

Eastside Projects have invited four anti-colonial artists to imagine, develop and realise new artworks across the city for Birmingham 2022 Festival

Birmingham 2022 Festival presents

Rajni Perera

Amy Ching-Yan Lam

Jon McCurley

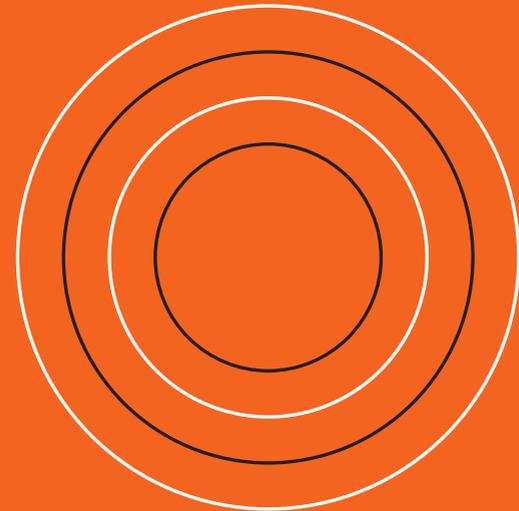
Jhenjiwe Niki Nkosi

What
might
anti-colonial
artists
make?

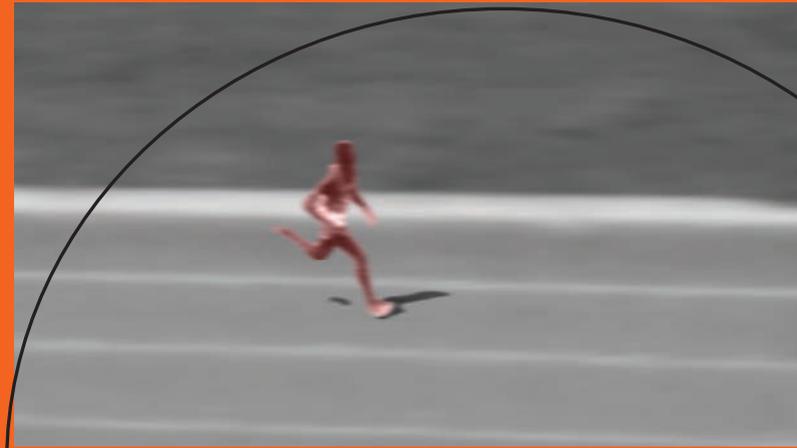


Courtesy of Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi and Stevenson

Art
that reveals a future
diaspora after the end of white
supremacy; art that brings the people
the Empire dubbed Monsters of the World
to Birmingham; art that gives us a point-of-
view experience of a small dog abducted and
transported to Great Britain for a Queen; and
art that offers a provocative meditation on the
experiences of Black athletes in the realm
of elite sporting competition and mass
entertainment.



Together
we have been
exploring Birmingham's
positions, affinities and complicities
within the Commonwealth towards
coinciding a set of artworks with the
22nd occasion of what is now called the
Commonwealth Games but was previously known
as the Inter-Empire Championships (1911), British
Empire Games (1930-50), British Empire and
Commonwealth Games (1954-66), and British
Commonwealth Games (1970-74).



Courtesy of Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi and Stevenson



Jon McCurley

What
can an artist-run-
multiverse do in response
to such an event being hosted by
their home town, the historical heart
of the industrial machine that fuelled,
traded and equipped the British Empire with
such efficacy from the 18th century onwards?

We
could
make art,
organise,
undermine,
boycott, unsettle,
protest, question,
listen, invite,
gather, make
noise!



Amy Chiing-Yan Lam

We
decided to
invite some inspiring and
visionary artists to work with
us to gather, question, listen,
make noise and create a series of
new site-specific projects across the city:

Rajni Perera (Toronto) in Eastside
Projects and Highgate/Balsall Heath;

Amy Chiing-Yan Lam
(Toronto) across Digbeth (location of the old
Typhoo tea Factory);

Jon McCurley (Toronto) in Bournville
(location of the still active Cadbury's Factory);

and

Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi
(Johannesburg) across multiple
community sites and poster sites
across Birmingham.

