its whispered conversations, interpret its dreams).

Walk.

Use libraries. They are a threatened resource that all researchers should try to preserve. And they remain full of wonderful resources and unexpected angles. (In the case of *Sea Breeze* we discovered a filing cabinet of old programmes and newspaper cuttings about the Winter Gardens, which was invaluable.)

Talk to people. Not all site-responsive projects need have a focus on community engagement or on gathering stories but if you want to find out as much as possible about a place you have to talk to people. Be open at all times to the possibility of hearing a story that will help you to tell your own.

Think about authenticity... The dust collected in the building, or any old dust? The sea and seagulls recorded at this particular beach, or something from the sound library? If we are honest then we have, at different times and for different purposes, used both. The objects (and the dust) displayed in an exhibition must be authentic. If nothing else this is an ethical imperative. In performance (the theatrical tradition founded as it is on simulation) it is more complex. In *Sea Breeze* the sounds of sea breaking on a beach were recorded here, seagulls and a carousel were not. Part of us suspects that it would be a better show, even if infinitesimally, if everything was authentic. And we debate this still amongst ourselves; because our instinct is that this might be crucial to making truthful work. This is important.

Find the key.

For us, this has become central to our work. We are always trying to grasp the elusive 'essence' of a place, to find the key that will unlock the story... So, again- give yourself time, don't decide too soon what the 'angle' is, but do have the aim of finding one. Find it. Trust it. Follow it through.

And...Somewhere in the small print there are a hundred practical details that are easy to overlook but which you ignore at your peril. As soon as you step out of the comfort zone of regular arts space everything is at least twice as complicated. If, for example, you are putting on a performance in a place that is not set up to do this then you will need to think about everything that is involved. Access, power, sight lines, safety. If you are bringing an audience into a place that does not usually cater for audiences then you have to look after them. If the people who look after the site are not used to working with artists, or putting on events, then you need to remember to talk about basics. Never assume that things are understood. It is a good exercise in many ways, to have to think of everything from scratch, good to consider what it is to make a show, what it is to present work to an audience, what we are aiming to achieve. And sometimes the focus on practicalities can make it seem like a very technical process and that artistic vision is being lost, but that is the nature of the beast. Everything is as achievable in a complex site as in a conventional space but it will require more planning, a bigger team and a constant effort to keep on top of details before you can finally raise the curtain.