

AURORA

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MAKING AURORA

INVISIBLE FLOCK

Making a piece of art about water is one of the biggest challenges our studio has taken on to date. On a technical level, putting lots of technology in a room with lots of water is very hard but also mostly on a communication level, water is about everything and so much that we can't comprehend; meanings, feelings, facts and concerns around our global relationship to it; how do you organise this into something that people can emotionally connect to. Can we create an artwork that rebuilds a primal connection to the natural world that we seem to have lost.

We fully embraced water as a material. In Aurora, every visual effect either uses or is generated by the behaviour of water and I think this is where it succeeds. Your feet are in it, it is pouring, melting, draining and echoing around you. We set ourselves the rule that the spectacle of the piece is only created out of the materials of water and light, not recreated or tricked through technology. The refractions of light were determined by the passing of lasers through each individual ice block; the Aurora is a natural effect.

Aurora is a global piece. It draws inspiration from India, Indonesia, Iceland, Japan and the UK and our invaluable international collaborators from these places have made it something dense, unsettling and magical. In the space of 6 months of making the work; Sulawesi in Indonesia suffered a Tsunami, Kerala in South India suffered the worst floods from rains in its history. Closer to home in the UK we had the driest summer on record. Climate change is all around us and we feel it deeply, in our own lives and through the lives of our friends and colleagues abroad.

Liverpool was the perfect city to create this piece of work for many reasons. Its long existing relationship to water, to public health and sanitation, its relationship to being a port, to being connected across waters to many places, the word Liverpool appearing in a dream of Jung –

"...I had a vision of unearthly beauty, and that is why I was able to live at all. Liverpool is the *pool of life*."

Aurora was sited in Park Hill reservoir in Toxteth, a Victorian reservoir built in 1845, to hold and supply 2 million gallons of water, for the local community that lived there or to make use of its elevated position using pressure to send water down to the docks to put out fires. The building is steeped in history and the dampness of the bricks holds this.

Only two times in my life have I felt overwhelmed, unsettled and completely overjoyed by nature. Looking down into the mouth

of an active volcano at Mount Bromo in Java, after climbing a couple of miles to the top, hearing it move and swirl and seeing the lava. Never have I felt like I shouldn't be somewhere, almost that I had no right, and that a multiplicity of systems were at work underneath me, that had no sense or care about humans. It was freeing to feel this. The second time was the beginning of the monsoons on a beach in Varkala in Kerala. I had read passionately about the monsoon season in India, but nothing prepared me for the air, the heaviness and immediate change in every material, the sand, the beach cafe walls, people's hair and faces. The green spreading. I felt if I had stood still for too long, a moss would start to grow on my skin and totally consume me. What we wanted to achieve with Aurora was for people to feel not that they were at something spectacular, but an awe, a connection to nature, as something not ours to be tamed but operating in ways outside of our understanding as something vastly more ancient than our histories. I think of this by Robert Macfarlane –

"(...) not as a single gleaming snow-peak or tumbling river in which we might find redemption, nor as a diorama that we deplore or adore from a distance – but rather as an assemblage of entanglements of which we are messily part."

A lot of people were involved in making Aurora. Local schools, groups and individuals gave us their time to talk to us about what water meant to them and their stories of water, what it meant to grow things, to sail across it, to ration it, to swim in it, water as a fraught political resource, to water given birth in. We traced the water from Lake Vyrnwy down into Liverpool, attempting to understand the fresh water flow into the city. We travelled rivers in Bangalore, across glaciers in Iceland recording and capturing water in the wild. We created water synthesisers with local young people, playing with water to create soundscapes for the final installation; through all of this trying to share and understand how we collectively think about water. Through the research we wanted to open up a dialogue on the value of water at a local and global level, to understand it as an element, a life force, a resource, a commodity and a danger.

In his book *Dark Ecology*, Timothy Morton talks about our responsibility towards the Anthropocene. "In simple terms I am formally responsible to the extent that I understand global warming. That's all you actually need to be responsible for something. You understand that truck is going to hit that man? You are responsible for that man." But this feeling of blame and of powerlessness can often leave us feeling stuck, unsure of how to make change, of course this can also be an excuse, but when we look at the slow rate at which people are beginning to understand the impact we are having on the natural world, we as artists and writers need to look at why the message isn't getting across fast enough. Perhaps we don't just need to feel responsible, we need to feel something much older, more spiritual, more magical, than we know.

Victoria Pratt
Creative Director
INVISIBLE FLOCK



Aurora at the Toxteth Reservoir, Sept-Oct 2018, Photo by Jon Barraclough



Traditional knowledge is passed to younger generations through practice on the field. However, in a lot of cases, due to man made interventions like dams/ barrages and climate change, this knowledge is proving inadequate to make good decisions.

RIVERSIDE PORTRAITS

Photographs from India

SIDDHARTH AGARWAL

Open well in a river.
After the construction of a bridge upstream, this village lost most of its land. The drama continues, to no response from authorities.





Children of fishermen showing off their diving skills at a village near Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.



Young kids played pose for the camera under a rhododendron tree. The Bhagirathi river flows in the deep valley behind.



A farmer discovers waste left behind by a flooding river. It is difficult to visualise how indiscriminate waste dumping can affect farming or ecology, but the threat is very real.



Young tender hands at work, working with the elders and learning the nuances of artisanal riverine fishing.



After the monsoons recede, farmers start searching for fertile ground underneath the layers of sand deposited on the river bed.



Women, hard at work
- Bhagirathi Valley,
Uttarakhand. As the effects
of Climate Change become
stronger, the weight of
everyday work on fields
increases on women.

Fishermen getting busy
near the confluence of
the Ganga and Yamuna in
Allahabad as the monsoon
starts to recede. The
monsoons are supposed to
be non-hunting season for
the fisherfolk, because this
is when the fish lay their
eggs. Some adhere to this,
but most don't.



A receding Ganga post monsoon in Uttar Pradesh. The river has been taking with it a lot of land every year, creating environmental refugees who have nowhere to go. In some stretches, one can even see roads suddenly vanishing into the river.



MOVING OVER THE FACE OF THE DEEP

STEPHEN SCOTT-BOTTOMS

"In the beginning," we are told, "God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And . . . God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light." (Genesis 1: 1-3)

Maybe that's going too far back. Maybe I should begin in September 2018, when the Leeds-based arts collective Invisible Flock invited me to attend the launch evening of their new installation, Aurora.

Which is how I found myself walking through pouring rain in the Toxteth area of Liverpool, along with other intrepid visitors to Aurora's very first public showing. Everyone was cold and damp, and we'd been warned that we were likely to stay cold and damp, because we were about to step inside a reservoir. Toxteth Reservoir, that is: a remarkable, Grade-2 listed building that is part of Liverpool's industrial heritage.

The reservoir's forbidding, sloping walls, built around 1845, were designed to contain and support vast quantities of water. This water, which presumably fell from the sky to begin with — this being Liverpool — was held in a rectangular tank measuring around 2600 square metres. It was distributed as needed to provide clean water to the city's rapidly expanding population, and also supplied early fire-fighting efforts, etc.

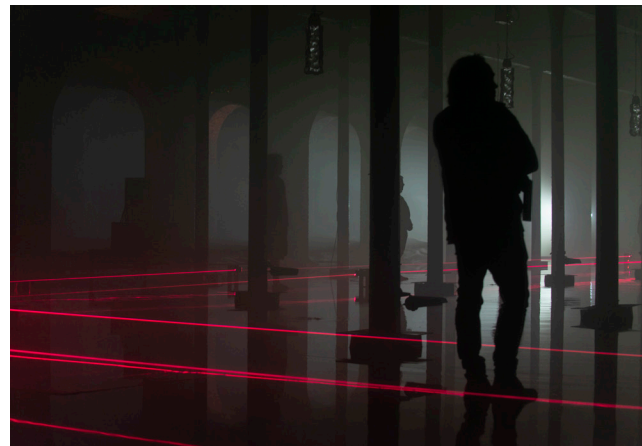
The roof of this vast space is held up with rows of iron pillars. Moving inside the building, we found ourselves navigating our way freely around a big rectangle of walkways, shadowing the interior edges of the building, which were marked out by coloured lasers. These walkways were all under 2 or 3 centimetres of water, so as we walked, patterns of coloured light rippled out in front of us.

I went into Aurora not really knowing what to expect. The last piece of Invisible Flock's that I saw, Control, was a theatre show based on interviews

with a myriad of "experts" — which explored who has what degree of control over the way the world is heading just now (politically, environmentally, technologically...). Control was all about the language from these interviews — words, words, words — and so I was expecting that to be continued somehow in Aurora. But instead... no words at all. Just impenetrable darkness, a void without clear edges, and water lapping around our feet, moisture clinging to us in the dank atmosphere. And light. Let there be light, said Invisible Flock. And behold, there was light. Especially, centrally, light picking out a big lump of slowly melting ice — hanging suspended in the middle of the space, and reflecting in the water below. Sometimes the ice was visible. Sometimes not.

As an experience, Aurora runs for about 40 minutes. Which is actually quite a long time when you're standing in the dark and the cold, watching light play across water. If this were a regular gallery installation, it would be the kind of thing you'd just walk in and out of, when you've had enough, but here — like a theatre show — we all entered together and left together at the end. A captive audience. Trapped in the dark. Not quite sure how to get out even if you wanted to. So you're very much left alone with your own thoughts. Partly because talking would seem, somehow, wrong in here. And partly because the sound score — an eerie combination of electronics and strings — is sometimes so loud it would drown out speech. Although it's also sometimes so quiet that you can hear water dripping.

A lot of things run through your head in a situation like this. I went through a phase, for example, of rejection and denial. It's really just a big Son et lumière display, I thought to myself for a while. Where is the content? I'd read that this was some kind of local community project, so where was the community — other than standing around with me in the dark? I'd also read that this was to be a piece about global "water issues" like flooding and drought... but how can sound and light alone talk about those concerns?



Aurora - Photo by Jon Barraclough

There was a stage in the show when the lighting started to pick out more of the looming, arch-like architecture of the building. It even started 'raining' around the inside of the exterior walls. This was the point when the piece felt the most "human" to me — an evocation both of man-made structures and of the weather we all live with in the north of England... the weather that Liverpool's Victorian workers trudged through, just as we had today.

But what was most surprising, and most chilling perhaps, was just how inhuman, or rather nonhuman, Aurora turned out to be. To speak of flooding or drought is to speak, really, of the impacts on humans of there being too much water, or too little, for our accustomed ways of living. But in the end, Aurora seemed to me spectacularly unconcerned with such passing matters. It really was about water as water. Mysterious. Impenetrable (even when we dive headfirst into it). Eternal. We're made of it, we depend on it, but it does not need us.

For me, this thought was epitomised by the strange, hanging shapes that formed a kind of field, or cloud, or constellation around that central ice block. Shapes that looked at first like lanterns, then maybe water containers of some sort... but also weirdly alien. It crossed my mind, briefly, that they were the eggs of an alien hive mother... Eventually I realised that they too were made of ice. And they were melting. Water going from solid to liquid.

In one particularly eerie moment, these shapes hung very low over the water — as if threatening to descend right into it — before rising back up into the "stars". The music during this whole section seemed mournful, haunting — I can't even start to describe it — but in my mind the whole thing started to crystallise as a piece that was really, truly indifferent to human beings. Like the planet itself, perhaps. The planet that we are irrevocably altering with our own indifference towards it. The glaciers are melting. Sea levels are rising. The next Great Extinction of earthly species is already underway, and we started it — around about the time of the Industrial Revolution, when this building went up and we started burning fossil fuels at an ever-more-exponential rate. Aurora, then, evokes the facts of a very 'dark ecology' . . . But the oceans will outlast us. And so, in the end, will the ice.

Towards the end of the piece, sharp shafts of laser light begin to stab their way into the middle

of the space — as if from the outer edges of outer space. And then, before you know it, those beams are catching and refracting through the hanging icicles, and the music goes from somber to strangely joyful, and there's a dazzling symphony — or choreography, or something — of co-ordinated light and sound.

Perhaps this, finally, is the Aurora Borealis evoked by the piece's title. The Northern Lights. The spectacular natural light show that's visible in areas approaching the north pole. (Come to that, it could equally well be the Aurora Australis — the Southern Lights. Both the ice-caps are melting, after all.) For me, though, something about those lights beaming in from outer space made it something else again.... A picture, perhaps, of an ocean-covered earth echoing with the music of the spheres — catching the starshine arriving from light years away, and amplifying its harmonies. An earth no longer despoiled by humans, but restored to one-ness with the rest of the universe...?

... Or something like that, anyway. Afterwards, I found two phrases from very different songs echoing around my head. From Canadian singer-songwriter Bruce Cockburn, the chorus of his hymn-like 1979 song "Hills of Morning":

Let me be a little of your breath
Moving over the face of the deep —
I want to be a particle of your light
Flowing over the hills of morning

Or on a bleaker, perhaps more realistic note, some words from U2's 2014 song "Iris":

The stars are bright but do they know
The universe is beautiful ... but cold.

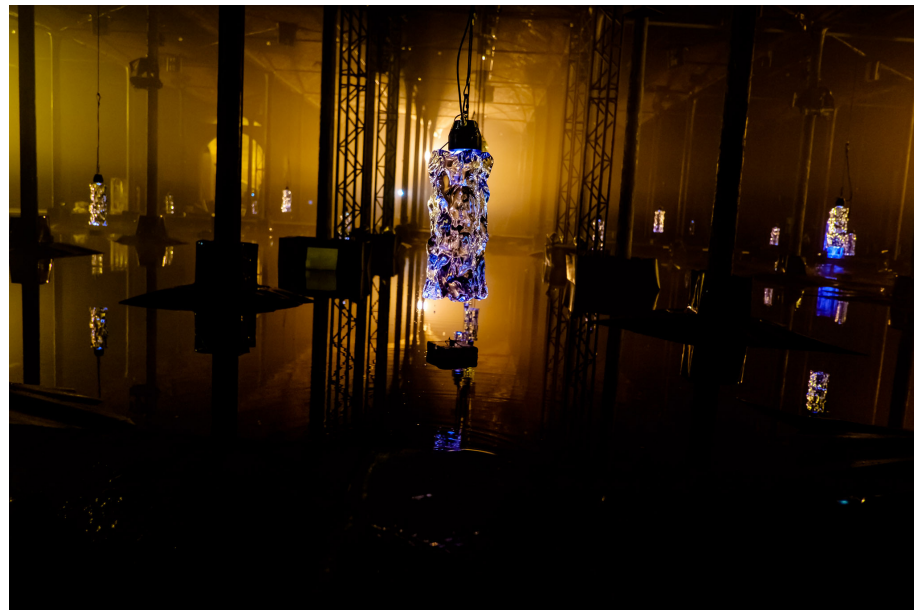
Having reached its climax, Aurora ends, and mysterious ice blocks appear lit at the corners of the walkways, to help light our way out. Ice blocks with items frozen inside them... is this an arrow? a quill? ...human relics of a forgotten civilization, preserved in ice forever.

