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Art Schemes for a city



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“We want those who visit Cardiff to remember Cardiff. Public art represents a real statement about a shared history and a shared culture. Public art is in no way elitist- it is there for everyone - it can touch/ those who may not otherwise volunteer to troop around a gallery or a museum ” ‘ Glenys Kinnock MEP - February 1998

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation was established in 1987 with the aim of transforming 2,700 acres of declining residential, industrial and dock lands close to the heart of the city. In 1990, it commissioned a comprehensive public art strategy and a year later appointed Cardiff Bay Arts Trust to undertake its implementation. Thanks to the percent for art levied - relatively painlessly - on incoming developers, the Trust has realised some fifty works in its trust seven years and is currently engaged on a further twenty schemes.

Sometimes controversial, often loved, always photographed, these artworks frequently appear even before the buildings themselves and have performed a significant role as optimistic signposts to the Bay’s rapid regeneration - humanizing, providing texture, variety, interest and visual stimulus.

The Gateway pieces are good examples, marking points of arrival. Officially named **Landmark**, Pierre Vivant’s dramatic use of standard road signs to clad four geometric



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shapes, transforms a previously unremarkable site into a magic roundabout. Eilis O'Connell's twelve metre high bronze cones at the Bay's eastern entrance issue steam intermittently. These twin towers, together with crisp blue fibre optic light, evoke the spectacle of industry and the birth of new technologies.

Two other popular works prominently sited in the Inner Harbour are Harvey Hood's **Celtic Ring** and a newer arrival, Brian Fell's Merchant Seafarer's Memorial. The former is a giant bronze ring which marks the sea boundary of the Taff Trail cycleway and walkway. Reminiscent of a bronze-age torch, it carries rich surface details which refer to the topography, seafaring and industry of Cardiff Docks. Similarly the memorial to the many merchant seamen of Cardiff, Penarth and Barry ports who lost their lives in times of conflict movingly evokes and shares the histories of these communities. It has just won the Lord Mayor's Civic Award for 1997.



Artists themselves are the most cost-effective force for regeneration. In London, they realised the potential of St Katherine's Dock and Butler's Wharf long before the business world and Sir Terence Conran. Artists can transform even the most functional of utilities. Indeed one of the most visible of all the art structures in Cardiff Bay is John Gingell's **Power Box, Blue Flash and Mesh Chips** which strikingly tops an electricity sub-station with a giant blue lightning flash and an arc of bright yellow dart-shaped

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sparks across a smooth bright red box. Still to come is a third element, a millennium light tower, symbolizing energy and announcing the approach of each hour with intensifying light patterns.

Small scale works of the imagination also make a vital and distinctive contribution to the Bay's special character. The **Tidemark Seatwall** leading to the Norwegian Church, reflects the passage of time by creating fossil-like marks which could have been left by flora, fauna and debris washed up by the tide. Progressing from prehistoric imprints of creature through to the present day, and ending with a maritime verse written in the many languages of Cardiff's multicultural residents it appeals to a sense of discovery in adults and children alike.



Recognising the importance of engaging young people in its work, the Arts Trust has raised funds for a programme designed to improve school grounds in partnership with teachers, governors, the young students themselves and their families. Action plans are developed and incorporated into the school curriculum so that the children's involvement with the enhancement of their environment also supports many aspects of their learning - from mapping and evaluation through to art, design, history and geography.

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At Mountstuart Primary School children were encouraged by artist Jeremy Waygood of Partnership Art to explore their own diverse origins through discussions with parents, grandparents and other family members.

The children came up with a huge variety of suggestions and imagery, ranging from steam funnels for gate posts and the prominent waves of the fence itself, to symbolic lions and flying fish. Thanks to recent donations through the new Landfill Tax Credit Scheme, the Arts Trust has been able to greatly extend its school grounds programme. Other community projects like West Close Square have also successfully drawn on the neighbourhood's rich cultural identity and aspirations with the help of local artists - this time providing a unique meeting place for young and old on a previously derelict site.

'All new buildings cry out for works of art'

Cherie Blair, September 1997

One of the Arts Trust central aims is to support young artists and to encourage them to make Cardiff their home and thus to enhance the City's visual culture. For this reason the Arts Trust's new **Art Direct** scheme helps businesses to commission, buy or rent paintings and sculptures from local artists to enliven the workplace.

From its new opened gallery and education centre at 123 Bute Street, the Arts Trust can promote the role of art within



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urban regeneration and its catalytic effect on building local pride and confidence. Here it offers exhibitions and public workshops to enable everyone - of whatever age and background - to feel comfortable with its projects. To celebrate the Euro Summit for the Arts Trust has commissioned a series of Street Art events to enliven the City and the Bay with artist-designed banners, flags, hoardings, artworks on bus shelters, rooftops and silos - even unique chimneys.

Artists are equipped with a wealth of imaginative and practical skills. These complementary qualities bring specific benefits to the projects which the Arts Trust champions with its business partners - quite different from a fixed solution to a practical problem. Barcelona springs to mind as a City which has achieved a positive image and generated confidence through the substantial involvement of artists. The Arts Trust is determined to see Cardiff achieve the same international profile and recognition for the wealth of public art which the City can boast - from Alexander Kerrick's animals on the castle wall and the fine, highly embellished Civic Centre buildings (192030) to Mill Lane and Cardiff Bay on the eve of the millennium.

An exciting series of art works will shortly be commissioned for the new mile-long Bute Avenue, a vital and symbolic route uniting City Centre, Bay and the new National Assembly for Wales.



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Elsewhere a highly visible interactive electronic artwork will connect the new Celtic Gateway Technology Park with the rest of the world via the Information Super Highway.

All these initiatives are seen as preliminary stages in the establishment of a permanent centre for Art & Urban Regeneration which advocates the benefits of underpinning the rapid development of industrial South



Wales with the dynamic creativity resulting from closer collaborations between artists, architects, landscape designers and town planners.