Investigating How Art is Used to Raise Social Awareness

By: Xavier A. Hines-Coombs

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Introduction  

There are a variety of issues in the United Kingdom that range from foreign policy and healthcare issues to immigration and social matters. Two of the problems that most people have turned a blind eye to or have indirectly ignored are the mental health issues facing men and the homelessness facing the United Kingdom’s community. The problems that are facing these under-represented groups are still prevalent based on the information gathered by the Office of National Statistics. Men in the UK had always had a higher suicide rate, dating back to the 1980’s, and the only number that would fluctuate amongst the men were the average age range of male suicide (Mental Health Foundation 2017). There are over 300,000 homeless in Great Britain and over half of them, 150,000, reside in London (Ministry of Housing 2015). Two prominent organizations that arose to address these issues are The Campaign Against Living Miserably(CALM) and 1625 Independent People (1625ip). CALM tackles the problem involving male suicide and mental illness while 1625ip takes on the issue of homelessness. Although some people are indifferent to the social issues that are present in their community, art that interacts with its surrounding environment can sometimes illuminate these problems.
Impact of Art

CALM and 1625ip chose to work with artist because art has a way of sending a message and bringing deep awareness in a way that words cannot simply convey. Art, in itself, is a universal language. According to a statement published by the University of York, Patricia Walton, a professor at the University of York, has been working in social work and academia for the past three decades and agrees with this new idea of “the use of arts and sensory methods for social work education, social research, and social action”. She believes that “Arts and sensory methods can be used for social work education, social research and social action”; social action can only be reached by an increase in social awareness among the population. According to an abstract of Patricia Walton’s article, “Beyond Talk and Text: An Expressive Visual Arts Method for Social Work Education,” she has used visual arts in her lectures and the results have included the audience having a “deeper and more detailed level of theoretical analysis than tutors might have expected in the time available” (Walton 2012). This suggests that the visual aspects that she presents in her lectures are causing her students to learn more about the social issues that are shown in her lecture. Art can impact people on a deeper level and bring about an awareness that words cannot display and through this awareness create social impact.

CALM

The Campaign Against Living Miserably in the UK, also known as CALM, had begun as a pilot program, started by Jane Powell and enacted by the Department of Health beginning on December 15, 1997. The purpose of this program was to try to decrease and eventually end the increasing suicide rate of men that are in the UK through support via their helpline, webchat, and website. The pilot version of CALM came to an end in 2004, as announced by the Department of
Health. However, there was enough local support for the organization, that Jane Powell was able to launch CALM as a national charity on March 31st, 2006. CALM was initially aimed to support and help men ages 15 to 35. But after extensively consulting with fundraisers, supporters, and commissioners before expanding to cover all men after collecting their data, based on the volume of calls that were coming in as well as suicide statistics, which had shown there was a growing number of callers over the age of 35 as well as an increase in suicide rate among older men.

CALM believes that there is a cultural barrier that is preventing men from seeking help because in some instances asking for help can equate to weakness. They think that with an increasing awareness of this issue as well as working with clubs, venues, and brands with voices that men respect, that men will feel more comfortable to seek the help that they need. CALM has increased the span and scope of their message through participating in events as well as what they inspire people to support their cause. They have keynote speakers, such as the Duke of Cambridge, as well as artists to address the issue. Some of the artists include musician Tom Robinson who supported CALM with a song, as well as an all-male dance group who choreographed a CALM inspired piece and the most impactful individual that they not only inspired but worked with, was a sculpture known as Mark Jenkins who had helped them create Project 84. Mark Jenkins can be seen as the most impactful individual because of the international headlines, that his art work “Project84”, brought towards the social issue of men’s mental health.

**Mark Jenkins**

Mark Jenkins was born in Alexandria, Virginia and he is one of the most famous American urban artists, widely known for his macabre and shocking street installations. He was inspired by the late figurative sculptor Juan Munoz, Aphex Twin, and Albert Camus’ philosophies on the absurd as his inspiration. He sees the world as his canvas and uses the streets as his stage for his
art installations. The installations are in such a manner that they inevitably interact with anyone who is passing by, turning them into actors. Mark Jenkins began his successful career in Rio de Janeiro when he installed one figure in a refuse dump. He had immediately become interested in the reactions of people and now considered his art installations as much of a social experiment as an art project, and now his work is across different cities worldwide invoking people to question. According to an exclusive interview with Mark Jenkins, “His sculptural process involves “sampling” objects such as toy dolls, carousel horses, and his own body using a “dry-casting” process he first discovered while he was still in school. By wrapping objects in plastic wrap and then tape, he creates an external cast that he removes and then reassembles into surreal and ghostly sculptures” (Karaicic 2015). He steadily grew credibility and an audience through his various sculpture installations, some of which include the Storker Project (Figures 1-4), Embedded Series (Figures 5-7), the Outcast Series (Figures 8-9), and the polar bears he had created for Greenpeace (Figures 10-13).
Sculpture Installations

The Storker Project

Mark Jenkins worked with Sandra Fernandez on his first major installation in 2005 on the Storker Project. As described on Jenkin’s website, the duo installed clear casts of toy babies in different cities to have his works of art interact with the surrounding environment.

