

Plymouth based artist Scott Daniels graduated with a Fine Art degree in 2008 from University College Falmouth, since then he has been developing his practice in Plymouth and working on his first solo exhibition '*Co.Lab*'. Scott's work seeks to involve his audience in an on-going creative process where the installation builds and changes through the direct involvement and cooperation of the public.

In discussion with Ali Donkin the artist looks back at the development and inspirations behind '*Co.Lab*'.

Q: '*Co.Lab*' is the title for your first solo exhibition. The title seems to be a conjunction of different words; can you explain where the title comes from?

A: That's right, the ideas behind the exhibition are all in the name. The title is made up of three words really. Company/Cooperation, meaning a collection of people who need to work together, in order for the installation to work and Lab, as the space can be seen as a place for people to experiment and be creative with the installation. '*Co.Lab*' also looks and sounds like a shortened version of the word Collaboration; which also links back to the notion of people working together.

Q: One of the works you have built for '*Co.Lab*' is a '*Shredder Piece*', where did the initial idea for this piece come from?

A: The shredder piece is a development on a combination of pieces I worked on whilst at Art College. '*Shredder Piece 2*' which used a cross-cut shredder coupled with a fan, the machine would activate when people walked through the door of the installation space. This is where I first introduced the broom as a tool for people to draw with or tidy the tiny pieces of paper. I liked the mischief involved because, if someone had spent a long time 'drawing' in the space, when they left the room, or someone else came in, the reactivation of the machine would ruin the drawing.

The cross-cut shredder makes quite a mess and that is what helps emphasize the element of responsibility. It's a fun process to watch and be part of but consequently there is a mass wastage of material and a lot of mess is generated, someone else will have to clear it up. The broom gives participants the chance to make up for this, either by tidying up, or by making use of the wasted material.

The floor pads that control this new shredding machine come from '*Copoperation*', the installation for my degree show at Falmouth. This was an interactive contraption that popped balloons. In this instance the device was wired to a set of floor pads, two of the pads had switches in, so the machine only worked when the right number of people stood on the correct floor pads. People had to cooperate to get a balloon to pop, hence the title *co - pop - eration*! Complete strangers would end up working together to figure out the puzzle of which floor pads to stand on.

Q: How have you adapted or developed those early concepts for 'Co.Lab'?

A: The '*Shredder Piece*' in this new show is activated via wireless floor pads, which, again, require two or more people to work together to complete the circuit. Because they are wireless they are not at all fixed to any particular spot. I have been able to set some Spatial Design students the brief to come up with different ways of arranging the floor pads, so the 'puzzle' is likely to change through the course of the exhibition.

To feed the shredder, I am using pages from biographies bought at car boot sales and from charity shops. I have acquired biographies from people such as Katie Price, Paul O'Grady, the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru and Helen Sharman, Britain's first astronaut. Whilst going through the machine, random biography pages become shredded and then scattered around the space via a powerful fan.

There are different calibres of celebrity amongst the biographies I have collected. This makes it all the more interesting to see the fragments of these stories mixing on the floor, being trodden on or blown around the space. Due to the fact that people in the installation have to work together to get the full experience of it; people who have never met may end up working together. In that respect you can get different life stories mixing together in person as well as on shredded pieces of paper.

Oh, yeah, I have included a broom again, so people can make the most of the mess they are partly responsible for creating. People may feel compelled to 'tidy' the space others may 'draw' by pushing the paper around on the floor.

For '*Co.Lab*', people can also take 'samples' of the shredded biographies and be creative with what they collect.

Q: And that's what the 'Sample Bags' are for?

A: Yes, it's so that participants have a memento but also another chance to be part of the creative process. It means as well, that people can take part privately at home without feeling self-conscious. People can create what I call 'Random Biographies', where they piece together sentences from random snippets of shredded biography to form fragments of fictitious new life stories.

Q: The '*Sticker Sculptures*' are the second part of the installation. How will those work and why stickers?

A: There will be a selection of wooden sculptures placed around the gallery. Each one will have a dispenser of coloured stickers next to it. People are invited to cover the sculptures in the stickers. They therefore have some creative input into the final aesthetics of the sculptures, by adding texture, pattern and colour. They are involved directly in creating the finished piece. If you go to the Tate at St.Ives during the summer months you will often see lampposts directly outside the Tate covered in little Tate stickers. And of course you see sticker bombing a lot wherever you go, so I guess they are the main underlying influences. Stickers are also quick, clean and easy to use so they lend themselves nicely to participatory tasks such as this.

