City Poems & City Music: Adrian Henri & Friends

11 April – 9 June 2019



Gallery 2

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Introduction

 City Poems & City Music: Adrian Henri & Friends

In 1975, Whitechapel Gallery invited sixteen writers to take part in an exhibition titled City Poems & City Music. Among them was artist, poet and musician **Adrian Henri** (1932–2000), whose work continually engaged with the subject of the city.

This exhibition of collages, ephemera and video recordings from Adrian Henri’s archive focuses on his interdisciplinary approach to the urban environment. The display follows Henri’s diverse output, from his contributions to Liverpool’s emerging live poetry scene in the early 1960s up to his international career as a performer and artist by the mid-1970s, the time of his participation in the Whitechapel Gallery exhibition.

Henri moved to Liverpool in 1956, after training as a painter at King’s College, Newcastle, under Victor Pasmore and Richard Hamilton. The city provided the backdrop to Henri’s early Pop paintings and poems that incorporated fragments of urban imagery, advertising slogans and traffic signs and sounds. A pioneer of performance art in the UK, he also created environments and Happenings that brought together poets, musicians and visual artists for all-encompassing countercultural spectacles in Liverpool’s music halls and beat clubs.

Henri came to national prominence in 1967 alongside Roger McGough and Brian Patten in the best-selling Penguin anthology The Mersey Sound, making poetry part of popular youth culture. He went on to front the poetry-and-pop group The Liverpool Scene, offering an experimental mixture of poetry, satire, blues, folk and rock. Their debut album with RCA was produced

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by John Peel. In 1969, they toured the UK with Led Zeppelin, performed at the Isle of Wight Festival on the same bill as Bob Dylan, and then toured the USA.

The exhibition is accompanied by a series of live performances reflecting Henri’s experimental and interdisciplinary approach.

#CityPoemsCityMusic

City Poems & City Music Live Events

11 April, 2 May and 23 May

With: Big Joanie, Pete Brown, Jarvis Cocker, CA Conrad, Libby Houston, Ted Milton & Odes, Thurston Moore, Sophie Robinson, Ian Svenonius and Alexandra Cabral, and Anne Waldman

Exhibition Publication:

I Want Everything to Happen

Published April 2019 by Ecstatic Peace Library

£20 paperback

Programme curated by Catherine Marcangeli, Thurston Moore and Eva Prinz

Walls

clockwise from left

City Painting,1956–57

mixed media on card

City Painting incorporates commercial iconography against an abstract neon-lit cityscape. Collage enabled Henri to convey the urban experience, with advertising leaflets, slogans and flashing signs finding their way into his work.

Death of a Bird in the City, 1954

oil on canvas

Henri's fascination for the image of a bird dying in a city partly derived from Federico Garcia Lorca’s collection titled Poet in New York. Henri also drew a link between war, birds and urban violence in ‘Death of a Bird in the City II’, a poem dedicated to the war photographer Philip Jones Griffiths:

Guns are bombarding Piccadilly
Firing at ten million splattered white

dying birds

Doors thrown open
Girls mouths screaming
The last unbearable white bird
Spotlit, slowly struggling threshing

against blackness

Piccadilly Station Drawing, 1962

ink on paper

Piccadilly Painting, 1964 / 2011

print after original painting

Henri saw Manchester’s Piccadilly Gardens as an example of a space structured by advertising and logos: ‘even the little bit of nature in Piccadilly was artificial. The flowerbeds were maintained by the Council. One day there would be a dense mass all of one colour, the next of another colour.’

Unlike William Wordsworth’s ‘host of golden daffodils’, which epitomised poetry’s relationship to nature, the daffodils in this picture ‘are not real’ – in 1964, they came as gifts in packets of Omo washing powder.

The Machine, 1962

poster for a happening at Hope Hall, Liverpool

Henri set up the first ‘happenings’ in the UK, bringing together poets, musicians, visual artists and audiences in multi-media experiments. In The Machine, rival ‘machine politicians’ churned out nonsensical speeches while the audience was gradually surrounded by chaos.

