

The Recipe Exchange and the Farringdon Society of Arts

A review by Charlie Lister

William James said “The community stagnates without the impulse of the individual. The impulse dies away without the sympathy of the community.”

Artist Helen Pritchard explored this symbiotic relationship between the individual and the community with her outreach project, The Recipe Exchange, commissioned by Exeter’s Spacex gallery in partnership with Villages in Action.

Pritchard, a PhD research student at Lancaster University, chose Farringdon as her subject and worked in collaboration with the Farringdon Society of Arts (FSA) to encourage individuals to share an impulse with their, hopefully, sympathetic community.



Taking the traditional communal practice of sharing recipes as her starting point, Pritchard asked residents of Farringdon to write a ‘recipe’ of their know-how to share with the village. Pritchard’s idea was to encourage the exchange of local experience and skills and cultivate the relationships and interactions which form during a first-hand exchange of ideas.

In doing so, the project posed questions about whether the fundamental relationship between the impulse of the individual and the sympathy of the community has been undermined as the channels of communication through which these exchanges are made have become increasingly technological, and decreasingly personal.

Indeed, the project has layers of meaning. As Dr Stephen Riley pointed out in his review of The Recipe Exchange, the project is “concerned with a profoundly serious issue: how to resist the effects of globalisation and corporate domination... We now face questions of how individual and community identities can survive in the face of infinitely-resourced, homogenising forces, expertly designed for maximum seductive effect and motivated solely by profit.”

The exhibition at the Spacex gallery was a multi-media display of Farringdon’s response to these forces; a visual representation of the village’s community identity.

A large collage showed pictures and recipes for a range of skills including ‘how to make Spanish omelette’, ‘how to draw perspective’ and even ‘how to skip’. Next there were three video presentations which talked the viewer through how to spin wool, dividing and re-potting plants, and rambling on a new country path. In a third room, two Apple iMac computers displayed The Recipe Exchange Website, anyone can share a recipe online and the website now has more than sixty contributions.

Pritchard's choice of computer here is interesting. Perhaps her use of an instantly recognizable symbol of corporate seduction in a project concerned with community identity was a stark reminder of the omnipresence of the multinational corporation; Dr Riley's "infinitely-resourced, homogenising forces."

Regardless, the diverse range of responses Pritchard received made for a vibrant and stimulating exhibition, and is testament to her participants' willingness to revive a first-hand dialogue between the individual and the community. In other words, to maintain this increasingly fragile relationship in the face of globalised, corporate mass media.

However, Farringdon's isolation and somewhat dislocated geography belie the fact that there are already strong community bonds very much in place. The village has a long shared history of creativity and community expression. Farringdon residents have given talks, held workshops and formed clubs for everything from singing to bridge. The FSA has held six years' worth of events and exhibitions, put on a two-day festival, and collaborated with an exhaustive range of local and national art and literary groups, schools and colleges, charities, trusts and societies.

Kate Green, from Villages in Action, pointed out that it takes time for a village to develop a collective identity. "Farringdon is unique; the village's community spirit is consolidated by recent memories of people in the community doing things together."

So, The Recipe Exchange, through Farringdon, presents a vibrant and exciting demonstration of one community's resolve to resist global mass-media and communicate on a more personal plane than YouTube. However, perhaps Farringdon's uniqueness as a creative hub made the project something of an unfair test. If Pritchard was to continue The Recipe Exchange elsewhere, we could only hope the impulse of the individual would be as sympathetically received.

To find out more about The Recipe Exchange or other projects, visit <http://www.spacex.co.uk/>

To read Dr Stephen Riley's review of The Recipe Exchange, visit <http://www.a-n.co.uk/interface/reviews/single/1327279>