

# Mintfest International Summer School for Street Arts (MISSSA)

## 2011 Evaluation Report

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# 1. Overview

**The Mintfest International Summer School for Street Arts (MISSSA) presents a unique opportunity for outdoor artists.**

It is a practical, performance-based course where participants work with a leading national or international artist on a piece of work that is showcased at the end of the course at Mintfest, one of the UK's leading street arts festivals (for further information please see Appendix 1).

A 10-day residential experience, the course is aimed at new and emerging<sup>1</sup>, aspiring<sup>2</sup>, or more established outdoor artists wishing to refresh themselves and their practice by trying something new.

## 2. Course Aims and Objectives

1. To bring national and international artists, at varying stages of their careers, together to collaborate, experiment and share knowledge and ideas.
2. To develop artists' personal practice working on a new, collaborative piece of work whilst receiving support and critical feedback from a highly experienced artist
3. To offer a performance opportunity at one of the UK's leading street arts festivals
4. To provide a fully immersive and intensive experience requiring commitment and discipline
5. To provide networking opportunities with visiting street arts professionals and artists performing at the festival
6. To contribute to artists' broader understanding of the street arts sector generally

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Report compiled and written by Jenny Graham, MISSSA Coordinator, Kendal Arts International

<sup>1</sup> By new and emerging we mean artists who are actively pursuing performance and training opportunities in this area

<sup>2</sup> By aspiring we mean, for example, students of drama or theatre or practitioners of other art forms who have little or no experience of working outdoors but are keen to gain experience in this area

# 3. Structure and Process

Building on feedback from 2010's course, MISSSA has been extended to 10-days to facilitate more time for the group selection process and accommodate more time for feedback and evaluation at the end of the course. In 2011, the course also incorporated an opportunity for each participant to run a short workshop for the whole group.

This year's course took place from August 27 – Sept 05 in Kendal, Cumbria. The course fees were £400 including all tuition, materials, food and accommodation.

## 4.1 Course Content

The artistic content of each tutor's course is not specified in advance of the course. The intention is to let it be determined and developed by the group, with their tutor, combining all their skills. Participants are thereby a part of the creation and development process, learning collaboration skills whilst receiving guidance, support and critical feedback from their course tutor.

The exception in 2011 was Jean-Luc Prevost's module, where the group worked on an existing concept, a scripted performance of The Yellow Hand (see below).

### 4.1.2 The Modules

Three highly experienced artists led the different modules:

**Lina Johansson, Joint Artistic Director of mimbre**

Using acrobalance and physical theatre techniques, Lina led a workshop in which participants explored non-verbal, physical expressions of emotional states.

**Brian Popay, Founder and Director of Fine Artistes**

Brian's group created, The Delegates, a bespoke piece of walkabout street theatre using Kendal and the local area as inspiration.

**Jean-Luc Prevost, Founder and Director of Les Goulus**

Building on The Krishnous module that Jean-Luc offered at MISSSA 2010, The Yellow Hand was a larger scale performance including both static and walkabout performances.

Jean Luc invited the three participants from his course in 2010 back to MISSSA to work on The Yellow Hand as paid artists alongside Les Goulus' professional artists.



## 5. Research and Evaluation

**Research and evaluation of the course was designed by The University of Manchester and undertaken by Kendal Arts International.**

Participants were asked to fill out evaluation questionnaires on arrival and on completion of the course (see Appendix 2); they were also asked to attend a group feedback session on the last day of the course. There is an ongoing post-course evaluation process through which questionnaires will be sent to participants 10 weeks after completing the course. The findings will be added to this report as an appendix.

## 6. Participation

**Participants are recruited onto the course by Email and Web-based publicity (see Appendix 3). Of the 19 students who took part, three were international artists travelling from Croatia, France and Greece, the rest were UK artists including one local, Cumbrian artist.**

Ranging in age from 23 to 58 years, participants' artistic interests and experience included physical theatre, clowning and mime, circus skills, storytelling, acrobatics, dance, stage combat, mask and puppet-making.

In terms of working experience, two were full time performers or artists with significant experience of working outdoors; fourteen were new and emerging outdoor artists and three were aspiring street artists.

Seven participants were subsidized on the course by the East Midlands Development Agency through Derby City Council. This was an initiative to support and cultivate new work from Derby based artists with the aspiration of incorporating their work in Derby Feste 2011.

In contrast with MISSSA 2010, there were significantly more new and emerging artists as opposed to aspiring artists on 2011's course.

## 6.1 Coming into the course: participants' objectives and aspirations

The questionnaire responses show that, as with those who attended MISSA in 2010, participants were drawn to working outdoors because of its unpredictability both in terms of physical environment and audience interaction.

