

Dragon of Profit and Private Ownership / Worker's Maypole

Walker and Bromwich





Image: film still from: *A Plea for Common Ownership* – recreating of banner with the community in Ashington, March 2017

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STATEMENT

The Dragon of Profit and Private Ownership & The Worker's Maypole: Participatory Projects **inspired by Ashington Miners' Union Banner**

2016 – 2018

Two interlinked projects by artist duo Walker & Bromwich originated in an Arts Council England Creative People and Places scheme, which aimed to increase arts engagement in Northumberland. The resulting artworks, including films, participatory performances and public sculpture, were presented in different contexts: in Ashington, at the Edinburgh Arts Festival and De Montfort University Gallery in Leicester. One strand of the research culminated in a monumental public sculpture that became a focal point of *The Great Exhibition of the North* in Newcastle in 2018.

Walker & Bromwich collaborated with the ex-coal mining community of Ashington to make a film inspired by a banner commissioned by the local branch of the miner's union in 1924. The banner, made for the campaign supporting the nationalisation of the mining industry, draws on mythical archetypes and socialist visual tropes to represent the values of the Mining Federation of Great Britain and the international Socialist Movement. One side depicts a miner as a modern-day St George, slaying 'The Dragon of Profit', while the other is a reworking of Walter Crane's illustration, *The Worker's Maypole* (1894).

The film, *A Plea for Common Ownership*, restaged the banner's socialist imagery with people from Ashington to examine its usefulness in contemporary contexts. *The Dragon* was reconfigured as a second performance in collaboration with people from Wester Hailes in Edinburgh, a community similarly impacted by post-industrialisation. The film and performances provided a means through which these communities could re-imagine their relationship to work, profit and labour. Finally, Walker & Bromwich appropriated Grey's Monument in the centre of Newcastle to re-present Crane's *Maypole* as a public sculpture in a civic space used for protest and debate. In so doing, Walker & Bromwich's work raises wider questions about group dynamics, activism and authorship.

ASHINGTON MINEWORKERS' BANNER



Image: Ashington Mineworkers' Banner



Image: Ashington Mineworkers' Banner

OUTPUTS

1. Participatory Performances

- i. The Dragon of Profit and Private Ownership* (26 April – 26 September 2017). A participatory art project devised and produced by Walker and Bromwich in collaboration with the people and community of Ashington, Northumberland, leading to a series of filmed performances in the town.
- ii. By Leaves we Live... Not by the Jingling of our Coins.* A re-framing and re-staging of the Ashington performance, produced with pupils of Canal View Primary School, Wester Hailes, and performers Tam Dean Burn, Francis Thorburn and Rhys Trimble, and dancers from the University of Edinburgh's dance company, Danns-ed. Enacted on the Royal Mile Edinburgh, 27 July 2017 as part of Edinburgh Art Festival 2017.
- iii. By Leaves we Live... Not by the Jingling of our Coins* (10 March 2018) At De Montfort University Gallery, featuring a cast and performers from the Gallery Friends.

2. Film

- i. A Plea for Common Ownership.* A 38-minute film by Walker and Bromwich, co-produced with Culture Colony Vision, commissioned by Buddleia Projects. First screened on 26 September 2017 at Ashington YMCA. Later screenings include at the Tyneside Cinema, Newcastle, 13 August 2018, as part of the Great Exhibition of the North.

<https://vimeo.com/250532871>

Also available as a separate file on this USB

OUTPUTS

1. Participatory Performances

The Dragon of Profit and Private Ownership, 26 April – 26 September 2017. Ashington, Northumberland.

Walker & Bromwich re-staged the historical socialist imagery taken from the Ashington Miners' Union Banner as tableaux and performances with community participants from local social and welfare groups. Following in the tradition of co-authorship of trade union banners, the artists co-produced artworks working with the community, including an inflatable sculpture of 'The Dragon of Profit' and a maypole derived from Walter Crane's illustration. The collective act of making and performing provoked public discussion and debate around the socialist principles inscribed on the maypole's ribbons, and further reflection on the relevance of those values for the community today

The commission formed part of 'bait', an Arts Council England's Creative People and Places scheme supporting people to take the lead in choosing, creating and participating in art experiences in the places where they live, in this instance an area once at the centre of the coal mining industry and now characterised by social and economic deprivation since the closure of the pits in the 1980s.

