

ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND

decibel ▶



decibel

A North West profile

Images:

Front cover: *Shadow Songs* performed by Suki Chan
at the **decibel** Performing Arts Showcase, May 2003

Photo: Dinu Li

Inside cover (left): *Diamond Projection*, detail of ceramic bowl
by Halima Cassell, 2002

Photo: artist's own

Inside cover (middle): *Neptune Landscape*, oil painting
by Sundar Kanta Walker, 2001

Photo: Michael Poulter

Inside cover (right): *Mariam Ghaddah, Manchester 2002*, from *Sisters*
the photography exhibition and publication by Clement Cooper

Photo: artist's own

Edited by Ngozi Ikoku

Design by Eg.G, Manchester







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Acknowledgements and index

Edited and coordinated by **Ngozi Ikoku**

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Foreword

The Arts Council is committed to ensuring that the arts are at the heart of our society. That means two things in particular. Firstly, we aim to ensure that our very best talent is able to fulfil its potential; to create an environment in which established and new artists are supported and valued. And secondly, we want to ensure that everyone in our society is able to engage with the arts, whether as artist, audience, or participant.

A fundamental part of fulfilling such a vision is ensuring that the arts truly reflect all our communities. Everyone in our society is entitled to be able to enjoy the arts. And attaining the highest quality

of arts in this country is dependent on ensuring that anyone with talent can develop and exercise it.

So, embedding diversity in all that we do is of fundamental importance. And a key priority is to develop opportunities for Black and minority ethnic artists and communities; to ensure that their creativity is allowed to flourish and that the arts in England truly reflect and celebrate their place in our society. In our planning, our expenditure, and programmes of work, we are ensuring that this priority is properly reflected.

We are also clear that we as an organisation need to learn and to change. We now have a national Race Equality Strategy, and central to that is ensuring that the Arts Council itself truly reflects the society for which it works. Nationally and regionally we are developing action plans to that end.

decibel was a key national initiative aimed at raising the profile and strengthening the opportunities for artists in England of African, Caribbean, Asian or Chinese descent. Both nationally and regionally **decibel** has been a very important and productive strand of work. It has sat alongside, and helped stimulate further

work, all of which is aimed at ensuring that cultural diversity is integral to our work, and to the arts in this country.

This book is just one part of our extensive programme of **decibel** work in the North West, work that will continue. It illustrates the quality and talent we have in the region in a way which I hope you find both interesting and of practical benefit. And, above all, I hope it helps in our aim to continue to grow the sector, and the arts generally, in the North West and beyond.

Michael Eakin

Executive Director

Arts Council England, North West

Introduction

Arts Council England's major national initiative, **decibel** (May 2003–March 2004), was a short-term project designed to have a long-term impact on raising the profile and strengthening the infrastructure of culturally diverse* arts in England.

Now in its official legacy period (which will run until 2008) **decibel** continues to provide focus, additionality and resources to help redress the historical underfunding and lack of support for artists of African, Asian, Chinese and Caribbean descent based in England. ***decibel: A North West profile*** forms part of this continued positive action work and it is with great

pleasure that we present to you this publication which is dedicated to promoting culturally diverse arts from the North West.

The book celebrates and profiles, for the first time, a selection of 40 of our flagship culturally diverse artists and arts organisations with whom we have had a relationship over the past three to five years, alongside those that are relatively new or emerging. All those featured are making a significant contribution to arts practice and provision regionally, nationally or internationally in the field of music, dance, theatre, the visual arts and literature.

One of the highlights of the **decibel** year was the 2003 **decibel** Performing Arts Showcase in association with x.trax, which took place in Manchester. The strategic aim of the event was to increase the amount of culturally diverse performance including theatre, dance, music, street arts, live art, puppetry and other cross-arts with live content being programmed in a wide variety of national and international venues. The North West was very well represented in the 2003 showcase, which bears testimony to the wealth of talent in our region, and some of the artists showcased are featured in this book.

A second x.trax/**decibel** showcase, building on the success of the one in 2003, will take place in Manchester from 31 May–3 June 2005.

The publication is a result of feedback from artists during the **decibel** year. Inside, the artists and arts organisations speak for themselves about the essence of their work and future aspirations. There is much work still to be done around cultural equity in the arts, and **decibel** has provided a catalyst for this. We hope this publication helps to move us one step further to realising our goals in the North West region.

While we have tried to include as many Arts Council England funded organisations and individuals as possible, this is not an exhaustive guide to the culturally diverse arts sector in our region. By bringing together those featured in one reference guide we aim to promote and raise awareness of the work of the artists and arts organisations and to make it easier for you to contact them. It is also our intention that the book provides invaluable insight into the wealth of diversity, creativity and expertise that lies within the North West.

We trust that you will find this publication a useful tool when you are looking for

an artist or arts organisation for your programming and project-based work. And we hope that you too will develop professional relationships and shared experiences with the artists and arts organisations listed within this book. We commend them to you.