But then, bit by bit, the magic ebbs away. On the way out, we can suddenly see the ramp up to the flooded walkways (when we came in, it was too dark...). Those familiar white lines marking the perimeter of a stage space or holding area. Suddenly so banal after the mysteries of what we just witnessed. But then, that's the way of magic, isn't it? Sometimes its most magical when you can see how they pulled off the trick...

Outside, it's still raining. It's still Liverpool. And those walls that had seemed so imposing and forbidding when we went in seem suddenly much smaller, more ordinary... But ordinary like the outside of the Doctor's Tardis. Because a moment ago they contained the universe inside.



Aurora - Photo by
Jon Barraclough



Aurora - Photo by
Ed Waring

THE WORLD IN ONE POSTCODE

NILOO SHARIFI

The bustle of Lodge Lane fills my spirit; my favourite fruit and veg shop, Manchester Superstore, with its colourful displays to cheer me; Tiber Square, a clearing among the clustered cars and people, designed by young local architects, with a sign that reads 'Loving Lodge Lane'; the words LOVE and PEACE painted onto the bricks on Coltart Road. I am walking to Yank Scally's house, a vegan commune in L8.

Yank Scally grew up in L8, on Warwick Street. He describes it to me in his typically concise, vivid way: "I could see the river every day. It was touched with crime, it was everywhere – drugs, stolen cars, police chases. A lot of misdirected, working-class energy going into the wrong efforts. Mostly good people in bad situations. There was always amazing graffiti at the end of my road." When I talk to Hazel Tilley, a founding member of the Granby 4 Streets Community Land Trust (CLT), she is also taken with the area's street art. "Art isn't new in the Granby area. [There's] great graffiti by the Methodist Centre. Where you've got a lot of dereliction, it invites graffiti art, and if there's a lot of it, you start to get some of great quality." She sees graffiti as a democratic art form, often political, which cheaply beautifies forgotten places and invites all to participate. The ethos behind graffiti is an apt metaphor for what the multitudes of L8 creatives and activists are achieving; turning derelict places full of potential and talent into thriving centres of life.

Hazel has been involved since the beginning in L8's people-led regeneration. "Our project started 27 years ago as the Granby Residents Association, to stop the demolition of what is and always has been a very vibrant, multicultural, mixed economy area." L8 is hugely diverse compared with the rest of the city; Liverpool on average is made up of 86.3% white people, but in L8 this figure drops to 48.8%. L8 was home to the oldest black population in Liverpool, a centuries-old community that has resided there since Liverpool's port days. Today, the area's cheap rent and proximity to the centre continues to make

it a popular arrival point for first-generation immigrants. This mixture of new immigrants and families who have been here for generations is what makes the area so diverse (and so maligned by a racist majority). The cultures that thrive here each bring their own creative and commercial practices, making it a comparatively varied and hyper-creative postcode. "That diversity is what makes the area exciting, and is the reason we fought for the area. It wasn't about keeping the houses, it was about keeping the people."

The Granby 4 Streets CLT is now a multi-enterprise organisation, working with a host of others in the area for collective benefit. Their Winter Garden is now open to the public, a testament to a movement that started with planting seeds. Hazel was part of the initial grassroots campaign to stop the demolition of L8's most important areas under the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders programme. Streets including a privately owned mosque were marked for demolition, people were being emptied out, lead was stripped from the remaining houses and basic maintenance to the area was reduced. "Empty houses on each side have such a detrimental effect," she tells me. "Empty streets are appalling to walk through. [Children were] watching rubbish being dumped on the way to a school that leaked. How a council can treat the children within its care in the disrespectful way they have done for years and then pile on degradation, is beyond me."

The government's inattentive treatment of L8 on this side of the millennium is a sanitised reflection of the other; L8 has been underfunded and over-policed for centuries, and it seemed the council wanted to give up on the area altogether. "They dubbed us a twilight zone, so it was up to us to take things into our own hands. Crap environments invite crap teachers, so everything becomes depressed and disinvested, and the most public thing you can do is plant a flower. And that's what we did." A group of women, sick of looking at debris, began sweeping and gardening the vacant streets. "We were like demons. It was like we were possessed, because suddenly [everything] was swept and there were flowers everywhere."

"A relentless, fervent dedication to community through creativity is an L8 tradition."

Once governments changed, the scheme to redevelop 'failing housing markets' was scrapped and the threat of demolition passed, but the spirit of resistance was reignited. That initial drive to do what the council wouldn't, and invest their time into undoing the wreckage of Thatcher's 80s, was a catalyst. Hazel tells me that people began to frequent the planted streets. The group began to paint empty houses, inviting artists to install projects and contribute in any way they could. Then, what started as a table sale grew into the monthly Granby Market, an absolutely unreal event I would personally recommend; vintage clothes, delicious food, music, arts and crafts all gather on Granby Street on the first

Saturday of each month. Since then, L8 has begun to transform, and media perceptions are shifting.

Hazel finds everyday art more exciting than the solitude of galleries. "Art is not just a picture on a wall, it is life." When I asked Yank Scally earlier why he makes art, he looked at me like I just asked him why he eats. "I don't know, I've been doing it for too long. But it feels great. It feels really good." Hazel, a decidedly more verbose figure than the former, pins it down: "This is a fundamental right of humanity, to express themselves in the most joyous and pointed way possible." The art institutions' renewed interest in L8 is something to celebrate; it has brought investment and opportunity for creativity, especially where artists have followed Assemble's model in putting people first.

This was the approach adopted by Invisible Flock, Quicksand and FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology) in creating Aurora, the breathtaking, immersive multimedia installation that filled the disused Toxteth Reservoir's vast space. Catherine Baxendale of Invisible Flock tells me that "it was important to us to work against the cliché of putting an artwork somewhere without responding to the site".

Aurora, has been a hit locally as well as in the press. The creators ran four workshops over two months with local children, whose musical performances formed part of the final, 40-minute track, which accompanies the gleefully disorientating display of water, ice and lights. Catherine says working with the reservoir's fiercely protective trustees was sometimes challenging, but they succeeded to please everyone eventually, and this trust-building is a key point of praise for locals. "It's absolutely amazing," Hazel says, "and there's also that appreciation of the building." Everything L8 has today was gained by people fighting for their own community; it is understandable that they should hold outsiders to the same high standards that they have been held to by circumstances. Nothing would work here without a stringent insistence on treating people and buildings preciously.

Tom Calderbank has been a community activist for three decades, and he has been on the frontline of this battle against dilapidation. He has been involved in the regeneration of three buildings; Toxteth Town Hall, The Florrie and The Belvedere. "Toxteth Town Hall was absolutely the launch pad for the other projects," he says, reminiscing about how he used to

sign on for the dole there and think, "What a beautiful building – if only someone would sort it out." Little did he know that he would come to be a key part of the community that made it happen. They campaigned to raise money and restore it to its original purpose when it was built in 1865, as a place for the community to turn to.

"It's thriving now," says Tom. Aside from its beautiful function hall and Winter Garden, the building contains a number of organisations offering services to the community. There is a Citizen's Advice Bureau, The Whitechapel homelessness charity, a weekly family games club, a beautiful spacious garden and Sola Arts, an arts charity. The halls of Toxteth Town Hall are spilling over with people that as a network have created a safety net which the state has never provided.

"Community doesn't really exist anymore to a large extent, but it does round our ways." Tom Calderbank

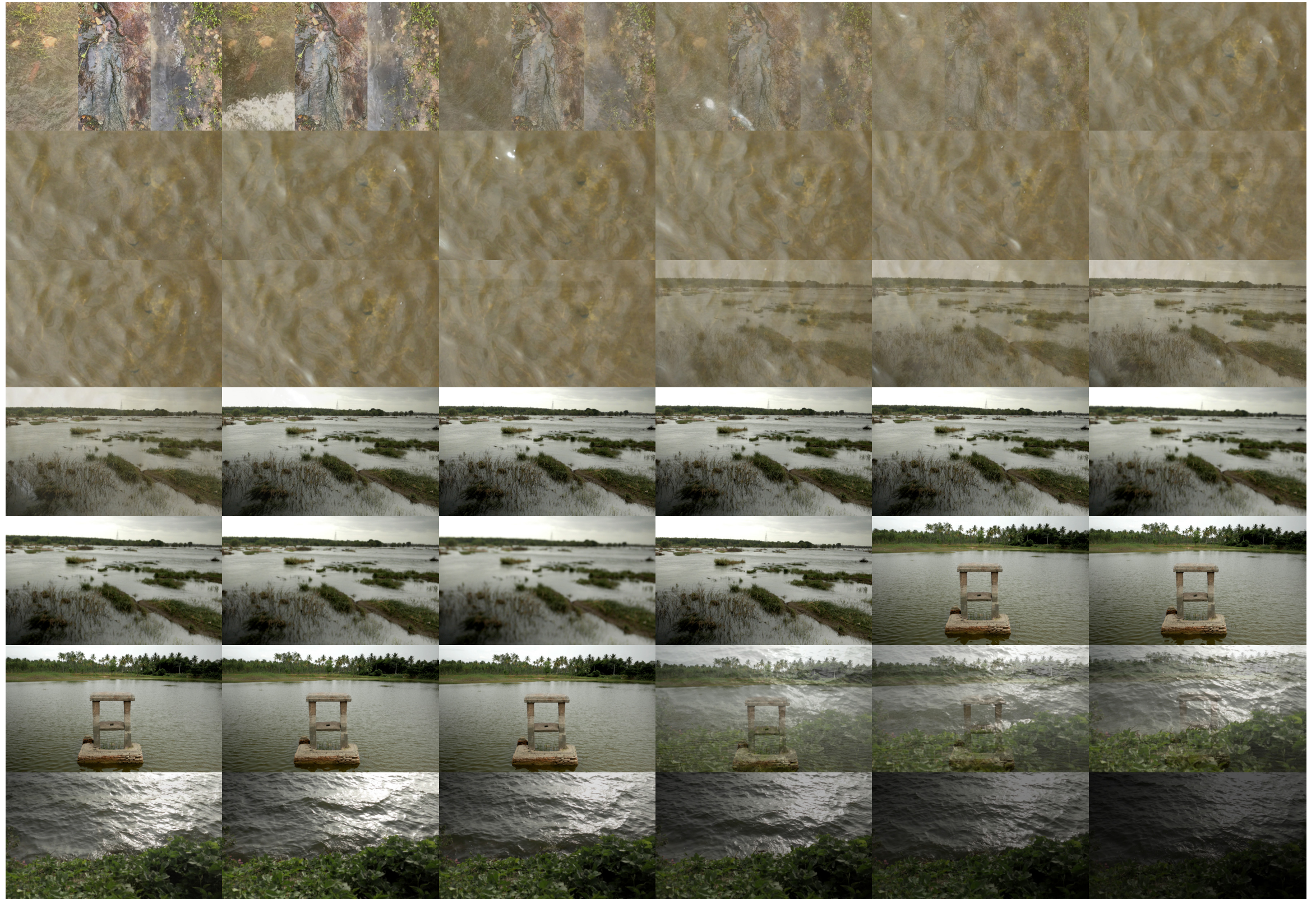
A relentless, fervent dedication to community through creativity is at this point an L8 tradition. "When Toxteth Town Hall was opened, one of the services it offered was 'services to the destitute', so if you had nothing, you'd come to our building and the police would donate clothes. And here we are, 150 years later, and we're still doing the same job. It's almost like nothing has changed for 150 years." If we don't shake the Tories at the next election, things are set to get more difficult. With austerity measures and privatisation continuing to disproportionately impact the poorest, and the roll-out of Universal Credit, places like the Toxteth Town Hall, the Belve, The Florrie and Granby Market become all the more precious, and their resources stretched.

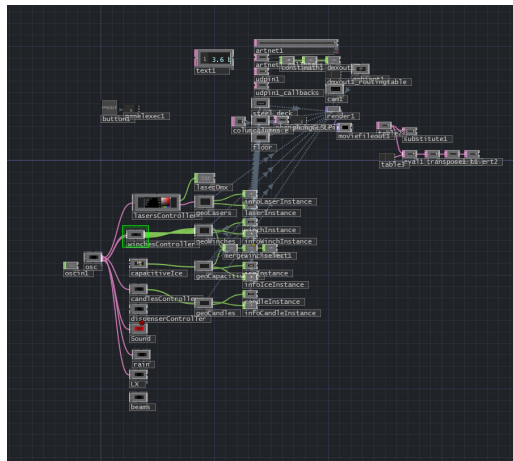
Underpinning all of these people's actions is a deeply held belief in collectivism and mutual responsibility. "People are so greedy," Hazel observes. "Capitalism has to become kinder. There has to be an economic shift." Her voice takes on an imperative urgency over the phone: "It's you, the young people. You have to do something and you've got to do it collectively." L8 is peppered with stories of eye-watering resilience and rare success, more than can be profiled here. "I think everybody needs to be more engaged. I think everybody thinks their time is too precious," says Tim, but concedes that "in the last year or so, people have been getting more engaged, and that's all we need." As he points out, organised demise is everywhere. If regeneration is to happen without gentrification, communities must unfortunately fight tirelessly for themselves.

"Regeneration is the most abused word in the English language. Around here, it's a dirty word; it's something that's done to you. But the very best is community-led regeneration. All the buildings we have talked about there, they have all been community-led projects, and there are lessons there for us all." In this confusing time, where the technological explosion seems to have made us hyper-connected but socially isolated, L8 is a unique place. Community doesn't really exist anymore to a large extent, but it does round our ways, doesn't it?"



