

MA Curatorial Practice – Reaching Audiences Module



Report on Social Knitwork Project

1st May – 7th June 2021

Katherine Dawe Schmeisser

Student ID – 356337



Abstract

Social Knitwork is a collaborative project between Artist Lou Baker and Curator Kat Dawe Schmeisser. An ambitious multi-site, socially engaged art project. The project is a timely intervention and focuses on how art can be used to build connections between local communities after the extended isolation of pandemic-induced lockdown. The project's hub is located at [The Art Cohort](#), an Artspace near Bath Spa University's Locksbrook campus. The Artspace was founded by Dawe Schmeisser in 2019 as a curatorial space to champion emerging artists. Through this project Baker and Dawe Schmeisser aim to cultivate connections with and between local people and places, and, potentially, a worldwide virtual audience, through sculpture, performance and social engagement. We'll 'knit together' these disparate elements, countering the isolation of current social distancing restrictions and exploring ways to move forward into a post-pandemic future. It will be empowering, fostering a sense of belonging, giving people who have experienced pandemic-induced isolation a chance to have a voice and to make art together.

Introduction

The focus for my research and professional practice project is a collaborative working relationship with artist Lou Baker. This collaboration culminating in a physical installation of the artist's work at The Art Cohort in Bath and a public participatory project from 1st May to 7th June 2021.

As a Curator I am interested in Art as a vehicle for social engagement and change. My current research interests centre around how art can be used to build and sustain a sense of connection and belonging in the local community after the enforced, extended isolation of lockdown. This collaborative project with Artist Lou Baker invites the public to share ways we can work together to develop creative strategies for recovery and regeneration as we move beyond the 'new normal' of the global pandemic and re-build social connections. A core research question is how can we reconnect through art?

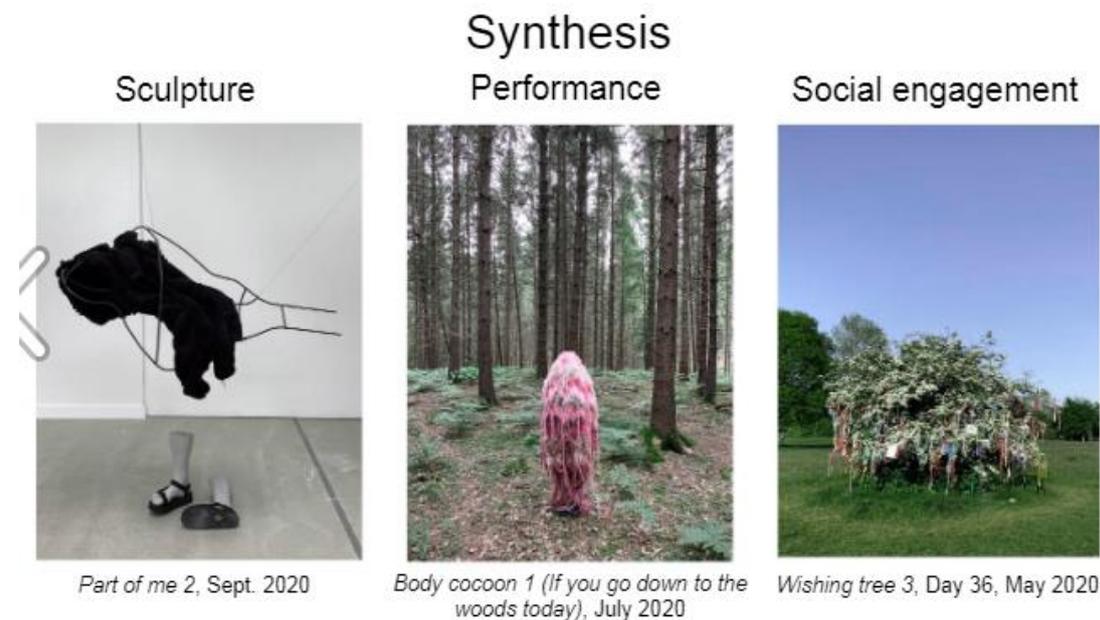
About the Artist

'Lou Baker makes public things that are normally private. She is both a maker and a facilitator. Her work provokes a range of conflicting responses; attraction, repulsion, horror and hilarity. Some aspects of her practice investigate the transformation of materials and, increasingly, some focus on social engagement. Making intellectual connections between material, process and concept, her work has a confessional element, as personal memories

resonate with universal themes. Stimulating conversations with her audience through performative actions, she facilitates opportunities for the viewer to become an active participant, to find a voice. Her works are provocations – often interactive, collaborative and participatory.'

Source: Artist's Website at www.loubakerartist.co.uk (Accessed 6th May 2021)

The artist self-identifies as a sculptor: 'I'm a sculptor and my making is increasingly performative. Traces of the form and force of my body are evident in the work.' (Baker, 2020) Baker's current research explores ways to synthesise the three strands of her knitting practice - sculpture, performance and social engagement. Dawe Schmeisser is interested in art as a vehicle for social engagement and change. At the time we started to collaborate the artist was critically looking at how to synthesis the three elements of her practice: '*I'm imagining a glorious, visceral, immersive, participatory spectacle which syncretises the complexities of my practice into a coherent, interdisciplinary whole*' (Baker, 2021). The project quickly coalesced around bringing to life these three elements using multiple venues to engage an audience across a gallery space, the physical public sphere and online.



Source: Lou Baker - [Lou Baker, Self and Other, Jan 2021 by Lou Baker - issuu](#) (accessed February 2021)

Knitting

Knitting transforms a line into a network of multiple connections. Baker's idiosyncratic research shows that knitting in public stimulates curiosity and conversations. Knitting is a people magnet; the artist's experience is when knitting in public, strangers talk to her. Knitting is as non-threatening activity and research has found that its side-by-side nature involves little or no eye contact, which promotes freedom in conversation (Baker, 2020).

Using knitting performance as a metaphor, during the project Baker makes visible those growing connections, knitting an installation which will develop throughout the project inside the exhibition space at The Art Cohort. Traditionally, knitting has associations with

comfort and the private sphere; it's functional, perfect and finished. Baker subverts these expectations, making abstract, unravelling forms.

Baker explains, *'I normally knit in public, making abstract, sculptural forms which are often unravelling. The process of knitting is transformative; it manipulates a line into a three-dimensional form by creating a network of multiple connections. Focusing on making connections in the local community, I will knit in public, as live performance, in The Art Cohort and in the neighbourhood, building a changing installation in the indoor space which will develop over the course of the month.'* (Baker, 2021).

The title of the project 'Social Knitwork' is a play on words, the idea of joining people together in a (social) network through the act of knitting.

Participatory Art and Social Engagement

Socially engaged practice is defined by Tate as, *'art that is collaborative, often participatory and involves people as the medium or material of the work. It's also referred to as social practice or socially engaged art, can involve any artform which involves people and communities in debate, collaboration or social interaction. The participatory element of socially engaged practice, is key, with the works created often holding equal or less important to the collaborative act of creating them.'* Okwui Enwezor argues that political and social catalysts (like a pandemic) instigates a *'reevaluation of the nature of artistic work and a reconfiguration of the artist in relation to economic, social and political institutions.'* (Enwezor in Wexler, 2019).

To broaden the project's reach in the public sphere, we set up a trail of participatory installations in nearby outdoor, public spaces inviting passers-by to bring something to add next time they walk that way. The intention is for participants to become part of an ongoing socially distanced 'conversation', sharing ways we can work together to develop creative strategies for recovery and regeneration as we move beyond the 'new normal' of the pandemic. The public can add their thoughts and objects to the installations physically or send messages virtually via social media as symbolic acts of reconnecting, debate and social exchange (Helguera, 2011).

A direct inspiration for the socially engaged nature of this project is the work of Situations, a Bristol-based 'arts organisation dedicated to producing and commissioning remarkable arts projects in the public realm and unconventional locations', produced by curator Claire Doherty. In particular, the collaborative project 'Sanctum' with Theaster Gates in 2015.

'In autumn 2015, a remarkable structure arose from within the bombed-out remains of Temple Church in Bristol. For 24 days, 24 hours a day, the site was transformed into an intimate place of listening, in which to hear the city like never before. Between 6pm on 29th October until 6pm on 21st November, Theaster Gates' Sanctum hosted a continuous programme of sound over 552 hours, sustained by performers, musicians and bands in a temporary structure within the shell of Temple Church, Bristol.

Having sought out discarded and dormant materials from former places of labour and religious devotion across Bristol, Gates built this extraordinary work, working alongside AN-Architecture.