The ability to engage with a broader than usual audience demographic was important to participants and many were inspired by the idea of transforming both people and places: they wanted to 'inject a familiar space with imagination' and 'bring it to life in a way that challenges the norm'; they wanted to make people see familiar places differently and for them to feel differently about them.

Inspiration, in many senses, was a key aspiration for participants coming into the course. They anticipated gaining inspiration from each other, from learning about each other's skills, from the course tutors, and from seeing professional work at the festival. In general they felt they wanted or needed to broaden their horizons and gain a new perspective from which to explore their personal practice and/ or develop their own work.

Most were seeking confidence and skills development. In more specific terms, this might mean learning more about group work, developing physical dexterity or learning about different modes of communication and new ways of expression i.e. non-verbal communication. Many were keen to work on and develop their audience awareness and interaction skills and for one international artist, an objective for the course was to develop English language skills by performing in a new language; this he felt would grant him more freedom in terms of where he could perform in the future.

The other key aspiration for participants coming into the course was to 'make connections'. Some sought networks and opportunities through which to showcase their own work, or to find work, or perhaps to find new collaborative partners. They were motivated by the prospect of being immersed in a street arts environment and experience, which would help them build stronger connections within the street arts sector.

'Danger, Democracy and direct contact with the audience!'

'Inspiring me, developing me, challenging me to leap forward with confidence'

'I'm hoping to develop a new network of artists and potential future collaborators'

# 7. Post-course reflections and feedback

The feedback indicates that participants experienced a consistently high level of satisfaction across the key dimensions of the course (Table 1).

COMPONENT	MEAN SCORE (out of 10)
Course structure	8
Course content	8.6
Teaching quality	8.9
Learning environment	8.6
Accommodation	9.4
General organisation, communication etc	8.8
Performing at Mintfest	8.9

It is clear that the opportunity to collaborate and experiment with a new and diverse group of artists was important and especially valuable to MISSSA participants.

**'The experience of meeting artists from a wide background and sharing in their specialisms as we built work and working relationships'**

**'To work, work, work, work and still have a great time with artists from all around!'**

They found the immersive nature of the environment, being surrounded by not only fellow MISSSA participants and tutors but also by professional artists arriving for the festival, energizing and invigorating; it fostered both inspiration and personal development.

In terms of learning, participants reported feeling challenged but supported and as a result many relished the opportunity to explore and experiment with their own personal and physical performance boundaries.

Whilst the intensive nature of the environment was inspiring and energizing, it also presented challenges in itself, asking a lot of the participants over 10-days. For example, in one group the content of the module required an extra commitment learning lines beyond the timetabled schedule, which left participants unable to take part in all timetabled activities and feeling under pressure. Almost all participants felt that they needed a little time off midweek to rest or reflect.

Nevertheless, a significant number of participants felt that they met and exceeded their personal objectives for the course. The most common key outcome was a considerable increase in confidence. For many, this meant feeling more confident to take risks with their own work in the future. The opportunity and freedom to perform on the streets and in many cases practice on the streets in the build up to the performance was a crucial factor in developing participants' confidence.

In terms of their performances, all participants reported both valuable and positive experiences.

As a group, their only frustration was that they didn't have time during the festival to see each of the other groups' work as their performance schedules often clashed.

**'An excellent experience, hard and intense but incredibly rewarding'**

**'I gained a lot from being allowed to be bold and risqué. I pushed myself hard and valued the chance to be slightly more extreme/present'**

**'It was brilliant, transforming and life-changing. I've developed an appetite for street theatre and will continue to develop new work.'**

**'...as a group it was fantastic - I felt we were quite distinct, creative with the street space and people enjoyed it'**

**'The response of the audience was incredible!'**

# 8. Conclusions and recommendations

**The feedback demonstrates that 2011's course was on the whole very successful, offering a professional development experience that was both highly regarded and valued by its participants.**

The course has benefitted from adjustments to its structure, developing a successful framework for delivery. Nevertheless there are some suggestions and recommendations to be made in this area which may further increase participants' satisfaction :-

- The workload for each module should be feasibly achievable within the structured time available. The activities that are programmed for the whole group provide an important opportunity for all the participants to mix and work with each other outside of their module group. This should not be compromised.
- An afternoon off could be programmed in to the timetable to allow some 'down-time' for participants. This could be an optional recreational activity or trip to allow participants time to reflect and relax during an intense period of activity and learning.
- If possible, participants would appreciate the opportunity to see each other's performances either during the festival, or perhaps just prior to the festival. However, we recognize that this cannot be guaranteed, as it depends upon the structure of the Mintfest programme together with the individual requirements of each MISSSA performance and the time available for rehearsals etc.
- Still more time for evaluation could be added to the end of the course to facilitate more depth in the process.

