

FlockOmania: Event and Exhibition Catalogue

**Zoe Robertson, Dr Natalie Garrett Brown, Amy Voris and
introduction by Professor Judith Mottram**

Published PDF deposited in [Curve](#) March 2016

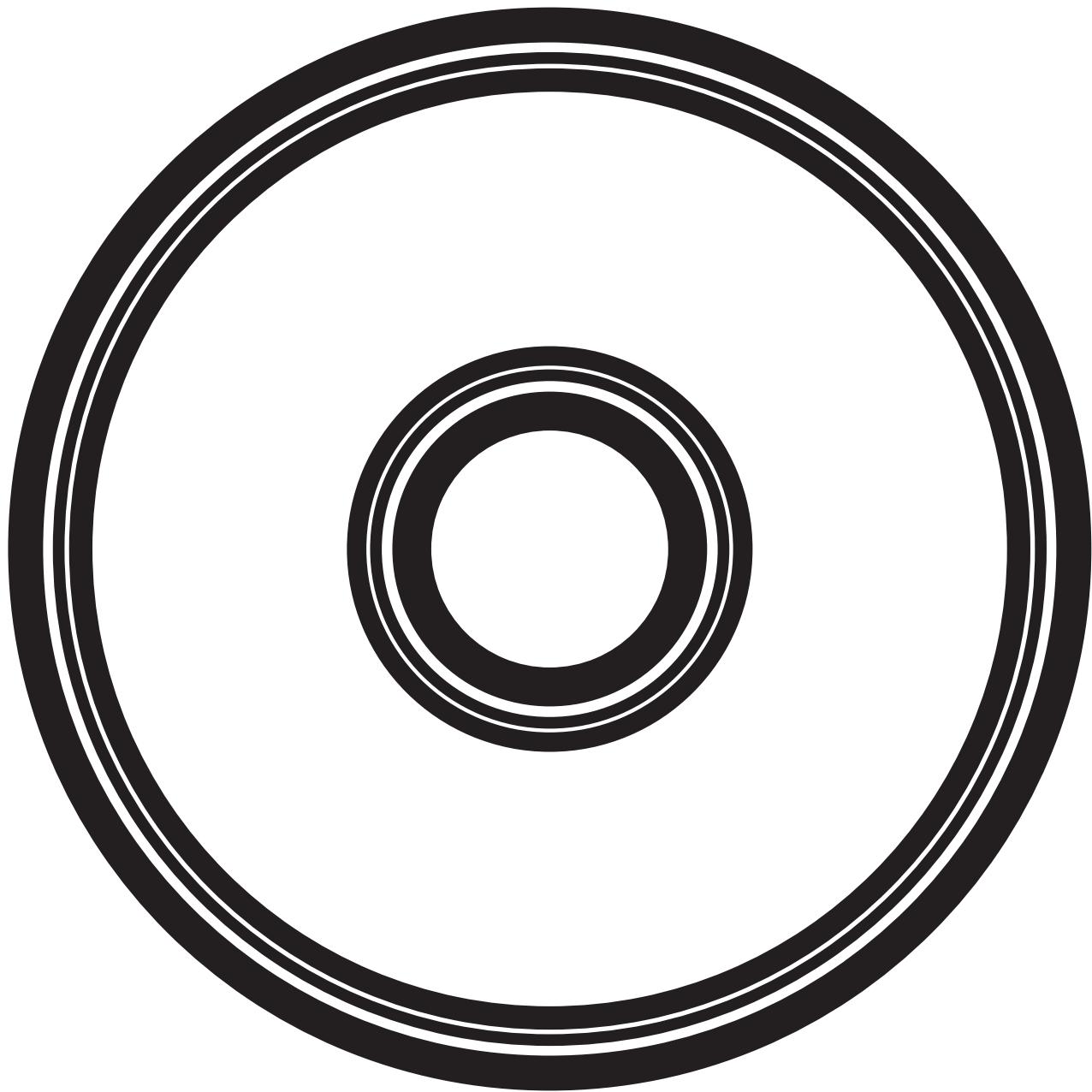
Original citation:

Robertson, Z; Garrett Brown, N; Voris, A. and Mottram, J. (2015) FlockOmania. Birmingham City University

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Credits:

ISBN: 978-1-904839-78-1

Published in 2015 by Birmingham City University

Catalogue designed by Coventry University

Printed by Emmerson Press Limited

Authors: Zoe Robertson, Dr Natalie Garrett Brown, Amy Voris and introduction by Professor Judith Mottram
Photography by Christian Kipp, Zoe Robertson and Stephen Snell.

