

Qualitative Impact of *The Great Austerity Debate*

To reveal more of the impact, here is a representative example of the responses we received from audiences, venues and partners from the tour.

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Audiences

Old Fire Station, Oxford

“Brilliant and thought-provoking show. Director handled the forum extremely well. Thank you”

Cheltenham, Bethesda Methodist Church

“This play has changed my mind about austerity. It is not inevitable but a political choice”

Shirebrook, Holy Trinity Church

“I felt the pain of the situation laid before us - but not complete despair once we had discussed it all. I have talked about the production many times and the impact on me and have felt better informed in subsequent conversations”

“...really interesting to see the common themes that emerged at all venues and encouraged me that there are still so many sensible and humanity-conscious people”

“Thank you again to all of your company...I have told friends and family to look out for you wherever they live and to attend a performance of this or your other work”

Norwich, Octagon Chapel

“Fantastic at getting the audience to think for themselves, listen to each other. I felt like part of a community wanting to help each other by the end”

“Thank you Menagerie for your play showing the desperation of people on zero-hours contracts”

Dronfield, Peel Centre

“Depressed by the play but energised by the "rewriting" segment. I've emphasised in discussions that Austerity is a political choice and also talked a lot about this amazing theatre group called Menagerie!”

“I particularly liked Forum Theatre. The acting was very professional and engaged the audience in issues of which they may not have had personal experience. I hope that all your hard work will have a positive outcome.”



Forum intervention in Shirebrook...joker/director Patrick Morris, performer Hayley Wareham, and two audience members.



Forum intervention in Shirebrook. Performers Neal Craig & Hayley Wareham, with an audience member.



Worcester, Warndon Community Hub

"We were so glad we came to the event... (I was) amazed at how real it felt... Have told others about the event and how powerful it was, thought about what I might have said/added, on reflection, when I came out front, and thought more about the reality of life for so many people that the play very much brought to the fore".

"Impressive - really pleased that discussion on austerity took place right in the middle of an Urban Priority Area. It was good to discuss austerity as a body of people, as opposed to individuals. Thank you very much for coming"

Great Yarmouth, East Norfolk Sixth Form College

"...it shows you that things just aren't always that straightforward in reality. What you think should happen doesn't always..."

"thought provoking and an innovative way to engage with the issues"

Great Yarmouth, Christchurch

"I was very impressed and appreciative of your company's performance here in Great Yarmouth, thanks for coming here."

Halton Mill, Lancashire

"I enjoyed the show's playful theatricality and engaged with the issues raised. The discussion afterwards - and the improvised scenes - were highly creative and the director orchestrated the different points that were raised with real skill. It was a distressing subject, but handled with care and respect."

Slough, The Curve

"What an amazing event it was, loved the play & debate, I learned a lot from it, thank you"

Cambridge, Storey's Field Community Centre

"I've not experienced the Forum theatre concept before, and this made clear the audience's sense of concern / disgust with the realities you presented."

"It was a truly moving experience, and what a great idea to gather the audience suggestions and then share these with our lawmakers."

"CONGRATULATIONS! Your play last night was AMAZING. The concept and format, performance and the overall experience was truly meaningful and inspiring."

"The forum theatre was fascinating, both in terms of content of the interventions people made, and also because of how they were while on stage. And the actors were brilliant, at staying in character and improvising in reaction to the suggestions."



Venues

Blackburn, The Bureau – Kerris Casey-St Pierre

“Thanks again so much for bringing the show to us. It was fantastic, very moving and gritty. The power of the first half and it's deep sense of desperation and powerlessness, was matched by the positive experiences of the second half, showing that small acts change lives, hope is not lost, collectively large change is possible and there is another way. One half without the other would not have had half the impact.”

Shirebrook, Holy Trinity Church – Karen Bradley

“It was a fabulous event and people are still discussing it even now, months later and sharing what a good evening it was... There is no theatre in Shirebrook and it was good to bring theatre to the community here. I do hope we can work together again.”

Great Yarmouth, East Norfolk Sixth Form College – Suzi Loades

“We were so pleased to host menagerie last week. It really was a fantastic production and the students gained so much from seeing it and participating.”

Cambridge, Storey's Field Community Centre – Richard Brown

“...this is a timely thought provoking piece. The performances were of the highest standard. The event exceeded our expectations in terms of attendance.”