Entitled Sanctum, the artist invited musicians and performers across Bristol to sustain a performance of sound and spoken word continuously for 24 days, 24 hours a day. Sanctum was open to visitors day and night, capacity remaining limited to ensure the intimacy of the space. Whether a headlining band, spoken word artist or gospel choir this secret schedule contributed to the sense of Sanctum as a gathering space for collaboration and new encounters.'



Sanctum, Temple Church, Bristol

Source: Situations Website - www.situations.org.uk/projects/theaster-gates-sanctum

"I'm engaged in an open dialogue concerning the challenges of people's right to the city – our total right to live fully, govern thoughtfully and have our desires fulfilled as much as our needs met." (Gates, 2015).

'Gates set about fashioning a temporary, intimate gathering space for just 50 people at a time. It was then the decision to sustain the sound of Sanctum, as a continuous, unending series of performances, readings, notes, chords, spoken words, protests and talks day and night from the evening of 29th October to the evening of 21st November, which then gave the project its primary organising principle. Sanctum unfolds over time – minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, 24 by 24.'

Source: Sanctum, Theaster Gates Programme Guide

This concept of encounters evident in Sanctum and the durational nature of the project and relationship with participants inspired the Social Knitwork project, particularly the extended time period of the installation, enabling engagement with a community over a five week period to allow encounters and conversations to continue and visits to happen again and again to the same space as the artwork changes and grows day by day.

The work of Rinkrit Tirivanija also provides inspiration for this project, in particular *pad thai* (1990). Tirivanija cooked and served food for exhibition visitors. His work is intrinsically about bringing people together, and enabling interaction and exchange through a spirit of generosity. Bourriaud highlights Tirivanija as a key practitioner of the Relational Aesthetics movement of the 1990s. The communal experience of eating encapsulates the paradigm of relational art. In Tirivanija's show there was no artwork on display, no big political issue to be addressed, instead people enjoying food in the replica of a kitchen. Nonetheless, Bourriaud saw this work as revolutionary. The participatory element and the sense of community were seen as the answer to '*alienation in postmodern society*' and relational art came to be the name for all those similar projects which bring people together by recreating environments

where people enjoy shared activities (Bourriard, 1998). The parallel of Social Knitwork bringing people together in direct response to a year of pandemic isolation feels poignant.

Audience for Social Knitwork

The exhibition was planned as both a physical and virtual experience. At the initial planning stage it was unknown whether the public would be able to enter the artspace due to pandemic restrictions. The Social Knitwork project aims to be accessible, inclusive and engage diverse audiences, including:

- intergenerational supporters of The Art Cohort in particular, families with small children; all age groups experiencing social isolation; and people wanting to learn and connect
- Socio-economically disadvantaged families via The Nest Project charity
- Over 55s age group via St. John's Foundation charity
- General public out walking, including people not normally interested in art

We also aimed to engage more widely through targeted communications:

- mailing lists, social media followers, personal contacts
- wider Bath Spa University community
- wider City of Bath/South West via press
- wider art communities

Audience Development

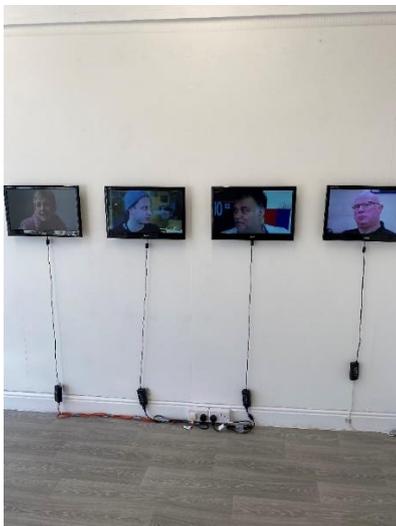
In 2019 I founded The Art Cohort, an intergenerational community-focused artspace at 13 Chelsea Road, Bath as a curator-led space championing emerging art and artists. Chelsea Road is a busy shopping street full of independent shops and cafes in a residential neighbourhood of the city. There is ongoing footfall on the street, local residents and workers using the amenities.

The Art Cohort belief is that everyone is an artist and its mission is to nurture and grow that creativity, from professional artists through to adults and children who want to get hands on and be creative. The Art Cohort is a mixed use artspace designed to break down barriers to the public entering and accessing the space. The space has been designed to enable an intergenerational audience, both those already engaged in art and those not to access the space.



The Art Cohort – Artspace at 13 Chelsea Road, Bath opened in 2019

Through The Art Cohort platform I have developed audiences that could be engaged for the Social Knitwork project – in particular, residents within one mile radius of the Artspace, including many families and the shopkeepers and businesses of Chelsea Road. In 2020 I curated a project with artist Andrew Brooks which explored the oral histories of the community of Chelsea Road – this project was key in building relationships within the immediate community:



Story Telling / Telling Stories Installation Shots at The Art Cohort, March 2020



Wera Hobhouse MP with Artist Andrew Brooks and Curator Kat Dawe Schmeisser at the Exhibition Opening of Story Telling / Telling Stories, March 2020

The Art Cohort followers were engaged in the Social Knitwork project and happenings through email newsletter and social media via Instagram, Facebook and Twitter platforms to share information and invite participation.

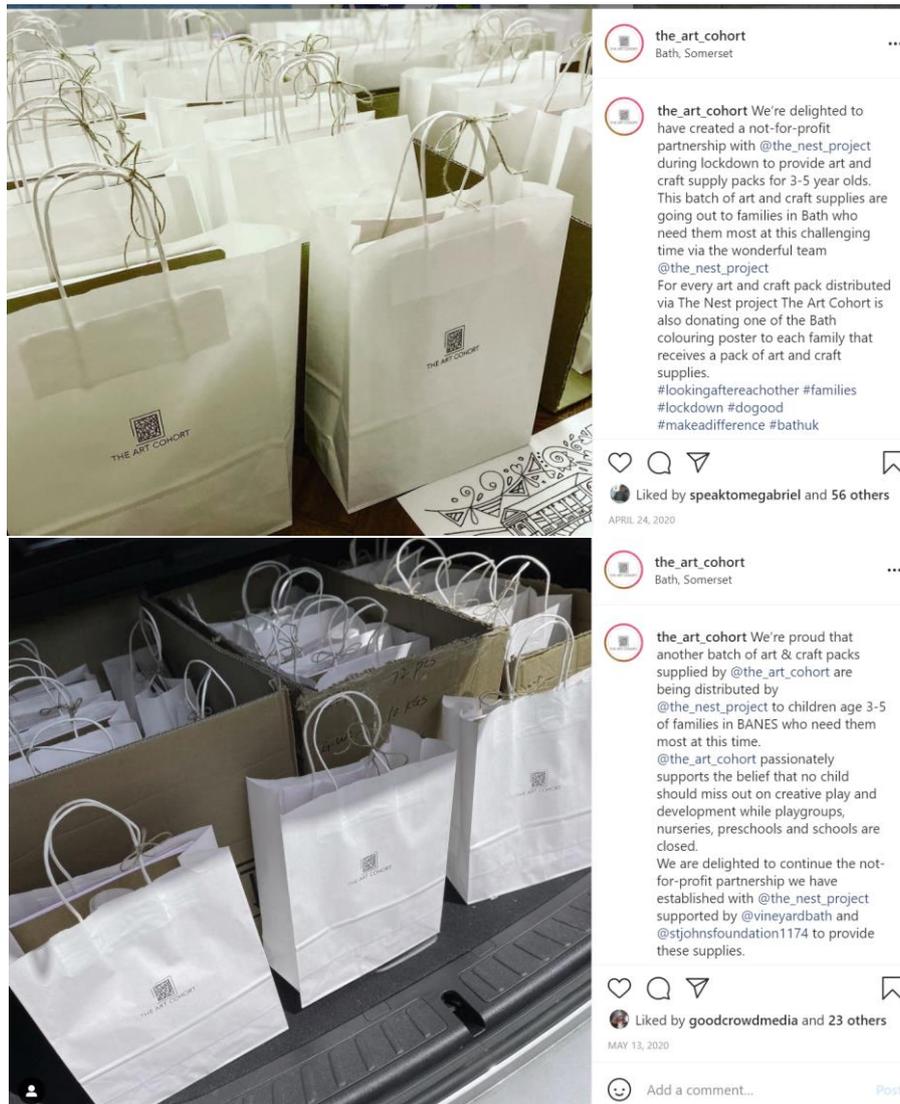
New audiences also needed to be developed for this project – in particular the Artist and I wanted to engage with older people experiencing social isolation due to the pandemic and low socio-economic families in the city, in particular those who would not normally engage with an art exhibition.