The post-course evaluation will tell us more about the longer-term impact of MISSSA as a professional development opportunity. However, early developments beyond the course are an encouraging sign. One new group, The Delegates, has been formed directly as a result of MISSSA (see case study, Appendix 4) and several participants on both 2010 and 2011's course have received paid opportunities with Les Goulus directly as a result of MISSSA.

## 9. Looking ahead: MISSSA 2012 and beyond

**It is the intention that MISSSA will continue to grow and develop both in terms of ambition and provision.**

In future years we hope to add shorter, specialized modules to the course for example, modules in street puppetry and open air or site-related contemporary dance. The course will include a series of one or two day master-classes, in various art-forms, led by internationally renowned artists and aimed at more experienced artists. We also hope to add a module in which participants develop a midscale spectacle over a considerably longer time period.

A priority will be the development of MISSTA; an International Summer School for Teen-Artists. We aim to be able to provide learning and development opportunities for local teens who are interested and inspired by street arts and / or by what they have seen at Mintfest and the Lakes Alive events. In 2011, a new performance by local 'teen-artists' was presented at the Garden of Delights at Mintfest. The show was written and created by the young performers who approached us independently to perform at the festival. They also designed and constructed their own set. We are keen to support and encourage this talent and enthusiasm and provide opportunities for other potential young performers who are inspired by what the festival and the Lakes Alive programme bring to Cumbria.

# Appendix 1: MISSSA Rationale and Context

**Within five years, Mintfest has become one of the UK's leading street arts festivals, attracting audiences of up to 25,000.**

In partnership with Xtrax, it acts as an international showcase festival with up to 100 visiting street arts professionals attending to network and see the work of approximately 60 - 70 street arts companies and performers each year.

Mintfest is also the flagship festival of Lakes Alive<sup>3</sup>, a four-year programme of outdoor arts events and festivals taking place throughout Cumbria in the build up to the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.<sup>4</sup>

Lakes Alive aims to establish Cumbria as a national centre of excellence for outdoor arts. As a member of Without Walls, it works with a consortium of eight of the UK's most strategically significant outdoor arts festivals to create and develop new outdoor work in the UK. Through 'Made in the Lakes', a commissioning strand of the Lakes Alive programme, Lakes Alive also commissions new work independently of Without Walls.

MISSSA, piloted in 2010, is a significant development in the aspect of the Lakes Alive programme which supports artists' professional development. It is envisaged that the course will be delivered annually providing a lasting legacy from the Lakes Alive Cultural Olympiad programme and thereby contributing to the growth of the outdoor arts sector both in terms of capacity and artistic practice.

In this broader sector context, professional development and training opportunities for new and emerging artists have been identified as in short supply and amongst the core and essential requirements for artists entering or considering entering this sector.<sup>5</sup> MISSSA therefore offers artists a unique and important opportunity to collaborate, create and develop a new piece of work whilst benefitting from the guidance and experience of a leading national / international artist.

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<sup>3</sup> Lakes Alive is created and produced by Kendal Arts International in partnership with Manchester International Arts

<sup>4</sup> Commissioned as part of 'We Play', the Northwest's cultural legacy programme for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Lakes Alive is a key component of the Cultural Olympiad and is the county's unique contribution to the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games.

<sup>5</sup> Arts Council England, 2008, New Landscapes: outdoor arts development plan, 2008 - 2011; ISAN, 2010, Mapping Outdoor Arts Training and Professional Development

# Appendix 2:

## MISSSA Evaluation: Arrival Questionnaire

Please note that your responses will be accessible only to Jenny Graham from Kendal Arts International and to members of the University of Manchester research team that carries out the Lakes Alive evaluation programme. Any data that is subsequently used or quoted in reports and publications will be anonymised.

1. Please indicate whether or not you already have some experience as a Street and Outdoor Arts performer

Yes  No

2. How did find you out about the Summer School?

3. What area(s) of Street and Outdoor Arts do you specialise in/are you interested in?

4. How long have you been working / interested in the field of Street and Outdoor Arts and how did you first become involved with/interested in it

5. As an artist, why have you chosen to focus on/explore Street and Outdoor Arts?

6. Which festivals or venues have you previously performed at or attended?

7. What in particular are you hoping to learn from or take away from the Summer School?

8. What are you hoping to get out of the wider experience of attending the Summer School?

9. In terms of career development, where do you want to be in 12 months' time and how do you envisage your experience of the Summer School helping you to achieve that?

