



INTRODUCTION

The Citadel is the name for a new residential neighbourhood in the historic town of Ayr. The site has a long history in terms of changing uses. Once the site of the long vanished Castle of Ayr and more recently a barracks, there is still evidence of a Cromwellian Citadel. There is also a significant industrial heritage linked closely to the River Ayr and the sea which continues into the present.

An award winning masterplan prepared by London architects, Patel Taylor, controls the transformation of the area. When complete, a wide range of properties for owner-occupation and affordable rent will have been provided as well as leisure and retail facilities. The design guidelines place an obligation on developers to include public art within their projects wherever possible.

Ayrshire Housing completed 78 flats and houses in July 2002. These were designed by the Alastair Murdoch Partnership closely following the masterplan. Ayrshire Housing saw its public art obligation as an opportunity to stimulate social interaction amongst its new tenants – the majority of whom are elderly. It was hoped that the project would help to foster a real sense of community within this new neighbourhood. Unlike the majority of such arts projects, tenants would have opportunities to be involved from inception right through to the final installation. Creating a sense of ownership was, therefore, at the core of the project.

Advised by The Glasgow School of Art, we agreed that the best way forward was to give an artist an open brief. We chose Stephen Hurrell. His commitment to engaged, concept led projects where the outcome is the product of dialogue seemed to fit the association's bill.

This booklet is not just a souvenir of an installation which has already become a much talked about local feature. It is also intended to provide a guide to other organisations who may be considering commissioning public art linked to a wider social purpose

JIM WHISTON • Director, Ayrshire Housing

BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH

I was invited to develop a public art project for the Citadel at a fairly early stage. At that point the buildings were still under construction and landscaping was just underway. Therefore, over a period of several months I was able to see the development take shape, explore the area and meet many of the new tenants as they moved in.

As well as this, and in contrast to most public art projects, there was no fixed brief. Instead, Paul Cosgrove of the Sculpture Department at The Glasgow School of Art had already produced a document that contained research material and suggestions on how the project might progress. Crucially, the document emphasised that the project should be concept led and the artist should engage with the place and the people.

In order to give myself a structure to work within I proposed three distinct stages:

Stage one: Research – a period of time to explore the area and its history based on visual, textual and oral material. This would be an opportunity to respond to the area in both a formal as well as an intuitive way. Students from the Sculpture Department of The Glasgow School of Art would be introduced to the project and invited to become involved.

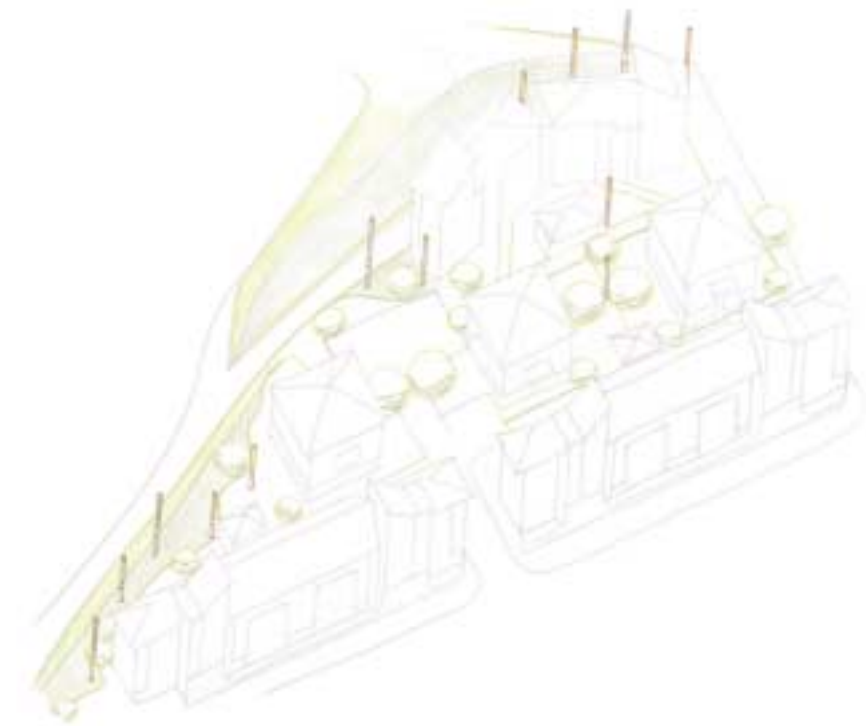
Stage two: Development of several approaches that involved an engagement with people and place leading to the presentation of 2-3 main proposals. G.S.A. students could choose to continue working on the project.

