

Wed 13 July
5.30-8pm

Walkthrough and Artist Talk: Assemble + Schools of Tomorrow

KEYWORDS

programme, schools, Nottingham, artists, people, play, gallery, space, workshops, exhibition, playground, children, collaboration, project, learning, organisation, elements

SPEAKERS

Jane Hall, Canan Batur, Lisa Jacques

Canan Batur 00:03

Thank you so much for being with us. As you know, today, we're gonna do a 30 minute walk through in the galleries, and then we're just going to reconvene again at 6.30 at the Space downstairs. In between those times, you will have the chance to kind of go use our cafe and get some refreshments. But I'm Canan Batur, I'm the curator of live programmes, thank you so much for being with us today. And without giving a bigger introduction, which I will do at the space, I'll just give the floor to Jane and Lisa so that they can take it away.

Jane Hall 00:36

I'm Jane, I'm from Assemble, we were the some of the artists involved in this kind of group work. So yeah, it's nice to come back and see the space after it's been in use for the last two months or so

Lisa Jacques 00:52
destroyed.

Jane Hall 00:55

Our structural Engineers are going to be very happy about this.

Lisa Jacques 00:59

msldgnittoI Contemporary

Yeah, and I'm Lisa, I'm learning programme manager here. And I also manage the schools of tomorrow programme, which you can see their work featured around the exhibition. And we'll go into a little bit more detail about that later on. But if you wanted to, yeah,

Jane Hall 01:15

Have to wait for it to come round. Well, so the exhibition is called The Place We Imagine. And that name really kind of grew out of process of lots of people kind of working together working with local schools. But the idea really began with a drawing by an architect called Lina Bo Bardi, who is Italian, she moved to Brazil just after the war in 1947. And her works in Brazil have really become known for centering people, she created a lot of social spaces, but within museums, within galleries, within leisure centres, and there's a drawing, which will eventually come around on the screen. And you might recognise some of the elements in it. So this structure, we called the Big Red, and this one, the Animal Roundabout, or Menagerie. And so we've kind of used Lina's drawing of the Museum of Art of Sao Paulo, as a starting point to rethink public space or publicness of galleries. And for us, this drawing is particularly interesting because it was done at the time, at the height of a military dictatorship. So she's actually imagining something which was at that time impossible. Public Space was also something that she was really kind of inventing in South America, it wasn't this kind of thing that we all sort of take for granted today. And so working with Nottingham Contemporary, we've sort of tried to rethink how we might invite different types of behaviours, different types of possibilities in these gallery spaces.

Lisa Jacques 02:55

So and then Schools of Tomorrow programme is an action led inquiry research programme, we've partnered with eight schools, seven of those are primary schools, and one of them's a nursery school. And we have placed five artists within those schools for the past four years. I'm nodding to Amanda, Amanda is our head of learning, she will fill me in if I forget anything. And the idea is to, for them to develop an action led research enquiry question bespoke to each school. And that is derived from their school improvement plan. And one of the elements of schools of tomorrow was about creating a creative hub within the school setting.

Nottingham Contemporary

And that was an area that could be a workshop, it could be an exhibition space, it could be a space for discussion, it could be a reading space. So it was this space that actually changed to allow for those discussions with the children and for them to share their ideas. And I think that was one of the points that was your initial sort of interest within the programme as well about how the environments change behaviours, and how behaviours change environments, and vice versa, with the connection with schools of tomorrow,

Jane Hall 02:55

Yeah, so it's really kind of actually centering the work that these amazing artists are doing in schools, kind of semi sort of in private, or going to school day, and seeing how that could be expressed in a space like this, but also evolve. And I think we'll probably talk more, you'll see later how some of those artists have actually appropriated this space as well. In addition to what they've been doing in the school,

Lisa Jacques 04:41

Yeah. And it was very much about the children taking ownership of their of that space within the school, and also very much child led sort of learning as well throughout. So and that has similarities to what Lina wants and what you were trying to achieve as well within the space.

Jane Hall 05:01

Yeah, I mean, the ambition and why we ended up describing it as a group show and something I hope when you kind of walk around the galleries, you'll start to see fragments of things from each of the schools and each of the artists, but that there's a kind of shared language or cohesiveness that has come from three years, maybe more

Lisa Jacques 05:17

Yeah we were through COVID, we

Jane Hall 05:19

conversations and workshops, and really, it all make sense now it's in the gallery. But actually, it's been this process of actually kind of like working out what we're doing, why we're doing it. And thinking of the artists, both as artists, but essentially play workers, several of them

msdnittoI Contemporary

are trained play workers, and that fine balance between sort of the playground and the artwork, and in a way, just sort of destroying both those terms, to create something a little bit different here and then have the children who we worked with, through this time actually come to Nottingham Contemporary, a lot of them were familiar with it but hadn't necessarily visited themselves. Some we did some workshops downstairs in the space we're going to be in later. And so it's also about them being able to feel like they can claim this space as part of their city.

Lisa Jacques 06:10

And we'll be talking a little bit in the talk later about the collaboration and the impact and learning and what actually collaboration within this project means within Assemble as a collective, within our partner schools, collaborating with Nottingham Contemporary as well as an internal process of us collaborating across teams as well. So that's really what.

Jane Hall 06:31

It's amazing we're still standing.

Lisa Jacques 06:32

I know. That's what we're gonna be talking about later down in the space. But I think whilst we're up here, we'll talk about the exhibits because we'll be probably referencing them. So, you've mentioned Big Red.

Jane Hall 06:42

Actually this, this structure we built last summer in Toronto, for an organisation called the Bentway who have an amazing outdoor space under a flyover. And they had a whole programme about play. And as an institution, were kind of thinking like Nottingham, about their role in Toronto as a place for kind of children and families. So we'd road tested this one, luckily, last year in an outdoor space, but it was amazing, because in Toronto, it's under a flyover. So it's like a 30 metre high outdoor space, and it just looks tiny in that setting, and then we put it in here. We've downsized it for here. No we didn't it's the same size. We thought we might have to downsize it, but we didn't. So we downsized the verticality actually because of the ceiling height, but it just takes on

Nottingham Contemporary

a whole new spatial dimension, I think, in this space. Please climb onto it and to participate in this artwork. But I think a lot of the ideas about thinking about these play pieces as sculptures is sort of challenging a bit how we think about the contemporary playground as well. Everything's brightly coloured. Everything looks familiar, everything's used in the same way, everything's static. So using Lina's drawing as a starting point, we tried to play around with different ways you might think about a slide. So there's the kind of going up going down, there's the stepping, there's a sort of slow slide around the back. There's a bit in the middle, which doesn't seem to have a purpose. And then the sort of giant steps. So it has that kind of uncanniness to it. That sense of familiarity, but something a little bit different. And you will notice also, on the ceiling, and elsewhere on the gallery, there are some fragments of Peter Rumney, one of the artists who does a lot of work with narrative and storytelling. There's one on the wall just there by you. Yeah. So these are all bits taken from things that the children he worked with have sort of said, and they kind of disappear and come back into focus. And then we start to create sort of nice relationships between the two where things started to kind of intersect - bigger bits up there. But when we began working on the sculptures for Nottingham, this piece felt like it had a home in a very obvious way. I don't know how many people have visited regularly, but every time I've been in the space, there's been a big wall up, often the light, the natural day lighting is closed off. So we really also wanted to create works that would really use this space and make the most of it by putting something really big in.

