

Droppers (i)



Shown at the Old School Room Project Space, Somerset, UK, as recipient of the OSR Projects Lobster Trap Commission 2016.

In 1965, Gene Bernofsky, Jo Ann Bernofsky and Clark Richet, graduates of the University of Kansas, desired to live and work together free from the hierarchies and restrictions of mainstream life so moved to a plot of land near Trinidad, Colorado and built an experimental settlement they later named 'Drop City.' Their aim was for the site to be an environmental research centre, a collaborative, communal space for artists, inventors, free-thinkers, and collectives who wished to celebrate creative experimentation; for people they described as 'Droppers'. Bernofsky commented that 'in the old days it was the Gold Rush that had brought people together, but now people come together looking for the true life.' For the Droppers establishing a non-hierarchical commons, a space for openly sharing ideas, collective living was seen as the embodiment of this idea of the 'true life.'

50 years on, do the Droppers thoughts and ideals still have relevance? What might the idea of the 'true life' mean today? What potential might this have in inspiring and imagining a common space for new modes of thinking and acting today? Collaborative artist's Andy Webster and Darren Ray used these questions as the starting point the project 'Droppers.'

The 'Droppers' foremost creative output was in the form of constructing buildings partly inspired by the geodesic designs of Buckminster Fuller. The structures were not built systematically to any blueprint but provisionally as a kind of DIY, ad-hoc version of Fuller's precise architectural method. Using salvaged materials including car parts, waste ply and timber, the fabrication of the domes were makeshift, improvised, often rough and lashed together, acting a kind of free-form mutation of Fuller.

Using photographic archives Ray & Webster replicated the building of a dome following the Dropper's approach – salvaging materials, improvising the design and working collectively to fabricate and furnish the dome. A key aim was to explore how collective building processes can act as a speculative prompt to critically reconsider the Dropper's ideas, to specifically to reflect upon what possibilities the idea of a 'true life' might have today and in reimagining the near future. They were particularly interested in exploring how such improvised architectural interventions could become settings which produce the conditions for creating a common space.

Droppers was commissioned to be built inside of the OSR Project Space, an old school room in the village of West Coker, Somerset, UK.

The context of building a strange folly-like dome structure within a former school building was an important aspect of the project. The artists were interested in the architectural intervention and how this could be a playful, eccentric, slightly absurd context and platform for discussions, events and workshops in the space. Ray & Webster were also interested in exploring the significance of re-fabrication, of replicating historical events / structures. The dome became a social environment for a series of 'drop in' events, consisting of performances, readings, music and cooking which practically explored ideas about collaboration, collectivity and counter-culture.

There were contributions from artists, writers, poets, musicians including: Counter-culture Disco with Tom Buchanan, Anna Best (reading / action), Neil Chapman (Reading / action), Paul Farmer (talk/performance on Counter Culture), Gillian Wylde (Reading / action), Tom Stockley (Performance / Song), Juliet Walshe (Music), Nicole White (Reading /action / Song), Stuart Blackmore (Action / making / song), Simon Lee Dicker (Talk, Soup), Sara Bowler (Talk), Andy Webster (Reading), Maddie Broad (Action /

Performance / Song), Darren Ray & Martin Dodridge (Dome building), Clare Thornton (Performance), and Keiken Collective (Readings, Performance, Inside Out Clothing).

Droppers (ii)

Ray & Webster installed the geodesic structure as part of the Weather Station (Part II), B-Side Festival, Portland, UK in 2016.

A giant inflatable ball becomes the Weather Station, a mobile pavilion for the collection of images, objects and ideas. An artist-led response to the changing relationship we have with landscape and the paradox of being both in and of the natural world. Cumulative rather than collaborative, the structure passes from one artist to the next, gathering traces of its journey through the beautiful and broken landscapes of South West England, before returning to its plinth for exhibition. Weather Station (Part II) exhibition will bring together work by artists Laurie Lax, Laura Hopes, Elaine Fisher, James Hankey, Nicola Kerslake, Phil Smith, Stair/Slide/Space, Jethro Brice, Simon Lee Dicker and Alexander Stevenson, and special guests Andy Webster & Darren Ray. Project partners included b-side (Dorset), Backlane West (Cornwall), Exeter Phoenix (Devon), Hand in Glove (Bristol), Plymouth Art Centre (Devon), and Hestercombe Gallery (Somerset).

The re-siting of the geodome was adjacent to projects curated by Simon Lee Dicker including works by Laurie Lax, Laura Hopes, Elaine Fisher, James Hankey, Nicola Kerslake, Phil Smith, Stair/Slide/Space, Jethro Brice, and Alexander Stevenson. The dome structure was used a setting and space for discussion, interventions and performances programmed by Simon Lee Dicker as part of Weather Station & B-Side, which included artwork by Phil Smith and hosting *The Crucible*, a forum which brought together creative practitioners for a day of art, food and conversation.

Droppers (iii)

As part of Camberwell Arts Festival 2019

We have been commissioned to build a dome structure on Camberwell Green, London, UK by the Camberwell Arts Festival for their project "The Art of the Party" 2019.

For this project the dome structure will be extended to 6 by 4 metres using salvaged materials, including palettes and window frames. The intension of the re-build is to reimagine and reconfigure the construction of geodesic domes using found / upcycled materials – allowing the structures to take shape and be configured by the materials at hand – becoming mutants of earlier ideals because of this process. The earlier domes at Drop City did this and remain interesting because they didn't have a definite blueprint, they really did make them with what was at hand, and with basic skills!

As part of the festival, and to take place within or adjacent to the dome structure we have proposed hosting Re-cycling, Up-cycling, and Resilience workshops. The project is inspired by imagining a time in the not too far future where oil has run out, mass production has stopped, resources have run out and upcycling isn't a hobby rather the only option – resilience workshops inhabit a similar space / time where we may well need to know how to build a fire, purify water etc. The aim is to run some workshops as part of the project – water capture & purification, fire building, foraging in Camberwell, how to build a toilet, how to build solar furnaces, wind turbines, making medicine, how to survive, how to die workshops. We would also like the dome structure to host 'staying alive disco', 'post apocalyptic pop party', 'art of the party radio broadcasts', d.i.y instrument making and scratch scrap orchestra workshops as part of the programme.

As part of the festival a series of talks will be hosted in the dome including:

Introduction to The Remakery (40 mins; presentation) – a history of The Remakery, including examples of projects accomplished in the past with community and environmental benefit (Dylan Lowe & Mark Ovenden).

Building a geodesic dome (40 mins; presentation) – presentation by the makers of the dome, its concepts, symbolisms, and relevances to climate resilience (Darren Ray & Andy Webster).

Actionable changes for making your lifestyle more sustainable (50 mins; panel discussion) – touching on the lesser-debated consumer choices in fashion, travel, technology and home, what are the environmental impacts and how everyday decisions can be taken as climate actions. Panelists: Vicky Smith, [Earth Changers](#); Georgina Wilson-Powell, [Pebble Magazine](#)

Diversity in Remaking (50 mins; panel discussion) – celebrating the multiplicity in ethnicity, gender, culture of remaking in Camberwell, South London and beyond; the challenges and opportunities of being a "different" remaker or remaking entrepreneur; audience open mic elevator pitch followed by feedback from panelists

Stand-Up for climate – open mic possibly evening, featuring musicians, comedians, poets, spoken-word artists, with performances all themed around climate change and resilience; Joe Duggan host