Photo by Catherine Baxendale



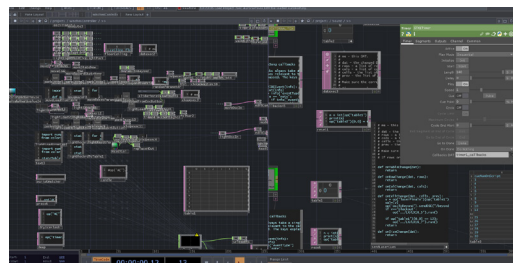


AURORA ON TOUCH DESIGNER

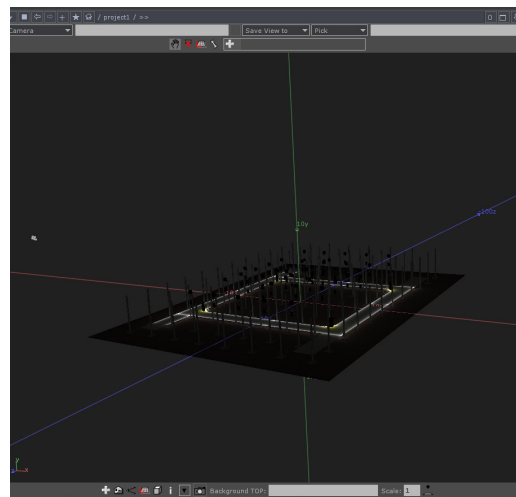
BEN EATON

This is an introduction to the inner brain that ran Aurora; screenshots taken from Touch Designer software with descriptions of how so many complex systems were able to work simultaneously to create an experience that could in theory have run from the press of one button.

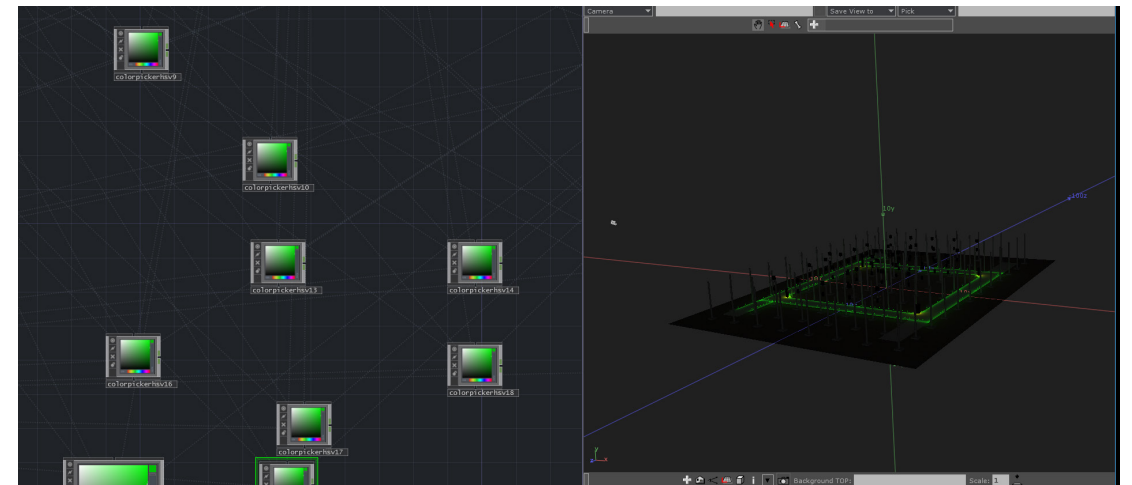
The challenge and opportunity in working from a blank canvas is that the project is yours to structure in any way you see fit - this means it can be as efficient or as chaotic as you are. As Aurora had so many systems running alongside each other, we wanted everything to operate independently whilst also being able to talk to all other components at any time. Here is the top level of our network. Each of the blocks on the left of the screen controls one of the major elements of the work - winches / lights in winches / lasers on the ground/ lasers / cues for the lighting desk etc.



This demonstrates how quickly things can become complex. The screen is split into two here so the operator can see multiple parts of the network at once - this is one part of the larger section of the network that controls the winch positions. The cue is sent into this network and a series of scripts (purple objects in left panel) parse that data and distribute the relevant bits of data out to the rest of the network - you can see the faint grey arrows showing the flow of the information. Being able to visualise that flow is one of the key advantages to working in a visual coding environment like Touch Designer. It allows for development and creative coding to happen in a nonlinear fashion and grow outwards as the work itself develops.

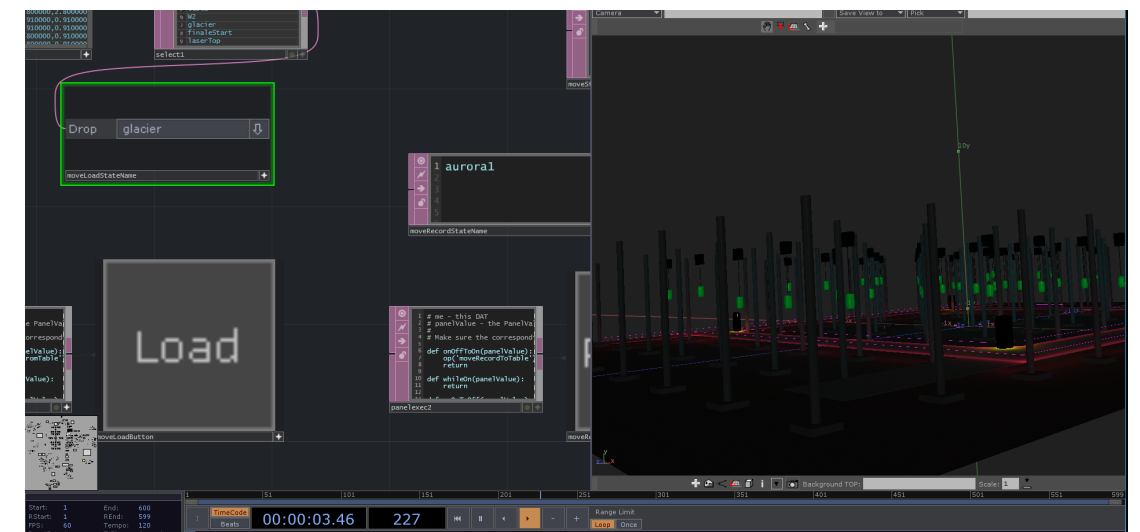


All of the network was powering a full 3D previsualisation of the space itself. When working with a site specific location with so many moving parts it is crucial for the team and the various departments on the install to be able to create and visualise states and test ideas. The pre-viz allowed us to do this, working more creatively offsite and also is a clear way to check that the real life install is behaving in line with the software.



The relationship here is a bit clearer - each of the green boxes on the left hand side of the panel controls one of the other lasers in the pre-viz on the right side of the screen. These in turn are piped through to other nodes that translate the colour data into a lighting protocol called DMX that we sent over 100s of meters of network cable via another variant of DMX called Art-Net. The code, previz and reality were tightly tied together.

This demonstrates the same principle working with the position of the winches in 3D space, this is even more complex than the laser paths as the relationship between the 42 winches had to be very precise in order for the laser mapping to be visually effective and safe. By having this tight control over the winches we could program complex generative animations driven by data and randomness in the machine; things that would have been painstaking to map one by one can be done relatively fast through our control system. This is one of the core drivers of this kind of control where a lot of the work goes into the system design early on in the process, allowing for really specific control of totally custom or esoteric gear.





Aurora - Photo by Ed Waring

Audiences were urged to respond to one of a few feedback questions on postcards placed in the front of house, after they went through the Aurora experience. Here is a brief glimpse of what they said.

WHAT WAS THE MEANING OF THE WORK FOR YOU?

"Temporality, beauty, uncertainty: how they relate to each other. A beautifully exciting installation that takes you on a journey of thinking about our planet and global warming. An overwhelming spectacle that engulfs all of your senses to get you thinking. Breathtaking!"

"A meditative experience and feast for the eyes and ears. Emotions ebbing and flowing - loved the vibration to the bones!"

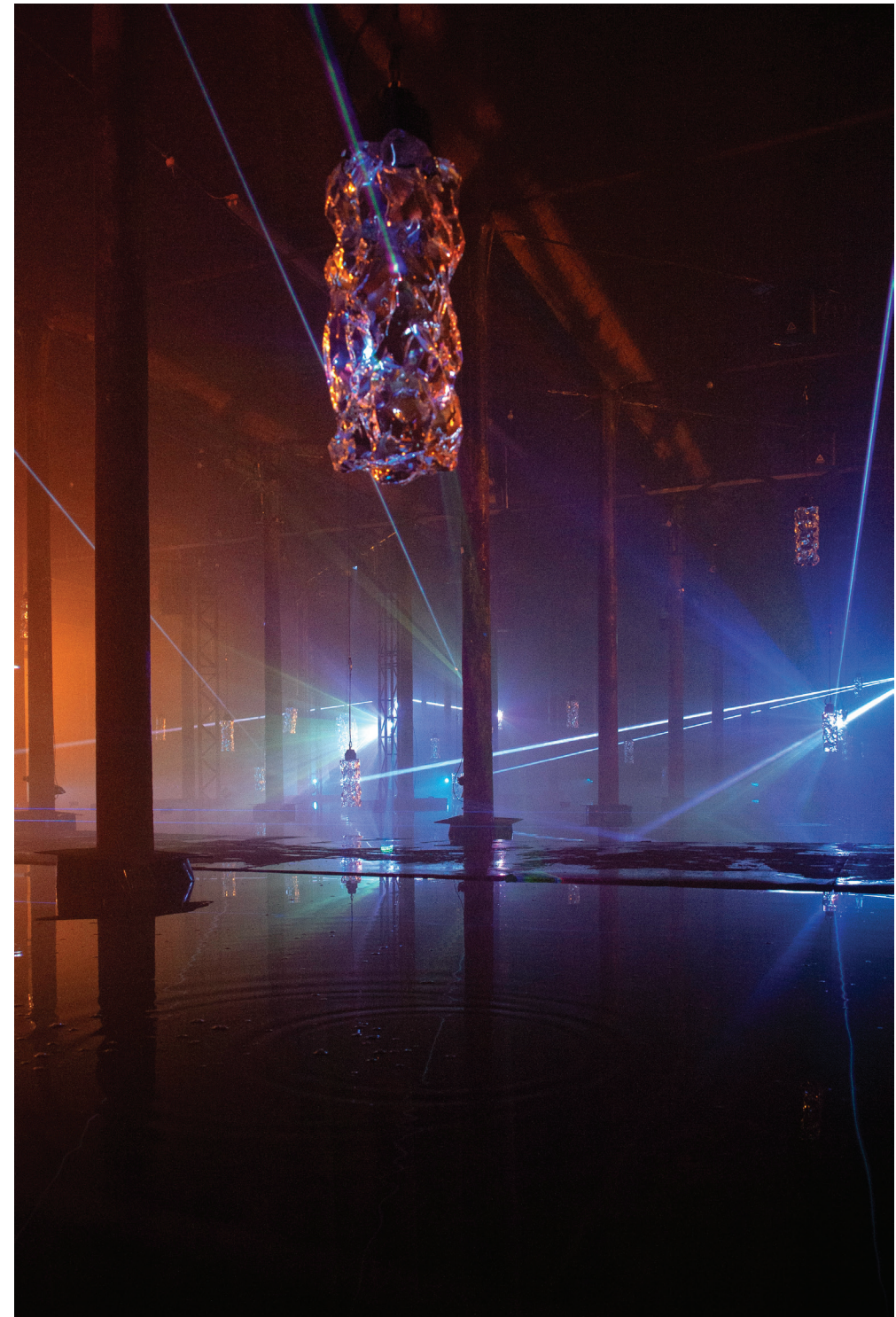
"Each sense heightened and struck. Wept and laughed out loud. Remembered the experience as a short-sighted child of being most still, hearing, feeling, seeing the rain. Shiny things, water droplets, ice, stars, prisms in water, reflections and shadows. Thanks for this time and place."

HOW DID THE EXPERIENCE MAKE YOU FEEL?

"I felt as though I was immersed in something elemental, the beginning or end of the world."

"Made me feel and appreciate the beauty in something we take for granted yet need to survive. Loved it!! Got quite emotional towards the end. Music was tremendous. Brilliant concept."

"Exhilarated. I was transported back to Borneo where I lived for a short time. Where nature surrounded one and violent storms occurred regularly - lightning, thunder and water, water, water everywhere. I also felt sad as the ice melted and water dripped away - I felt sad for our polar ice caps which are melting away. Will our grandchildren get to experience their wonder or only wonder at what they missed."



Aurora -
Photo by Jon
Barraclough

IMAGINING WATER

BHARAT MIRLE

Water surrounds us in more ways than we can possibly know. Not merely in a physical sense, but also in the way we think, perceive and even believe. The mysterious allure of water is something that mankind has grappled with for centuries and this is evident from our mythology and folklore. Across geographies and cultures, it has repeatedly provoked the imagination, birthing some of the most curious beings in recorded history. Despite the world's diversity, it would be a challenge to find even one community that has not fallen under the sacred charm of water. Spirits, demons, monsters, imps and gods - belief in these creatures continues to dwell in human consciousness to this very day.

Yacuruna

The mighty Amazon River meanders across South America, churning its landmass, nourishing the densest jungles known to man. Over time, the region has grown infamous for swallowing entire expeditions whole, providing explorers with enough yarn to spin colourful tales about the horrors of its depths. But while headhunting tribes, piranha-infested waters, man-eating serpents and tropical diseases capture the imagination of the alien adventurer, the Amazonians themselves are watchful of the river with different intentions. Derived from the Quechuan words Yacu (water) and Runa (man), the Yacuruna are believed to be mythical man-like creatures who covet the local women and are described as hairy, with their heads turned backwards and their feet deformed. However, the indigenous people of the Amazon liken them to gods, bearing testimony to their magical powers of seduction. It is said that a Yacuruna can transform into a river dolphin, allowing it to seek out unsuspecting women. It then transforms into an attractive man to lure its victims, even employing aphrodisiacs to aid it in its kidnapping scheme. Those who fall prey to the Yacuruna are smuggled away into their kingdoms - majestic, underwater cities consisting of palaces made from multi-coloured crystal and fish scales. Over time, the victims are permanently transformed into Yacuruna themselves, closely resembling their captors. Their heads are forcibly turned backwards, so they never find their way back home.

The Yacuruna spend the day sleeping in their cities, often located at the mouths of rivers and on lake beds. They are said to be extremely cautious, keeping one eye open at all times, even while in the deepest slumber. At night, they emerge into the open and roam the rainforest on the back of a black crocodile, wearing a serpent around their necks, searching for prey. It is not uncommon to find local fishermen who are adamant about getting home before dark, urging their daughters to stay indoors, for fear of abduction by a Yacuruna. But while most keep their distance from these beings, there are those who seek them out. For it is said that the Yacuruna have healing abilities. Shamans beseech them to help them heal the sick. One can never be too careful with the Yacuruna, for it is only by appeasing them that one can ensure the safe return of a Yacuruna abductee.





