

REMOTE

ANNABEL McCOURT - ST HUGH'S FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS, MAIN AWARD 2018

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REPORT

BACKGROUND:

I grew up in rural Lincolnshire, to the soundtrack of A-10 Tank Buster gunfire at RAF Donna Nook bombing range. From Cold War to current conflict, Lincolnshire has provided a platform for 'intervention'.

CONCEPT:

Drone Ground Control Stations form the focus for 'REMOTE'. Building on from 'Electric Fence', themes of our own latent potential fused with the macabre muscularity of the work itself, 'REMOTE' will physically place a replica of a Ground Control Station in the gallery. Rules of Engagement, gaming culture, fake news & technology will collide with our preconceptions, our imagination and ultimately our moral code.

I will create a Ground Control Station, using my extensive research & refined techniques in order to make the work accessible for both intergenerational audience and exhibition installation requirements – i.e. large but portable.

Today, Reaper MQ9A or drones, operational thousands of miles away in 'conflict zones' are remotely piloted by 39 Squadron, Royal Air Force in Lincolnshire.

The work will not assume a particular position, only act as a catalyst for imagination and a conduit for conversation.

The audience will only be able to imagine what goes on, on the inside of the control centre. It is intended to heighten their senses bridging the gaps with their viewpoint, knowledge base, research and imaginations.

Working with tech partners, I will create an augmented reality experience, allowing a viewer to hold up a mobile device to the Ground Control Station, walking its exterior and peering into a surprising augmented reality scenario. e.g. kittens – cat videos on social media can have over 120 million views.

I would eventually like to develop a full VR user experience of a fully 'operational' Ground Control Centre interior - will you push the button?! – This phase will require additional funding – although consultancy is underway.



above: Reaper Drone Control Station image © Mark Richards
<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2525553/RAF-pilot-unleashes-hell-Taliban-comfort-armchair-Lincolnshire.html>

below: Reaper Drone
<https://www.lincolnshirelive.co.uk/news/local-news/raf-waddington-drones-iraq-isis-4342341>



AIMS & OBJECTIVES:

I aim to produce an entirely new and exceptionally challenging artwork. Challenging in terms of direct emotional engagement, physical confrontation, cerebral connotations etc. and challenging to me, as an artist to produce the ultimate work via a rigorous and experimental process.

I aim for it to spark debate, engender a sense of ownership, which upon first encounter the work might appear off-putting/macabre/unwelcoming. The layers of interaction will counterbalance the confrontations. I wish to question, or rather get an audience to question the loss of physical interaction/physicality in connection to the reality around us, by creating the ultimate balance between art and technology.

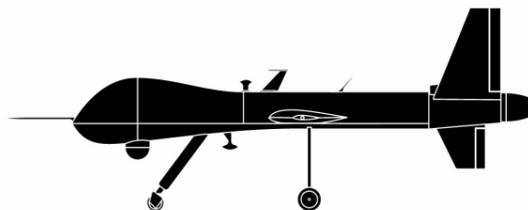
The very name REMOTE plays devil's advocate. Are we completely detached from the wider world, more insulated, less connected, fragmented or are we ultimately in charge?

I intend REMOTE (ground control station) to be the physical conduit for exploring our insular world as remote voyeurs and the augmented reality blurring fact and fiction in the way we choose to present ourselves to the wider world via social media. Does this influence the mainstream media's decision on what to present to us, our appetite for kittens playing outweighs our interest in war zones – or does it?!

Being brave, but rigorous in my process in order to present a strong and challenging piece of work, which stands up to debate and is made with honesty, integrity and intelligence that represents me as an artist and more importantly the foundation which has supported me.

above: purchased - <https://www.turbosquid.com/Search/Artists/mzubak>

below: purchased - Vectorstock



INTENDED OUTCOMES:

