

**folkestone**  
**fringe**

**FLINT+**  
**CLAY**

# HOLDING THE CONVERSATION: FLINT & CLAY RESEARCH STORIES

How conversation and translation worked in practice, rooted in place and inseparable from Folkestone.

## About the research stories.

“We had a rich and magical conversation travelling deep into this subject matter and sharing experiences. The conversation itself was a spontaneously creative act incorporating our voices, but also mark-making and bodily expression/performance.”

(The Body Room)

## Key words and phrases.

**Place** The specific geography, histories, communities and spatial politics within which creative work is made and experienced. In this report, Folkestone is introduced and understood as a place in these terms.

**Meaningful Engagement / Participation / Meaningful Opportunities** Experiences that enable agency, contribution, connection and growth — rather than passive consumption. Opportunities that are meaningful both personally (supporting development of practice, skills or experience) and civically (contributing to the life of the town).

**Place-Based Practice / Place-Based** Art Rooted in a specific geography, responding to its histories, assets and communities. In this report, projects are inextricably linked to Folkestone and its past, present and future.

**Relational Practice** Describing artistic approaches that are built on relationships — between artists, communities, places and ideas — rather than on individual production or passive consumption.

**Socially Engaged Art Practice** Creative work that centres participation, relationship and social context as both method and material, where the process of working with people is as significant as any outcome.

**Artists / Fringe Artists** In this report, ‘artist’ refers to anyone who contributed artistic content to the programme. This includes visual artists, performers, curators and others whose work may not fit traditional definitions. Their works in the programme are referred to as projects.

**Creative Facilitators** Those working on projects who invite audience participation and translate artworks into accessible experiences, creating opportunities for making and exchange.

Collectively the *Flint & Clay* research stories reveal a shared thread running throughout:

**the artists, artworks and creative facilitators acted as translators across language, lived experience, ideas and place, and utilised a wide range of approaches to hold deep, reflective conversations to affect meaningful place-based participation and exchange.**

Four short narratives explore the creative processes that are, at their core, relational - ensuring the programme is socially engaged and genuinely place-based, providing different experiences across varied artforms and locations.

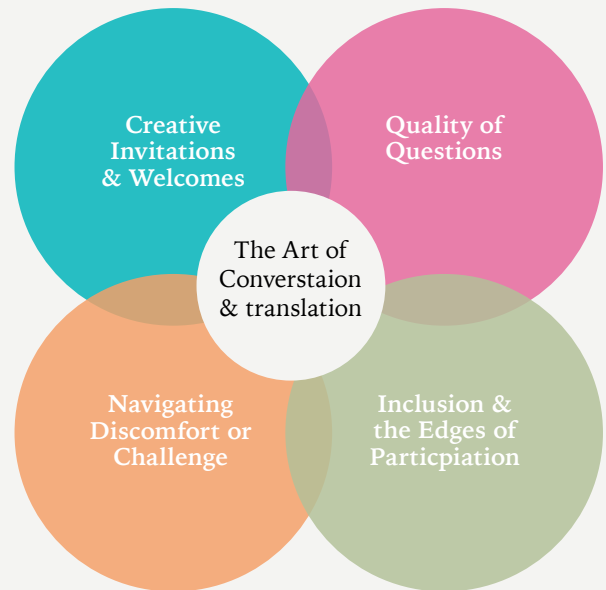
The overarching observation across the research stories is of the artists' dual roles as creators and researchers. Those artists and facilitators who were able to take on the role of researcher (it was not possible for all) were able to develop a deeply reflective and inquisitive angle to their work. Using observation, dialogue and attentive listening in the context of the *Flint & Clay* question framework, they explored how art mediates connection, surfaces difference and opens space for personal and collective transformation.


They reflected on how art creates space for conversations that might not otherwise happen. They noticed how gentle provocations, playful activities, and creative prompts open up dialogue about more difficult topics such as migration, privilege, identity, grief. They observed firsthand how participants translate their inner worlds into shared stories, and how art helped to bridge divides.

Their reflections reveal the *Flint & Clay* programme not as a collection of projects, but as an unfolding process—one that is relational, participatory and inseparable from the place from which it has grown.

These research stories highlight ways that conversation and translation worked in practice, through four themes: **creative invitations, quality of questions, navigation of discomfort and challenge and inclusive approaches that attend to those on the edges of participation.**

Each story is not stand alone, they should be read as overlapping, interconnected approaches that foreground the art of conversation and translation as both method and outcome.