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Lanchester Gallery
Exhibition: 19 January - 19 February 2015
Finale Event: 19 February 2015



Introduction by Professor Judith Mottram

The shaping of an exhibition programme for a gallery in a university can take on some quite different and interesting perspectives from those that might drive the selection of shows in other sorts of venues. The opportunity we identified in our first discussions about Zoe Robertson using the Lanchester Gallery space was to use the exhibition both as a lever, or fulcrum, around which to explore the 'objectness' of her works, and as an event in which performativity could be manifest. The exposure of working method which can be seen on Robertson's twitter feed of the making process was one of these important manifestations, showing some of the stages of making and reflecting her thinking as the works took shape. Her own records of the development of the works are even richer, providing an important archive resource for future study of the making process. Performativity and objectness is also explored through the collaborative aspect of the work. We set up the condition of collaboration at the inception of the project as part of the objective to move beyond the static display of objects of veneration normally associated with jewellery display. We did not know what would happen and the record of the final event in the gallery will be the measure of what was achieved. The extent to which audiences engage with the works was the third aspect of performativity we wanted to enable. Again, the experience of visitors, the gallery staff and the record of interaction will witness the outcome of this experiment.

For the Lanchester Gallery, this freedom to see what more can be done with the exhibition form, and the artist's willingness to engage openly in this journey, are important aspects to its work. FlockOmania will be an arresting visual experience, but it will also leave a record of its making, of the collaborative process, of audience interaction reflection on these, and a set of new objectives for future work.

Professor Judith Mottram, 3rd January 2015





The opportunity to host a solo exhibition has been a wondrous adventure from concept to realisation, the voyage has been joyous if not a little daunting at times. For me this inaugural solo exhibition has been a long time coming, with past possibilities not coming to fruition. At times I wondered if I would ever make it to this career accolade! Responding to the beauty found within the architectural landscape of the Lanchester Gallery has been challenging. Not a typical jewellery gallery, this barren industrial space has no pre-existing furniture other than four walls (two of which glass) a concrete floor, five pillars creating a natural division and a ceiling comprising of various frameworks all set within a cool grey colour palette with red detailing.

This unrestricted environment has offered limitless possibilities; which on one hand has enabled my imagination to run riot. However the scale of this venture in the relatively short period has been at times unnerving. This freedom has led to constant questioning and continued evaluation to inform decisions. Such as how will the dancers navigate the space? How will the work be displayed to enable interaction? How do I illustrate the working process?

Prior to this I had the opportunity to work with dance artists Dr Natalie Garrett Brown and Amy Voris in the Lanchester Gallery as part of a project called L219. I was surprised at how liberating I found the experience, especially the unexpected nature of their durational performance in which I was captivated by the level of movement in the space from calm to chaos to calm. The addition of light, sound and film created a dynamic atmosphere and the jewellery I created for them was moved from their original positions around the space, from inside, to outside, and back again.

In response to this uplifting experience I craved the opportunity to develop this relationship, to explore a new direction and to enhance my knowledge. I was therefore excited when the opportunity to collaborate arose and the notion of creating a series of wearable objects that explore the body, object and space commenced. The rationale, thinking and design decisions have been led in particular by my observations and a sustained dialogue with the dance artists has been the catalyst for my invention.

Interestingly their contemporary dance practice has led me to become much more aware of my intuitive working process and my embodied experience. I was particularly struck during a researching session in the dance studio where curtains covering walls of mirrors remained drawn. This triggered my understanding of how important the kinaesthetic sensation to Garrett Brown's practice was and not purely the visual aesthetic.

Prior to this my visual sense has been most dominate in resolving design decisions for previous collections. Visual language combined with a cognitive thought process has served me well to realise design ideas from two to three-dimensions. My methodology has centred around a hands on approach, to design via making, resolving three dimensional as and when they arise.

Curiously I began to pay much closer attention to the physicality of making. I started to feel my way around an object, rather than purely looking at. With my eyes closed I sensed through touch the undulations of the three dimensional form through my fingertips extending out to my muscles. I became aware of my body moments and how the scale of these objects were physically demanding, labour intensive and how they enticed an energetic athleticism to achieve the desired result. Subsequent awareness of the continual repeating motions of various manufacturing processes (both hand and machine) became apparent as did the activate trance like state of doing.

