



Keys to the City

Dundee Contemporary Arts Dundee Scotland 1998

Atkinson Davidson asks what is needed to engage people in thinking about contemporary art, as a result of her own practice within the public arena. How do you get people to talk about abstract ideas? How does the artist create a structure to inform the development of a local authority arts policy? How can the Council be truly accountable to its tax payers? Following an invitation to the city, Atkinson Davidson is commissioned by Dundee Contemporary Arts and the Arts & Heritage department to carry out her own proposal to address these issues. Working in each of the city's 36 local wards to identify 36 key holders, the artist becomes involved in political processes, engaging with the city and developing the audience. Gathering these 36 people from all sorts of backgrounds becomes the work itself. Each key holder, ordinary people, becomes a conduit to report back on arts activity in the city. A questionnaire is devised to make people think about ideas and becomes a key piece of the work, as it causes controversy in the questions asked. The work is about ideas and imagination, having fun and subverting city structures, and is truly radical in that the processes are not controlled. The key holders, in a truly creative act free of institutional control, set up and continue on their own to keep the project alive.