Lisa Jacques 09:40

So the the narrative quotes that you referred to are by Melbury primary school and their associate artist, as you mentioned, Peter, and they actually developed a script and made a film which you can see on one of the monitors around the corner. And what we've done for the exhibition is take the audio off the film, and worked with the children for them to extract the quotes from the narrative that they wanted. So there's actually 14, they're quite hard to find. Some of them are like little smudges on the walls. There's 14 quotes that actually tell the story, as you go around the room, there's some on the windows, on the floor, on the walls. Yep, in the ceiling. I don't think anyone's found all 14 yet. So that's the script that the children have written. And that was to

msldgnittoI Contemporary

provide a different type of play. That was to provide more of a creative thinking type of play, and to promote roleplay, which then possibly would encourage physical play. So the content that you can see around the perimeters is the children's work and the schools content that, and some, what we wanted to do is make sure that what Jane and Holly were looking at aligned with the schools, we didn't want to force an element onto the school that they were not interested in, or they were not developing, a strand they were not developing. So we've got most, I think we've got about six out of the eight schools. And then we found other ways for the other schools to participate in that actually is genuine to what they're looking at. So these behind me are the play prompts, and they've been done by Robin Hood primary, and their artist Laura Eldret. And what they did is they in as part of their enquiry question, they wanted to find out how teachers teach. So they brought the teachers in and said, How do you teach, what is the skill that we need? And then they decided, actually, we need to teach you how to play because you're an adult, and you don't know how to play. So this is a call out from the children of prompts to adults to come and play with them. They're on sale in the shop as well. We've also got other elements around the room that you can see. So the large typographical quotes that you can see are taken from the prompts. And they've been produced in an alphabet, which you can download called Us, which was designed by Milford Academy. And you can see the alphabet I think most of you were standing in front of it is on show there. And you can download that. And again, that was with their artists, Laura Eldret. So she's crossed over the two schools. We've got work by Jubilee L.E.A.D. academy. We've got a couple of pieces, actually, in the show one is the annotated drawings of them actually working with their artists, Gillian Brent to actually create sculptures, but they actually turned into play pieces. And you can see that on a film around the corner as well. So their learning was about learning by doing and making, and it was more about the materiality. But as a side element it sort of, they turned into these play elements, which was really lovely. And Gill was looking at outdoor learning with with that school. And then you can see the little projection up high. That's by Nottingham nursery and their associate artist Sian Watson Taylor, and the children wor go pros. So we've got an idea of actually what they do when when you know, when they're not supervised in a sense of one to one when they're left to roam around the nursery and play with the

Nottingham Contemporary

materials that have been provided or that they find. And so we get an idea of, there's a lot of noses and floors and blurs and things like that the adults had them on as well. I think you got to

Jane Hall 13:27

I think it was just me, I got given a go pro but it didn't work.

Lisa Jacques 13:32

Yeah, I think you forgot to turn yours on, where the children actually managed it. Yeah. So and that's projected at height, in order that when you're actually on the structures you actually can see it directly on. But also, we also realised that it provides the view of a child looking up to an adult as well. So we get their sort of perspective thrown back at us, which I think is quite a nice take there. So the I think that's covered most elements in here, we've got Reach as well.

Jane Hall 13:58

Yeah, the gold leaf that's Laura Eldret's, which school was that?

Lisa Jacques 14:02

So that was Robin Hood again. And that was about within their school, about them taking ownership over a space. And the idea of leaving something that's very precious, like gold leaf like all the kids were like wow. And we activate that every Saturday 12 till 1, so you're more than welcome to join us and leave your own fingerprint. And that was about leaving traces. So that they when they come back into that familiar space that's in the school, they know exactly which mark is theirs. Yeah. And it was also about hierarchy as well with the material that's been used. But yeah, that's my selling point when we do it with the families, do you want some real gold? Kids love it, it's like treasure. And then the highest one I will let you know that was an adult that ran and jumped at it. Yeah. So a bit of cheating there.

Jane Hall 15:32

And so, do take a seat. Yeah, I mean, they're very comfortable, stable, some more stable than others. But the animals were inspired by Lina's drawing, it's a bit hazy. But if you zoom in closely, you can kind of get a sense of these different sort of personalities. And our interpretation

msdgnittoI Contemporary

with this one was really based on something that's a little bit more accessible. So it's just a kind of vinyl application to the floor for the kind of rainbow roundabout. And that the animals would sit somewhere between a kind of oversized soft play, which a lot of people be very familiar with. But on a scale, that means, you know, they're quite hefty, they require a few people, more if you're smaller, to move them around so there's aspects of necessitating kind of collaboration, but also that they're not fixed elements. So they have a home in the gallery, but you'll see them kind of roam around and interfere with just

Lisa Jacques 16:29

We've just dragged them out of The Funhouse actually. Yeah.

Jane Hall 16:31

And this one ended up being a lot more geared towards kind of younger age groups, particularly in conversation with Sian, who works at Nottingham nursery, who talked a lot to us about the idea of schema in play that even at a very young age, people have different ideas about personalities in place. So some people are builders, some people are destroyers, some people are movers, and this kind of like fixation on different types of movement, of engagement, and how a piece like this could sort of maybe facilitate that. So often you see towers of animals, they often get knocked over, right, and people jump across them. But also, and I think Lisa will be able to speak more to this a bit later. But the different ways in which people have just kind of interpreted the pieces for themselves. And there's really that invitation to not kick them about, but you know they definitely do, they do they do. But they're pretty, pretty robust. So this is, I suppose, is interesting, because it's in a way, a more literal interpretation from Lina's drawing, but actually, materially is a little bit more kind of interesting. And as device sort of does something more, I think spatially than the Big Red, which is a kind of big,

Lisa Jacques 17:59

And it's got moving elements, and you have to collaborate to move them. So really, even us earlier, they're really heavy. And so there's a lot of different elements of play that are drawn from this piece, as opposed to Big Red, you know, they move they do travel quite a bit. Yeah. And they can also got that sort of familiarity of soft play, that allows our audiences

Nottingham Contemporary

possibly to engage with them in a more

Jane Hall 18:25

There's that, like, they know what this is.

Lisa Jacques 18:27

Accessible way. Yeah. And also, they've got character as well, yeah. So, you know, we find the kids feeding them or naming them, things like that. So yeah.

Jane Hall 18:38

And maybe we'll speak more about it later as well. But I mean, assemble have a lot of play projects. And there's a kind of a little bit of a tension between sort of fixed play objects, which are seen as maybe kind of too prescribed or prohibitive, to free, imaginative play. And then loose parts play, which is almost at the kind of opposite end of the spectrum. So this sort of exhibition is trying to kind of integrate and speak to different forms of play that are sort of hotly contested in the play world. But Amanda and Lisa you can go in depth into that later on.

Lisa Jacques 19:13

Okay, well, should we talk briefly talk about The Funhouse, because we might reference this quite a bit downstairs. Yep, yep. And I think that's quite interesting, because like the marks on the floor are remnants of workshops that have happened here, so they weren't here for the install. And, if you are interested, they were sort of the way that our workshops with schools, because it's been heavily booked by schools, and how we manage the room. And the different play styles that have emerged, in order to manage a group of 60 children within the space is quite interesting. Part of this mark making became management of the group and how they take that ball and follow the red line, how they line these up, and it sort of has to go over it or how they all stand in a line and pass it to each other. So there's that sort of, there is a free play element. But the chaos that ensued with 60 children from a school, the teachers were like, so our associate artists quickly learned that some of their session needs to be an element of free play, an element of facilitated play, and an element of very structured play. So that's been quite interesting, that's emerged that we didn't foresee actually.

msldgnittoI Contemporary

Jane Hall 19:17

Yeah, so the Funhouse is named by the kids at Robin Hood. And we worked a lot with Laura Eldret, the artist there observing the kind of workshops that she did, and then did one that was a little bit more kind of didactic in that we did a ceramics kind of freeform making ceramics workshop with them, where they sort of designed the Funhouse for us, which is what's in the vitrine over there. And the Funhouse was really born out of conversations with them about play and representing this in clay and describing what each element does, but doing that together and it really centred around what they sort of talked about as the tree. And it was about climbing, it was about being able to hide and it was about running. And it was about doing that collectively and together. And so we worked from the way in which the children described this object through a series of drawing workshops in our studio with other members of our group. And you can see our drawings, also to the right there, of how we start to think about this as actually a structure that had some buildability that can be fabricated, which we did in our studio, we have a series of workshops, other makers. So we were able to CNC all this, these elements, which is a product called valchromat, like an MDF, by its very sustainable product made of wood waste, and comes in these amazing colours, so we didn't have to treat it or anything. And it all slots together. The only fixings are a few screws around the top. And then it's all crowned by this massive inflatable ball that was fabricated by, the ball of death, fabricated by an amazing company called Imagine Inflatables. It's just such a great, great name. So fitting for the show. And the ball can be removed and it to roams the gallery at various speeds. And then, these kind of squidgy elements have, you can kind of hear it there, but they have sound pieces, which are recordings that Sian did at the nursery. And also, the neon is Sian's kind of illustrations that were sort of adorned the structure with so there's also this moment of kind of collaborating on the structure as well. So it's a bit of a mix of the different schools. It's not necessarily kind of like one piece.

