INTRODUCTION

Since 2010 Jeni Walwin and Tammy Bedford have been responsible for curating and producing WOMAD’s programme of world music and arts. Their brief is to present contemporary visual art of the highest quality, to reflect the festival commitment to celebrating a range of cultural influences, and to create projects that will appeal to adults and children of all ages, many of whom are not regular visitors to art galleries. Over the last 14 years the programme has focused on a series of artistic film installations, selected around a particular theme each year, and presented in shipping containers. Following the positive response from festival goers, the World of Art programme aims to build on this interest by commissioning a new work from artist Nevillie Cabe for 2014. Nevillie’s brief is to develop a project that has two key ingredients – to create a strong visual or experiential presence within the festival and to invite some form of active participation from festival goers.

Each of Nevillie’s many previous projects has operated on several levels – passers-by experience a fleeting encounter, while others engage with the work directly, by becoming active participants in its making. One such example is a project for the Olympic Delivery Authority, during the construction of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in East London. Nevillie noticed that one section of the Park’s waterway correlated with the scene in Seurat’s famous painting ‘Bathers at Asnieres’. Inspired by this association, he invited a number of construction workers on the Olympic site to recreate this image for the twenty-first century. A dedicated website revealed personal stories about the workforce. The resulting large-scale photographic image was reproduced as a centre page spread in London’s Metro newspaper, delivered to millions of commuters across the capital each day.

It is Nevillie Cabe’s ability to create multilayered works, offering spectators a variety of means by which to engage with contemporary art that made him such an appropriate choice for the first WOMAD World of Art commission. The three-part work for this Festival, ‘Experiments in Black and White’, encourages us to consider many aspects of the world in which we live: the chalk deposits in remote lands, our continuing reliance on fossil fuels across the world, and the quality of the air we all breathe. The five films, one recently completed for this commission, all feature the artist as performer – an individual in an often hostile environment, grappling with simple, but demanding, physical tasks. Premiered at the festival, the live performance extends this celebration of air – passers-by experience a fleeting encounter, while others engage with the performance, which will be recorded on film, places the artist in direct physical proximity to many festival goers: they make their way from the campsites to the main arena, and consequently the work itself will be marked and extended by their activity.

Nevillie’s brief is to develop a project that has two key ingredients – to create a participatory project: collective breath. Nevillie has created 1,111 opportunities to contribute to this project. Each participant will be asked to write their postal address and to suggest where this ‘collective breath’ might be released. Films showing on the large screen:

P1(t) = P1(0) + [P1(t) – P1(0)] t/t1

Films showing on the smaller screens:

Experiments in Black and White IX [oil] – 2013
Experiments in Black and White VIII, 2013, 33mins, 3secs
Experiments in Black and White XII / XV, Karoo, South Africa, 2014, 11mins
Experiments in Black and White XII

Films showing on the city screens:

Experiments in Black and White XI, 2012, 55mins 59secs
Experiments in Black and White XII

EXPERIMENTS IN BLACK AND WHITE

‘Experiments in Black and White’ is an exploration of four materials – ice, chalk, oil and air. These four elements are fundamental aspects of the natural word and are variously contested and debated as we look to the future of the planet. There are three aspects to the project.

OUTDOOR SCREENING OF SHORT FILMS

The five films feature the artist working with each of ice, chalk and oil, in endurance, physical performances which heighten our awareness of these natural elements. There are one site, the Arboretum: one large screen presents a loop of three different films each day between ‘sunrise and midnight’. Two further films, are shown on tall freestanding screens either side of an ancient oak. A bag suspended from the tree will enable festival goers to trigger the action of the monitors.

PERFORMANCE DRAWING

The work will attach a 10kg chalk block to a rope and for an hour each day of the festival, the artist will create a linear drawing along the tarmac road that runs through the Arboretum. The performance, which will be recorded on film, places the artist in direct physical proximity to many festival goers: they make their way from the campsites to the main arena, and consequently the work itself will be marked and extended by their activity.

PARTICIPATORY PROJECT: COLLECTIVE BREATH

Visitors to the Collective Breath tent are invited to fill a bag with their own breath. The artist has created a free opportunity to participate in this project. Each participant will be asked to write their postal address and to suggest where this ‘collective breath’ might be released. As collected from the bags will then be transferred to a pressurised container. Following the festival the artist will travel to one of the suggested locations, attach the pressurised vessel to a large, purpose-built sound instrument, release the air, and record the reaction on film. Postcards with a photographic record of the event and a link to the website where the sound can be heard will then be posted to all contributors.

The artist has recently been in residence at the Cabot Institute, Bristol University where scientists are researching ‘clean air’. A musician at a recent event there described playing a wind instrument as ‘imagining a relationship that starts at the tip of your fingers, and meanders through your body to the tip of the instrument. The sound it makes is an extension of your being’. The relationship between the artist is fundamental to much of experimental sound sculpture and connects here to the main focus of the WOMAD Festival on the music stages. Talks on this subject by musicians, scientists and the artist will be an integral element of the ‘Collective Breath’ project.
COLLECTIVE BREATH – TALKS
FREQUENTLY 25 JULY 12.15PM – 1.00PM
TUNING THE ATMOSPHERE

Neville Gabie, WOMAD, World of Art, Commissioned Artist. An introduction to the ‘collective breath’ project.

Matt Rigby, School of Chemistry, University of Bristol: Researcher on greenhouse gas emissions

Gay Blanch, Research Engineer developing technology and equipment in the agricultural and waste sector.

Ellen O’Gorman, University of Bristol: Classical and recorder player with Pink Nose Quintet and Bristol Ensemble

Chair: Jeni Walwin, World of Art Curator

SATURDAY 26 JULY 12.15PM – 1.00PM

BODIES OF AIR

Neville Gabie, WOMAD, World of Art, Commissioned Artist. An introduction to the ‘collective breath’ project.

Gathering Voices, an innovative arts charity giving a demonstration of their world music vocal techniques

Arta Ghanian, School of Chemistry, University of Bristol: Researcher in greenhouse gas emissions

Chair: Tammy Bedford, World of Art Producer

AIR DISSECTED

Neville Gabie, WOMAD, World of Art, Commissioned Artist. An introduction to the ‘collective breath’ project.

Lizette Rowley, Yoba Folk saxophonist

Science teacher, Buddha meditation practitioner and keen swimmer

Helen McDonald, Yoba Youth vocalist

Singer-songwriter, storyteller, jazz singer, and runs music workshops using African instruments

Chair: Philippe Boulay, Cabot Institute. University of Bristol: Works to bring together multiple perspectives on the changing environment

 Entry-free with WOMAD festival tickets