

## **Freedomination Billboard and Soapbox Performance**

Commissioned by RedBoard for their Freedom themed billboard series that was a part of Hull 2017 City of Culture programme. The billboard artwork was produced and the performance idea devised in collaboration with Davin Watne during a research trip to Kansas City in July 2017, supported by a travel grant from Artist Newsletter (a-n).

We developed 'freedomination' in response to a brief to produce a billboard design that responds to ideas of freedom, set by Red Contemporary Arts in Hull. The billboard series are part of Hull2017's Creative Communities Programme. The organisers asked: What does freedom mean to you? What does it look like to you? Does freedom really exist? Is freedom allowed to be expressed? Is freedom an understood word? Utopia?

Our design addresses these questions by problematising the notion that freedom is a neutral or intrinsically good thing. We ask: whose freedom? Are we all equally free? Freedom and domination appear to be mutually exclusive concepts. The artwork aims to draw attention to this binary to expose and explore a grey area in between. The freedom to act without restraint can oppress others. As John Stuart Mill said "The right to swing my arms in any direction ends where your nose begins." The freedom of companies, markets, and governments to act as they please can go too far and impinge upon individual's rights. The idea of freedom is evoked paradoxically by those in power to go against the best interest of others. Loss of freedom could be the price of inclusion and citizenship. Exclusion can also be a restriction. The natural landscape in the background of the poster evokes a romantic sense of freedom, but one that could be lost to urbanization and industrial encroachment.

To accompany the billboard we proposed a performance that underpins the ideas behind the design. With the help of friends, organisers, and city of culture volunteers we took over a street corner in Hull and turned it into a temporary speaker's corner. I read a script (manifesto!) written in collaboration with Davin, and then read my own soapbox speech about the colonisation of the public visual realm by commercial advertising. The participatory performance encouraged members of the audience to get on a soapbox and make a speech on any subject. As individuals expressed their freedom of speech it became increasingly difficult to hear what they were saying, demonstrating the concept 'freedomination'. The soapboxes were also different sizes, suggesting that the benefits of freedom aren't enjoyed equally.

### Hard Stop

Davin and I work collaboratively to produce art interventions that question notions of freedom and truth in contemporary society. Drawing from current affairs in the UK and US, we examine the rhetoric of mass-media. Through an exchange of images & ideas we explore how images communicate, persuade, and seduce.

Hard stop is a method used by police to bring a vehicle to a stop, often by shooting the people inside. The idea of bringing something to a violent halt resonated. Walter Benjamin writes that the 'ideology of progress' naturalises the idea that the current course of development as an inevitable trajectory that cannot be altered. The consequence of this is conformism and passive acceptance of the status quo. For Benjamin, the crises of 'modern time' are not moments in which violent change might

take place, but where existing power structures remain. Real progress will take place when the myth of progress is exposed.

In a world characterised by alt-truth and continuous communication via social media we need time for reflection. With this in mind Davin and I appropriated the term 'hard stop' to signify the possibility of bringing to a halt (at least momentarily) the deluge of information we receive. Under this moniker we create interventions in the public realm that invite viewers to pause and critique the images they see.

Davin Watne is interested in the aesthetics of power, authority and desire as constructed by governing systems. This awareness pushes him to develop visual means of resistance. Watne communicates images and experiences that are visceral and symbolic in nature, ultimately creating new visual lexicons that combat the prevailing modes of signification.

Watne is based in Kansas City with an established record of professional achievement. He received his BFA from the Kansas City Art Institute in 1994 and his MFA at Maryland Institute College of Art in 2013. He has been awarded the Charlotte Street Foundation Award, ArtsKC Inspiration Grant, Avenue of Arts Municipal Arts Grant, Art in the Loop Public Arts Grant and a former resident of the Studios Inc. Residency Program. Davin is a full-time lecturer at University of Missouri Kansas City, where he teaches Painting and Drawing. Davin is also the head curator and director of the UMKC Gallery of Art.