Mishipeshu

The indigenous Anishinaabeg tribes of North America are known to have an intimate connection with Nature. It is said that they look upon their landscape as if it were a library, with its different formations (rocks, streams, trees, animals) being the books. Perhaps this is in some way responsible for the rich oral tradition that is found with most Native American tribes. However, since a large portion of their culture remains undocumented, the outside world has little knowledge of their folklore. Mishipeshu, a mythical being from Anishinaabeg folklore, is more commonly known as the underwater panther. Known to possess immense power, it is depicted with the head, legs and body of a giant cat, but is covered in fish scales, with jagged dagger-like spikes that run down its spine, to the tip of its extremely long tail. Mishipeshu is believed to be the master of all aquatic creatures, frequently calling upon water-snakes to do

its bidding. Known to inhabit the Great Lakes area of North America, Mishipeshus are also believed to be guardians of vast amounts of copper, something that is feverishly sought after by Anishinaabeg medicine men. According to legend, they do not make any substantial use of this copper themselves, only giving bits and pieces to their cubs as playthings. While Mishipeshus have a reputation for being malevolent, there are some who believe that proper appeasement will turn them into allies. This is the reason for fishermen in the area to make an offering to the water, before setting out on a journey.

The roar of a Mishipeshu can be compared to the sound of rapids and they are said to live in the darkest depths of lakes. Apparently, every Mishipeshu ever born is said to live in opposition to another mythical creature, the Thunderbird. Thunderbirds are considered to be masters of the sky and it is believed that these two creatures have been locked in eternal conflict. With both of them possessing the ability to influence the weather, their battles are said to cause the most devastating storms known to man.

Glashtyn

There are some places on Earth that seem to be more conducive to the fantastic, and judging by its folklore, the Isle of Man is one of them. Right from its name, which can be traced back to the sea god Manannán - the original ruler of the island, to its history of witchcraft, Manx mythology is steeped in tales of goblins, spirits, fairies, imps and is traditionally rich with magical curiosities.

Originating from the Celtic Old Irish term glaise, which means stream, Glashtyn is an aquatic goblin, a shapeshifter that takes the form of a stallion when it becomes terrestrial. Appearing friendly at first, Glashtyn is known to lure unsuspecting men into riding it, trapping them on its back with its adhesive skin before returning to its home, taking its rider to a watery grave. However,

when it comes to women, Glashtyns display immense curiosity and have been known to chase after them, even ripping off bits of their clothing. They sometimes even take on the form of curly-haired, handsome men, in the service of this curiosity. But what betrays their identity is their ears, which remain that of a horse.

Following in the goblins' long tradition of mischief-making, Glashtyns are known to be cunning, even mingling with ordinary livestock to appear docile. But while caution is generally advised around these beings, it is considered that their strong and muscular nature make them ideal farmhands and it is also considered extremely fortunate to tame one. It is also said that the cries of a Glashtyn can be compared to the howling of wind and are indicative of a brewing storm. There are many who are thankful to these creatures for the warning, but there are also those who believe that it is these cries that cause the storm in the first place.





Inkanyamba

The African continent is steeped in natural spectacle, but like any femme fatale worth her salt, Mother Nature can be as perilous as she is exquisite. Nature's savage beauty is something that one must eventually come to terms with, in one way or the other and the Zulu people of South Africa have used folklore to aid them in this regard. Their mythology consists of numerous deities that are commonly associated with animals or are personifications of natural phenomena.

Inkanyambas are legendary, angry, winged serpents from Zulu mythology that control the weather and are responsible for seasonal storms. Depicted with the body of a snake, a horse-like head and the tail of a fish, Inkanyambas are believed to reside in deep pools, most commonly in the base of Howick Falls. However, they surface during mating season and take to the skies in the form of massive tornadoes and cause lightning storms. Locals live in fear of the Inkanyamba, even refraining to utter its name in case they summon it by accident. Even those who make clay models of the creature, refer to them as tornadoes and not by their actual name,

for fear of angering the volatile beasts. People whose houses have unpainted zinc-sheet roofs are said to be especially susceptible to its havoc as Inkanyamba can easily mistake the shiny roofs for the surface of water and dive down.

According to lore, the only ones who can safely approach an Inkanyamba is a Sangoma - a practitioner of traditional medicine, who can only offer prayers in appeasement of the creature. It is believed that, if angered, an Inkanyamba will migrate and leave a place for good, forsaking its inhabitants to an arid existence. There have even been reports as recent as 2015, where an Inkanyamba, complaining that its river was too polluted, decided to leave, taking all the rain with it leaving behind a drought-ridden land.

Bannik

Popular belief suggests that to truly 'experience' water, one must see it in all its natural glory. However, there are those who will argue that the experience of water does not merely end there, but is still prevalent in its less spectacular forms as well. The more human-made experiences of water, right from the taps in our homes, to community wells, to public swimming pools - these transcend the mere physical aspect of water as a substance and give rise to something much greater - the ability to birth communities. The experiences found in these water bodies are very different from those in Nature, but if there is one thing they have in common, it is their share of mythological creatures.

The Bannik is a spirit from Slavic mythology that frequents banyas or bath-houses. Depicted as a wrinkly old man with a large beard, hairy arms and long nails, he is believed to live behind the stove of the bath-house. The third (sometimes fourth) bath of the day is usually reserved for the Bannik, who usually invites demons and other forest spirits to join him. As a result, there are no religious icons allowed inside these bath-houses, for the Bannik is said to have a volatile temper. If he is disturbed, the Bannik will resort to suffocating the person, throwing boiling water on them or even burning the entire bath-house down. However, he is believed to be a stickler for cleanliness and once he is finished, he leaves the room in an impeccably clean state.

Banyas hold an important place in Slavic culture. They are used as birthing rooms by women, who also use it as a place to practice divinity and are believed to possess immense vital energy. While it is not considered fortunate to have a Bannik in one's bath-house, people leave him offerings in the form of soap and fir branches. He is also known to predict the future and if one is to stand with their exposed back to the bath and consult him, then he will humour them with a stroke. A gentle touch indicates a prosperous year ahead, while a harsh scratch with his nails suggests impending trouble.



Makara

India is a land teeming with gods and goddesses. In Hindu mythology alone, every aspect of nature finds representation, with water bodies being no exception. Lake and river goddesses hold an especially sacred place in Hindu belief, with the goddess Ganga being one of the most widely recognized. One of the largest rivers in existence and possibly the most sacred to the Hindus, it is no surprise that the Ganga (or the Ganges) is renowned the world over, drawing millions to its banks every year. But mighty as they may be, even divine beings require a vehicle to travel in; one that is befitting of their stature; and in this regard, goddess Ganga does not compromise.

Makara, which in Sanskrit translates to 'sea-dragon' or 'water-monster', are beings from Hindu mythology that serve as the celestial

vehicles for the river goddesses Ganga, Narmada and also the sea god Varuna. Believed to be part terrestrial animal and part aquatic, they are often depicted as having the head of an elephant, the horns of a deer, the legs of a lion, the jaws of a crocodile and the tail of a fish. However, there have been varying representations of Makara across South East Asia and speculation is rife about whether there existed several subspecies of the creature, or they were all mis-sightings of the same one.

Ancient scriptures describe Makara as being strong and ferocious, often entrusted with the guarding of a treasure or a throne room. They are also seen as symbols of chaos and fertility. Certain Indian fishing communities believe that while out at sea, if one is to encounter a Makara, then they must do their utmost to gratify it, for this will ensure a fruitful catch and a safe journey back home. Images of goddess Ganga from mythology show her seated on the back of a Makara, while holding its tongue and is representative of her power. She is believed to be bringing order from the chaos.



Kappa

One of the most striking aspects of Japanese culture, is its tradition of discipline. The orderliness of its people is something of a spectacle, garnering admirers from across the world. Meticulousness is something that is taken for granted in Japan, regardless of the task at hand, and this strongly extends to the maintenance of their cultural records. Considering that the Japanese also have an affinity for the supernatural, it is no surprise that their folklore is bursting with a vibrant, albeit neatly organized, variety of creatures.

Kappa is a water imp from traditional Japanese folklore, belonging to the Yōkai class of mythical beings. Getting its name from the words kawa (river) and wappa (child), it is said to be of humanoid form and resembles a small child. The skin of a Kappa is scaly and reptilian, with its colours ranging from green, to yellow, to blue. Webbed hands and feet make it an excellent swimmer and Kappa are known to reside in freshwater lakes and streams. While its image varies across Japan, with certain depictions giving it a beak, a plate or a shell, the most distinctive aspect of its appearance is also the most consistent. The top of a Kappa's head features a bald patch, containing a cavity that holds a small pool of water. When a Kappa comes ashore, this patch must be kept wet at all times, for it is the source of its power. If dry, the Kappa will rapidly weaken and waste away, eventually to die.



Kappas are generally known to be tricksters, mostly pulling harmless pranks on unsuspecting folk. They are said to be extremely curious about human beings, even going to the extent of learning Japanese. Considered to be experts in medicine, especially bone-setting, Kappa have been known to share their knowledge in exchange for cucumbers, their favourite food. But while a good portion of the folklore describes the Kappa as a friendly creature, there is an equal amount of material to suggest the contrary. Kappas are known to be extremely fond of wrestling, often drowning their human challengers in the course of a match. They have also been known to kidnap people, drink their blood and feast on their flesh. Kunio Yanagita, one of Japan's foremost experts on its folklore has even written about women who have been accosted and impregnated by Kappa. On encountering one in the wild, if you are not confident to sumo-wrestle it, then you are left with only one course of action, to save yourself. Kappa are reputed to be obsessed with politeness and if one is to bow to them, then they will return the gesture, spill the pool of water from their heads and become frozen. The Kappa can only be revived if the cavity is replenished with water from the lake in which it lives. It is believed that if a person does this, then the Kappa is duty-bound to serve them for life.

Bunyip

Australia is a land that is home to some of the most curious specimens of the Animal Kingdom. Right from their national animal - the Kangaroo, to the collage like duck-billed platypus, the creatures here are unlike those found anywhere else on Earth. The imagination-pool of the island-continent also benefits from both Aboriginal as well as European thought, making its mythology remarkably diverse.

The Bunyip is a creature from Australian Aboriginal mythology that literally translates to 'devil' or 'evil spirit'. Official records of the Bunyip only came into existence after the European settlers arrived, due to the oral tradition of the Aboriginals and even these have largely been inconsistent as the locals were too terrified to adequately note down its characteristics. Believed to live in swamps, creeks, billabongs and riverbeds, most say that the Bunyip is an excellent swimmer, stands over ten feet tall on land, has a dog-like face, a crocodile-like head, dark fur, a horse-like tail, flippers, walrus-like tusks, and a duck-like bill. However there have been accounts that liken it to an enormous starfish. Some have even claimed that it has countless eyes and can move with incredible speed. It is said to have a booming roar that it uses to cripple its prey and though it possesses claws, it prefers to hug its victims to death. While there is general consensus among the aboriginals that the Bunyip is a supernatural being that can alter the level of the water, beliefs vary with regard to its intentions. Some call it a malevolent spirit, while others believe it has been sent from the heavens to punish the wicked and protect the wildlife.

Researchers however, believe that the Bunyip is actually an extinct, prehistoric marsupial - the Diprotodon Australis. Between 1818 and 1846, several fossils were found in riverbeds that have been attributed to the Bunyip, most of which still exist in Australian museums to this very day. In 1851, a newspaper called The Australasian published a report about a Bunyip being speared after killing an Aboriginal man. The creature was eleven paces long and four paces in width. Aboriginal people used to visit the site of the creature's death every year and outline its form, but those outlines have been lost over time.



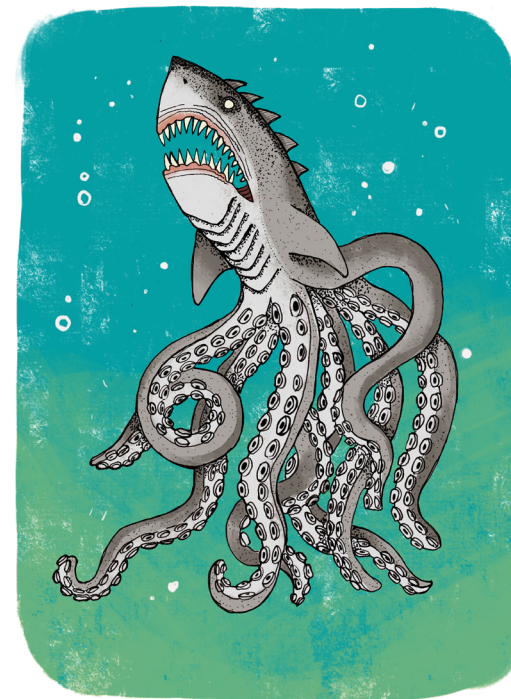
Lusca

The vast expanse of the ocean is something that has repeatedly provoked the human mind, setting the imagination adrift and instigating speculation around its unknown abyss. Mankind has yet to fully explore its entirety, but until now much has already been unearthed. Mountains far taller than Everest, gorges far deeper than the Grand Canyon and an entire kingdom of creatures far removed from the ones on land. A mere thousand metres under the surface, one will find the densest darkness in existence, for even the sun's rays cannot penetrate these depths. It is this pitch blackness, where light hesitates to venture, that several creatures call home.

The Lusca is a sea monster that inhabits the Atlantic Ocean, most commonly found off the Caribbean coast. Believed to be a giant octopus, with the head of a shark, the Lusca grows to anywhere between 75ft to 200 ft long, making it far bigger than any giant octopus in recorded history. With razor-sharp teeth and suckered tentacles, Luscas are known to attack ships and drag them down to the depths of the ocean, into rugged underwater caverns

where they live. For decades, fishermen and divers have lived in terror of the Lusca, even calling it an evil spirit. Some of them have even claimed that it has many heads and are wary of passing over blue holes in the ocean, for fear of waking it up.

Aside from the occasional missing diver or the pale-faced fisherman who swore he saw one take a person right off his boat, there have been several official reports of Lusca sightings. In 1896, the carcass of a large octopus-like creature washed up on the coast of Florida. Christened 'The St Augustine Monster', it is the best possible candidate to be a Lusca specimen. Scientists however, refute this and claim that it is probably the rotting carcass of a sperm whale. In January 2011, the remnants of a giant Octopus washed ashore on the Grand Bahama Island of the Bahamas. Local fishermen, based on their understanding of morphology, said that the creature was 20-30 feet long, while other witnesses insist that it was only the creature's head that washed ashore.