The original banner was commissioned in 1924 by the Ashington Federation of Mineworkers with miners designing their banner by selecting from a catalogue from the George Tutill Studios in London, of images representing the aims and values of the Socialist Movement (Edwards, H. 1997. *Follow the Banner: an illustrated catalogue of the Northumberland Miners' Banners*). Typically these images were often adaptations of mythical archetypes. In this instance, one side of the banner depicts a miner as a modern-day St George slaying the 'Dragon of Profit', and the other a reworking of Walter Crane's illustration, *The Worker's Maypole* (1894). The socialist imagery challenges capitalist power structures as part of the campaign calling for the nationalisation of the mining industry.



Image: film still from *A Plea for Common Ownership*. Recreating of banner with the community in Ashington, March 2017

OUTPUTS

2. Participatory Performances



Video: *By Leaves we Live... Not by the Jingling of our Coins*. The Royal Mile, Edinburgh, 27 July 2017
Part of Edinburgh Art Festival 2017

OUTPUTS

2. Participatory Performances

By Leaves we Live... Not by the Jingling of our Coins. The Royal Mile, Edinburgh, 27 July 2017 as part of Edinburgh Art Festival 2017.

In 2017, as one of four contemporary commissions, Walker & Bromwich were invited to respond to the Edinburgh Art Festival's theme exploring the legacy of Patrick Geddes, the Edinburgh town planner, social activist and environmentalist, and the centenary of his manifesto *'The Making of the Future'* (1917). In this publication, Geddes laid out his radical vision for a holistic society in which "Art and Industry, Education and Health, Morals and Business must ... advance in unison".

Their response comprised a performance in the form of a procession that launched the Festival, drawing on folk pageants and Geddes' own 'masques of learning', as well as an exhibition documenting the development of the idea from its origins in the Ashington banner.

For the commission, Walker & Bromwich reconfigured Ashington's Dragon on a larger scale to form the focal point of a performance. *By Leaves we Live... Not by the Jingling of our Coins* took the form of a procession along the Royal Mile, drawing on folk traditions harking back to the Middle Ages but extolling the socialist values of radical 19th century thinkers such as Patrick Geddes, as well as those incorporated in the Ashington banner. The performance invited audiences to consider an alternative way of living, inspired by Geddes' own eco-anarchism and love of pageants. It was developed with performers Tam Dean Burn, Francis Thorburn and Rhys Trimble, together with pupils from Canal View Primary School and dancers based at the University of Edinburgh, dressed as leaves in reference to Geddes' quote "*This is a green world, with animals comparatively few and small, and all dependent on the leaves. By leaves we live. Some people have strange ideas that they live by money. They think energy is generated by the circulation of coins. Whereas the world is mainly a vast leaf colony, growing on and forming a leafy soil, not a mere mineral mass: and we live not by the jingling of our coins, but by the fullness of our harvests.*"

OUTPUTS

Following the presentation at the Festival, Walker & Bromwich were invited to develop the project over a further year-long engagement with Canal View Primary School in Wester Hailes, a housing scheme on the outskirts of Edinburgh, impacted by social and economic deprivation. The school, under the leadership of headteacher Ann More, had a strong ethos of innovative teaching and learning. The extended project was part-funded through the Scottish Government's Pupil Equity Fund, which was aimed at closing the poverty attainment gap in schools and communities in Scotland. The artists ran a Family Art Club with the support of WHALE Arts, in which participants created costumes, banners and placards for a May Day parade. Further workshops and a dance lunch club led up to the performance in which the entire school, together with a group of actors, processed *The Dragon of Profit and Private Ownership* across the school grounds. The school was gifted photographic prints, taken on the day, to display throughout the school as a legacy of the event.

By Leaves we Live... Not by the Jingling of our Coins performed at De Montfort University Gallery, 10 March 2018, as part of the *An Act of Participation* exhibition (see below). The performance featured a cast and performers from Fine Art students at the University and Gallery Friends.



Image: Participation, workshops and performances with Canal View Primary School, Wester Hailes, Edinburgh, July 17 - May 18.

