

A Project by Bart Lodewijks in London

Dutch artist Bart Lodewijks (b. 1972) uses urban environments around the world as a canvas for his chalk abstract drawings – from residential buildings in quiet suburban neighbourhoods to street surfaces in bustling metropolitan city centres. He is interested in how drawing can be a social process built on relationships and conversations with individuals or communities. While the drawings often disappear, the stories and encounters are captured through writing, and brought together in books and other printed materials made in collaboration with Roma Publications.

As part of this new commission for the Whitechapel Gallery, Lodewijks worked with two groups of young people from across London. A series of assignments was used as the basis for the workshops and developed into creative interventions inside and outside of the Gallery. The title *White Li(n)es* functioned as a conceptual framework for the project and challenged participants to expand their idea of drawing to consider how a line on a wall can be ‘made out of chalk and trust’. Bart Lodewijks exhibition includes a series of chalk drawings made in response to the gallery space and its surroundings, presented alongside images and writings on the working process in London, and archival material from past projects.

Published in December 2014 by Whitechapel Gallery, London, on the occasion of the exhibition *Bart Lodewijks: White Li(n)es* 7 April 2014 – 8 March 2015 Curated by Sofia Victorino and Paul Crook

Text: Bart Lodewijks
Copy editors: Sanne de Boer and Danielle van Zuijlen
Translation: Manon van Zuijlen
Publication editors: Sofia Victorino and Paul Crook
Photographs: Bart Lodewijks, Richard Eaton and participants
Photo editing: Huig Bartels
Design: Roger Willems (Roma Publications, Amsterdam)
Printed by Mart. Spruijt, Amsterdam

Supported by Nadfas: London Area, Mondriaan Fund and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

With special thanks to all participants in the Easter and summer workshops:
Olusola Adeniyi, Ayo Akingbade, Mohammed Rahmat Ali, Tasneem AminSana Arif, Amber Augustin, Justina Balynaite, Amabel Barlow, Samima Begum, Aysun Binboga, James Bruin, Lauren Chiu, Halima Chowdhury, Oana Damir, Lucie Holzer, Marjan Hussain, Shafeenoor Hussain, Alice Iardella, Matthew Jordan, Michile Khan, Harjot Kundi, Christina Marshall, Layo Olayiwola, Rafiqur Rahman, Pascale Robinson, Gabriella Schofield, Kyle Smith, Andrew Tweedy, Fiona Verran

And thanks to Renee Odjidja (Education trainee), Carolina Silva (Goldsmiths, University of London), Lea Campbell (Head of Art, Wapping High School)



I explore the Whitechapel area with a piece of chalk in one hand and a spirit level in the other. For the last fifteen years I have been drawing straight lines with chalk on streets, walls, façades of houses, and sometimes inside people’s homes. The workshop participants need some kind of basic material in order to claim a space of their own on the streets. Their most important resources are assertiveness, trust, patience

and humour. Little white lies may also come in handy. The question is how to counter the condescending stares, the intimidating comments of passers-by, the distracting compliments from tourists, the unsolicited participation of children, or being told off by shopkeepers and by the police. To take part in the social traffic of the streets we need to be aware of what happens behind us.



One cannot argue that the fence is in a dull spot. This piece of land has probably been fought over by real estate developers to the point of an impasse. Stuck between streams of fast-moving traffic the fence currently belongs to everyone and no one. I draw lines on the fence with chalk, in an attempt to appropriate the surface for our workshop. None of the passers-by reacts or even stops for a moment. Are they all walking past in a kind of trance? Would that be possible? Then a neatly dressed waiter from the neighbouring Turkish restaurant interrupts politely: “What are you doing?” “Thirty-five young people will soon cover this surface with their energy and lines” I say. “Well that is great.” I nod in agreement.



backgrounds, and it is often a rather big step for young people to work in public space. They can draw over, below or above my chalk lines.” He laughs. “The city is a big collection of overwritten places, although I must admit that we anarchists have held this particular spot since 1886. He coughs and continues, “I do not want to limit the creative spirit. One cannot stop pieces of chalk. Consider this my approval.”