10. Please state your:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex: Female  Male

Ethnicity: White  Mixed  Asian/Asian British  Black/Black British  Chinese

other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for completing this questionnaire!

# MISSSA Evaluation: Closing Questionnaire

Please note that your responses will be accessible only to Jenny Graham from Kendal Arts International and to members of the University of Manchester research team that carries out the Lakes Alive evaluation programme. Any data that is subsequently used or quoted in reports and publications will be anonymised.

1. Overall did MISSSA meet your expectations?      Yes       No       Partially

2. What did you enjoy most about the experience of attending the Summer School?

3. What did you enjoy least about the experience of attending the Summer School?

4. What is the most important or useful thing you have learned from attending the Summer School?

5. How do you feel your performance at Mintfest went and in what ways, if at all, was this a valuable experience for you?

6. How could MISSSA be improved?

7. On a scale of 0-10, how would you rate your experience of the MISSSA in the following terms:

Course structure 

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Course content 

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Teaching quality 

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Learning environment 

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Accommodation 

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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General organisation, communication etc 

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Performing at Mintfest 

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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8. Would you recommend MISSSA to other artists? Yes  No

9. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

10. Would you be prepared to take part in a follow-up survey about  
MISSSA and your future work in Street and Outdoor Arts?

Yes

No

11. Please provide your:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for completing this questionnaire!

# Appendix 3

Participants are recruited on to the course electronically, with information being forwarded to:-

- Arts organisations – both local and national
- Local Arts Development officers
- Arts Council England officers to distribute via their networks regionally and nationally
- Industry networks for artist training and development
- Via ISAN, XTRAX, Without Walls and NASA networks
- To all UK university and college performing arts, theatre and drama departments
- Via Lakes Alive social media networks and website and
- European Street Arts networks e.g. Circostrada

For a copy of the 2011 pre-course information pack please visit:

<http://www.lakesalive.org/mintfest-summer-school/>

where the information is available to download.

# Appendix 4: Post course developments

## Case Study: The Delegates

Following MISSSA 2011, The Delegates was commissioned by Derby Feste to be further developed as a piece of work; it was subsequently booked to be performed at Derby Feste in September 2011.

The group comprised both new and emerging and aspiring artists and included some artists who had been subsidized on the course by Derby City Council together with some who hadn't.

The case study below was written by Sarah McCluskey of The Delegates.

### The Delegates

The Delegates consists of five performers who attended MISSSA in Aug 2011 and who co-devised the piece under the direction of Brian Popay of Fine Artistes. We are:

**Ben Adams, Actor**  
**Antoinette Burchill, Visual Artist**  
**Stephen Jon Cooper, Mask-Maker**  
**William Trevelyn, Festival Producer**  
**Sarah McCluskey, Burlesque Compere.**

### About the performance

The Delegates is a five act narrative performance, 2 of the acts involve audience engagement and 3 of the acts are non verbal. Each act lasts 20 minutes, leaving from and returning to one location. The five delegates are from the International Institute of Insectology and have to raise awareness of a dangerous insect mutation without causing any public alarm. They may at first glance look like imposing officials but each has a particular quirk, which soon becomes evident to all who meet them. The acts include official openings of random street furniture, insect mutation awareness raising, use of props, and a truly terrifying climax, all accompanied by insect buzzing.

Our different sexes, ages and body types are factors used to great effect. We walk in a particular formation, at a particular speed and have fixed standing positions when engaging with the audience. This gives a feeling of order and sense, totally let down when we begin to explain the gravity of the insect mutations heading the way of the unsuspecting townsfolk. Two of the five acts involve direct engagement; encouraging the all-important suspension of belief as the audience listens to the ludicrous information the insect experts are giving them. Visually we dress in a palette of grey tones, and look like very plausible professionals. Knowledge of the local area is very important to the piece.

I felt the piece we developed was very strong and had a good narrative. I felt very confident in performing it and the group dynamic was incredibly positive and supportive. We learnt a tremendous amount from Brian in a short space of time and have found working together an extremely positive experience.

As a group, we are applying for Arts Council England funding to further develop and strengthen the piece. It works very well in an urban location but we would like to look at taking The Delegates to outdoor festivals too. We feel that The Delegates could also be experts in a number of different fields – e.g. art experts, festival health inspectors, or even an Olympic Delegation!

We have been booked to return to Mintfest 2012 and have also been provisionally booked for the Lakes Alive banquet tour in 2012.

Further information and documentation about the development of The Delegates can be found at:

<http://pitchblackarts.tumblr.com/TheDelegates>

<http://storify.com/misachievement/the-delegates>

<http://vimeo.com/album/1690385>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/misachievement/sets/72157627519960023/>