

JESSICA VOORSANGER
PECKHAM SPACE/PROJECT PROPOSAL
'Peckham Personalities'

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Jessica Voorsanger is an American artist living in London. She trained as a painter at the Rhode Island School of Design (BFA) in 1987 and later received her MA in Fine Art from Goldsmiths College (now part of London University) in 1993. She makes work exploring popular culture with a particular fascination with celebrity. She is particularly interested in the relationship between the fan and the celebrity. This is explored through obsession, souvenirs, sound and image. She uses a range of different media from performance, painting & installation to beadwork and mail art. She has had one person exhibitions in London, New York, Edinburgh, Turin and Berlin.

Often she explores performance and viewer participation within her projects. For the *How to Improve the World: 60 Years of the Arts Council Collection* exhibition at the Hayward Gallery she did her 'Impostors' and 'Fan-a-grams' performances. In 'Impostors' she dressed up as artists from the collection and interacted with the public, more specifically David Hockney, Francis Bacon & Henry Moore. And 'Fan-a-grams' is based on the idea of a telegram but instead of receiving a message the recipient receives a group of screaming fans demanding their autograph. She has shown at the Serpentine Gallery in the exhibition *Hearing Voices, Seeing Things*, has exhibited recently in Germany (Galerie 33-FON, Berlin and Kornhausen Gallerie, Aschaffenburg) as well as recently completing projects with New Art Gallery Walsall ('*Stage Struck*' as part of *Star Struck*), The ICA and Art on the Underground entitled '*Mystery Train*' and The Whitechapel Art Gallery as the first recipient of The Children's Gallery Commission in 2009.

OVERVIEW (HOW THE CONCEPT & PROCESS ADDRESS THE THEME OF IDENTITY)

'*Peckham Personalities*' will be an interactive exhibition that is an exciting new opportunity for the Peckham community to celebrate their diverse and historical identity in the creation of a social space where people can inhabit, have conversations and enjoy performances, even join in! The project will be in consultation with the local community to help steer it to bring together the diverse interests of the area. This is a new work that brings together aspects of my work but never this encompassing and exciting to celebrate Peckham.

The project will take on two parts; the first (exhibition), '*Peckham Personalities*', will be an interactive performance installation for viewers to experience the excitement of a live performance *as the performer* and celebrate Peckham's historical/famous residents through karaoke. It would also be a celebration of the performers themselves (both the audience *and* the celebrity they may be pretending to be). There will costumes and wigs available to become these celebrities with open mike sessions for the public to participate in the karaoke. The selection of the celebrities will come from the community focusing on Peckham. The 'karaoke Lounge' will bring visitors into Peckham Space to view, participate and hang out (drinking teas & coffees).

The second part of the project, '*Peckham Heroes*', will be a poster/postcard campaign celebrating the local heroes of Peckham (some of which will be the same as in the karaoke project), ranging from Robert Browning to "Del Boy" from *Only Fools and Horses*, Chris Eubank and Michael Caine. The posters would be displayed in the gallery as well as all over Peckham creating a dialogue outside of the gallery and bring an awareness of the project to the area.

Both of these projects will use the consultation period to research, formulate, select the celebrities featured and meet the community. This project will explore the identity of Peckham through the celebration of its current and historical inhabitants.

EXHIBITION PROPOSAL (INCLUDING HOW THE CONSULTATION WILL INFORM ARTWORK)

I. '*Peckham Personalities*' The gallery installation itself (The Karaoke Lounge) would be in the style of a nightclub. The lighting would be subdued, with disco lights and strobes. During the duration of the show, teas, coffees and soft drinks could be available to create a social atmosphere that the community would inhabit and remain in for longer durations than a standard gallery visit. This will create an environment for the art and local communities to enjoy, hopefully creating a repeat visit experience. The tea/drinks counter should always be open and available for visitors (possibly staffed by Camberwell Art College students?).

There will be a stage built into the gallery space to designate the 'performance area'. The stage will function as an important part of the installation as a boundary but also as an important journey that the participant must take. The step up to the stage is one that can hold a great deal of emotion from excitement, fear, anxiety and joy.

The music that will be used for the karaoke will all be pre-selected determined by the consultation phase of the project, the determination being local celebrities and celebrities that are inherently important to the local residents. The celebrities themselves may include important local figures, such as the "Lollypop Lady", the favourite newsagent or a historical/famous resident, i.e. Michael Caine. The songs will be well known and connected to specific celebrities all connected to Peckham (for example the song for Michael Caine may be "Alfie").