Fossegrim

Music has always been an integral part of culture, all over the world. But what some find more intriguing than the music itself, are the ones who create it. Where does this ability come from? Personal experience teaches us that not all are musically inclined and for those who do not possess the talent, it seems only natural that they attribute it to the other-worldly. Across cultures, one can find tales of ordinary mortals, who gained their musical prowess by negotiating with the unearthly.

Fossegrim is a water spirit from Scandinavian folklore that is an exceptional fiddler. Although accounts of his physical appearance vary from dashing handsome to a hideously deformed troll, there is a general consensus that he will teach his skills for the right price. It is believed that Fossegrim will part with his knowledge, in exchange for a food offering, made in secrecy on a Thursday evening. Known to reside in northward-flowing waterfalls, the offering is commonly in the form of a white he-goat with its tail facing the waterfall, or a considerable amount of smoked mutton. If Fossegrim is satisfied, the supplicant will be put under his tutelage and will be transformed into a master fiddler. It is said that Fossegrim makes his pupils drag their fingers over the strings of his fiddle until they bleed, bestowing them with the skill to even make the trees dance to their tune. Contrary to most spirits, Fossegrim is known to be reasonable and in cases where the sacrifice made is insufficient, he will still teach the beseecher to impeccably tune their fiddle.

While Fossegrim is popularly known as a teacher, with his list of students including the legendary Norwegian fiddler Torgeir Augundsson, it is said that he reserves his music for other spirits. With the sounds of the forests, wind and water believed to play over his strings, it is said that his best music is reserved for the night and when heard, "tables and benches, cup and can, gray-beards and grandmothers, blind and lame, even babes in the cradle" will begin to dance.



AURORA & WONDROUS DREAM

CATHRYN PEACH-BARNES

In the first publication Victoria (Invisible Flock's Creative Director) discusses that the purpose of Aurora was to "move beyond reason and logic... to engage with the more sensual and emotional parts of us...[to] have a deeper conversation". I think this is exactly what Aurora did. It harnessed a spiritual quality that provoked people. So often contemporary art can be isolating and alienating and yet Aurora found a common ground between different types of people by reaching into a private, emotional space. It didn't matter who you were, what you knew about art; this was all stripped away in the awe-inducing experience of Aurora.

Aurora also gave room for audience members to bring their own experiences of water to the piece. Families rooted in Toxteth were moved by the heritage which echoed within the walls of the reservoir, remembering their dads and grandads who worked there. Other audience members discussed memories of Nigeria and Sudan; the thundering of the water bringing back memories of waterfalls and the hazy light, the dawn of the bush. Aurora allowed members from across the community to access its beauty at their entry point.

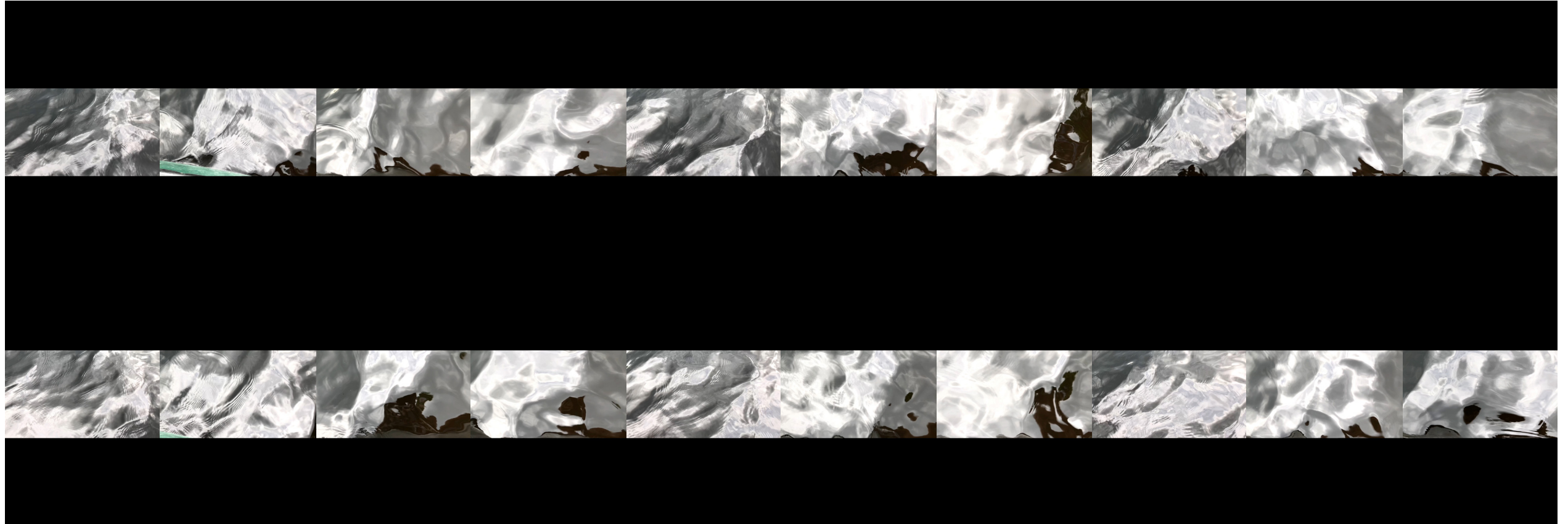
We were able to invite a wealth of groups from the local area to preview the work – from teens to ex-veterans, elderly residents at Mersey Parks & Wheel Meet Again to scouts, mental health support groups to refugee groups.

It was intrinsic to the success of the piece that we knew members of the community, and through this Aurora created a community of people around the piece itself, through the family of volunteers, supporters and staff – many of whom would advocate widely for Aurora, chatting to their neighbours, whilst at work and to strangers on their walk to the reservoir, provoking conversation outside of the direct experience of Aurora.

Experiencing something intimate on such a grand scale has a deeply unifying affect and often Mount Carmel, where we briefed audiences, became a place for swapping stories, sharing emotions and a deeper discussion regarding our planet, creating a temporary community that echoed the one that Aurora was presented in. A piece of work entirely rooted in community; the communities of Indonesia, India and England, by both exploring and creating community.

It opened up dialogue about water, resources and how we view our planet. It also made me think about how we view our daily landscapes; so often people would comment on how pleased they were that this work was in Toxteth, was made specifically for Toxteth, an area with a chequered reputation. Aurora provoked me to think about how we enable people to see their landscapes differently, how those places can become known for something else.

In this way, Aurora was a deeply political piece; it challenged assumptions about Toxteth, about our natural landscape and about whom contemporary art is for. Those who are often thought of last in the context of contemporary art, were able to brag to their friends from outside Toxteth that they were one of the first, and few, to see the work. The temporary nature of Aurora embedded the alchemy of the piece; a wondrous dream.



Screenshots from the
Aurora Exhibition Video
Wall at FACT, Liverpool

REJUVENATOR

BHARAT MIRLE

"You see all that?" Mr Patel pointed at the horizon. "If you climb up, you will be able to take a photo....," he continued, signalling to a cluster of boulders that stood precariously on the edge of the hillside. I obligingly hoisted myself to the top of the rocks. The valley sprawled below, its lush green thicket stretching as far as the eye could see. Combined with the crimson smears of the setting sun across the almost-clear sky, it was a sight to behold. I turned around to check on Bejoy, my photographer. I knew that his rotund physique was not suited to strenuous activity and I grew concerned as to how I would get him to climb up. But it seemed that he had already found a way out of this predicament. "No light....," muttered Bejoy, casually peering through the viewfinder of his camera, ignoring the look of bewilderment on Mr Patel's face, "Shoot tomorrow..."

As we made our way down the hill, back to where the taxi was parked, I tried to liven the mood with a pep-talk. "Mr Patel, the hospitality industry is highly competitive, so we really need to find a distinct way of portraying ourselves...and we can only do this if we capture the true essence of this place. For that we have to experience it... and right now, we haven't even seen it yet..." Mr Patel looked at me and frowned, bobbing his head, "Yes, absolutely. The brochure must really capture the soul of this place..." Bejoy rolled his eyes, discreetly playing a game on his phone. He had heard many variations of this conversation before. "Yes..." I went on, "We really need to capture what is truly unique about it..." "Oh that's easy..." Mr Patel quipped, "it's the rejuvenation zone."

We had been on the road since the break of dawn and it was the fifth 'scenic spot' at which Mr Patel had made the driver stop. "These are Chairman sir's favourite photo locations." Mr Patel seemed nervous and with good reason. Though it was not at the physical scale of the apartment complexes or townships that Empire Realty generally built, Secret Springs Luxury Resort & Spa was ambitious in its own way. The personal passion project of the Chairman himself, the property was an old estate that he had inherited from an estranged uncle. Inspiration struck him

when he discovered a natural spring on the land. Convinced that the water from this spring had miraculous healing powers, he had begun developing the place into an exclusive retreat for 'like minded people'. Few from his company were privy to its details and Mr Patel considered it an honour to be one of them. Development of the property had already begun and his first order of business was to get a brochure made, in order to attract investors.

The estate was not far away, but the road we took was tightly wound around the hill and climbing up slowed us considerably. By the time we got there, it was dark. The first glimpse of the estate was a security guard's cabin, lit by a solitary light, hanging limply in the blackness. It is only when we got closer that I noticed the fence behind it, stretching on either side. The guard exchanged glances with Mr Patel and hurriedly opened the gate and we took off into the dark. "One of the first things Chairman sir did was put up this fence...his uncle used to let all sorts of people inside...you know, some of the local people would come and spend hours here...no privacy at all..."

We drove for several minutes. Except for the little patch of asphalt that caught the car's headlamp, everything else was plunged in darkness. After some time, lights appeared in the distance and as we got closer, the dim outlines materialised into a large, colonial style bungalow. However, except for the porch light and a couple of others on the side, the house too lay in complete darkness. Surprisingly, the car did not stop at the house and we drove past it, taking a dirt path that led into the bushes. "Whose house?" Bejoy looked a little worried. "That is where Chairman sir's uncle lived...currently it is being renovated...You will see tomorrow..." Mr Patel smiled. "Tonight sleeping?" Bejoy made no attempts to hide his uneasiness. "Just you see..." Mr Patel's smile grew wider.

After some time, the car came to a halt and the three of us got out. It was still too dark to see, but before we could ask him any more questions, Mr Patel pulled out a flashlight from his pocket and set off down a narrow path, forcing us to hurry after him. After walking a short distance, he stopped in his tracks, shone his flashlight into a bush and peered at something before turning, "It's here...come on..."

Hidden behind a thick clump of bamboo was a contemporary-looking door. It was equipped with some kind of scanner that he flashed his official ID card into, before punching a few keys on a number pad below it. The door unlocked and Mr Patel ushered us in. We were enveloped by a curious odour, one I could not place immediately, but there was a freshness to it. However, it was still too dark to see anything and we just stood there for a few moments. I could hear Bejoy curiously sniffing the air, "some smell..." he muttered, but was cut short by Mr Patel, "Behold!" he shouted, "the rejuvenation zone!"

The lights in the room turned on with a flash, revealing what appeared to be a huge swimming pool. However, we soon realized that its size was merely an illusion. The walls and the ceiling were fitted with mirrors, making it look much larger than it was. In actuality, it was no larger than the average sized children's

pool. We stared at it in silence for a few moments, until Bejoy suddenly blurted out, "That's all?"

Mr Patel was stunned, "That's all? My dear fellow..." he began, but then changed his mind, "Ah...you think this is just an ordinary pool? Let me tell you, this is natural spring water...in this region, it is unheard of...can you smell that? The water is completely loaded with rejuvenating minerals...sulphur ... other minerals ..." As Mr Patel tried to win Bejoy's approval, I took a closer look at the pool and realised that the water was turbid and did not look particularly clean. I was about to point it out to Mr Patel, but just as I turned to do so, I saw Bejoy bending down and splashing some of the water onto his face.

"How does that feel?" Mr Patel beamed at Bejoy. "Nice..." "You know, Mr Chairman has told me personally, if he does not take a dip at least once a day, then his entire energy feels drained. He needs it!" Bejoy nodded at him silently. "Dinner?" he asked.

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Our rooms were on the floor above the pool and moments after we had checked it, I saw Bejoy sauntering downstairs in his underwear, a towel over his shoulder, "Rejuvenation zone..." his voice trailed off.

There was a small dining area on the floor above us and a short while later, I found myself alone at the dinner table with Mr Patel, "Your friend is really enjoying eh? I cannot blame him..." he smiled, "Can you imagine how this place will be once it is finished? One of the most exclusive nature retreats in South India!" I nodded. "The Chairman is lucky to have someone as passionate as you handling this," I said. "Oh, Ownership and Accountability are two of our important values. We are honoured that Mr Chairman reached out to us. We treat every company we work with as our own..." "Oh wait...you mean you aren't an employee of Empire Realty?" The advertising agency I worked for had been handling Empire Realty's marketing for some time now and I was quite familiar with their values. And while Diligence, Transparency and Innovation were on the list, I had no recollection of Ownership and Accountability.

Mr Patel stared at me blankly for a few moments, "...

well...technically...since this is Mr Chairman's personal endeavour, it is outside the purview of Empire Realty. My company was hired by him to help manage it..." he paused for a few moments, "If you ask me, I think he did a smart thing..." He resumed, plunging into officialese as I noticed he often did, "As per the law, any large-scale development in close proximity to a natural water-source, requires mandatory coordination with the state department... and you probably know how complicated these transactions can get..."

"Ah, so that's why Empire isn't being involved?"

"Empire will be involved... but only in an official capacity..." Mr Patel grinned, "We still plan on utilizing the company's valuable network of partners, something that has been realized through exceedingly fruitful collaborations since 2025."

I smiled and continued nodding. Mr Patel was quoting the very lines that I had written for one of Empire Realty's brochures.

"...Needless to say...and tell your photographer also...do not broadcast any images of the property... your agency has already signed the non-disclosure paperwork... water is too sensitive a topic... we have to be careful..."

I gave Mr Patel my assurance. Water was indeed a sensitive topic and seeing that he had grown a little grave, I tried to lighten the mood, "You know my father always likes to talk about how, when he was younger, they would pump water up from the ground...to the point where their tanks actually overflowed!"

Mr Patel smiled, "I remember...now for us city folk it is almost impossible to even imagine..." He paused, "You're from Bengaluru, right? Ah...so you use Etchtwooah?" "Oh yes... for as long as I can remember..." I had no memory of the time before the city had come under the EH20 scheme, but I was familiar with the phrase, "when the ground still had water..." on account of my father's nostalgia. "The Engineered H20 scheme is doing really well. Really efficient. The government won an award for it a few years back..."