- To fully engage and absorb a new, intergenerational audience for contemporary art by placing a confrontational catalyst and inviting them to consider, interact with, be challenged by, digest and ruminate, question and transport themselves to a new-found reality, or rather a rediscovery.
- Engender a sense of ownership by making an audience 'work for it'. I don't want to give them everything on a plate. i.e. make the work appropriately interactive.
- Critically integrate insights from art, politics, anthropology & technology without pushing a particular agenda. Establish a diverse working group in the 'Culture Campus', as facilitated by Hull University to devise and debate appropriate 'AR' content.
- Successfully combine multi-agency/partnership approach to produce the strongest possible artwork, by integrating all required elements following a rigorous process.
- Create a multilayered experience – enjoyable yet thought-provoking – taking into consideration the demographic of the intended audience, including; family groups, young people and retired visitors.
- Select and apply appropriate methods for manufacture and development, accounting for making the work accessible for audience and appropriate for multi-venue display/legacy.
- Overcome design and manufacture challenges. e.g. applying practical solutions but not compromising the work.
- Seek additional (match) funding to maximise technological potential – i.e. create the most enhanced possible version.
- Analyse evaluation, implement into a legacy, constantly evolving & demonstrating value for money.

REMOTE

ANNABEL McCOURT

Are we completely detached from the wider world,
more insulated, less connected, fragmented
or are we ultimately in charge?



PV photography by Anna Bean (Bluebeany)
www.bluebeany.com

INTENDED AUDIENCE:

I have discovered there is a real appetite for interactive contemporary art. I like people to happen across my work and be drawn into it. The muscular physical presence of 'REMOTE' will command attention. I was surprised to discover how a true cross-section of intergenerational society were so receptive to quite brutalist work, such as the Electric Fence in a Minster, how they were prepared to interact and engage with challenging concepts, be receptive to marginalised groups and relate concepts to their own experiences and histories. Essentially people were prepared to invest, suspend their disbelief, deconstruct the work and create their own dialogues.

By making a direct physical connection with the work an audience are able to take ownership of it. Just as humanity stands accused of desensitisation to suffering, unable to disseminate between fake news and reality, disengaged, disenfranchised, suspicious, frightened or just 'CBA'... I genuinely believe that art is the only way explore and question the human condition and we must never underestimate or prejudge our potential audience. Therefore my intended intergenerational audience, comprising of young people, families, groups, retired and older people, is entirely realistic.

Indeed my intended audience is an audience I couldn't predetermine!

The design and construction of the work will enable it to be enjoyed by a wide audience. The very nature of it will also allow it to be exhibited outdoors, maximising the potential for it to be exhibited in both gallery and community settings.



TIMELINE:

2018

- Jul Notification of successful application
- Jul/Aug Collate information and start project administration
- Aug Announcement - Activate online presence/documentation
- Aug/Oct Pre-production planning technology & development – (ongoing process)
- Oct/Nov Pre-order material samples based on technology findings
- Oct/Nov Site visit with tech/manufacture partners
- Nov/Dec Explore possibilities and apply for additional funding
- Nov/Dec Progress report to St Hugh's Trustees

2019

- Jan/Feb Deadline for tech partners
- Feb Progress report to St Hugh's Trustees
- Feb/Mar Initial Risk Assessment & additional insurance identified
- Mar/Apr Manufacturing and collating of installation materials
- May/June Working group – AR Discussions and content decided
- Jul/Aug Filming of AR Scenarios (delayed until December)
- Aug/Sep First test of REMOTE (workshop location)
- Sep/Nov Feedback to tech & fine-tuning

2020

- Jan Publicity drive start and ongoing
- Feb Meeting with partner groups, volunteering, publicity, participation
- Mar Launch Event
- Mar Installation 'live' - Ongoing evaluation and documentation
- Dec De-Install



PROJECT PARTNERS:

I had made initial connections with the University of Hull in May 2018, in order to establish connections with their specialist VR and AR department HIVE. I was extremely impressed with the department and their world-leading technology. The benefits to REMOTE were clear to see and the potential was massive. I was very keen to establish meaningful collaborations with the University in terms of development, mentoring and legacy.

A whole host of possibilities was explored between various departments including embedding myself in the University HIVE with access to equipment in 'downtime', storage and experimental studio space, even the potential fellowship/scholarship/qualification... sadly none of this came to fruition.

However numerous conversations naturally lead to further exploration of the project with the University's Culture Campus, which included their fabulous in-house gallery The Brynmor Jones Library Gallery. Further explorations and negotiations to secure dedicated interns for the project ultimately failed, but to their great credit the University of Hull, and then Head Of Culture Campus Marianne Lewsley-Stier, stuck by the project, eventually committing to exhibiting REMOTE in their gallery in 2020.