Lisa Jacques 22:57

But I think the children from Robin Hood, one of them mentioned that, wouldn't it be great if it if there was sound? Yeah, that was just a little comment that

Nottingham Contemporary

Jane Hall 23:04

They had a menu, they had a list of like everything they wanted to achieve in this one structure. Yeah, so it's climbable, and yeah, the ball comes off.

Lisa Jacques 23:14

So behind you, we've got three, the love letter to play, three stages of play, which is the children at the nursery, and artist Sian Watson. And so because the program's heavily documented, it was a way of actually almost an editing process. But it became, you know, I can't receive all these images, there's too many, what sums up your workshop? So she sort of, you know, worked out the start of play, the middle - actually play taking place, and then the remnants and what happens afterwards. So she's documented her workshops in these three stages, quite clearly. And then on the two monitors are the films that we spoke about - one's from Jubilee Academy, which is the them sort of creating those sculptures in their outdoor space at school. And the other one is the Melbury primary film that they developed the script for, and then went out into their school grounds to yeah, to film, so that's there as well. And then over here, which has actually got quite a lot of post it notes on it, is about rules. So we had a big discussion about rules. And because this project was quite new, in the sense of working collaboratively, and also in the sense of it's actually going to change what we're asking the public or that invitation, it changes the invitation to the public that are coming in about how to interact with an exhibition. And so from internal and external conversations we had, well, they won't be able to run, they won't be able to do this, they can't do that they can't do this. And so I was you know documenting all that because what we need to do is make sure our staff are comfortable within this space. So we've done quite a lot of training with our staff on how to manage a space that actually might and could potentially be quite problematic, where people are taking risks because we want them to take risks, where they're owning the space, you know, it belongs to them, you know, and what they and the parameters of what that risk, you know how that's managed. And so one of our schools, Edna G Olds is working with their artist Charlotte Tupper. And Charlotte had been working with them on providing loose parts actually, for their play for their playground that they'd selected.

msdgnittoI Contemporary

And when she went back a couple of weeks later, they've got all these post it notes all over the windows with rules on - no more than five people, no more than 10 minutes. You can't have this, you can't have that. So we're like, right, okay, we need to talk and she was like, we need to talk about this. So what we did is we were sort of like, actually, we've got the same issue here as well, you know, let's present these to the children and see what sort of I think she calls it silly, ridiculous sort of responses that they come up with. So that's that piece there that gets covered everyday in postits that we have to edit down. And then everyone else sort of adds to about taking out the do nots, taking out the can'ts and the ridiculousness of some of the responses of the children. So for instance, if they can't run, what can they do? Can they zip wire in? Can they fly in? Can they, you know what's the worst that's gonna happen? You're gonna trip fall and your head will split open? You know, so we were looking at that sort of ridiculousness and consequences of rules. And what's the worst that can happen really, and that's what that piece is about there. as well. We, what we didn't point out was in the front window, the lovely sort of marks that have been left by our visitors, yeah that have been scratched into the white paint, not so much in this one, actually. But there's some so it started off with a little love heart with initials in, like what you would leave in a tree stump, you know, or the, you know, in the bark of a tree, or what you'd scratch into the enamel on the playground. And so there's some really lovely, really lovely moments in there on the window that have emerged.

Jane Hall 24:15

Yeah, also I don't know if any of you've noticed coming along, but the kind of abject opposite, obelisk opposite on the street mirrors, the Big Red.

Lisa Jacques 27:22

Oh, yeah!

Jane Hall 27:23

In such a funny, we have a photo of its reflection in the window. So there's these really nice moments of coming back. And I mean, you're seeing it every day, but the way in which people are using space in a way that we wouldn't have been able to predict. And you can kind of start to

Nottingham Contemporary

see what the invitation is, you know, it's not destroyed. But there are kind of moments where people have maybe done something that in early meetings about the space, we might have been like, oh, we need to make sure that's painted over or that's touched up and, and actually working out what to embrace and I think Assemble pushing Nottingham a little bit on what was acceptable or not.

Lisa Jacques 28:01

And I think we still are as we go through the exhibition, because there's things that have emerged. Yeah, like was that okay? Yes, fine. So we still go back, you know, a little bit and just question because that's in our nature. That's how we work within galleries. So it's, it's challenging us, which is really good thing.

Canan Batur 28:18

It's nice to see you again. A very warm welcome. And thank you for joining our in conversation today between Jane Hall, a founding member of Assemble, and Lisa Jacques, our, Nottingham Contemporary's learning programme manager. My name is Canan Batur and I'm the curator of live programmes here at Nottingham Contemporary. We hope all of you and your families are safe and you've been enjoying the summer thus far. And tonight, as you know, we welcome you here to join us in conversation between Jane and Lisa to talk and deliberate on our exhibition, *The Place We Imagine*, and it will last for an hour and 30 minutes. But before I mean, I will let them, maybe shorter. But I just want to kind of relay some brief housekeeping notes. Our live programmes open up different interventions and propositions within our curatorial research across the organisation. And this event expands on our current research trend, *Emergency and Emergence*, as well as our event series *The Adventure Playground: Architecture of Contemporary Play* that consists of exploratory talks and propositions that investigate processes of play and imagination, and their role in built environments and designed spaces of playgrounds. It brings forward architectural and political history of playgrounds and dedicated spaces for children across contemporary cities, and centres on the idea of world making. Although we will keep an informal atmosphere throughout the evening, I mean, you can understand from the fact that we're not even using mics. Our talks and performances, screenings seek to create challenging

msdnittoI Contemporary

environments where open mindedness and respect for each other's approaches and perspectives can foster growth, so please be mindful and respectful of each other's opinions and views. In the unlikely case of an emergency, a member of staff will guide you to the nearest fire exit. And I would like to use this opportunity to extend our thanks to our funders, the University of Nottingham and Nottingham Trent University for generously and graciously supporting today's event, as well as my colleagues, Philippa Douglas, Shannon Charlesworth, Catherine Masters, Paul Buddle, Jim Brouwer and Amelia for making this event possible. Lastly, as with all events here at Nottingham Contemporary, today's talk is free to attend. But all donations are always greatly appreciated, to help support future programmes. So without further delay, I'm very pleased to introduce Assemble and Schools of Tomorrow for those who haven't had the chance to be with us during the walkthrough. Assemble is a multidisciplinary collective working across architecture, design and art. Founded in 2010, Assemble has worked and developed a cooperative working method that enables built, social and research-based work at a variety of scales, both making things and making things happen. In 2015, they won the Turner prize, the first architects to do so. Schools of Tomorrow is a four year long learning and research programme funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, which places artists in residence at eight local schools. Together artists Gillian Brent, Laura Eldret, Peter Rumney, Sian Taylor and Charlotte Tupper, alongside teachers developed approaches to supporting creativity in and beyond the classroom through a process of action led enquiry. Assemble linked with three of our partner schools to develop a play structure. Many thanks again for joining our event and our community. And, and without further delay, I'll let Jane and Lisa to start their conversation. Thank you.