On the first day of the workshop, young people wander into the room one by one. Everyone introduces themselves and I talk about my drawings. Matthew asks whether the social environment in which I make them is more important than the drawings themselves. My answer is that although residents sometimes say that I have come to live in their neighbourhood, it is actually the other way around for me; the residents have come to live within my drawings. The social environment and the drawing gradually become intertwined, they turn into a knot impossible to untie.



I wrote 32 short assignments that can only be realised out in the street. The first one is to be done individually. *Make a line. Collect all kinds of materials from the street (empty cans, paper, plastic bags). Find a place somewhere outside and arrange the materials you found in a long line.* Although there is a lot of useable material in the street, the assignment causes some confusion among the group. They don't know where to start. We split into small groups to discuss it together and then head outside in different directions.

Make a change and decorate a bin becomes one of the favourite assignments amongst the group. There are chalk markers, pens, tape, paper, white chalk, rope and ladders to use. Samima draws minuscule lines on the edge of a rubbish bin on the street. Someone asks her what she will tell people when they ask for an explanation. "I'll say that I am transforming the rubbish bin into an object with dignity", states Samima.



With a marker, make drawings on flattened chewing gum that is stuck to the pavement everywhere. From this assignment a flattened street population of happy, sad and serious faces is born.



"Do you ever use a projector to make your drawings? Your lines are so straight!" comments Ayo. "No, I always draw by heart". "The projection would be over your hand, your arm or shoulder, so you would continuously draw in the wrong spot." I ask Ayo to draw on the window of a café, tracing the outlines of the reflections with a chalk marker. This is difficult because your own perspective changes continuously and the reflection of what happens in the street is not exactly static. As Ayo's drawing develops, the café owner gets increasingly enthusiastic and decides to write under it: *Want to draw on our window? Submit your design inside.*



Angel Alley, London



One week later, a kind of afterimage appears on the window of the coffee shop. The anonymous artist also used a chalk marker, but the lines are less exploratory. Ayo says: "It is copied from a picture, anyone can do that."

Ziggy approaches the staff manager of Kentucky Fried Chicken and asks permission to make an intervention in the front window. The chef does not understand the question and gives a standard reply: "Everything is printed on the menu". He points to the menu for Ziggy to indicate exactly what he wants. When the manager realises this action is part of a workshop, he disappears into the back of the shop, leaving Ziggy behind, bewildered. He comes back with hands full of paper napkins and empty KFC boxes: "You can release your creativity here", and hands Ziggy the material.



All the paper used in the workshop is of superior quality. Besides the greaseproof KFC cartons, we get lots of paper from the nearby Aldgate Printing Press for sketching. The group manages to get the printer's staff to collaborate by cutting the waste paper into hundreds of narrow strips. Tied together like rope, the strips fill our project space.



During lunch I ask the group to draw portraits of people (preferably sitting) and to pay attention to the side effects of their drawing activities. James draws a member of staff who is reading in the cafe, motionless, as if she were frozen. The side effect he notes is "The lady seemed to 'melt' immediately after she saw the completed drawing."

1.
MAKE A LINE
Collect materials from the street (empty cans, paper, plastic bags). Find a place outside and arrange the materials in a long line.

2.
COLLECT SMALL TALK
Stand at a corner of a street for ten minutes and find a way to collect all the small talk you hear.

3.
BRING ABOUT A SMILE
Draw a cartoon about something that happened in public space and find a way to bring humour back to the street.

4.
MAKE A CHANGE
Decorate a bin.

5.
DRAW A TELEPHONE CALL
Call a friend from a public telephone box. Draw the conversation on the window of the telephone box with a chalkboard pen.

6.
GO FOR A WALK
Take a 15-minute walk and make notes of all the words you see in advertising or on traffic signs.

7.
MAKE A GIFT
Make a surprise gift and stick it behind the wipers of random cars or taxis.

8.
PLACE A FREE AD
Design an eye-catching advert and add it to a notice board of your choice in one of the local cafés.

9.
SHOW VALUABLE OBJECTS
With stuff given away for free in shops or cafés (such as zines, napkins, sugar bags etc.) make a cabinet of curiosities where ‘worthless’ objects are shown as valuable.