'Despite outward appearances, Bath & North East Somerset is one of the most unequal places in the country. From one end to another the differences in literacy levels, life expectancy, unemployment and life chances are stark.' Source: stjohnsbath.org.uk

'Twerton West and Kingsmead rank within the 15% most deprived areas in England. Whiteway/ Southdown and Foxhill North/Combe Down rank within the 20% most deprived areas in England.' Source: www.thenestproject.co.uk

We applied to Bath Spa University Harbutt Fund (see Appendix 1) and received £1000 funding towards venue cost and materials for the project. This enabled us to reach out to specific audiences through providing art materials to engage with the project. In order to reach these specific target groups I contacted The Nest Project, who support families with children aged 0-5 years within Bath tackling family poverty in the city, and St. John Foundation, a charity in Bath that works *'to build communities where children can grow into happy, healthy and educated members of society, while continuing to honour our founding principle of supporting older adults to live independently.'* Source: www.stjohnsbath.org.uk

A relationship existed with The Nest project and St. John's Foundation from a collaborative project in 2020 during the first pandemic lockdown. The partnership saw The Art Cohort and The Nest Project deliver eighty Art and Craft packs to families in greatest need, to ensure children did not miss out on development opportunities because of the closure of schools, pre-schools and playgroups. This established relationship was essential to reach the same audience for the Social Knitwork project as credibility existed and relationships with key people were in place. St John's Foundation had funded the project in 2020 and as a result this connection enabled direct access to publicise to the Over 55s age group in Bath via St John's newsletters and What's On communications.



Partnership with The Nest Project to deliver Art & Craft supplies to families in Bath – April 2020

In order to develop connections with the broader local community, Baker and I set up a trail of participatory art installations in nearby outdoor spaces to The Art Cohort. Each site approximately ten minutes' walk from The Art Cohort with visual connections to the main installation. Passers-by were invited to bring something to add to the installations next time they walk that way. Every interaction changing the installations aesthetically and part of a socially distanced 'conversation' of accumulating thoughts, ideas and objects. The project aims to engage a diverse audience and enables them to use their voice through accessing creative practice by 'making' and participating in a temporary public art installation. The project also extends to much more eclectic, global audiences through social media, inviting people to send messages to be added to the installations.

Through this project connections are made with and between local people and places, and, a virtual audience, through the three strands of practice - sculpture, performance and social engagement. The intention being to 'knit together' disparate elements, with curiosity and

delight, creating a social network which counters social distancing restrictions and explores ways to move forward into a post-pandemic future.

Marketing / Publicity

In April 2021 I sent out a press release for Social Knitwork (Appendix 2) to press contacts across Bristol and Bath. Coverage on BBC Radio Bristol, in local periodicals and Bath Spa University website helped to build awareness of the project and engage audiences beyond the current followers of The Art Cohort and the artist's network. (See Appendix 7 for press coverage.) The project was publicised online via The Art Cohort website and via The Art Cohort and Lou Baker's social media platforms. The existence of an audience already engaged with The Art Cohort platform meant that awareness of the project spread quickly among local residents and visitors entered the Artspace to find and explore the project and installations.



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://www.theartcohort.co.uk>. The page features the logo for 'THE ART COHORT' at the top, followed by a navigation menu with links: Home, About, Gallery & Shop, Art Consultancy, Studio Hire, Contact Us, and And so it begins... A central image shows a person interacting with a large, web-like installation made of white threads and colorful wool. Below the image, the text reads: 'Social Knitwork at The Art Cohort 1st May – 7th June 2021.' The main body of text describes the project as a collaborative effort between The Art Cohort and artist Lou Baker, supported by Bath Spa University's Harbutt Fund. It details the installation process, the artist's residency, and the public's role in creating the artwork. A list of events is provided, including a virtual artist talk, an Instagram live walking tour, and a virtual knit-along. The page concludes with a 'Walking Trail Map' section, explaining the purpose of the map and providing a link to download a PDF document.

Home About Gallery & Shop Art Consultancy Studio Hire Contact Us And so it begins... Q

Social Knitwork
at The Art Cohort
1st May – 7th June 2021.

Social Knitwork is a collaborative project between The Art Cohort and artist, Lou Baker, supported by Bath Spa University's Harbutt Fund. The project focuses on how art can be used to build connections between local communities after the extended isolation of lockdown.

Lou Baker will create a web-like installation in The Art Cohort Exhibition Space, drawing in space with wool.

Knitting transforms a line into a network of multiple connections; Lou Baker will be in residence during the exhibition, knitting and adding to the installation which will develop throughout the month of May inside the Artspace, making visible those growing connections. Visitors will see the installation grow like an organic body day by day.

During the exhibition a number of outdoor installation sites will be in Bath, near The Art Cohort. Members of the public, walkers, families, neighbours and passers-by are invited to add their thoughts and objects to the installations physically the next time they pass that way or send messages virtually via social media which we will add. The location of the external sites forms a walking tour of these temporary art installations, which take approximately 1 hour to complete.

The IMAGINATION STATION with art materials will be accessible to the public at The Art Cohort throughout the exhibition to make something to add to the installations.

We invite you to become part of an ongoing socially distanced 'conversation', sharing ways we can work together to develop creative strategies for recovery and regeneration as we move beyond the 'new normal' of the pandemic.

A programme of free events will take place online alongside the exhibition:

Thursday 13th May, 2pm – Virtual Artist Talk with Lou Baker – Social Knitwork: Thinking of the Future [BOOK HERE](#)

Tuesday 18th May, 2-3pm – Instagram Live Walking Tour with Lou Baker and Kat Dawe Schmeisser

Thursday 27th May, 6-7pm – 'Knit Together' Virtual Knit Along Social with Lou Baker [BOOK A PLACE HERE](#)

Join us to 'knit together' our community in Bath countering the isolation of the last year.

Social Knitwork: Walking Trail Map
1st May – 7th June 2021

[Why not walk the trail?](#)

How do we make connections between one another as we emerge from the extended isolation of lockdown?

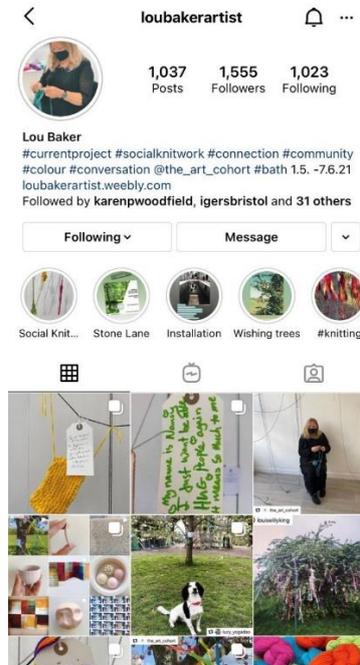
Please bring something to add or visit the Imagination Station at The Art Cohort to make something to add to the indoor installation there and the 4 outdoor installations and join the conversation.

[Click Map Image to Download PDF document of Walking Trail Map](#)



Source: The Art Cohort website at www.theartcohort.co.uk (Accessed 6th May 2021)

Daily updates were posted on social media platforms – Instagram, Facebook and Twitter – on both The Art Cohort and Lou Baker’s accounts.



Source: *The Art Cohort Instagram account @the_art_cohort (accessed 15th May 2021) and Lou Baker Instagram account @loubakerartist (accessed 6th May 2021)*

Exhibition Installation at The Art Cohort

Baker and Dawe Schmeisser carried out some experimental research in April 2021 at The Michael Pennie Gallery, Bath Spa University in advance of set up of the exhibition at The Art Cohort to determine the most appropriate method and materials for the Social Knitwork indoor installation.



Photos of Experiment 1 by Baker and Dawe Schmeisser ahead of the Exhibition Installation, April 2021 – research determining mechanism to hang a web-like installation

The creation of the indoor Social Knitwork Installation at The Art Cohort was a day of performative work by Lou Baker, drawing in space with wool enacted during the public opening hours at the Artspace on Friday 30th April. The artist's drawing in space with wool was distinctly influenced by Eva Hesse's drawings in space and soft sculpture. The end result was a site-specific installation filling the space at The Art Cohort, engulfing visitors in its materiality and imbuing a sense of presence. As stated by Kwon there was an 'Indivisible relationship between the work and its site' (Kwon, p.12).