OUTPUTS

A Plea for Common Ownership. A 38-minute film by Walker & Bromwich, co-produced with Culture Colony Vision, commissioned by Buddleia Projects. First screened on 26 September 2017 at Ashington YMCA. Later screenings include at the Tyneside Cinema, Newcastle, 13 August 2018, as part of the Great Exhibition of the North. <https://vimeo.com/250532871>

A Plea for Common Ownership, made in collaboration with the people of Ashington, documents the participatory art project and allows the ideology and message of the 1920s socialist movement to resonate in today's very different social-political climate. It invites reflection on the changing nature of work, living conditions and community, and the relevance of this imagery today. The film traces the rise and fall of the trade unions and coal mining in the area through interviews with local people, representing ex-miners, the local Marxist reading group, and younger members of the community now dealing with the social and economic deprivation that followed in the wake of the pit closures. It moves between interview and moments of magical thinking, through the historic and contemporary re-imagining of the imagery of the banner.



Image: *A Plea for Common Ownership*. A 38-minute film by Walker & Bromwich, co-produced with Culture Colony Vision, 2018

OUTPUTS

Exhibitions

- ***The Dragon of Profit and Private Ownership***. An exhibition, including the inflatable dragon used in the performances, Trinity Apse, Edinburgh (27 July - 27 August 2017). Trinity Apse is a partly rebuilt 15th century chapel, commissioned as an art venue during the Edinburgh Festival.
- ***An Act of Participation***. Exhibition, including the *Dragon of Profit and Private Ownership*, De Montfort University Gallery, Leicester (15 December 2017 – 17 March 2018). The exhibition also featured Walker & Bromwich's earlier project, *Art Lending Library*.

<https://www.visitleicester.info/whats-on/an-act-of-participation-by-walker-and-bromwich-p731871>

Walker & Bromwich: *An Act of Participation*, De Montfort University Gallery, Leicester, is an education, teaching and research resource. The exhibition displayed the soft sculpture and film from the Ashington project alongside a re-staging of earlier work, *Art Lending Library* (2012-16), linking the projects through the shared theme of the artists' research into changing ideas of public and private ownership in contemporary society. The exhibition placed the artists' research in the critical framework of the Fine Art course at De Montfort and was also used as case study for the postgraduate Museum Studies programme at the University of Leicester. De Montfort students took part in the performance *By Leaves we Live... Not by the Jingling of our Coins*, staged for the exhibition.



Image: Exhibition, Edinburgh Art Festival, Trinity Apse, July-Aug 2017



Image: Walker & Bromwich: *An Act of Participation*, De Montfort University Gallery, 15 December 2017 – 17 March 2018

OUTPUTS

Public Art

The Worker's Maypole, a site-specific public sculpture, Monument Square, Newcastle upon Tyne (22 June – 2 August 2018) was commissioned by BALTIC Centre for Contemporary and the Great Exhibition of the North 2018. Elements from the installation were later exhibited at BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art (10 September – 10 December 2018).

Having tested the imagery of the 'worker's maypole' in Ashington, Walker & Bromwich produced a highly visible sculpture using the same methods of re-appropriation and re-interpretation of historic imagery; in this instance, a civic monument and public space used regularly for protests and demonstrations. Grey's Monument was transformed through an intervention of fabric and flowers, sculpted in steel. The 30-metre column was wrapped with multi-coloured ribbons, printed with historic labour slogans from the Walter Crane illustration, as seen on the Ashington Miners' Union Banner. The monument became a temporary 'worker's maypole' displaying the socialist aspirations - health, education, science, art and employment for all - in the heart of Newcastle's civic space, as a reflection of the shared principles that have been - and remain - significant to communities in the North of England.

Grey's Monument stands in the centre of Newcastle, a tribute to Charles Grey, 2nd Earl Grey and Prime Minister (1830-34), who led the passing of the Great Reform Act in 1832 and the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833, and is a symbol of the area's role in supporting a fairer society. The monument takes the form of a statue of Grey, created by Edward Hodges Baily, sculptor of Nelson's statue in Trafalgar Square, atop a classical column.



Image: *Workers Maypole* during Great Exhibition of the North, June 2018

OUTPUTS



Video: *The Worker's Maypole*, a site-specific public sculpture, Monument Square, Newcastle upon Tyne, 22 June – 2 August 2018. Commissioned by BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art and the Great Exhibition of the North 2018.

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

Walker & Bromwich re-presented the monument as Walter Crane's illustration *The Worker's Maypole* (1894), an image combining English folk tradition with the values of the international labour movement such as 'Solidarity', 'Humanity', 'The Hope of Labour is the Welfare of All', 'Art and Employment for All' alongside demands including 'Employers' Liability', 'Leisure for All', an 'Eight Hours' working day and 'No Starving Children'. The commission was developed for *The Great Exhibition of the North* (22 June - 9 September 2018), a multi-venue exhibition held across Newcastle and Gateshead celebrating art, culture and design in the North of England which garnered an audience of 3.8 million people.