I noticed a distinct change in the direction of the objects whereby the tactility, sensuality, sensory and physicality of the objects became of primary importance and the underlining vocabulary for my decisions. Thereby the subsequent work focuses much more closely on kinaesthetic sensations and the relationship between objects and the body. This manifests itself along the lines of several key themes which relate to the body including scale, extensions, space, movement, balance, weight, and dual wearability.

I have been further intrigued by how the change in workshop environment has influenced the scale of this collection. Previously my work was created on a traditional jewellery bench in my studio. The main jewellery working area is a semi-circle cut-out, on which hands manoeuvre across a central jeweller's peg (the place in which materials are manipulated by hands and tools).

The opportunity to work in much larger workshops at Coventry University has given a broader sense of freedom, in comparison the monumental scale of this environment in contrast to the jeweller's peg has enabled the work to transform from the hand to the body.

For example the objects when residing in my studio monopolise the space, whereby the same object in Coventry's workshops becomes insignificant. Therefore it's been of great benefit to my design process to work in a space that aligns more closely to the scale of the Lanchester Gallery. This has significantly helped me to see things in context by laying out the work across the space and has enabled the production of work at an exaggerated the scale.

The resulting jewellery is theatrical in scale enhanced by a monochromatic colour palette to emphasise form, visual simplicity and the relation to the body. These objects have been meticulously hand crafted using traditional fabrication techniques in combination with industrial processes and new technology, alongside this a plethora of different materials have been used which are primarily industrial in nature and are not traditionally related to the commercial jewellery discipline.

The challenge I now face as a maker is to let these pieces live. As a perfectionist with a scrupulous jeweller's eye for attention to detail, it will be an anxious moment to let go of the intensive relationship of making these objects. The notion of exploring these objects in the context of performance and dance inevitably means they will start to accumulate scuffs, marks, wear, tear and traces of time. These traces will hint at a life lived and these objects will start to gain a sense of their own history beyond the making process. It will be interesting to see how comfortable I am with this as a maker. Will I experience a sense of freedom, wonderment and enjoyment at seeing these objects leave the confines of the workshop or in contrast will it be a nailing biting moment of trepidation as I watch the dancers explore these objects?

Primarily this endeavour is a solo venture. Nevertheless this exhibition would not have been possible without those people who have helped me along the way. This collaborative process has been the catalyst for my creative thinking with continued dialogue sparking fresh ideas and new possibilities.

My counterparts' observations and critical analysis have helped to define my thinking and solve technical problems. This experience has made me aware of how important others' expertise is crucial in realising my grandiose dreams.

One of the things that has struck me most during this period has been the kindness and generosity of those involved. I have been overwhelmed by such warmth and enthusiasm in response to my creative process. To those people who have been part of this process; this would have not happened without your continued support so I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to you all.

At the time of writing this I'm not yet sure of the final outcome. The intention is that the exhibition will challenge the traditional display of jewellery whereby the work will hang freely and not be typically displayed behind glass. In addition the space will be seen as a laboratory of making in which the dance artists will improvise movement and the audience will be invited to interact with the work on show. The closing finale will bring together other artists as a collaborative improvised performance working across art forms of sound, light, photography and film. These artists will create an atmospheric, dynamic environment within which the dancers will explore the ever-changing relationships between object, body and space.

Finally this exhibition offers me a tantalising new direction; it is hoped it will trigger further work of this nature and new collaborative endeavours. Above all it is hoped that this will entice 'you' the audience, to touch, to play, to wear, and to explore flock0mania.

Zoe Robertson, 4th January 2015







flock0mania a dancer's perspective
by Dr Natalie Garrett Brown and Amy Voris

Our collaboration with Zoe Robertson began in an earlier Lanchester Gallery project entitled L219 (2013), itself an evolving collaboration across time and multiple art forms. In this earlier project the permission to move the 'art' objects or jewellery pieces from the pedestal of gallery plinth to pavement was established. As part of this work, we began the dialogue with Robertson around notions of making from the kinesthetic, first through practice and latterly through conversation and shared writing.

