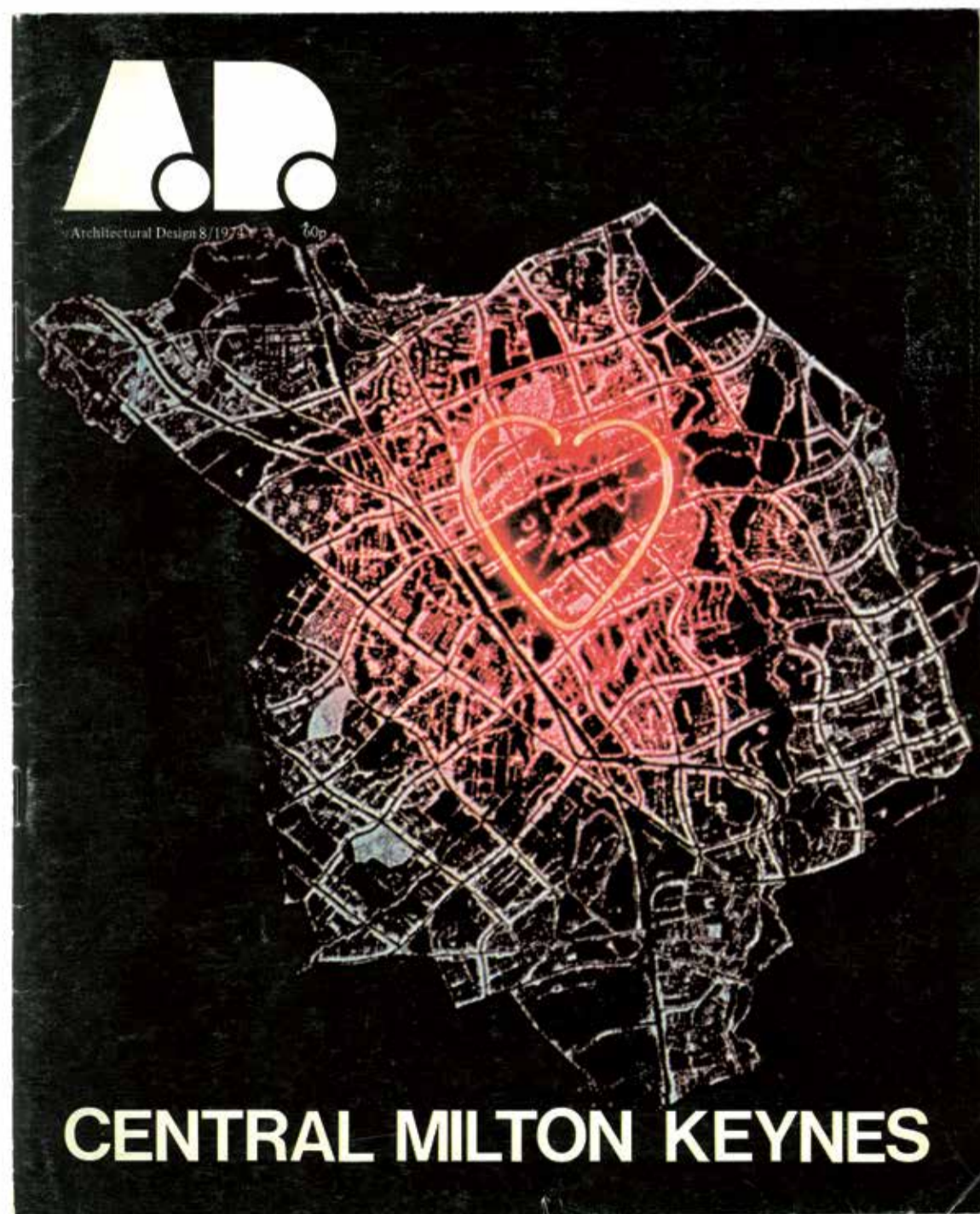




# CITY CLUB

## A SPACE FOR EVERYONE



Architectural Design magazine, August 1974. This special edition, with its striking cover image by graphic designer Brian Tattersfield, publicised plans for the future city centre. The neon heart of Milton Keynes was at that point a large area of farmland called Bradwell Common.

Welcome to the City Club – a programme of new art, performances, family activities, happenings and talks inspired by the original cultural plans for Milton Keynes.