Lisa Jacques 32:14

Thank you, Canan. We're just fascinated by the photos, we're quite distracted at the collection of photos. So we've decided not to use mics. So please do let us know if we need to speak up at any point. However, we do have a roaming mic for if there's any questions that you'd like to ask after we've had our conversation our in discussion. And if there was any questions that sort of fell over from, not fell over, from upstairs from the walkthrough, as well, please do hold on to those. So

Nottingham Contemporary

we can also answer those. We're all really distracted, Jane's not seen all of these. A little bit of a slideshow, but they yeah, this gives you an overview, really, of how we've been working with our schools, and also what's been happening in the galleries upstairs, and the interventions that have taken place up there. But I think from our perspective, one of the things that we would like to discuss is the collaborative process. And how that's provided many challenges. It's provided many insights and lots of learning. And at the same time it's been very celebratory in what it's achieved, as well. And I think from my perspective, I'm really interested in how Assemble as a collective work collaboratively with other organisations and see whether how difficult we were, quite it can be, it might be quite an indulgent sort of questioning with Jane. But I think it might be good to just give an overview of how Assemble work as a collective in a collaborative structure.

Jane Hall 34:00

So Assemble, and it's quite interesting in your introduction, because Assemble were the first architects to win the Turner Prize, I don't think actually any of us were qualified at the time. Three people who are qualified now and I'm not even one of them. So we came together as a group of friends fresh out of university, who wanted to have a close relationship with building and with making alongside our sort of day jobs in offices. And so we built a cinema inside an old petrol station. And it was made kind of by many hands, making on site, we didn't have a single drawing, it was all done orally through testing, through failing, through prototyping. And really, it was kind of one big disorganised collaboration. And so much of that was about kind of working out a methodology for working with each other. And sort of embracing different people's voices. So the really the thing I really love about our early projects is how you can really observe different people's kind of hands in a project, you know, things there's this was one project, there's one photo, I really like showing of the interior of the garage with these like crazy plastic ceiling tiles, because we'd made a vacuum former to turn these tiles in something more interesting, and they look terrible. They look really bad. But someone made them someone put in a lot of effort and really innovated to get that to happen. And so they're there and they're part of the project. And so I think for us as kind of young designers, it was all about how can you open up your work to embrace

msdnittoI Contemporary

kind of input from other people, when it might not fit within your kind of box, or idea of what a project should be about. And so a lot of our projects, because I think we're quite open to that and really enjoyed that, ended up involving a lot of more explicit collaborative ways of working with clients especially. So the project in Liverpool that got nominated for the Turner Prize was a refurbishment of 10 houses and a really rundown area called Granby, which is not dissimilar to lots of areas in Liverpool, unfortunately, but these buildings have fallen into decline, yet there were still people living among them, and they really wanted to save their homes. But that meant also saving their neighbourhoods. So it was a really big task. And a lot of it was actually about supporting them. And it was years of visits, staying there and working with them, and really kind of building the, rebuilding houses from what we could find locally, a lot of the materials kind of literally from the ground and really kind of being embedded over a long period of time. But our first project with play was a playground in Glasgow in a place called Dalmarnock, which was called Baltic Street Adventure playground. And actually the way we did the playground, we won some funding to make an artwork in 2014, during the kind of I think Glasgow was hosting with Commonwealth Games. And it's like, why does that, they can't feed their children, like, what are they going to do with a public sculpture. So we repurposed the funding to get piece of land, and turn it into an open access space for play. And the only thing we really did was remove all of the stuff, get rid of the stuff that's kind of making it dangerous. And we have some amazing photos of children just kind of running about in mud. Like that's all they needed. And a lot of the work there was setting up and installing experienced play workers, but also just buying coats, and Wellington boots, and knocking on the doors and getting the children and feeding them every day and facilitating play to happen. So we've always been very interested in that kind of sense of enabling things to happen. And I think that sort of underpins our approach to collaboration. And in a sense, sort of, there's a thread of that here as well. And we've done lots of other play related projects. But they've, we've done a kind of film called The Voice of children, which was looking at adventure playgrounds from around the world. And also a project called the brutalist playground, which is also very similar in that it's kind of thinking about scale and typology of play structures. So on the one hand, we're really interested in challenging the playground as a thing, but also

Nottingham Contemporary

about the built environment as a playful place, as a place for children, which often it's kind of designed in quite a hostile way for children or for people with children. So a lot of our projects are kind of in that liminal boundary between playground, artwork, and just building. And I've kind of loosened up a bit. I like lots of galleries and things I've talked about, like we're making a playground in the gallery, and I used to be really, like reticent about that. And quite like, no, it's not a playground. It's artwork. But I've loosened up a bit about that.

Lisa Jacques 39:28

Yeah, I think it was quite clear that these were sort of artworks, sorry I'm pointing as if I'm like referencing the exhibition. Yeah. Because they don't, they're not regulated with regards to if they were play structures. Yeah. So they are artworks that you can play on. And I think that was what you sort of,

Jane Hall 39:46

yeah, and there's some really interesting conversations, you know, with curators here who are like, should we talk to rospa and it's like well, rospa just do guidelines for play. Like there's no legal imperative in the UK to install their guidelines in the way that you'd have to with kind of building control and putting building regulations, so they're just guidelines. And lots of them are like, completely outrageous and ridiculous.

Lisa Jacques 40:15

Right, I was gonna say, shall we talk about the, you'll see Jane's approach, and how that might sort of jar a little bit coming into an organisation such as Nottingham Contemporary. And I think for us, the project was a massive and a really generous invitation for us, particularly within learning to collaborate with you and with our programme and our schools and an amazing opportunity. So if we just step back a little bit about the organisation, we'd started to collaborate internally, within our teams, when I first arrived actually about four years ago, with an exhibition called Still I Rise. And I think that was sort of the beginnings of collaboration within our organisation. And I think it's taken until now, in order for it to actually be true, a truly collaborative process, and we're still not there yet, we've still got a lot to go towards. So I think

msdgnittoI Contemporary

this moment in time, provides of the sort of the schools of tomorrow programme being where it was, and what it was about, and with your interests sort of seemed to sort of happen at the same time. And that cross sort of fertilisation of those ideas. And the way that they sutured together, then became more of a collaboration than we could ever imagine. So we have, obviously, the internal teams here at Nottingham Contemporary. And it was a new process, in the sense of how much collaboration there was now. And I think if you look at the exhibition notes, I'm sort of termed as a curator, whereas I sit within learning. So that itself is quite interesting, same as Amanda, as well. And then we also had what was going on with our work with the schools. So we've got eight schools, as we mentioned previously, and then we've also got five associate artists. And so how do we make sure that the conversation is collaborative with them? How do we make sure that that conversation goes beyond the teachers, and to the pupils, as well. So you can imagine how many pupils there are in those sort of eight schools as well. So I think it was getting bigger and bigger. And then obviously, the collaboration with Assemble and the actual programme, as well.

Jane Hall 42:44

But I think that's, that's why creating a sense of ownership is really important to how we think about collaboration, because I don't think you can have, it feels collaborative, unless people feel like they have some sort of stake in the project or agency over shaping it. And I think there was for a long time, it was like, having all these zoom meetings and coming up to Nottingham and meeting you and Amanda and other people who run you've got the kind of older programme, that's what's the age range? 18 to 25, or something? 15 to 25. You know, at the beginning, there were loads of conversations with loads of different characters,

Lisa Jacques 43:24

I think, yeah, if we start sort of at the beginning, the conversation started with yourself and Sam Thorne our director, yeah, about what might happen. Do you want to just

Jane Hall 43:32

Actually more simply than that Sam came to our studio and said, Do you

Nottingham Contemporary

know anything about this drawing by Lina Bo Bardi?