There will be costumes available for the viewing public to wear. The costumes will enable the participants to feel less inhibited, as they are no longer portraying 'themselves'. The costumes will also serve the function of celebrating the artists that the viewers will be portraying. There is an element of parody and humour involved in the selection of songs and costumes. The adulation of celebrity often takes the form of imitation. As mentioned above, the selection of the celebrities would be determined through the consultation process with the community focusing on Peckham residents (historical or current).

I have created installations that have used karaoke before and they are very successful in getting the viewer involved in the exhibition. (See examples at the end of the

proposal in the images section). This project is new and different because it not only uses the consultation period to get the community involved; it is primarily focused on Peckham itself. Another aspect that makes it new and different is the exciting inclusion of a refreshment area that will allow the visitors to inhabit the space and have conversations if they do not want to participate in the karaoke themselves. It will become a meeting point and central hub for Peckham, in a different way than the gallery itself will already be doing.

There will be a film constructed around the karaoke performances that will be running continuously on a Plasma screen during the exhibition. This will be filmed prior to the exhibition opening during a workshop session. This would enable the excitement of the ongoing event to continue when there weren't live performances taking place. We could also use live feeds to show events as they are happening on-line.

The costumes will be hanging on a clothes rack; the mikes will be in place as if the performers are currently taking a break. The visitors to the installation will be free to try on all of the costumes and go onto the stage at any time, although the live events will be restricted to the times that suit the gallery (as they will be noisy) but would ideally always be available for use. Assistance from gallery staff will be needed to oversee the costumes and reset the karaoke machine as needed.

Lastly as part of the décor there will be portraits painted (in oil) of all of the celebrities (local & historical) featured in the installation.

II. 'Peckham Heroes' This aspect of the project consists of the posters and postcards. They will primarily be of quotes taken from the community about whom they feel are their local heroes. The people described could be anyone from historical figures like King Henry I ranging to the characters of *Only Fools and Horses* and local people who help their communities, like well loved teachers, etc.

The posters would be fly-posted around the gallery but would also be distributed all over the Peckham area. The posters would serve as both an advertisement of the project, but also a celebration of the area and a way to have Peckham share its voice with its community in a positive way reinforcing its identity. We could also approach Art on The Underground to see if they would be interested in displaying some of the posters in the local tube stations. The number of posters produced would be limited to the budget available but postcards could also be produced on a larger scale and these could be available in the gallery for the visitors.

The longevity of the project will exist through the production of the posters and postcards, as these will continue to exist and be enjoyed long past the end of the exhibition and consultation periods. Ideally the longevity of the project would be seen through the positive reinforcing of the strengths and celebratory aspects within Peckham itself.

CONSULTATION (INCLUDING METHODOLOGY TO ENGAGE RESIDENTS AND OUTCOMES) & HOW THE PROJECT WILL REACH ITS RESIDENTS

There will be several workshops and events built into the programming for the consultation period (to learn more about Peckham, its residents and their concerns) and during the exhibition to encourage viewer participation and attendance.

The project will reach the residents of Peckham in several ways, initially through the consultation period and later through the poster campaign and events. The consultation period will consist of working with steering groups and meeting the residents. As well as hosting an interactive research project at the Summer Fete. The project will also have a strong presence in Peckham through the use of the poster campaign.

The Summer Fete will be a fantastic opportunity to be able to work with large numbers of community residents to quiz them on who their favourite local celebrities are. This is where the second component of the project, the poster/postcard quote research, will be generated. There will be handouts and games created to invite the Peckham community to be interviewed as to who they would like to celebrate in Peckham for "**Peckham Heroes**". We could also invite the visitors at the fete to get dressed up in costumes and have their photos taken (which they can take away) to give them a flavour of the future exhibition in 2011. The photos can be printed easily on a portable photo printer as long as there is access to electricity.

I created a project for the city of Hull, where residents were interviewed as to who their favourite famous resident had been. The responses were varied and unexpected ranging from *"I saw the bloke who won Stars in Their Eyes as Chris De Burgh in Sainsburys"* to *"Dick Turpin, highwayman, was reported to have been a regular at the Ferry Inn Pub in Brough, where he was finally arrested and sentenced to be hung in York after shooting his landlord's rooster!"* (See examples at the end).