These
projects
are presented
by Birmingham
2022 Festival and
generously supported
by Heritage Lottery
Fund, Arts Council
England, Canada
House, Canada
Council for the
Arts and British
Council.

| | |
|---------------------|----|
| Rajni Perera | 11 |
| Amy Ching-Yan Lam | 15 |
| Jon McCurley | 19 |
| Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi | 23 |

Courtesy of Rajni Perera and Patel Brown Gallery



Birmingham 2022 Festival
On the Occasion of the 22nd Commonwealth Games
www.birmingham2022.com/festival

Rajni Perera

Traveller



Courtesy of the artist and Patel Brown Gallery

Rajni Perera expands on her visionary *Traveller* series of paintings, pollution wear and sculpture for both a large-scale exhibition in Eastside Projects' main gallery and a public mural on the eastern banks of the River Rea on the edge of Highgate and Balsall Heath.

Set after the end of white suprematism and ecological collapse, Perera's ongoing series builds a complex, energised diaspora of climate refugees, habitats and survival mechanisms set against rapidly transforming landscapes. Perera's travellers are imagined as "immigrant futures," the artist's science fiction metaphor for cross border resilience. The mutated bodies of the travellers indicate an evolutionary timescale thousands of years into the future, yet their humanoid shapes still connect them to earthly pasts. Escaping from a planet no longer able to support human life, and extending out of this world, and into space, each character occupies future worlds with a noble confidence and intelligence, interconnected through self and community knowledge maintained and valued as living culture.

Perera's vivid artworks animate ideas and issues related to immigration, mutation, hybridity, ancestorship and futurity. Depicting diasporic identities and dream worlds, they emerge from her own reflections on our current reality: "As immigrant cultures get stripped away and homogenised in nation states — or that being a goal of the nation state as we know it — ideas around spacefaring and off-worlding stand in as a metaphor for immigrant resilience to retain our cultures, and survive and thrive."

Rather than the European adventurers that typically dominate science fiction stories of spacefaring and off-worlding, Perera imagines the kinfolk of black and brown people as her brave protagonists. She casts migrants, so often characterised as aliens, as first explorers.

A Starry-Eyed Subspecies (2022) is a major new sculptural work featuring life-size Traveller and Post-Horse traversing a mutated and poisoned landscape left behind by greedy and wealthy corporate nations. The installation approaches the feeling of searching in a very particular sense, familiar to many — leaving unsafe places to find safe ones, trying to take care of one's kin and family, feeling isolated, and needing to prevail despite unreasonable situations and circumstances.

Traveller and Post-Horse are set in a mutated habitat produced by Birmingham artist Matt Gale in conversation with Perera and initially imagined whilst walking along the River Rea, the small main river that runs South West to North East through the centre of Birmingham, where you can find Perera's new large scale *Traveller* mural work.

Perera's travellers and post-beings are born out of an approach she describes as "immigrant styles and mashups, like really brightly coloured plastics and neoprenes with ancestral patterns and very region specific things that you would wear to temple and to church or mosque and then come back home." An approach informed by the multi-ethnic neighbourhoods of Perera's childhood which continue to influence her world view.

In the case of climate refugees it is a desperate search for basic life needs. As the colonial-capitalist project begins to heavily press down on its billions-strong oppressed populations, hunger, thirst, pollution and displacement become some of the most ignored yet prevalent issues the majority of the human race is directly faced with. As we begin to question abundance as a birthright for all, the glaring question becomes "at what cost? And to whom?"

Bio

Rajni Perera (b.1985, Sri Lanka) lives and works in Toronto. She explores issues of hybridity, futurity, ancestorship, immigration identity/cultures, monsters and dream worlds. All of these themes marry in a newly objectified realm of mythical symbioses. In her work she seeks to open and reveal the dynamism of the icons and objects she creates, both scripturally existent, self-invented and externally defined. She creates a subversive aesthetic that counteracts antiquated, oppressive discourse, and acts as a restorative force through which people can move outdated, repressive modes of being towards reclaiming their power.