A street scene featuring a colorful kiosk with a wooden frame and a blue and yellow body. The kiosk has a sign that says "THE CURIOUS KIOSK" and "COMMUNICATION". Several people are gathered around the kiosk, including a woman in a white coat and a woman in a wheelchair. The background shows a building with various signs, including "SONG + DANCE", "TELLING STORIES", "BEING ALONE.", "LIVE", "SPRINKLE", "PIE", "APPLE", "TIL", "KIOSK", and "COMMUNICATION".

“I met a mother and her daughter who made a sign about the importance of Folkestone Park as the source of all their best friendships.

The woman said she was very shy and introverted and found having conversations with strangers a struggle but when she was leaving she thanked me and said how much she had enjoyed talking.”

(The Curious Kiosk)

# 1. Creative Invitations

Creative  
Invitations  
& Welcomes

The strength of the projects within the *Flint & Clay* programme lay not only in their form and place-responsiveness, but in the quality of how people were invited to participate: creative invitations that acknowledged uncertainty, respected difference, and allowed people to enter on their own terms.

*Flint & Clay* artists, producers and facilitators continuously tested and reflected on the ways their work met the public—across outdoor and indoor spaces, participatory encounters and projects that were just to be watched or seen. A central learning was that creative offers softened barriers and opened space for connection, conversation, and exchange. Aimed at Folkestone’s local communities, *Flint & Clay*’s audiences were largely passers by, who rarely engage without being invited.

The offer to make something granted permission to enter a safe, creative space. These invitations were signalled that participation was welcomed, if not vital.

“The art becomes just one layer of the experience of a walk together, rather than a dominant factor or the main event.”

(Chalk Path Group Walk)

Making often showed up as an important bridge between artwork and audience. Playful, hands-on processes enabled people to translate their experiences and for conversation to unfold naturally. Through sign-making, writing, performing or assembling, participants shared memories and imagined new possibilities together.

Creative processes scaffolded these interactions, allowing strangers to meet, children to draw adults in, and diverse voices to express perspectives and experiences.

“... people can really open up in a creative space. It feels like a free safe space.”  
(Visitor)



*Stride, The Long Walk by Turner Schools & Toby Melville Brown, cc Igor Emmerich*

The reflections below help to shed light on how creative invitations opened up ways for participants to engage more deeply in the issues affecting people and place, with conversation and translation at the heart of the project.

## Facing Each Other, at the Warren, Deborah Crofts

In Deborah Croft's community workshop, family groups explored the unique environment of the Warren together to make connections through their shared experience of the landscape.

Participants reflected on broader principles of individual differences and similarities while taking part in a collective creative process - making faces, symbols and other forms using natural, found materials.



Facing Each Other by Deborah Crofts, cc Deborah Crofts

“Collaborative/creative activity helps people work together and share ideas. Listening to children but also supporting them is important for adults to do. Meeting and working / creating with different people outside of the usual familiar connections, i.e. different community groups helps to build ideas for new ways to do things.

Valuing individual ideas is as important as the larger ideas.... This started by family groups collecting items to make faces but I noticed groups helped each other, discussed what they had and shared some items. Some older children gave fossils to the youngest child from another family group. This helped build a shared/ common pursuit and friendships.”

*“I thought it was amazing. It has made me think of doing more outside whatever the weather, and to use art to talk about things.”*

(Participant, Facing Each Other)

# Clay Conversations, Community Art Studio, Sarah Lloyd

Artist researcher Sarah Lloyd invited people to play with clay as a tool for mindful practice, opening up conversations about self-care and creativity. Located in the pop-up Community Art Studio based at the Folkestone Museum, Sarah modelled curiosity through sculpting alongside the visitors to develop a piece that responded



*Clay Conversations as part of the Community Art Studio by Sarah Lloyd, cc Sangmin Cha*

to and connected with people's creative expressions of care.

“Satisfying’ says my daughter. A moment of calm in a window where people can watch. The artist moulds clay as she watches you mould. I found I wanted to pull, then roll then twist back into the centre, creating a sort of tornado, expressing how I feel at the moment. My daughter’s was something that looked like a croissant by the end, emerging out of her playful exploration. We documented our process with a Polaroid which will become an animation or a flip book. It was a very connecting experience, connecting with materials, self, others (the artist, my daughter) and all clay pieces are eventually connected...”

## 2. Quality of Questions

Quality  
of  
Questions

*“We talk about borders, about the sea... the construction works on the cliff defence and about change, grief and loss. They ask practical questions— ‘was it easier to make this kind of work before Brexit?’ The informality of the framework invites more open questions throughout, rather than all at the end.”*

(Chalk Path Walk)

The quality of questions was something deeply considered and actively trialled by the *Flint & Clay* artists, who recognised that questions could do more than prompt participation—they could open space for reflection, dialogue and increased local connection.