Arguably the exhibition objects inherently structure meaning in the space, through their identity as intended art works. These objects are knowingly in critical dialogue with notions of what jewellery can be, questioning conventions of scale, materials, production modes and relationship to the gallery visitor. They are imbued with associations and socio-cultural reference points particular to their maker. For us as dancers, these objects collectively combine to construct a world of their own, offering unexpected and unknown connections with the gallery as site and those that visit.

As dancers we are interested to physically explore the scale, weight, texture and potential momentum of the objects. Beginning with 'what do these particular objects, in this configuration of space, place and time invite?', we begin a dialogue between the materiality of the body and that of the sculptural objects. In the closing event of the exhibition the objects are brought into relationship with multiple art forms (movement, sound, film, light, photography) and collaborators, interested in image creation from the perspective of their own tradition of making. Specific to the flock0mania project is an investigation of how the potential to 'dance' the wearable objects changes their design, production and conception. And implicitly how collaborations such as these challenge, shape or consolidate our own practice.

For us as dance artists, the enquiry into image making is honed through the relationship between body, space and object provided by the wearable objects. Integral to this enquiry into image is the exploration of improvisation strategies that serve to maintain a sensorial response to objects, space, light and sound within a performative context.

As with other collaborations and projects that we are involved with, our approach to movement and to performance is underpinned by an engagement with Somatic Practices, a field of practice within dance which is concerned with bodymind integration while moving. The gallery space is approached as a 'site' that is intertwined with the urban landscape of Coventry and its postwar modernist architectural legacy. Our interest is in meeting the objects through the sensing moving body with an awareness of the surrounding environment. Amongst a landscape of sound, light and film, allowing image and association to emerge through this encounter becomes the artistic play.

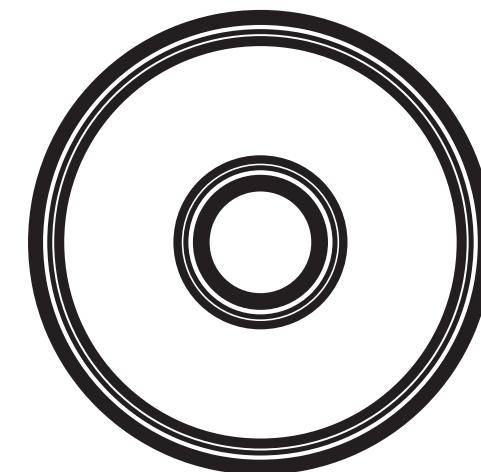
The collaboration between the artists in flock0mania can be characterised by a process-orientated approach to making and by an interest in cultivating knowing through exploration. In Robertson's work we detect the traces of construction within the objects and as part of their arrangement in space. Films and images of the design and production process appear on the flock0mania website and also form part of the exhibition. This transparency of process is echoed in our approach to creating the improvisational structures or movement 'scores' of the dance for the closing event. Such scores experiment with the shifting meanings and associations accumulated by the objects across time. The movement scores have been developed leading up to and during the exhibition amongst the visiting public. In the context of this durational approach to developing the work, the closing event extends the ongoing experiment in public view. And in this closing event Robertson also inhabits the gallery, as participant-performer in an event of objects moved, collected and rearranged.

The history of dance and art collaborations is long standing. This project draws on this rich lineage within the UK and beyond. The moving body in a gallery setting can be traced back to the Bauhaus dances of the late 1920s and the 1970s Judson Church activities in the US amongst others.