The Entry of Christ into Liverpool

1968

poster poem

The Entry of Christ into Liverpool

1962–64 / 2011

print after original painting

In his variation on a painting by James Ensor, and several years before the iconic Sgt. Pepper, Henri assembled a cast of friends and heroes: Ensor as Christ, playwright Alfred Jarry on a bicycle, his preposterous character Père Ubu, William Burroughs, Charles Mingus, Charlie Parker and The Beatles are joined by members of Liverpool’s 1960s bohemia, including photographer Philip Jones Griffiths, painters Don McKinlay and Sam Walsh, musicians George Melly and Mike Evans, and poets Pete Brown, Brian Patten and Roger McGough. In the accompanying poem, later set to music by The Liverpool Scene, syncopations and truncated words convey the fragmentation of contemporary life.

24 Collages N°6, Mulligatawny Soup Painting (Homage to Andy Warhol), 1964

mixed media on paper

24 Collages N°1 (Anti Goldwater Painting, for Jimmy Witherspoon) 1964

mixed media on paper

Like many artists of his generation, Henri was fascinated by an America that enjoyed push-button-age prosperity at a time when memories of ration books were only too fresh in English minds. Yet he maintained a certain ironic distance, swapping Warhol’s iconic Campbell’s Soup logo for a quintessentially British ‘colonial’ variety, Heinz’s Mulligatawny. In Anti Goldwater Painting*,* he debunked the Republican Senator’s recent stance against the Civil Rights Act by using a campaign leaflet in a painting dedicated to an African American singer.

Art in a City, ICA, London 1967

poster, designed by George Jardine

Inspired by John Willet's book on the history of the visual arts in Liverpool, the exhibition described the city's emergence as a centre for music and poetry in the 1960s. It included several paintings by Adrian Henri, who had a one-man show at the ICA the following year.

UFO Coming: Liverpool Love Night, UFO Club, London, 1967

poster, designed by Hapshash and the Coloured Coat

The Liverpool Poets, reading at The Roundhouse, London, 1967

poster

By the summer of 1967, John Willett’s Art in a City had been published, Edward Lucie-Smith’s Liverpool Scene had been launched at Liverpool’s famous Cavern and at London’s ICA, and The Mersey Sound was a sensation. The media hailed poetry as ‘the new sound’ coming out of the city and ‘The Liverpool Poets’ were invited to perform in London. Their appearance at the UFO Club and at The Roundhouse marked them as part of youth culture and counterculture.

Love Night N°2, Everyman Theatre, Liverpool, 1967

hand made poster

In May, June and July 1967, Adrian Henri, Roger McGough and Brian Patten staged a series of Love Nights, multimedia happenings which combined poetry, music, light shows, dance and live painting.

Batcomposition, 1967

collage on paper

The Batman series was aired on British television from 1966, prompting a flurry of Bat-themed works. Henri’s Batnights and his Batpoem are featured in the display cases and the film programme.

Homage to Miles Davis II (Blue in Green), 1960

mixed media on paper

Homage to Miles Davis I (Kind of Blue), 1960

mixed media on paper

Homage to Miles Davis III (Miles Ahead), 1960

mixed media on paper

Henri relished the freedom of musicians who experimented with new forms and structures. In a 1960–61 series of drawings and collages, he paid homage to jazz heroes like Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk or Charles Mingus.

Evergreen Interior (Ah Um), 1961

mixed media on paper

Charlie Mingus Drawing, 1961

ink on paper

Friday Morning Drawing II, 1961

ink on paper

While London poets like Michael Horovitz, Pete Brown and Christopher Logue usually performed to jazz, the Liverpool poets collaborated with blues, rock, pop and folk musicians. As Henri explained in 1977, ‘I liked jazz too much to want to muck about with it. Rock and folk music can’t exist without words, but jazz got past the stage of being a backing music for singers 30 years ago and there’s no point in me being up there having a battle with a jazz soloist.’