The programme itself was framed around place-based questions “What connects us?” and “What divides us?” as its starting point, but a common trait across the artists and facilitators was to employ responsive, context-specific questions to deepen engagement in conversations about difference and similarity within the local area. Open, thoughtful prompts encouraged people to pause, reflect, stay a while and share personal memories and perspectives rooted in their experience of Folkestone.



Through questions, people stayed longer and engaged more deeply and prompted an ethos of enquiry and exchange, often beyond what was expected.

Children asked parents what the questions meant to them, prompting intergenerational dialogue, while adults reflected on their own experiences and listened to those they had only just met.

Facilitators played a key role by extending these moments with gentle follow-up prompts like “Tell me more about that,” helping conversations unfold naturally. These questions did

not seek correct answers, but invited exploration, allowing multiple interpretations to coexist.

The reflections that follow demonstrate not only quality questioning but the skills of facilitation which helped transform simple creative encounters into meaningful opportunities for shared reflection and connection. Crucially they also demonstrate questions that are offered back to the artist as an exchange, further deepening the experience for all.

# The Curious Kiosk, various locations, Folkestone Fringe with Constructlab and Bad News Press

The Curious Kiosk is a mobile workspace that displayed community-led campaign signage. Workshop participants and passers-by alike were invited to respond to *Flint & Clay's* programme-wide questions—What connects us? What divides us? And what (un)imagined futures might we create together? Within this framework, the facilitators skilfully employed further layers of questions, prompts and playful or thought-provoking hooks to achieve deeper engagement.



The Curious Kiosk by Folkestone Fringe x ConstructLab x Bad News Press, Harbour Arm session, cc Igor Emmerich

“Signs responding to What Divides Us? included ‘Shout less, love more’, ‘Phone use’, ‘Understanding the world’, and ‘Go green’. The activity surfaced a lot of ideas and conversations between families with gentle questions and thoughtful provocations from those running the event today. The children all had great ideas straight away.

Two sisters wanted to talk about sharing a bunk bed and getting over the argument of who had the top bunk. Was the place (the public realm) helping to open space for dialogue? Comment from one child: ‘maybe for some, but for others this was unexpected.’

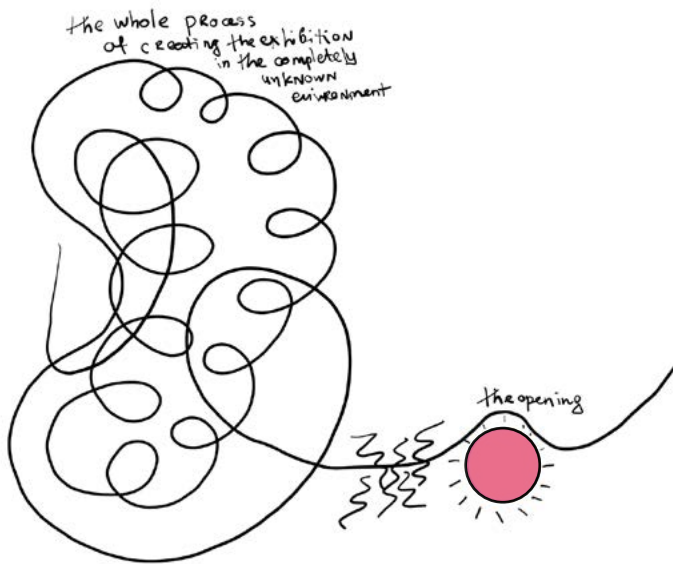
Later, one facilitator reflected with me that starting by asking a question allows people to start by considering what is closest to them in their world/perspective - disputes around the house etc - and enables the facilitators to talk in ways that pan outwards to broader areas that are both related and have new meaning in a wider context. In this sort of activity, people practise compromise, working together, voicing their own opinions and what is important to them.”

# Mortifier, She Comes, Block 67, Liz Page Train

Liz Page Train's live atmospheric performance immersed the audience into a story of mortality and life, rich in symbolism and inviting the audience to join the search for the light.

The performance concluded with an open and reflective discussion afterwards.

“Attendees seemed to enjoy having space to think about life. The piece involves questions around life, death, hope, gratitude. It is reflective and the things they shared showed an openness to this moment of reflection. After the performance I invited people to share their reactions. [...] It was simply interesting to have space where people felt able to share that they felt differently because of who they were and we could all take away from that the fact we had caught a glimpse through somebody else's eyes.”



Credit: Victoria Dini

As part of the programme research, we invited artists and facilitators to reflect on key moments and shifts. Here Victoria Dini explores the journey of experimentation and uncertainty leading up to her exhibition in Mui Folk in the Centre of Town.