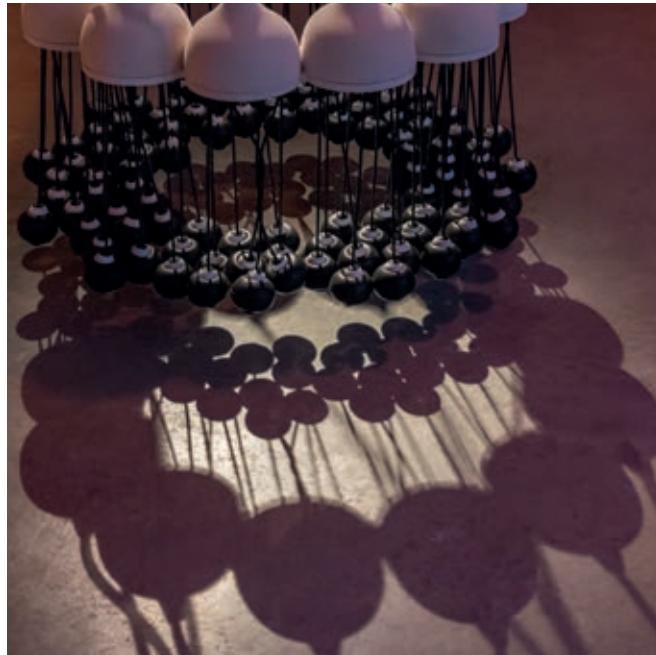
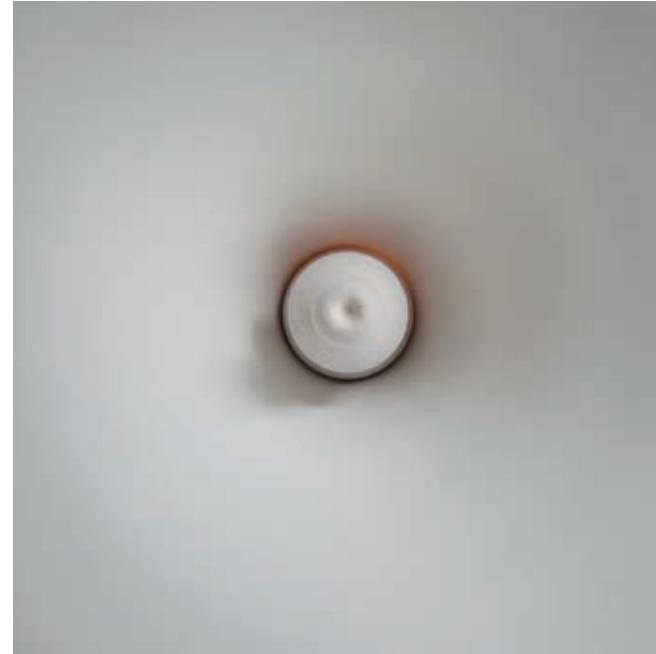
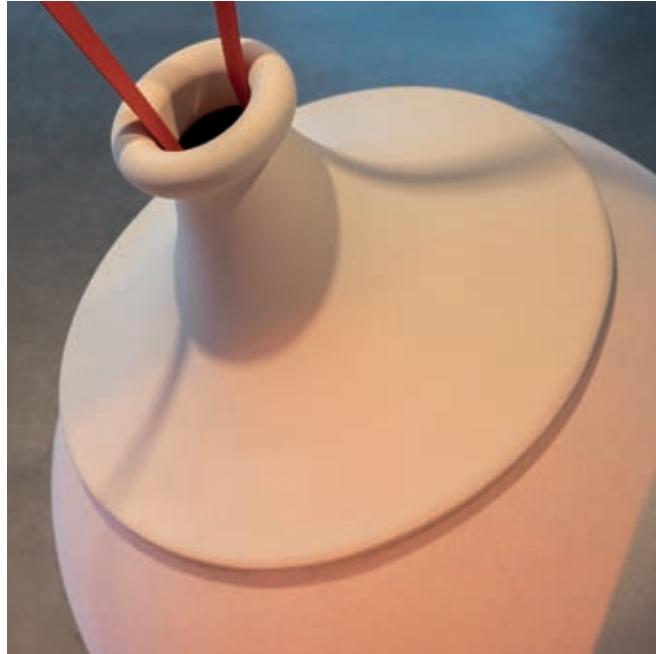
Currently the programming of dance in UK galleries is not uncommon. Recent examples include multiple London galleries such as The Hayward Gallery, The Tate Modern, Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) and The Horniman Museum alongside The Baltic Gallery, Gateshead, Ikon Gallery Birmingham and Dovecot Studios, Edinburgh.

The particular conditions of the flock0mania project, situated within a university context, enable the slide across and between artistic disciplines and between teaching and research. It is in companionship with many other dance artists, some known and others not, many moving between the academy and professional world, that we explore the potentiality of the dance/gallery collaboration inviting audiences and visitors to the gallery to become participants and perhaps co-creators.

