

## CRAFTIVISM: The art of co-production

The participative exhibition 'Craftivism' at Arnolfini in Bristol involved projects created through collaborative processes of co-production between artists and communities which developed over periods from one week to three months. A new version of 'bau-Stelle' was produced by Austrian artists Christine + Irene Hohenbuchler and the **Young Arnolfini Artists Collective (YAAC)**, a group of ten young people of 17 years and upwards. They worked in the gallery over a week to create colourful wall paintings before installing the sculpture: wooden



bau-Stelle, Christine + Irene Hohenbuchler + Young Arnolfini Artists Collective (YAAC), 2009, Craftivism at Arnolfini.

elements like components of an oversized erector set which visitors were invited to build and re-build, again and again over the duration of the exhibition. The wall paintings and rugs on the floor, colour coded to look like a play area, structured and tied the space together. 'Anti-Factory Bristol' by San Francisco based artist **Stephanie Syjuco** functioned as a workspace for visitors to make a limited edition fashion line of hoodie-scarves and shopper bags from repurposed clothing, raising issues of global trade and labour relations. Local activist group Labour Behind the Label animated the



*Anti-Factory Bristol*, Stephanie Syjuco + Labour Behind the Label, 2009, *Craftivism* at Arnolfini.

space with discussions on ethical fashion and living wages for garment workers. Glasgow-based artist **Mandy McIntosh** and members of the West Country Branch of the International Guild of Knot Tyers worked in the gallery over nine days to produce 'Extended Family', a cluster of play, sitting and hammock objects that provided a social space and craft library.

Four 'Craftivism' projects were developed out of Arnolfini, in different local communities: 'Handmade Hero', by artist Rhiannon Chaloner and four local pro-style wrestlers; 'CASSAVA' by artist **Gloria Ojulari Sule** and an intergenerational group of eleven women with Full Circle - St Paul's Youth and Family Centre; 'Salon Bench Knowle West' by artist **Trevor Pitt** and twenty four local knitters with Knowle West Media Centre; and 'DIY Shades of Bristol' by artist **Clare Thornton** and sixty local residents. When subsequently re-contextualised to the galleries at Arnolfini, visitors continued to

animate all the projects and produce items to take away and use.

The exhibition sought to shift visitor's expectations of crafting and activism. A number of software (art) projects were included initiated by Netherlands-based artist-programmers. These included '/mode + v noise' produced by **GOTO10** and ten workshop members who created software sound synthesisers and internet chat bots to provide an interactive sound platform for the gallery and 'unCraftivism', initiated by **Rui Guerra**, an un-curated and self-organised weekend open platform co-ordinated through an online wiki.

For me a highlight of this project was when all the different communities who had co-produced work came together at the exhibition preview. Within the context of Arnolfini, a key interest of 'Craftivism' was to shift the focus of the white cube away from the monologue of the artist and institutional voice towards dialogue and meaning being a social collective activity.

**Written by Zoë Shearman , curator of *Craftivism*.**

*Zoë Shearman is director of RELATIONAL, a Bristol-based contemporary art commissioning agency that works with artists on the production and presentation of context-led, socially engaged and participatory projects.*

*Craftivism was developed with the support of a Crafts Council Spark Plug Curator Award. The dialogues it stimulated around craft and activism, participation, and the digital interface, in addition to other themes, will be explored in a new publication scheduled to be launched in late 2010 by Crafts Council, researched and edited by Dr. Ele Carpenter (Open Source Embroidery).*

**Find out more:**

- <http://craftivism.net>
- <http://arnolfini.org.uk>
- <http://relational.org.uk>



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