

## 'The role of creative dialogue in fostering compassion within and across communities'

**Bobby Lloyd and Sally Labern**

**Their presentation explores the particular role of a Twitter live art writing project and parallel printmaking project in creating dialogue and 'communities of imagination', fostering compassion within and across communities.**

'In today's shifting political, economic, and ecological landscape, the need for compassion has never been greater - compassion understood as mutual interdependence, knowledge of self and others, and concern for human flourishing. This kind of compassion requires seeking to know all aspects of human reality, being open to truths beyond our everyday experience and embedded in it. Artists often awaken compassion most profoundly. They form our imaginations such that we can envision our interconnectedness in ways that mere didacticism cannot achieve.'" *Compassion exhibition text*, The Institute of Art, Religion and Social Justice, New York, 2010. [www.artreligionandsocialjustice.com](http://www.artreligionandsocialjustice.com)

**the drawing shed** is led by visual artists Sally Labern and Bobby Lloyd. Labern+Lloyd practice both collaboratively and individually while Bobby Lloyd is also an art therapist and Sally Labern is studying for her practice-led professional Doctorate in Fine Art at University of East London. Their work uses diverse media and engages with issues of resilience, resistance, commonality and displacement. Both artists explore ideas that interrogate 'the edges' of (often contested) places and communities. Using mobile studios **the drawing shed** delivers socially engaged or 'dialogical' arts projects, while both artists also respond as individuals and in collaboration to commission briefs for site specific and other work that extends their ideas and practice. Funding has come largely from Arts Council England (ACE) in addition to local council ward funds and charitable trusts.

**the drawing shed** mobiles were established in 2009/10/11 as an artist-led resource, they form a central platform for Labern+Lloyd's creative practice and are at the heart of **the drawing shed**. These three mobile studios – the drawing shed, ClayOven and PrintBike - live in **the drawing shed's** three garages on The Drive housing estate E17, from where the artists currently run socially engaged projects both on the local estates, at Forest YMCA and in settings across London. Through these mobile projects **the drawing shed** is able to go to where people are rather than waiting for them to arrive, also using online tools, such as Twitter, where and when it fits.

### **Social engagement**

In their socially engaged practice, Labern+Lloyd have worked together for the past few years, as well as on autonomous practice for the past two decades in East London and beyond, working with communities experiencing high levels of social exclusion. They often develop long-term relationships with individuals which allow complex and rich collaborations to emerge as trust develops. Integral to their work is a strong focus on developing dialogue and celebrating difference through the visual arts.

As part of the ACE Be Creative Be Well (BCBW) Well London programme in E17, 2009-11, **the drawing shed** took a strategic community development role working alongside University of East London (UEL) and London Sustainability Exchange to develop catalytic projects and access to training that could support behaviour changes for local residents. The resulting real changes in the well-being of individuals created the foundations for community-led projects by a 'Delivery Team' of residents who then set up a new community group ("...Ask Freda") to continue and sustain this grassroots development. **the drawing shed** wove creativity and well-being through a community cohesion approach to supporting a healthier community - at its centre offering as well as co-producing, contemporary arts projects.

## Signage and Twitter dialogues

For the past three years, Labern+Lloyd have used the existing signage that looms large and loudly punctuates the two estates, creating screen-printed text/visual posters with participants, developing skills of local people to forge deeper connections with their neighbours. These temporary Twitter-based 'conversations' in the public spaces on the estates (separated by a wide road) change their tempo and shift them into 'common' space with Labern+Lloyd as artists negotiating the content of the posters as they are made, and working with residents – children, teenagers and adults – 'to drag the poetic through the every day'.

More recently, Labern+Lloyd have set up a Twitter live art writing project for adults on the estates in developing workshops using Twitter both on the page and in the ether. This has brought extraordinary results in terms of changes in residents' relationship with their own and other's writing, their tolerance and acceptance of cultural difference and their capacity to enter into an imaginative dialogical space with others.

Lloyd+Labern work with two male artists on these projects, artist-printmaker Joseph Kopiel and poet Jacob Sam-La Rose. A public Twitter writing performance has further extended this space beyond the estates and into the ether where others have been able to join the **PeopleLikeUs** Collective in writing to the hash-tag **#bestow** during the recent E17 Art Trail, September 2012.

## Management and Partners

**the drawing shed** is an artist-led fully constituted arts organisation, set up in 2009 and managed by a rigorous board. **the drawing shed** has worked with diverse partners including: Well London with the Institute of Health and Human Development at University of East London (UEL) and London Sustainability Exchange; Arts Council England (ACE); Goldsmiths College, University of London; Forest YMCA; Allies and Morrison; Dohaland; University of Qatar; Pentonville Prison; BAAT; A New Direction; Local Authorities; primary and secondary schools, including Walthamstow School for Girls; Walthamstow International Film Festival and E17 Art Trail; New Work Network; London Arts and Health Forum (LAHF); Live Art Development Agency; Studio Polpo; Immediate Theatre; Proboscis and The Campaign for Drawing (Big Draw national award winners 2009), and most recently in 2012, with Heart in the Community (Public Health / Social Action for Health), the Pakistani Community Forum, and Well London Phase Two/UEL.

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