Dr Natalie Garrett Brown and Amy Voris
15th January 2015









Biographies

Lead Artist

Zoe Robertson

Award winning jewellery artist, Zoe Robertson is a practice-based researcher who exhibits her work internationally. This new body of work focuses around Jewellery and Performance, exploring the relationship between the object, body and space. She is also the Course Director for BA (Hons) Jewellery Design and Related Products at the School of Jewellery, Birmingham City University. www.zoerobertson.co.uk

Collaborating Artists

Dr Natalie Garrett Brown

Dr Natalie Garrett Brown, BA, MA, PhD is a principal lecturer in dance at Coventry University. Her practice and research interests are theoretically situated within Feminist understandings of embodied subjectivity and the ways in which Somatic practices can inform dance education, making and performance. www.enterinhabit.com

Amy Voris

Amy Voris is a dance-artist based in Manchester. Her current research is concerned with Authentic Movement as a methodology for the choreographic process. Her practice is responsive and associative, driven by an interest in the body as a multitudinous entity and in shaping movement material across long periods of time. www.amyvoris.com

Christian Kipp

Christian Kipp is a photographer based in Essex. He splits his time between working on his own in the natural landscape and collaborating with a variety of dance artists. He is interested in the ways that these two areas feed and reflect each other. For Christian, photography feels like a way of connecting more strongly with nature and people. www.christiankipp.com

Cath Cullinane

Cath Cullinane is a lighting designer, originally from Liverpool, who has worked as a performance technician for over 20 years, in theatres, colleges and festivals in the UK and Europe. She is currently senior theatre technician/skills instructor at Coventry University and has enjoyed experimenting with non-theatre light. Most recently Cath has worked on lighting commissions for KILN (formerly Kindle Theatre).

Daren Pickles

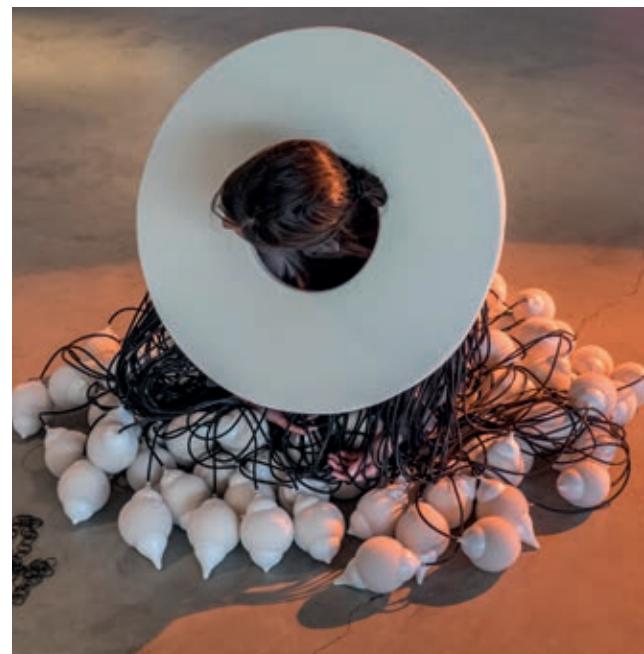
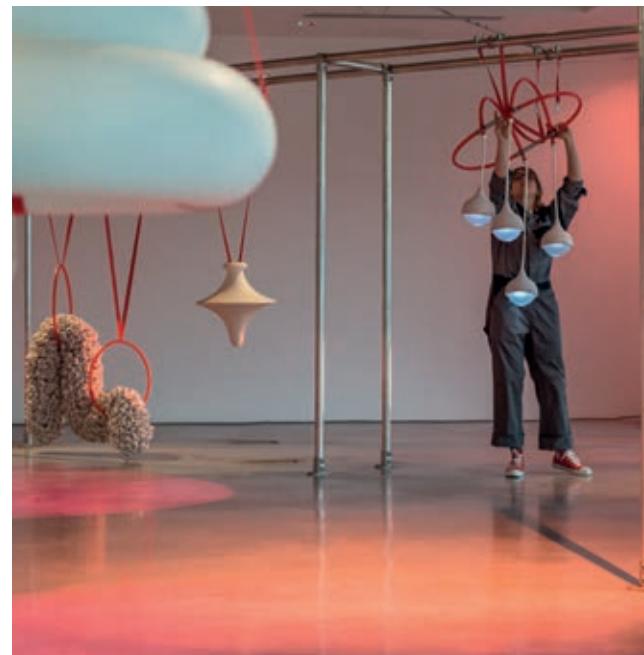
Daren Pickles is a composer of electronic music and associate head of performing arts at Coventry University. He is currently researching feedback systems in composition, the application of Cybernetics to compositional systems and generative music for his PhD. He has worked with creative audio technology for over 25 years, as a recording artist with electronic music act Supercharger and as a composer for film and television.