Lisa Jacques 43:40

He just happened to come across it.

Jane Hall 43:41

He had happened to come across it. And I'd done my doctoral research about Lina's work, and particularly, actually, about the museum in the drawing and I was like actually I do know quite a lot about this, and I think he then mentioned that he really wanted to do something with the learning programme, and the education programme and to try and maybe mirror in a way or take inspiration from the way Lina Bo Bardi talked about the museum as a kind of place of learning, a place that was child led. And it's just a big question mark about like, well, what could that mean, in Nottingham, and in a way it was sort of like he just sort of put us together in a room. I don't think I've talked much to Sam about the project since, mostly just to you guys it's kind of been this amazing transition, I think from kind of feeling a little bit like we didn't want to step on your toes.

Lisa Jacques 44:38

Well I was just going to come to that. Yeah.

Jane Hall 44:41

And I think at the beginning there was this kind of sense of inequity as well. You know, that thing where you don't know each other?

Lisa Jacques 44:46

Yeah. So I think the first sort of meeting that we had with our associate artists and we were sort of, why would our associate artists want to do workshops from Assemble?

Jane Hall 44:58

We weren't part of and you were trying to do those conversations separately.

Lisa Jacques 45:00

So I think firstly, the the project was introduced and the potential was

msldgnittoI Contemporary

there, with the cross between the collaboration with Assemble and schools of tomorrow. And then I think it was very much about remaining true to the programme of schools of tomorrow, and what that's about, so that we don't change the direction for the schools, we don't change the direction that the artists were going towards. And so it was about, like you said, that inequity and stepping on toes, so it was about almost quite possessive I think about retaining what that programme was, and what it was about, we didn't want to lose our voice, you know. So I think from the outset, that that was what you were coming into, really, that's the room that you were coming into. And I think the first stage in the process was actually discussing that with our associate artists, discussing it with our schools about the potential of what might happen, there might be a collaboration, because I think, to impose that, you know, was a bit woah, actually, can we see whether this aligns, can we see whether this fits? So I think it was about how it could possibly work and the potential it had before we actually sort of said, Yes, it will, etcetera, etcetera. Because, yeah, it's you're Turner prize winners, you know, it's like, whoa, and we need to share the skills and the knowledge and the learning that was happening in the schools. And to make sure that that had a voice from the beginning. So yes, I think that initial sort of meeting was about our artists showcasing their practice, and also the history that they had with regards to the connections of play, outdoor learning, and their journeys within each of their individual schools. And I think it was from that moment, which was very early on about three years ago.

Jane Hall 46:58

Yeah. Because everyone came to our studio, you brought lots of people. And it was kind of I could sense it was like, people didn't quite know why they were there, what we were talking about. And one of the big things that everyone was really worried about was how, and I don't know if you've noticed, but we haven't talked about it since. Everyone was so worried that if you let children run around, it would be too noisy. They really worried like how are you gonna control the noise? Yeah. And I was like, well I don't know what I don't even know what we're doing yet. So I don't know, like, is that a problem? And so it was really interesting as a starting point, to just actually hear what different people are worried about, you know, what are the anxieties and the concerns, and I suppose

in the very early stages, like that, sort of, like lack of trust a bit, like, it's all going to be okay. And like, there's a process here. And I thought that was really interesting, because it felt at that point that we needed to just actually like, sit back a bit and just observe. So then we came here, I think, actually, it took about a year because of everything. But in this space, we had, all the artists over the course of an afternoon present their different work, and there's some really interesting and kind of diverse approaches. And it was really, I think, giving that moment for everyone to have their voice and to say what's important to them, and what their inquiry is about and the challenges they have also the things that they're really excited about. And we brought Penny Wilson, who's an amazing play worker, she's written this text that's online called the play worker primer. And she's just kind of really calm guiding voice about how risk can be managed, how it can be embraced, about the role of adults in play as much as about what it is that kind of children are doing and also the sort of opportunities, so at different moments we tried also to bring in people who might be able to shape a conversation rather than try and be like extractive about it, like you know, what did they say okay, we must include that like.

Lisa Jacques 49:04

And I think at the time you'd started Assemble Play that Penny.

Jane Hall 49:07

Yeah. So Assemble have a sort of sister organisation called Assemble Play, which is basically just Penny and it enables her to organise pay workers in actually kind of institutions a bit like this. So Pitshanger Manor, Royal Academy, lots of outdoor developments, like around Kings Cross for Argent, the developer, kind of activating underused public spaces, mostly on weekends, and in holidays, and it literally is like a toolkit of stuff and some experienced play workers who just sort of make things kind of happen. And so Assemble Play is sort of trying to challenge the way in which parts of the built environment kind of understood to be used and see if they could be used in a different way and invite children into that way of using space. So that sits within Assemble, it's kind of managed by us at assemble, but it's really about supporting Penny to kind of do that type of work, which is playwork adventure playground, it's all completely unfunded by the government,

msldgnittoI Contemporary

it's just kind of free for all. So it's also about how to make it something that can actually be, you know, really important offer to support play workers to do what they kind of want to do in quite precarious sort of contexts. But yeah, Penny is a kind of really well known established sort of voice in the sort of play world.

Lisa Jacques 50:38

And I think it was really good to hear that external voice. And she is very relaxed, very calm. And, you know,

Jane Hall 50:46

Yeah, she's been up to talk to the GAs.

Lisa Jacques 50:48

Yeah, so another strand of sort of the collaboration, and I touched upon it earlier, within the galleries, was about ensuring that our staff were confident in delivering a show such as this. And so we did a few research trips. So the Baltic, in Newcastle has been amazing. So they're on their fourth year of play exhibition. And we went up with our play and learn facilitators, learning and our gallery assistants, as well. And our curatorial team, I think were in touch with them in dialogue with them as well, to understand the complexities of this type of show and how it challenges, the usual traditional exhibitions on gallery and how that's challenging for our staff to manage, which we touched upon upstairs. And so it was about understanding their sort of anxieties as well. So this is where we sort of talk more sort of internally about how we've sort of collaborated internally with the teams. So we've put in quite a lot of a training programme and worked really closely with our gallery assistants, our front of house team, and listen to their concerns. That's why I got the big list that I gave to the school. And listened when they've seen some of the designs, the yeah, the gasps and horror of the potential of how these were going to be used, the audiences that were going to come and how we had our traditional audience and how this was going to change that. We drew on quite a lot of experience from our families programme on how we engage with our families, within this space, actually, how to negotiate conflict, how to negotiate risk, but in a way that isn't obstructive to play or obstructive to certain behaviours. And so Baltic were really supportive in sharing their knowledge of their

Nottingham Contemporary

fourth play exhibition, I think their first one they had a broken arm. So yeah, they've I think they've learned a lot along the way. And taking that on board, but then actually, it's completely different for us because the exhibits are different, the space is different, the floor is different, you know, it's a no shoes exhibition, and how we sort of negotiated all that with our front of house and alleviated their concerns to build that confidence in them, that they were confident to be on gallery, confident to interact, confident to engage. So we had workshops that were to do with body language, that were to do with language, how we approach people about rules, and there are no rules, but there are some rules with regards to risk, etc. So and this was a challenge for our curators as well, I believe, and I'm talking on behalf of one or actually in this instance, as one, with this exhibition, about the possibilities.

