



Art Alert is a collective of artists, designers, teachers, students and others with an interest in art and the environment. We specialise in staging performance art events on environmental themes using re-used and recycled materials.

Over the last ten years we have worked with a wide range of clients and delivered everything from management training to major interactive art installations (and a great deal in-between). Recent clients include: The Worldwide fund for nature (WWF), the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Coventry City Council, Swansea City Council and the David Shepherd Conservation Foundation.

The size and composition of an Art Alert event team varies immensely from one project to another as both are determined by client need, the nature of the project and the budget. When a client wishes to use an event as an opportunity to train their own staff and/or volunteers we only use a core team. When a client wishes Art Alert to handle all aspects of an installation, we supply all the staff necessary to run the event.

This document details two of our larger projects from recent years, Africa Alert and Ocean Alert. If you would like to see our promotional video, samples of television coverage our projects have attracted and our project video diaries, these are available on request (CD-ROM: PC format or video: VHS-PAL).

To find out how Art Alert could help your organisation or if you are interested in becoming a member or a project partner, please get in touch.

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# Africa Alert



Africa Alert was commissioned by the David Shepherd Conservation Foundation. The brief was to provide a high profile, fully participatory, art/education activity in London's Covent Garden to publicise both World Animal Day 1997 and the Work of the Foundation.

We chose Africa as our theme for two reasons. Firstly, this allowed us to highlight the importance of Africa as home to some of the World's most impressive and endangered animals. Secondly, this fitted well with David Shepherd's respected work on behalf of, African Wildlife - particularly Elephants.

Our aim was to create an art installation that not only provided an exciting range of activities for members of the public but also created an impact that lasted long beyond World Animal Day itself. The event succeeded in creating significant media interest prior to, during and after the day itself.

Howie Watkins and David Shepherd, along with a team of artists and designers supervised the construction of an artwork consisting of a mural and freestanding - life sized - sculptures of elephants. By the end of the day, the marquee contained a representation of the African plains: past, present and (possible) future.

The final artwork resulted from a combination of the contributions from the design team and the public. This ensured that the work was genuinely participatory, fully involving the public and evolving as the day progressed.

The visual elements of the artwork were constructed from reused materials; junk collected from industry. This allowed us to highlight the important conservation role we can all play through a greater recycling and reuse of resources.

## Mural

The mural (approximately 60 square metres in area) was created by erecting and then painting upon a "canvas" of waste cardboard. It consisted of two panels of equal size running along the rear and left hand walls of the marquee.

The construction of the mural was a two stage process: painting a background scene and creating animals and plants to fit within it. Both stages took place simultaneously with members of the public free to paint the background and/or cardboard cutouts which were added to the background as it neared completion. This approach allows participants of all ages and abilities to contribute freely to the finished mural whilst still allowing our team to control the finished result to a large degree.

The mural design, by Chris Andrews, shows a scene typical of an African Plain: groups of animals against a background of mountains and lush vegetation. On the left-hand side, we see the consequences of intensive ranching, poaching and uncontrolled human encroachment upon the plain. This section, a symbolic "Africa-future", shows a dry plain littered with the corpses and skeletons of animals along with tombstones and a highway blocked with traffic and pollution.



The message was simple, yet effective, "Do you want to risk this happening to some of the most important wild habitats in the World?". Having posed this question, in a simple and graphic way, the other activities and information delivery points within the marquee gave participants the chance to learn more about the developmental and conservation problems faced by Africa and built a greater understanding of the importance of the in-situ conservation programmes operated by DSCF. Experts and environmental educators were on hand to discuss the issues raised and the work of DSCF.



## Sculptures

The centerpiece of the installation was a life-sized pair of African Elephants, a Bull and Calf. These too were constructed mainly from waste materials. The basic shapes of the sculptures were created by building a wood and chicken-wire frame to which "skin" made from old hospital sheets, surplus material from tea-bag manufacture and plaster was added.



Although all our sculptures are normally built from scratch, the time-scale and location of this installation demanded that they be partially constructed prior to the event and assembled on site before the public entered. By taking this approach we ensured that all participants had the opportunity paint a section of finished elephant.