<http://www.davinwatne.com/>

[https://www.instagram.com/hard\\_stop/](https://www.instagram.com/hard_stop/)

<https://www.a-n.co.uk/blogs/hard-stop/>

## Press Release



## **PRESS RELEASE**

**8th September 2017**

### **New Performance Inviting People to Get on their Soapbox**

*For RedContemporaryArt's Freedom series of billboards artists Davin Watne and Dawn Woolley have created 'Freedomination' that will be installed on the corner of Freehold Street and Spring Bank next week. On Saturday 23rd September at 3pm Woolley will stand on a soap(wine)box in front of the billboard and initiate a*

*participatory performance involving soapboxes and a demonstration of the concept freedomination.*

*Freedom and domination appear to be opposing concepts but the freedom to act without restraint can oppress others. As John Stuart Mill (may have) said “The right to swing my arms in any direction ends where your nose begins.” Watne and Woolley say ‘For the Freedomination Soapbox performance we invite anyone who is outspoken and passionate – about ANY subject - to get on a soapbox and make a speech. It can be about something very serious, or not, someone might get up and speak for 1 minute or 60 minutes, it is entirely up to the audience. As more and more people express their freedom of speech it will become increasingly difficult to hear what is said, demonstrating the concept freedomination.’*

*Audience members can spontaneously decide to participate during the event itself, but If you would like to know more, please get in touch.  
dawn.woolley@network.rca.ac.uk*

*23rd September, 3pm. Corner of Freehold Street and Spring Bank. The performance is expected to last 30mins to 60mins in total.*

## **ENDS**

For more information, please contact:  
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## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

RedBoard is one of 60 new projects to receive funding through the Hull 2017 Creative Communities Programme, which is being delivered in partnership with the Big Lottery Fund, a Principal Partner of Hull 2017.

A total of £750,000 is being invested in the programme, which was set up to celebrate, nurture and support local talent and develop opportunities for emerging artists.

In addition to cash from Hull 2017 and the Big Lottery Fund, the projects will receive staff support to build capacity in the arts sector, helping to create a legacy. The Creative Communities Programme is also being supported by Hull and East Riding Charitable Trust.

The projects - which range from photography exhibitions to music and food festivals and choral and orchestral concerts to audio-visual installations - will see local artists, community groups, cultural and other organisations in the city working with local people of all ages to create new artistic work, events, installations and other activity throughout 2017.

For a full list of projects visit: <https://www.hull2017.co.uk/discover/article/sixty-community-projects-inspire-creativity-across-hull-2/>

**About Hull UK City of Culture**

**Hull UK City of Culture 2017** is a 365 day programme of cultural events and creativity inspired by the city and told to the world. Hull secured the title of UK City of Culture 2017 in November 2013. It is only the second city to hold the title and the first in England.

**Divided into four seasons**, this nationally significant event draws on the distinctive spirit of the city and the artists, writers, directors, musicians, revolutionaries and thinkers that have made such a significant contribution to the development of art and ideas.

The Culture Company was set up to deliver the Hull 2017 programme and is an independent organisation with charitable status. It has raised £32 million, with over 60 partners supporting the project, including public bodies, lottery distributors, trusts and foundations and local and national businesses. Key contributions are coming from: **Host City** – Hull City Council; **Principal Partners** - Arts Council England, BBC, Big Lottery Fund, East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Heritage Lottery Fund, KCOM, KWL, Spirit of 2012, Yorkshire Water and the University of Hull; **Major Partners** –Associated British Ports, Arco, BP, the British Council, British Film Institute, Green Port Hull, Hull Clinical Commissioning Group, MKM Building Supplies, P&O Ferries, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Sewell Group, Siemens, Smith & Nephew and Wykeland Group.

68 per cent of the funding is dedicated to public facing activities, including the widest range of cultural events in every corner of the city, with a further 11 per cent for legacy and contingency. More than £5 million is being invested in volunteering, learning and community engagement. £1.6 million is being invested to ensure a legacy after 2017. This includes capacity building, such as supporting existing events so they can grow, staging curtain-raiser events, developing future programming for after 2017 and building a new platform to support a unified ticketing system for the city.