The Liverpool Scene at the CCB Theatre, London, 1968

The Liverpool Scene, The Amazing Adventures of…,

LP, RCA records, 1968

The Liverpool Scene, 1968

posters

Adrian Henri in 1972: ‘We started out as a poetry band, ended up as an all-purpose rock group. What probably made us was the English club scene of the time; it makes you sound like an O.A.P. talking, but back in ’68, the Bonzos, the Fairports, Colosseum, Edgar and all the others did the same circuits as us: The Farx Club, Southall, The Angel, Godalming, The Van Dike, Plymouth, and of course, Mothers in Birmingham. If you ever saw Liverpool Scene doing its sixth encore at Mothers, perhaps Andy singing The Ballad of the

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One-Eyed Trouser Snake, sweat pouring off everyone and Spud putting another tray of Newcastle Brown on the stage for the band... if you didn’t see the jam with us, Led Zeppelin and Blodwyn Pig at the Albert Hall, after I’d done my bit with the collapsing trousers and the gold lame underpants... if you didn’t hear Percy and me do Winterpoem for a totally silent 250,000 people at the first Isle of Wight Festival... or the time the stage was groaning under me at the Bath Festival... or the night we covered ourselves, the audience and O’Connor’s Tavern in custard pies... or the night a huge banner appeared saying WE WANT BOBBY AND THE HELMETS from the back of the crowd at the Farx, Potters Bar... Oh, Hell, there’s too many memories for a dozen records.’

The Liverpool Scene at Mothers, Erdington, Birmingham, May 1969

The Liverpool Scene at the Union Ballroom, Oxford, February 1969

The Liverpool Scene with Savoy Brown at Mothers, Erdington, Birmingham, January 1969

The Liverpool Scene at the Cheshire College of Education, Alsager, Stoke-on-Trent, February 1969

The Liverpool Scene with Synanthesia at the London College of Printing, London, February 1969

The Liverpool Scene at the University of Warwick Jazz Club, May 1969

posters

Led Zeppelin UK tour : The Liverpool Scene at the Bath Festival of Blues, June 1969

Led Zeppelin UK tour : The Liverpool Scene at the Pop Proms, Royal Albert Hall, London

June 1969

The Liverpool Scene at the University of Warwick

January 1970

posters

New York Collages #1 to #7, 1969

mixed media on paper

The Liverpool Scene LP, St Adrian Co. Broadway & 3rd, RCA, 1970, poster

During The Liverpool Scene’s U.S. tour, Henri collected press cuttings, boarding passes, photographs, advertising leaflets and other ephemera, for a series of collages-cum-visual diary: New York Collage #3, Homage to Robert Motherwellis an abstract composition made from various paper bags picked up at The Museum of Modern Art, where Henri had just seen Motherwell’s paintings.

Henri also composed collages for the cover of the group’s LP St Adrian Co. *–* the name of a New York bar they frequented. Side A of the album is a continuous track titled ‘Made in U.S.A.’, which alternates poems written by Henri and Mike Evans during the tour.

The Liverpool Scene Film Programme

Isle of Wight Festival, newsreel, 31 August 1969 1 min

The Liverpool Scene Look at…, television series, transmitted February 1969:

Liverpool, 22 mins

The Future, 20 mins

Love, 28 mins

The Seaside, 19 mins

The Liverpool Scene, Baby(anti-Enoch Powell version), concert at Victoria Park, London,

29 March 1970, 14 mins

Filmed by David Mead, Doug Daulman and Alasdair Ogilvie. Restored and edited by Alasdair Ogilvie, 2014

Reading area:

* Books including poems by Adrian Henri
* City Poems & City Music, exhibition catalogue, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 1975
* Catherine Marcangeli (ed.), Adrian Henri: I Want Everything To Happen, Ecstatic Peace Library, London, 2019

On wall:

Poster for a poetry reading by Adrian Henri,1968, poster

🎧 Listen:

* The Amazing Adventures of…,LP produced by John Peel, RCA Victor, 1969
* Bread on the Night, LP, RCA, 1969
* St Adrian Co, Broadway and Third, LP, RCA, 1970

Display Cases

clockwise from left

I - POP GOES THE POEM

Through the 1960s, Adrian Henri, Roger McGough and Brian Patten organised poetry readings in basement bars, beat clubs and other venues across Liverpool. Their poetry was accessible, and their subject matter – love, music, the city, superheroes, the bomb – made poetry part of popular youth culture.

LOVE IS

1. Joyce Collage, 1961, mixed media on paper

2. Underdog, No. 7, 1965

From 1962, aged 16, Patten edited a poetry magazine, which published local poets alongside the work of American Beats.