## Ellie-Masks

In our experience, it is important to allow participants to create something for themselves that they may take away from the installation as a souvenir. In order to allow this, we also ran an elephant mask workshop. Pre-made cardboard cut-outs of elephant heads were provided for participants to paint as they wished. Once dry, these were transformed into masks, by the simple addition of a stick. We also had a small army of volunteer face-painters on hand to create revenue and add to the "Africa Experience".



## Customs & Excise

A stall of illegally imported, confiscated, animal artifacts was provided to allow participants to learn more about the illegal trade in the body parts of endangered mammals. Biofacts (natural animal remains e.g. teeth, antlers etc. from captive animals) were also be available for the public to handle. The stall was provided and manned by H.M. Customs and Excise inspectors able to answer questions and provide information on the display specimens.



## Information

Information delivery and fund raising: through donations and merchandising were central to this installation. There were three main information points: The Meet and Greet zone by the entrance was manned by staff to welcome members of the public and guide them into the marquee. These staff will also acted to control crowds and implemented a ticket system for the art activities during busy periods.

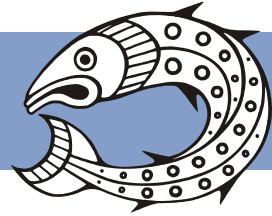
The DSCF information point at the entrance to the marquee handled general enquiries about the installation and DSCF. This station also promoted the sponsors and ensured that their support was fully acknowledged.

The Merchandise and Autographs stall in the marquee stocked a range of DSCF merchandise and acted as contact point for guest celebrities.

## Sponsors

The event was sponsored by Imation. Posters, postcards and banners were designed and printed free of charge by 3D Studio. TDI provided free advertising space on the London Underground. Covent Garden Market gave us free use of both the East Piazza and their custom made marquee. Colorblend donated paint. Transport was provided by Kennings Car and Van Rental. Cardboard was supplied by the W.J.Jenkins and Son of Swansea.

# Ocean Alert



Ocean Alert was commissioned by the City and County of Swansea for the City of Swansea Show, May 25th & 26th 1997, in Singleton Park, Swansea. The client wanted an exhibit that would: add value to their event; generate additional pre-publicity and introduce an environmental theme to the show. In addition, the client requested that the artwork should have a life after the show.

Within the boundaries of Swansea County are some of Britain's most beautiful stretches of wild coastline, "Ocean Alert" was therefore a natural choice. We set out to highlight the importance of the marine environment around Swansea and the commitment to preserving this environment currently being shown by the City & County of Swansea in partnership with the business sector.

At the show, in a dedicated marquee, we ran a range of activities, including; painting, collage, sculpture, modelling, music, poetry and animal encounters. In addition to this, we also organised a two week long exhibition based around our artwork at The Environment Centre, Swansea and ran events on June 8th, 9th and 10th to coincide with World Oceans Day.

Howie Watkins, along with a team of artists and designers supervised the construction of an artwork consisting of a mural, a freestanding (life-sized) sculpture of a Sperm whale's tail, mobiles and masks. By the end of the show, the marquee contained a three dimensional representation of the marine environment that featured local landmarks and history.

The visual elements of the artwork were constructed from reused junk collected from beaches, junk stores and companies around South Wales. We liaised closely with the City & County of Swansea Council to utilize local sources of material. This allowed us to highlight the Council's work towards encouraging greater recycling and reuse of resources. The final artwork resulted from a combination of the contributions from the design team and the public. This ensured that the work was genuinely participatory, fully involving the public and evolving as the day progressed.

## Mural

The mural (approximately one hundred square metres) was created by erecting and then painting upon a "canvas" of waste cardboard. It consisted of three main panels of equal size and two smaller sub-panels running along the walls of the marquee.

The construction of the mural was a two stage process: painting a background scene and creating animals and plants to fit within it. Both stages took place simultaneously with members of the public free to paint the background and/or cardboard cutouts which were added to the background as it neared completion. This approach allows participants of all ages and abilities to contribute freely to the finished mural whilst still allowing our team to control the finished result to a large degree.



The mural design, by Wyn Griffiths, sought to represent the world's oceans as if seen from a viewpoint on Swansea beach. On the right hand side we see the familiar sight of Mumbles head, then the open ocean and the deep sea. On the far wall is a coral reef. The left hand wall, returning to Swansea, shows an over-exploited and polluted ocean, merging into a scene of industrial devastation and rubbish. Thankfully, the mural (and our journey) continues through this to a greener, better future of re-use and recycling.



