

Articulate Caribbean

Visit by Mary Bourne of Deveron Projects

Organised by Dr. Marsha Pearce with the Medulla Gallery, Port of Spain, Trinidad

With support from the British Council, Caribbean

8th-10th March 2017

Dr. Pearce had organised a programme of interesting and varied activity. On the first day I visited the University of the West Indies where I talked about the role of art in place-making, both from the point of view of my own public-realm art practice and from the point of view of the engaged practice of Deveron Projects. It was clear that, in common with many art students in many places, the idea of art beyond the gallery was challenging here, as were the notions of the participant/audience being a major player in the genesis of the art and the context affecting its meaning. There were a number of good questions after the talk and I also visited the studio to talk to a final year student.



While at the University we had a short ceremony to hang one of the peace flags made for Deveron Project's White Wood in Huntly, Scotland in a tree in the University grounds as a gesture of peace and friendship. It also served as a tangible example of engaged artwork and its ability to generate ideas and make connections.





8th of March was International Women's Day, an event given added urgency in Trinidad by an up-swelling of concern and outrage surrounding high levels of violence against women, and the political reaction to this violence. In the evening we ran a workshop at the Art 6 Gallery for women to express their feelings about this in a "Women's Cable" artwork. Each woman was given a "strand" on which to write her "cable" to the world. All the strands wound together to create an image of collective strength. Over 20 women attended ranging in age from high school pupils upwards, some travelling from outside the city to attend. This was an intense and moving workshop with the women all very committed to the artwork and their contributions. The final piece was very successful, reflecting the pent-up frustration and energy of the women involved.



The following day was taken up by preparations for the Articulate launch event in the evening at the Medulla Gallery. This was a well-organised and well-attended event. Dr. Pearce and I discussed Deveron Projects' socially engaged philosophy and working methodologies: *the town is the venue*; live where you work and work where you live; 50/50 and social consequence. I showed slides of a number of the organisation's projects and this generated considerable debate in the room about how the arts community should move forward in Trinidad, and how best to engage people with contemporary art. Deveron Projects' practice of identifying themes from the local community, rather than bringing them to the community, was of particular interest.



While in Trinidad, Dr. Pearce arranged for me to meet a number of artists and visit several workspaces, including shared spaces, Alice Yard and Grandison Lab, where interchange and cross-fertilisation of ideas are strongly encouraged. I was very impressed by the energy of the artists here and by the way that divisions between disciplines, art/design/craft/education, seem to be no barrier to collaboration and exchange. Indeed most artists had practices that encompassed more than one of these categories. In a world of very limited arts subsidy a mixed practice with some form of design supporting art seemed the way most people operated – somewhat in common with what is known as contemporary crofting in Scotland. It was also an inspiration to meet with individuals who are enabling so much to happen by supporting spaces such as the Medulla Gallery and Alice Yard, and useful to share knowledge with Annalee Davis and the other British Council sponsored visitors to Port of Spain at the time.



I am now back in Scotland and have been talking already with the Director of Deveron Projects about the artists I met and issues I encountered, and how they relate to our programme – a discussion we will continue in the near future. I am also in contact with some of the artists I met in Port of Spain, following up conversations we had during my visit. The visit may have been short, but I believe its influence will be long-running and I am very grateful indeed to all those involved, especially Dr. Pearce, and to the British Council for enabling international discussion and exchange such as this, something I believe to be more vital than ever in our rapidly changing world.