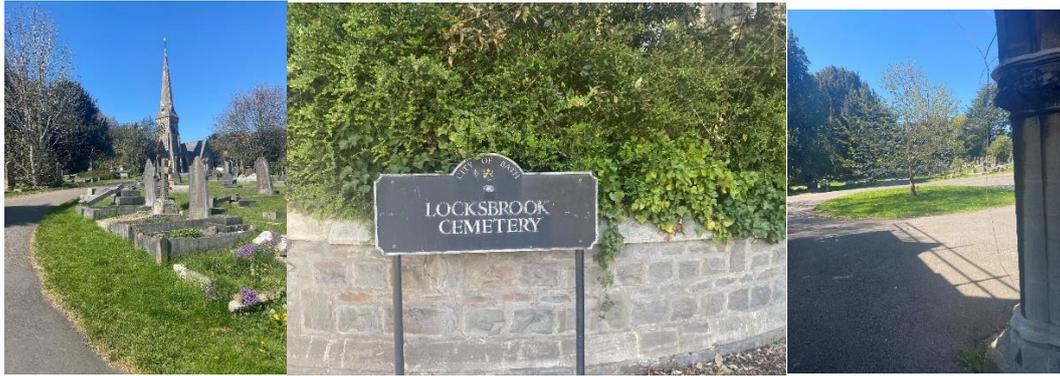
Lou Baker drawing in space at The Art Cohort – 30th April 2021

Link to time lapse video of Lou Baker Drawing in Space, Friday 30th April 2021 - <https://vimeo.com/549670077>

One of the first observations when installing the work at The Art Cohort was the tactile nature of the installation. Visitors to the space on the day of installation wanted to touch the work and were drawn to interact physically with the drawing in space. Hesse was asked about the tactile nature of her soft sculpture work, she responded, 'I'm not asking everybody to, but every time I've been in a place where I've seen my work, there were hands on it. I guess it was a greater involvement' (Hesse). This was certainly true for Social Knitwork.

Outdoor Installation Sites

At the original time of planning the exhibition (February 2021) it was unclear if the public would be able to enter the Exhibition Space due to government pandemic lockdown restrictions. In order to invite the greatest possible public participation we decided to set up a number of outdoor installation sites, in addition to the installation at The Art Cohort. We conducted research walking within a mile radius of The Art Cohort to identify outdoor green spaces in the city, popular with the public, e.g. cyclists, walkers and families, to ensure participation, with a tree that was eye catching and stood in its own space. Situating art in the public sphere, rather than just the gallery environment adds meaning (Kwon). The four sites identified through this research are illustrated below:



Locksbrook Cemetery, Bath



Royal Victoria Park, Bath



Kelson's Playing Field, Bath Riverside



Locksbrook Campus

Social Knitwork Walking Trail Map

The Social Knitwork Walking Trail map was developed as a visual guide for the public to explore the five Social Knitwork sites. The map was available as a downloadable pdf document on The Art Cohort website and printed on flyers and distributed to families via The Nest Project, tied to the outdoor installations and available to the public at The Art Cohort as an invitation to visit and add to the outdoor installations.



Outdoor Participatory Installations

The photos below show the outdoor installations on the first day of the project.



Locksbrook Cemetery Installation



Royal Victoria Park Installation



Kelson's Field Installation



Locksbrook Campus Installation

All photos taken – 1st May 2021

Impact

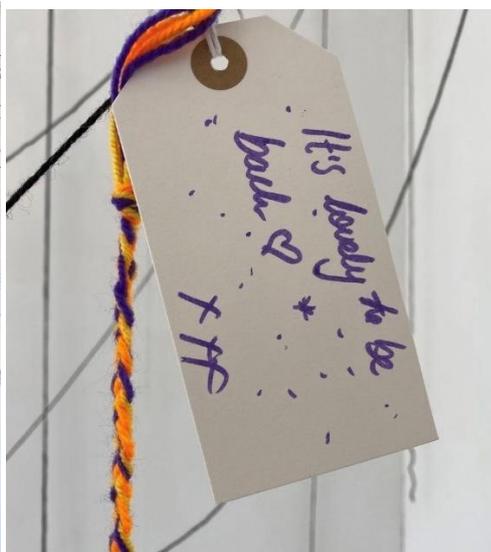
Artspace audience

It was apparent as soon as the Social Knitwork exhibition and outdoor installations opened that the public were captivated by the spirit of the project and wanted to interact. The installations have a strong relational aesthetic (Bourriaud), as 'people magnets' from the point of installation. Lou Baker was in residence knitting on the opening day and daily: talking to members of the public, having conversations about knitting, personal experiences during the pandemic and inviting the public to join her in making something to add to the installation. The Art Cohort social media platforms providing real time publicity of the artist in residence brought visitors into the space. The presence of the artist in residence, knitting and inviting people to add to the installation, was an embodiment of 'a political aspiration towards the greater "democratization" of art ... seek(ing) to engage "real people" outside the art world...to empower the audience by directly involving them in the making of the art work, either as subjects, or, better as producers themselves.' (Kwon, p. 107).



Lou Baker in Residence at The Art Cohort, Knitting – 1st May 2021

Of particular note is how much the Social Knitwork installation at The Art Cohort evolved on the opening day through public participation. Members of the public sat in the Exhibition Space, masked and socially distanced, making together and adding to the installation. The energy in the space was warm and collaborative; people articulated joy at connecting again. An observation of the project is the phenomenology of the physical experience of art, interactions with the growing knitted installation had a visceral nature for visitors, a direct encounter with a growing object, its physicality having an impact on the senses (unique to each visitor) and imbuing meaning, and demonstrating the power of physical embodiment. In a world where curators, arts producers and artists are grappling with the pandemic-fuelled digitalisation of art and exhibition-making this project underlines that materiality matters.





Public Participation – Social Knitwork Installation at The Art Cohort on Opening Day,

1st May 2021



Social Knitwork – Installation at The Art Cohort

During the first week the artist observed, *'Every interaction changes the aesthetic of my drawing and sculptural installations'* (Baker, 2021). As the project progressed the installation at The Art Cohort became an accumulation of responses – individual participants responding to each other, as well as responses to Baker's original drawing in space and provocations in her daily knitting additions. A daily blog of the project showcasing participatory acts by the public can be accessed online at [Social Knitwork, Day by Day \(weebly.com\)](http://SocialKnitwork,DaybyDay.weebly.com)

Participatory audience

The 'Imagination Station', was set-up at The Art Cohort with free art resources available to the public to make something to add to the indoor installations. Also offered was a knitting needle 'library' to enable visitors to borrow needles to help them start or re-explore knitting as a medium. A simple graphic invited the public to make something to add, giving some possible examples. Central to building momentum with the public was collaborative interaction between the artist and a community (Foster, Kwon).



What will you add?



Create a pom pom!

Make a cardboard ornament



Tie together a fabric friend!

Write a message!



...or do something completely different



Members of the public making at the 'Imagination Station'

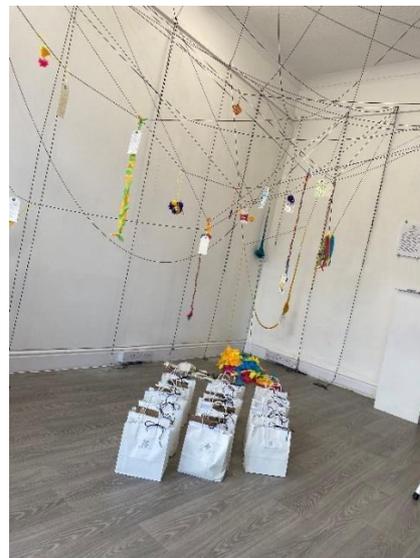
Lou Baker with visitors at The Art Cohort 'Imagination Station'

Initially we observed that participants were mainly female. This is an interesting observation on the gendering of textiles, especially knitting, as a female artform. Interestingly as the exhibition developed and the installation grew in volume participation increased across all genders and ages. The volume and accumulation of responses broke down inhibitions, and people sat to knit, reflect and communicate in the installation space, often spending an hour or more making and talking, warmed by the flow of conversation from Lou Baker and the pleasure of sharing in a creative, connected moment. Noted was the 'quasi-anthropological' role of the artist in this context. (Kwon).



Member of the public spending 1.5 hours knitting and talking with Lou Baker among the installation

Art packs were sent to families in Bath via The Nest Project, with the aim of art-making resources reaching low socio-economic families in the city to invite participation. On receiving the packs Vix Blythe at The Nest said an emphatic thank you and commented, *'it's an especially important donation at the current moment as so many things are closed because of the pandemic families in our community do not have their normal support and places to go.'* At the beginning of June 2021 we will seek feedback from the families who received the packs as to whether they engaged with the installations and/or visited The Art Cohort as a result of the packs, via a flyer asking 'What did you Make'? This type of engagement with an indirect audience means it can be challenging to directly evaluate impact.