In support of the exhibition, Culture Minister Ed Vaizey said:

"Investment in our arts and culture not only benefits these sectors but, as we have seen from Hull being named UK City of Culture 2017, can drive regeneration of whole towns and cities."

(‘Competition opens to host Great Exhibition of the North’, Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 04/04/2016)



Image: Walter Crane illustration for *The Workers Maypole*, 1894 courtesy of William Morris Museum

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

Research Questions

How can artists re-appropriate the cultural traditions and imagery associated with early 20th century British socialism for use by post-industrial communities as educational and aspirational metaphors in contemporary society?

Research Aims

Walker & Bromwich took inspiration from the mining heritage of Ashington and, specifically, the imagery used in the Miners' Union banner to explore its contemporary relevance and use with the community. Drawing on folk traditions and mythological narratives of St George and the Dragon, and applying the same principles of co-authorship and co-ownership valued by the Socialist Movement, the artists aimed to work with cross-generational groups and reflect on the changing nature of work and labour conditions resulting from the decline of the mining industry. The resulting research and artworks would form the focus for discussions between geographically separate communities affected by the same industrial legacy of unemployment.

Research Insights

In the context of Scotland's Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology 2017, Walker & Bromwich's response to Geddes' vision of a better way of life, centring around the triangle of 'Work/Folk/Place' with art and culture playing a central role, also acted as a meditation on current attitudes to heritage and the role of art in society. Their performance, raising the spectre of 'The Dragon of Profit and Private Ownership', was staged shortly after heritage experts warned that "commercial over-exploitation" of Edinburgh's city centre posed a serious threat to the "authenticity" of this World Heritage site. It provoked questions about the distribution of wealth in Edinburgh itself and reignited the original vision for Edinburgh International Festival as a way of revitalising the human spirit after the war.

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

Research Insights (cont.)

The opportunity to develop *The Dragon of Profit and Private Ownership* with communities in Wester Hailes was the first time that the Edinburgh Art Festival had supported work beyond the parameters of the summer programme. For the Festival, traditionally aimed at art audiences and tourists, this development demonstrates the impact of Walker & Bromwich's project and its contribution to shifting commissioning policy towards an increased emphasis on engaging with Edinburgh's diverse communities. Canal View Primary School itself was impressed with the benefits of the project for its children and fundraised for its second iteration:

“The partnership with Edinburgh Art Festival and collaboration with Walker & Bromwich has been a fantastic opportunity for WHALE Arts' three-year Placemaking programme, in which we are working across Wester Hailes to run creative outreach activities with community partners, cross-community events and commissioning artists to create public artworks. The project has enabled us to extend our outreach and relationship with Canal View Primary School and their wider school community bringing high quality arts and cultural experiences to their families.” (Helena Barrett, WHALE Arts)

The theme of revisiting the past to inspire the future was further developed in Newcastle, where an existing historic monument was used to compare the aims of the reformist Earl Grey with the current political landscape and the role of arts and culture in economic growth and regeneration. The motif of the 'maypole', representing public community celebrations at the beginning of summer, also raised debates about 'post-work' societies and the diminishing role of labour in an increasingly automated and digital economy.

The re-appropriation of a civic monument also contributes to current debates about how societies commemorate and celebrate historic figures, and how artist interventions can offer new readings that draw out contemporary relevance or reveal dissonant narratives in connection with Britain's past.

CONTRIBUTION IN THE FIELD OF PARTICIPATORY ART

Walker & Bromwich's work contributes to the field of participatory art through the specificity of each project, rooted in a locale and producing new readings, with the community, of its social history. It uses methods of collective performance-making, including amateur theatre, costume and prop-making, and performance, with the core aim to activate a sense of community through the act of making together. The work builds on Joseph Beuys' concept of 'social sculpture'; artworks that strive to structure and shape society through the use of objects, ideas and human activity. Here, site-specific labour histories form the starting point for the work, and community participants engage with the historical subject matter through fictional narrative, which allows a re-imagining of the future through the past.

With *The Dragon of Profit and Private Ownership*, audience members cease to be passive viewers and instead become active agents of co-creation within the artwork, or "emancipated spectators" (Rancière, 2008). In Walker & Bromwich's work, audiences are invited to explore, analyse and transform the current reality in which they are living, by embodying the artwork and its restaging of historical socialist imagery.

