

THE HAPPENSTANCE.06
Play

Scotland
+ Venice

Venetian children in a hammock attached to the armature
Image: Sean Campbell

PLAY

DEPARTMENTO
MULTI

Pester and Rossi, Hannah Bracketton and Louise Samba workshop at the Sagra Festival
Image: Nadia Rossi



THE HAPPEN STANCE

The Happenstance was Scotland's contribution to the 16th International Architecture Exhibition, Venice, 2018

In this dispatch, artist, Brian Hartley, looks at the importance of play as a spontaneous and creative process, reflecting on its agency in projects in Scotland, and in the freespace created for the local Venetian community and visitors to Venice. How play opens up vital conversations and actions around identity and encourages the collective use of public and private space. He looks at two projects that engaged specifically with themes of play - one of his own and the other the collaborative practice of Ruby Pester and Nadia Rossi (Pester and Rossi).



Issue 1
An Introduction



Issue 2
Venice Reflective



Scotland
+ Venice



Issue 3
Into the Mouth
of the Wolf



Issue 4
My Experience
as a Fellow at
The Happenstance



Issue 5
Venice /
Local Context



Issue 6
Play



Issue 7
Tools of the Trade

This publication is one in a series of twelve reflections on The Happenstance. Click here or go to ads.org.uk/the-happenstance-archive-dispatches to access the other publications.



Issue 8
One A-Z of
Making Connections



Issue 9
Participatory Practice



Issue 10
A Conversation,
A Workshop
and Afterwards



Issue 11
An External
Perspective



Issue 12
On Legacy



year of young people
bliadhna na h-òigridh
2018



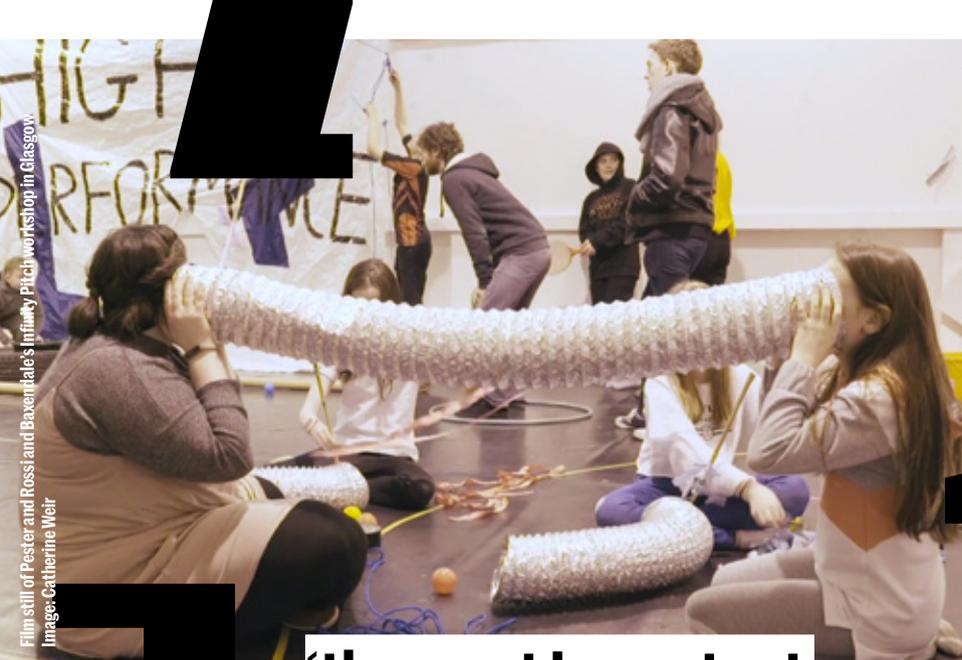
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Film still of Pester and Rossi and Baxendale's Influx Pitch workshop in Glasgow
Image: Catherine Weir

'the most important legacy is the awareness of the needs of a public space for all'



Brian Hartley and Fergus Purdie Notations workshop in Perth
Image: Brian Hartley

Listen to your hunches.
 Play by your own rules.
 Embrace the unknown.
 Make your own sense.
 Turn it upside down
 Less talk, more action.
 Into your own hands,
 Make a move. Pass it on.
 Loosen up. Assemble. Unfetter.

Pester and Rossi motivation ideas
Image: Pester and Rossi

Our play,
 Our party,
 Our work.