3. Love badges, 1967

4. Love poems by Henri, McGough and Patten (‘Party Piece’)

5. DIY Christmas Kit*,* 1965

SUPERHEROES

6. Batgram, Batcomposition, Batmask and Batbadges,1966–67

7. ‘Batpoem’, 1966

The first stanza starts like a celebration of popular culture and sexual liberation, but turns unexpectedly into an indictment of America’s involvement in Vietnam – from the BatPill to BatNapalm. Henri performed the poem to the upbeat theme tune of the television series, further underlining the jarring discrepancy between style and content, optimism and accusation.

8. ‘Me’, 1966

KINGSIZE POLYTHENESCAPES

9. 4 Seasons Do It Yourself Kit,1964

10. Piccadilly poem and drawing, in Sphinx, Fall 1962

11. Manifesto, in Sphinx*,* Spring1962

12.Liverpool 8 Spring Collage N°11*,* 1965, mixed media on paper

13. ‘The New Fast Automatic Daffodils’: poem and Dutch motorcar leaflet, c. 1966

II - HAPPENINGS

CITY EVENT, Hope Hall (later The Everyman), Liverpool, 1962

1. Festival brochure, introduction and script for City Event

2. Poem by Brian Patten, with instructions for actions performed

by Henri

3. Photographs by Philip Jones Griffiths showing Adrian Henri, Roger McGough, Pete Brown and audience during City Event

4. Review of City Event

Adrian Henri: ‘we tried to portray instant cityness using poetry, painting and collage, dance, sounds and smells, within a painted environment and improvised around a pre-recorded sound track – using tracks by

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Charlie Mingus and Thelonious Monk as well as a “twist” sequence and passages of television commercials.’

DEATH OF A BIRD IN THE CITY, Hope Hall, Liverpool,1962

5. Poster for Death of a Bird in the City, happening

6. Bird II, 1960, oil on card

DAFFODIL STORY, Hope Hall, Liverpool,1963

7. Script publishedin Solem Magazine, 1964

8. Photographs by Philip Jones Griffiths

BOMB, The Cavern, Liverpool, 1964

9. Newspaper article and invitation card

10. The Clayton Squares, publicity card

The local rhythm and blues band played Ray Charles’s ‘Danger Zone’ and Charles Mingus’s ‘Don’t let them drop that atomic bomb on me’

11. Civil defence booklet quoted by Henri in a mock Bomb lecture

12. Adrian Henri and Brian Patten performing Bomb, newspaper photograph

III - BEAT CITY - 1967

In 1967, as publishers looked North, media attention shifted from Liverpool’s musicians to its poets.

BOOKS

1. The Liverpool Scene, Edward Lucie-Smith ed., Donald Carroll, London, 1967; American edition, Doubleday & Company, NY, 1968

2. Press cutting; invitation to the champagne launch at The Cavern

3. Adrian Henri at the ICA launch,photograph by Graham Keen

4. John Willett, Art in a City,Methuen, 1967, and ICA catalogue, 1967

5. Adrian Henri, Roger McGough, Brian Patten, The Mersey Sound,Penguin, 1967 (back and front)

The book captured the mood of the 1960s: its original print run of 20,000 copies was expected to last ten years – it sold out in three months.

PRESS

6. Geoffrey Mather, ‘Where a New Flame Burns’, Daily Express, 1967

2 March, 1967. Photograph by Brian Duff

7. Sean Hignett, ‘The Sound of Liverpool 8’*,* withphotographs by Don McCullin. Weekend Telegraph, 31 March, 1967

8. Mary Griffiths, ‘Now, the Liverpool Sound is Words’, The Daily Mirror, 25 February 1967

CENTRE OF THE UNIVERSE

9. Allen Ginsberg quote and photograph with Adrian Henri, 1967

10. Ted Joans photograph and poster, 1967

Joans performed his Chocolate Astonishments at the Edinburgh Festival and at Liverpool’s Everyman.

11. Adrian Henri wrapping Yoko Ono for Fog Piece,The Bluecoat, Liverpool, 1967

IV - AMAZING ADVENTURES

The Liverpool Scene went from a loosely-knit group of artists, poets and musicians to a full-blown, albeit quirky and atypical, rock ’n roll outfit, a regular feature on the university circuit.

