

Wouter Osterholt finishes his winter residency at The White House in Dagenham whilst Alice Theobald makes a welcome return to the community



Beacon Tree, Walnut Road/ Green Lane, (work in progress), Acrylic on paper, Wouter Osterholt

Today Dutch artist Wouter Osterholt finishes his winter residency at The White House, Dagenham, which sits at the heart of the Becontree Estate. Selected in collaboration with the V&A Research Institute ([VARI](#)), the Berlin-based artist took up residency in November 2017 for five months developing his project 'Beacon Tree'. During his residency, he has been exploring the utopian origins of the garden city movement so as to re-imagine new models of communal living within Dagenham's Becontree Estate, the biggest municipal housing project in the world when it was built in the early 20th Century.

Osterholt's work, inspired and informed by meetings with the residents of the estate, but also with local experts, historians, architects, members of the council, community workers and activists, has focussed on the meaning of the name 'Becontree', which derives from the words 'Beacon Tree' as recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086. The original tree indicated the location where early meetings took place. In order to reignite an ancient tradition of community gatherings, Wouter has been taking to the streets with a field easel to make a series of acrylic paintings of distinctive trees in the neighbourhood. Whenever passers-by approach him during his painting sessions, he starts a conversation and invites them to be painted standing around the tree.

However, the paintings are not just works of art, they become 'visions' of future events. Osterholt will return this summer to organise a series of neighbourhood gatherings based on the paintings he made during his residency. In these gatherings, the portrayed residents will be given a copy of the paintings and will be brought together with all the other people portrayed by the artist. Through this, Osterholt aims to reignite the early meetings tradition, effectively creating a new neighbourhood forum for Becontree and The White House where participants will be invited to discuss different recurring social topics that he encountered during the numerous exchanges he had during his time working on the streets and green spaces of the estate.

Following Osterholt's residency, artist Alice Theobald will return to The White House, following her residency in summer 2017. Her show, *We May Believe Or We May Never Know*, will open at The White House on 27 April 2018. It will be open every weekend until 27 May, and will include a performance event featuring the

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poets and musicians she worked with during her first residency, as well as a two screen video installation.

The White House today also announces that this summer, instead of welcoming just one artist-in-residence, it will start a local artist residency programme inviting six selected local artists to use the studio space from May until September. In addition to studio space and use of the facilities at the house, the programme is geared around personal and professional development including four weekends of talks, exercises and trips to support them in growing their confidence and developing their practice. Aimed at those at the beginnings of their artistic career, or those who might not yet identify themselves as artists and want to get to the next phase, artists will be selected through a process of nominations. The White House team will work with local stakeholders and groups to identify and nominate the artists based on their commitment to the area as well as their emerging artistic practice. The programme will run May to September 2018.

For more information, please contact Annalie@createlondon.org
www.whitehouseart.org

Notes to Editors

VARI

The V&A Research Institute ([VARI](#)) is a five-year programme of research projects and partnerships supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. It takes the V&A's pioneering research culture into a new phase that allows the Museum to experiment with new ways of studying, displaying and accessibly storing its collections. VARI will give better access to the V&A's objects and join its experts with academic scholars, practicing artists, designers and makers and members of the general public.

Create London

Create London is a charity that exists to explore the ways artists can contribute to the lives of people in cities. Its work is primarily focused in east London, home to more artists and art organisations than anywhere in Europe, and one of the most economically deprived parts of the UK. Create helps artists to connect more closely with communities through an ambitious programme of projects. Unlike a gallery or theatre, Create has no fixed public space, preferring to work in the places people encounter every day.

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