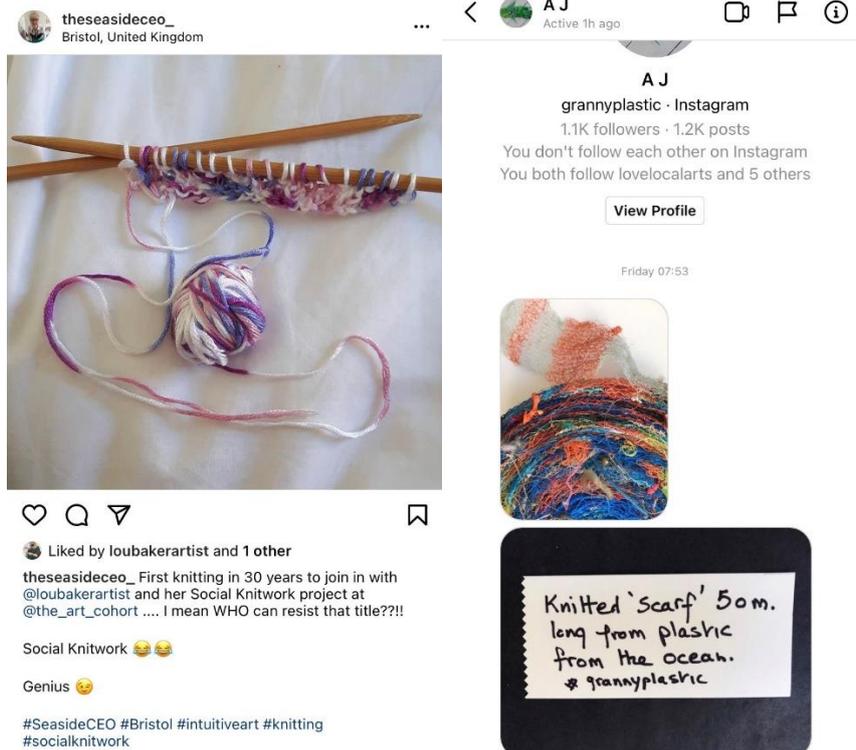
20 Art & Craft Packs delivered to The Nest Project on 6th May 2021 – see Appendix 6 for pack contents

Online audience

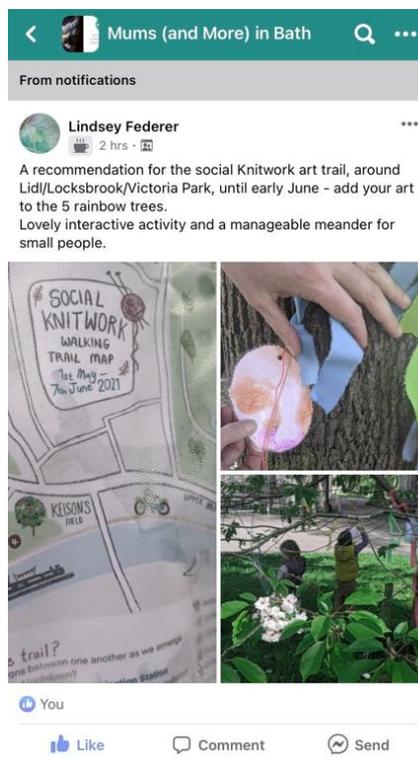
Over the course of the project an engaged online audience developed, posting updates on the evolving indoor and outdoor installations, and their participatory actions. Social media expanded the public sphere of the project to an audience beyond local publics. Rancière suggests that new kinds of artworks (like Social Knitwork) create new communities and ways for people to relate to one another. For him, this gives them a possible relation to politics (Davis, 2006). The politics of re-connection in a pandemic is evident within the installations and the public nature of the installations gave agency to the actors who engaged with them.



1. *Posted on Instagram by a member of the public, addition to the Locksbrook Cemetery installation – 3rd May 2021*
2. *Posted on Facebook by a member of the public, addition to the Locksbrook campus installation – 2nd May 2021*



Contributions to the installation sent virtually via Instagram – May 2021



Participant post in Facebook group Mums (and More) in Bath – 11th May 2021



Instagram post by @lwandlembede – addition to Locksbrook Campus installation – 17th May 2021

In general the installations inspired curiosity, creativity and connection. Claire Bishop discusses ‘relational antagonism’ in her thoughts on socially engaged art and this was evident in a small number of responses to the installations, including concerns the outdoor installation may pose a danger to wildlife. These polar responses to the work illustrate the interplay and tension between relational aesthetics (Bourriaud) and relational antagonism (Bishop).



Audience comments on a post in Walk Ride Bath Facebook group – 6th May 2021

Evaluation

At the time of writing this report the Social Knitwork project is yet to conclude. The project has deepened my research in the curatorial framework of socially engaged art, enabled a highly collaborative creative partnership with the artist and developed my practice in the expanded field of social practice. My primary observation of this field of practice is the multi-disciplinary nature of the research; in this context an amalgamation of aesthetics, anthropology, sociology, political discourse and knowledge exchange. The project has created a buzz of engagement online and in-person. A counter tracks the number of visitors to the Artspace engaging with the work, and for each person visiting The Art Cohort a quality encounter with the artist occurs. The artist sitting among the installation knitting and talking excavates personal stories and insights, connecting each encounter with the installation. The growing installations are a visualisation of the qualitative data of connections, however the visual representation is the tip of the iceberg and the greater data lies in the conversations that happen around each encounter.

A post-project evaluation between curator and artist, and partner organisations will occur. However, in reality we will never fully know the extent, impact and audience reach for this project because it is fluid, authentic and in the public sphere. Reflecting on the experience so far, Baker and I noted that we did not anticipate how much the project would catch the public imagination. The timing of the project in the reopening of society after lockdown has been key. Much of the engagement has come from passers-by in the busy Chelsea Road community, but the online awareness from Instagram, Facebook and generous press coverage has driven people of all ages into the Artspace. The walking trail has also made the project accessible 24/7 and engagement has not been limited to the public opening hours of The Art Cohort therefore. The level of participation this project has engendered has certainly developed my skills in curating participatory work. This project has provided practice-based experience and impetus to further continue my curatorial research in the field of social practice, in particular using The Art Cohort platform, with its highly engaged community of followers, to work with artists to develop future socially engaged projects.

Link to Social Knitwork project Video Essay: <https://vimeo.com/553640448>

Word Count – 3512 words

Bibliography

Becker, C. (2015) *Theater Gates*. Phaidon Press, London.

Bishop, C. (2004) *Antagonism and relational aesthetics*. Available at

<http://www.teamgal.com/production/1701/SS04October.pdf> (Accessed 7th May 2021)

Bishop, C. (2012) *Artificial hells: participatory art and the politics of spectatorship*. Verso, London.

Bourriaud, N. (2002) *Relational Aesthetics*. Les Presses du Reel, Paris.

Davis, B. (2006) *Ranciere, for dummies* Available

at: <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/books/davis/davis8-17-06.asp> (Accessed 7 May 2021)

Habernas, J. (unknown date) *The public sphere: An encyclopaedia article*. Available at

https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/56426612/STUDI_MEDIA_DAN_BUDAYA.pdf (Accessed 12th May 2021)

Helguera, P., (2011) *Education for Socially Engaged Art, A Materials and Techniques Book*.

Jorge Pinto Books, New York.

Kester, G. (2004) *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*.

University of California Press, Berkeley.

Kwon, M. (2004) *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Location Identity*. MIT Press,

Cambridge, Mass.

Matarasso, F. (1997) *Use or ornament?: the social impact of participation in the arts*. Comedia, Stroud.

Murav, H. (unknown date) *Marking time: Bergelson and Bergson*. Available at https://docserv.uniduesseldorf.de/servlets/DerivateServlet/Derivate-23711/12_Leket_Murav_marking_Time_A.pdf (Accessed 10th May 2021)

Nixon, M, (ed) (2002) *Eva Hesse*. MIT Press, Cambridge.

Rancière, J., (2004) *The politics of aesthetics: the distribution of the sensible*. Continuum, London.

Wexler, A. and Sabbaghi, V. (ed.) (2019) *Bridging Communities through Socially Engaged Art*. Routledge, New York.

Online Resources

The Art Cohort website www.theartcohort.co.uk

Social Knitwork Blog [Social Knitwork \(weebly.com\)](http://SocialKnitwork.weebly.com)

Bath Spa University Social Knitwork Article <https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/social-knitwork/>

What is Materiality?

Posted on [July 1, 2014](#) by [Daniel Morgan LaChapelle](#)

<https://blogs.cornell.edu/aitmw2014/2014/07/01/what-is-materiality/> (Accessed 3rd March 2021)

In Your Area – Social Knitwork News Feature

[Giant lockdown knitting project comes to Bath | InYourArea News](#)

Definition of Socially Engaged Practice at Tate.com - [Socially engaged practice – Art Term | Tate](#)

[Theaster Gates, Sanctum - Situations - www.situations.org.uk/projects/theaster-gates-sanctum/](#)

Sanctum, Theaster Gates Programme Guide - www.situations.org.uk/content/uploads/2020/02/Sanctum-programme.pdf

Relational Aesthetics - Critique of Culture and Radical Research of Social Circumstance: www.widewalls.ch/magazine/relational-aesthetics-nicolas-bourriaud-social-circumstance

The Nest project website - [***www.thenestproject.co.uk***](http://www.thenestproject.co.uk)

St John's Foundation website - www.stjohnsbath.org.uk

Link to Video Essay of Social Knitwork project: <https://vimeo.com/553640448>

Other Reference Materials

All photos are Author's own, unless otherwise indicated.