Jane Hall 54:09

Yeah, and it felt like that was quite difficult for us because in a way, at that moment, Nottingham has to decide what level of risk you're happy with, and we've kind of mitigated against obvious ones with the way we've designed things. But what we've always found with a lot of projects is like the unexpected happens. So you can plan as much as you like, but it's always gonna be something over there that someone does. And I think we've also, I think this thing about experience is really important and but also confidence because a lot of the playground that we've worked with and the one in Scotland is, you know, children have, they have knives, they have swords, they have fire. And the film we made, there's a very experienced play worker talking about, you know, okay, so people cut themselves, but they only cut themselves once, because it's about learning as a proper tool. And in a way, it felt like a real challenge because gallery assistants are being, you know, the gallery assistants are not signed up to be playworkers, which is actually a really skilled job that people, you know, do professionally. So, was it too much of an ask, is there a balance? How can the process of the show become something that people feel supported to take on a bit of that role. And the one rule we have at Baltic Street is you can't do, you can do whatever you want, as long as you don't stop someone else from doing what they want, which has like a really kind of nice clarity to it. But in practice, yeah, you find a lot of other stuff happening. And when we've done the Brutalist playground, I remember in Sheffield, it's

msdnittoN

Contemporary

these huge sculptures covered in foam, really brightly coloured, they just like, completely transformed the space, the whole landscape of fun stuff. And I remember, they tried to bring a group of reception kids, so they're like four or five years old, and they were coming up the hill. And the people in gallery were like, right, so when they come, you just, we're gonna take them here, and we're gonna sit them all down, I'm gonna explain to them the show, we're gonna take their shoes off, they're gonna neatly arrange them, and then we'll take them on to the thing. And I could just see these four year olds coming towards us. And I was like, good luck with that. And you know, they're right in there, just throw themselves at it, they're throwing their shoes back up the area, they're supposed to take them off in because they've decided later to do that, you know, it's just, it's interesting to understand, I think adult behaviour, I quite enjoyed your email, I think sent a week later, which had a list of things that had happened in the gallery since it opened and a lot was sort of normal, nice things that we kind of expected. But then we had lots of stuff. I don't know if it was you or someone else said that the animals had been made into, like bowling pins. And people like adults were using the ball to like, knock them over. And it was like, oh, it's quite innovative. Well done adults participating, too. So I think it's Yeah, I don't know. It'd be interesting to know if the GAs feel okay about it all.

Lisa Jacques 57:24

Just going back to the sort of collaboration process in, we'd had these conversations were all quite tentative. We were trying to work out whether this was the right thing for our programme. Yes, it was, was this the right thing for our associate artists for our schools? Yes, it was, and for the organisation to sort of provide something quite different for our audiences and also different for the organisation. And I think that the dialogue and the conversation you touched upon when we were just chatting between about how important it is to try and work people's personalities out, try and work out. You know and that in itself is quite complex, given the amount of people that were involved in that collaboration, collaborative process. And we started off with Kiera, who was our interim chief curator, then, who was covering maternity leave from Nicole. And so the conversations did start with that. And so there's this passing of information as well. And you were I don't know if you want to elaborate a little bit more about how important the honest

Nottingham University

communication and dialogue is, you know, in order to sort of progress forward and where that becomes a challenge and where the frustrations lie, because you know, it has some of it is a frustrating process.

Jane Hall 58:44

I think, there were a few moments where it was like, I think there was a bit of a kind of lull where I think we were all expecting something to happen. But no one knew what it was. And I think the associate artists, or maybe you guys are expecting us to come in and do a thing. And the thing would make a thing, and then that would be a thing. And that would look like workshops or something. And we were like we're here to embrace whatever it is that you do. What do you do? And I think what really kind of enabled us to move forward was actually just starting a direct conversation with, you know, when you distilled it into the three associate artists who we would be working with, and we had kind of three direct points of contact who were in the schools, you know, then it got to this point where it felt like we were talking so much about doing stuff with children and I hadn't met a single child yet. And I remember the day when we went to see Sian at Nottingham nursery and Laura at Robin Hood and actually just observed, we just participated in what they were doing and you're like straight in there with Sian who is like singing and painting and has got glow sticks. And these are kind of like 18 month younger, even children.

Lisa Jacques 1:00:10

At the nursery? Yes, they're all sort of zero to four. Yeah.

Jane Hall 1:00:16

And sort of what I really took from that was how much she expected from them. Do it! Yeah, she, she just was like kind of encouraging them to do all sorts of stuff I didn't think was possible. But I think that really them for us enabled us to think more confidently about the structures we were making, rethink how appropriate they were or not, would they suddenly realising that kids that young could get meaningful participation out of what we were designing, and every conversation we had with Sian and then with Laura at Robin Hood, where it was year five, and six, so kind of 10-11 year olds, we just got something new out of just being there. You know, at Robin Hood, also this sense of permissiveness. So we had a

msldgnittoI Contemporary

teaching associate, come round with us with the different groups. And depending on which teaching associate you had it was a completely different vibe. So some of the kids were like climbing up trees, they're in this, like forest schools environment that was climbing up the trees, and the teachers just like, they're not normally allowed to do that, you know, like this is special. But she really embraced this sense that they, the kids were taking part in something whereas the other TAs were, like, kept telling them off, and it was all very kind of, sort of more bounded. But just being able to be part of the school and seeing the different things that those children were exposed to during their day, their environment, the impact Laura had, when she came in, she did a thing in the afternoon, where she just got bowls of water, and like lots of bits and just put it on the floor. And then these kind of 10-11 year olds come down, and she's like, there it is. And I thought we were doing like a water workshop, I thought she had like, a strategy for this. But she just sat down. And that was her strategy. And they just did what they wanted to do. And they had a great time. And it was, we took a lot from that. So I think we were talking earlier about collaboration, there's usually an expectation for it to look like something, for it to look like a workshop or a thing that we can document and we can point to. And actually, the collaboration over the last two years has become, and the things that you do see in the gallery are just a product of dialogue between us all, you know, talking to Laura in the staff room, over a cup of tea between, you know, between the actual activities, like I think that's where we got so much inspiration for kind of what to do, and why for when it came to the Funhouse. I think as a designer, you're always worried with these collaborative projects about imposing yourself too much.

Lisa Jacques 1:03:04

I think that was our worry as well. It was about ensuring that the artists, the school, that partnership had a voice, the children very much has a voice, you know about their sort of autonomy and the authorship.

Jane Hall 1:03:19

That was the other thing that I found amazing as we you know trying, they're like Jane explain what you do to these 10 year olds. So I got some, I got our website up. And like we're architects, we do this thing and how responsive they all were, you know, you show them terraced houses,

Nottingham Contemporary

you know, does anyone live in a house like this? And they're like I do. Or we showed I showed them a picture of I think our winter garden project. And I was like, did do any of you know what this is? And they all just had a go. They all got it completely wrong. But they were so confident and just saying what they were thinking. And then I was describing to them that we will be making large sculptures in a gallery that lots of them hadn't been to in Nottingham, and they would design them with us and come and see them. And they just got it. They were just so, their little faces they were like so excited. And so coming out of those assemblies was like, Oh, God, we have to, better make this good. Because like they it seemed suddenly much more obvious about how we would like take them on this journey with us coming in now and again, but with Laura, Sian, Gill, Charlotte, Peter, like installed as a constant. That's kind of how I think our collaboration sort of took form.