Hull 2017's International Partners are: Aarhus, Denmark, which is European Capital of Culture 2017; Reykjavik, Iceland; Rotterdam, The Netherlands; and Freetown, Sierra Leone (twinned with Hull). These relationships are reflected in a number of events throughout the year.

For information go to [www.hull2017.co.uk](http://www.hull2017.co.uk)

Follow us on **Twitter** @2017Hull **Instagram** @2017hull **Facebook** HullCityofCulture  
**About Big Lottery Fund**

- The Big Lottery Fund is the largest funder of community activity in the UK. It puts people in the lead to improve their lives and communities, often through small, local projects.
- It is responsible for giving out 40% of the money raised by National Lottery players for good causes. Every year it invests over £650 million and awards around 12,000 grants across the UK for health, education, environment and charitable purposes.
- Since June 2004 it has awarded over £8 billion to projects that change the lives of millions of people. Since the National Lottery began in 1994, £34 billion has been raised and more than 450,000 grants awarded.

### **About Hull & East Riding Charitable Trust**

The Hollingbery Family founded the business in 1933 with the first Comet superstore opened in Hull in 1968. The business was subsequently sold to Kingfisher and in 1985 the charity was established with the defined purpose of donating funds to help and support charities, both national and local, and other deserving causes, provided that

direct benefit was forthcoming for people who live in Hull or the East Riding of Yorkshire.

For more information, including on how to apply for funds, see <http://hullandeastridingtrust.org.uk/>

**HULL 2017**  
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22 Sep 2017  
**BILLBOARD ART ENCOURAGES FREE SPEECH IN HULL**

Hull UK City Of Culture 2017  
ART AND DESIGN | CCP

**Get on your soapbox! REDboard provides an inspirational backdrop to speakers' corner.**

Billboards across Hull have been brought to life this year in the name of art and culture as part of **REDboard**, a project supported by the Hull 2017 Creative Communities Programme celebrating 20 years of RED Contemporary Arts (formerly RED Gallery).

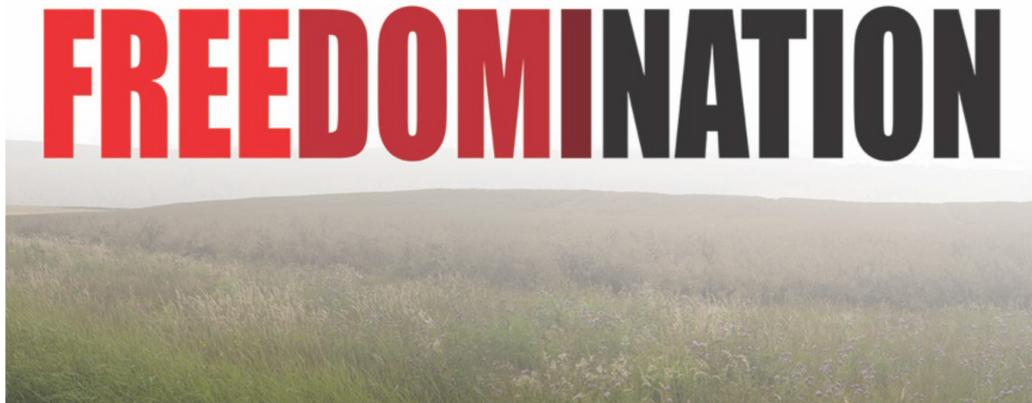
Situated on the corner of Freehold Street and Spring Bank, near Hull city centre, the latest billboard, *Freedomination*, was designed by artists Davin Watne and Dawn Woolley. It tackles the concept that, as more people exercise their freedom of speech it can become increasingly difficult to hear what is said. Therefore freedom to act without restraint can in fact oppress others.

And this Saturday 23 September will see *Freedomination* act as a backdrop to a unique performance allowing people to stand up and speak their mind.