"Yes, I read about it...They say it single-handedly saved the city from drying up. Bengaluru is a model city like that. In Pune, my home...we are still under Mumbai's jurisdiction...so it's still quite chaotic...the tankers don't come regularly...yes, under Mumbai's 'Inaap' scheme.

It was uncommon to find someone working in India's creative industry, who did not have an opinion on the names of the different State-Engineered-Water schemes. Some names were more favoured than others and Maharashtra's Inaap scheme, was one of the popular ones, along with Gujraat's iJAL programme. The marketing gurus had been highly impressed and one had even been quoted saying that "By taking 'Paani' - the common Hindi word for water and catalyzing it with age-old wit, Inaap is something that is not only memorable, but is also rooted in a unique marriage of traditions. At the same time, the very sound of it resonates deeply with the magnitude of the water crisis."

Mr Patel looked thoughtful, "But soon we should have our own Inaap plants in Pune...then it will be fine...In any case...about tomorrow..."

Just then, a large figure came bouncing into the room. His hair was a mess and the wet towel around his shoulders was dripping onto his t-shirt. It took me a few moments to recognize Bejoy, primarily on account of the spring in his step.

"My! You are looking refreshed... Rejuvenated rather!" Mr Patel laughed.

"Thanks!" Bejoy made his way to the table and sat down. He seemed unusually fidgety, keeping an eager eye on the kitchen door.

I was a little taken aback by the transformation. It almost seemed like he was glowing! "What did you think of the Rejuvenation Zone?" I asked.

Bejoy beamed at me, his smile widening into a grin, "It works!"

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I woke up to the sound of thudding from the corridor outside. My eyes still heavy with sleep I peered through my peephole, to see Bejoy jovially bounding back into his room in a vest and a towel, his wet hair flopping about.

A short while later, as I groggily stood in front of the mirror, brushing my teeth, there was a knock at the door. I opened it to a fully-dressed Bejoy, complete with his camera gear. "We'll go?" "Where?" I was not familiar with this enthusiastic version of Bejoy. "To take photos..." "What photos? Mr Patel has to brief us first..." "Mr Patel?" "Yes...we are meeting him first...in the estate house. He will brief us there..." For the first time since the previous night, I saw Bejoy's face drop, "But photos...we will take?" I assured him that we would take photos but we were expected to meet Mr Patel for breakfast first. I expected the topic of food to cheer him up, but he sighed, "Ok...let's go..."

The estate house was bare, with the exception of Mr Patel's workstation and a dining area, but the dust-patterns on the walls suggested that the walls had once been fairly crowded. We were greeted at the estate house by an exceptionally enthusiastic Mr Patel,

"Great news! Mr Chairman will be joining us for breakfast!"

We sat in silence around the breakfast table, staring at the empty seat in which the chairman was expected to appear. In one corner of the room, I could see the Cerebrograph, glowing red, like the crystal ball of a robotic fortuneteller. Mr Patel would constantly shift his gaze between the seat and the Cerebrograph, growing increasingly impatient, "He said it was set up last night... I wonder if I should call him..."

"I have never seen one of these before... Only pictures..." I knew that it wasn't easy to get one of these. It had been launched only a couple of years ago and could only be afforded by the larger corporations.

Mr Patel smiled, "I told you, Empire Realty can't get involved officially, but unofficially..." he winked. "What's the coverage like?" "Oh this entire building has been equipped...and also the rejuvenation zone...Mr Chairman was very particular about the coverage over there..." "So using this, someone can project themselves here from anywhere in the world?" "Oh yes, of course, the user can project into any registered Cerebrograph zone, anywhere in the world. The reason we have it is because Mr Chairman is traveling so much...I don't think even he knows where he is most of the time!" He laughed, "...besides, this signal is completely secure and private... It has never been compromised, ever! These days there is simply no room for security risks..."

The Cerebrograph slowly began to change colour and it began to glow yellow. Mr Patel hadn't realized and continued, "But the two of you still need to get your security clearance..." The orb was now flashing green and Mr Patel followed my gaze to it, his face immediately lighting up, "He's here..."

With bated breath we watched the chair and for several moments, nothing happened. Then, slowly the light began to change and a silver apparition began to fade into view, shining brighter and brighter. A few moments later, the silvery, shimmering silhouette of a man sat at the breakfast table.

"Goodmorning, Mr Chairman Sir!" Mr Patel quickly got to his feet. The figure surveyed the room for a few moments before speaking. It's voice was robotic, "No need to stand Mr Patel, good morning... and a very good morning to you boys!"

It took me a moment to realize that the figure was looking at us, "Er..." "What's the matter? You boys look like you've seen a ghost..." Mr Patel...don't they have their security clearances?" Mr Patel immediately grew defensive, "No sir, it was only setup yesterday. Following the necessary protocols takes time, but I will get it done!"

The figure was silent for a few moments, "Alright... My apologies boys...The Cerebrograph is one of the most sophisticated communication tools on the market. If I enter a space where there are people without the right clearances, then I will appear and sound as you see me now...It's quite remarkable what a simple spinal implant can do these days..."

Bejoy and I continued to stare at the figure in silence. I suppose it got awkward because the chairman suddenly broke in, "I don't have much time...I'm on my way to *BLEEP* after which I am meeting with *BLEEP* to discuss *BLEEP*." I only have a couple of minutes and I just wanted..." The chairman froze mid-sentence and appeared to stare at us for a few moments, "You will have to excuse all the bleeping. I'm not used to speaking to people without the right clearances...anything I say that you are not cleared to hear will be bleeped out...In any case, I wanted to personally welcome you on board. Hopefully, the next time we meet, you will be able to see and hear me in my true form..." he chuckled for a few moments and I took the chance to speak up, "Thank you Mr Chairman sir. Mr Patel was telling us about the project and the fact that it is very personal to you..."

"Indeed!" The silvery figure boomed, "I first came here twenty years ago, when I was still a boy. Even then, I was so taken up by the water that I kept a bottle of it...and that is precisely the route we must take while pitching to investors. Unfortunately, state laws prevent us from doing full justice to the rejuvenation zone... So instead, let us play up the exclusivity. I want Secret Springs to be the most ultra-luxury spa in the entire country...It's not just a place, but a destination! We can make it an invite-only destination exclusively for the best of the best!"

"Absolutely sir!" Mr Patel chimed in, "For those nature lovers who are used to the finer things in life." "Correct you are Mr Patel... Now this is going to be the first trip of many, boys. Mr Patel will give you your list of tasks to complete...photographs to take and so on. I believe you're scheduled to drive back to Bengaluru...tomorrow?" The figure stood up, like it was preparing to go somewhere. "The day after morning sir..." Mr Patel stood up, "Sir, not to worry... the next time they come here I will ensure they have the necessary clearances..." "Good Man!" The figure quipped to Mr Patel, "Now if you'll excuse me, I have reached *BLEEP* and I am late for my meeting with *BLEEP*." It was good meeting you gentlemen. All the best." The

figure suddenly froze and then slowly faded away, out of sight.

We turned to a beaming Mr Patel. "Okay gentlemen, can we start?"

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This was not my first assignment with Bejoy. We had worked together for well over a year and in this time we had formed an efficient system of working, which primarily involved me telling him exactly what to do. However, the rejuvenated Bejoy would not wait for any instructions. The moment we arrived at a new shoot location, he would begin clicking away, even insisting on doing multiple compositions. At one point, when I made a suggestion to him, purely out of habit, he turned to me and said, "I can do, but visual not good." It was the longest sentence I had ever heard him speak. Mr Patel was most impressed, for Bejoy would continuously keep him abreast of what he was doing, in his signature albeit energetic monotone, 'Depth' 'Nice angle' 'Perspective'. He even humored him when he made us stop at certain parts, raised his hands to his ears and whispered, "Listen! You can barely hear the traffic from here..."

The spa was going to have a few luxury cottages, spread out all over the land, with the most exclusive of the lot being at the source of the natural spring, but when we got there, we were met with a daunting compound wall, fitted with barbed wire, security lasers and an equally intimidating security guard.

"Ah Mr Chairman didn't know that you don't have your clearances... We will have to reschedule this for the next time...I told you no, earlier all sorts of miscreants would come here and drink..you know local people..."

I noticed that Bejoy was carrying a bottle of water, when he produced it from his camera bag and began to take a swig from it, "Hey...can I have a sip of etchtwooh?" I asked. But he pretended not to hear me and drained the bottle, "Sorry," he looked rather sheepish.

That evening, while Bejoy retired to the Rejuvenation Zone, Mr Patel produced a small bottle of rum from his desk drawer, "Er...sir...Do you take hard drinks?"

"The bitterness of the etchtwooh and the sweetness of the rum are a great combination" Mr Patel sighed with satisfaction after taking a big swig of his drink, "Your friend is simply hooked eh? He's really making the most of his time here...How come you didn't go? You definitely should..."

"Oh I wanted to...but I feel like I'm coming down with something... been sniffing a lot..." I lied. I didn't want to disclose to Mr Patel that, like most people my age, I was not fond of the water at all. It would lead to a conversation that I have repeatedly had with older folk. I would have to explain that I had no particular interest in swimming, that I refused to go to the beach because I didn't want to spend

hundreds of thousands of rupees on the mandatory-protective-sea-suit you have to wear and that I particularly disliked drinking it. Even in cases of dire thirst, the taste of EH2O had no element of relief and besides, I feared I might say something out of line in the heat of the moment, on account of my drink.

But Mr Patel didn't pry any further, "Oh no problem, next time you can go...By the way, great work today. There are a few more spots left for tomorrow. Once you take those shots, then we are finished with this leg of the project. You guys can get cracking on the investors brochure. I will send you the specifications for the cottages when they are finalized...If you need any other materials from my end, please ask."

"Actually, Mr Patel, there is something. To go back to what I was telling you before we came here...in order to develop the brand identity of this place, what we need is a story...The rejuvenation zone is great, but we need some kind of historical rooting, to craft the perfect story around it. To make it seem like a really exclusive destination. We have to answer the 'Why' - why should people come here?" Even though Bejoy wasn't present, I could see him rolling his eyes. Mr Patel seemed a little dazed, "Hmmm..." Then, draining his glass he stood up, "Let me make some calls...Right now, I must bid you goodnight right now. I will eat in my quarters itself...I have a dinner concall with my project manager...You please keep the bottle...offer your friend when he comes..."

Mr Patel took his leave just as Bejoy came bouncing in. After dinner, when we went back to our rooms, I realized that Bejoy was lingering by the rejuvenation zone, his camera bag around his shoulder. I could tell he was waiting for me to leave. I fell asleep to the sounds of Bejoy splashing about in the water.

When I woke up, I could still hear splashing. A short while later I heard Bejoy thudding back into his room and I wondered if he had spent the night in the Rejuvenation zone. The rest of the day went as smoothly as the previous one. Bejoy was still a rejuvenated man of action, giving me very little to do and I found myself observing him more closely than usual. Every now and then he would slip into a corner with his camera bag for a few moments and emerge in a far more gung-ho avatar. Before we knew it, our work was done and we were back in rooms, packing to leave. We were to have dinner with Mr Patel and leave the following morning. I entered Bejoy's room to remind him and found him sitting on his bed, amidst a number of empty EH2O bottles, "What the..." Bejoy looked like I had caught him doing something wrong and he looked terribly embarrassed, "Oh nothing nothing...for throwing..."

At dinner, Mr Patel thanked us profusely, "I will not be there tomorrow morning...I am taking a flight out tonight... The driver will take you in the morning. Since you have not got your clearances, you will be subjected to a routine security check as you leave. Nothing to be alarmed"

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The following morning, I sat in the taxi with the driver, waiting for Bejoy who had suddenly disappeared into the Rejuvenation Zone. He emerged a little while later, his backpack bulging. As he sauntered into the car. I could hear bottles of water swirling and swishing about inside.

"Bejoy... What do you have in your bag?"
"Water bottle"
"Did you fill up water from the Rejuvenation zone?"

Bejoy didn't say anything and just looked at his feet.

"Look man, I don't know if it is safe to be drinking all this stuff...but that's your business. But I don't know if you should be taking anything from here...It's not our property, it won't look good that we took it without permission..."

Bejoy continued to look at his feet, but he was nodding. He understood, but there was nothing much we could do, the car was already at the security check. I felt my scalp prickle as the guards looked through our bags. I was certain there would be an issue and was preparing to explain Bejoy's actions, but when they opened his bag, all they found were full bottles of EH2O and did not think much of it.

As we left the property, I decided to break the awkward silence that followed by being encouraging, "I know that was a close call...but in a way, I am actually glad you did this..." Bejoy, stared at me wide-eyed. "I actually wanted to talk to Mr Patel about it. I think we should get the water tested in a lab. Perhaps we can use the results to strengthen our brand-story..."

"That's a good idea..." Bejoy looked thoughtful. I had no memory of him ever participating in a work-discussion before, "Otherwise everyone else is saying the same... Elephant used to live here...Tiger used to live here..."

He was right. Most of the other nature resorts played on their history and claimed their property was once home to several exotic animals. My boss had joked with me by saying that all land was once home to the dinosaurs.

"Sorry..."Bejoy was still embarrassed about his little stunt, "But I couldn't help it. It is the best water I have tasted in my life..."

Not knowing what to make of this, I smiled at him and gazed out the window as the last few trees slowly zipped by. The last green cover for 200 Kilometers. Soon, we would pass the Green Cover Mall, which stood at the border of the forest and after that, since

it was a Sunday, it would be a slow and painful drive to the highway through crowded villages, bursting with factory-seconds' shops. We stopped for lunch at Hillside Mall and after we had eaten, I noticed Bejoy looking around for his bag and I reminded him that he had left it in the car. He gestured to my bottle of EH2O and I handed it to him, but the moment he took a sip, he spat it out, "Dirty water..." he handed it back to me in disgust.

Soon, we were on the highway and the journey immediately sped up. The tech parks on either side had all their traffic restricted to below-ground, so it was one long drive back and I fell asleep while gazing at the seemingly unending facade of skyscrapers whizzing by.

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In the following week, as I waited on the results of the lab tests, I slowly watched the rejuvenated Bejoy return to his former self. By the end of the week, when he stopped showing up for work and couldn't be reached, I was tasked with checking up on him. When I got to his house, I found him sprawled out on his bed in a vest and a pair of boxers. There were empty EH2O bottles lying all around the bed and he just lay there, staring at me.