The message was simple, yet effective, "Do you want the rubbish-filled or the green future for the oceans?". Having posed this question, in a simple and graphic way, the other activities and information delivery points within the marquee gave participants the chance to learn more. Experts and environmental educators were on hand to discuss the issues raised.

At the end of the event, the mural and kelp forest were relocated to Swansea's Environment Centre where they formed the centrepiece of an



art exhibition in celebration of World Ocean Day. After the exhibition, it was planned that the cardboard on which the mural was painted would be recycled, however, a number of teachers requested that sections of the artwork be donated to their schools. As we always re-use rather than recycle, we divided and distributed the piece among five local schools.

## Rockpools

In the centre of the marquee, Howie Watkins ran animal handling sessions with locally collected marine animals and plants in specially designed touch tanks.



The tanks were made from old baths and shower trays mounted on a stage of waste palettes and polystyrene. They held over four hundred gallons of aerated seawater and allowed us to keep a wide range of local marine plants and animals healthy for the duration of the show. At the end of the event the animals were returned to the sea at the point of capture.

## Information

Representatives of Marine conservation and local environmental action groups were on hand throughout the event. This helped us effectively deliver our environmental message and promote recycling and recycled products.



A stall of illegally imported, confiscated, animal artifacts (including turtle shells and coral) was provided to allow participants to learn more about the illegal trade in the body parts of endangered animals.

## Sculpture

The main sculptural element was the whale's tail constructed at the entrance of the marquee. It was made from waste wood, polystyrene, chicken wire, tea-bag material and plaster.

Within the marquee, cardboard cut-outs and waste material from a Christmas decorations factory were used to create a walk-through kelp forest.

## Jellyfish on Sticks

In our experience, it is important to allow participants to create something for themselves that they may take away from the installation as a souvenir. In order to allow this, we also ran a "jellyfish on a stick" workshop. cut-outs of sea creatures were provided for participants to paint as they wished. Once dry, these were transformed into masks, by the simple addition of a stick.

## Poetry

A "sound workshop" allowed participants to record words, poetry and sounds that evoked strong images of the sea. These were added to a "Marine Sound Poem" which evolved alongside the visual artwork. The poem was played on BBC Radio Wales live from the event.



## Sponsors

The event was funded by the City and County of Swansea Council. They obtained sponsorship from W.J. Jenkins & Son (Waste Paper Merchants). The Art Alert Crew received further help from Jenkins & Son in the form of cardboard. Addis housewares donated buckets and brushes (many of which are still in use today!).

# The Core Team



## Howie Watkins:

Howie started, and continues to co-ordinate the Art Alert Project. Best known for his work as a presenter on the popular BBC television programme, "The Really Wild Show", Howie has been working with young people since graduating from university in 1990. He has experience of public relations, event organisation, environmental education and has been organising performance art events of this kind on a variety of themes since 1990. You can view a more detailed biography.

## Wyn Griffiths:

Wyn has worked with Howie on a number of Art Alert projects, most notably at Gelli Aur Country Park, Pencynor Wildlife Park and Swansea County Show. He holds a BA in three-dimensional design (University of Wales, Newport) a PGCE specialising in technology education (University of Wales, Swansea College) and an Msc. in product design (University of the West of England). He has experience of working both in industry and academia and is currently a senior lecturer at the University of Bournemouth. Amazingly, he still finds time to join Howie when Elephants, Whales, Dragons, etc. need constructing.

## Michael Shadbolt:

Michael is another long-standing member of the team. He studied Landscape Architecture at Leeds University and holds both BA (hons) and Diplomas in Landscape Architecture. He is a freelance community landscape architect who specialises in learning environments. An advocate of "Planning for Real" he is currently working on a number of projects for the groundwork trust allowing young people to help design their own play environments.

## Chris Andrews:

Chris, the newest member of the team, first joined in 1997 as site foreman on the Ocean Alert project. Having survived the experience, he has become an invaluable member of the team. Chris holds a BA in Fine Art (Cardiff).