Stage three: Final proposal agreed on and developed for presentation to the tenants followed by the installation of the artwork.



Within this structure it was important to have on-going discussions with the architects and Ayrshire Housing as a way of identifying what form the artwork might take.

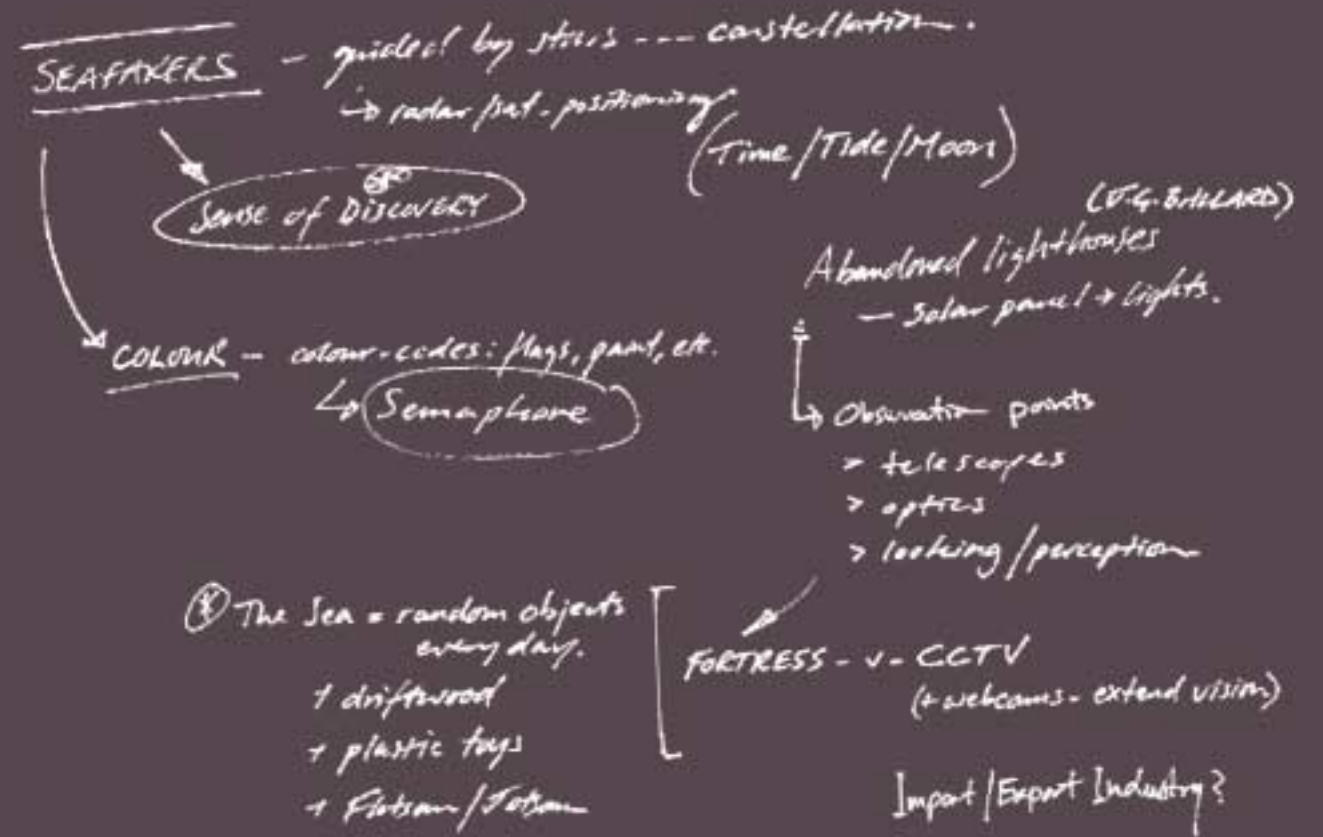
We discussed the formal characteristics of the development: its scale, layout, physical qualities etc. as well as how people would interact with it and with each other. Through this process we were able to explore the possibilities and restrictions offered by the site and this led us to consider what might work, and what might not work, for this particular development.