City Club was the name given in the 1970s to a mind-boggling leisure complex designed to occupy a whole block of Central Milton Keynes. Among its many wonders were a wave pool, a rodeo and a souk, as well as the theatre and art gallery. We've looked back at this un-built scheme, borrowed the name and visualised a space for numerous activities. City Club re-imagined for the 21st century is like a cover version of a classic song, updated with a new sound.

Milton Keynes is world-famous for its architecture and town planning. Less well known is the history of social development in the city, which often took the form of art projects. These activities created some much-loved landmarks including Liz Leyh's *Concrete Cows* and Bill Billings' *Triceratops*. They also brought the pioneer residents of the new city together, to build communities through art.

During 2017, MK Gallery will bring together artists and arts organisations from across Milton Keynes to celebrate the city's 50th anniversary. This will take the form of specially commissioned installations and events that reflect the city's unique environment and its dynamic population across six decades.

MK Gallery is undergoing a major expansion. Once work is completed, City Club will also be a permanent physical space. For now, it's a pop-up space in different parts of the city; a virtual space through its own website; and an imaginative space for the people of Milton Keynes, a spur to individual creativity.

City Club is a space for everyone.

**To find out more and how to get involved: [www.cityclubmk.org](http://www.cityclubmk.org)**

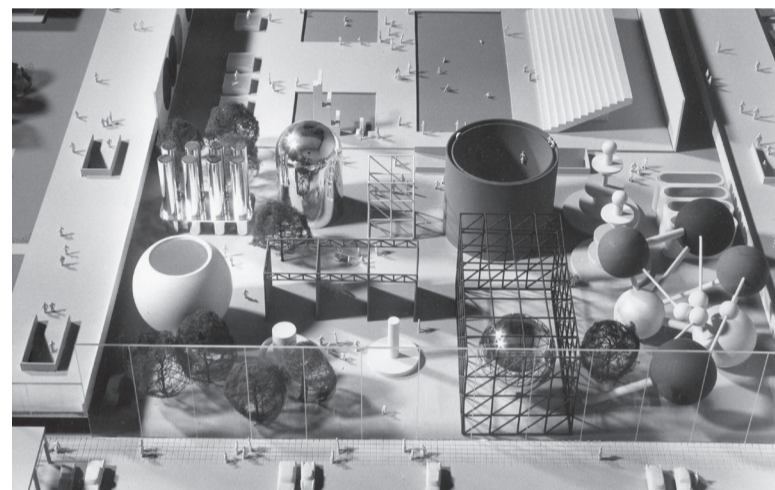
The idea for City Club originated with artists Gareth Jones and Nils Norman as an ambitious project to re-imagine the public spaces surrounding an expanded MK Gallery, animating the top end of Midsummer Boulevard with alternative models of contemporary art.

Gareth grew up in Milton Keynes in the 1970s and this experience recurs throughout his work, which spans drawing, sculpture, installation, exhibition making and printed matter. Nils brings an international perspective on public art, play and the urban landscape, having worked on major public art projects across Europe. Here Gareth talks about how he and Nils approached the project.

## MODEL MAKING AT THE CITY CLUB

The original City Club model was a lovingly detailed attempt to give a physical form to a scheme that was quite possibly unbuildable. The whereabouts of the model are today unknown, but for an artist there is a simple solution to this situation: make your own.

Early on in our Arts Council funded Research & Development period we started to make models using a process known as *bricolage*, which involves



Lost: a detail from the original City Club model, 1974. Photo courtesy MKCDC



Found: the City Club Conceptual Model, 2015

the re-use of found or discarded materials. Nils worked on a scale model of the gallery and theatre site, focussing on elements such as lighting, flooring and play equipment, while I produced a model of the new MK Gallery re-imagined as a playground, mixing interior and exterior spaces.

This culminated in the City Club Conceptual Model, produced in collaboration with 6a architects. Their extension for the gallery is here visualised as a red grid structure enclosing a large mirrored ball. On an adjacent table, ideas for unbuildable play equipment are sketched in a wide range of materials, a means to develop a visual language for the new City Club. From our first proposal of over two years ago, to the images across these pages, one thing leads organically to another. That's our creative process.

## LOGO-MANIA



Step one: dream your dream. Step two: design a logo for it. The first logo for Milton Keynes was a stylised version of the labrys or double-headed axe, a talisman for city makers everywhere. This was followed in the late 1970s by a rolling logotype that said all you needed to know: MK had arrived.