'The Happenstance is still alive around the city, a spirit of freedom and community engagement, a public agora, a place that was given to Venetians for daily use'



Adults playing
Image: Brian Hartley



Local scouts playing
Image: Brian Hartley

Play

Brian Hartley

The Happenstance brought together a diverse and experienced team of artists, designers, architects and makers, under the leadership of lead artists WAVEparticle, to create Scotland's contribution to the 16th International Architecture Exhibition at la Biennale di Venezia. Responding to the theme of Freespace, and to celebrate Scotland's Year of Young People, the project began in Scotland with an exploration of how young people respond to, and engage with, the idea of freespace, what it means to them and their communities. The initial work generated a suite of short films, artifacts, images and interventions which were curated and presented in a 'living library of ideas' within The Happenstance

programme at the Armenian College at Palazzo Zenobio. The Happenstance installation featured an armature, designed and built by Baxendale Studio, as a focus for the idea of freespace for the local Venetian community and visitors to the city. It enabled many vital conversations and actions around identity, play and use of public and private space - very current and politically resonant themes in Venice.

Two projects in particular engaged specifically with themes of play, building on my artistic practice as a artist and designer, and collaborative the practice of Ruby Pester and Nadia Rossi (Pester and Rossi).

I have a multi-disciplinary background combining visual arts

and design with a performance practice, and worked with Fergus Purdie Architects, along with a group of primary school children, to investigate a series of narrow streets in Perth, Scotland called vennels. Similar to the narrow calle in Venice, there was a desire to create playful interventions and begin to change the perception of these neglected and overlooked urban spaces. My previous work, creating performance work for and with young children, has responded to archetypes of childhood games as a potential for choreographic research, challenging and changing how people interact physically in urban spaces, creating agency and confidence for children. This creative process created improvised dance scores and games in the vennels, which developed into a creative intervention at a local festival, the Sagra, in Venice, creating new versions of traditional street games with local children in a piazza near The Happenstance. The work was also informed by the writing of Patrick Geddes (1854-1932, a Scottish biologist, socialist and innovative town planner) “a city is more than a place in space, it is a drama in time”, which offered a social foundation to the process.

Grounded in sculptural performance, Pester and Rossi have been working collaboratively across Scotland and internationally since 2008, and create work that challenges conventional perceptions of the everyday, using sculptural props, colour and performance,

often incorporating colourful DIY costumes and working with an anarchistic and feminist approach. Pester and Rossi create absurd and humorous gestures and interventions to question our perceptions of modern day existence. Working with Baxendale Studio, Pester and Rossi worked with a group of young people in Easterhouse, Glasgow, to create Infinity Pitch, occupying and playing on disused football pitches and re-imagining and playfully creating new games with the young people, using a wide range of found materials. The results of this process were also presented at an interactive exhibition at Baltic, Newcastle in 2018, to make, break and re-make the rules of play. Within The Happenstance installation in Venice Pester and Rossi created a series of interventions, including Gobby, a vibrant and playful structure at the entrance to the garden, “a humorous invitation to re-think and re-invent how we inhabit, occupy, leave a mark, share our voices within public space. An invitation to share your voice. A mouth through which to enter into a new imagined body within civic space.” (Pester and Rossi) Within the armature, a giant inflatable sculpture was created with a group of children and resulted in a joyful interactive and physical game; “creating a tactile environment... a colourful and surreal free-forming landscape. Temporal in nature - the importance of spontaneity in the nature of play - changing one moment to the next.” (Pester and

Rossi). They also created a striking and surreal collection of colourful large-scale participatory costumes, worn at a memorable and surreal parade around the local piazza, led by a young Scottish piper carried on the shoulders of a group of adults.

Through a rigorous and extensive artistic practice Pester and Rossi have created an artistic manifesto bringing together the principles of their work, many of the themes linking with play:

- collectivity through actions and collective power
- openness, trust, honesty, and making space for people to share their ideas
- cross generational activity and exchange
- importance of play, an invitation to make, break and re-make your own rules
- a focus on process rather than outcome
- creating a space for positivity, with inclusive and empowering energy YES WE CAN, WE ALL CAN, GIVE IT A GO
- consideration of place, people and site all being intrinsic to a piece of socially engaged work

Working through common themes around play, my work has focused on work with young children and using play as a fundamental part of the creative process:

- games and play as a choreographic process
- learning through creative physical activity
- changing perspective and ways of seeing
- imagination and curiosity
- a creative process of not knowing, open to change, chance and unpredictability

While coming from different artistic context all our work has a strong basis in play, in both cases using an understanding of play as a way to create artistic material, to open up new kinds of dialogue with participants, sharing colour and creative materials with participants as part of the creative process, to believe in the agency and voice of people of all ages, and use a sense of not knowing and trust, to work together.

RESOURCES

- [Brian Hartley Website](#)
- [Pester and Rossi Website](#)
- [WAVEparticle Website](#)
- [Related Films](#)



Initiatives - Gobby and balloons
Image: Peter McCaughey

**Play as a spontaneous and creative process,
and how it opens vital conversations and
actions around identity, and use of public and
private space.**



Gay Gordons at The Sagra Festival