Funding was agreed and the long road to installing the work was secured. It wasn't an easy journey and walls quite literally had to come down, but the sense of relief was massive!

Another breakthrough came when I was able to team up with Scarborough Museum's Trust and renowned curator Simon Hedges. Since being awarded the St Hugh's main award in 2018, and working developing REMOTE, I had secured a solo show 'Suffering Arcadia' at Scarborough Art Gallery with SMT. Following the great success of the show, I was delighted when Simon and SMT wanted to continue the working relationship and we were able to turn our attention towards REMOTE.

During my time in Scarborough and whilst initial fabrication of the main REMOTE unit was

underway with Strata Holdings (Pearlgreen Engineering) in Hull, another fortuitous opportunity landed at my feet in the form of THEATRE. The famous Stephen Joseph Theatre Scarborough was undergoing a major signage refurbishment to replace the broken neon with a bespoke LED upgrade. As luck would have it, my manufacturers were the ones working on the new signage and I was able to acquire the original sign.

I knew instantly that THEATRE belonged with REMOTE and the companion piece became 'THEATRE of War'. It said everything I wanted to say about REMOTE, the perfect military word play, exquisite red glow, nostalgic cold war aesthetic, the intertextual references associated with contemporary 'Stranger Things' culture... it was a risk, it was everything, and like a magpie I had to have it.

It was such a huge boost to have Simon Hedges onboard. His sheer art world knowledge, spectacular attention to detail and total expertise in lighting meant that REMOTE would be elevated to a whole new level.

Having the ultimate respect for Scarborough Museums Trust and now knowing that I had spectacular support, not least in terms of PR, but also the fantastic opportunity to link the partnerships and expand the show offer. The decision was made to create a satellite exhibition in Scarborough with a REMOTE Marquette – or 'Mini REMOTE' as I like to call it.

There was only one person for the job, artist Dale Christopher Wells. Dale is a Cleethorpes-based artist whose work 'focuses on the metaphorical shaping of landmass' and architecture, in order to convey the acknowledgment of tragedy.' You can find out more about his work here: <https://dalechristopherwells.weebly.com>

'Mini REMOTE' Mixed Media Sculpture. Dimensions: 110mm x 280mm x 150mm. Mini was particularly pleasing in the way that it was a model of a full-size model (REMOTE) based on a 3D computer model (<https://www.turbosquid.com/Search/Artists/mzubak>) of a real



PROJECT PARTNERS:

Reaper Drone Ground Control Station. Thus blurring the lines between fact, fantasy, fiction and fake news. This layering and attention to detail was vital to convey the true aims and objectives of the work: 'The layers of interaction will counterbalance the confrontations. I wish to question, or rather get an audience to question the loss of physical interaction/physicality in connection to the reality around us.'

Mini REMOTE provided the perfect catalyst for enquiry and an ideal link to Scarborough Museums Trust who displayed the work in the satellite exhibition at the Rotunda Museum. Mini REMOTE had all of the same Augmented Reality functionality as REMOTE.

The collaboration with Dale also produced another remarkable opportunity. His multi-disciplined practice extended to retro sprite games. Therefore presenting the possibility for truly bespoke game for REMOTE. This was an opportunity not to be missed, as the game would be able to connect the two exhibitions and audiences on a collective drone flight path, emanating from the dome of the Rotunda to the University of Hull's campus. Participants were lured into a familiar world and landscape.

Michelle Dee in reviewing the exhibition interpreted these elements as follow:

" Eighty miles away along the North East Coast a maquette of the larger model can be found inside Scarborough's Rotunda Museum. The Reaper maquette is the first link in a chain of interactive installation elements that exist in the real world and in virtual space.

To understand REMOTE it helps to imagine it as a timeline of events or scenarios which begin in Scarborough with the mini reaper control station. The work then shifts inside a digital game commissioned by Annabel McCourt and designed/developed by Dale Wells and BetaJester. The game played via iPads adapted for REMOTE invites the user to play as a drone operator, dropping bombs on an arcade-style scrolling city below. Players move quickly through the game destroying targets, game pro-

gress is displayed as collateral damage and lives lost. Through repeated play there is a growing awareness that this is far from a carefully controlled precision bombing exercise: the battleground appears uncomfortably close to home."