**CONTRIBUTORS**

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## Participant Call Out



### Freedomination Soapbox Performance

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On Saturday 23rd September at 3pm Woolley will stand on a soap(wine)box in front of the billboard and initiate a participatory performance involving soapboxes and a demonstration of the concept freedomination.

Freedom and domination appear to be mutually exclusive concepts but there is a grey area in between. The freedom to act without restraint can oppress others. As John Stuart Mill (may have said) said "The right to swing my arms in any direction ends where your nose begins." For example, the freedom of companies, markets, and governments to act as they please can go too far and impinge upon individual's rights.

Watne and Woolley say 'For the Freedomination Soapbox performance we invite anyone who is outspoken and passionate - about ANY subject - to get on a soapbox and make a speech. It can be about something very serious, or not, someone might get up and speak for 1 minute or 60 minutes, it is entirely up to the audience. As more and more people express their freedom of speech it will become increasingly difficult to hear what is said, demonstrating the concept freedomination. The soapboxes will also be different sizes, suggesting that the benefits of freedom aren't enjoyed equally.'

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Websites: [www.dawnwoolley.com](http://www.dawnwoolley.com) / <http://www.davinwatne.com/>

Social Media Links: [https://www.instagram.com/hard\\_stop/](https://www.instagram.com/hard_stop/)  
[https://twitter.com/dawn\\_woolley](https://twitter.com/dawn_woolley)

The billboard and performance is commissioned by RedContemporary Arts as part of Hull 2017 UK City of Culture.

Performance Script

Welcome, thanks for coming + temporary speaking corner.  
I'd like to present talk to you about the idea of freedomination, a concept jointly created with Dawn Watne to express our feelings about the current socio-political environments in which we live. I am based in the UK + Dawn in the States. Trump + May / Brexit +

**START BY STANDING ON F R E E (maybe pace up and down?)**  
Freedom and domination appear to be mutually exclusive concepts. We aim to draw attention to this binary to expose it as a falsehood and help people to explore the grey area in between.

The freedom to act without restraint can oppress others. As John Stuart Mill may have said "The right to swing my arms in any direction ends where your nose begins." I am only free to act as I please within very tightly constrained social regulation.

However, And there is good reason for that - a significant reduction in blacked eyes + bloody noses for example. The freedom of companies, markets, and governments to act as they please can go too far and impinge upon individual's rights. Some of you will know the battle being fought in and around Humberside, against fracking companies and the Government that supports them. It appears that we are less free to determine what happens in our local environments in comparison to the freedom of companies to exploit its natural resources and for Governments to profit from this exploitation. Some are free to pollute the natural resources we all rely on to live. The natural landscape in the background evokes a romantic sense of freedom, but one that could be lost to urbanization and industrial encroachment. Are we free to roam the land, use it for grazing, fishing, camping, anything at all that we want? When it comes to pure companies + individualised agriculture, we have to ask whose land it is, and what we are allowed to do on it?

(point to billboard)

Fracking is an example of how the idea of freedom is evoked paradoxically by those in power to go against the best interest of others. Last year Boris Johnson was free to travel the country in a bus emblazoned with a slogan that turned out to be a lie. His freedom to make these claims remains unchallenged. As a result we face an economic and political crisis that will affect our lives, jobs and finances for generations.

In America, neo-Nazi's marched under the protection of 'freedom of speech'. This begs the question, at what point does speech become the equivalent of someone's fist hitting another person's nose? Are we still living under the childish mantra that 'sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me?'. Do we accept the right to a freedom of speech at any cost?

Loss of freedom could also be the price of inclusion and citizenship. To participate in a society we have to follow its rules - that is the price of our membership. Exclusion can also be a restriction. For example, if we do leave the EU we will collectively loose a lot of funding for all sorts of social and cultural projects. Businesses may feel they have more control but will loose privileged access to a large market - and may increase prices and pay less tax, while lowering production standards and working conditions. The freedom afforded by our exclusion from the EU would have negative impacts on workers and consumers alike. Will we have the freedom to complain, to demonstrate, to call our politicians to account?

