

The fabric of the city's history commissioned for Plymouth Art Weekender 2019

Portmanteau, Jaeger and textile sculpture weave together in new artwork

From Friday 27th – Sunday 29th September, as part of Plymouth Art Weekender 2019, venues of all shapes and sizes across Britain's 'Ocean City' will play host to exhibitions, events and community-based activity. All of which will invite dialogue, prompt questions, drive analysis and contemplation of life and the world as we know it. And today (20th August 2019), Plymouth Art Weekender announces its key 2019 commissions.

The PAW Community Engagement Commission this year is with Dartmoor-based artists Tabatha Andrews and Tim Bolton. Tabatha Andrews makes performative installations that explore how materials and energy can trigger memory and unsettle the senses. Her work responds to many different sites and contexts including galleries, forests, public spaces and hospitals, and she has worked with a variety of communities. Tim Bolton is a sculptor and former vice-principal at Plymouth College of Art who previously worked in ceramics and glass. Tim and Tabatha are collaborating with seamstresses who worked at the original Jaeger textiles and clothes-making factory on the city's Union Street. Together they will be developing a series of eclectic, bespoke designs, borne from textile patterns to create objects and interactive activities that passers-by can engage with as part of a sculptural project entitled 'Make It Up'.

The title, 'Make It Up' was inspired by the quote, "First you make it up. Then you make it real," famously said by American English Literature Professor, Elaine Scarry. An initial iteration of the work will be presented at the Union Street Party on Sunday 15th September, where visitors will be invited to take part in activities encouraging them to reinvent the world around them by exploring the relationship between portmanteau* images and tailors' pattern-making in the city.

A series of surrealist games made by the artists will invite people to imagine the creation of new objects, shapes and forms,

for example; a jacket crossed with an electrical junction box, a van crossed with a home or a place of work crossed with the idea of happiness - bringing two often conflicting ideas or artefacts together to create a new ideal. Unusual sites on Union Street will be transformed to make temporary spaces for this event. Over the Plymouth Art Weekender itself, Tabatha and Tim are planning to develop a series of large-scale, hard 'block' patterns, cut out of recycled materials. These will be abstract sets of instructions for imaginary objects that will be hung along Union Street, forcing dialogue and intriguing those who witness them.

This year's Community Engagement Commission sees the Weekender partner with Nudge Community Builders, a community benefit society that is bringing buildings and spaces back in to use on Union Street. Nudge's funding from Creative Civic Change supports communities across England to use the power of the arts and creativity to create meaningful civic change in their areas. Celebrating its tenth birthday this year, the Union Street Party run by locals including those behind Nudge will be a great precursor to engaging with the final commission for the Weekender.

Tabatha Andrews said, "We're really excited to bring 'Make It Up' to Plymouth. We really want people to have fun, use their imaginations and come on a journey with us. Working with original Jaeger seamstresses, the project will explore connections between one object, body or place and another, breaking down the distinction between the human subject and our environment and unpicking the idea of the 'bespoke', the 'made to measure', and our personal preferences and aspirations." The sculptural project was also partly inspired by Babcock International, based nearby in Plymouth, which constructs and maintains ocean-going vessels, and also has a department that tailors soft protective cases for a range of large scale abstract forms including heavy guns on warships, utilising a combination of sail-making and tailoring.

There are currently a number of Babcock apprentices working on such cases at Makers HQ so the history and future of

tailoring in Plymouth doesn't just relate to clothing, it is also architectural.

Makers HQ is an 18-month-old Community Interest Company (CIC). Set up as a collaboration between Millfields Trust, Plymouth College of Art and the local Stonehouse community to establish a fashion factory on Union Street and to reignite fashion and textiles manufacturing in the city. Its vision is to create jobs and provide work opportunities through its sampling studio and all profits are reinvested into the provision of training and education programmes. Founded in 2015 by Visual Arts Plymouth CIC (VAP), after the British Art Show 7 in 2011 saw a growing appetite for ambitious artistic activity in the city, the Plymouth Art Weekender started off as a grassroots experiment to bring together emerging and existing artists in a 'fringe-like' fashion. The collaborative event has grown in magnitude and last year, the Weekender partnered with The Atlantic Project, a pilot for a biennial for Plymouth to bring a set of renowned international artists and a programme of commissions across the city on the same weekend.

As part of a unique city set up, new contemporary art production agency, Flock South West is coordinating and managing the Weekender in 2019 and 2020. Passionate about helping to develop and deliver artist, curator and producer led projects, Flock South West pools together the extensive collective experience of its directors and other associates working in the city to provide production support for small and large creative projects.

Plymouth Art Weekender 2019 is supported by Arts Council England National Lottery Grant Project Funding, Plymouth City Council, The Box and a successful crowdfunder campaign. Paul Brookes, Interim Chief Executive of The Box said, "A fundamental aim of The Box is to create opportunities and platforms for artists to showcase their work in the city, and to develop a dynamic, sustainable visual arts ecology in which artists are enabled to live, work and thrive. The Plymouth Art Weekender contributes to this ecology, in particular the opportunities it provides for artists studying, living and working in Plymouth."

*A portmanteau consists of two meanings or functions packed into one object or word. Examples of portmanteau words include jeggings, Brexit, Labradoodle, and so on. Futurists and economists claim that innovation, unlike invention, often comes out of bringing two pre-existing things together to make a third thing. For example, an engine and a carriage making a car, or taxis and smart phones making Uber.