

Liverpool Biennial artist Jeanne van Heeswijk mixes art, regeneration and bread in Anfield

PROMISES, promises. The people of Anfield have been on the receiving end of a good number over the last few years – with, most would agree, very little to show for it.

Share



Share

Email

Tweet

+1



Artist Jeanne Van Heeswijk at the former bakery Michell's on Oakfield road in Anfield, set to become a community bakery project

PROMISES, promises. The people of Anfield have been on the receiving end of a good number over the last few years – with, most would agree, very little to show for it.

So you can understand why they might not exactly have put out the

flags when Dutch artist Jeanne van Heeswijk arrived in their midst two-and-a-half years ago asking them to put their trust in her and her plans for a new social engagement project.

“People were hesitant, which I think is normal,” she admits of the initial reaction. “There are a lot of reasons for that. People think it’s an art project that will come and go. It took a while for them to understand – this isn’t going, it’s staying.

“They’ve seen so many promises and proposals of things that will change things but that were not delivered. I understand their scepticism. A lot of them are tired of promises and beautiful stories.”

Well, as they say, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Or rather here, the proof is in the baking.

Because Jeanne’s initiative to re-energise the community includes Homebaked, a plan for a bakery and café – a community-run cooperative, in the old Mitchell’s Bakery in Oakfield Road, alongside 2Up, 2Down, working with a range of residents to develop ‘places and spaces’ for the neighbourhood in empty terraced homes and vacant ground surrounding Anfield stadium.

A Land Trust has been set up, residents have been encouraged to gain urban design, architecture and construction skills, and the project has also involved architect Marianne Heaslip from Urbed and designer Wayne Hemingway.

“Housing is the battlefield of our time and the house is its monument,” says Jeanne, who had been keen to work in North Liverpool for some time when she was approached with an idea for a scheme by the Liverpool Biennial.

“We’ve involved young people in the process of working in ways to design or redesign their neighbourhood, and at the same time we’ve been working very closely with all members of the community to

create an alternative to the existing situation.

“I’m talking about small-scale developments with more manageable footprints which are easier for the community to understand what will happen.”

The most high profile part of the initiative so far is work taking place to transform the old Mitchell’s Bakery.

One of those who has become involved in ‘Homebaked’ is Lynn Tolman, who describes how “it kind of saved my life.”

She explains: “I was in a really bad place and I felt at home in Anfield because there’s a sense of hopelessness and that you deserve nothing but what Anfield has to offer.

“Tonight I’m going to a meeting in Salford with a new artists’ collective who want to turn me into an artist. I’d never have had the confidence or skills if it hadn’t been for this. It really turned my life around.

“Other people I know are still suffering. Hopefully when we’re selling stuff here in the bakery these people will have the confidence to come in and get what I have got.”

And it did take confidence for Lynn, who lives close to the bakery, to take that first step. She finally used the excuse of coming in with a flyer for the window, looking for a new lodger.

She got chatting to Jeanne, and since then hasn’t looked back, holding philosophy classes in the building and becoming evangelical about baking.

“People that live around here get treated like they’re worthless and that they don’t deserve to drink coffee and eat good bread,” she says.

“People will be able to come in and buy sliced white if they want, but we’ll also be giving them the chance to try all sorts.

“I bake twice a week now. It’s cheaper and easier than buying from the supermarket. And it’s so empowering. And we can do that for everybody.

“We want to create jars for breadmaking – sourdough yeast spreads the love!”

Lynn isn’t the only one feeling energised and enthused as the bakery takes shape.

“I’m now super-excited,” grins Jeanne. “Step by step, loaf by loaf, we have built ourselves. Step by step, bit by bit, every time trying again to plough our way. It’s not easy at times.

“You can see things happening. It still means there’s a lot of work to do, and at some point it will have to find a way of sustaining and running itself.

“There will be a community room, and it will be community owned. People are in the process of training, learning to be bakers, but also learning how to manage the shop and the cooperative.”

Product testing will start soon and the bakery proper is expected to open at the start of 2013, while the Land Trust is also going from strength to strength.

Meanwhile people are also being given a chance to see the work that’s going on there through the Anfield Home Tours running on Saturdays during the Liverpool Biennial.

“There are a lot of tours in Liverpool to famous houses,” Jeanne points out. “This will be a tour through Anfield.

“We’ll be visiting some homes and meeting people who will explain about how this is changing the area and how it affects them, ending up at the bakery with a cup of coffee and a slice of cake.”

The Anfield Home Tour departs the Cunard Building each Saturday until November 24, at 2.30pm. Places are free but book in advance on 0845 220 2800 or via visit@biennial.com.

Keep up to date with Homebaked news on Twitter.

PROMOTED STORIES



Scoring goals: How LED lights are transforming life on and...

(Philips)



If you use Gmail, you'll hate you never tried this.

(Andrew Skotzko)



Internet of Overwhelming Things

(NetworkWorld)



5 Herbs and Veggies that Love Growing Indoors

(Goodnet)



To Get Young Women Into Tech, Focus on Successes

(Forbes)



Why MH17 Changes Everything In Airline Safety

(hubub)

Recommended by

Follow



theliverpoolecho

@LivEchonews