Figure 1 shows a toy baby near a fire hydrant, taken in Philadelphia (Jenkins 2005).

Figure 2 shows three toy babies on a rail, taken in Washington, DC (Jenkins 2005).

Figure 3 shows two toy babies inside a waste bin, taken in Lisbon (Jenkins 2005).

Figure 4 shows babies hanging on metal coils, taken in Washington, DC (Jenkins 2005).
The Embed Series

The next installation that the duo did was in 2006 and it was called the Embed Series. The Embed Series consisted of “casts, filled with newspaper and cement, and dressed to create hyper-realistic sculptural duplicates of himself and Fernandez” which had created mass confusion and even invoked some people to call 911; this resulted in police and rescue units to arrive at the place of the installations. According to Jenkin’s website, this project is where his groundbreaking success came from because of how much media attention his work had gained.

Figure 5 shows a sculpture with its head through a wall (Collabcubed 2015).

Figure 6 shows a sculpture with a cone on its head, leading on a wall (Collabcubed 2015).

Figure 7 shows two sculptures leaning on each other (Collabcubed 2015).
The Outcast Series

The following year, in 2007, he worked on the Outcast Series, according Jenkin’s website, it featured “more macabre works that alluded to both the finality of death and a residual ghostly presence”.

Figure 8 shows a masked sculpture in the corner of a room, sitting on the floor with a baseball bat and a cellphone (Fabien Castanier Gallery 2007).

Figure 9 shows a masked sculpture in the corner of a room with two guns pointed in two different directions (Fabien Castanier Gallery 2007).
GreenPeace

In 2008 he worked on a collaborative project with Greenpeace organization, in which to emphasize the shared predicament of polar bears and humans in regard to global warming. Spyros reported that Jenkins’s pieces once again drew the attention of police, because his polar bear sculptures were mistake for suspicious (2018).

Mark Jenkins intentions for the Greenpeace project was to use his street installations to promote awareness about the issue of global warming and how the polar bears are being affected. It was a shared goal between Mark Jenkins and Greenpeace to have the public develop empathy for the polar bear just how the public has developed empathy for the homeless.

Figure 10 shows a homeless polar bear sculpture holding an SOS sign. (Spyros, 2018).

Figure 11 shows a homeless polar bear sculpture sitting on the ground (Spyros, 2018).

Figure 12 shows a homeless polar bear sculpture leaning on a trashcan (Spyros, 2018).

Figure 13 shows homeless polar bear sculpture pushing a shopping cart (Spyros, 2018).
Project 84

In 2018, Mark Jenkins worked with CALM and was inspired to create this installation of sculptures, because of the mental health awareness that CALM wants to spread. According to Butler (2017) in the UK, a man takes his own life every 2 hours. CALM wanted to make a statement that would cause people stop in their tracks and realize that there is a severe issue with the male suicide rate as well as their mental health, similarly what Mark Jenkins did in partnering with the Greenpeace organization.

The process for this project was much different than one that Mark Jenkins had done before because he created 84 individual sculptures in respect to their loved ones. Marris (2018) reported that “The friends and family members of the deceased helped in the creation process of the figures. Each one, a poignant reminder of a real-life lost and a call to society to come together and ultimately take a stand against male suicide”. The 84 sculptures were placed on top of This Morning studio and ITV’s headquarters on London’s South Bank (Figure 14 & Figure 15). The number of sculptures was 84 deliberately picked because it how many men in the UK commit suicide, on average, per week (Leguizamon 2018).

Figure 14 shows sculptures on top of This Morning studio (Marris 2018).
Impact

Project 84 was an overall successful project that was sought out by CALM and enacted by Mark Jenkins because of the media attention that it brought, as reported in the Washington Post, BBC, and CNN. These strange human-like sculptures had brought a profound amount of awareness to men’s mental health and suicide rate because it had spread across the media like wildfire. The statues had made international news and caused not only onlookers who were walking by to stop what they were doing and look up but also people from around the world to question what this site was. These questions were answered by the media and awareness of male suicide rate had increased drastically.

Figure 15 shows sculptures on top of This Morning studio (Marris, 2018).

Project 84, an interactive art installation, was an effective way to gain international notice and raise awareness for men’s mental health. Mark Jenkins work with CALM can be compared to Luke Jerram’s work with 1625ip because both artist had similarly used interactive art as a medium to raise awareness for social issues. Luke Jerram’s art installation sought out to help 1625ip’s mission by raising awareness for homeless.
1625 Independent People (1625ip) is a non-profit organization that aims to reduce the number of homeless by supporting young people, ages 16 to 25, who are at risk or already homeless. Independent People started as a merger of Priority Youth Housing, Wayahead Housing and Support for Young People. Wayahead was established in 1982 (then known as East Bristol Youth Housing) and Priority Youth Housing in 1989 (then known as South Bristol Youth Housing). Both organizations were born out of the necessity for specialist support for people ages 16 to 25, in order to combat the rising statistics of homelessness. As reported on their website, they are now leaders in the field of supporting young homeless people in Bristol and the South West because they have been perfecting their craft for the past 3 decades.

Their website states that their mission is “to prevent homelessness, by keeping young people safe and to support them to the best of their abilities.” Success to them is when an independent young person can manage their housing and money, are connected with positive communities as well as being able to be aware of their health issues, whether that be mined or body. 1625ip’s vision is “a world where all young people have a safe place and trusted adults to turn to and can access the opportunities they need.” They asked Luke Jerram, an artist known for his glass sculptures to help spread awareness on homelessness, through a project known as “Invisible Homeless,” to emphasize the Early Doors Campaign in order to raise funds for the organization.
Luke Jerram

Luke Jerram, a UK born artist, is internationally known for his multidisciplinary practices that involve the creation of sculptures, installations, and live art projects. Jerram has a set of different narratives that make up his practice, which are developing in parallel with one another. Gaining extensive international media coverage, he has exhibited with many of the established cultural organizations around the world. Luke Jerram is now known globally for his innovative arts’ practice and large-scale public artworks.

Jerram’s ongoing research on perception is fueled by the fact that he is color-blind. He studies the qualities of space and perception in extreme locations, from the freezing forests of Lapland to the dunes of the Sahara Desert. New ways of seeing and new artworks emerge from these research field trips; works such as Retinal Memory Volume, Sky Orchestra, and his Glass Microbiology series have developed from Jerram exploring the edges of perception. Jerram builds and manages specialist teams of engineers, craftsmen, and technicians to help him realize his works. From composers to glassblowers, medieval musicologists to hot air balloonists. As reported on his website, he says “I’m only limited by my imagination in what can be produced. Anything is possible”.
Sculpture Installations

Play Me, I’m Yours

“Play Me, I’m Yours” was first commissioned in Birmingham, UK in 2008. With 15 pianos located across the city for three weeks it is estimated that over 140,000 people played or listened to music from the pianos. Since then more than 1500 street pianos have been placed in 50 cities, which have been played and listened to by more than 10 million people worldwide. Each new city that commissions the artwork becomes part of this growing international legacy (Street Pianos 2008).

Described on the website StreetPianos, according to Luke Jerram: “The idea for Play Me, I’m Yours came from visiting my local launderette. I saw the same people there each weekend and yet no one talked to one another. I suddenly realized that within a city, there must be hundreds of these invisible communities, regularly spending time with one another in silence. Placing a piano into the space was my solution to this problem, acting as a catalyst for conversation and changing the dynamics of a space. Where people have met for the first time around the pianos, the project has led to several marriages around the world.”

Figure 16 shows pianos placed in Hong Kong (Jerram 2018).

Figure 17 shows a piano placed on a street in Barcelona (Jerram 2018).
Park and Slide

Park and Slide was installed as a one-day event, on May 4th 2014; the event, which partnered with the charity FRANK Water, had raised 1500 pounds that day. According to Luke Jerram, this installation was meant to have people navigate the streets of their city in a new, innovative way; it had drawn over 95,000 people to sign up and only 360 tickets were issued, but despite the few tickets 65,000 people came out to watch people ride the slide.

Described on the website Park and Slide, according to Luke Jerram: “This massive urban slide transforms the street and asked people to take a fresh look at the potential of their city and the possibilities for transformation. Imagine if there were permanent slides right across cities?”

Luke Jerram wanted people to think about the endless possibilities for their communities and the news about this installation had reached over 600 million people worldwide.

Figure 18 shows the slide going through a street in Bristol, UK (Jerram 2014).
Glass Microbiology

Glass Microbiology was developed by Luke Jerram, in 2004, and were made to cause people contemplate the global impact of each disease. They were created as alternative representations of viruses to the artificially colored imagery received through media because viruses have no color as they are smaller than the wavelength of light. As described on his website: “His transparent and colorless glassworks consider how the artificial coloring of scientific microbiological imagery, affects our understanding of these phenomena.” This means he wants people to ask themselves how different colors affects perception.

Figure 18 shows a glass sculpture of E Coli (Jerram 2018).

Figure 19 shows a glass sculpture of smallpox (Jerram 2018).
Sky Orchestra

Sky Orchestra is an artwork designed to deliver music to sleeping people from out of the sky. A form of provocative urban art, Sky Orchestra questions the boundaries of public artwork, private space and the ownership of the sky. The Sky Orchestra is made up of seven hot air balloons, each with speakers attached, which take off (at dawn or dusk) and fly across a city. Each balloon plays a different element of a musical score, creating a massive audio landscape (Sky Orchestra 2018).

According to Luke Jerram, he first had the idea for the Sky Orchestra when he had experienced voices calling from many different areas of a town simultaneously, it had opened a kind of sculptural map in his imagination. Luke Jerram describes that he could see the layers of sound building onto one another. The sky Orchestra was designed to share this experience, as well as deliver a giant surround sound performance artwork to the people’s homes. He hopes that the music the Sky Orchestra creates and lifts the public into the perceptual space on the edge of sleep, inspiring their imaginations with sound.

Figure 20 shows the Sky Orchestra in Sydney, Australia (Jerram 2018).

Figure 21 shows the Sky Orchestra in Avon, UK (Jerram 2018).
Museum of the Moon

Described on the Museum of the Moon website, the installation is a fusion of lunar imagery, moonlight and surround sound composition created by BAFTA and Ivor Novello award winning composer Dan Jones. Each venue programs their own series lunar inspired events beneath the moon, meaning that over its lifetime, the Museum of the Moon will be presented in a number of different ways both indoors and outdoors, so altering the experience and interpretation of the artwork (Museum of the Moon 2018).

Figure 22 shows the sculpture of the moon in Dubai (Jerram 2018).

Figure 23 shows the sculpture of the moon in India (Jerram 2018).
In 2015, Luke Jerram partnered with 1625ip, in order to create life-size glass sleeping figures as a way to highlight the growing number of hidden and invisible homeless people that were on the rise. The artwork was funded by the Arts Council, at the Glass hub, and the sculptures are shrouded in a blanket made of glass and the ghost-like figures, which have no gender, are in a vulnerable and fragile form. The glass figure, as part of the Early Doors campaign, were around Bristol in order to highlight the rising number of often “invisible” homeless people who are living on the streets or in temporary, unsafe, insecure housing (Bristol247 2015).

Described on his website, according to Luke Jerram: “For every person you see sleeping on the streets, there are many others sleeping in hostels, squats and other forms of unsatisfactory and insecure accommodation. I was interested to see whether the sculpture would be ignored and treated like street furniture as homeless people often are in a city. I hope the artwork will raise awareness of the problem and that the public will feel moved to support the charity, to make a difference.”

Figure 24 the Invisible Homeless on the ground (Jerram 2016).
Impact

This installment was an overall success because of the amount of media coverage that came from it, which included BBC News, the Huffington Post, Discovery News and many more. As reported in an article on December 22nd, 2015 “Bristol's 'Invisible Homeless' Sculpture Unveiled”, These unique sculptures, that highlighted how vulnerable and invisible the homeless are, had drawn a lot of attention from people who so these ghost-like figures in on the pavement and other locations (BBC 2015).

Figure 25 shows the Invisible Homeless sculpture by the Thames River, illuminated (Jerram 2016).
Conclusion

As artist, Mark Jenkins and Luke Jerram have worked throughout their years to perfect their craft. They both have gained international fame through the installations that they do and have an enormous fanbase through their interactive installations. Just as Mark Jenkins and Luke Jerram have become notable, awareness for social problems can become prominent through the use of art. Through analyzing and researching how Mark Jenkins and Luke Jerram have brought profound social awareness through the pieces that they create, art should be valued for its impact in addressing social issues. Art can not only be used to bring awareness to social issues facing the UK but issues in general that are facing the people here, whether it political or foreign. Art should be valued for its impact on addressing issues and future investigation into this topic it would be interesting to see how and what have artist done to address other issues that are facing Londoners, such as the political issues that are raging between the left and right wing.
Work Cited


CALM. “#Project84 By CALM.” Campaign Against Living Miserably, www.thecalmzone.net/.