Lisa Jacques 1:04:38

I just want to come back to as you said it really sort of changed when we had the three schools. So the way that we selected the three schools for the collaboration. So obviously, we've got eight. One was actually budgetary and time. And then it was working out which schools best aligned with actually this journey and also providing different age ranges, because we know their developmental stages were going to be completely different. So you've got quite a lot out of the nursery. You know, you've already said those revelations about, you know, what they can do so young. And so and, and so that's why we sort of selected them, one because the the age range, and also what the enquiries they were already looking at. So we had this and I keep mentioning it, had this natural flow to it. So the the school was the Jubilee L.E.A.D. Academy school. And they were, we've worked with them previously, and we've been working with them. And they've done an amazing job, they've gone into special measures, they did an amazing job to get out of special measures. And, yeah, and it got re ofstead. And it was, it was amazing. But in order to get out of that special measures to a good sort of grading, they had a very regimented style. And that sort of stays has stayed with them. And elements of that has stayed with them. So it also provided a school that was very regimented in their approach, and the impact that that might potentially have, as well as the school like Robin Hood, where they embrace the, they fully embraced the arts. They're partnered

msdnittoI Contemporary

with the, you know, RSC, they've got like a very arts rich curriculum. So there was that as well, as well as the nursery, which also provided that sort of early years elements. So the three schools were quite, you know, particular in our selection about well,

Jane Hall 1:06:46

And that's what I think also, we're talking a lot about associate artists, but it was Riley, Amanda, and Terry, who were the teachers who were just so welcoming. It was amazing, very hard not to call Riley Riley in front of his kids who are all like, Mr. Walker, yeah. But they were yet another layer to take on this kind of whole thing.

Lisa Jacques 1:07:12

Okay. So we've got to these three schools, and then it was one school in particular, which was Robin Hood, you went in, and you touched on that briefly how the third sculpture was developed. So it's just want to talk a little bit about this sort of genesis of the sculpture, which we sort of explained upstairs. The Funhouse. Yeah.

Jane Hall 1:07:31

So with, from the beginning, from the outset, we were sort of like, well, we were going to do two of the kind of four things that you can see in Lina's drawing. And we'll make a third one that will be the product of this collaboration without really knowing like how that was going to kind of manifest itself. And I think it was towards the end of last year, it became obvious that Robin Hood was the school which would best welcome us in a way to visit more frequently and do a more hands on workshop with their students kind of guided by Laura and Kerry, the teacher there. And we and coming back to this idea of your your role as a designer and kind of when you step in, a lot of our projects, people come to us because they're interested in the way we work with people, and they have this sense. And there's always a sense when you see architects talking about participation, that somehow like people can design buildings themselves. And the architecture just step aside, they are not needed. Whereas actually, the and I think it's so evident here, this moment where you have to interpret something, you have to have knowledge of construction and of building in order to fit with these constraints such as budget, time, safety measures, and how we could take something

Nottingham Contemporary

that the children had made, the pupils have made themselves and be in a way true to that and representative of that so they understand it as something they've made, but actually just deliver a thing that will kind of stand up for the three months or four months of the show. So the Funhouse, You know to get 3D really quick, we use clay because it's just so it's like the best amateur craft because you need no skills to do cool stuff with clay. And we have a kiln in our studio in London so we were able to fire the sculpture and glaze it and.

Lisa Jacques 1:09:04
Many many pieces.

Jane Hall 1:09:43
Many pieces.

Lisa Jacques 1:09:44
I collected it from the school the receptionist shook the box. Here you go!

Jane Hall 1:09:48
A box of brittle greenware, but no, we haven't. We've done a lot of clay stuff with professional ceramicists in our studio. We have professional ceramicists also in our studio. And we have a clay club at the studio. But making as a form of conversation was something I hadn't really done before. And it was really interesting with the children, we talked as we made, and the thing became representative of the conversation, but it wasn't like, Oh, we're going to make a climbing wall, or we're going to make a thing, it was this sort of weird organic lump. And I think I that's why I'm unsure about putting it in the gallery space. Because I think to anyone who looks at it, it's probably quite hard to understand what it is. Whereas I think when me and Holly, my colleague who's worked on this project, look at it, I'm like, I remember which kid did which bits, you know, it's Victoria's tree, if anybody wants to know, Victoria's tree, she was responsible for that bit. And then different students did other elements. And actually, there's a bit of all of them in it. And so we really tried in our interpretations to kind of represent that, but almost also distill it to these basic parts just to have that clarity of something that we can build. And so it became this structure that sort of all slots together,

msldgnittoI Contemporary

making best use of a sheet of material. That could be flat packed from our studio and taken up an event Nottingham installed on site in a limited amount of time with, you know, two people being able to lift each thing or rather two people from my studio, me bossing them around. And then getting kind of moments fabricated - the blue bag structure stuff, it's made by a textile designer called Georgia Boston, who we work with a lot, because she's up for weird challenges. And then Sian, brought in, the associate artist from the nursery brought in the sound pieces, capturing moments, recordings, and then those are sort of integrated into the soft bits and they're kind of discoverable. So that's also, one of the things she talks a lot about is curiosity. And that things shouldn't be obvious, that you might accidentally come across something, and then kind of work it out for yourself, and it might lead you somewhere else. And then this notion of the kind of big crowning ball, the top of the tree, as something that would be enable the thing to kind of come apart a bit in the way that the clay sculpture does. So at that moment, through the workshop, it was really like about interpreting it. And then when they came, and you sort of tried to explain to them how you've done it all, and they're just running after the wall and deflated it.

Lisa Jacques 1:12:48

We'll get onto actually everything being activated. So I think from from what you're saying, really, you're talking about the dialogue, the conversation, the learning that that's collaborative, the collaborative process, the learning that it's enabled for you, you know, in order to influence sort of like the exhibition, the exhibits, and the way that objects are used. And you were talking about Sian and the nursery about it's all about discovery, it's all about coming across something and about them, the child's voice as well comes quite strongly in the sense where you're sort of talking about Robin Hood, and about it was through discussion and making at the same time, as well. So that's quite an interesting sort of draw on the processes that have happened. And I know we can't cover everything. Because there's so much to say, isn't there? We could we could go on. But I think if we move on to actually when the exhibition sort of opened. The kids came in. So I think for us, to make sure that we, so you were up for a number of weeks installing, sorry it was installed over a couple of weeks, that process and at the same time, we were organising with schools, when they come in for their

Nottingham Contemporary

private view, it was definitely their private view. It was their art that's on show here, you know, the perimeter work as well from content from each school, as well as the input into I would say, you know, quite, you know, the the Animal Menagerie was, you know, is was that cumbersome element that you took from the nursery, the collaborative way of working that you found with the children and for them to be able to sort of see that realised and for them to come in and own the space. And I think we had a test group in to test out the Funhouse. And we all stood there, just waiting to see what might happen. And that group weren't involved in the design of it or hadn't actually seen it before. And so it was, yeah, reading their reactions and our observations and there was no sort of prompts or anything like that. And then to the following day where we actually had the private view, in the afternoon, you were just saying, as you as you came in, last time you came this was full of kids. I think we were all singing and dancing as a little bit of a warm up for their private view and how we celebrated their achievements as well, and how much it was about them on the gallery. And then I think we had 60 pupils at a time on gallery, which is the capacity to see yeah, what happened, how they were going to respond, and how they seen themselves within the exhibition. And so I think, yeah, I mean, do you want to talk a little bit about actually, what did happen?

Jane Hall 1:16:00

Carnage! Yeah, I think it's, and that's something that I think maybe kind of could have anticipated, but hadn't really thought much about is the difference between a gallery that's full of people who know each other. And actually a gallery, which on any given day is full of smaller groups of strangers, and the impact that that might have. So I think because the children had been quite hyped up about coming, and all knew each other, they were just like, they treated it like it was, like their house or something. Like they really took it apart. And I think they discovered that the ball had the stopper. Yeah. So they took it out. And of course, the whole thing deflated. Oh, no, it's gonna rip, but it was absolutely fine. And luckily, I think it is pretty much undestroyable.

Lisa Jacques 1:16:51

And so it was yeah, it was having conversations with them and observations about how they started to use the space that we could

msldgnittoI Contemporary

then take back and we were like, we never expected the softplay to be used as trampolines. You know, we were like, wow, what are they doing? You know, and observing that, and I think that's been quite important throughout the whole exhibition about this observation of how our visitors who then become participants experience the show and the environment.