“...learning that failure is learning, that death is a blanket others call fear.”  
(Audience member)

### 3. Navigating discomfort and challenge

“... it gave people confidence to share their thoughts and fears and hopes on all sorts of tricky ideas and deep felt issues.”

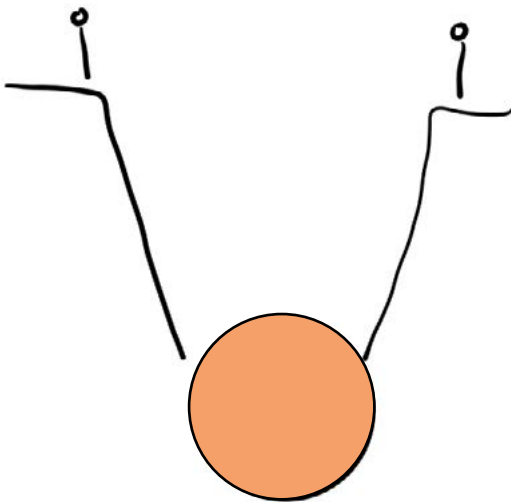
(Climate of Hope  
Breakfast)

Socially engaged, relational practice that centres conversation and translation—both as method and outcome—can be complex, vulnerable work. Within *Flint & Clay*, artists were invited to ask difficult questions, including “What divides us?”, intentionally opening space for discomfort as well as trying to hold and encourage connection.

The festival’s question framework encouraged dialogue across difference, but it also required artists, producers and facilitators to navigate moments of resistance, awkwardness and emotional exposure in the public realm.

Observations often captured hesitation, challenge or challenging behaviour towards artworks (and sometimes the artists themselves), and artists described the adaptability that was needed to navigate discomfort and challenge.

Rather than retreating from these moments, many recognised them as sites of potential growth of connection. Considerable thought went into how to hold such encounters safely: how to translate tension into conversation, how to acknowledge discomfort without escalating it, and how to remain open while protecting the integrity of the work.



Credit: Alison Neighbour

Artist Alison Neighbour, creator of the Chalk Path, illustrates a literal part of her project which also represented a precipice and considered how art might connect across challenges and divides.

The body of research demonstrates *Flint & Clay*'s capacity not to resolve division, but to hold space where complex, often avoided issues can be named, explored and understood.

The reflections that follow illuminate the difficulties faced and the courage required within public realm practice. They reveal artists and facilitators grappling with their own practice-based questions and of identity, while also addressing the visible and invisible barriers shaping participation.

# Edge States: Cutaway II, between Folkestone Harbour Arm and Sunny Sands, Cutaway Collective

**Edge States** was a triptych of performances across three consecutive days unfolding at sunset and sunrise along Folkestone's coast.

Concrete explored erosion and endurance through embodied movement; Time and Tides invited participants to place clay spirals on a performer's body at low tide; and Cutaway II connected the works, using plastic sheeting as shared skin as performers moved between Harbour Arm and Sunny Sands.



*edge states 1 by cutaway collective, performance at the Harbour Arm platforms, cc Katy Casey*

“Our expectations of what and who we might encounter were shaped in part by fear and awareness of risk, by the reputations of the different zones of the harbour (for rowdiness, for example) and inevitably by classism and our internalised expectations for what this historically working class area of town would signify, and what we would signify within it.

The production team and performers are of mixed heritages, including class backgrounds, and a number are Folkestone natives with lived experience of difficult interactions in the harbour area of Folkestone. [...] The most difficult moment of the performance was when we encountered a person who shouted lots of critical things at us just as the performance was beginning... some of his observations were more hurtful than others!

... Our communication immediately became much more active—instead of conducting the performance mostly in silence as intended, we also became more verbal, directing each other's movements, warning each other about obstacles and conducting welfare check-ins.”

# The Waiting Gym, Rendezvous Street, genuinefake, People United, KRAN

**The Waiting Gym, a Folkestone Fringe co-commission by artist genuinefake with People United and Kent Refugee Action Network (KRAN), reframed waiting as active resilience through movement, play and imagination.**

The vibrant, interactive installation with activities and information for occupying waiting time was developed to convey the experience of prolonged waits for housing and paperwork experienced by refugees and asylum seekers across the UK.



*The Waiting Gym by genuinefake x People United, KRAN, cc Igor Emmerich*

“I think trying to engage the skittish Sunday audience is an interesting task! People are interested but on their way to other places and scared of eye contact. They are likely to come in when the gym is full and bustling but not when it is empty. Fun attracts fun and engagement attracts engagement.

