

Gallery: Wysing Arts Centre & Kettle's Yard

Filed under: Peer Led

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The Way to Cambournia

Circuit Cambridge collaborated with artist Rebecca Birch on *The Way to Cambournia*, a film made in Cambourne. The making of the film involved a series of interventions, requiring cooperation and encouraging contribution from the Cambourne community. The film was screened at an outdoor evening event in July 2014 in Cambourne.



During initial stages of *Circuit Cambridge's* formation, we had many discussions with the group around how to access new audiences through the opportunities being developed by the peer-led group. We talked about working to make Wysing and Kettle's Yard more accessible and less intimidating to our neighbours. After discussion of 'how' and 'why' and the challenges of Wysing's rural location, the group decided that it would be worth investigating delivering a project in and for Cambourne, a new town and Wysing's closest neighbour. After initial recesses the group identified that they would like to collaborate with an artist. The young people were involved in all stages of artist recruitment: writing the job description, shortlisting, and interviewing.

'Being part of the artist recruitment process gave me a valuable insight into the role played by an interviewer – an education that will be of practical use to me throughout my future. As well as learning about the expectations of an interviewer, I had the rare

opportunity of being to engage exciting artists in discussion about their work – which I found very enjoyable’ – Sam Spence, Circuit member

The group spent five weeks exploring Cambourne through mapping and engaging local residents in conversations, and they noticed and thought about thresholds in the town – for example between new urban spaces and existing countryside or between public and private spaces. The group became interested in the surreal nature of this new town that hasn't yet had time to evolve and grow, and has instead been created by planners. We noticed many blank spaces for which narratives have yet to be made. This curiosity about Cambourne led the group to decide to make a film about living in the town and through the filming process they explored creative ways of making contact with residents. The group researched, planned, filmed, interviewed, designed marketing, planned and hosted the screening.

‘One of the great things about the project has been that there were lots of opportunities for everyone to do lots of different things if they wanted’ – Rebecca Scott, Circuit member

Together with Rebecca Birch the group wrote a project proposal which was submitted to the learning and curatorial teams at Wysing & Kettle's Yard. It was important that the group understood that their project was treated in the same way as any others undertaken by the organisations. They identified the following aims of the project:

- To inspire curiosity and make a connection with the people of Cambourne and provide an opportunity for people to come together
- To strengthen relationships between Wysing, KY, and Cambourne
- To make the process interesting for the *Circuit* group, to enable individual personal development
- To challenge ourselves creatively to produce an interesting and inspiring event

‘The way to Cambournia was definitely a collaboration between myself and the group, with me facilitating around it. The project was led by lots of strong individuals, although who was around and when varied, so these strong voices changed throughout the project. The project was peer-led by ‘lots of voices’. It was challenging to work around ‘momentary consensus’ and we could have articulated when and why decisions were made in a clearer manner so that those who weren't around when those decisions were made understood why. It wasn't always clear how interested the group were in each others ideas – there could have been more work done with the group to get them to support tasks being done by individuals. It was definitely peer-led by consensus of who was around.’ – Rebecca Birch, The way to Cambournia artists, on how far she feels the project was peer-led

Key successes of *The way to Cambournia*:

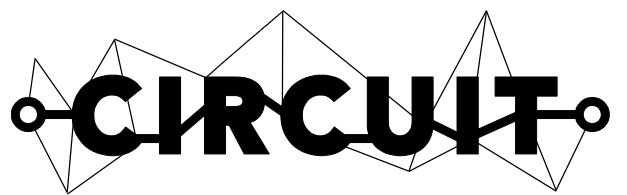
- Everyone agreed that they had gained skills in filmmaking – there were individuals who didn't realise they had a talent in this
- Individuals expressed that they had learnt to discuss and communicate ideas
- The research phase allowed the group to approach a project in a new way and it allowed them to explore Cambourne in a way they would not previously have considered
- Established relationships where previously we had none – new routes for future work in Cambourne and for engaging local young people through *Circuit*, and for disseminating knowledge
- Screening event: attracted 90 people including those from the community groups we worked with. The group felt proud on the night.
- Young people producing high quality culture that has been shared with wider audiences

'The highlight for me was seeing the impact the project had on individuals in the group. Working with them over several months meant that I saw their confidence grow and it was great to see individuals take a lead on specifics. I often felt it was a shared experience – that we were accomplishing something together. I felt useful to them individually.'

Key challenges of The way to Cambourne:

- Challenging to work on a long-term project that doesn't always involve the same people
- Managing many voices: creating an environment where everyone had the confidence to share their ideas, not just those with the loudest voices
- Couldn't always achieve what was needed as not enough people at each session
- Had to adapt ways of working throughout – often working closely with individuals. Rebecca felt the final outcome was better off for this. Rebecca felt useful to them individually
- Exam time and sickness time
- Coordinating between individuals in the group and also the community in Cambourne – often difficult to find a time that suited everyone
- Having to take steps backwards in order to bring the group up to speed during Wednesday sessions – i.e. it wasn't always the same individuals
- Broad ideas at the start – important to let them fly – going somewhere.
- There were bits of research that we could have commissioned others to do – other staff or other artists, or residents of Cambourne.
- More time at front end for planning
- More time at the start for getting to know individuals in the group – as they still didn't all know each other when they started working with Rebecca

'One of the worst parts of the whole project was the planning process because of how often we had to go over everything again!' – Lou Greenwell, Circuit member

The word "CIRCUIT" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letters are overlaid on a complex geometric pattern of thin black lines that form a series of interconnected triangles and polygons, resembling a circuit board or a network diagram. Small circles are placed at the ends of the horizontal lines that pass through the letters 'C' and 'T'.

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