**STAND ON D O for this bit**  
Freedom, and particularly freedom of speech are not unproblematic terms. They are not innately positive 'good' things. One person's freedom to act is another person's inhibition of freedom. And even where these freedoms are positive and beneficial to individuals - they are not enjoyed widely and equally in a society. Some privileged groups have greater access to freedom than others.

Just as some of these boxes are higher than others, so are the opportunities to access the benefits of an advanced capitalist society greater for some than others.

the rise of the alt-right niche for interesting times. Freedom is an attempt to express the nature of this free will. all truths + that by better.   
oppression to these protests was vilified simultaneously - by as an attack of freedom of speech + hole speech

During the last 10 years of imposed austerity measures, <sup>always proportion</sup> the bulk of the population have experienced stagnant wages, increasing costs of living due to inflation, and reduced access to vital public services. <sup>of it</sup> In the meantime the wealthiest few in our society have watched their <sup>assets</sup> wealth grow.

#### STAND ON M

<sup>These</sup> I stand on ~~the~~ box that came to England full of chateau wine from France. The very boxes we stand upon are signs of capitalism and a class system that functions to perpetuate its own privilege by exploiting others, and hindering their access to public services that would improve quality of life and potential enable social mobility such as: health, education, and positions in local government.

We are not all in it together.

And our loss is always a gain for someone else.

So when you hear the word 'freedom' uttered, ask your self – whose freedom? Are we all more free as a result? Or, are some people more enslaved, marginalised and disenfranchised when one group exercises their own particular brand of freedom?

#### STAND ON I

The affect of an indiscriminate freedom of speech is demonstrated on social media every day. Outrageous claims are made and shared through ever-widening social circles without ~~ever~~ being fact-checked or challenged in open-debate. Groups like <sup>like</sup> the people on 4Chan systematically flood websites to impose their often racist, sexist and homophobic views <sup>with vitriol</sup> out into the public. The more these voices are heard, the more they are normalised and treated like an unavoidable side-effect of the freedom of speech. <sup>learn to tolerate the intolerable</sup> Because social media are basically democratic – if you have access to the necessary technology – everyone can express their views. But the shear volume of chatter means only the loudest voices are heard.

As each individual expresses their freedom of speech it becomes increasingly difficult to hear what is said. Only the most insistent – those with the luxury of time and privilege of a <sup>big</sup> platform in front of a large audience are able to drown out the rest. This is 'freedomination'.

#### STAND ON N

So, with this in mind I invite you all to join me on a soapbox and talk about whatever the ~~hell~~ <sup>offer you a platform - the freedom to speak</sup> you want. Some of these boxes are old – crumbling relics of the system that is surely ready to fall. <sup>can</sup> If the box collapses under you, don't be angry, see <sup>it as</sup> a sign that your freedom to speak has undermined the structure that takes away our freedom to choose in favour of others freedom to sell.

Are you mad about brexit, or fracking, or parking tickets, or the size of a freddo bar? If so, join me and make yourself heard.

*walk down to the very end N*

#### SECOND SECTION (HOPEFULLY OTHER PEOPLE ARE JOINING IN)

I am going to talk about a very ambiguous area of freedom of speech – the freedom of advertisers to put these things all over our visual landscape. The city, the visual realm, cannot be owned. It is everyone's and no-one's. But somehow, somewhere it became a saleable commodity, and now you cannot move for

advert. Every time you take public transport, drive on a motorway or walk down a street your eyes fall upon an advert.

I was in Waterloo station some time ago and I had two realisations. The first was that I often walk around looking at the floor – at least in part to avoid looking at adverts – and the second was that this space is no longer free of the pollution of advertising. Even the floor of the station was emblazoned with slogans and logos. There was literally nowhere left to look.

But there are organisations; artists and activists trying to make a stand against this visual pollution.

