

Bromford Dreams Graffiti Project

An overview of the Bromford Dreams Graffiti Spirituality project.

For more information please visit the projects webpage: www.birmingham/bromforddreams (<http://www.birmingham/bromforddreams>)

Duration: 1.22 mins

CS: Chris Shannahan

MA: Mohammed Ali

PW: Paul Wright

CS: The Bromford Dreams Graffiti Spirituality Project has been an exciting partnership between the University of Birmingham, the Worth Unlimited youth organisation, the Muslim graffiti artist Mohammed Ali and Arts council England. It's a project that came to the end, and forms the culmination of my eighteen-month research project on the Bromford estate, working alongside unemployed young men to think about how their experience of social exclusion affects the way they talk and think about spirituality.

MA: we've been planning for a while to bring one of these mural cube projects to the city. I've painted a lot of similar projects, these cubes in fact, which has been an extension of my mural projects where I'm painting the side of a building, a flat surface, which evolved into these cube structures where the arts isn't flat, rather you engage with it whilst circling it and spinning around it and it unravels as you walk.

PW: The cube is basically the end of the project. What we were wanting to do was give a fantastic opportunity for young people to express themselves – to have a look at their dreams, their identity, their struggles – something that was real, not something that was fake or just focussed on the positives – something that meant something to them.

MA: It makes perfect sense to be bringing this into this neighbourhood. For me it's not about preaching to the converted – it's about working with young people – people who need to use different ways of expression – this being the visual arts and public art being that expression of them being heard. Their art being an expression of themselves.

CS: We've given them the opportunity to raise their voice, to weave their dreams onto the Bromford Dreams cube. The story that they've told is disturbing, it's challenging, but it's also uplifting and very thought-provoking.

MA: There is imagery depicted within the cube that came over a period of a week engaging with young people. Talking, engaging and event travelling and eating together. It was a unique experience that we delivered for the young people. During that week we took out some of those challenging subject matters, that for some might be difficult to comprehend or appreciate. It was important that the mural really spoke about certain truths for the young people, certain realities for them and didn't censor them in any way. I didn't push them in any way towards what might be comfortable for me as an artist or for the rest of the community – it really was their voice. So there was imagery that was difficult and powerful and disturbing maybe, but this is their reality.

If you travel around the cube you will probably see, actually there's different moods – it's like a mood-cube if you like – in that as you travel around it there's a story to it, a narrative. You might see the angry expression but then you might see a very spiritual and almost sacred element to the cube.

CS: I hope this Bromford Dreams cube will be on tour, not least coming to the University itself before coming back home to the Bromford. The story is just beginning.

MA: When a mural is painted in one location where it might stay there for the next five to ten years – if we'd painted on the side of one of these tower-blocks for example – I think the mural, the art, really speaks to a different audience. It takes on a different dimension in a way. As opposed to something like this which is mobile and moves to a different space. We had to bear in mind when we designed this – who is the viewer? Where will it be seen? These are different dynamics to something that may be based here, on a permanent location, speaking to the people in this space.

The cube going to different locations and different parts of the town, definitely takes the voice of the young people to different spaces where they may not have been heard.

CS: It's been a real privilege to be part of this project and a really important expression of how the University can engage seriously and in-depth with grass-roots communities, to the benefit of the community and to the benefit of the University.