Traveller Mural

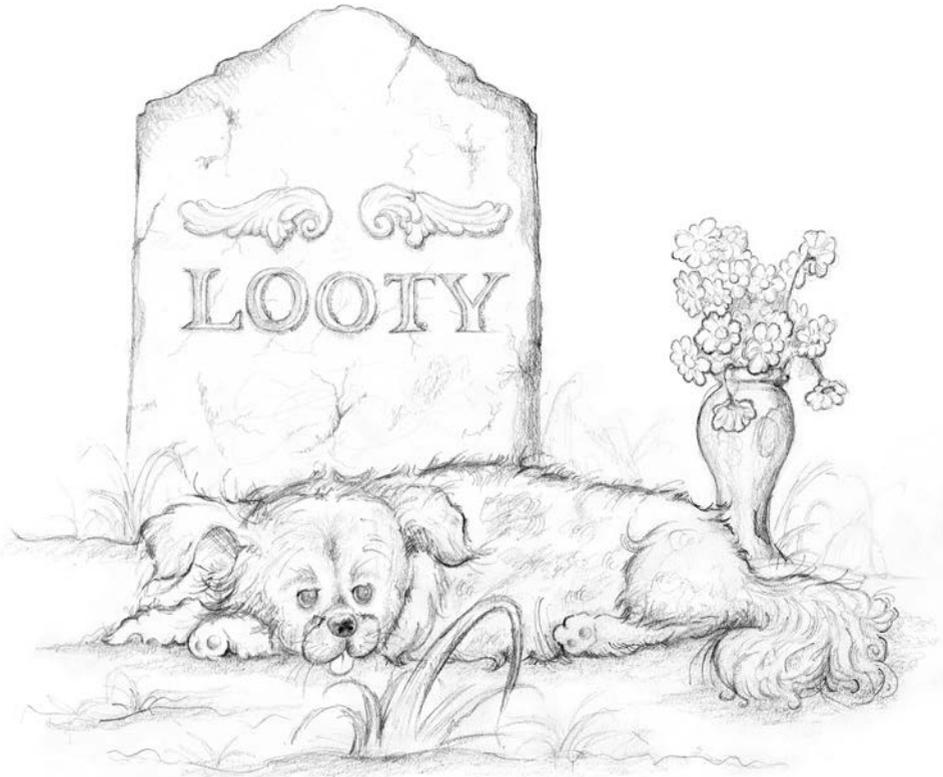
From Monday 30 May, 24 hours
Eastern bank of the River Rea,
Highgate. Viewable from Belgrave
Middleway bridge at the junction
of Horton Square, B12 0YR

Mural Launch: Friday 3 June, 4–6pm
Syrian House Restaurant,
25–27 Horton Square, B12 0YR

Traveller Exhibition

Launch: Digbeth First Friday, 3 June,
6–8pm. Open Saturday 4 June until
Saturday 6 August, Wednesday
to Saturday, 12–5pm at Eastside
Projects, 86 Heath Mill Lane, B9 4AR

Amy Ching-Yan Lam Looty Goes to Heaven



A small Pekingese dog was taken from China at the end of the Second Opium War by British troops, brought to England, and gifted to Queen Victoria. This dog was renamed Looty, after the activity of 'looting,' in reference to how the dog was found during the looting of the Summer Palace (Yuanmingyuan) outside of Beijing. Looty lived for twelve years at the British royal palaces and died in 1872. It is not known where she was buried.

Amy Ching-Yan Lam revives Looty's story in the context of Birmingham, which is the current site of Crufts, the largest dog show in the world, as well as the home of Ty-phoo tea, a brand named after the Chinese word for doctor. The colonial trades of tea and opium were closely linked and directly led to the Opium Wars, and the arrival of Pekingese dogs in England informed new trends in dog breeding and eugenics. For close to fifty years, Pekingese dogs were the most popular breed of toy dog in England.