For example, Brandalism performed their largest ad-takeover by installing over 600 posters in bus stop advertising spaces in protest at the COP21 climate talks in Paris. Bill Posters of Brandalism said 'As is the case with the climate talks and their corporate sponsored events, outdoor advertising ensures that those with the most money are able to ensure that their voices get heard above all else.'

Although advertising space can be bought by anyone – it is highly dependent on money – so not everyone can use this platform to express what they want. And we certainly do not get to choose who and what is advertised in our cities. This undermines the 'publicness' of public spaces – they become commercial spaces.

The activist group Brandalism are against outdoor advertising because it is undemocratic – the comments <sup>is always</sup> / messages aren't determined by the community <sup>or</sup> society in which they appear. <sup>The</sup> They tend to encourage growth in consumption that also happens to be bad for the environment, contributes to social inequality, and something produce wars etc, and we are never asked if we like it or not, or, if we want it or not.

Jordan Seiler, another activist said 'By privileging one type of message over another we are, through repetition, setting the terms of our cultural and political discourse. Considering the great hurdles we face socially and environmentally, the commercial discourse we surround ourselves with not only ignores our current reality but actively works against it by distracting us from each other in favour of ourselves.'

We are encouraged to see commodities, rather than communities, as the solution to all our problems. Because our everyday, daily lives are littered with advertising messages we absorb the marketplace into our social lives and connect everyday thinking with commercial imperatives. The whole of our lives becomes an extension of the capitalist system. And we are continually told, despite evidence to counter it, that market will see us right...

Our visual landscape is polluted by this ideology and we are powerless to oppose it.

Or are we?

Over the years I have applied for funding from different funding bodies and charities and bought advertising spaces - I have then filled them with my own artwork or the works of others. I felt I was doing good because I was creating a space ~~with~~<sup>within</sup> the visual landscape in which nothing is being sold. I thought I was creating a gap in the hard sell visual culture, to allow passersby to contemplate the bigger issues in our society. (POINT AT BILLBOARD) I continue to take this approach in my collaboration with Davin Watne, because I think it is a great platform to reach a wide audience and voice important ideas. As Raymond Williams (I think) said - billboards are the art galleries for capitalist societies.

But...

I realized that I am also adding to the demand for advertising space - I am encouraging the companies that colonise our visual culture to take over even more public space because there is an even greater market to sell to. ~~Since~~<sup>After</sup> working with a company in Cardiff they told me my project had ~~lead~~<sup>led</sup> to an increase in artists, art schools and other cultural organisations buying space to use as alternative exhibition forms. I had made things worse rather than better. Because I know that once the cultural project posters come down ~~adverts~~<sup>adverts</sup> for doctor martins or the latest HBO tv series is going to fill ~~its~~<sup>their</sup> place. I had provided a ~~means~~<sup>way</sup> for the system to further encroach on our visual landscape.

My freedom to use this platform to express myself results in the freedom of massive multinational, billion dollar advertising companies to dominate the surfaces of our towns and cities. ~~Even the backs of toilet doors.~~<sup>Even the floors.</sup>

So I am pretty ambivalent about the idea of 'reclaiming the visual realm'. And freedomation is essentially ambivalence.

~~But~~<sup>But</sup> Ambivalence may ~~not~~<sup>be</sup> our best weapon ~~yet~~<sup>to</sup> - treat everything with unemotional indifference - as something that is neither good nor bad but potentially ~~both~~<sup>to result in</sup>. Then think about how this meaning or function can be pushed to be ~~more bad than good~~<sup>the best of both</sup> and vice versa. This is how we change the balance of freedomation, in which the loudest and richest become dominant voices...  
~~WORK ON THIS BIT MORE~~

thank you.

~~mean~~<sup>mean</sup> ~~free~~<sup>free</sup> walk towards a system that always aims to achieve ~~the~~<sup>the</sup> freedom for the many not the few.

## Documentation

Performance Video:

<https://vimeo.com/249174894>







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