## MILTON KEYNES

We began with ideas for turning the cover of the Milton Keynes Infrastructure Pack into a City Club logo, taking it through multiple colour versions to describe a piazza, a boulevard and a playscape. If the original City Club was unbuildable, this logo was likely to be unreadable.

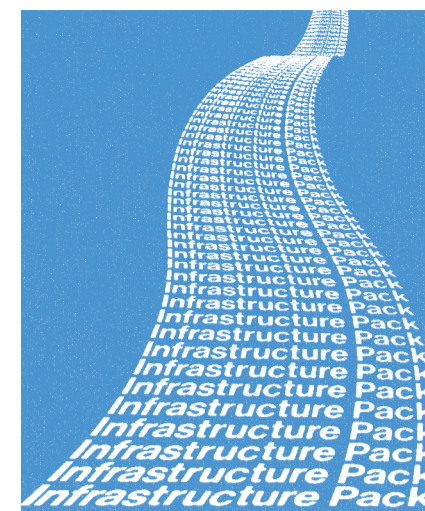
Last summer, working with designer Mark El-khatib and City Club Creative Producer Niki Braithwaite, we looked more practically at the question of a logo for the project. A solution was found close to hand, in the model of 6a's new gallery building – a sphere contained within a grid, movement stilled.



We then translated the new logo into the fourteen options of the City Club Colour Chart, and created the poster on the back page of this newspaper. The colours on the left represent the crisp neon language of downtown; those on the right may remind you of the north



Buckinghamshire landscape in late summer. In this combination of the urban and the pastoral I find a mirror image of the extraordinary city I grew up in.



Milton Keynes Infrastructure Pack, 1970s

“It’s a place to play, but also a place to think about vision”

A simple question lies behind our approach to designing the new City Club: What would happen if the public art of a city were to swap places with its infrastructure? Let’s suppose that sculptures were to function as signposts, and lampposts were to be thought of as sculpture. Well, perhaps the city would be remade as a playground.

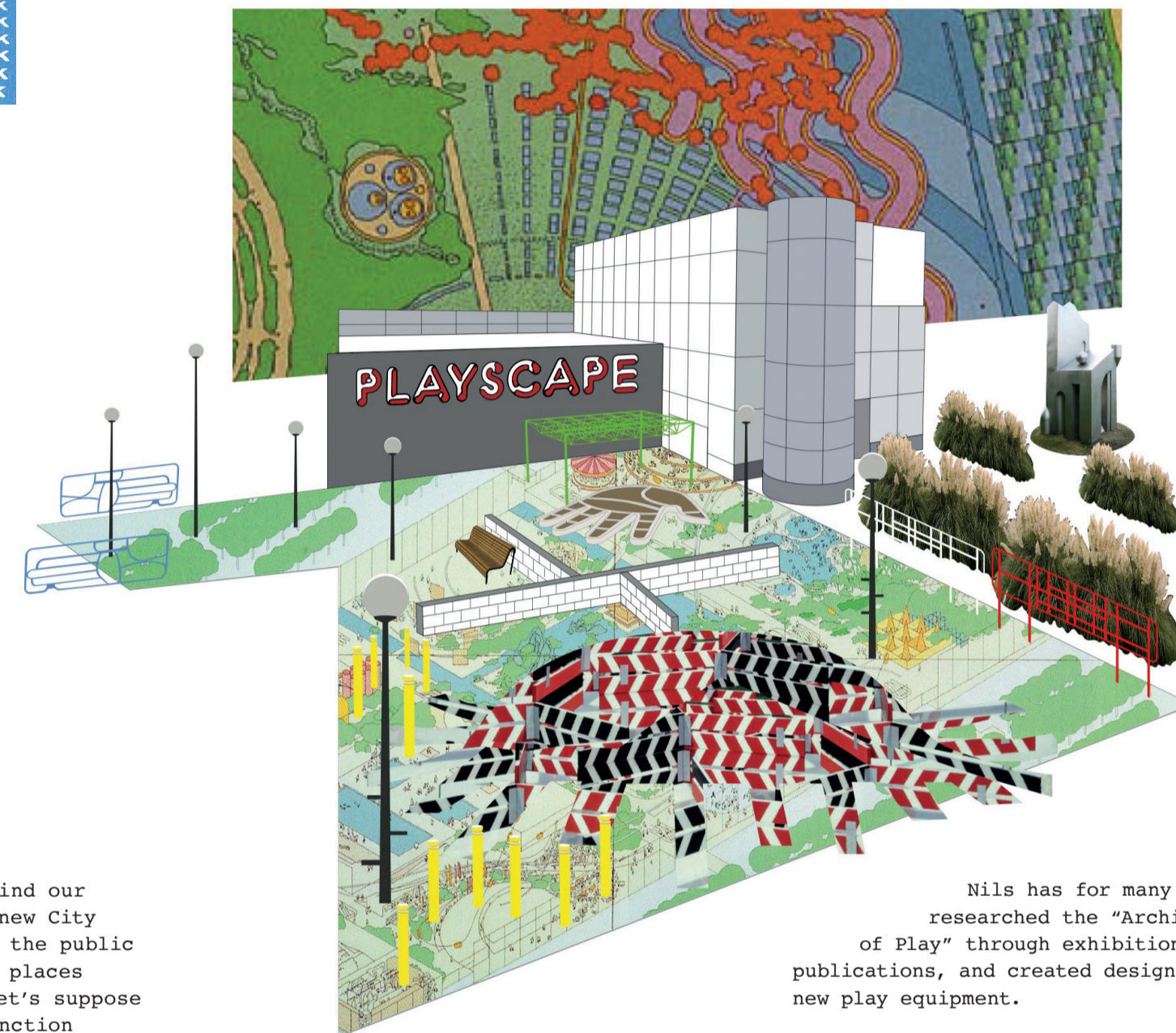
Play and infrastructure are central to our plans to remake the public spaces surrounding a newly expanded MK Gallery.



