

Interactive art in Wester Hailes

Later today the Wester Hailes Education Centre, in partnership with The Art Room charity will be unveiling Billboard, an installation work by artist Kevin Harman in the main playground of the school. Once installed, the 4.7 m x 3.5 m large Billboard will become a platform for messages and images that will change every two weeks as part of an interactive programme. In September 2014, The Art Room studio was opened to offer art as a therapeutic intervention to students of WHEC and the neighbouring primary schools. Kevin Harman's Billboard will celebrate the strength of art in engaging creatively with students.

Kevin Harman, an ex-student of the Wester Hailes Education Centre (WHEC), has been an important supporter of The Art Room and said of this project, "the School is a place close to my heart. It had a formative effect on my commitments to becoming an artist, so I was honoured and very pleased to join forces with The Art Room charity when they approached me to create a public artwork for the school. During my visits to the school, something in the familiarity struck me as madly heroic, this unwavering commitment by all the staff to educate the youth was mesmerizing, I needed to produce something for all. To try and adopt the WHEC slogan which says, 'together we will succeed'."

The billboard format makes use of an advertising form familiar to students, yet with a noticeable difference – it is not aimed at making a profit from them; it is not commercially oriented. Subtle empowering words and images will appear over time and students will be encouraged to comment, interact, even contribute to the image as a way of illustrating how dynamic and active art can be in our lives. The content of the billboard will include words of support and wisdom from

artists, scientists and educational visionaries. Over time it will also feature contributions from students of the school and closely work with the practitioners of The Art Room.

Kevin Harman has engaged with students from The Art Room through workshops and will be showing a group of students his current exhibition, ABJAD, Ingleby Gallery. The Billboard project has been made possible through generous sponsorship by The Barcapel Foundation, The Bernard Cayzer Charitable Trust and The Binks Trust. Eastern Exhibition & Display have been hugely supportive of the project and pledged to print a new sign every two weeks for the first year.

The Art Room believes in learning and achieving through art. Working with up to 72 students each week at the Wester Hailes Education Centre, The Art Room offers art as therapy for those who might be facing challenges in their lives. There are many reasons why children and young people attend sessions with an Art Room. Since opening at WHEC over 40 students have used The Art Room, and this year the intervention is being extended to the neighbouring associated primaries.

Sheila Paton, Head Teacher of Wester Hailes Education Centre said of the project, "It is extremely exciting to welcome Kevin Harman back to WHEC and to be able to tap into his success and creativity as an inspiration for our students. The Billboard promises to be an ongoing story and we look forward to seeing how the students react to it."

Since 2002, The Art Room has grown into a national UK charity working with over 1,000 children and young people each year to increase their self-esteem, self-confidence and independence through art. The highly trained practitioners work with groups of children aged between 5 and 16 to encourage them to learn and achieve through art. These sessions take place in Art Room studios located in primary and secondary schools. There are currently four Art Rooms in Oxford and three in London and our first in Scotland at WHEC.

The Digital Sentinel recorded a video of the opening of the Art Room last year.