So inside we try to look like we are having fun while also dancing, cleaning, filling in forms and trying to judge whether and how to engage passers by. It is possible and often effective to catch people’s eyes as they walk by and invite them in.

There is something active and alive about attraction and repulsion, rejection, request and attention. X is doing some boxing to make the space look active. A guy comes and says he used to be a boxer. He shows a picture of him looking scary some time in the mid-1990s, he says I was scary then, I’ve mellowed now. He wishes us the best with what we are doing, whatever it is. [...] I worry about making eye contact with white men, my internalised prejudices about class and signifiers and politics are at play here.... I constantly worry about 3 people of colour in a room together (internalised racism?) with mostly white crowds passing. How it makes us attractive, interesting, vulnerable.”

## 4. Inclusion and the edges of participation

The artists' research is marked by an awareness of who feels included and who remains on the margins. They strived to create spaces where everyone can participate, noting the ease with which some audiences (such as children, families) engage, and the barriers faced by others (those with social anxiety, language differences, or who feel art “isn't for them”).

Artists observed how playfulness can lower barriers and spark joy, while also leading to profound conversations and self-reflection. Their research is a story of striving for inclusivity—experimenting with formats, venues, and approaches to invite broader participation, while also acknowledging the limits and ongoing effort of this work. The act of making, doing, watching—whether art, signs, or performances—became a way for people to share stories and imagine new futures together.



By creating spaces that were both accessible and inclusive, artists enabled broader engagement, and feedback confirmed that many participants felt welcomed and their opinions valued even when confronting difficult or uncomfortable issues.

Meanwhile it is recognised that true inclusion requires sustained attention, and ongoing care and openness to those who remain on the margins.

The reflections below convey moments where artists and facilitators in the public realm observed what it was to feel on the edges of participation.

These reflections consider the role of creative processes as conversations unfold, offering opportunities for lived experiences to be translated. Artists themselves often navigate these edges, occupying an uncertain position between connector and outsider.

# The Curious Kiosk, various locations, Constructlab and Bad News Press

The Curious Kiosk is a mobile workspace that displayed community-led campaign signage.

Workshop participants and passers-by alike were invited to respond to *Flint & Clay's* programme-wide questions—

What connects us? What divides us? And what (un)imagined futures might we create together?



The Curious Kiosk by Folkestone Fringe x ConstructLab x Bad News Press, Folkestone Street Market session, cc Manuel Vason

“I spoke with the father who did not wish to help. One of the signs on the kiosk about blaming others caught his attention and he told me about how he came to Folkestone as a refugee when he was 13 and had lived in the UK ever since. Only in the past 2 months, has he had people telling him to “go back to his country.” He would like to leave the UK, but feels that he can’t because his family is settled and he has work - all his life is set up here and leaving would be too much upheaval.

He said he wishes that people would think about that when they think about immigration. Just how huge a thing it is to leave your home and start a new life in an unfamiliar place. Nobody does that on a whim. [...] One woman came to find out what the kiosk was about, but she didn't want to make a sign. She had lots of negative opinions about how there is no community and as an elderly lady, she felt very isolated living in Folkestone - that her neighbours and her family ignore her. She said that the kiosk was all very well, but it wouldn't do anything because it would be gone soon. I listened to her and started to ask her questions about her family, neighbours and life in general. [...]


It sounded like she finds it hard to make relationships herself, but we got onto talking about her cat and gardening and she started to warm up. Using the sign I was making was a good way to take the conversation further. It was thinking about truth vs falsehood and how we understand truth, when everyone's personal truth is different.

By the end of the conversation we had discussed time she spent working in Brunei and differing attitudes to women and she started to smile. She said thank you and went on with her day."



*Sign Making Workshop as Part of The Curious Kiosk run by Chloe Osborne and Katy Casey, in front of the Folkestone Museum, cc Katy Casey*





# Enter + Inhabit, various locations, Natalie Garrett Brown, Amy Voris, Emma Meehan and Christian Kipp

A site-based dance performance that moved through public spaces drawing attention to specific places in Folkestone. Audiences encountered the three female performers, and could join an artist walk and talk.

Memories and stories were to be collected from the audience, exploring what connected people to Folkestone.

“Divisions came up when people were nervous, uncomfortable or found it too unusual to connect with. Perceptions of dance are that they are spectacular, not odd or silly. More work could be done to think about how different people are invited into the experience. It worked best for people who were sitting and looking out their window for a long time and who had time to engage.

The shared space also connected us - we were committed to dwelling in the site and getting to know it. We were loitering with intent, which people don't always give time to do. Some people thought we were ... acting like children, which gives a sense of who is expected to dwell in the street without productive purpose.”