Q: Where did the interest in interactive art first spring from?

A: During my second year of university I started creating kinetic installations, inspired by Jean Tinguely and Rebecca Horn. At that stage my installations were just passive and automated by timer switches. I then became more interested in cause and effect; this interest came directly from the film '*The Way Things Go*' by Fischli and Weiss. It's all about, inputs, outputs and energy transfer, both industrial and biological. Each action has a consequence. Chris Burden's installation '*Samson*' was another influence in changing from solely kinetic to interactive works. It involved a huge electric jack connected to a turnstile. As people entered the gallery they had to pass through the turnstile, thus causing the jack to press against the gallery walls. Theoretically people were partly responsible for the degradation of the structure of the building.

I hadn't thought about it until the other day but Michael Landy's '*Scrapheap Services*' is definitely relevant to my current process of shredding biographies. That was the installation where he portrayed a fictitious service specifically for the removal of people from society that were considered to be pests. He suggested that some sort of people shredding machine would be used and filled the space with thousands of people-shaped paper cut outs.

More recently I have been drawn to Phoebe Washburn's work, which often uses living materials. I particularly like '*Regulated Fool's Milk Meadow*', for this she built a factory within in the Deutsche Guggenheim, it comprised of a hugely complex assembly line for producing trays of grass, that were used to clad the roof of the installation. I like how it goes against the whole industrial ethos. It's really ironic how the product is grass, one of the planet's most abundant plant species.

Q: Your contraption for 'Co.Lab' also shows a liking to industrial machinery. Was this an inspiration for the aesthetics of the 'Shredder Piece'?

A: I have had a long-term interest with machinery and the whole utilitarian industrial aesthetic. I actually work in a factory now, and that's definitely amplified these interests. In the factory its all about flow and speed. The factory machinery is all exactly the shape it needs to be. Spatially, machines also 'cut' through many different angles and levels of the factory space. Their form follows their function.

Q: Yet your work doesn't use the materials that factory machinery would do?

A: No, that's a good point, I use a lot of wood and timber mainly because its very accessible to me, much more so than stainless steel. I also like the combination of the archaic use of wood to build contraptions that resemble contemporary machinery. I don't tend to varnish or paint the things I build and at Art College I got told that my contraptions looked like prototypes for inventions. I liked that interpretation and I suppose they are in some way.

Q: What is it about interactive art that particularly interests you?

A: I like that to some extent it is quite exclusive, you have to be there to experience it properly. But on the other hand interactive and participatory artworks can be, on the whole, more accessible to people. When an artwork is concerned with providing the viewer with a more direct, tactile and sensory experience, I think the concept behind the work is made more accessible to a wider demographic of people. People can draw their own conclusions. Their understanding can be on a more personal level than through a solely academic understanding. I am particularly into artworks that instigate interactions with and between people, maybe giving them a role to play.

Q: If this piece didn't have an interactive aspect do you think it would still work?

A: People would see something had taken place, just without actually instigating or experiencing any of the processes. In that case I would have to employ some kind of narrative and the artwork would be about something else all together; like in the Michael Landy piece I mentioned. The principle behind my recent installations is that they only work when people are present and will participate.

So to answer the question, my installations can be viewed and understood without the interactive element but for me they are not complete without participants.

Q: Do you think the humour of the piece makes it more effective and memorable?

A: I think it's a combination of humour and people's willingness to take part. Humour can bring people together and it also helps people to overcome inhibitions stopping them from participating. Participation or merely being there gives a first hand, tactile and sensory experience of any artwork. That is what makes anything a lot more thought provoking and memorable.

Q: Is the element of fun an important aspect to this installation then?

A: Definitely, because people need to engage with each other and use logic to work out the puzzle. People will work with strangers more readily in a less daunting situation and where they are less likely to feel judged by others. Although my installations use trivial contraptions and processes, there are deeper connotations of waste and social responsibility. Each participant can influence the input and experiences of the other participants. The 'Co.Lab' installation has to be activated in a certain sequence for everything to work. There is a sort of kitsch '*Crystal Maze*' element to my latest installation pieces which people do find funny.

Part of the fun for people is working it out, part of the fun for me is watching people work it out!