Picture: Axonometric view of the development



Clockwise from top left:
View of harbour from flats,
lighthouse at end of harbour
wall, helmet washed up on
beach, CCTV camera and
lookout post as part of the
Citadel wall.



TENANT INTERVIEWS

As part of Stage One it was important to introduce the project to the new tenants. So, in collaboration with three students from the Sculpture Department of The Glasgow School of Art; Jean Glass, Gerard Keenan and Fiona Kernagan, we came up with a list of introductory type questions. We basically wanted to know where people had lived prior to their move to the Citadel. Were they from the local area, from other parts of the country or from other countries? Had they lived in a coastal location like this before or was it a new experience for them?

As the tenants had only recently moved into their new homes we were able to meet them at a point when they were still forming impressions of their new environment and perhaps also reflecting on the places they had recently left behind. The replies to our questions often led to personal stories about life-journeys and the important decisions that were made along the way; decisions that had ultimately led them to the Citadel in Ayr.

At the end of each visit we asked each person to choose an object or image that they had always taken with them when they moved house. We then asked if we could document the selected item with the intention of incorporating it into the project in some way. The choice of objects and images were surprising in their character and diversity. But this random collection seemed to reflect the variety of people in the Citadel and also revealed the important role that these types of objects have in creating a sense of place, identity and 'home'.

The process of talking with tenants revealed that some people had lived locally, some had lived in various parts of the U.K. and quite a number of people had lived in other countries, including Australia, South Africa, Cyprus, Canada, America and Singapore. As well as gathering this type of information we were able to get a better idea of the different age groups and numbers of families that had moved in.

“Even when you walk beside the sea it is better than any medicine”

“I’ve always been beside the sea. I don’t know why because I hate the water and cannae swim”

“I’ve not lived beside the sea before. I love it!”

“I saw the sea when I was four years old. I have photos of me and my sister at the beach at Ayr. Lovely sand, nice picnics.”

“I suppose I have lived beside the sea in a lot of places. My best remembered colour is the Indian Ocean – Ocean blue”

“I came from Stirling when I was fifteen and I’d never seen the sea before.”

“The Fisherman’s Mission was right here where my flat is and they used to sell the fish outside there on the pavement.”

“Last time I saw the sea it was crashing on the shore”



What personal objects or images have you always taken with you when you move house?

The interview process provided us with initial contact with the new tenants. However, as everyone was new to the Citadel no-one had really got to know their neighbours yet. So, as a way of introducing the project, and perhaps creating a talking point between people, we decided to post the documentary images to each household in the form of postcards. This was a reference to the Ayrshire coast being a popular holiday destination and, for many of the tenants we spoke to, it was the first seaside resort they had visited in their childhoods.

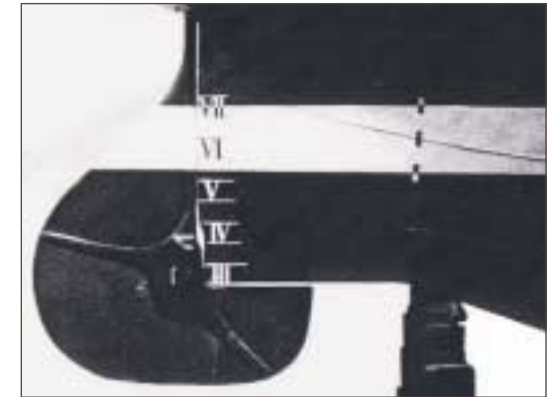
THE POLES

In parallel with the postcard project, and leading onto Stage Two, I was developing ideas for the permanent artwork. I felt that the harbour-side location and the Citadel's connections with the sea should strongly inform the artwork. I also felt that it should consist of a series of objects placed throughout the development as opposed to a single sculptural object, and this was agreed upon during group discussions. Although I wanted the artwork to be informed by the history of the area I also felt that it should announce the Citadel as a forward-looking contemporary development. After all, the buildings and the tenants were both new introductions to the area so it seemed fitting that the artwork should be both 'of the place' as well as an obvious new addition.