1. Adrian Henri, Tonight At Noon, Rapp and Whiting, London, 1968; Mike Evans, The City and the Slumgoddess, London: September Music Limited, 1969

Some of the poems published in these volumes were set to music by The Liverpool Scene

2. The Amazing Adventures of…,LP produced by John Peel, RCA Victor, 1969

3. Melody Makeralbum review; John Peel quote and photograph

4. Mike Evans, Andy Roberts, Adrian Henri and Mike Hart at Gregson’s Well, Liverpool, March 1968. Photograph by Dennis Hussey

5. Posters, programmes and press cuttings for The Liverpool Scene concerts, 1968–70

6. Photo of The Liverpool Scene rehearsing, Granada Studios, Manchester, 1969

7. Programme for a Liverpool Scene tour with Tyrannosaurus Rex and John Peel, May–June 1968

8. Publicity material and photographs for The Liverpool Scene, 1968

🎬Watch: The Liverpool Scene Look at…, television series, transmitted February 1969. Showing as part of the film programme

🎧 Listen: The Amazing Adventures of…,LP produced by John Peel, RCA Victor, 1969. Available in the gallery reading area

V - BREAD ON THE NIGHT

1. Ephemera related to Bobby and The Helmets, 1969

Bobby and The Helmets were a creation of Adrian Henri and The Liverpool Scene. The great undiscovered band was supposed to have drowned in an ice cream fountain. When The Liverpool Scene toured with Led Zeppelin in 1969, Robert Plant and Jimmy Page went along with the joke and started wearing Bobby and the Helmets tee-shirts.

2. The Bath Festival of Jazz, Led Zeppelin Tour, 1969: programme, leaflet and photographs by Lawrence Impey

3. The Pop Proms at The Royal Albert Hall, Led Zeppelin Tour, 1969: programmes and tickets

4. Photograph of The Liverpool Scene jamming with Led Zeppelin at the Royal Albert Hall and concert review in Disc and Music Echo, 5 July 1969

5. Isle of Wight Festival, 1969: programme and press cutting

The band played to an estimated 150,000 at ‘Britain’s Woodstock’, headlined by Bob Dylan.

6. Bread on the Night, LP, RCA, 1969

7. Publicity photographs by Don McCullin

🎬Watch: Isle of Wight Festival, newsreel, 31 August 1969. Showing as part of the film programme

🎧 Listen: Bread on the Night, LP, RCA, 1969.

Available in the gallery reading area

VI - THE AMERICAN TOUR

In October–November 1969, The Liverpool Scene toured the USA, supporting The Who, The Kinks, Joe Cocker, Led Zeppelin as well as Sly and the Family Stone – in front of an audience of 17,000, at Kent State University, Ohio.

ST ADRIAN CO.

1. Publicity photograph, New York, 1969

2. St Adrian Co, Broadway and Third, LP, RCA, 1970. Cover collage by Henri

3. Publicity material for St Adrian Co, Broadway and Third, 1970

ON TOUR

4. The Liverpool Scene in New York, photographs

5. Ephemera for performances at Kent State, Ohio, The Boston Tea Party and Ungano’s, New York City

6. Adrian Henri with Ted Joans on the New York Subway and at an Archie Shepp concert

7. Adrian Henri, article on the English club scene in a Fillmore East programme, 1969

8. New York Collage: Self-Portrait with Hero, 1969, print 2019

AMERICA

9. Adrian Henri, USA travel diary and manuscript title

10. Adrian Henri, America: A Confidential Report to Dr Bertolt Brecht on the Present Condition of the United States of America, London: Turret Books, 1972: manuscript page and book

This book-length poem is a succession of images from The Liverpool Scene’s American tour – ‘soft ribbed sandclouds’, landscapes from airplane windows, the noise of police sirens, advertising slogans, three

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prostitutes looking like the Supremes about to break into song, Joseph Cornell’s Taglioni’s Jewel Casket and floodlit skaters in Rockefeller Plaza.

🎧 Listen: St Adrian Co, Broadway and Third, LP, RCA, 1970. Available in the gallery reading area