



## **Our Town project: Reflections from the Artist**

‘Our Town’ was, is and will forever be a journey. Its passengers have different destinations but its direction is singular: to re-envisage Bognor for the future, not just a decade from now but several generations beyond. What type of place do Bognor’s future young people – the children of the young people today – want to live in.

Together, the groups of young people decided identity is a good place to begin. We asked ourselves, “Who are we? And how do we see the world we live in?” Asking broad, existential questions like these is never easy, often overwhelming, and doesn’t necessarily lead to an answer. We needed a different approach. We needed to find another way to ask this which was exploratory, open-ended and outside the square. How could we allow ourselves to dwell on and in our world, and our place in it from an altered perspective?

Naturally, we turned to photography. With basic camera handling skills, the Bognor young people visually dissected their environs. In great detail, they enquired at the spaces immediately in front of them. They began to realise that how they see their place, their hometown, and the atmospheres and ambiance that complete it, is completely unlike how anybody else sees exactly the same material world. Reflecting this realisation in the photographs, viewers may realise and learn how certain youth feel and what they think about their environment.

For Edward Bryant Primary and the juniors of The 39 Club, here would be their final stop – ‘Seaside’ ends their journey with an abstract representation of vibrant movement. For Felpham CC, the journey would become more intense, with professional camera handling and instruction which would see them having full manual control, and 3D model building training. ‘Cardopolis’ punctuated their destination. Enjoy!

## **Our Town Project (The Buildings)**

For the Our Town project, we were tasked with re-imagining Bognor for the future. Originally as this project was conceived we were going to assign part of the project to encompass sustainability and environmental impact and other areas that would be relevant in town planning, however as we had to move through identity

environment and photography from point and shoot to professional equipment we simply did not have the time to consider 'town planning factors' while we were designing the types of buildings that we wanted to see in the area. Instead of this however we were allowed to let our imaginations run totally free and make fantastical architectural designs where the sky was the limit while also encompassing elements of the town that really needed to be there i.e. Butlins etc. Here is some of the thinking behind the build which includes comments from the young people about the project, their involvement and its impact.

**Butlins:** Of course Butlin's is a big part of the community of Bognor Regis and therefore needed to be part of the build. The young people did not want to change the main structure too much however they did feel that "future Bognor" would benefit from the whole Butlin's complex being more open and integrated with the rest of the community.

**The Pier:** The pier is also an important part of Bognor however it is in need of regeneration. The young people wanted to focus on the old and not modernise the pier however take it back to its Victorian roots and make it a place where families can enjoy a walk with added new entertainment and dining facilities

**Alexandra Theatre:** This building however did receive a modern make over. The increased size of the stage is to incorporate big doors at the back which can be opened during certain productions utilizing the sea and beach as a backdrop.

**Art Gallery:** The community sharing and using art was an important factor to the young people, with one of the art gallery being a giant permanent art installation in itself with the art displayed around the open building with a massive mirrored column in the middle that will reflect the art, the people viewing and the surrounding area through the opening in the front.

**Shoe shop:** The remit here from the young people was 'Why does a building need to reflect what it is used for?' therefore this shoe shop was designed to look like a sculpture, a standalone work of art with a practical use, with incorporated a large children's crèche in the centre of the structure.

**The Giant camera:** In contrast this build is totally modelled on what it is to be used for with an interesting above ground entrance which takes shoppers through the lens.

**The Oil Can:** This was one of the first structure completed during the build and was to be a night spot with drinks and dancing. It gained its name because of the resemblance to an oil can which is a trend with architecture in any town or city. Lighting was also an important factor to the young people as they felt that Bognor at night could be more interesting if lit imaginatively.

A lot of the build was about putting more height and interesting structural form into the landscape of Bognor with the view that 'If the place looks more interesting then more people will take an interest in it.'

### **Our Town Edward Bryant and 39 Club**

As well as Felpham Community College, who worked on the buildings, Edward Bryant primary school and the 39 Club juniors were involved in the Our Town project. As the young people from these two facilities were younger than the pupils at Felpham (from around 7-11) there had to be a slightly different direction to their work. Firstly the photography section would concentrate entirely with the 'point and shoot' cameras as we just wanted them to be able to let their imaginations run free without the added pressure of learning various photographic techniques. I also wanted them to focus on just the positive aspects on how they see Bognor now and how they relate to the environment they are living in today.

When we had completed the image capturing we then started to make several 2D abstract representations of 'living by the sea' using the images that they had produced, with only the instructions that it did not need to look like the sea side just give a feeling as such and also to build and build on the images so that they would appear more 3 dimensional and solid. The images were printed out on ordinary paper therefore they would look slightly duller than they should which they were encouraged to cut and stick in any way they wished, they were also encouraged to go over the edges and not leave any straight lines. After they had built and built on these images we then stuck some 3D structures on such as boxes and also covered those in the photographs. We then had a number of shots printed on photographic paper which would go into the centre. As it is photographic paper then this would be much smoother and brighter than the rest of the imagery, and therefore we would place these in the centre to draw the eye of the viewer.

We had six of these depictions at the end of the project that we would join together to make two large pieces that were in the final exhibition.

Their commitment and work was outstanding!