Appendix 1

Harbutt Fund Application

Description of the activity you wish to pursue

Social knitwork: thinking of the future is a joint application between artist, Lou Baker (MAFA 2019-21), and curator, Kat Dawe Schmeisser (356337, MACP 2018-2021). It's an ambitious multi-site, socially engaged art project throughout May 2021 which will form part of both students' final Master's assessments. Baker's research explores ways to synthesise the three strands of her knitting practice - sculpture, performance and social engagement; Dawe Schmeisser is interested in art as a vehicle for social engagement and change.

The project focuses on how art can be used to build connections between local communities after the extended isolation of lockdown. The project's hub is [The Art Cohort](#), a community-facing artspace near Locksbrook campus, founded by Dawe Schmeisser in 2019 as a curator/artist-led space to champion emerging artists.

It will be accessible, inclusive and engage diverse audiences:

- intergenerational supporters of The Art Cohort (families with small children, all ages experiencing social isolation, people wanting to learn and connect, disadvantaged families via [The Nest Project](#))
- general public out walking, including people not normally interested in art
- mailing lists, social media followers, personal contacts
- wider University community
- wider City of Bath/South West via press
- wider art communities

Knitting transforms a line into a network of multiple connections. Baker's research shows that knitting in public stimulates curiosity and conversations. Using knitting performance as a metaphor, Baker will make visible those growing connections, knitting an installation which will develop throughout the month inside the artspace. Traditionally, knitting has associations with comfort and the private sphere; it's functional, perfect and finished. Baker subverts these expectations, making abstract, unravelling forms.

To broaden our reach, we'll also set up a trail of participatory installations in nearby outdoor, public spaces. We'll invite passers-by to bring something to add next time they walk that way.

Participants will become part of an ongoing socially distanced 'conversation', sharing ways we can work together to develop creative strategies for recovery and regeneration as we move beyond the 'new normal' of the pandemic. They can add their thoughts and objects to the installations physically or send messages virtually via social media. We'll also:

- actively promote conversation by being available and knitting in public
- document the conversations, with permission
- set up a making space

- share progress regularly on social media
- send out 'participation packs' via The Nest Project
- tend the outdoor installations
- offer various online events

If restrictions permit, the space will be open for socially distanced participation; if not, some of the knitting performances and conversations will be outside and the changing installation can be viewed through the large windows.

Through this project Baker and Dawe Schmeisser will cultivate connections with and between local people and places, and, potentially, a worldwide virtual audience, through sculpture, performance and social engagement. We'll 'knit together' these disparate elements, countering the isolation of current social distancing restrictions and exploring ways to move forward into a post-pandemic future. It will be empowering, fostering a sense of belonging, giving people a chance to have their say and to make art together.

Why have you applied for funding to achieve this activity/project/purchase of equipment?

An aspirational project of this scale, reach and duration will be costly and will be hard to facilitate fully without some external funding, especially in these times of financial difficulty and uncertainty for artists and artspaces.

The greatest expenditure would normally be paying Baker and Dawe Schmeisser but we're both willing to give our time 'in kind' to facilitate the project, as part of our MA research.

The exhibition space is usually hired out at £200 a week. The Art Cohort is funding 50% of this cost via crowdfunding through The Art Cohort Patreon platform so we need to secure funding for the other 50% to be able to run this ambitious project fully.

The materials required to make the largescale indoor installation are substantial, as are the materials required to set up the satellite outdoor installations.

Documentation of the project will be very important as it will need to capture the breadth but also the nuances of the different kinds of connections made over the course of the month. Being able to pay a photographer and videographer will free the artist and curator to concentrate on the key aims of the project, making and connecting, and will also mean that there is a professional record of the event.

We consider this project to be a good economic and social investment that will benefit the wider University community and targeted diverse audiences and **inform** our MA research.

How will this benefit your academic course and subsequent career?

Lou Baker – 'For my final Master's project, I'm researching ways to synthesise the three strands of my practice - sculpture, performance and social engagement - using knitting as a research method. This project presents a wonderful, collaborative opportunity for me to develop the research findings from my recent lockdown [Wishing trees](#) project. It will enable me to trial the synthesis of the different elements of my practice in a public facing setting, in ways which allow for the restrictions of the pandemic, but which will still enable me to engage diverse and eclectic audiences both physically and virtually. The timing of it is perfect as my course finishes in September 2021 and after over a year of extremely limited opportunities to engage with the public or to exhibit, I'll finally be able to facilitate an aspirational multi-site, participatory art project and use the experience, my research findings and the professional documentation as part of my final submission for my MA in Fine Art in September.

Working with funding from Bath Spa University, in partnership with The Art Cohort, the project will gain recognition and a following locally, nationally and globally through publicity and social media. This can only benefit my future career as a multidisciplinary artist once I graduate.'

Kat Dawe Schmeisser – 'This project will be the subject matter for my practice-based module *Reaching Audiences* and may further inspire the final Master's long study I will complete in the remainder of 2021. The Art Cohort is a platform I have developed for my professional practice during the course of studying for my Master's degree. This project will further deepen my research in socially engaged and participatory art practice and build awareness and following of The Art Cohort, the platform through which I intend to continue to build my future career.'

Why should we award this to you?

This ambitious project is a socially engaged, relevant and timely intervention. After the recent extended isolation, it will foster connections between a local artspace, diverse audiences and the University but also the City of Bath and beyond, via publicity and social media.

Baker's idiosyncratic research finds that knitting in public is a people-magnet. Knitting is benign, familiar, comforting, associated with reminiscence and personal stories. It involves little eye contact so strangers talk freely. Both Baker and Dawe Schmeisser are experienced art practitioners and connectors, with significant inter-personal skills through which we will actively engage our audiences.

Research suggests that connectedness, creativity and colour are critical for wellbeing. They're pivotal to this project, will enable participants to develop personal and community resilience and will also be important in recovery after this challenging year.

Currently, facilitating socially engaged art is an enormous challenge. This project is an innovative and highly responsive approach. Its unique concepts allow for flexibility in the levels and kinds of participation, both physically and virtually. We hope to have masked, socially distanced conversations inside, but if we can't, knitting performances will be outside and the growing installation will be visible through the windows. Whatever the restrictions, local people will still be able to engage independently and safely with the outdoor installations on their daily walks. There will also be a varied programme of online events.

Lou Baker – 'For over a year, I've had limited access to the resources and facilities I had hoped for whilst studying at Bath Spa. It's meant that my MA experience has been much more limited and isolated than I expected. Being supported financially by the University through The Harbutt Fund to bring this multi-site project to life would be a very aspirational and affirming outcome for my final Master's project at Bath Spa.'

What is the benefit to the wider university community?

We will involve Dance, Photography, Film and other Fine Art students from Bath Spa University in the project. We'll set up one of the satellite installations, with permission, on the Locksbrook site so that the University community can experience a model of socially engaged art. We'll promote the project within the University, through knitting performances and targeted social media posts, inviting the wider University community to engage with the participatory elements of the project and join the conversation. Restrictions allowing, we'll offer small group talks in the artspace and walking tours of the installation trail.

We're also facilitating a range of online events, some of which will be targeted at the wider University community, so that postgraduate and undergraduate students, and staff, can engage with the project even if they are not able to participate in the physical locations. These activities will include webinars, Instagram Live events, virtual talks, tours and knit-ins, a visual blog, using The Art Cohort website and targeted social media posts. We will also share our research findings with the wider University community when the project is over.

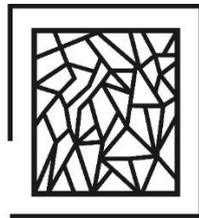
The project will be a public facing showcase of a collaboration between two postgraduate students at Bath Spa and will foster connections between the University and the local community through the public nature of the installations. The public reach of the project may also attract potential benefactors and students to the University.

The Art Cohort is a small, independent artspace working with local emerging artists, providing a gallery space, retail opportunities and a workshop space. It's five minutes' walk from the Locksbrook campus. This project will build awareness among the wider University community of this local community artspace as a venue for art students to collaborate, curate, sell and exhibit as a way to build their professional practice.

Link to [Lou Baker and Kat Dawe Schmeisser, Supporting documentation for The Harbutt Fund, Feb 2021 by Lou Baker - issuu](#)

Appendix 2

Press Release for Social Knitwork



THE ART COHORT

PRESS RELEASE

Social Knitwork: 1st May – 7th June 2021

The Art Cohort is an award-winning Artspace at 13 Chelsea Road, Bath. We champion emerging art and artists and exhibit new artworks in our exhibition space, showcase work from local artists and makers in our art shop and run art classes and workshops in our learning space.

