

1. My presentation today is titled, 'If You Build it, They Will Come' – a famous and often-repeated quote from the 1989, Kevin Costner film, 2. 'Field of Dreams'. I'm sure at least some of you in the room have seen it, but to assist you all in pretending otherwise, I'll contextualise it for you.

Costner plays a farmer who, whilst walking in his corn-fields one day, hears a voice saying, 3. '*If you build it, they will come.*' Naturally, he interprets this to mean he should dig up his fields and build a baseball field, so that the ghosts of eight Chicago White Sox players, banned for life in 1919 for throwing matches, might visit him. He does this and, sure enough, the ghosts appear, along with the ghost of his dead father and enough others to field two full teams. At this point, only Costner's character can see them, but as he faces bankruptcy and everyone believes he's going mad, the ghosts materialise to all and people come from far and wide for the opportunity to watch the ball games and, of course, pay for the privilege.

I believe all of this was achieved without any Arts Council funding.

That line, '*If you build it, they will come*', is something I've quoted many times over the years, and heard quoted by others, and it felt entirely appropriate for a presentation about being an artist whose entire career has been based regionally.

It was only when I began researching images I realised the quote is, in fact, 4. '*If you build it, HE will come*'. Myself and others have been misquoting the film for the best part of the thirty years – so much so, I found it listed in an article about the Top Ten most misquoted film lines of all time, amongst other all time greats such as, '*Do you feel lucky, punk?*' and, '*Luke, I am your father.*'

In all honesty, this just enthused me, as misinformation, misquotation, myths and semi-facts are something I've often played with in my work, as I'm interested in how a lie without context is, on some level, for those receiving it, a truth. And how a confident quotation so frequently goes unchecked.

5. Most recently, during the cuts to UK arts funding, a quote from Churchill has regularly been wheeled out. Apparently, Churchill, responding to proposals to cut money for the arts to fund the war effort, simply replied, '*Then what are we fighting for?*' A simple, beautiful and powerful quote which would appear to be game, set and match in pretty much any argument around the value of the arts.

Unfortunately, he never said it. It's just a very liberal interpretation of a comment he made about storing the UK's art treasures in caves, after it was suggested they be sent abroad for safe-keeping.

6. But back to our incorrect Field of Dreams.

Pop-references and Chinese whispers aside, I do believe there to be more than a little truth in this statement. As an artist who has lived and worked his entire professional life in the regions, I've seen instances where the vision to

stay put and start building, has led to some of the most important developments in the British contemporary art scene of the past 20 years.

To lend some context to my own background, **7**. I was born in Romsey near Southampton, and at six months old was moved to **8**. Herne Bay in Kent. I studied at **9**. the University of Derby, then lived in **10**. Nottingham for a considerable time, with a brief period in **11**. Edinburgh thrown in for good measure. **12**. Then I moved to Cardiff about seven years ago. My life has been a veritable tour of the regions since the very beginning.

Throughout that time I've been developing a career as an artist, which has afforded me the opportunity to work extensively across the UK and beyond, including significant periods in Argentina, Poland and America. I've concurrently been developing a career as a lecturer, again something I've been lucky enough to do at various institutions across the UK, all in the regions, and I'm currently Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at the University of Worcester.

Growing up where I did had a profound effect on my relationship with living a decentralised existence. **13**. If you look on a map, where I grew up is roughly sixty miles from London. But I grew up there in a time when there was nothing cool, or chic, about shabby Victorian seaside resorts. When I moved away in 1995, the idea that something like Turner Contemporary would happen in Margate, or that Whitstable would become Shoreditch-on-Sea, wasn't even a daydream, it was an impossibility. We were the wrong side of London, so for art, gigs, or anything that might usefully feed a young creative imagination, I had to spend two hours on a terrible local train service to London. **14**. Even now, it takes an hour and half to travel that 65 miles, in comparison to an hour and twenty minutes to travel the 118 miles to Birmingham.

This had one of two effects – it either made you want to move to London at the first opportunity, or it made you rather tired of the place and interested in exploring other options. **15**. Like so many young artists, I spent my teenage years believing I was going to be a rock star – that's me on the right hand side, at the time becoming the youngest person to have ever played the legendary Marquee club, as I was only 15 - and I saw many of my on-the-dole musician friends from Margate move to London to make it, only to become on-the-dole musicians in London, but with no beach and comparatively less money to scratch-by on.

I must say none of this is a criticism of London, which is a fantastic city that I enjoy very much; I just never wanted to live there. **16**. So when I came to study fine art at university, I found myself in Derby – primarily after asking my best mate what he had put as his fourth choice on his UCAS form and him telling me, 'Derby.'

I'm not a fatalist, but I couldn't have ended up in a better place. Derby is a great little city, so was an exciting but manageable place for a lad who had come from a town of about 25,000 people. It also has an incredibly diverse community, ethnically speaking - a glorious shock to the system for someone

who, in a school of six-hundred pupils, had been one of the 597 white faces there, which gives you a pretty accurate idea of the cultural diversity of North Kent through the 70s and 80s.

That fine art course I enrolled on was a very young course, only having seen one full cycle of the three-year degree, but it was a course that counted Craig Richardson, Karen Forbes, Robert Clark and Chloe Brown amongst its staff at the time.

In terms of accessing the visual arts, the city was pretty bad. It had one contemporary art gallery, which closed just as I finished university. It had the usual library gallery and a community arts organisation, imaginatively called Derby Community Arts – so not exactly a hot-bed of contemporary artistic activity, even for a small regional city. At the time this felt like a burden or a disadvantage, but I've come to realise it was one of the best situations I could have found myself in, as it meant I spent a lot of time travelling to other places to see art and visit people, quickly developing an extensive network of friends and peers across the UK. This was all in the first couple of years out of university – arguably the toughest couple of years for an aspiring young artist to make it through.

17. I count myself particularly fortunate to have had Rob Clark as one of my lecturers there. Quite apart from being exactly the sort of tutor anyone might hope to get at university – funny, knowledgeable, connected and hard-drinking – Rob also had the kind of career I realised I wanted; he was a successful artist in his own right, but also worked as a lecturer and a freelance arts journalist. For any of you who don't know who Rob is, if you've read the exhibition previews in *The Guardian Guide* at any point in the last twenty years, then you've experienced some of his writing. He was also someone who had followed his own path through his career, geographically speaking, being a Blackburn lad and a long-time resident of Sheffield. He was living proof that the regions could provide you with an interesting and rewarding career in the arts.

18. Derby, as you probably know, is in the East Midlands and it was through my time there that I first really experienced the politics and hierarchy of geography. In the East Midlands, Nottingham is unquestionably top of the pile, certainly culturally-speaking. Being based in Derby I was surrounded by people who viewed Nottingham as the privileged, even bullying, older brother. Any success in Derby was one in the eye for Nottingham. Any failure in Nottingham was a success for Derby. To move there made you some sort of traitor and it was in 2001, after six years in Derby, that I became that traitor and succumbed to Nottingham's allure.

It didn't take long living there to realise that Derby's preoccupation with Nottingham was not reciprocated. There was, of course, a long-standing rivalry through football, but beyond that they didn't really care. Derby was wasting all that energy on a competition that Nottingham wasn't even engaged in. If that energy could have been harnessed in to action, then Derby would have had nothing to be competitive about, as it would have been

confident and happy with its own lot. And I believe that's a relationship being played out across the UK and beyond. It's certainly the case with the rest of Wales' relationship with Cardiff and, arguably, even Wales relationship with England.

19. I used to work for g39 Gallery in Cardiff, running a strand of their professional development programme, having meetings with artists right across Wales. I lost track of the number of meetings I had with artists in places like Llandudno where they would say, 'How can I get an exhibition in Cardiff?', to which I would always reply, 'Why are you interested in Cardiff? Liverpool's an hour away, Manchester's an hour and a half. Birmingham's only two and a half. These are your contemporaries and peers, not the artists in Cardiff.' But I'm not honestly sure how much difference that made, as these kinds of views are somewhat ingrained.

20. So, Nottingham. This is actually a key focus of what I want to talk about as I think the arts ecology there, particularly the recent history of that ecology, provides an inspirational model for any city frustrated with itself.

I have to put my hand up and say that until this academic year, I worked on the fine art degree at Nottingham Trent University. But being as objective as I can, the fine art degree there is proof that any decent art scene is built on a decent art school. I would confidently say that, in terms of the visual arts, Nottingham would be a shadow of itself today were it not for the fine art undergrad programme at Trent.

Nottingham had an artistic hey-day in the 80s, but as with the ebb and flow in most cities, by the late 90s the city was very much experiencing an ebb. There were several well-established municipal galleries, the best known being the Angel Row, but there was no scene to speak of. Then, in the early 2000s, a group of graduates recognised the opportunity a city with cultural gaps and disused industrial buildings offered, and stuck around. The cost of living was cheap, the cost of workspace was cheap and in a city of only 300,000 people it was possible to be young, enthusiastic and clueless, but visible in a useful and productive way.

21. This was the embryo of what would become the artists group Reactor, who would also become an inspiration and driving force for the art scene of the next decade or more. One of those graduates, Niki Russell, has been involved in pretty much all of the significant building blocks of the past fifteen years, whether that be setting up a studio in the first place, being ambitious with the scale of Reactors projects, or being part of the Nottingham Studios Consortium that eventually established Primary in 2012 – a collection of studios, galleries and project spaces in an old Primary school.

So, having seen what Reactor did, in 2005, a collective of about twenty-five graduates took over an entire floor of an old factory and set up Stand Assembly studios and MOOT Gallery – **22.** named after The Moot Hall Inn - their favourite pub in the area. Importantly, they made the decision that the

gallery wouldn't be a vanity space of friends showing friends. They wanted to bring through fresh blood, to build their own networks and those of the city.

Thankfully for Nottingham, at the time we had a lead visual arts officer in the form of Alison Lloyd who could see that value. She had a developed understanding of why it was good for Arts Council East Midlands, as it was then, to fund artists in the region to go elsewhere or to bring other people in. Not only that, people such as Tom Godfrey, who was one of MOOTs directors, took himself off to intern with Anthony Wilkinson Gallery in London and through the contacts he made doing that, MOOT were invited to take part in Zoo Art Fair – which, for those of you that don't know was a smaller, arguably cooler, frieze art fair of younger, less-established galleries. It was an important moment, as the gallery's presence there was further validation of the city's growing arts scene.

23. A really significant marker that things were on the move came in 2005 when The British Art Show announced its intention to come to the city. That this important, Hayward generated project, would come to the city was unequivocal proof that the rest of the UK were now taking Nottingham seriously.

So by this point, the art scene was looking pretty healthy and because of that, each year, another bunch of Trent graduates would stick around and set up studios, galleries and project spaces. This was now financially facilitated by Trent, with a £500 golden-handshake being given to the group of graduates who wrote the best proposal for a project or initiative.

24. The one that really sticks with me, and I believe is a benchmark of the optimism and possibility in the city, was a when a group called Backlit moved straight in to the old Stand Assembly and MOOT spaces and contacted recent Turner Prize nominee Mark Titchener. They basically said to him, 'We've got £500 and this gallery space, would you come and do a project with us?', and for whatever reason he said yes. So the very first project that Backlit ever realised, in their first year after graduating, was a new commission by a Turner Prize nominee. All on a budget of £500.

Such was the volume of studios, galleries and project spaces that had now appeared in the city, it became a self-feeding ecology, with many of the undergraduates on the Trent degree taking up internships at the spaces, picking up the skills they needed to then set up their own projects on graduation.

25. All of this really culminated in the opening of Nottingham Contemporary in 2009 – a multi-million pound new-build contemporary art museum in the heart of the city - part of the Tate Connect scheme and truly international in its programme and aspirations. It's of no coincidence that the first director appointed was Alex Farquharson, who had been one of the freelance curators responsible for the British Art Show in 2005.

I genuinely believe that were it not for the likes of Reactor, Stand Assembly and MOOT, and their decision to stick around, then Nottingham Contemporary wouldn't be there today.

26. The arrival of the gallery also proved very beneficial to myself. Alex came up with a wonderful idea for the gallery's branding, that rather than pay a marketing company thousands of pounds to come up with something that would invariably be overhauled within two years, he commissioned ten different artists to come up with logos for the gallery, with a commitment to always use all of them. So there is no single brand or identity, just a bunch of great logos designed by people such as Ryan Gander, Olivia Plender and myself.

The logo I designed was born out of my obsession with what's called Google architecture – that classic West-coast American architecture of diners, bowling alleys, motels – lots of neon and sharp angles. When I e-mailed it to Alex, I just said, '...and if you ever feel you'd like to turn this in to an actual sign for the building, just give me a shout.' Sure enough, about six months before the gallery opened I got an e-mail from him saying, 'We've got some money left in the build budget. Let's do it.' **27.** And so from a slightly cheeky sign-off to an e-mail, I found myself in the Brixton workshops of MDM Props, surrounded by work they were fabricating for Anish Kapoor, The Chapman Brothers and David Batchelor, discussing the finer details of an enormous 3D rendering of my Nottingham Contemporary logo.

As a shop window, I couldn't have asked for anything more. It was the first public commission of that type that I had ever undertaken and it has directly led to further commissions in Portsmouth, Bristol and Cardiff, including for the Welsh Assembly Government.

I would confidently say that my entire career, both as an artist and a lecturer, has been based on a mixture of building, feeding and maintaining my professional networks, along with being a bit cheeky at opportune moments. I'll finish up by giving one example of this, which in many ways is a micro-example of how I constantly seem to operate.

In 2005, I was shortlisted for a moving image residency in Krakow, Poland. This in itself is an interesting example of how the art world likes to function. I have a theory that if you do anything more than once, then in the eyes of the art world, you're the artist that does 'that thing.' In my still relatively short career, I have been **28.** 'that artist that makes work about rock music', **29.** 'that artist who makes work using text' and, **30.** 'that artist who makes light sculptures.' I'm just waiting for the day when I'll be **31.** 'that artist that makes loads of money.'

I'd had two successful arts council applications, both of which contained an element of moving image, therefore in the eyes of the arts council I was a moving image artist, and in November 2005 I found myself jetting off to Krakow as an Arts Council England Moving Image Fellow, to be hosted for a month by the gallery Bunkier Sztuki.

32. Whilst there, I became friends with a Polish artist called Janek Simon. A talented young artist who has since gone on to win a Deutsche Bank Prize, amongst other things. I learned early on in my career that invariably the best and most profitable things to come out of any residency type project are the friendships and professional relationships you make, so on my return to the UK, I put in an application to the Visiting Arts, Artist to Artist scheme, to get Janek over to the UK for a research visit. The plan was really just to get him over so we could hang out a bit more and for me to set him up with a bunch of meetings through my various networks.

33. One of my colleagues at Trent, Sean Cummins, had been instrumental in establishing a gallery called Gasworks Gallery in London and I knew they had worked with Visiting Arts on international residencies before now, so I dropped them a line to say Janek was over and received a reply from their residencies curator, Mia Jankowicz, who said to come down. That was the first and only time I've ever met Mia, but a year or so later I got an e-mail from an artist and curator based in Buenos Aires, Melina Berkenwald, saying Mia had put my name forward for a residency and was I interested. Of course I was interested, but the two weeks of the residency were exactly the same as the install for a major solo show of mine at The City Gallery in Leicester, so I had to decline, but made sure to stress that should there be any future possibility to participate, I would love to.

34. Then in 2010, out of the blue came an e-mail from Melina saying, did I remember her, she was running a month-long group residency in Buenos Aires with a new organization called URRRA, and would I like to come. So I made an application to Wales Arts International, who are the Welsh arm of the British Council, and was lucky enough to head off there in October 2010.

I got on very well with Melina and she was really interested in Wales, as I was the first artist from Wales that she had ever worked with, so I said that it would be great to keep the link open and would she be interested in me nominating another artist from Wales to take part the following year. She said yes and, consequently, an artist based in Wales has gone every year for the past five years. Because this is now quite an established relationship, we were able to get funding to bring her to Wales during the last Artes Mundi prize to do some studio visits and she has become something of a contact for Wales Arts International in Buenos Aires.


Quite directly this all links back to that residency I undertook in Krakow, in 2005 - my chance meeting with Janek Simon and the subsequent application we made to Visiting Arts for him to visit.

I do believe there's something of a model here that can be adapted for most cities. It's about the art school empowering its students to step out in to their city and do interesting things. To see a lack of activity as a gap to be filled. Whether we look at the artistic boom of Downtown Manhattan in the 80s, or the Washington punk scene of the same period that gave rise to Fugazi and Dischord Records, these were responses to nothing being there and being

able to test things and learn, slightly out of view. I'm proud to say that my second year students have just staged three public exhibitions in Worcester, and I've had all of them come to me individually and thank me for pushing them to do it, as they are so excited by the outcome and potential. Imagine that...

So the last thing I'd say, very genuinely, is if through my activities as an artist and as a lecturer, I can help facilitate opportunity for others and open up possibilities within a decentralized landscape, to practice as an artist or educator, then I feel that I'm doing my job properly.

35. Thank you.

A wide-angle photograph of a lush green cornfield stretching to the horizon. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow and casting long, soft shadows. The sky is a deep blue with wispy white clouds. The text 'If you build it, they will come' is overlaid in the center in a white, serif font. The first part is in a larger, bold font, and the second part is in a smaller, italicized font.

If you build it,
they will come

FIELD OF DREAMS



‘If you build it, they will come’



‘If you build it, he will come’





When Winston Churchill was asked to cut arts funding in favour of the war effort, he simply replied, “then what are we fighting for?”

‘If you build it, they will come’





United Kingdom

SCOTLAND

NORTHERN IRELAND

Ireland

Isle of Man

ENGLAND

WALES









SCOTLAND

United Kingdom

NORTHERN IRELAND

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Edinburgh

Manchester

London

Cardiff

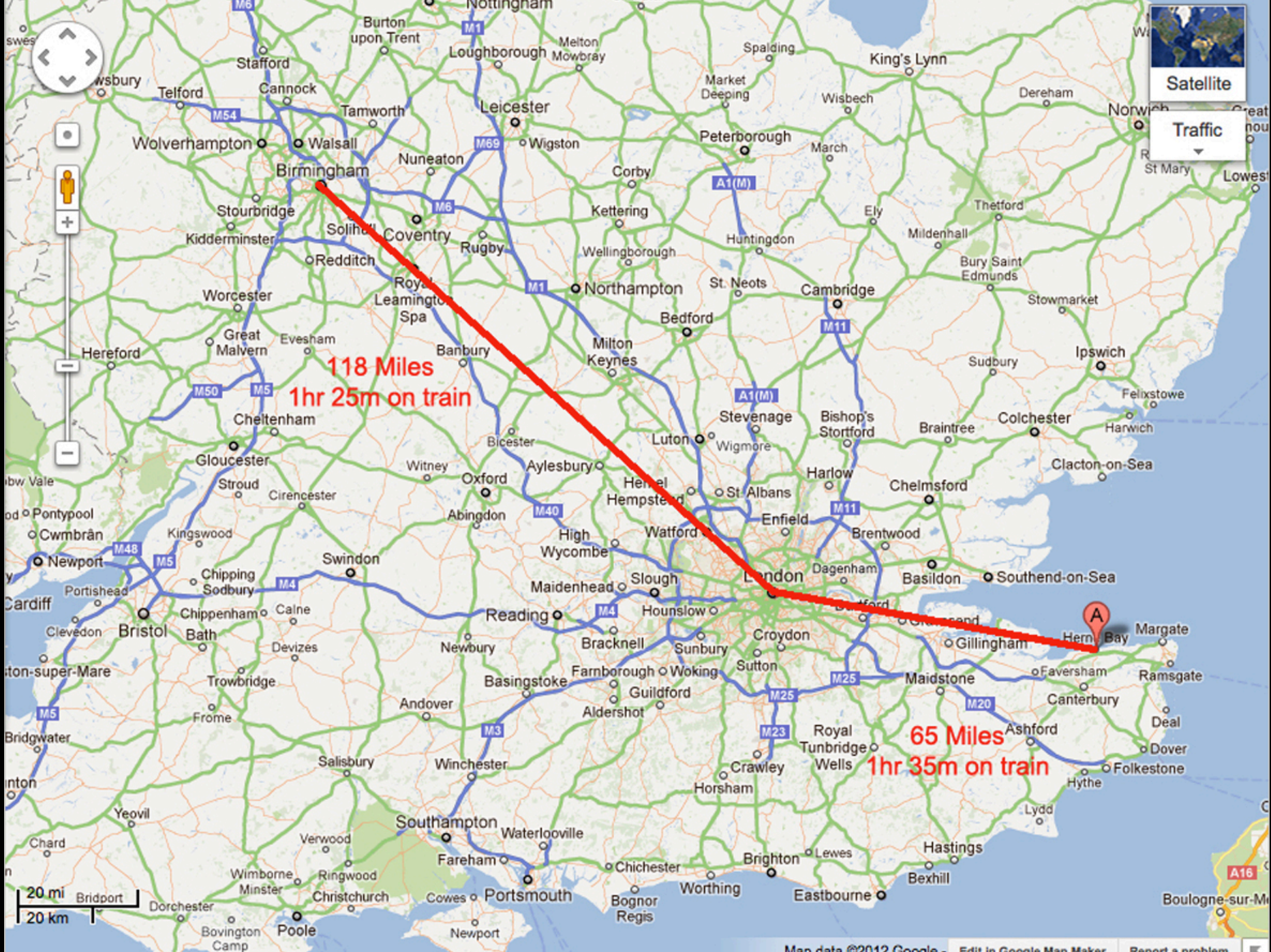
Google



Satellite

Traffic





118 Miles
1hr 25m on train

65 Miles
1hr 35m on train

Satellite

Traffic

20 mi
20 km



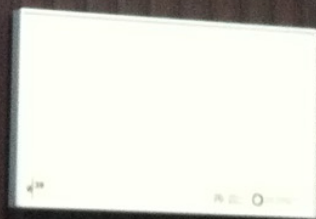




Robert Christy



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COUSINS!
STRIKE THE
FINAL
BLOW'S
OF
DARKART'S

UNITY
VE
GIV

OFFICE



THE MOOT

THE RENEW

CARLTON ROAD

ESSEX
LIVE
LIVE
LIVE

BEER
CRACK

COME
FLY

HAPPY
HOUR



BRITISH
ART
SHOW

6



BACKLIT

ALFRED HOUSE

BACKLIT

ASHLEY STREET

KB04 ZPZ







Nottingham
CONTEMPORARY



CHAPTER

FREE FOR ALL

FOREVER









GASWORKS

*East Africa & Finland
A Love Story*

GASWORKS EXHIBITIONS INTERNATIONAL RESIDENCIES & STUDIOS

EXHIBITION

REINVENTION BY ME
AN EXHIBITION BY MISSY COURT
10 June - 7 July 2011
Open weekdays: Tuesday 10 - 4pm

ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE

April - June 2011

Wendie Frenkelstein (Canada)
Yungang Chen (South Korea)
Wendie Kuhn (Brazil)
Sheng-Kuei Lin (Taiwan)
Rosauro Pereira and Inês de Azevedo (Portugal - Germany)

July - September 2011

Marisa Garcia (Spain)
Mark Piller (Germany)
Eugene Smith (Australia)
Piero Pignatelli (Italy)

PARTICIPATION PROGRAMME COMMISSION

Artists engage their students, fellow residents in a series of workshops with families from Michael Balfour, St John's Church and St Mark's Primary Schools in London.

RESIDENCY EVENT

A free programme that supports the development of an exhibition with a temporal, social or performative focus, including featuring live performance based residencies.

EVENTS

TALK: ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE

Tuesday 6 June, 6.30pm
Guests: Current residency artists introduce their work and discuss the projects they are working with in person.

RESIDENCY OPEN STUDIO RESIDING

Friday 23 June, 11.30am - 5pm & Saturday 24 June, 10 - 4pm
Residents invite members of the public, teachers, young people, families, older and disabled people to visit their studios by opening their studios to the public.

OPEN STUDIO TOUR

Friday 23 June, 8.30pm
Guests: Residency Programme leads an informal tour of the residency artist studios.

For more details about these and further events, please visit www.gasworks.org.uk

100, Abchurch Lane, London EC4N 3DF
Tel: 020 7403 3333 Fax: 020 7403 3334

www.gasworks.org.uk

URRA

RESIDENCIA DE ARTE EN BUENOS AIRES

ALFREDO MÁRQUEZ - Bolivia

ANDRÉS BEDOYA - Bolivia

ANNE SAUSER-HALL - Suiza

AXEL STRASCHNOY - Argentina

BERNARDO RAMALHO - Brasil

CAROLINA ILLANES - Chile

CHRISTIAN VINCK - Venezuela

CYNTHIA KAMPELMACHER - Argentina

ENDRE AALRUST - Noruega

THE SOUTHERN CROSS THE FAR EAST

FROM HELL HELL

THE TRISTAN DE CUNHA ISLAND THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA
SAVES FROM SAVES FROM

HELL HELL

THE MORNING LIGHT OF A CHILD THE EYES

SAVES FROM SAVES FROM

HELL HELL

THE BREAD AND WINE HOPPING

SAVES FROM SAVES FROM

HELL HELL

LORENCIA BOHTLINGK - Argentina

GELI GONZÁLEZ - Argentina

GUILLAUME CONSTANTIN - Francia

HALINA KLIEM - Alemania

MAKO ISHIZUKA - Japon

NIAMH McCANN - Irlanda

RAÚL FLORES - Argentina

S MARK GUBB - Reino Unido

TAMIR LICHTENBERG - Israel



That's all Folks!