A hand sandpit greets the toddler

# CITY AS PLAYGROUND

At the heart of the new City Club will be a playscape created by Gareth Jones and Nils Norman. Gareth reports below on their collaboration.



Artist's impression of the playscape

Nils has for many years researched the “Architecture of Play” through exhibitions and publications, and created designs for new play equipment.

These interests collide in our proposals for a playscape between the gallery and the theatre, illustrated on this page. Two giant hand gates from the 1970s lead to an alley of lampposts surreally growing out of the ground at different heights. A schematised hand becomes a sandpit for toddlers and an early piece of Milton Keynes play equipment, the Tri-stack climbing frame, is collaged into a labyrinthine play mound for older children. Explore it, roll off it, or just think of it as a sculpture.

Along with the ideas we have for a new garden next to Midsummer Boulevard, and a redesign of Margaret Powell Square – we plan to feature both in future issues of this newspaper – the playscape exists as a microcosm of the original vision behind the new city, remade within the contemporary reality of Milton Keynes. It’s a place to play, but also a place to think about vision. Perhaps the two things are not so different.

Both of them are enshrined in a forgotten document from the early years of Milton Keynes, the Infrastructure Pack.

Lavishly produced by the Milton Keynes Development Corporation in the mid-1970s, it carefully records designs for the seating, rubbish bins, bus shelters and street signs that were soon to become such a familiar part of the landscape.

The pack also documents the first designs for play equipment, created by Brian Milne, which closely resemble the visual art of the era. As artists, we’re both invested in this blurring of categories. I grew up in the new city in its utopian phase and draw on my memory of this highly memorable time as a catalyst for making art.

Bedfordshire-based artist Andy Holden discusses a new use for public sculpture with Anthony Spira, Director of MK Gallery.

# KISSES FROM MK

**ANTHONY SPIRA:** As you grew up nearby, can you describe your relationship with MK?

**ANDY HOLDEN:** Milton Keynes was undoubtedly exotic. And seemed to be growing up in synch with me growing up. The Point was a multiplex-beacon, and the place we'd go to see Blockbusters. These fed America into my imagination, and Milton Keynes seemed a bit more like America after each subsequent film. Unlike Bedford, Milton Keynes seemed future orientated. It was built around a grid with labels like Midsummer Boulevard, and a vision that included having snow indoors all year round.