Social Knitwork is a collaborative project between The Art Cohort and artist, Lou Baker, supported by Bath Spa University Harbutt Fund. The project focuses on how art can be used to build connections between local communities after the extended isolation of lockdown.

Lou Baker will create a web-like installation in The Art Cohort Exhibition Space, drawing in space with wool. Knitting transforms a line into a network of multiple connections; Baker will be in residence during the exhibition, knitting and adding to the installation which will develop throughout the month inside the Artspace, making visible those growing connections. Visitors will see the installation grow like an organic body day by day.



During the exhibition a number of outdoor installation sites will be set up in Bath, near The Art Cohort. Members of the public, walkers, families, neighbours and passers-by are invited to add their thoughts and objects to the installations physically the next time they pass that way or send messages virtually via social media. The location of the external installations will enable a walking tour of these temporary art installations.



Wishing Trees, Bristol - Lockdown Project 2020 – Photo by Lou Baker

A ‘Making Space’ with art materials will be accessible to the public at The Art Cohort throughout the exhibition to make something to add to the installations.

Participants will become part of an ongoing socially distanced ‘conversation’, sharing ways we can work together to develop creative strategies for recovery and regeneration as we move beyond the ‘new normal’ of the pandemic.

Programme of Virtual Events

A programme of free events will take place online alongside the exhibition:

Thursday 13th May, 2pm – Virtual Artist Talk with Lou Baker – Social Knitwork:
Thinking of the Future

Tuesday 18th May, 2-3pm - *Instagram Live* Walking Tour with Lou Baker and Kat Dawe Schmeisser

Thursday 27th May, 6-7pm - ‘Knit Together’ Virtual Knit Along Social with Lou Baker

The Art Cohort and Lou Baker look forward to cultivating connections with and between local communities. We’ll ‘knit together’ people and places, countering the isolation of current social distancing restrictions and exploring ways to move forward into a post-pandemic future. It will be empowering, fostering a sense of belonging, giving people a chance to have their say and to make art together.

The Art Cohort Press Contact: Kat Dawe Schmeisser

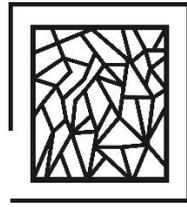
Tel: 01225 635017

Visit online: www.theartcohort.co.uk / www.loubakerartist.weebly.com

Instagram: [@the_art_cohort](https://www.instagram.com/the_art_cohort) / [@loubakerartist](https://www.instagram.com/loubakerartist)

Appendix 3

Exhibition Statement at The Art Cohort



THE ART COHORT

Social Knitwork

1st May - 7th June 2021

'How can we begin to make connections between local communities after the extended isolation of lockdown?'

Social Knitwork is a collaborative project between The Art Cohort and Artist, Lou Baker, supported by Bath Spa University's Harbutt Fund.

Knitting transforms a line into a network of multiple connections. Lou will be in residence at The Art Cohort, knitting, having conversations, and inviting visitors to add something - a message or an object - to her dynamic, web-like installation.

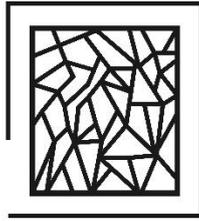
There are also four outdoor participatory installations in public spaces within walking distance of The Art Cohort. Passers-by are invited to bring something to add to them next time they walk that way, or to send a message via social media and we'll add it for them. If you'd like to visit these other installations, please take a map of the walking trail.

You are warmly invited to make something to add to any of the installations. Bring something with you or use our 'Imagination Station' here at The Art Cohort, which has lots of colourful art materials available to use.

If you visit The Art Cohort and the outdoor installations again, you'll see how they change as the days go by, making visible the growing connections.

We invite you to become part of an ongoing socially distanced 'conversation', sharing ways we can work together to develop creative strategies for recovery and regeneration as we move beyond the 'new normal' of the pandemic. Join Lou Baker and The Art Cohort to 'knit together' our local communities here in Bath, countering the isolation of the last year.

@the_art_cohort @loubakerartist



THE ART COHORT

A programme of free events will take place online alongside the exhibition.

Book your place at www.theartcohort.co.uk

Thursday 13th May, 2-3pm - Virtual Artist Talk with Lou Baker,
Social Knitwork: Thinking of the Future

Link to Recording of Virtual Artist Talk -

<https://vimeo.com/549671545>

Tuesday 18th May, 2-3pm - Instagram Live Walking Tour with Lou Baker and Kat Dawe Schmeisser



Marketing Material for Instagram Live event

Link to Instagram Live Artist & Curator Walking Talk Recording -
https://www.instagram.com/tv/CPBFM6jDJzj/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

Thursday 27th May, 6-7pm - 'Knit Together' Virtual Knit Along Social with Lou Baker



Marketing Material for 'Knit Together' event

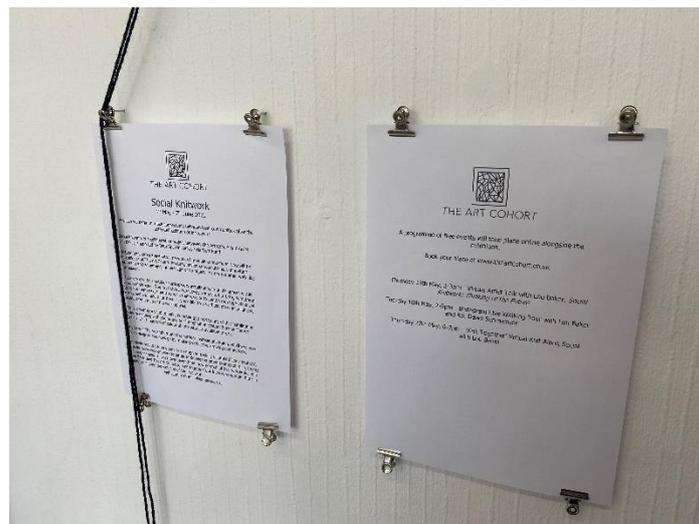
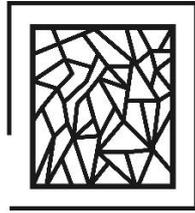


Photo of Signage in place at The Art Cohort

Appendix 4

Imagination Station Invitation at The Art Cohort and Photos of Use



THE ART COHORT

Social Knitwork: Imagination Station

Please use these materials to make things to add to the Social Knitwork indoor & outdoor participatory installations.

Ask us for a Walking Trail map.



Photo of Signage in place at The Art Cohort

Appendix 5

Walking Trail Map and Invitation to participate in the Outdoor Installations

500 Flyers were printed to offer to the public at The Art Cohort and include in Art & Craft packs distributed to families via The Nest Project



Appendix 6

Photos of Art & Craft Packs provided to The Nest Project to distribute to families in Bath

Each pack contains: a Social Knitwork walking trail map, invitation to make something to add, marker pens, pair of scissors, cardboard, instructions to make a cardboard pom pom maker, strips of coloured fabric and three balls of wool. The packs were distributed in the spirit of generosity and invitation to residents in the city who would not normally engage with an art exhibition.

Packs were funded by the Harbutt Fund, Bath Spa University.



20 Art & Craft Packs delivered to The Nest Project on 6th May 2021

Appendix 7 – Press Coverage

Bath Life Magazine – Issue 442, published on 23rd April 2021

Available online at:

issuu.com/mediaclash/docs/bl442_final

SPOTLIGHT



www.theartcohort.co.uk | DAH1181 | 9

In Your Area News

Source: [Giant lockdown knitting project comes to Bath | InYourArea News](#)

Giant lockdown knitting project comes to Bath

A programme of free events will take place online alongside the exhibition

© 26 April 2021

Audio Recording of BBC Bristol Breakfast Radio Show on 5th May 2021 – featuring discussion of the Social Knitwork project, available at:

[Breakfast on BBC Radio Bristol - James Hanson - BBC Sounds](#)

Clip starts at 1.40.39

Bath Spa University Website and Social Media Coverage of the Project – 7th May 2021



Bath Spa students hoping to 'knit together' communities through their Social Knitwork art project.

Friday, 7 May, 2021

Knitting transforms a line into a network of multiple connections, according to artist and **MA Fine Art** student Lou Baker.

She'll be working with Kat Dawe Schmeisser, who is studying **MA Curatorial Practice**, to create Social Knitwork – an opportunity to bring together local communities after the extended isolation of lockdown.

Kat is also a Curator and Arts Producer at The Art Cohort in Bath – together they're creating a web-like installation in The Art Cohort Exhibition Space, effectively drawing in space with wool.