Jane Hall 1:17:21

Well, it was actually one of the Robin Hood kids who I was like, Should we take the ball off the top, because no one had really worked out that they could do that. And he was like, can we? And I was just so shocked that it's like, people are going crazy around us. And you're asking me if we're allowed to take the ball off, which was probably the mistake, because once it came off it, but this is still, you know, they're always navigating what's allowed. So it looks like chaos, but actually, they're all thinking like, Can I do this? What's happening? What will happen if I do this? Like, there's actually a thing?

Lisa Jacques 1:17:59

And how can I do that? Yeah, who can I work with? How can we make this happen as a as a group?

Jane Hall 1:18:05

And, yeah. And that's, you know, it takes a couple of people to do stuff in the gallery. So like moving the animals or the getting the ball off or moving that or, you know, there's not much stuff that you can do entirely alone. And so there's some nice, there's one photo, that's just got like five or six children, pushing the ball with just loads of adults sitting chatting on a bench, just not having anything to do with it. And I think that's quite a nice image of the way in which the space sort of is articulated for different people.

Lisa Jacques 1:18:44

And so we were quite keen to make this a dynamic show in the sense that there's a lot of activity programmed, so we've had so many school visits and workshopping happening in that space. And what was left behind. So we mentioned the tape on the floor, and then how another group then uses that, to navigate their way around the space or to

Nottingham Contemporary

navigate the exhibits. And that has been quite a challenge for us as an organisation to have remnants left on the gallery, and it's okay for people to interact with, how our school groups interact, and collaborate with our day to day visitors. So how that's negotiated, whose space is it when a school group is in there, as opposed to you know, as well as having sort of public visitors. And it's about that dialogue that our artists has with, you know, the parent and with the school kids, to the point where there was one point where actually the school kids were taking a little toddler down on their knees down the slide, so it became, it was everyone's space, you know, it belonged to everyone. And they were sort of, you know, encouraging those visitors to draw and do what they do. And, and it's about how they felt so comfortable within that space.

Jane Hall 1:20:07

It's quite weird when you have to leave projects like we have left it, whereas you have to deal with it every single day.

Lisa Jacques 1:20:13

But I think so this is an element that I think is really quite interesting, in the sense of, that's the traditional model of an exhibition, it's up. And therefore it's just about maintenance. This has been a high maintenance, as Niall will, high maintenance show, but at the same time, we're also wanting it to be quite active, and we want it to change want the environment to change. And so whilst Holly and Jane haven't been here, we've been in constant dialogue around actually this happened today, we've had to look at all these play different play styles to manage the space, which I touched upon upstairs. You know, there were these moments like the human Skittles with the adults and the yeah, the Skittles with the soft play and, and so having that feedback, and you sort of sending us images of your friends in the space and how they've used it. So and I think that's been very generous of you to share. And for us to continually have this very much dialogue and this back and forth of how it's all going. Because we're all really curious to how it's being used in order that we can take some of that learning, and input it into our future programming, you know, to understand what our audiences want from a space such as this, from a show such as this, so that we can identify that and take it forward. So I think for us, that's been quite key. I mean, I know that you also maintain that dialogue with some of the artists as

msldgnittoI Contemporary

well. So there are separate conversations going on, you get a playlist, I think, from Sian every week, or a monthly playlist or a Friday song or something like that. And so it's about those relationships, and how they've developed across the time.

Jane Hall 1:22:03

And definitely lots of stuff that we've done through this process, I can already see we're applying to the way in which we work with other institutions that are also seeking in a different way very participatory ways of working. And this has been very formative in having I think we preach it a lot. We talk about process and just going with it and trialling, trial and error and failure. These are things that we like really value as a design practice. But this project I think has really kind of given me confidence to like legitimise all of those things, there can be uncertainty sometimes, and that's okay. And you know, I really enjoyed the shift where it really felt like you were shepherding artists, it's like, oh, Lisa's in it now, like it's her project too. And that's when I really felt like it was all of ours. And in a way I like I kind of completely relaxed about delivering the thing, because I was very confident that, you know, as an organisation, we were now at a point where it felt very equal as a project, and it's really nice that I still get text messages from Sian and you know, I think it's a, it's got these, you see the remnants and traces physically in the gallery of use, but there are also these less tangible ones that, you know, will kind of end up somewhere in the future.

Lisa Jacques 1:23:35

So that's really interesting how the process has influenced sort of future ways of working. And I think this is a nice way to sort of round up by saying about us as Nottingham Contemporary, about our exhibition programming, and about how we sort of aim to go forward with the collaborative process within our teams, and how we are observing behaviours on gallery and how that might influence future programming, to provide those opportunities that our visitors, you know, are sort of really responding to. So I think in that way, that's been really positive for us. And I think the learning that has taken place throughout the whole process, not only from the schools of tomorrow programme, about how we work with schools, how we bring in additional artists, how we, you know, and it is all about that communication, and that dialogue

Nottingham Contemporary

and understanding the ebbs and flows that happen, as well throughout the whole process. So yeah, I think there's been many challenges, much learning as well, but how we will take those forward into future practices of Assemble, Nottingham Contemporary and how our artists will take those forward as well within their own practice. So yeah. So I think we are done so we can talk forever, and we need to be stopped. And obviously, if there's any questions, please just, you know, we may have covered everything. Possibly. Yeah. Please feel free to ask, no pressure. It's quiet. Must have a few from internal staff maybe just.

Jane Hall 1:25:31

So nice to see all the photos.

Lisa Jacques 1:25:33

It is yeah. Yeah. Also, that's a fraction. Quite a lot of them have been taken on a mobile phone as well. So the quality might not be. But they've been moments, key moments for artists where they needed to capture. And so yeah, so that, and I think that sort of DIY aspect is really endearing to the project as well.

Jane Hall 1:25:56

We've got because we've got someone from our studio, Hannah, who's a great photographer. And we've just become really like, every project we do. I'm like, we have to get it properly photographed. Because you can never trust anyone else to photograph your own project for you. Like you have to make sure you've got your own person there. And she's been like, it's quite lovely photos really lovely. But actually, I'm seeing all these nice, less formal ones taken with phones, which just capture it so much more in a way. There's a really nice, like quality to them. So you have to send me

Lisa Jacques 1:26:28

So if nobody else has a question we'll just carry on. Yeah.

Jane Hall 1:26:35

And things I'm like when did, that was one of my favourite moments. Actually. This is Esme who was a complete terror who was bossing the photographer around. And then he left in the afternoon. She's

msdnittoI **Contemporary**

like, where's that man gone? Where's the man gone and she was just instructing him. I think she was the tiniest one.

Lisa Jacques 1:26:52
I think she yeah, yeah.

Jane Hall 1:26:54
Sian said it's because she had older siblings.

Lisa Jacques 1:26:56
Yeah, she is a character.

Jane Hall 1:26:58
She knows what she wants.

Lisa Jacques 1:26:59
She came to the private view as well. Yeah. Yeah.

Jane Hall 1:27:01
So yeah. Enjoy upstairs and bring people to it.

Lisa Jacques 1:27:09
Yeah, so it's on the until September the fourth. As Canan mentioned, there was the additional talks, the additional programme that's happening as well. So you may be interested in that - that's all online. And that's happening throughout July. And then we also have our summer family programme of workshops, which are free workshops for our families that take place in this space, with the environment being designed by Southwold primary school, who were very much into immersive environments, but didn't quite fit with upstairs so the invitation naturally fit with our families programme. So they'll be designing the, or giving us the ideas for the AV, IT and sound in the space. So yeah, so please do come back and play in the exhibition. And if we've got our family activities on please do bring any littlies that belong to you to enjoy it.

Nottingham Contemporary

Colophon

Curator: Canan Batur

Assisted by: Shannon Charlesworth, Philippa Douglas

Technicians: Paul Buddle, Catherine Masters