These quotes were then made into posters and postcards and distributed around the city of Hull. It was a successful way of giving the project a visual presence around the city as well as to strengthen the awareness of their identity and bringing the community together. The "**Peckham Heroes**" project is new and different because it is so tightly linked to the '**Peckham Personalities**' project bringing Peckham together through singing, and positive social interaction. People may also have anecdotes that are specific to the neighbourhood like "The caretaker at Camberwell College found my keys, what a hero!"

PUBLIC PROGRAMME PROPOSAL (INCLUDING IDEAS FOR TALKS & EVENTS AS PART OF THE EXHIBITION AT PS)

Workshops

The workshops would incorporate game playing into a workshop environment. I have created workshops that incorporate game playing in the past that culminates in a collaborative artwork. For example photographs which could be taken of the residents to create fortune tellers (a folded paper game) and pinwheels (see example at the end).

The idea behind these collage projects would be that they are a way of making photographic collages of the residents/participants melding them together, literally; making a clear visual cohesion of diverse groups.

The ICA project consisted of taking photographs of the participants and creating a series of posters that were later on display at Charing Cross Station from December 2008 to May 2009. The photographs were spliced together based on the game "heads, bodies and legs". That project was about making transport accessible for young adults with special needs. The participants included the young adults, Charing Cross Station Underground Staff, ICA Staff and me. (See images at the end.)

There would also need to be a preliminary workshop where we filmed a karaoke session to make the film that would be playing continuously during the exhibition.

Events

1. The main event(s) would consist of open mike sessions where the public would be invited to perform with the karaoke for their friends and other visitors. These would be arranged with the Peckham Space staff to ascertain the most appropriate times. There would be an open mike session at the private view of the exhibition.

2. There would be an artist talk where the project would be explained in the context of my other projects and work. There would be a question and answer session at the end of it.

BUDGET

The budget is not set at this stage but the elements involved would be:

- Hire of stage/or use of existing stage
- Hire of karaoke system
- Hire of chairs and tables
- Hire/purchase of costumes & tablecloths
- Technical equipment (microphones, lighting equipment, etc.)
- Catering supplies (drinks, cups, etc)
- Making of compilation karaoke CDs
- Clothes rack & hangers
- Assorted workshop materials (paper, pens, access to a printer, etc)
- Printing of posters/postcards
- Filming/editing expenses
- Canvases/oil paint for portraits of featured Peckham Personalities

PREVIOUS WORK/IMAGES

Stage Struck, New Art Gallery Walsall, 2008



(Detail), Costumes



(Detail), Wigs & Accessories



(Detail), Stage with plasma screen



(Detail), Participants as Elvis & George Harrison

TV Studio, Whitechapel Gallery, Children's Gallery Commission, 2009



(Detail) Studio View



(Detail) Camera View



(Detail) Make-up area



(Detail) Wigs & Accessories

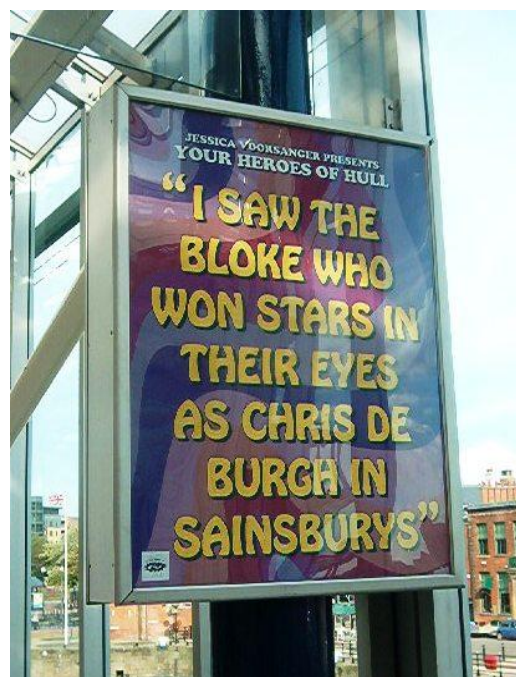


(Detail) Entrance, Portraits



Pinwheel Portrait example

Hull Heroes, Hull Time Based Arts, Illuminate (selected poster details), 2006



Mystery Train, Charing Cross Station & ICA (details from publication), 2008