The site-specificity of the work contributes to debates articulated by Hal Foster (1996), Grant Kester (2004) and others, facilitating a "situated dialogue" that is responsive to its context and so creates "a new aesthetic and theoretical paradigm of the work of art as a process – a locus of discursive exchange and negotiation" (Kester, 2004).



Image: *By leaves we live... not by the jingling of our coins* (performance).
parade performance of *The Dragon of Profit and Private Ownership*,
launching the Edinburgh Art Festival. 27 July 2018

DISSEMINATION

- BALTIC and the Great Exhibition of the North estimated the Workers' Maypole was encountered by three million people: <https://baltic.art/over-3-million-encounter-the-workers-maypole>. As the centrepiece of the Great Exhibition (Monument Square is at the heart of Newcastle), the work was featured extensively in media coverage of the event.
- Education activities were a major part of the project, particularly focusing on the Summer School Education Programme (18 May – 22 June 2017 and 13 March – 3 April 2018) of Canal View Primary School, Wester Hailes.
- A public symposium, '*How Do We Slay the Dragon of Profit, Private Ownership and Corporate Greed?*' was held at the University of Edinburgh, 12 August 2017, with panelists Walker and Bromwich, Neil Cooper, Dr David Korowicz and Nadine Andrews.
- The postgraduate Museum Studies programme at the University of Leicester used the *Worker's Maypole* project as a case study, and Walker & Bromwich contributed a seminar (12 December 2017), held in the De Montfort University Gallery.
- The projects were widely publicised and critiqued in the mainstream media and art press.

PARTNERS AND FUNDING

- The original Ashington commission was funded with £20,000 awarded by Museums Northumberland and 'bait', an Arts Council England Creative People & Places scheme, in partnership with Woodhorn Charitable Trust, Northumberland County Council Public Health and Cultural Services, Northumberland CVA, Northumberland College, and Queens Hall Arts.
- The restaging of the performance at the Edinburgh Art Festival and the school workshop programme was enabled with £30,000 funding from the Edinburgh Art Festival, with an additional £10,000 from the Scottish Government's Pupil Equity Fund and Bridgend Growing Communities Award.
- The De Montfort University Gallery, Leicester exhibition was funded with a £25,000 budget from De Montfort University Gallery. *Worker's Maypole*, one of the artistic centrepieces of The Great Exhibition of the North, Newcastle was awarded a £46,000 commissioning budget from BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art and The Great Exhibition of the North.

LINKS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

Visit Leicester, An Act of Participation:

<https://www.visitleicester.info/whats-on/an-act-of-participation-by-walker-and-bromwich-p731871>

This week's best exhibitions. Jonathan Jones, The Guardian:

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/jul/21/pablo-bronstein-jac-leirner-best-uk-exhibitions>

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14714787.2017.1377581?journalCode=rvcb20>

<https://www.architecturaldigest.in/content/explore-edinburghs-art-design-highlights-public-arts-festival/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/3SSyz3ZbZcqVWdyNtgVtF0q/edinburgh-art-festival-2017>

<https://www.edinburghartfestival.com/archive/when/year-2017>

<https://www.edinburghfestivalcity.com/news/653-dragon-procession-opens-art-festival-events-lineup>

<https://edinburghfestival.list.co.uk/article/94347-zoe-walker-and-neil-bromwich-the-dragon-of-profit-and-private-ownership/>

<https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/15425203.dragons-town-plans-and-pop-ups-at-edinburgh-art-festival/>

<https://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/culture/edinburgh-festivals/giant-dragon-to-tour-royal-mile-in-festival-curtain-raiser-1-4515117>

<https://edinburghfestival.list.co.uk/article/92636-edinburgh-art-festival-events-programme-aims-to-make-us-think-again-about-how-we-live/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWDyCCYrGrw>

<http://baltic.art/whats-on/getnorth/over-3-million-encounter-the-workers-maypole>

<http://baltic.art/whats-on/exhibitions/zoe-walker-neil-bromwich>

<https://getnorth2018.com/previous-events/the-workers-maypole/>

<https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/article/9405/Great-Exhibition-of-the-North-2018-engages-millions->

<https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2018/jun/15/arty-party-gallery-and-event-highlights-from-the-great-exhibition-of-the-north>

<http://www.thecourieronline.co.uk/courier-grad-issue-art-to-distract-you-from-your-fears-of-the-future/>

<https://www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/greys-monument-transformed-flower-halo-14809690>