"What happened?"  
"Over..."  
"What's over?"  
"Rejuvenation..."

It took me some time to convince him to come back to work. What finally did the trick was telling him that it was only on finishing a draft of the brochure, that could we make another trip to the Rejuvenation Zone. A solemn expression across his face, Bejoy took my hand in his, "Please... actually...my father...when he was my age...he was also doing photography...but after I was born he had to do family business...I always wanted to carry his passion forward..."

I was quite taken aback by this sudden openness from Bejoy, "But you are carrying his passion forward aren't you? You are a photographer..."

"Yes..." Bejoy sighed, "But I didn't have the passion...I lost it..." He then looked me dead in the eyes, "But after Rejuvenation zone... I got it back...but now..." I could have sworn I saw tears in his eyes.

I assured him that work was well underway and that if he came back to work, things would go even faster. I told him about the water sample I had sent in and that I

was going to collect the results right after I left him.

With Bejoy cheered up and ready to return to work, I made my way to the lab. I was given a token and made to wait in the lobby of the Diagnostics Laboratory. On one side of the room, sat people with tokens and on the other, people with bags of different-coloured liquids. It was where I had sat the previous week, when I had brought in the samples. I remember trying to guess what each person was holding.

My number was called and I made my way to the counter. A surly woman on the other side of the counter stuffed an envelope in my hands, "Here. Can open, but you won't understand. Take one more token. Lab wizard will explain to you."

I took another token and opened the envelope. The woman was right, I couldn't make head or tail of the figures on the sheet. I waited an hour before my number was called and I was led into a tiny white-walled room. The only occupants of the room were two chairs. After a few moments, the hologram of a young, spectacled man in a lab coat appeared in the chair opposite mine. He was staring right past me like most automated holograms did, "Greetings, I will be your Laboratory Wizard for this session. Please input file number" he said.

I told him my file number and he thanked me. Then, after staring past me for few more moments, he spoke, "Sample identified as follows: 96% H2O, 3.8% organic matter and 0.2% Nitrates. For a detailed Chemical Analysis, please input bank credentials... to receive rest of preliminary report please say continue..."

"Continue..."

"Sample classified under XH2O category, formerly known as Drinking Water - as per the Supreme Court ruling in 2028, when the last known naturally drinkable source was declared 'dead'. Sample ideal for consumption."

Drinking water? Directly from the ground?

Before I could ask any more, the lab wizard began to speak once again, "As per government regulations of 2037, any water sample above 40% in purity must immediately be sent for review. Please remain in your seat. The doors have automatically locked. Someone will be with you shortly, to ask you further questions."



Aurora - Photo by Jon Barraclough

## WHAT IS ART ANYWAY (AND CAN ANYONE APPRECIATE IT?)

TANYA LEARY

A few months ago I received an email from the lovely people at FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology) Liverpool asking me whether I'd like to be a part of an advisory group to help discuss and develop ideas to engage a broader audience as they move forward. I was thrilled to be asked of course but, as I composed my reply I felt it necessary to fess up to the fact (excuse the pun) that I am absolutely hopeless at art and in fact, art in its most traditional form is something that in the past I have been a little intimidated by.

I've always felt that my brain doesn't really 'get it'. As if the artist is trying to express something way beyond my comprehension and, as a result I've probably tried too hard to understand it instead of just seeing what I see and enjoying it from my own perspective. Second guessing people isn't fun at the best of times and second guessing an unmade bed or a cow in formaldehyde wasn't really a priority for me in the early noughties so it's fair to say that I've sort of shied away from it a bit and haven't got much knowledge of the traditional art world at all. I've never spent a huge amount of time in galleries. Libraries yes; Mr L and I spent hours in the 'main branch' of New York Central Library many years ago- and I could happily reside in Liverpool library with its poetry and glass domes. Maybe I just naturally focused my attention on the stuff that I understood more readily. The People's Palace in Glasgow for example held my attention for the best part of a day and I see something new and absorbing every time we go to the Liverpool museum. But, traditional picture on wall with writing in a box underneath, in galleries haven't often been on the must visit list. As I grow older though, I really would like the time to amble around a gallery and ponder the why's and the wherefores of the pictures before me but, with two young children there isn't a huge amount of time for that at the moment!

Anyway, back to FACT. FACT actually stands for Foundation for Art and Creative Technology and they are the UK's leading media arts centre offering a unique programme of exhibitions, film and participant-led art projects. Based in the town centre of Liverpool, FACT is just one of the many organisations in the area that helps keep Liverpool

at the absolute top of its game in respect to the quality and variety of exhibitions and artists of all disciplines it attracts. There is always something to see. This evening that something was the preview event for FACT's latest installation – Aurora, an "epic immersive experience" based within the bowels of the old Toxteth Reservoir and I was invited along.

Honestly, I very, very nearly didn't go. It was cold, pouring with rain, I didn't know anyone else that would be there and a large part of me had that old niggle... you won't get it and everyone else will be proper arty types that know what they're talking about... gulp.

In the end, I went along mainly because I had asked my mum to babysit and I didn't want to mess her around but I am so very glad I did;

It reminded me of the beauty of people power.

This installation is a collaboration between artists from the UK, India and Indonesia. It has been 2 years in the

making! It has involved schools from across Toxteth as well as the wider community. There have been multiple sponsors and funding applications to bring the artists' vision to reality. Absolutely everyone involved is so proud of what they've achieved together and it really felt like a community effort as we gathered in the church hall for our briefing this evening.

It consumed me.

For 40 minutes I was removed from the chaos and mundanity of modern life. To begin with I was still that anxious non-artist trying to second guess what the real artists wanted me to think or see or feel at particular points but the longer I stood, the less that mattered to me. I was just totally absorbed by the lighting and the hauntingly stirring music; it filled my ears and reverberated in my bone and when it was over I felt like I wanted to cry!

It was just for me.

I am so pleased I was able to attend and experience it completely by going alone. I didn't hear anyone else's take on it. I didn't have to articulate what I thought of it and I didn't have to rush or linger. I was there viewing it in my own time, on my own terms.

As we exited the experience we were handed postcards asking;

"What did the installation mean to you?"

At the time I couldn't find a way to articulately express my thoughts so here they are, a few hours later.

Water is life. It is constant but it is ever changing. It has the power to soothe and to scare. To calm and to kill. It will outlast us all and it is beautiful.

Thank you FACT. Thank you to the artists - Invisible Flock. Thank you to everyone that played a part in getting this art installation to completion. I found it mood altering, mind opening, utterly absorbing and completely consuming. In short, brilliant.

Thanks for reminding me that art comes in various forms and it is for all. Thanks for bringing it to a new space and a new audience.

Tanya Leary is part of FACT's Development Advisory Group. This article is taken from her blog Mum Metamorphosis, posted on 20 September 2018.



Aurora - Photo by Ed Waring



Photo Courtesy  
British Council

Aurora brought together artists and practitioners from various disciplines and geographies to work together over the course of 6+ months of intense production to put together the work. We asked all of them to respond to two questions after Aurora.

## HOW DID WORKING ON AURORA INFLUENCE/AFFECT YOUR OWN PRACTICE?

## HOW DID IT CHANGE YOUR OWN PERCEPTION OF/RELATIONSHIP TO WATER?

### Simon Fletcher

Aurora was a massive jump up in the scale of projects that I'd been working on. Collaborating with such a wide range of creative and technically minded people was a really important experience for me. When I'm in the process of solving problems I can often have a very singular focus and I learned to really appreciate being pulled out of that, which is something I will definitely search for in the future.

I'd have to admit that coming into this project, my knowledge of the water cycle and it's significance was largely based on what I learned in primary school. This whole experience has taught me a lot. The first few workshops with schools in Liverpool were a real baptism by fire as the students were all really engaged and asking challenging questions. We had some great discussions about cultural relationships with water, which have made me far more conscious of my own attitudes.

### Azusa Ono

My lighting design work is usually done inside of theatre but working with this project made me explore environmental / architectural lighting elements which I really enjoyed. Also this project made me more interested in environmental lighting design, in a historical and meaningful building within a community.

One of the greatest things about this project was to take the audience through the water journey / storytelling with lighting, sound and water materials and no performers – that was an exciting challenge and made us very bold and creative, which you can not always do in theatre. This creative process was very delicate in a good way. In order to illuminate something fragile and with constant movement such as ice and water, my design practice also had to be sensitive and reactive to its unique characteristics. This special space (the Toxteth reservoir) itself also gave me great inspiration to open up the five senses fully (visual, sound, smell, touch, taste?!, from humidity and echo) and I/we all responded to those senses, individually and as a team.

I think I became more aware of the aura of water itself, whether or not we can see it visually. The feel of this aura and energy from water is something I have become more sensitised to after this project. For me, the sound of water dripping / rain dropping makes me feel melancholy and relaxed. That still remains the same but the sound of water evokes more atmosphere and memories unconsciously now. It also reminds me of the rain chanting and the celebration of water sometimes.



Setup for school workshops. Photo by Anya Stewart-Maggs



Aurora installation testing. Photo by Brian Roberts

### James Hamilton

Writing for Aurora was an opportunity to make something completely unique, composing in 3D for a space with an other worldly sonic signature. The space was as much a part of the sound track as what was coming from the speakers. It has made me consider how and where my work is performed or installed, the influence it can have on the compositional process and the impact it can have on it's reception. I have continued to experiment with chance or randomness provided by measuring or taking triggers from an external source and combining this with structured forms and live improvised performance to create unique and cohesive compositions. My focus is on how this can be engineered with consideration so the resulting music is as strong as it's concept.

### Miebi Sikoki

The Aurora experience has been insightful, challenging and memorable.

It was great to see this range of artists come together to collaborate on a message with implications beyond nationality. The sense of awe I felt at seeing everything come together for the first time allowed me to reconsider my own practice in light of what can be achieved through global cooperation.

Having learned of the research behind Aurora and being part of its execution, it's impossible to revert to viewing water as a simple utility. Water brings with it a sense of incomprehension, wonder and urgency when we begin to think about it as a life force, a possible medium for consciousness, a globally protected global commons.

It has been the most technically difficult, yet almost spiritual element I have worked with and I am honoured to have been invited to participate in this project; thank you.

### Etza Meisylara

For me Aurora was a project that gave me an unexpected experience. As an artist and musician, I could see new possibilities of making art with other disciplines. Through Aurora, I got an understanding of how to see other collaborators working with their own mediums differently and then putting it all together as one big concept. Aurora was also a project of healthy communications, for me. Every collaborator was open to share their artistic ideas, with the public seeing it as one huge beautiful experience together at the end.

### Babitha George

My work so far has been very research-driven, primarily with people and communities. Aurora gave me the chance to understand place and history, especially in how we as people relate to water. Water draws our attention not only to the two-dimensional space between points on a map- as when we trace the lines of a river- but to depth and altitude and community and livelihoods and spirituality, which often matter way more than history gives it importance. Working with such a diverse group of collaborators also further helped me recognise my own biases and opened up new possibilities in a way that nothing else but intense collaboration can.

Living in India with the monsoons, I felt I have always had a fairly intimate relationship with water. But through the stories and research for Aurora, what got reinforced is the profound extent of human intervention in the last two hundred years across the world, to a point where we are now suffering irrevocable consequences. Water pays no heed to human frontiers and the way in which Aurora explored this fragility made this all the more prominent.

### Catherine Baxendale

We learnt a lot about working with water on a very practical level; it always found a way to move and shape the environment we put it in, finding the tiniest of holes with the full force of a gravitational pull. The deep analysis of water that came from using it as a medium in the way we did created a respect and awe for it in a way that I really hadn't felt before. I loved hanging the ice each day and working with water as an ally in the creation and upkeep of the work on a daily level. It felt like we were able to achieve a closeness and relationship with water that is usually only possible when standing beside a powerful river or at the edge of the ocean. By working with water at scale we were able to connect with and understand it on a much deeper level and that has changed my relationship to it completely.





Fabric panel at the Aurora Exhibition at FACT, Liverpool. Photos by Catherine Baxendale and Victoria Pratt

### Romit Raj

Aurora allowed me to get back to building technologies to craft experiences, which I had done a lot of in the past but not so much in the last few years. To me this was extremely challenging, refreshing and rewarding. To add to that, it did all that while still being closely tied to the more research oriented work I have been doing recently. So, for me, professionally, it was the best of both worlds. Finally, to top it all off, Invisible Flock put together an amazing team full of talented individuals. It was a pleasure to work with everyone.

Aurora happened, while I was thinking deeply about climate change. I am from India, where the consequences of climate change are projected to get very dire very soon. Our agricultural sector is in crisis, our rivers are dying and many of our cities are some of the most polluted in the world. But at the same time, there is so much still to lose. In the state of Karnataka, where I live, there are still pristine water systems - rivers, lakes, ponds and the coast. Aurora reinforced my urge to experience and emotionally connect with these water systems before it's too late.

### Victoria Pratt

Making Aurora brought together a lot of questions I had for some time – how do we talk about climate change, how do we get across nature's power and essence, how can we feel closer to it. I think using water and really thinking about how we could bring it to life as a material gave me a real focus in my practice, to explore the natural world in as many ways as possible to try better to understand it and to celebrate it.

I definitely think more about water since Aurora, I've been reading a lot about ice since and I'm not finished thinking about it, I think I'll be making work about water for some years to come.

### Klāvs Kurpnieks

Aurora was the first large scale project that I had worked on. It was amazing to be part of such a large project that involved collaborators from multiple countries, all of us working together to create this complex piece of work. The experience of working in such a multidisciplinary team was invaluable and helped me realize the scope of what is possible to achieve.

Aurora made me think about the volume of water and how much water we use on a daily basis, how difficult it is to contain and how quickly it runs away. On paper, the amount of water we had delivered felt like a huge amount but in reality, this is a very small fraction of the amount of water used in a single day in a city.

### Ben Eaton

Aurora felt like a marker in my practice. I think there are works that you get to make that feel like they are culminations of longer periods of learning and thinking. In that sense Aurora was the end-point of a couple of years of the studio tooling up in a literal as well as more abstract sense to make work on this scale and in this manner. Watching it unfold with the large team and turn into the thing that it became was really amazing, hard and physically draining at times but also incredible. In as much as Aurora is my practice it was the clearest articulation of 10 years of learning and making and working with technology. But also it is most influential in that I am already seeing the work and creativity that is emerging from the aesthetics and vocabulary we created in this work.