Looty Goes to Heaven takes the form of an animation, a speculative fiction, and a poppy meadow, presented in the area of Digbeth, where the now-defunct Ty-phoo tea factory is located. The looping animation, made in collaboration with artist Emerson Maxwell, shows Looty in a state of eternal rest on screens in Digbeth and Victoria Square. The speculative fiction, available as a book in English and Traditional Chinese, imagines what Looty's life and afterlife may have been like. The book is available for free at Eastside Projects and other screening sites.

The meadow, to be planted after the Games end, is a legacy

project that will feature varieties of *papaver somniferum* (opium poppy) alongside a wildflower meadow. A small version of this meadow will grow this summer at the Digbeth Community Garden.

The book *Looty Goes to Heaven* is available for free at all of the following sites.

Bio

Amy Ching-Yan Lam is an artist and writer. She has exhibited conceptual, film, and performance works internationally, both solo and as part of the collective Life of a Craphhead. Her work approaches histories, personal and communal, via intuition and necessity. Lam will have a major solo exhibition at the Richmond Art Gallery, Canada, in 2023. Her poetry chapbook titled *The Four Onions* was published by yolkless press (2021) and her first full-length collection is forthcoming with Brick Books in 2023. She lives in Toronto (Canada), which is Mississauga Anishinaabeg territory. Lam was born in Hong Kong, which became a British colony as a result of the Opium Wars.

Eastside Projects at Recent Activity

Launch: Digbeth First Friday, 3 June 6–9pm. Open Saturday 4 June until Thursday 30 June, Wednesday to Saturday, 12pm–5pm. 80–82 Floodgate Street, B5 5SR.

Project and Book Launch

Saturday 4 June, 1pm. Digbeth Community Garden, Shaw's Passage, B5 5PG.

At this launch event in the garden, Amy will read from the book, which tells the story of Looty confronting

her afterlife at the gate to heaven. She will also be in conversation with Dr Sarah Cheang, a historian of Chinese dogs and material culture, to talk about the history of Pekingese dogs in England.

Pekingese dogs and their owners will also be present (and welcome)!

In the event of rain, this event will take place at Eastside Projects.

Cow Vintage

Friday 1 July until Sunday 31 July, open Monday to Saturday, 10am–6pm and Sunday, 11am–5pm. 82–85 Digbeth High Street, B5 6DY.

Eastside Projects

Launch: Digbeth First Friday, 1 July, 6–8pm. Saturday 2 July until Saturday 30 July at Eastside Projects, 86 Heath Mill Lane, B9 4AR. Open Wednesday to Saturday, 12–5pm.

City Centre Festival Site

Wednesday 27 July until Monday 8 August. Daily multiple screenings. Victoria Square, city centre.

Jon McCurley

Monsters of the World

Jon McCurley's *Monsters of the World* focuses on the global chocolate trade through the lens of his Irish-Vietnamese roots, and his parents' experience of meeting whilst working for Cadbury's in the 1970s.

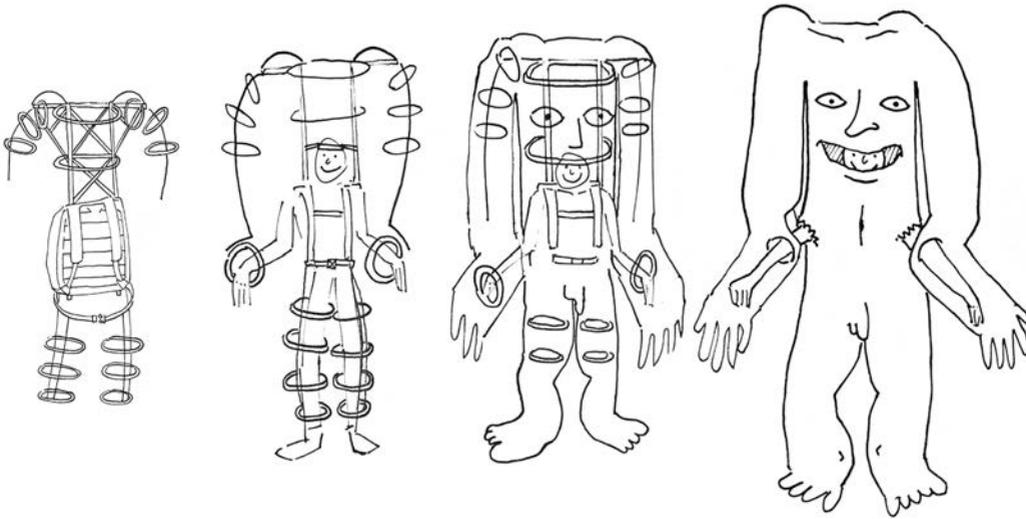
What do you see when you stare at the Commonwealth connections of Birmingham's industrial past?

