

NEW WAYS TO LOOK AT BIKES

Stockport War Memorial Gallery

Wellington Rd S, Stockport SK3 8AB

28TH JANUARY - 3RD MARCH 2023



REDDISH MEN IN SHEDS

Introduction

“All art is useless!” declared Oscar Wilde. If you don’t agree try riding one of our sculptures. And Bertolt Brecht argued that all art should make familiar things ‘strange’ – his celebrated ‘*verfremdungseffekt*’. (We talk of little else in *Reddish*.) In this exhibition, *New Ways to Look at Bikes*, the *Reddish Men (and Women)’s Bike Art Collective* aims to prove both these positions on the ‘function of art’, true.

The original aim of *Reddish Men in Sheds* was for a group of isolated, older men to take donated broken bikes and fettle them up, make them rideable again, so that we could sell them on to low-income families. We still do that and have sold over 50 bikes this last year. That’s probably 50 cars off the road for many journeys. In pursuing this noble aim however, we found we had lots of left-over bike bits and bobs that couldn’t be re-used. Being green – in all senses – we didn’t want them to go to landfill or to add to air pollution, as we ourselves will be doing that quite soon enough, thank you; so we thought about making redundant pedals, bells, cassettes, chains, frames, wheels, handlebars etc., into art works, i.e. some things that were both strange and useless, but which would force us to look at the world of everyday objects in new ways.

There were plenty of examples of this kind of thing on *You Tube* so, like Brecht and Wilde, we shamelessly stole every good idea and added them to our own stock of fancies. We made lights, clocks, things about Stockport’s cycling history, a goat and a splendid – but useless – Golden Tandem. We exhibited first at the *Stockport Together* exhibition in September 2021, just after Covid lifted its grip on our lives. None of us had ever done anything like this before, but we

found putting something from our own imaginations out into the real world, was very satisfying and enjoyable. And other people liked it too. They came in large numbers.

Buoyed up by this, in 2022, we started a *Women in Men's Sheds* division and they took the ideas further, making wonderful wall hangings, wheel weavings, candle holders etc from bits that were lying about the Shed, often by silhouetting them onto calico and spray painting their combined surfaces. This produced both a hard durable 'art' object and a soft textile decoration: a nice clashing together of dissimilar things that would have pleased both Brecht and Wilde. We held the first women's exhibition at the Reddish Community Hub in July 2022, which created quite a stir amongst the residents of Reddish and beyond.

So here we are today, hoping that you will re-look at the familiar old bike and its many bits and pieces, and at the new challenging shapes and awe-inspiring items of representation, ingenuity and beautiful uselessness, that we have clashed together. Enjoy.

Eric

Secretary

Reddish Men in Sheds

The Works

We've tried to work in as wide a variety of materials and styles as possible – as long as there's some connection to bikes. We hired Andy Fear as the only professional sculptor on the team and he got working straight away on a moveable feast of old bike bits.



He also taught us how to make simple castings which made it possible to do 3D models from Rob's Artificial Intelligence images derived from fairly random words linked to bikes:



We used simple expressions, like 'Man on Bike' and 'Fish Needs a Bicycle' and the algorithms did the rest, which we then cast, printed or worked into textile pieces. Judith used this image

which then was transformed into new wall hangings with other bike-linked imagery, made by our tried and tested spray-paint method.



Bikes and living things seem to go together and suggest each other. Playing around with a couple of old saddles and chain rings suggested crocodiles, so we had a go at giving it 3 dimensions.

This was what the first idea looked like.

Joe Warner is, relatively, a young member of the group and brings some much-needed IT and photographic experience to the skills' mix. After some discussion, he agreed to do a photo essay of the Shed members in the photographic style of people like Alberto Cavalcanti and Humphrey Spender, Mass Observation documentarists of the 1930s. The legacy of that period still plays out in Reddish, with its huge redundant cotton mills, from whose factory gates large numbers of cyclists would have exited on finishing their shifts. It's nice to see that expressive style reproduced for a modern audience.



Frank, a very regular member also used the opportunities to explore the history of cycling in Stockport through informative memorial pieces documenting the lives of Stockport's unsung cycling heroes, Allan Newtown and Jack Sibbit, both of whom had added Olympic medals to Stockport's glory and, until very recently, had received little recognition for their pains.



This also contrasted nicely with the very contemporary AI style developed by Rob, the youngest member of the team, who acts as a carer for his member father. Besides doing the sur-real 'fish on a bike' images, Rob combined with Eric to make parody and



parody and pastiche images of famous 'high' art works, to bring them down a bit by the addition of bike elements the famous artists might never have considered.

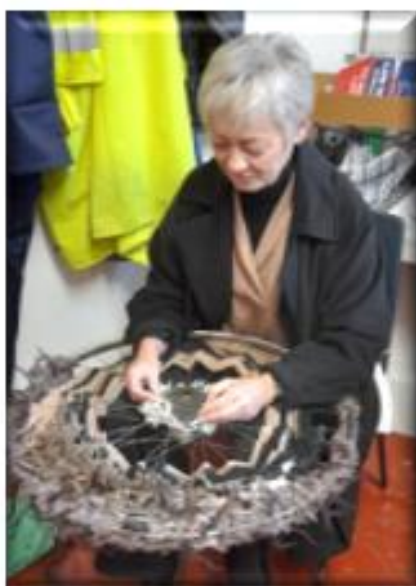
When cleaning and washing chains we realised how fluid and expressive chains could be and Joyce took on the task of exploiting this possibility by exploring the idea of making a seascape with painted chains on scrap Shed wood, which transformed quite easily into salt-eroded driftwood. It pushed the boundaries of what you could do with stiff inflexible metallic forms by turning them into expressive materials.

Denise similarly saw the potential of redundant bike wheels, to weave interesting shapes into the spokes with equally



redundant bits of left-over textiles. This re-use, reconfiguring and reinvention of common objects, opens up all kinds of ways of resistance to the throw-away culture, so that we can begin to fight back against the over-powerful corporations who rule us.

Then there was also the small things we'd make and which



might once have been thrown into the skip: the key rings, clocks, candle holders and wotnots which teach us to look again at bikes and bike parts and see that hidden potential that all objects contain, to turn themselves, with our aid, into objects of awe and wonder. And perhaps that's the true 'function' of art that both Wilde and Brecht were searching for.

This was very definitely a collective, creative effort from the whole team at the Shed.

Exhibitors

Andy F
Denise
Eric
Frank
Joe
Joyce
Judith
Rob
Tim

Facilitators

Andy C
Andy S
David
Gregg
James
Peter
Tony

Many of the items displayed are for sale; if you were interested in purchasing one – as a **donation** to *Reddish Men in Sheds* - please email.

Contact Us

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Your primary contact is ERIC

