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Art, Design and Maintenance in Healthcare Settings: a provocation

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Art, Design and Maintenance in Healthcare Settings: a provocation

Art and design developed for hospitals and other healthcare settings is frequently required to be low or no maintenance. Can the requirement for no maintenance be understood as a creative problem (rather than a technical one) and therefore provoke a different or innovative approach?

Keywords: art, design, healthcare, hospitals, maintenance, management, brief

Public art and therapeutic design in healthcare settings can enhance the environment, provide distraction, contribute to a sense of place and aid way-finding. It can be an important contributor to the sense of the patient as person by creating dignified spaces.¹

That being said, one of the key challenges for public art and therapeutic design in healthcare settings can be the issue of maintenance. Everything requires maintenance sooner or later, but art and design in healthcare is always going to be low on the list of maintenance priorities (and fundraising for maintenance is an almost impossible task). Frequently briefs for public art and therapeutic design in healthcare settings ask for 'low' or 'no' maintenance proposals.²

The author was prompted to think about this issue differently when he read the following, “Her plan maintained that for such a developing and unique habitat ‘the best

1 In relation to this latter point see Fremantle, C., Hamilton, A. and Sands, J., 'Dignified Spaces: participatory work deinstitutionalises rooms at the heart of the clinical environment.' *European Design for Health Conference*, 2013
http://research.shu.ac.uk/design4health/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/D4H13_Vol2_web.pdf accessed 29 December 2016

2 The author has been responsible for writing such briefs and participating in the Steering Groups that establish such principles.

management of oil shale bings is no management' ...³ This sentence appeared in an article discussing the artist John Latham (1921-2006) and his work in relation to the shale spoil heaps of West Lothian in Scotland.⁴ It referred to a report on biodiversity prepared by Barbra Harvie. The phrase 'the best management is no management', provoked the author to question whether the approach to public art and therapeutic design in healthcare settings could benefit from creative thinking inspired by this idea.

When developing arts (including visual art, craft and design) in healthcare we are frequently asked to deliver a programme of artworks that have no maintenance requirements. That is, no-one will do anything to them after they are installed. What we, artists and project managers working together, tend to do is to curate and propose work which we have selected and developed with minimum maintenance in mind. So we often end up with vinyl imagery, or framed works, or very hard wearing materials like ceramic (or newer materials such as Corian). What does not seem to have been explored is what a work might be for which the best regime is no maintenance.

Let's consider the shale bings for a minute - they are not natural environments. They are thoroughly man-made resulting from one hundred years of oil production in West Lothian. The biodiversity developing on them is growing on, to quote Richardson again, "...cones of burnt and oxidised waste are the residual product of a mid-nineteenth-century mining process designed to extract and distil products from oil-bearing shale for use as paraffin fuel."⁴ Whilst this is not what you'd call ideal soil, the

3 Craig Richardson, 'Waste to Monument: John Latham's Niddrie Woman', Tate Papers No.17 (Spring 2012), www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/waste-monument-john-lathams-niddrie-woman accessed 8 September 2013. 'Bing' is the vernacular for a spoil heap in Scotland.

4 *ibid*

landscape benefits in the usual way from sun, wind and rain. It's not operating in isolation.

The author is clearly not wanting to extend the metaphor to suggest that healthcare buildings are like the bings, i.e. the result of industrial processes, nor probably that we should simply allow art to seed in them as biodiversity has seeded on the bings.

Rather the author is suggesting that a healthy ecosystem is thriving in what appear to be superficially challenging circumstances with everyday inputs of sun, wind and rain. In fact that ecosystem is constituted of grasses and rare plant species, I.e. things that can develop in the specific circumstances.

Increasingly art and therapeutic design strategies for healthcare in Scotland anyway are relying on underlying interpretations of theories of biophilia and what we are interested in imagining is how to extend this metaphor, or set of design principles. This is an exercise in wondering what a biomimicry approach to art and therapeutic design might look like if we took the ecosystems of the shale bings, and in particular their characteristic of being best served by 'no maintenance,' as the inspiration.

Before turning to the specific criteria in the brief, there is a wider context to thinking about art and maintenance. (Environmental management being about the wider issue of maintenance. The author is in this case conflating management and maintenance for provocative purposes.) The American artist Merle Laderman Ukeles (1939-) has since the late 1960s focused her practice on the issue of maintenance in the context of urban waste and the waste management industry, particularly in New York City, and also internationally. In 1969 Ukeles wrote her *Manifesto for Maintenance*

Art, 1969!.⁵ This was a response to having a child and the work of the housewife.