**AS:** A lot of your work has been related to public monuments and sculpture. Can you say why?

**AH:** I love public sculpture. Art on a scale that has to engage with the

outside world. In Marcel Proust's book *Swann's Way*, there's a twenty-something page description of a church spire from various vantage points, and how it helps you orientate yourself in the landscape. I used this passage to think about public sculpture, landmarks that give a space identity, that we re-encounter numerous times from numerous directions, in many weathers and many moods.

**AS:** The works on display in centre:mk and shown here come from your 'Kisses' series, 2013, when you photographed adolescent couples kissing on different public sculptures in MK. What prompted you to stage these romantic scenes here?

**AH:** It intuitively made sense to me. It came from a photo I'd taken of a couple kissing on the base of a public sculpture when I was travelling in

Germany eight or nine years ago. It was complete chance, but looked staged. I wanted to re-create this and Milton Keynes' strange abstract sculptures, lurking in corners I'd discovered whilst roaming around, were always at the back of my mind. It was certainly in tune with how Milton Keynes had seemed to me as a teenager.

## “Milton Keynes seemed like a film set ready to be activated”

**AS:** Can you say a bit more about this?

**AH:** I think public sculptures are interesting as they seem like totems of self-consciousness positioned in the street and this feeling of self-consciousness is underscored by the adolescents. Kissing when you're an adolescent is funny as you're trying to imitate what you've seen in films but you're thinking, 'does this look right?', while at the same time trying to be in the moment.

**AS:** Is that self-consciousness particular to sculptures in MK? You've recreated some of the city's most iconic sculptures as two dimensional stage sets. Why?

**AH:** Milton Keynes seemed, especially on a deserted Sunday morning, like a film set ready to be activated. The sculptures feel like key props in this. My encounter with blockbuster movies was central to my experience of the town in the 1980s, as something more like America. The sculptures are a big part of this feeling. I thought it would be interesting to imagine them as a backdrop for a play, or part of a film set. Here they work like backgrounds in fashion shoots, letting you know it's posed and fictional. They emphasise a few of the feelings I mentioned, the way the planning of Milton Keynes required imagining spaces that would be needed in the future.

[www.andyholdenartist.com](http://www.andyholdenartist.com)



[www.mkgallery.org](http://www.mkgallery.org)



Milton Keynes Kisses, Andy Holden, 2013

[www.cityclubmk.org](http://www.cityclubmk.org)

# THE NEW PIONEERS

## Townley and Bradby play out in Milton Keynes

In the 1970s, the Milton Keynes Development Corporation worked with artists to help bring new communities together. In a series of new projects reflecting this pioneering approach, artist duo Townley and Bradby will be in residence for two years in Conniburrow and the neighbouring communities of Fishermead, Downs Barn and Springfield. Often working with their three children, the artists incorporate mundane domestic routine and the emotional intensity of family life into their art. Here, they talk about their first impressions of Milton Keynes and how they see the project developing.

“For the past six or seven years, we’ve been trying to find a way for our art and parenting to have equal importance. Sometimes our children leave us to get on with what we are doing, and sometimes they choose to join in. Recently we did a ten minute performance at a literature festival in Colchester where all five of us asked each other questions. They were the kind of questions that get asked all the time at home like:

What milk is this? Can you leave me alone? Why can’t you tell her to stop? Are you being a bear? That music in the bathroom, do you not like that music? Where are my tap shoes?

The rule was that none of us could answer any of the questions, we just had to fire back another question in response. The performance ended by all of us falling in a heap.

As artists, we’re inspired by the way our children use their surroundings. Wherever they are, they always find a way to play. In Milton Keynes, we noticed how much thought has gone into the outdoor spaces: the separate infrastructure for traffic, cyclists and pedestrians; the light, airy underpasses; and the generous courtyards within each block of housing in Conniburrow. But urban spaces aren’t always used as designed and we hope to think, with MK residents, of new playful ways to use some of these spaces.

Our first visit to Milton Keynes sparked some ideas for things we might do -

a heely ballet in centre:mk; a cyclo-marathon covering every inch of every cycle path in MK; a pop-up family car wash as a way to meet people; singing different notes in an underpass until we find the one that makes it resonate the most; a city-wide bottle flipping contest. These could all be ways to begin thinking about how to dress up, make noise and occupy the public spaces in MK.”