You can read Michelle's review here:
<https://michelledee2012.wordpress.com/2020/03/10/remote-annabel-mccourt/>

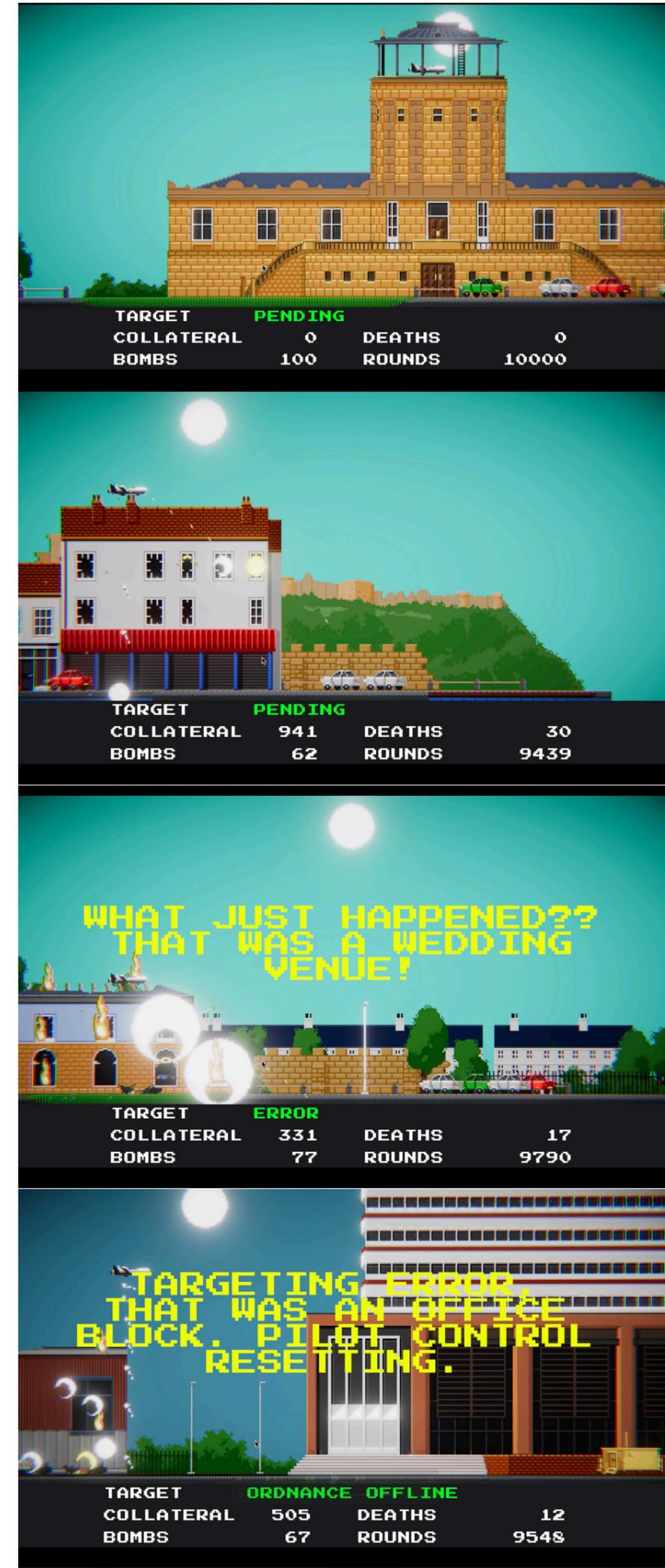
BetaJester are a young Hull tech startup and comprise of former University of Hull students. In my mind they provided the perfect solution for the missing AR development required to really bring the project to life.

I had already secured the ideal partners and location for the underwater filming scenario I so wanted for the project. HOTA Hull 'Established in 1987 and based in Hull, East Yorkshire, HOTA is a Limited Company with Charity Status, providing Internationally Approved and Accredited Training and an extensive portfolio of bespoke courses for the Renewables, Offshore, Maritime and Onshore Sectors to meet individual and company specific training needs.'

