

Richard Franks

WE CAN CREATE

artist documentation 2023



Artist and Creative Producer, Richard Franks from We Can Create was invited to assist organise an exhibition of photographs from the Jubilee Arts Archive 1974-94 at Haden Hill House in 2023, one of the historic buildings that Sandwell Museums manage.

A special part of the exhibition focused on 'the art of protest', with a contemporary investigation of the subject. Richard explains: "A lot of the projects that Jubilee Arts did were with marginalised groups, and I wanted to focus on this element of their work. I worked with a group of young carers, their families and staff at Sandwell Advocacy, as well as with Year 8 Pupils from St Michael's Church of England High School and adult service users (SEND community) from Creative Arts Project. A starting point was this quote from Ai Weiwei: 'If anything, art is... about morals, about our belief in humanity. Without that, there simply is no art.' We explored the idea of protest art based on something they cared passionately about, creating banners, signs, slogans, paintings, and illustrations on pieces of roughly cut-out cheap cardboard, stuck to a plank of 2 x 1-inch wood, along with making ceramic brick as place-holder. Protest art crosses the boundaries of visual art, media, ephemera and copywriting. This was something the participants enthusiastically embraced and the opportunity to show this back to a wider public was much appreciated."

THE ART OF PROTEST



These were some of the images from the archive that the group used as a starting point for their discussions. The photograph above is from a protest by school dinner ladies outside Cradley Council House in 1983, campaigning against cuts in wages and increased hours. This building was adjacent to Haden Hill House. This council house was demolished and is today the site of a Firestation and a leisure centre.

The artist asked the group these questions:

What do you want to change? What are you passionate about? What are you angry about?

What would you like to protest about? Design yourself a banner, a poster or a placard - how can you make your voice heard?



Creating large statement posters at youth workshops, 1983.



Tenants march in West Bromwich in 1981, protesting against large rises in rents and the poor condition of social housing.



'Fight the Cuts' posters, Whiteheath, 1980.



This photograph is from Smethwick in December, 1982. It shows a group of women workers who were on strike outside of Supreme Quiltings and Raindi Textiles. It was mainly Sikh women organising the strike over low pay and for union recognition.



Workshops included a day visit to Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery to look at different types of exhibitions. This was to start them thinking of how art can be used to send a powerful message without using many words.



Participatory workshops were undertaken with Sandwell Advocacy and with St. Michaels, to create a series of placards and ceramic bricks as placeholders.







Protest banners made with Richard Franks and the young carers group, showing work in progress and installation at Haden Hill House Museum.



Sandwell Museums & Arts Service
29 June at 13:23 · 🌐

There's lots to see and do at Haden Hill House Museum today.

You can view the [Jubilee Arts Archive](#) exhibition and the Art of Protest exhibition 10am - 5pm (last entry 4.30pm). Under 5's can get stuck in to Tots At Museums drop in messy play and mark making 11am-3pm and the Old Hall is open for a Warm Welcome 11am-1pm. Free entry to all activities.





The exhibition at Haden Hill House included 35 photographic prints from the Jubilee Arts Archive placed on easels around the Victorian property, with 9 large format prints along with pop up banners, and a bespoke self-portrait book.

The exhibition ran from June through to September. Haden Hill House can be found in Cradley Heath, a Victorian house surrounded by 55 acres of parkland.

Three large vinyl banners were placed on railings outside the property, along with two at Oak House Museum and one at Smethwick Library (where Sandwell Archives are based) to promote the website.



Richard Franks also ran a series of badge making workshops at Haden Hill House Museum.

“I wanted to create lo-fi, era-specific badges with families and others that would be inspired specifically by the Jubilee Archive (mural artwork) and the wider aesthetics of popular culture in the 70s, 80s and 90s. I chose badge making because again it was evocative of the time, of Jubilee’s work and it is a simple and engaging process for people to enjoy.”



Some feedback

The workshop sessions were very thought-provoking. It enabled young carers to air their thoughts and feelings using art. The thought-provoking process led our young carers to discuss other issues that they may not have had the opportunity to explore before. Using creative activities allowed freedom of expression, challenged stereotypical views and empowered young carers to become more self-aware.

As for the visit to the final exhibition at Haden Hill House, here are some comments:

Parent; "I didn't know that Haden House existed until now - a nice way to engage young people in art and history."

Young person: "We exist and have a voice."

Young person: "I'm going to show that girls can be super heroes too"

Comment made by a parent after visit to Haden House referring to the SYIPHLIKE poster:
"Who did this placard? – the person is very talented and it is poignant piece of art."

Young Person: "Good to be able to stop and think about what makes us angry and what we feel passionate about."

Parent: "What an opportunity to give to young people. This work is fantastic. So glad to have been a part of it."

Sharon Wilson and Helen Charles – Advocacy Matters

We identified twelve Year 8 students to participate in the protest art workshop. The students selected had expressed an interest in our Arts Award programme and this project would enable them to engage in something outside of their standard curriculum.

The workshop allowed the artists to not only gain a greater understanding of the history of Jubilee Arts, but also provided a platform to share their passions and views in a creative manner. The opportunity for students to explore themes they felt passionate about, linked directly with our whole school approach to student voice. The group covered a range of national and global issues from the cost of living crisis to the environment. Despite the limited time, the workshop enabled students with varying artistic ability to engage fully and produce quality pieces for the final exhibition. There is no doubt that the workshop helped to develop skills and knowledge, whilst raising aspirations.

We are very grateful for opportunities such as these and would like to thank Richard Franks for excellent facilitation and communication throughout the whole process. The students thoroughly enjoyed the experience and felt a sense of pride that their work was displayed in a professional exhibition.

Kerry Whitehouse, School Engagement Development Manager, St. Michaels.



Laundry



Sandwell Museums and Arts Service



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