10.
OCCUPY A WALL
Gather cardboard boxes and wrap a wall with them.

11.
MAKE FACES
Make drawings on flattened chewing gum that is stuck to the pavement. Create a series of happy, sad and serious faces.

12.
FIND A SHOP WINDOW
Start a conversation with one of the shop owners. Ask permission to make a large scale drawing on the shop window.

13.
SHARE THOUGHTS
Ask someone to draw their thoughts on paper. Respond to each other through drawing.

14.
SEND A MESSAGE
Take photographs of lines you find on the street. Use them to make postcards and send them by post. Ask the recipients to send you a self-made message in return.

15.
DRAW IN SLOW MOTION
Find a place with a view. Use a large sheet of paper and a pencil to draw the skyline. Do it in a single line, without lifting your pencil for 15 minutes.

16.
COLLECT SIMILARITIES
Gather both natural and man-made products from the street and find a way to chart similarities.

17.
MAKE PORTRAITS
Take a large sheet of paper to the street and make quick sketches of passers-by.

18.
SHOW AFFINITIES
Visit a bookshop and look for a book you like. Buy or borrow the book and display it in a way that reveals why you felt drawn to it.

19.
PRESENT THE BEAUTY OF UGLINESS
Collect food you find in the street and prepare a meal to be served in an attractive manner.

20.
DOCUMENT WALLS
Research the graffiti in the area. Make drawings of the works you like, find out who the authors are and what their intentions were. Gather drawings and stories into one document.

21.
TELL A WHITE LIE
Insert a fictional story into a given situation and turn it to your advantage.

22.
DRAW A STORY
Visit a remarkable place and ask for a tour. Make a report of the visit through drawing.

23.
CATCH A SHADOW
On a fine day, document shadows through drawing or photography.

24.
MAP COLOURS
Chart the colours in the area. What colours are people wearing? What colour do you hardly see?

25.
DRAW ON OBJECTS
Assemble a series of objects and draw on their surface. Make a composition on a wall or on the floor with the objects.

26.
UNPICK SHOPPING
At a supermarket, gather shopping lists or receipts and make a menu out of it.

27.
ASSEMBLE INTERPRETATIONS
Choose a wall on the street and make an abstract drawing using duct tape. Try to find out what passers-by see in your lines.

28.
SET UP AN EXCHANGE
Make a drawing and swop it for a book. Read the book and make a drawing about it. Find a way to give form to this exchange.

29.
WATCH PEOPLE MOVE
Document the actions of a person. Become his or her shadow.

30.
SHOW YOUR FACE
With rope, thread, wire or tape, make a self-portrait on a wall.

31.
ASK FOR FORGIVENESS
Use chalk to make a drawing on a wall or on the pavement. If someone protests against your action, apologise.

32.
CREATE NEW ASSIGNMENTS
Continue this work, create new assignments.

Like Marjan, Farzana apologises for the fact that she “cannot draw”. She has no affinity with art and does not get the purpose of the assignments. “The street is too dirty to touch”, she complains. They both had different expectations of the workshop. Because they are continuously messaging on their phones, I ask them to draw this exchange on the solid letterbox, which has been standing in front of the Gallery for maybe over a 100 years. They tentatively look at the letterbox, not intending to trust it with any of their messages, until Marjan decides to write: ‘Hey, I am on the other side of the letterbox. Come around, innit’.



The workshop participants often visit the Anarchist bookshop in Angel Alley. They prefer the alley to the black fence on the main street because it offers the protection of two opposing walls.



Pascale pays a visit to the Whitechapel Bell Foundry opposite the Gallery. Inspired by the tour and the 500 years of history, she creates a life-size bell construction made of cardboard, and installs it on the stairwell leading to the studio spaces. By pulling on a cord from the ground floor, the clapper, which is fifteen metres higher up, moves and sets off an MP3 player echoing sounds of bells tolling.