In short HOTA was the solution to gathering the underwater POV footage of a life jacket floating on the surface of a dark ocean, as viewed by a search and rescue diver.

Ian Rook is an incredible and celebrated photographer and the Operations and Emergency Response Manager at HOTA. He coordinated the filming and offered his expert eye over proceedings. The team were remarkable in their generosity, they provided the whole facility, dive team and equipment for free – they even invited me to join their staff Christmas dinner in the canteen after filming, what a bonus!

I then had the perfect blend of 3D and 2D underwater footage – deciding then and there to include footage of the diver into the narrative. Enabling the audience to be able to peer down and view the diver 'inside' the REMOTE, as well as looking up and seeing the life jacket floating on the surface.



PROJECT PARTNERS:

BetaJesta worked on transposing the REMOTE Sprite Game and my 2D and 3D footage to integrate into the user experience. The uniform surface of the REMOTE model (both mini and main) presented a challenge as did the time-frame and remaining budget.

It was at this point that I applied for a Hull City Arts Unit grant and was delighted that it was successful.

I wanted to push the boundaries between gaming and reality further still, and briefed BetaJester to include a lifejacket and water simulation within the AR experience before playing the 'real' scenario. An additional twist being the random inclusion of a cat 'playing' a tune on a keyboard, with its owner's black-gloved hands (not fully) disguised from view.

This jarring interruption hammering home the notion that REMOTE should be the physical conduit for exploring our insular world as remote voyeurs. The augmented reality blurring fact and fiction in the way we choose to present ourselves to the wider world via social media. Does this influence the mainstream media's decision on what to present to us, and our appetite for kittens playing, outweigh our interest in war zones?!





REMOTTE

AN... BEL McCOI



SUFFERING ARCADIA

REMOTE

ANNABEL McCOURT

06 March 2020 - 31 May 2020



Rotunda museum

UNIVERSITY OF HULL

Vernon Rd,
Scarborough YO11 2PS

Tue - Sun: 10am - 5pm
Closed Mondays

01723 353665
info@smtrust.uk.com

The Brynmor Jones Library
Cottingham Road, Hull HU6 7RX

Mon - Sun: 10am - 5pm
Late opening Tuesday 'til 7pm

01482 465620
culture@hull.ac.uk

ST HUGH'S FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS SUPPORTED BY THE ST HUGH'S FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS AWARD 2018

Scarborough museums trust | strata | Hull City Council | BetaJester | NOTA

EXHIBITION:

TALK:

03/03/2020
Feren's Fine Art Lecture
Middleton Hall

EXHIBITION:

05/03/2020 - 31/05/2020
Brynmor Jones Library Gallery
University of Hull
Mon-Sun: 10am - 5pm, late opening Tuesday 'til 7pm

COVID 19:

Closed by the pandemic on: 18/03/2020
Reopened on: 12/10/2020
Closed Again: 04/11/20
Dismantled and get-out 21/12/2020

I would like to thank the wonderful Absolutely Cultured exhibition Volunteers.

Can we please apply the brakes rather than rushing headlong into complex situations?

1 **2** **3**

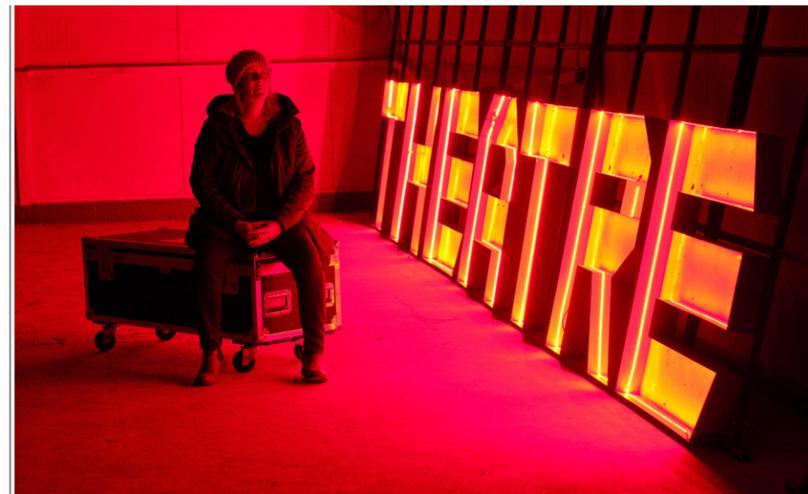
ARTS DIARY

1 **Targa Film:** Starting in a remarkably unusual way, Targa's new series 'Garden' and 'Stalk' are a pair of extraordinary, Targa's new series 'Garden' and 'Stalk' are a pair of extraordinary, Targa's new series 'Garden' and 'Stalk' are a pair of extraordinary...