Ukeles proposed that the work of maintenance could be understood as art. Since that initial decision Ukeles has undertaken a number of performative and sculptural artworks including *Touch Sanitation* (1978-1984), a multi-year performance during which she shook hands with the 8,500 employees of the New York City Sanitation Department; and *The Social Mirror* (1983), a Department of Sanitation garbage truck covered in hand-tempered mirror, of which Ukeles said, “This project allowed citizens to see themselves linked with the handlers of their waste.”⁶ Ukeles' work springs from the feminism of the late 60s and she is only one example of an artist who has transformed everyday life into art, but she is one of very few who have brought the question of maintenance into the world of art.

If management and maintenance are significant issues in commissioning new art and design for healthcare settings, the provocation initiating the author's train of thought proposed 'the best management is no management'. The example of Ukeles' *Manifesto* and artworks demonstrates that maintenance can be art. In order to further provoke this issue the author proposes opening the challenge up to artists and designers through the use of a 'brief'. A brief is widely used in art and design as a means to engage the interest of art and design businesses and freelancers. Briefs are distinct from tenders and other forms of procurement because the formulation of the brief can act as a creative

5 Merle Laderman Ukeles' *Manifesto for Maintenance Art* is reproduced on the Arnolfini Gallery (Bristol, UK) blog <http://www.arnolfini.org.uk/blog/manifesto-for-maintenance-art-1969> accessed 27 December 2016

6 Quoted in 'Merle Laderman Ukeles and Maintenance Art at Freshkills Park', a blog posted on The Freshkills Park Alliance website 19 October 2012 <http://freshkillspark.org/blog/merle-laderman-ukeles-and-maintenance-art-at-freshkills-park> accessed 27 December 2016

stimulus.⁷ Briefs are used in open and closed competitions for live and speculative projects across art, design and architecture.

This Brief is entirely speculative and open to any artist, designer or architect, or other practice or discipline to propose works that address the brief. Responses to the Brief are welcome and the author may publish submissions – specific submission criteria are included in the Brief below.

(Title: The Zero Maintenance Brief: Art and Design for Healthcare Settings

1. Introduction:

We are seeking proposals for artworks that fulfil one of the conventional roles in a healthcare setting such as distraction, way-finding or patient dignity, but are made in such a way as to meet the zero maintenance requirement in an imaginative way.

2. Location:

The challenge we are posing is to develop proposals for artworks that can be created for healthcare settings, including acute hospitals, dementia units, renal dialysis units, children's wards, secure psychiatric wards, local health centres, waiting rooms, entrances, immediate landscapes, and so forth. Various these might be challenged by strict infection control, heavy usage, long waiting times, regular repeat visits, stress and anxiety. The proposals would need to recognise the different people in the environment, staff, patients, families and visitors; the different ages and the cultural mix. Differences in sensory ability should be taken into account. No healthcare setting

⁷ Briefs can be more or less effective in stimulating innovation depending on the way in which the challenge is framed.

has all these characteristics.

Proposals should self-define the specific set that provides the context for the work. Proposals might include plans and elevations of the context for the work.

3. Community Engagement:

The location selected will have a range of users including:

- Medical, Nursing, Administrative and Ancillary Staff
- Patients
- Relatives and Carers
- Community organisations and groups
- Arts networks, local contractors and craftspeople

Responses to the Brief should indicate the form(s) of Community Engagement that are relevant to the proposal.

4. Budget:

The budget for making the work is unlimited. Clearly a normal brief would have a required lifespan for the work, usually varying from 10 years for internal finishes to 50 years for structural elements. The proposal should indicate the lifespan or duration or process of the work which could extend to the full lifespan of a healthcare building (and some of the ones that we are still using are over 100 years old).

This is not primarily framed as a 'problem solving' brief, but rather one that focuses on 'sense-making.' In other words we are not looking for technical solutions to making the normal things in more robust ways, but rather proposals that creatively engage with the challenge to make sense of the best maintenance being no maintenance.

Proposals should include an indicative budget.

5. Timescale:

The author will accept submissions up until 31 December 2017.

6. Copyright and Moral Rights:

The copyright and all intellectual property rights in the works remain vested in the individual submitting the proposal. The submitter of the proposal grants the author of the Brief an irrevocable, exclusive royalty free licence to copy, use and to reproduce designs, models and supporting information for any purpose including publishing in any media or other form of distribution.

The author will at all times acknowledge and identify the person submitting the proposal including all occasions on which the work (including drawings and models) is exhibited in public.

The author undertakes not to intentionally alter, deface, modify or destroy the work (or knowingly consent to others doing so).

7. Submissions

Submission to be sent in electronic format (pdf no greater than 5mb) to the author at chris@fremantle.org as below by 5pm 31 December 2017. You will be notified of receipt of your proposal with 4 days of submission.

Submission should include:

1. Curriculum Vitae;
2. Your Proposal including:
 - Description and explanation including the imagined location of the work and how it meets the Zero Maintenance challenge (up to 2 sides of A4)
 - Visualisation of your proposal (up to 15 images)

- Statement describing your approach to community engagement
- Outline budget