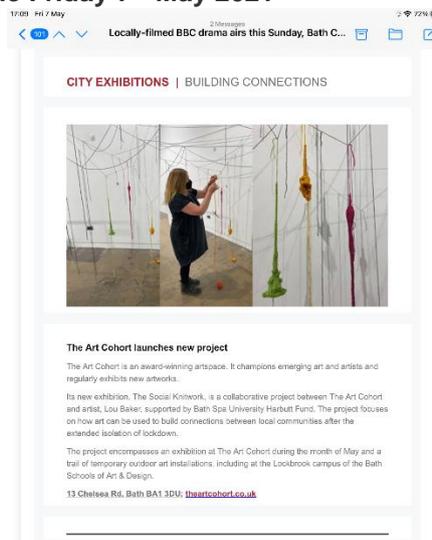
To make sure anyone can join in, Kat and Lou have also set up an 'Imagination Station' where art materials will be accessible to the public at The Art Cohort throughout the exhibition.

"We've been very touched by the response to Social Knitwork so far," Lou said. "People of all ages have joined in enthusiastically, making something to add to the installation, either in the exhibition space or using our 'Imagination Station'. Some have written labels and all are keen to talk. We've had laughter, tears and so many thoughtful conversations."

She will be in residence during the exhibition, knitting and adding to the installation which will develop throughout the month inside the Artspace, so that visitors will see the installation grow like an organic body day by day.

Source: [Social Knitwork \(bathspa.ac.uk\)](https://www.bathspa.ac.uk)

The Bath Magazine – article Friday 7th May 2021



The Bath Chronicle – article in 6th May 2021 issue



Article 'In Conversation' with The Art Cohort for Social Knitwork in Take A Part Newsletter – 17th May 2021

Link to article - <https://mailchi.mp/06a4ba0b0d29/oi4imtwcb-6180893?e=%5BUNIQID%5D>

Fringe Arts Bath

Social Knitwork is included in Fringe Arts Bath 2021 from 28th May – 7th June 2021 – advertised through the FAB website and social media accounts

At www.fringeartsbath.co.uk

[FAB Festival - 28 May - 13 June 2021 \(fringeartsbath.co.uk\)](http://www.fringeartsbath.co.uk)

Appendix 8 – Pre-Exhibition Research for Outdoor Installations

We conducted research into which materials would work best for the outdoor installations. In a garden we created an experimental outdoor installation with pure wool – the material to be used for the indoor installation and our preferred material for the outdoor sites. However this experiment showed that the wool became tangled and felted by inclement weather. As we planned to use trees as the host for the temporary installations we wanted to pre-empt any public concerns about damage to the tree, and thus decided using strips of fabric to ‘seed;’ the installations, as in Baker’s 2020 Wishing Tree project in Bristol, in order to safeguard the health of the trees.



Pre-Installation Experiment – Pure wool garden installation pre-exhibition

Appendix 9 - Participant Conversations (Written Notes made during time in residence knitting by Lou Baker)

Written notes in Artist's Notebook added to during the Social Knitwork exhibition from conversations the artist had with participants (with permission) whilst in residence.

James Hawes 'A Short History of England'
Zen Rowing - decomposable trailers
Raina
QIAC.org.uk/ISOLATED-FANTASY-EXHIBITION
'Oh! Are you behind the installation in the cemetery? ^{My dad} ~~the~~ loved it and came back bursting!

'Creativity + colour kept me going through lockdown'
of my knitting - 'sprouting in lots of different directions'
'I live in Whiteway... could you do something on the estate?'

'I've very cheekily taken some scraps of the yarn I was knitting with to remind me of this conversation. Its yellow + orange + also makes me think of marmalade!' (Clare)
Lady with a baby - friend whose baby is very ill. How can she help?

'I'm so relieved that I can talk to you about this. I can't talk to my partner as he gets too upset.'

'Community spirit. It makes me cry.'

'Humanity like pigeons on a bell tower. Every hour, on the hour, the bell tolls + the pigeons scatter. As they return, things return to normal very quickly.'

William Faulkner Requiem for a non

Appendix 10 – School Visit to Social Knitwork by ‘A’ Level Textile Students from Oldfield School, Bath – 20th May 2021

The Art Cohort received a request to host a school visit to Social Knitwork by a group of teaching staff and A Level Textiles students from Oldfield School in Bath. Lou Baker was in residence introducing the project to the visitors during the visit and talking more widely about her practice.

The group talked while making in the Imagination Station and Installation spaces, and added to the installation during their visit.



Photograph of Oldfield School Visit – used with permission of the participants

Appendix 11 – Visitor Counter at The Art Cohort– 24th May 2021

A visitor counter tracked the number of interactions with the indoor installation at The Art Cohort. The photo below shows visitor numbers of Monday 24th May 2021. The exhibition runs until 7th June 2021.



We are not formally tracking the number of interactions with the outdoor installations. We do engage in online conversations where participants post photos of themselves with the outdoor sites, and some of the visitors to the installation at The Art Cohort recounted experiences of interacting with the outdoor sites. Therefore the number of participants in the project is likely much higher than this tracked number.

Appendix 12 – Artist Evaluation of Social Knitwork by email

Written by Lou Baker on 26.5.21

The responses to Social Knitwork have been touching and very varied. We've had laughter, tears and so many thoughtful conversations. People of all ages have joined in enthusiastically, making something to add to the installation, either in the exhibition space as they sit and chat, or using our 'Imagination Station'. Some people have made something at home and brought it add. Others have written labels and many people are interested in the project and are keen to talk.

Some visitors have come specially to take part, having seen it publicised either on social media or in the press; others have seen the installation as they pass by and curiosity has drawn them in. Many parents have come back with their children so that they could join in and we've had plenty of adults of all ages adding to the installation too, predominantly women.

The contributions have been very imaginative. Many people have knitted small pieces of knitting, some in one colour, some with multiple strands; others have used the strips of cloth to plait, wrap or tie; others still have drawn or written on a label with coloured pens. One person brought in a small sculpture which she wrapped with strips of cloth and added, with a label.

The messages have been varied too; many are motivating and meaningful, some are humorous and some are very poignant.

We've also been sent some messages via social media and email, which we've added on behalf of each participant. One person sent a photo of her knitting, which we printed and tied on.

The indoor installation has definitely been growing day by day, as we hoped. I have enjoyed seeing how each interaction changes the form of the installation as well as the aesthetics. I have knitted in the space for a couple of hours most weekdays but I haven't knitted as many pieces as I thought I would. This might be because I have also been talking to visitors, ripping cloth and winding wool. We also did an Instagram Live tour of the Walking Trail one day and I did a talk another day.

The outdoor installations haven't changed as much as I imagined they would. The tree in Royal Victoria Park has had the most added to it so far, and the others have all had just one or two contributions. This might be because lockdown restrictions have eased or because there is the choice of adding to the indoor installation. The weather has also been appalling! One young woman told me that her father had stumbled upon one of the trees and had come home 'bursting with excitement'. I think it will be impossible to quantify the impact of these installations and the Walking Trail generally.

I am also conscious that I haven't visited them as often as I had hoped, so, consequently, I haven't added as much to them as I might have done, or photographed them and posted about them on social media. It's hard to know whether this would have made a difference, but it has made me realise that the reality of juggling time in the indoor installation and walking the trail with the rest of my MA - and life - was ambitious.

Although we have counted the visitors who have responded to Social Knitwork at The Art Cohort, I think that it's impossible to quantify the impact of a project like this. We

can recount anecdotes of the heartwarming conversations we have had in the space, share images of participants making, talking and adding their contributions and take videos and photos of the growing installations. This evidence, I think, shows high levels of engagement amongst the people who have chosen to participate. We specifically highlighted two communities to invite their engagement- the University and 20 families via The Nest Project- but, again, we have no way of telling whether people from these communities have visited, or been involved.

It's also hard to quantify the impact the project has had on the virtual community. We have had a few messages sent through Instagram and a couple of posts about the project, but again, fewer than I imagined.

Personally, I have found the project heart warming and hopeful. I am always very touched that complete strangers will talk openly about very personal things to me in a situation like this. I have also thoroughly appreciated and enjoyed working with Kat, Raina and Lotte at The Art Cohort. They already have a large following of regulars in their local community with whom they make connections daily through the work they do and because they are warm and welcoming.

Overall, I think that through Social Knitwork we have done what we set out to do; we have provided place, space, materials and connectors to enable a significant number of people to reflect on ways we can make connections as we emerge from lockdown... and while doing this we have made connections with those who have been involved. I think the project has also brought joy to a significant number of people– through colour, creativity and conversation – and it's helped people to make connections and begin to rebuild a sense of community in the local area.