2 **Sam Avery:** Sam Avery, the opening act for the exhibition, is a young man who has been working in the film industry for over 10 years...

3 **Benjamin Work:** Benjamin Work, the opening act for the exhibition, is a young man who has been working in the film industry for over 10 years...

Michael's Diary: Michael's diary is a collection of his thoughts and experiences from the exhibition...



COVID 19:

I had been placed in the very unusual position of having 2 solo shows, including St Hugh's REMOTE, shuttered across 3 locations. At the time of starting this report, the exhibition was 'paused' - and I was unable to conclude my findings as I didn't know how the story would end!

There was a possibility that REMOTE would reopen to the public towards the end of the year (2020), but there would be many questions and considerations around the interactive elements. The University Library team were generous with their continued help, communication and flexibility throughout.

I guess my response was to shut down and regroup. I initially felt exceptionally depressed to lose the culmination of 2 years worth of work, 3 if you counted the Electric Fence exhibition, but those thoughts soon turned to 'what happens next?' and a greater comprehension of the seriousness of the global situation (which I knew was bad... I make dystopian works!), coupled with a total understanding of being lucky enough to be healthy and supported.

An awful lot has changed in a very short space of time. At the beginning of lockdown it felt like everyone was clambering for artist-responses to the crisis, creative solutions, online interpretations... it actually felt overwhelming. If anything I had completely overdone it with the preparation for two exhibitions, I had given my all and then some - I was actually gearing-up for a bit of a break. What I didn't anticipate was an enforced rest!

In the end, I decided to be very strategic about what I wanted to aim towards. I secured a major public art commission and it was great to learn of my inclusion in the Art UK index. A great little boost at a difficult time <https://artuk.org/discover/artists/mccourt-annabel-b-1975>

REMOTE briefly reopened on 12/10/2020 only to be closed again 04/11/20.

However, I count myself incredibly lucky to have been able to make the work in the first place and to have that glorious PV on 5th March 2020, what an evening that was...

ACHIEVEMENTS:

Nobody could've predicted what happened next, not even in my wildest dystopian nightmares did I expect a global emergency to close the exhibition!

In terms of innovation & excellence, I felt that REMOTE really pushed at the boundaries of what was possible on the available budget and my own capacity to deliver such an ambitious project. I firmly believed that the work increased the community's knowledge, understanding, participation in and enjoyment of the arts with comments including:

'Interesting to see the AR in action and have a chance to play with the tablet'. 'As with the previous works from the Suffering Arcadia series, Electric Fence, MAGA Grabber and Happy Hour in the Harmful Factory, McCourt is once again demanding far more than a passive response from visitors to REMOTE'.

I was incredibly grateful and honoured to receive the St Hugh's Foundation Main Award. It made all of the difference in creating an interactive audience experience, and was the great vote of confidence I needed to enable me to continue to push at the boundaries of what's possible in my work.

It also signalled the opportunity for a step-change. The pandemic hugely impacted the exhibition by closing it - but thankfully the fact that it opened at all is a miracle. The Arts Council recognised the level of ambition and quality in the work. They have supported future iterations of my use and integration of technology by supporting my DYCP application, to explore new ways of developing an integrating audience interaction in a Covid world.

I believe that this is recognition that I'm (hopefully) doing something right!

Every aspect of the grant was spent locally with regional companies, artists and developers, their collaboration made REMOTE a reality.

LINKS:

Film: <https://vimeo.com/508539692>

Game: <https://annabelmccourt.itch.io/remote>



web: annabelmccourt.com
insta: [annabelmccourt_artist](https://www.instagram.com/annabelmccourt_artist)
facebook: [AnnabelMcCourtArtist](https://www.facebook.com/AnnabelMcCourtArtist)



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