

CoolTan Arts at South London Gallery: the making of a soundscape and the screening of *Innovation in Mad Culture*

Wednesday 20 July at the South London Gallery. A diverse group of around 50 people, sharing a common interest in CoolTan gather in the Gallery's studio to listen to a sound scape and to witness the premiere of the documentary on the Largactyl Shuffle Walks "Innovation in Mad Culture", funded by Heritage Lottery Fund and the Mayor's Story of London.

The sound scape presented consisted of sounds recorded at July's Largactyl Shuffle Literary Walk created in collaboration with sound artist Isa Suarez.



Production of the soundscape

The Largactyl Shuffle Group met Isa Suarez for the first time in the beginning of July at one of our weekly meetings. She told us about her projects, such as the Human Right Jukebox and audio tours she created. Isa was very enthusiastic about our idea to focus on storytelling, either on the artists' life or on characters from his/her work. She introduced us to the original hand crafted marquetry floor in the South London Gallery designed by illustrator and social reformer Walter Crane which bears the sentence: "the source of art is in the life of a people".



Fascinated by the line, we decided to make it the central theme of the Literary Walk. Isa proposed a few ideas for the walk, amongst which a so-called "spontaneous choir". This choir would consist of the group being separated into several small groups whom would all recite a particular sound, word or verb related to the walk. One person would be appointed to conduct the choir and speed up or slow down the recitations and increase or decrease the volume.

The following week we met again for the final preparations, this time at the South London Gallery. Frances, the education coordinator introduced us to the gallery and to Tue Greenfort's exhibition. After visiting the exhibition, we participated in a spontaneous choir using words and sounds that reflected our impressions of the exhibition, which was a lot of fun. After this, we discussed the content of the walk in more detail in the garden. Most of the group decided to leave, and a handful stayed to witness the official opening of the exhibition.

Literary Largactyl Shuffle Walk

On Saturday we gathered at the Maudsley Hospital to start our walk. Despite the heavy rainfall 12 enthusiastic walkers joined the Largactyl Shuffle Group. As the weather did not show any signs of improvement, we decided to walk to the CoolTan building to warm ourselves up with coffee and tea and to listen to the stories in doors about John Ruskin, Walter Crane's sentence, Lord Byron's life and some of his work, the recent controversy surrounding Robert Browning, the lives and works of Mary and Charles Lamb and some of volunteer Sasha's wonderful poems.

As soon as it stopped raining we went out to continue our walk in an adjusted route in the neighbourhood. We passed an interesting grave tomb at which volunteer Zoe told us about Dickens' Miss Havesham. It was here that we decided to record our spontaneous choir. We recited lines from Mary Shelley's work and Crane's "the source of art is in the life of a people". Volunteers Zoe and William contributed to the orchestra by reproducing "drip drop" rain drop sounds. Volunteer and musician Paul enthused everyone into perfecting the performance by skillfully indicating us to be louder/softer and faster/quieter. It put a smile on everyone's face. The walk continued along a church where volunteer June captivated us all by her vivid storytelling skills on Chaucer's wife of Bath. After Lu enlightened us about the fascinating and dramatic story on John Keats and Fanny Brawne's relationship, we continued our walk to a pub where volunteers Rachel, Genevieve and Kaya talked about Marry Shelley and the women in Shakespeare's work. The walk officially came to an end by John reciting his own colourful poem.





The following Monday, Largactyl Shuffle volunteers assisted sound artist Isa in the making of a sound scape. We listened to the recordings in her studio, a large room full of sound boxes, keyboards and small ethnic instruments, a large sofa and a desk. While enjoying tea, coffee and cookies, comfortably nestled on the large couch in the room, and with the pleasant breeze of a fan, we decided to focus on the spontaneous choir primarily. Isa showed us the programme she uses, how one can make a compilation of the various recordings, the wide range of sound effects and we discussed what voices we like and how they should be edited.

Launch of the film *Innovation in Mad Culture*

The presentation of the soundscape on Wednesday at the South London Gallery was greeted with much enthusiasm. The film *Innovation in Mad Culture* was a wonderful introduction to CoolTan's work and especially the Largactyl Shuffle Walk. As I have recently joined the group (the Literary Walk was my first walk) the film was especially informative. Amongst others, it showed what CoolTan means for so many people. For example, one of the volunteers in the film says with regard to the walk-leader training: "*When dealing with mental health issues, we tend to avoid the masses, but now we are leading the masses, instead of avoiding them.*" The film showed the diversity of the walks and the enthusiasm, collaboration and creativity of all the volunteers, something I have experienced myself in these last few weeks while creating the Literary Walk and collaborating with Isa Suarez. The panel discussion after the viewing was also very informative and reflective on the walks, as film director Richard Muzira beautifully stated: "*The Largactyl Shuffle Walk is about finding a balance between reality - reality in the ontological sense of recognizing objects and the epistemological sense of dealing with conceptual issues - and pleasure*".

I am very happy and honored to be part of the CoolTan Arts, an organisation that works with all these creative, intelligent and warm people and to be able to contribute to the Largactyl Shuffle Walks, because it is, as volunteer Peter so spot on vocalized at the premiere: "Such a good way to spend a Saturday". Kaya Völke, Largactyl Shuffle participant

Largactyl Shuffle participant Trilce added:

"Taking part in this sound project, particularly in one of our stops, was an unusual experience, and I found it very entertaining and relaxing as well. I felt like taking part in a real choir, when each of us had a sentence to speak up, but in different volume and at a different pace, according to the instructions of a director, while being recorded. It was like taking part in creating something, without knowing the result, which made it more exciting.

On the other hand, the fact that one of the guys who joined us just in this occasion recited his poem in front of all of us at the end of the walk, says something about the special atmosphere we experienced.

I also took part in the "Innovation and Mad Culture" Largactyl Shuffle walk last year [Oct 2010], and this was my first walk with CoolTan Arts. This was a joyful experience for me, walking through the streets of Southwark with all the sculptures and the people who joined us for this sponsored walk. It was a good opportunity to know more about the role of this institution to change perception about mental illnesses, and to discover altogether something about this innovators and their legacy in Mental Health related issues, which I enjoyed very much."

Additional information:

CoolTan Arts believes mental wellbeing is enhanced by the power of creativity. It is an arts mental health charity, reg. charity no. 1064231, run by and for people with mental distress and exists to inspire the wellbeing and creative participation of a diverse range of people through the production of quality art based on social enterprise principles.

Upcoming Largactyl Shuffle Walks and CoolTan events:

Sat 14 Aug, 12noon: Elephant & Nun Festival – Largactyl Shuffle Walk

Tue 16 Aug, 6pm: Private View Batik & Textiles 'RETRO-spective'

Sat 20 Aug, 12noon at Maudsley Hospital: CoolTan Arts Largactyl Shuffle - Family Treasure Hunt

Sat 3 Sept: Liberty Festival at South Bank with Largactyl Shuffle Walks

Sat 17 Sept, 12noon at Maudsley Hospital: CoolTan Arts Largactyl Shuffle – Black History Walk



For more information, please contact Kathrin Kirmann, Communications Manager CoolTan Arts, on kathrin@cooltanarts.org.uk or 020 71830350, check www.cooltanarts.org.uk, follow us on Twitter: [@cooltan4](https://twitter.com/cooltan4) or Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/cooltanarts>