I wanted to work with the language of colour in relation to the sea. In particular I wanted to sample colours from the nautical environment as a way of creating a connection between the Citadel and its coastal location. In a formal sense I felt the combination of this approach, together with the idea of a random arrangement of elements, would introduce another kind of logic or language into the housing development. I felt this would create an interesting contrast to the clean lines, white surfaces and formal layout of the buildings.



Idea of 'marking territory'
Research into the area had revealed a long history of battlements, barracks, etc.



Details of boat markings



Details of boat colours
The harbour had seen a lot of activity in the past and many vessels and ships that passed up and down the Firth of Clyde would have been making journeys to and from various exotic and far-flung destinations.



My proposal to install a series of painted steel poles of various heights, each a reference to a different boat, was a form that seemed to work well within this particular context. The artwork was bold yet also fairly minimalist and it could be experienced from many different viewpoints during the journey through or around the development.

As the artwork was to become part of a small living community I also wanted people to relate

to it in a more intimate way. As an extension to the themes of 'the sea', travel and navigation I created five miniature landscapes that represent 'other places'. These are intended as points of contemplation. They could be places that people have seen or visited before or places that ships from the Clyde have travelled to. Perhaps they are examples of archetypal picturesque landscapes; the kind you take photographs of on your travels or that you see on postcards. Maybe they are a hybrid of all these things.

To view these landscapes you look through small wide-angle viewfinders and illuminate the interior of the pole with a small torch. As part of the project each household was given a small key to access a torch box located within their entrance stairway. Therefore, this aspect of the project is practically invisible to people outwith the Citadel and requires that people are told about it, or shown it, by one of the tenants. It is like a secret that each person can choose to share.

Similarly, three types of chimes are suspended within three other poles and a small wind vane at the top of each pole activates these. People can press their ear to the pole and listen to the sound echo down the length of the pole. Sounds that suggest other, more exotic, distant places.

The title of the work **Constellation** suggests a reason for the arrangement of poles and therefore makes reference to the oldest form of navigation - the stars. These same stars, one of the few unchanged aspects of the location, would have been the main source for guiding the earliest settlers to these shores.

Images:

(left image) Diagram of Pole Star constellation used in navigation

(right image) Signal Flags from the International Code



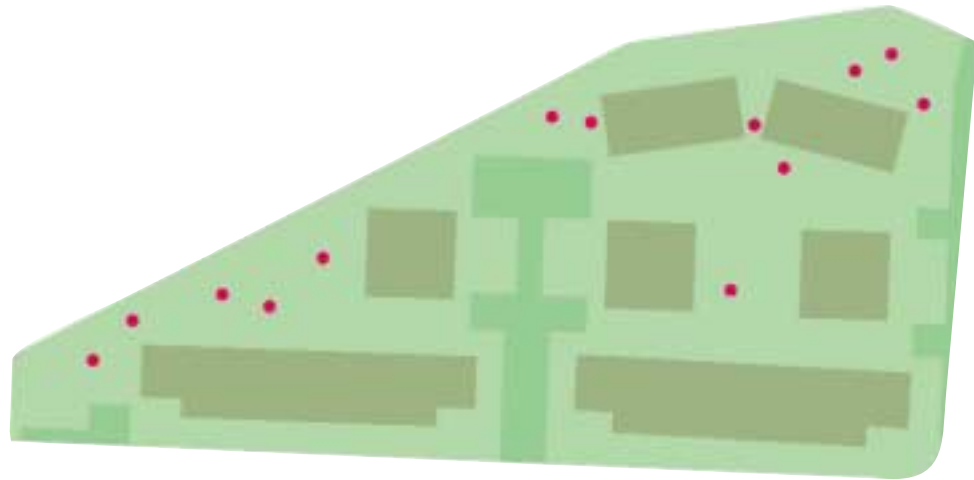
PREVIEW

As part of Stage Three of the project, a preview event for **Constellation** took place on Thursday 17 October 2002 in the Citadel Leisure Centre. At this event I presented scale models of the proposal to the residents, architects and Ayrshire Housing and was generally available to discuss ideas and answer questions. This was also an opportunity for anyone to object to the proposal if they felt it was inappropriate or felt strongly enough against it.



