

As it Comes

FOR THE PROJECT *AS IT COMES*, ARTIST **ALICE ANGUS** RESEARCHED THE TRADING HISTORY OF LANCASTER AND MET LOCAL PEOPLE AND TRADERS. THE INSPIRED NEW WORKS COMBINE DRAWING, EMBROIDERY AND DIGITAL PRINTING ON COTTON

In August 2010 I was commissioned by Mid Pennine Arts and Lancaster District Chamber of Commerce to create a work inspired by Lancaster's independent traders. I created *As It Comes*.

As I began to meet and draw in traders' places of work, we would talk about craft and knowledge, communities and friendships and the relationships they have with commodities, food, and people. Whilst I was drawing I came to be aware of the difference between the physical tools of the trade and the unspoken skills - the intangible assets. Those skills, the care and connection many traders had to local communities: whether selling fabric, tailoring a suit, fitting a floor, repairing tools, advising on paint, gutting fish, butchering meat or finding that single tiny screw when you didn't need a whole pack.

He'd go, 'Just a minute...' and he'd go in the back where he had hundreds of drawers and then he'd come out with it and you'd go, 'Thank you so much. How much?' and he'd go, '5 pence please.'

I looked at the tools people used in their shops, market stalls and workshops. There are some tools that almost everyone has a version of like scissors and Sellotape, computers and tills, and others that are highly specialist like a needle or sewing machine, a gilders brush, a mitre, a grinder or a filleting knife. But when you ask traders what the tools of their trade are it's not really obvious tools that matter, but the unspoken, intangible, invisible assets like knowledge, ability to talk to people, humour, honesty and trust.

'There'll be a shop full of people laughing their heads off cos of something we've said to one of the customers... it's an important part of business, you've got to bring out the sense of humour sometimes...(and) they trust us with our knowledge of fish, you've got to know where it has come from, how it was caught, how to cook it...'

Throughout I made drawings of people at work and in conversation, to try and understand more about their knowledge and how they use it and pass it on to other generations. As the project progressed I thought a lot about how the presence of local shops affects life in the community and the way informal things can happen around local shops and markets.

'You could go in and you could smell what kind of shop you were in. With your eyes closed you could tell what kind of place it was, the cobblers, the grocers, the coffee shop... When there were more independent shops you went in and you picked what you wanted, and how much you wanted, not all in packs that have to be sold within a certain length of time. There was more variety, you could pick and choose shops.'

Local shops sometimes foster a very human scale of vibrant life on streets and it is often the more personal, less regulated and more informal spaces like independent shops and markets that help connect us and our communities. In some ways they are social centers, meeting places, communication hubs and local networks. Independent shopkeepers help shape the city into a shared, flexible space, using the market, shop and pavement as a selling space, a meeting space, a space of conversation.

'It was absolutely phenomenal in the old market (before the fire) you couldn't walk through the aisles and get past people, there wasn't a supermarket. Lancaster itself, the town, was where all the food was, in the market and around about. It was so good to go to work there, it was really busy, people could be fresh all the time and you didn't overbuy what you wanted.'

There was a single floor Victorian market hall that tragically burned down in 1984, a new market was built and opened almost 10 years later, but it has been a controversial venture as its architecture is very different (on two floors, with steps up to most entrances and defined stalls rather than a flat and open plan) and its new position takes it away from the natural flow and movement of people through town. The market is still important as more than just a place to buy food.

'People will come and buy one or two slices of meat at a time cos they don't want to waste any money.... Its local producers selling to local retailers, the people who come in are regulars, they know the traders and it's more of a partnership than just a commercial transaction, they are not just coming to buy their meat off me, they are talking to me about their family, I'm talking to them about my family, community...there is a rapport between the customers and traders that you just can't get in a supermarket, and I think that is why there will always be a place for independent traders.'

Whilst independent traders face an uncertain future, the unique relationships these traders have with their customers, their skills and produce, seems more important than ever and is something many people value greatly.

'For everything we sell we provide a back up service, which isn't what many people do now'r days...but at the current time its very hard... Independent shops are going to be a thing of the past and I think everybody, once they are gone, is going to realise how important they were, but it's going to be too late.'

For the *As it Comes* project, Alice worked with historian Michael Winstanley and artist Caroline MacLennan. The project was commissioned by Mid Pennine Arts and Lancaster District Chamber of Commerce with The Storey Gallery and Lancaster University. Alice Angus is an artist and director of Proboscis.

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Snig

Angling for something better,
you know from the first
half-hearted tug you've caught a snig:
his zigzag capitulation, the certainty
he's taken both lob-worm and hook to gut,
that even new whelped he'll come out
a disappointment
exuding white lard as your grip melts,
that he'll gob mesenteries to the rag
you swaddle him with,
writhe a half-hitch, blood-knot,
figure of eight, make a garrotte
of his own weight as he twists the line.

Leave the old timers to snag
them on bent shed nails,
flay them with pliers,
rip away the leathery sheaths of their
impossibly glued skins,
souse them for days until they can
suck the cartilage clean.

Unless you like the odour of slack water,
the acid taste of vinegar,
disgorge him,
put a knife through his spine
sling him back.

Ron Scowcroft

Frog

Frogs, opened up at the same angle, breast
the dark, gleam in the sweet rain and bounce
up, on from their brief pause, and then again
together, focused; it is unison -
the road is just their landing place, a launch,
and crosses as an incident their journeys.

For they are new and carefully equipped
with all their purposes will need. They have
somewhere to go, so many of them, now.

None of the drivers know this.
No one swerves.

Iris Woodford



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