"I am motivated," Kyle states. "Then why do you make such little effort?" "I am enthusiastic," he declares. "The workshop is called *White Li(n)es*, you know... you'd be the perfect person to demonstrate that on the street." He wanders outside with a roll of masking tape to write *White li(n)es* on the black fence. He has barely started, when two cops order him to remove the tape. Kyle is about to take the tape off.

"You are smothering the work of an enthusiastic young man," I argue. The cops say that we should feel lucky that we won't be brought to the police station. When they disappear from our view, Kyle asks, "Where do these cops get their motivation from?" We decide to try our luck once more, this time in the alley behind the Anarchist bookshop.



"It is easier to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission", says Mathew. The laws of the street are largely unwritten and it is not easy to claim a space in between them. It surprises me to see the group working out on the street with confidence, without questioning, despite the many obstacles to overcome. They say they feel protected. I take notes from a distance and every now and then I ask them how things are evolving. My intention is that they carry on with each activity independently, even if occasionally this might need a push. "Who is ultimately more important in the street?" Kyle asks impatiently. "We all have equal authority in claiming the space," I say. Kyle looks at me, disappointed. Usually it works, if you pretend you don't know the rules. Saying sorry gets you sympathy, and with a bit of luck even cooperation.



The group must now write new assignments, to be shared and realised together. Participants prove to be more free-thinking than I am, and invent assignments that are difficult to carry out. One of them: *Climb up somewhere you find amusing and take a photograph of the world from above. Look for colours.*



"It feels good to create your own place in the midst of all the ubiquitous ugliness of London. By intervening in a spot that nobody pays attention to, something changes, at least within ourselves", says Lucy.



Marjan identifies with the graffiti near Whitechapel.



I watch in amazement how everyone seems completely immersed in drawing. After four days out there, there seems to be no end to the potential spaces to use and share.



On the last day, the group tacks individual and collective works on the walls of our project space. They make connections between written assignments and works, using coloured tape on which they write new words and concepts: 'displacement', 'colour', 'line', 'trust', 'anti-social'. The workshop's structure reveals itself.



When we discuss the process and the results, I challenge the group, "I encouraged you to act by doing, to create work in the street in a context which does not invite the work. It is not so relevant whether the work is good, well thought through or display-worthy, as long as you overcome your hesitation and approach the street. After you leave, it is my turn to develop an exhibition that takes into consideration what

happened this week." "Maybe it is time for us to give you an assignment?" says Alice without looking away from the work she wants to finish. "Why don't you just write everything about us and let the visitors read that?" Matthew suggests. "Yes", agrees Pascale, "You can make a kind of report with photographs and text, and show everything you have shown us, like the drawings

made in different cities... and you can also make drawings on the wall. I think you will be alright in a space which has been built to be drawn on," she teases. "It is not so easy to write a report," I say hesitantly. "You just have to do it... from the action..." Matthew says casually.



Because the interventions took place outside, the group decides that the display they have shown inside should also be visible on the black tarred fence. An outdoor exhibition however requires a very different plan; the street is a treacherous context. We drag the sheets of paper onto the street. Outside, we battle with the wind that causes us to lose some of the connecting concepts. A few passers-by lend a hand and return the information that was blown away. Kyle says: "We are all together, no one will dare to intervene." Almost euphoric he covers the whole fence. "It will get damaged when we have left, nobody will take care of it. Let's clean it up," says Christina. "I prefer working here to indoors, simply because it is outdoors and everyone can see it," argues Lucy.



Draw as many buildings as you can is one of the last assignments they give each other. Sitting together in a circle, everyone has to draw a 360 degrees urban panorama on different sheets of paper. Whoever has finished continues on the sheet of their neighbour. A dynamic unfolds that literally makes everyone overwrite each other's work. Alice says: "This is a way of touching each other, just like Bart



says that with his lines he gets to touch people's daily lives." "This is not 'touching' but 'connecting', Shaf corrects her. Alice defends vehemently: "Touching' is so much more. It is a strong thing. It certainly has to do with something physical, like two hands accidentally stroking each other, or a hug."



Wapping High School, Commercial Road, London



Gunthorpe Street, London