Ngozi Ikoku

decibel Project Manager

Arts Council England, North West

* In the context of **decibel**, the term 'culturally diverse' means ethnic diversity resulting from post-war immigration, with an increased focus on artists of African, Caribbean and Asian origin in England. Asia refers to the continent from Turkey to Japan.



Image: *My birth will take place a thousand times no matter how you celebrate it*, by Ruby Chishti, 2000
Photo: Shisha

The artists

Benji Reid

Born 1966, Manchester

Solo dance artist, deviser and director

Artist's statement:

'I am a performance artist using the language of body popping, mime, storytelling and live music, utilising modern day folklore (hip hop) to tell the stories of the human condition.

The essence of my work is to explore the two worlds of dance theatre and hip hop using the traditional methods of theatre and imbuing them with the lens of hip hop. Replacing the traditional roles of musical director with a DJ and scriptwriter with a MC/poet, with the

aim of creating a modern language that no longer alienates working class people but becomes a reflection of their plight.'

Selected work:

Reid has performed and toured his work internationally.

13 Mics, codirected with Jonzi D, 2003

B Like Water, written by Lemn Sissay and codirected by Reid and John McGrath, 2003

The Pugilist, 2002

The Waiting Room, 2000

Aeroplane Man, written by Jonzi D and codirected by Reid, 1999

Paper Jackets, 1999

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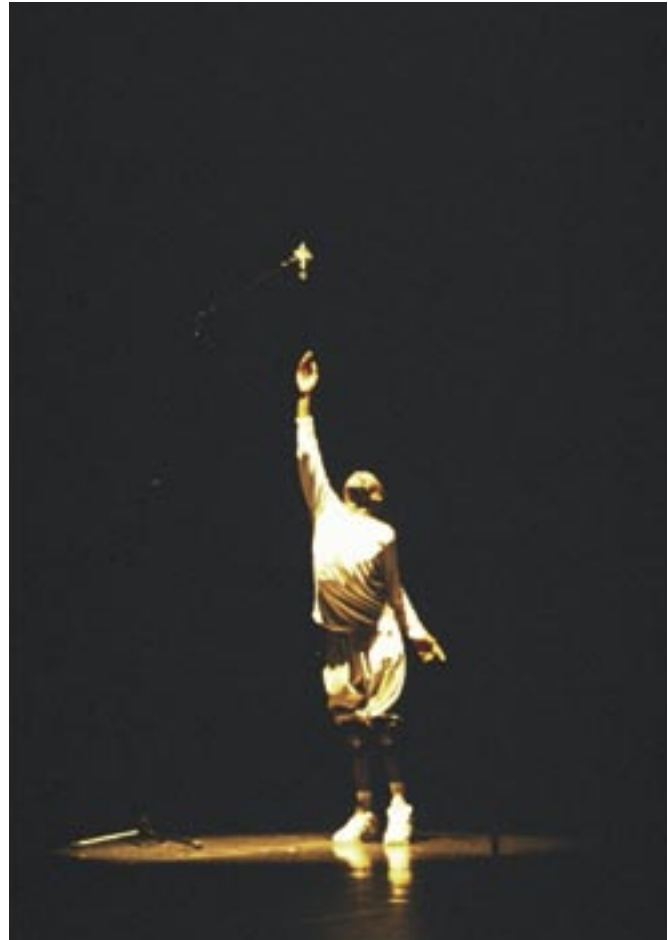
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Clement Cooper

Born 1965, Manchester

Visual artist

Artist's statement:

'I'm certain of the profound truth. When you're born, you almost know and feel everything. Incredible! The progression through life soon strips you of that innocence. So utterly sad. Anyway that's what I'm all about as a man: getting back, through the medium of light, to that original state of being. Nothing more, nothing less.

Everything I am is light. Everything to my mind begins with light. I realised that fact from the age of three, standing in that

kitchen in Longsight beneath the window, feeling and looking at the rays from the sun, just the certain things it spoke.'

Exhibitions:

Cooper has exhibited widely within the UK and abroad. His photography exhibition *Sisters*, supported by Gallery Oldham, Manchester City Art Gallery, The British Council and Arts Council England, will be shown at Gallery Oldham from 4 December 2004–31 January 2005, and will then tour the UK.

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Clement Cooper

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of Black Photographers

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Image: Sobia Bibi and Sisters, Oldham 2004, from Sisters the photography exhibition and publication by Clement Cooper Photo: artist's own

Dinu Li

Born 1965, Hong Kong
Visual artist

Artist's statement:

'My interest in photography began at an early age while spending time with the arrangement of my family portraits. These I grouped and displayed on walls and between glass tables. My work often delves into my own history, culture and identity. Originally trained as a photographer working for advertising and design agencies, I expanded my practice in 1998 by working as an artist. My views are expressed through the medium of photography, film, video and installations.

As an artist, my work is preoccupied by an observation of changes, brought about by the passage of time. I have adopted an ongoing strategy in addressing social agendas in a way that has a universal value, both on an emotional and intuitive level. As a diasporic artist, I am interested in the postcolonial interpretation of the 'third space' dealing with such issues as homeland/guest land and native/foreigner.'

Exhibitions:

Li has exhibited his work in the UK, Europe and China. Showings include: Art Forum Berlin, White Space 798 Beijing, Shanghai Art Fair, Liverpool Biennial, Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool, and Chinese Arts

Centre, Manchester. His work is published in a selection of catalogues including *As If I Were A River*, CITE 2003, which accompanied an exhibition of the same name which showed at Bury Art Gallery and Museum from 26 July–20 September 2003 and at The Lowry, Salford from 2 August–26 October 2003.

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Image: from the photographic series *The Mother of all Journeys* by Dinu Li, 2004

Photo: artist's own

Donna Berry

Born 1966, Birmingham

Visual artist

Artist's statement:

'Practically, my approach to sculpture has continued to evolve; conceptually, its concerns are expanding in area but the approach remains constant: the continued exploration into our ephemeral relationships, the subtle shifts in personal, social and global culture that we catch like shadows in the corner of our eyes, almost imperceptible but relatively rapidly changing.

My practice continues to test the water where the boundaries are blurred,

eclectically teasing out the humour of the commonplace while blending more fanciful notions with an underlying discomfort. The issue base of my work leads to a constant search for new materials and methods thus each new piece is a source of revelation and new awareness.'

Solo exhibitions include:

Carbon Dating, Liverpool Independent Biennial 2004, Boodle and Dunthorne, 18 September–29 October

Toast 2003, Building Design Partnership, Liverpool, 3–31 October 2003

Solo, Pushka restaurant, Liverpool, October 2002–January 2003

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Images: (left) *Phoenix II*, charcoal and copper, from the series *Phoenix* by Donna Berry, 2003; (right) detail of *Phoenix II*
Photos: Mark McNulty

Halima Cassell

Born 1975, Pakistan
Sculptor

Artist's statement:

'I am an artist, designer and maker based in Manchester. I graduated from the University of Central Lancashire in 2002 with a Masters degree in 3-dimensional design. My artistic practice incorporates the influence of both Islamic and African art, which enables me to develop contemporary ceramics based on architectural elements and forms.

With my style firmly established I now have plans to work on an increasingly larger scale and move more towards public art and architectural work.'

Exhibitions:

Cassell is currently working on a programme of national and international exhibitions. Solo shows to date include: *Architectural Ceramics*, Portico Library and Gallery, Manchester, 5–28 May 2004
Exhibition celebrating International Women's Week, Blackburn Museum, 21 February–24 April 2004

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J Chuhan

Born 1955, Punjab, India

Painter and Professor of International Art
at Liverpool John Moores University

Artist's statement:

'I am engaged in expressing ideas through the painterly language of colour and form, aiming at a visceral expression of the sensuality of the human figure and natural forms. My paintings portray my response to the appearance, personality and inner life of people who have posed for me as models, and explore ideas of intimacy and sexuality, strength and fragility.

My paintings focus on the individuality of people, as in my *Parampara Portraits*

solo show initiated by Shisha. In Sanskrit 'Parampara' means tradition as it is passed between generations and my paintings show a non-stereotypical perception of 15 people from the South Asian diaspora, rarely reflected in western art exhibitions or collections, exemplified in portraits of people including writer Yasmin Alibhai-Brown and the politician Baroness Pola Uddin.'

Exhibitions:

Chuhan has exhibited her work internationally. Solo exhibitions include: *Journeys*, Cartwright Hall, Bradford, 4 December 2004–6 February 2005
Parampara Portraits: paintings by J Chuhan,

Central Art Gallery, Tameside,
8 January–28 February 2004,
Watermans Arts Centre, London,
21 October–3 December 2004
A long way from home...a painter's journey,
The Lowry, Salford, 2002

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Juliet Ellis

Born 1969, Sheffield

Director, performer and live art practitioner

Artist's statement:

'I am an artist. I make theatre, happenings and events. My work is characterised by its haunting yet beautiful atmospheres, creating images that are visually compelling, evocative and disturbing, juxtaposing strange harmonies, which leave a sublime residue creating a world beyond language that seduces the eye of the watcher.

My underlying personal exploration resides in continuing to make challenging and provocative art, art that asks questions and fuels dreams, that searches for purity,

truth and candour, and arouses a curiosity, questioning the nature of performance that crosses the borders between disciplines and examines our human existence.'

Selection of works:

Weeding Cane (by Sonia Hughes), designed and performed in, 2004

A Hurricane is Coming, 2003

Under My Skin, 2001

Hang Up, performed in and devised with Third Angel, 1999

Ellis is currently Artist in Residence at the Greenroom, Manchester, where she is developing *Autobiography in 5 Chapters*, which will launch in Autumn 2005.

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