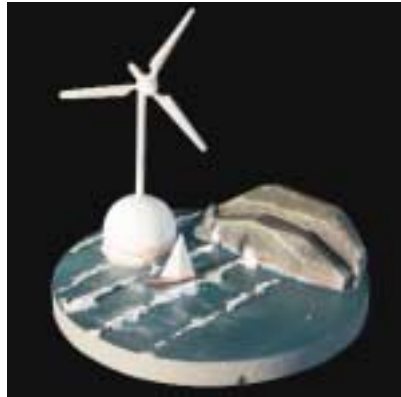
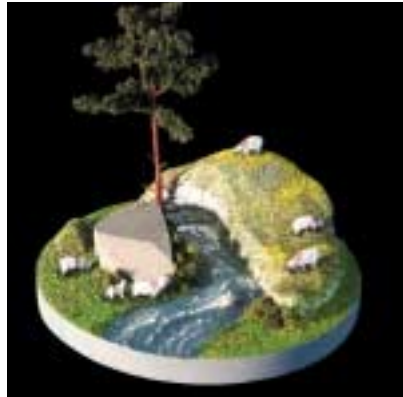
INSTALLATION

Following a period of further development the artwork was produced. Prior to installation the final location of each pole, as well as the torch boxes, was decided in consultation with Ayrshire Housing and the architects. Installation of the artwork took place over several days in early June 2003. The official unveiling took place on Thursday 19 June 2003.



Map of Poles on Site





MINIATURE LANDSCAPES

Pole Interiors

Images of the models contained within five of the **Constellation** poles

Right:

Torch Box containing; torch, rechargeable batteries, solar panel, log book.
Resident Pack containing; postcard series, miniature pole with stand, key to torch box.



TORCH BOX



RESIDENTS PACK



CONCLUSION

Two months after **Constellation** was installed Jean Glass was invited to revisit the Citadel to ask each tenant a series of questions. We basically wanted to know whether people liked the artwork and whether they thought it was a good addition to their environment. We were also interested to know, now that people were a bit more accustomed to the artwork, whether their response to it had changed over the past two months. Additionally, we wanted to know whether people had placed their miniature pole somewhere in their house. And, if so, Jean would ask them if she could take a photograph of it.

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

In general the people who liked the artwork really seemed attached to it in a positive way and seemed to have made their minds up about it.

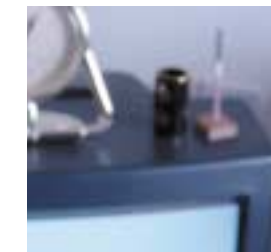
The tenants who were negative about it were also more ambivalent. Some said they might change their minds about it especially now that they knew more about it and how it was funded.

Asking each tenant to comment on the artwork from a personal point of view was a positive thing in itself. This was appreciated, as more often than not people are not consulted about changes to their environment. Although at first people appeared a bit reluctant to express an opinion on an art project, the fact that it was part of their environment seemed to make this easier. Most people were willing to interpret the artwork and make comments about it.

Whether in favour of the artwork or not, age group was not an influencing factor.

Viewpoints were not necessarily related to whether people liked staying in their new houses, as some who had complaints related to the housing association still liked the artwork.

An initial reaction from those negative about the artwork was that it was a waste of money. When it was explained that the money was from a separate fund used only for art some tenants appeared to reconsider their response to the work.



A recurring comment was that the Citadel was now known as 'the place with the poles'.

The overall feeling was of a small community adjusting to each other and to the changing landscape around them.

Footnote:

The process of asking this series of questions was an interesting aspect of the project as it is often the case that the artist does not get direct feedback from people about a public artwork. Similarly, the public is not often asked to respond individually.

I think it would be interesting to repeat this survey twelve months after the first survey. It would be interesting to see how, or if, opinions had changed. In order to get a truly considered opinion back from each person the survey could also include an option to remove the artwork. If, for example, over the past year, the majority of people had become negative towards the artwork then there would be the possibility that the artwork could be removed and sited in another similar community. I believe this would make people think about the artwork and its impact on their environment in a very considered way. They would then have to imagine what it would be like without the artwork there. I think this kind of enquiry is worth undertaking as a way of understanding how people relate to public artwork over time.

Constellation by Stephen Hurrell
Installed 2003

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