Rather than a specific relationship to water itself, for me the work is about a more full mode of ecological thinking - water serves as a perfect vector for this as it is in everything around us and performs itself as an object of nature as well as a resource, a threat and a utility; it has a deep complexity and runs through everything both figuratively and literally. In a way, working on Aurora has allowed me to abstract my emotional relationship to water further, but for me this is a good thing. Through my work at the moment I am trying to find languages of existing in this current age and I find that being in factual proximity to things, makes it impossible to participate in them. Instead art allows us to exist in a shared space of abstraction, which I feel brings me closer to elements, but recognising the impossibility of perception through our limited human means; instead arts brings us into a thing. So in that sense I understand my primal relationship to water more closely than ever.

## THE DEEP

There are depths beyond our comprehension.

The Aurora app is a digital experience meant to accompany the installation in Toxteth, that seeks to provide a glimpse into the sights, sounds and inspirations for Aurora. The narrative spans four environments - glacier, sea, rainforest and below the water, explored from the central position of a digital representation of the reservoir. The App features a new composition made from global field recordings and music created for the installation, including a performance recorded in the Reservoir by four schools in L8 on 6 July, 2018. This is an excerpt from the app; a dialogue set in the deep.

**Diver 1:** I can't see anything ahead of this, can you?

**Diver 2:** Only the smallest amount of green light  
Could be a distant ship...  
Or a lighthouse

**Diver 1:** No, lighthouses aren't this far out, are they?

...

Have you heard the story about the woman and the shoal of fish?

...

(FADE OUT AND BACK UP)

She was trying to escape her country, she swam out, and was caught in a huge swirl of them, thousands and thousands, spinning round each other like a rolling tornado, glistening blue and green everywhere. They spin her round and round in the centre of the mass, stuck in the eye of their perpetual journey...



**Diver 2:** What happened to her?

**Diver 1:** It is said that the vortex of fish created an air bubble and in this moment she could breathe underwater and they carried her across the ocean to safety

She saw everything that they saw, she lived within their collective belly

**Diver 2:** What was her name?

**Diver 1:** They called her Atergatis, the Syrian mermaid

**Diver 2:** Do you think about how we might ever go back?

**Diver 1:** Not sure it's possible... my battery is a little... low

**Diver 2:** What's that noise?

**Diver 1:** I think it's just the effect of the pressure on your ears  
What does it sound like?

**Diver 2:** Like fire ...

Brittle

Do you think it feels like the world is upside down?

**Diver 1:** I feel like everything below the water is a mystery

**Diver 2:** I feel like everything above the water is a mystery

Down here makes more sense to me

Time slows here

Up there...we don't live long enough to perceive change

**Diver 1:** What do you mean by that?

**Diver 2:** Your light is dimming

**Diver 1:** Yeah a slow dimming

**Diver 2:** Ok here's one for you...If humans can see water but not air, can fish see air but not water?

**Diver 1:** It looks clearer here

**Diver 2:** Something to do with being closer to the earth's crust makes this place feel more unpredictable

I feel like we are intruding

And the water is barely tolerating us

**Diver 1:** You're being paranoid

**Diver 2:** Do you know they found traces of cow DNA in the stomachs of amphipod crustaceans down in the deep ocean... There is no place where you cannot see the traces of us

**Diver 2:** What would you do if we got to the bottom and it felt like we were back at the top?

**Diver 1:** Like a submerged city

**Diver 2:** like a loop

**Diver 1:** I think that is the oxygen talking

**Diver 2:** Maybe

**Diver 1:** I think we just passed through the line to the Abyssopelagic zone  
I can feel the cold

Aurora app and video in the accompanying exhibition at FACT, Liverpool. Photo by Babitha George

**Diver 2:** I'm excited

**Diver 1:** me too

**Diver 2:** Down here it's impossible to imagine the world without water

**Diver 1:** ...yes  
Look up  
Do you feel like we are falling or rising?

**Diver 2:** did you say failing?

**Diver 1:** No, falling

**Diver 2:** I'm thirsty

**Diver 1:** What's that shadow?

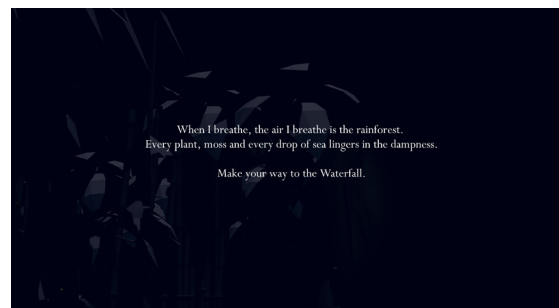
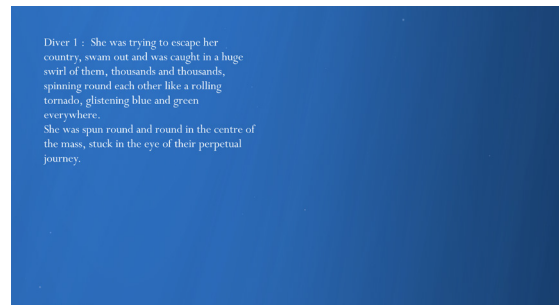
**Diver 2:** I think it's just your light glitching

**Diver 1:** no it looks like...

...

(FADE DOWN AND UP)

Like darkness



The app was made by Invisible Flock and Romit Raj, Babitha George, James Hamilton, Etza Meisyara and Abshar Platisza. It featured the voices of pupils from King's Leadership Academy, St Silas Primary School, Holy Family Primary School and Matthew Arnold Primary School during a collaboration with Invisible Flock, FACT's Learning Team, Musician and Engineer Simon Fletcher and Composer James Hamilton.

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FACT Digital Ambassadors: Andy, Anna, Alan, Begs, Corinne, Bunty, Dave Mc, Dave W, Dot, Eric, Leo, Irene H, Irene M, Ken, Linda, Paul, Rob, Staff, Sheila Mc, Sheila Mc, Sylvia M, Sylvia P, Vic, Jen.

## Partners

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FACT is the UK's leading media arts centre, bringing people, art and technology together.

Invisible Flock is an interactive arts studio operating at the intersection of art and technology based in Leeds.

Arts Council England champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives.

Liverpool 2018 is a year-long programme which celebrated the city's culture and creativity a decade on from the European Capital of Culture.

British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities, involving the very best British and international artistic talent.

Dingle 2000 Regeneration Trust focuses on the redevelopment of the Dingle area of Liverpool.

Park Hill (Toxteth) Reservoir

The Reservoir is Grade II Listed; it was built by the Corporation of Liverpool in 1855 to provide a reliable, safe water supply for its rapidly expanding port and population. It was closed for water storage in 1997.

We would like to extend special thanks to Mike Stubbs, Robin Kemp, Eliza Willis, Irma Chantily and Adam Pushkin.

## Acknowledgments

### The Team

Invisible Flock is Catherine Baxendale, Ben Eaton, Klavs Kurpnieks, Victoria Pratt and Anya Stewart-Maggs. Aurora was created by Invisible Flock in collaboration with an international team of artists:

Romit Raj and Babitha George are from Quicksand, a human-centered design firm headquartered in India.

Azusa Ono is a lighting designer for a range of theatre, art, and site-specific experimental projects.

James Hamilton is a composer and musician. Simon Fletcher is a musician, technician, engineer and teacher.

Digital Nativ is Miebi Sikoki & Rudi Nurhadi, a digital fabrication studio.

Abshar Platisza is an artist who works with both conventional and new media. Bagus Pandega works with kinetics, sounds and lights. Etza Meisyara works with sound, installation and performance.

Lighting Assistants; Jack Hathaway and Saki Torlumi

Project Manager; Sarah Rowland

Mediator; Cathryn Peach-Barnes

Front of House Volunteers; Tonis Toomsoo, Lucia Clark, Charlotte Freyne, Liana Jane Bourne, Ann McCormack, Douglas Ligertwood, James Phoenix, Malek Dawud Aouissaoui, Alison Stokes, India Gillespie, Emily Morton, Annie Feng, Sally Brewer, Elizabeth Gorman, JP Alves, Gillian Parry, Sidonie Mepsted, Pengnien Chen, Amy Stoakes, Luke Hodgkinson, Alyssha Edwards, Phyllis Roberts, Ali Awais, Morag Reynolds, Paula Blasbery, Olivia Walsh, Benjamin Nelson, Michael Murphy and Daniel Tarbuck.

Front of House Duty Managers; Bethany Howells, Carlos Marfil, Rebekah Hughes, Roger Lloyd, Naomi McAllister and Luke Hodgkinson.

FACT staff - Alistair Savage, Ana Botella, Andrew Joy, Anthony Price, Carl Davies, Carlos Marfil, Carly Paton, Charlotte Horn, Dave Hope, Holly Christopher, Ingrid Evans, Jenny Watts, Jess Fairclough, Jo Robinson, Jo Wright, Joan Burnett, Jon Couch, Joe Goulding, Julia Youngman, Lesley Taker, Lewis Eyles, Lucia Arias, Mark Murphy, Mary Spiers, Mary Jane Edwards, Matthew Brown, Mike Stubbs, Neil Winterburn, Nina Valvi, Patrick Mussard, Pippa Lea, Peter Brown, Rachael White, Roger McKinley, Sinead Nunes, Susie Mellor, Tom Ray and Washington Buckley.

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### Credits

- 8 Water by Pablo Neruda
- 12 Sea Fever by John Masefield
- 16 Rain by Edward Thomas
- 20 Autumn Rain by D H Lawrence
- 24 Nils by Aslak Valkeapää
- 28 Spirit Song Over the Waters by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
- 34 To the River Charles by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
- 36 The Brook by Alfred, Lord Tennyson
- 40 My River runs to thee by Emily Dickinson
- 44 Heaven by Rupert Brooke
- 50 A River by A K Ramanujan
- 52 The River by Kathleen Jessie Raine
- 54 Indian River by Wallace Stevens
- 58 Starling, The Lost Words by Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris
- 64 Heron, The Lost Words by Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris
- 68 A Toast to Iceland by Jónas Hallgrímsson

### Colophon

Designed by  
Sanchita Jain (Quicksand)

Edited by  
Catherine Baxendale, Victoria Pratt & Anya Stewart-Maggs (Invisible Flock) and Babitha George (Quicksand)

Front and back photos by  
Catherine Baxendale



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Liverpool  
City Council





# LIVERPOOL WATER MAP

Tracing Liverpool's main sources of water

## Brief History of Liverpool's Water Supply

The Liverpool Water Map marks significant sites and events related to present day and historic water supply to what is now the city of Liverpool. Together, the map and timeline offer a sense of the historical scope of the city's relationship with fresh water.

What becomes apparent is that the sources of water supply appear fragile and minuscule in comparison to the sea, which, while not a useful source of freshwater, is a repository of life. This hopefully gives a sense of the vast geography of water, of how fresh water is a precious entity, and over 70% of the planet is oceanic, and occupied by our fellow species.

By using hand created drawings and textures, I have tried to instill a sense of energy and fragility as well as a sense of playfulness into the illustrations - all qualities that can be attributed to human interactions with that wonderful element - WATER.

Sneha Updekar www.microdragons.co.uk

A big thank you to Peter Cahill, Civil Engineer, for providing a lot of the information for this map. Illustrative map is not to scale.

|      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |             |                                                                                                                                       |             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1500 | During this period, Fall well supplied up to 100,000 gallons a day to Liverpool, which comprised only of a few streets at the time                                                                                        | 1881        | Stone laid by Earl of Powys to commemorate start of Vyrnwy works to Liverpool                                                         | 1900        | Population supplied by Liverpool Corporation Water Works was approximately 568,000                                                                                                                                             |
| 1709 | First Act of Parliament relating to Liverpool's water supply enabled Sir Cleave Moore to bring water into town from Bootle springs                                                                                        | 1881 - 1892 | Vyrnwy scheme was being constructed                                                                                                   | 1904 - 1952 | More reservoirs, pipelines and aqueducts were added to the scheme over the years                                                                                                                                               |
| 1786 | Liverpool Town Council obtained powers to sink new, deeper wells to meet the increasing demand for water                                                                                                                  | 1884        | Dry recolonised drought. Yield at Rivington was less than the earlier drought of mid 1960s.                                           | 1939        | Chlorine was added to the water as a disinfectant                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 1822 | Further wells were sunk at Soho (1823), Tosteth Park (1826), and Windsor                                                                                                                                                  | 1887        | Lowest rainfall on record                                                                                                             | 1946        | Hydrated lime was first added to reduce acidity of the water                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 1844 | A well at Green Lane was sunk and service commenced to a reservoir constructed at Kensington Fields to receive this water. During this period, water from the wells began to be used for street cleaning and firefighting | 1888        | Additional boreholes had to be sunk at hand pump wells at Windsor and Dudlow Lane                                                     | 1973        | North West Water Authority was formed                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 1847 | Liverpool Corporation Waterworks Act enabled the construction of the Rivington scheme                                                                                                                                     | 1889        | Lake Vyrnwy was full and water flowed over the dam for the first time                                                                 | 1973 - 1984 | New reservoirs were constructed at Kensington and Aubrey Street and a new 220 million litre storage reservoir and associated treatment works were built at Prescot                                                             |
| 1852 | The Rivington scheme including Prescot storage reservoirs and a 44" aqueduct to Kensington was under construction                                                                                                         | 1892        | Vyrnwy project completed                                                                                                              | 1989        | The water industry was privatised and North West Water Authority became North West Water Ltd.                                                                                                                                  |
| 1857 | Rivington water was first brought to the city of Liverpool via the Prescot reservoirs                                                                                                                                     | 1994        | A £13.1 million ozone treatment plant to remove colour added by seasonal rainfall at Vyrnwy was opened                                | 1995        | United Utilities plc was formed                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 1860 | All new houses had to be provided with water closets (flush toilets)                                                                                                                                                      | 1995 - 96   | Driest period of drought since records began                                                                                          | 1996        | A 10 Km long pipeline was laid in record 13 weeks from Prescot Reservoirs to the Montroy balancing tank on Rivington aqueduct to enable water to be pumped from Prescot towards Wigan as part of the drought alleviation works |
| 1864 | The Great Drought in which water could be supplied for just one or two hours daily                                                                                                                                        | 2006 - 2016 | Further refurbishment, repairs and new work has been continually undertaken in the schemes that supply water to the city of Liverpool | 2016        | Today Liverpool can also receive water from the Lake District, and Rivington water is often directed to Manchester.                                                                                                            |
| 1890 | Act of Parliament made provisions for 40 million gallons by undertaking the Vyrnwy scheme                                                                                                                                 |             |                                                                                                                                       |             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |



