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You Are the Journey: Public Art in Your Pocket -Essay

Original Citation

Barber, Claire (2009) You Are the Journey: Public Art in Your Pocket -Essay. In: Winchester School of Art Research Anthology. Winchester School of Art Research Anthology (1). Winchester Gallery Press, England, pp. 66-67. ISBN 9781873451618

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Claire Barber

You are the Journey:

Public Art in Your Pocket

Art Plus is an Arts Council England and SEEDA (South East England Development Agency) Award Scheme for Art in Public Places. Place Space and Identity 2 is a response to the social economic and environmental changes taking place in North Staffordshire and is a strategic initiative funded by Arts Council England West Midlands, Renew North Staffordshire, and Stoke City Council, and managed by B Arts.

www.placespaceidentity.net

A bus ticket may seem a rather small and throwaway space for public artwork. However it is the ticket's facility to reach so many individuals on a very immediate and human level during their journey that fascinates me. As a ticket is bought, handled, stuffed into a purse or back pocket it presents a discreet level of human intimacy that contrasts with the digital and mechanical functionality of the ticket as artefact.

You Are the Journey originated on the Hythe to Southampton Ferry Ten Journey. In collaboration with artist R.A. Webb and with support from an Arts Plus Award we redesigned the front of the ticket asking commuters to write a few words during their journey. The commuters' responses were then repositioned in the spaces where the tickets are clipped, creating an ephemeral poetry and weaving social patterns that were erased through a punch hole each day.

I was commissioned, in November 2008, to develop *You Are the Journey: North Staffordshire* for *Place Space and Identity II* and I am now in the process of executing the work. By posing questions on the reverse side of each bus ticket in the North Staffordshire region passengers will be enticed to text in responses to their journey. As Caroline Bassett puts it, images taken with their mobile phones become a form of witnessing, which I seek to harness, develop and reveal as public art, using the immediacy and transportability of text messaging to capture people's thoughts, insights and ideas at a particular moment in time.

The first batch of 367,000 bus tickets was released on 8th December 2008 on the First Group fleet of buses leaving the Hanley and Adderley Green depot, Stoke-on-Trent. Many of the texts received into my 'in box' were subsequently printed onto the back of bus tickets early in 2009; subliminal texts, subtly revealed through the front of the tickets, working within the economy of thin bus ticket paper and non-archival inks.