Monsters!

Headless, gold-skinned, half-human people with facial features on their shoulders or chests can be found throughout ancient and Medieval European writings on the once-popular subject of monsters. For a period spanning 2500 years, religious and political leaders, explorers, scholars of Ancient Greece and colonists of the so-called New World all claimed to have spotted these creatures, with multiple alleged sightings at the 'edges of the known world,' more formally, in Asia, Africa, and North and South America.

Known as Blemmyes, these headless monsters could be seen climbing trees, hiding from explorers, speaking softly, eating leaves, and behaving in various other ways generally interpreted as 'weird.' With the utmost horror, witnesses claimed that the Blemmyes engaged in practices of cannibalism and worse: the worship of non-Christian gods.

Though the etymologies of these monsters are varied and inconsistent, Blemmyes can be interpreted as evidence of an originary 'fear of the other,' a proto element of 17th century concepts of nationalism and 20th century xenophobia and racism.



Surprisingly, however, the Blemmyes were invoked throughout the Middle Ages to teach inclusivity and tolerance.

Within Bournville's historic green spaces over two consecutive weekends in July, visitors will be invited to witness the Blemmyes as they were once witnessed by European traders, explorers, and colonisers. In the shadows of the Bournville Cadbury Plant, the Blemmyes will climb, speak softly, eat leaves, and behave strangely, as they once did in the maps, journals and missives of the Commonwealth.

McCurley's parents met in Montreal, where they held positions as the Technical Director and Director of Quality Control at Cadbury Schweppes Canada. They travelled from Montreal to Cadbury's Bournville, UK location, as well as plants in India, South Africa, Australia, and America as Cadbury representatives. Later in their careers, their travels continued across the continents (all except Antarctica) for other multinationals in the food industry.

With his parents' help and expertise, McCurley has created a replica chocolate bar food made of 100% Coberine: a manufactured vegetable fat product invented by Cadbury's as an inexpensive replacement for cocoa during the 1970s.

Before you meet the 'Monsters', join McCurley at a potentially humorous, and definitely satirical, *Taste Test*—an interactive stall as part of the Bournville Village Festival, where audiences are encouraged to interact with his live consumer survey before taking a whirl on the bumper cars or helter-skelter or enjoying the maypole celebrations of the village.

Monsters of the World considers Cadbury's role in the Age of Globalisation and draws parallels to the Middle Ages and the Age of Discovery. The so-called 'edges of the known world', where mythical monsters were claimed to have existed in previous centuries, appear to mirror today where multinational companies extract resources, exploit labour, open new markets, and sell products.

Bio

Jon McCurley (b.1982, Toronto) works in performance, film, sculpture, and theatre. He was half of the art group Life of a Craphead (2006–20), projects include *King Edward VII Equestrian Statue Floating Down the Don River* (2017), where a life-size replica of a well-known colonial statue was dumped into a Toronto river on a weekly basis for a month; and *Doored* (2012–17), a monthly live broadcast performance art show that featured over 150 performers over the span of five years. In 2018, *Life of a Craphead* was nominated for the Sobey Art Award.

His work investigates the diaspora, identity and white supremacist culture. His most recent show, *Skull Island* (2022) at Écart, Rouyn Noranda, is a collection of work about a trip to Vietnam where he discovered that the *King Kong* movie *Kong: Skull Island* (2017) had been filmed in the city where his family comes from, Ninh Binh. In 2023, he has an upcoming show at Richmond Gallery (Vancouver).

