

04 / 28 / 21 | TIM GLEDSTONE

Squire & Partners on collective strength and communities working together

Tim Gledstone is Partner at Squire & Partners. In this article, Tim reflects on Squire & Partners' installation 'Who Cares?' at The Department Store in Brixton, discussing collective strengths and beauty in communities working together.



As the saying goes – the more you put in, the more you get out. Since our involvement in Brixton's creative community began in 2015, it's been a labour of love. An area with a unique history, identity and cultural mix, we were keen to play a part in preserving, supporting and shaping one of London's most exciting neighbourhoods.

After moving Squire & Partners' 200-strong office to [The Department Store](#), we've embarked on design festivals, creative collaborations and met many wonderful people who have informed our approach to experiencing buildings and public space.

From creating a [new education and community centre](#) for 200-year-old Brixton Windmill (opened in 2020), conceiving [award-winning installations](#) with young people to manufacturing [bespoke scrubs and visors](#) for South London hospitals, we've looked for ways where design can make a difference.

When LFA announced the theme of 'Care', it presented another opportunity to work together with local people on an installation which highlighted a collective response to how Care manifests itself in communities.

Following a successful creative collaboration for LFA in 2019 – [Brixton Boundaries](#) – we invited friends Arberor and Mohammed from design collective [AWMA](#) to workshop with us on how we might be able to give a voice to the Brixton community and create a symbol of care by and for local residents.

With COVID restrictions uncertain, we conceived a large-scale window display at The Department Store which could be enjoyed regardless of rules on indoor socialising – along with a wider plan to expand the installation into other venues locally. We wanted to explore and showcase the different ways people experience Care in their lives, and how COVID has affected the way people Care for themselves and others.

Taking inspiration from prayer flags – specifically Tanzaku paper wishes for the Japanese festival of Tanabata – we envisaged a series of suspended messages in uplifting colours to spread love and good wishes.

An important aspect was that the installation had minimal waste and created a legacy for the community after it was dismantled. Together we researched seed paper as a material, with a view to gifting the seed-infused messages to participating schools and the Brixton Orchard – a local community space designed to improve air quality locally and educate people about growing food in the city.

Following initial digital modelling, Squire & Partners' modelshop created hanging prototypes for different volumes of responses to spell out CARE within a colourful rainbow of messages. Meanwhile AWMA's sister agency We Convey created a digital information pack and website including animations, illustrations and an online questionnaire. Together we reached out to local schools and groups and shared the callout on social media.

The positive response quickly gave us over 750 messages. Common themes were friends and family as the backbone of care, but also the NHS, good food, shared activities such as baking, and mindful behaviour to safeguard our own mental health. Not forgetting the stalwart British cuppa!

Schoolchildren talked about connections with nature including growing tomatoes or walking in local parks, as well as escaping reality by diving into gaming worlds and keeping in touch with friends and family digitally. Teachers were a key source of care, with many children talking about how school staff kept them positive in difficult times.

Distance from loved ones during the pandemic highlighted how valuable hugs and shared moments are with friends and family, and how sometimes caring for someone means staying away.

The response to Who Cares? has been overwhelming, and has enabled the installation to grow into two other local venues as well as The Department Store – the greenhouse at community initiative Pop Brixton and Re:Sole in Brixton Village, an outreach program that delivers quality new and used shoes to homeless people in South London and beyond.

The Who Cares? installation is designed as an iterative process where messages of care grow as people add to the installation over the month of the festival. While individual contributions can be read in isolation, the overall effect is one of collective strength and beauty in communities working together through good times and bad.

Who Cares? runs at The Department Store, Brixton throughout the month of June and will launch at Re:Sole, Brixton Village from 13 June and Pop Brixton from 21 June.

#LFA2021 #LFAWhoCares

@squireandpartners

@awma.co (Instagram) / @awma_co (Twitter)

The Department Store, 248 Ferndale Road, London SW9 8FR

The Greenhouse at Pop Brixton, 49 Brixton Station Road, London SW9 8PQ

Re:Sole, 57 Granville Arcade, Brixton Village Market, London SW9 8PS

Collaborating with Squire & Partners and AWMA were:

Hill Mead Primary School, Stockwell Primary School, Lansdowne School, The Study School, Kids Kreate, We Rise, The Brixton Project, Pop Brixton, Re:Sole.

Who Cares? website: <https://whocaresbrixton.com/>

Who Cares? LFA event page: <https://www.londonfestivalofarchitecture.org/event/who-cares/>

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