Nicholas Peters

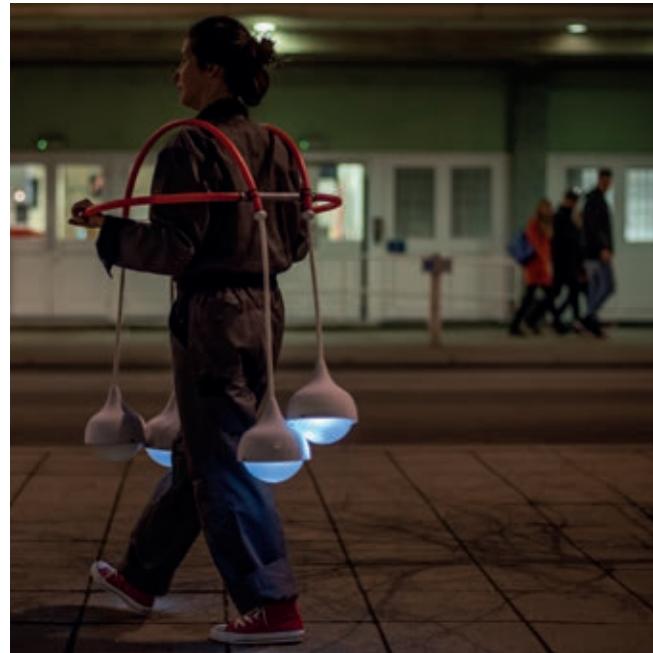
Nicholas Peters is a musician and Lecturer at Coventry University. He is a member of the Central Composers' Alliance and he is researching toward his PhD in music. His musical output covers a variety of activities, from performing and improvising through to composition and arranging. He has also worked in live television as a Score Reader. www.nicholaspeters.co.uk

Sellotape Cinema

Sellotape Cinema are artists Stephen Snell and Steven Chamberlain. Sellotape Cinema creates film worked directly onto sticky tape and played through a specially adapted projector. This medium lends itself to processes usually associated with experimental film, montage, direct to film techniques, as well as media specific techniques, notably 'flayed paper'. www.sellotapecinema.com







Acknowledgements

The following people have helped bring flockOmania to fruition from idea to realisation.

Coventry School of Art & Design, Coventry University

This project would not have been made possible without the generous support of Coventry University.

With thanks to the following staff

Professor Judith Mottram (previously Professor of Visual Arts and Director of the Lanchester Gallery at Coventry School of Art & Design) and Michael Goatman Head of the Industrial Design Department.

Pete Phillips, Gary Perkins, Roger Cooper, Stephen Snell, Keith Holmes, Paul Bryan, Carl Williams, Adam Rugg, Sarah Riddell, Imran Mamoojee, Alex Roache, Rob Hearne, Kathryn Hawkins and her team of ambassador invigilators.

With special thanks to Dr Natalie Garrett Brown as lead academic, exhibition coordinator and Professor Sarah Whatley, Director of the Centre for Dance Research, C-DaRE.

School of Jewellery, Faculty of Arts, Design and Media, Birmingham City University

Thank you to the Faculty of Arts, Design and Media and the School of Jewellery's Research Centre for Creative Making (S.T.U.F.F) Including Professor Jivan Astfalck, PhD, Director of the Research Centre for Creative Making and Sian Hindle, School Research Co-ordinator

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Celebrating 125 years of the School of Jewellery
With thanks to my friends from the School of Jewellery for your continued words of wisdom.

Exhibition set up

3D Rigging by Rick Waterworth
Films by Sellotape Cinema
Lighting by Cath Cullinane
Publication Photography by Christian Kipp

Collaborating Artists featured in the finale event

Amy Voris
Christian Kipp
Cath Cullinane
Daren Pickles
Dr Natalie Garrett Brown
Nicholas Peters
Sellotape Cinema
Zoe Robertson

A heartfelt thanks must be mentioned to Stephen Snell.

Who with his continued encouragement, reassurance and sense of humour has given me the drive and determination to achieve flockOmania

For more information visit: www.flockomania.com