Taste Test

Saturday 25 June, 1–10pm, Bournville Village Festival, Linden Road, B30 1JR

Eastside Projects

Monsters of the World launch:
Digbeth First Friday, 1 July, 6–8pm,
Eastside Projects, 86 Heath Mill Lane,
B9 4AR

Monsters of the World
Saturday 2 July, 10am–4pm, Women's
Recreation Ground, Bournville. Access
via Bournville Lane or Mary Vale
Road, B30 2HP

Saturday 9 July, 10am–4pm,
Bournville Park. Access via Linden
Road or Selly Oak Road



Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi

Equations for a Body at Rest

Johannesburg-based painter and filmmaker Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi presents a multi-site video and multimedia artwork titled *Equations for a Body at Rest*, which tracks the history and symbolic presentation of the Commonwealth Games (and, by association, the Commonwealth body itself) from its genesis in empire to the current day. Has the changing public face of the Games corresponded to equivalent changes at an anatomical level? What are the implications for all those participating in the Games today?

Equations for a Body at Rest has two components, *The Same Track* and *The Name Game*, each working in concert with the other. Together they form a public work in video, print and online. Spread across the city, within community groups and on large screens, posters and billboards, Nkosi's works speak to the institutional exploitations and desires of a white Commonwealth geo-political-industrial complex.

The Same Track is a new video work playing on screens around the city, using archival footage of Commonwealth Games athletes, spectators, and administrators, cut together with promotional and other film materials. Through symbolic juxtapositions of scenes from different eras, the work—using tropes of public messaging—highlights both transformation and stasis through time. Alternately playful and shocking, 'The Same Track' works with the idea that the Games, including in its current iteration, is implicated in an ongoing political project centuries in the making.

The Name Game takes the form of a series of street posters

Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson



placed on six prominent billboard sites throughout the city. Each poster—reminiscent of, or alluding to, historical Commonwealth Games posters—has been redrawn by Nkosi to interrogate the meanings of the current Games here in Birmingham. Via QR Codes on the posters, audiences can also access an online database of images and texts related to the history of the Games. This curated repository, which includes a comparative historical lexicon of frequently used terms, is designed to illuminate, provoke and inspire.

In consultation with Birmingham-based visual artist, curator and organiser Pauline Bailey, Nkosi has also apportioned a percentage of her funding to a small group of local artists making Games-related work. This action, which the artist describes as an integral part of *Equations for a Body at Rest*, seeks to imagine (and enact) the possibilities of 'common wealth', or how a genuine sharing of platforms, energies and resources can help bring into being a world that does not yet exist.

Bio

Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi (b.1980, New York). She was raised in New York, Harare and Johannesburg, where she now lives. She obtained her BA from Harvard University and her MFA from the School of Visual Arts in New York. Nkosi divides her time between studio work, performance, and navigating the field of art as social practice. Her first solo exhibition with Stevenson, *Gymnasium*, took place in 2020 in Johannesburg.

Recent solo exhibitions include: *Landings*, Stevenson, Johannesburg, South Africa (2020), *The Beginning of Stories (Part 1 of Many)*, Seedspace Gallery, Nashville, Tennessee, USA (2017). Recent group and collaborative shows include: *Mixed Company* at the Norval Foundation, Cape Town, South Africa (2021); *FIVE, We Buy Gold*, New York (2020); *Don't Ask Me Where I'm From*, Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, (2020); *That's What She Said*, Constitution Hill, Johannesburg (2019); *Lost Lover*, Rampa, Porto, Portugal (2019); *About Face*, Stevenson, Cape Town (2018); Nkosi is the recipient of the Philippe Wamba Prize in African Studies (2004), and the Tollman Award for the Visual Arts (2019).

Smithfield Festival Site

The Same Track open Saturday 30 July until Monday 8 August, daily throughout the games. Smithfield Festival Site, B5 6UB.

Eastside Projects

The Same Track launch: Digbeth First Friday, 5 August, 6–8pm, Eastside Projects, 86 Heath Mill Lane, B9 4AR.