*Townley and Bradby will work with participatory artist Georgina Manly and a research student from the University of Northampton linking up with Big Local Conniburrow, a groundbreaking project run by the local community.*



Townley & Bradby visit Milton Keynes, 2016. Photo Snoot & Gobo



Pupils from St Thomas Aquinas School with artist James Aldridge



Pupils from Holne Chase School take part in workshops

“I never realised Milton Keynes was so green”

Last year children from four primary schools, St Thomas Aquinas, Holne Chase, Brooklands Farm and Pepper Hill, took part in workshops in Campbell Park and Howe Park Wood throughout the changing seasons. James led the groups in exploring the natural environment - from making casts of animals’ footprints, to weaving shelters using sticks and creating stories from the noises in the wood. As one of the children commented, ‘I thought art was something that you just paint but actually it’s nature and stuff around you’. Victoria Mayes, Head of Learning at MK Gallery talks to James about the project:

**VICTORIA MAYES:** Had you ever visited Milton Keynes before working on this project? What surprised or inspired you about the city?

**JAMES ALDRIDGE:** I used to visit Milton Keynes as a child, to go shopping with my family in the late 70s and early 80s, but I hadn’t been back for 25 or 30 years. The sapling-lined roads that I remembered have matured and it was exciting to have a chance to explore some of the parkland and wooded areas. I never realised that Milton Keynes is as ‘green’ as it is.

**VM:** Can you talk about the kind of experiences you create in the workshops?

**JA:** I give children opportunities to stop and look, to feel, smell and listen, and then to record and share these experiences creatively. The physical artworks they make are often remarkable but the real value lies in the way each individual learns through connecting their body, emotions, imagination and intellect with their environment.

**VM:** Was there a particularly memorable moment?

**JA:** What sticks in my mind is the children’s hunger for these kinds of experiences. There was very little in the way of nervousness or self-consciousness. The muddy woods, birdsong and wide-open spaces spoke to their innate creativity. It was fantastic to witness.

All of the children taking part had the opportunity to achieve their Discover Arts Award and an exhibition in February in MK Gallery’s Project Space will show some of the project outcomes.

“Dress up, make noise, occupy the public space”

## INTO THE WOODS

### Green Town Group explores a city of trees

Milton Keynes aimed to be a city greener than the surrounding countryside, and pioneer residents were greeted with a voucher that entitled them to a free tree. Today, fifty years later, over a quarter of the city is still open green space. Green Town Group used the green spaces and pockets of woodland around the city as inspiration for a series of workshops with children and families led by Wiltshire based artist James Aldridge. James is concerned that ‘we live in an age where children spend more and more time indoors, disconnected from the ecosystems on which we depend’.

Sound artist Caroline Devine talks to Iain Standen of Bletchley Park about work on her major new commission for City Club, swapping London for MK, and the sounds of a unique city.



# LISTENING TO MILTON KEYNES

**IAIN STANDEN:** Congratulations, Caroline, on being selected to make a new digital artwork for City Club. There was a very strong shortlist of artists from across the UK and beyond but perhaps your knowledge of Milton Keynes and track record here gave you the edge. Could you tell us a bit about your work?

**CAROLINE DEVINE:** I am a sound artist and composer and aim to create playful and unexpected encounters with sound. My works explore hidden voices and signals that are ordinarily imperceptible, or in some way absent. I'm also interested in the use of physical space as an element of composition. I've made works that explore the natural acoustic resonances of stars, VLF radio signals, scientific data, noise and near silences for a range of locations from an 18th century tower to a lift, the Thinktank Science Museum and Alan Turing's Hut at Bletchley Park.

**IS:** Did moving to Milton Keynes impact on your work?

**CD:** When I moved here from London ten years ago I set about exploring my acoustic surroundings - making recordings using binaural, hydrophone and electromagnetic recording techniques and developing compositions to present as multi-channel sound installations. I made a number of works that investigated the voices and sounds of the area, including a work about the underground music community that grew up with Milton Keynes.

My practice was fairly experimental - using a DIY approach as the technology just didn't exist to do what I wanted. Simon Wright at MK Gallery had just started his Scratch Night programme

which was a great platform to try out my early sound installations and to meet other artists. I also gained my amateur radio licence attending evening classes held in a freezing cold generator hut at Bletchley Park, which then led to making a composed documentary for BBC Radio 3 about the relationship between radio amateurs and astronauts on the International Space Station.



Autopia, Caroline Devine, 2011

I enjoy the dynamics of working with the acoustic environment outdoors and have had a number of opportunities to do this in the city. The Open University commissioned me to make an installation that celebrated the 50th anniversary of Harold Wilson's famous University of the Air speech and involved hiding over 100 speakers throughout the grounds of the university campus.

**IS:** What sounds do you particularly associate with Milton Keynes?

**CD:** When I moved here I felt as though I had the opportunity to catch up on several years of broken sleep! I'd been living in Kings Cross, accustomed to helicopters, sirens, traffic, at all hours, so the comparative quiet of Milton Keynes was a huge - if slightly disconcerting - relief. It was so quiet I would lie in bed listening - wondering whether I could actually hear ivy growing on the side of the house.

Wildlife is audible here and I've made many recordings of birds and bats but all daytime sound is underpinned by the keynote of cars. In his book *The Soundscape - Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, R Murray Schafer, refers to hi and lo-fi soundscapes. As soon as I moved here, I was struck by the hi-fi soundscapes that exist in the centre of Milton Keynes. In spite of the berms (raised grass banks to protect housing from



Sound system: Campbell Park at daybreak, Central Milton Keynes. Photo courtesy Parks Trust and Drone MK

**“As soon as I moved here, I was struck by the hi-fi soundscapes that exist in the centre of Milton Keynes”**

traffic) the noise from the grid roads is hard to ignore or get away from. However, because of its design Milton Keynes has an intriguing and singular soundscape - the teardrop lakes are an example of wonderful green space with an extraordinarily loud accompaniment of traffic.

**IS:** What aspect of Milton Keynes' heritage are you particularly interested in exploring?

**CD:** I'm interested in sonic heritage and the way that sound relates to people, memory, time and place. Milton Keynes was a countryside shaped into a city so there is an interesting dynamic between the imposition of a city grafted onto the surrounding countryside and the inherited characteristics and attributes of the older communities. One aspect of the work I am quite excited about is the sonification of archive material that is not in audio form - the transformation of text to sound for example.

**IS:** How are you planning to develop this commission?

**CD:** I am interested in the way that those who grew up with the city, unencumbered by age-old customs and inherited culture, had a certain freedom and a kind of authorship as to how Milton Keynes would develop. I am starting a sonic investigation of Milton Keynes that will include sounds, signals and voices from the city. I'll be listening, researching

archives, making field recordings and interviews and presenting this work both in the form of a multi-channel sound installation and online.

And of course, there is the distinctive look of the place when viewed from the air - as we've become so accustomed to in the digital age. When I began researching old material from the planning of Milton Keynes, I was struck by just how similar the city centre looks when viewed from above today to Helmut Jacoby's futuristic aerial drawing published in *Architectural Design* magazine in 1974 that predicted what Milton Keynes would look like at the start of the 1990s. I'm looking forward to what will show up during my research - during a recent visit to the Cowper & Newton Museum in Olney, I encountered the extraordinary summer house where William Cowper wrote many of his poems. The poems themselves often refer to the noise around him and his lifelong mission to escape the din - I was also struck by his descriptions of the River Ouse.

I am interested in the development of technology and its sounds - the Bombe machine and Colossus at Bletchley Park, the signals of covert communications and the trend towards silence of digital technology. I'll be thinking about how the soundscape has changed through time and searching for voices that can open this up to our ears.

[www.carolinedevine.co.uk](http://www.carolinedevine.co.uk)

Citylab is the engine of City Club, a wide-ranging programme of talks, screenings, exhibitions, workshops and events that will take place while MK Gallery undergoes a major expansion. Throughout this period MK Gallery's Project Space remains open, hosting a series of exhibitions inspired by Milton Keynes. We preview the first of these by Josh Gurner below, and look forward to some of the activities that will animate the MK Gallery Event Space and public sites across the city centre.

# GROUND CONTROL TO CITYLAB

## Through the Concrete

Collaboration lies at the heart of the work of Josh Gurner. He's a musician and videographer who graduated from Lost & Found, a ground-breaking project initiated by MK Gallery that connected young people with the cultural life of the city.

For the last few months, Josh has been working with a group of teenagers from across Milton Keynes, looking at their experience of a unique landscape to create a new film, *Through the Concrete*. This explores their detailed knowledge of the city from a focused perspective: all the participants are women.

Josh's family background keeps him anchored in Milton Keynes. His maternal grandparents moved to the city from Sri Lanka in the 1970s, and his father managed the legendary indie club Bar Central in the 1990s, playing an eclectic mix of reggae, rock, salsa and drum n bass. He wants the new film to be "a celebration of Milton Keynes and a study of the people who make the city their home".

Milton Keynes has a rich history of community video. Fishermead was home to a television station, Channel 40, which broadcast across the cable network connecting the new city homes. Early residents were invited to make television programmes, using their own voices to talk about life in the new city.

*Through the Concrete* will be shown at MK Gallery's Project Space throughout January. During the project a further new film will be created in the spirit of early community video at a special multi-media event.



Josh Gurner at work in Milton Keynes. Photo Ayesah Bernard



Events are at the heart of Citylab: Baffic & Morell Maison take part in BYOB 4, MK Gallery, 2015. Photo Churchill Studios

## Garden Without Walls

Citylab is for all ages. A season of films will look at the relationship between art and gardening, taking its cue from the new garden that City Club lead artists Gareth Jones and Nils Norman are designing.

On 24 February there will be a screening in the Event Space of *I, Claude Monet*, which looks at one of the most famous artist-designed gardens in the world, Monet's own at Giverny. The evening will begin with a talk by gardening historian Dr. Twigs Way, who has written about garden gnomes, allotments and gardening in wartime.

Citylab will also feature discussions around the future development of Milton Keynes, looking at topics such as public art, place-making, and new technology. We are kick-starting the conversation with a rare public screening on 20 January of *Milton Keynes: A Village City*. It's a film showing the birth of the city.

Citylab is based at the MK Gallery site, but we are also planning to turn some less-familiar outdoor spaces across the city centre into temporary stages for events. Watch out for a performance from Musarc, a progressive amateur choir that responds to the relationship between sound and architecture. Visit our website [www.cityclubmk.org](http://www.cityclubmk.org) to keep up to date with the programme.



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City Club is produced by MK Gallery with Bletchley Park, Milton Keynes Arts Centre, Milton Keynes International Festival & The Stables, and On The Verge.

We are also delighted to be working with Big Local Conniburrow, Cowper & Newton Museum, Living Archive, Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre, Milton Keynes Museum, The Open University, and the University of Northampton.

City Club is supported by the National Lottery through Arts Council England, by MK Council as part of the MK50 anniversary celebrations, the Ernest Cook Trust, The Open University, and the University of Northampton.

With thanks to the City Club Steering Group: Cllr Liz Gifford, (Chair), Lucy Bedford, Niki Braithwaite, Shane Downer, Cllr Derek Eastman, Monica Ferguson, Briony Fox, Cllr David Hopkins, Anouar Kassim, Louise Izod, Anthony Spira, Francesca Skelton, Iain Standen, Emma-Jayne Taylor, Sunita Yeomans.







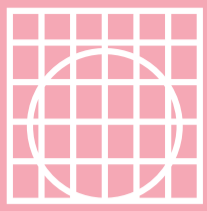




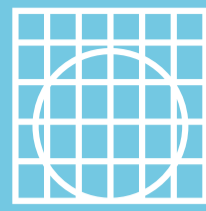

# MK CALLING

Are you an artist, musician, performer or writer living or working in Milton Keynes or simply inspired by its history and design? In spring 2017 MK Gallery will launch the third edition of MK Calling – a season of exhibitions and events to celebrate the creativity of our city. Sign up to our newsletter to receive further information about how to take part at [www.mkgallery.org/information/join/](http://www.mkgallery.org/information/join/)

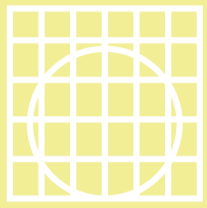
MK Calling 2016 exhibiting artists gathered outside MK Gallery. Photo Derek Wales



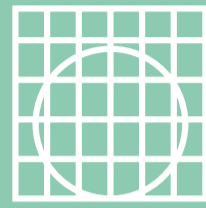
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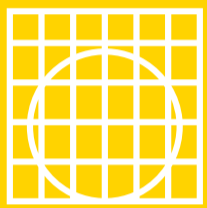
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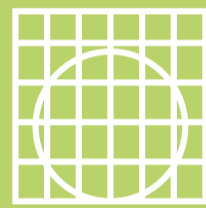
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