

Robert Jarvis was one of eight artists I invited to participate in 'Paradise Revealed: re-animation of place', a two site project featuring artists' interventions in the rural and urban environments of Dover District. The project ran in Pines Garden, St Margaret's Bay and parking levels 5 & 6, The Charlton Shopping Centre, Dover from 15 May – 13 July 2008.

Paradise Revealed was funded by Arts Council England, South East, Dover District Council, Kent County Council, Dover Town Council, The Bay Trust with in-kind support from Targetfollow, The Charlton Shopping Centre Management, Cloke Scaffolding Dover and The Bay Trust.

Robert Jarvis is an artist, musician and composer based in Faversham who works in the UK and internationally. He defines himself as a sound artist with an active interest in sense of place but from an acoustic perspective. His first reaction on visiting the car park was that it was an acoustically unpleasant space and spent some time researching various propositions to change this. His solution was straightforward - to introduce a non-indigenous sound – that of a male nightingale calling for a mate.

Jarvis's intent was to change and enhance this functional complex by introducing an intriguing sound which brought life into the space. The source of the sound was not apparent as the single speaker was located on an overhead steel beam. The nightingale's call could be heard on the lower car park levels, breaking through the noise of the resident pigeons and the seagulls landing on the roof.

The reactions of The Charlton Centre Management team and Targetfollow's portfolio manager, Jeremy Aldous were immediately positive. Eric Grey, centre manager who heard the sound piece on a daily basis was adamant that Nightingale should stay. He said, "What with the sound of the river running alongside the car park, Robert's piece gives the soothing feeling of the countryside. It gives that relaxed feeling as people try to see where the nightingale is".

Sarah Cannell, the then Arts Development Manager for Targetfollow met with Robert Jarvis to hear the work and discuss the possibilities of Targetfollow's purchase of Nightingale for a permanent installation in the Dover car park. This was proposed to the head office in Norwich and the work was purchased in August 2008. Initially Eric Grey had hoped to relocate Nightingale to level 4 but this was not possible due to the building's structure. Jarvis increased the volume and adapted the technology to ensure the practicalities of running the work on a daily basis. To date, Dover's Charlton Shopping Centre's car park is the only site to have an artist's sound work located in the District's public realm.

Nightingale is both a simple and subtle way to have a significant impact on the public realm. It does change the immediate environment, creating a sense of welcome and safety. Asked why Targetfollow wanted to keep the piece, Eric Grey said, "Targetfollow bought the piece as it helps to make members of the public feel a little more comfortable when parking in the car park as we like them to do".

In terms of promoting community cohesion, Nightingale has created an on-going connection between Targetfollow, the Charlton Centre Management team, the car park and the artistic community. The management team has taken ownership of the work, Tina Doyle, admin assistant commented "We like it being here, a lot of people comment on it".

Christine Gist
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