Neighbourhood Festival Sites

Thursday 28 & Friday 29 July, Farnborough Fields, Castle Vale, B35 7LQ

Friday 29 & Saturday 30 July, Sense Touchbase Pears, Selly Oak, B29 6NA

Saturday 30 & Sunday 31 July, Sparkhill Park. Sparkhill, B11 4LX

Monday 1 & Tuesday 2 August, Edgbaston Reservoir, Edgbaston, B16 9EE

Wednesday 3 & Thursday 4 August, Oaklands Recreation Ground, Yardley, B25 8UB

Friday 5 & Saturday 6 August, Handsworth Park, Handsworth, B20 2BY

Sunday 7 & Monday 8 August, Ward End Park, Ward End, B8 3PH

The Same Track

Community Screening Micro-Festival in collaboration with Bertz Associates. Throughout July and August in community centers and places of workshops across the city. Featuring *Tower of Dreams* by Black artist and Birmingham filmmaker Pogus Caesar and *Sporting Tower* by Birmingham-based young filmmaker Yonatan Tiruneh. Check website for venues and timings.

The Name Game

Monday 11 July until Sunday 24 August, 24 hours. Billboard locations across the city in Digbeth, Selly Oak, Small Heath and Erdington.

Barford Street Right, 10 Barford Street, B5 6AG

Custard Factory Carpark, High Street Deritend, B9 4AA

Chester Road Station, Erdington Chester Road, B73 5JS

Bradford Street, Digbeth, Bradford Street Canal, B12 0QY

Bristol Road, Selly Oak, 676 Bristol Road, B29 6BJ

Golden Hillock Road, Small Heath, 245 Golden Hillock Road, B11 2PJ

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During exhibitions our (FREE) gallery is open Wednesday to Saturday, 12–5pm

The exhibition is wheelchair accessible, and alternative formats of written and audio material are available. Please see our full access guide on our website or contact info@eastsideprojects.org for more information.

- Artist–Curator Gavin Wade
- Artist–Maker Ruth Claxton
- Offsite Curator Zoë Sawyer, Tim Mills
- Artist–Caretaker Amelia Hawk
- Artist–Curator Trainees Jaz Morrison, Dinosaur Kilby,
 Katherine Smith, Trixiebella Suen
- Artist–Organiser Ania Bas
- Saturday Assistant (& Recent Activity) Ashley Wilson
- Finance Administrator Neisa Reid
- Graphic Design. Rosen Eveleigh
 assisted by Cecilia Brena
- Technician Suzi Osborn
- Mural Painters Annatomix, Tom Bloor
- Media Partner. JACK ARTS part of the
 BUILDHOLLYWOOD family



Eastside Projects makes art public. We are an artist-run multiverse, commissioning, producing and presenting experimental art practices and demonstrating ways in which art may be useful as part of society.



Thanks to Aziz Albadr, Jon Andrews, Helen Annetts, Pauline Bailey, Miranda Banfield, Iris Bertz, Sarah Cheang, Birmingham City Council, Bournville Village Council, Bournville Village Trust, Michael Cheesman, Chinese Community Centre, COW, Digbeth Community Garden, Easy Fix Scaffolding, Matt Gale, Andrew Gillespie, Charles Gillett, Sahjan Kooner, Mondelez International, OPUS, Devan Patel, Jon Saner, Beth Baker-Wyse, West Side Tim.

Amy Ching-

Man Lam

Recent Activity launch

Digbeth First Friday,
3 June, 6–9pm

Project & Book Launch:

Saturday 4 June, 1pm

Jhenjiwe

Niki Nkosi

The Same Track

Digbeth First Friday,
5 August, 6–8pm

Community Screening

Micro Festival
throughout July
and August.

Rajni Perera

Exhibition launch

Digbeth First Friday,
3 June, 6–8pm

Mural launch:

Friday 3 June,
4–6pm

Jon

McCurley

Taste Test

Saturday 25 June,
1–10pm

Monsters of the World

Tour launch

Digbeth First Friday,
1 July, 6–8pm;
2 & 9 July
in Bournville