Slough, The Curve – Dayna White

“Our front of house were really impressed with how engaged the youth parliament who attended were with the show and how well the actors brought them into the show.”

Whitworth, Library – Pam Brotherton

“People really enjoyed the standard of performance and the interactive element – getting up and acting the parts and joining in a debate...people were stopping me in the street for several days afterwards to talk about how interesting they found it.”

Peterborough, Undercroft – Keely Hawes/Ivan Cutting

“...an engaging piece and presented with great quality. Audiences enjoyed it and I suspect enjoyed it more than they thought they were going to.”

Chesterfield, Library – Susie Crowley

“Audiences appreciated the debating aspect of the show and felt it was an opportunity to contribute to the show rather than sit as a passive audience member”

Dronfield, Peel Centre – Maria Smith

“The performance was excellent and everyone really enjoyed the interactive aspect.”



Great Yarmouth, Christchurch – Katy Dunn

“The production was of a very high standard, and was really effective in its aims. It also enabled people from different groups in Yarmouth to meet one another, and find out about the work that is being done in the town.”

Newmarket, Turner Hall – Max Drinkwater

“... it felt tailor-made for us and particularly suited the venue and audience we had provided. The production and delivery was to a high standard, which nonetheless did not alienate the audience.”

Oxford, Old Fire Station – Alexandra Coke

The forum debate exceeded as the audience were really engaged and active in the debate – well joked.

Kettering Arts Centre – Becky Wills

“Thank you for bringing your innovative and challenging Forum Theatre play The Great Austerity Debate to us on Saturday. [@Ketteringarts](#) audience was inspired and entertained.”

Cheltenham, Bethesda Methodist Church – Naomi Cooke

“This piece of work was excellent. The play was powerful even though very simply staged. And Patrick Morris’s skills as a joker were exemplary – putting the audience at ease, enabling full participation, having a deep wisdom about how to read the audience and let debate and exploration flourish.”



Forum intervention at Blackburn Bureau...performer Neal Craig and audience member



Partners/Local Authorities

Junction Arts, Chesterfield – Jane Wells

“We were thrilled to see how quickly people immersed themselves and connected to the characters and storyline. The skilful writing and experienced performers made it a success and seamless transition from the professional actors to the audience contributions. We had some incredible feedback afterwards and the whole thing was a joy to witness! We would welcome the opportunity to work with Menagerie again, to continue to develop audiences by bringing more live theatre to the communities we serve.”

Spot-On Rural Touring/Culturapedia (Lancashire) – Sue Robinson

“I thought the show was well constructed, covered a range of issues, and you managed the debate extremely well. I came in feeling depressed about the subject, and left feeling strangely energised. Things can be done and people out there do care.”

Great Yarmouth Borough Council – Julia Devonshire, Cultural Lead

“It was a really powerful piece and one of many potential stories that really struck a chord with the experience of the local community...It would be great to maintain our contact with you for future possibilities whilst we build our theatre offer (theatre and non-theatre venues), awareness of our audiences/ participants and our connections with touring companies. Keep us posted!”

Bolsover District Council – Daniel Oakley, Arts Development Officer

*“I will definitely be looking at ways I can incorporate some of this data (**the list of audience suggestions**) into my reporting on how arts is having a wider impact in communities finding ways to address issues facing people universally given the current climate. Do keep up conversations with Junction Arts, they are a very capable and highly respected organisation here in our region. I am more than happy to be involved in anything I can as you develop your thoughts and ideas.”*



And finally...Jamie Holmanwho commissioned his students to research, make and publicise 'The Great Austerity Debate' Art Exhibition at Blackburn Bureau.

Blackburn is a post industrial, working class Lancashire town with high levels of deprivation and poor health outcomes. It is the 12th lowest area of engagement in the arts according to Arts Council England. Recently published research proposes that most people from Blackburn do not travel to access culture, and the BA Fine Art course has developed partnership strategies to engage with these audiences.

(<https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/data-map-reveals-levels-arts-engagement-across-england>)

Blackburn College art students are assessed on works that are visible to a public facing audience, with the intention to develop 'professional practice' and 'real world' experiences.

In order to achieve this, staff must identify opportunities to work in partnership with venues, artists and other creatives who may be working in the area. In addition, the current economic and political climate in Blackburn, especially post Panorama - ('The Most Divided Town in England - Broadcast 2018) opportunities for students to explore relevant issues are critical to their engagement with their communities.

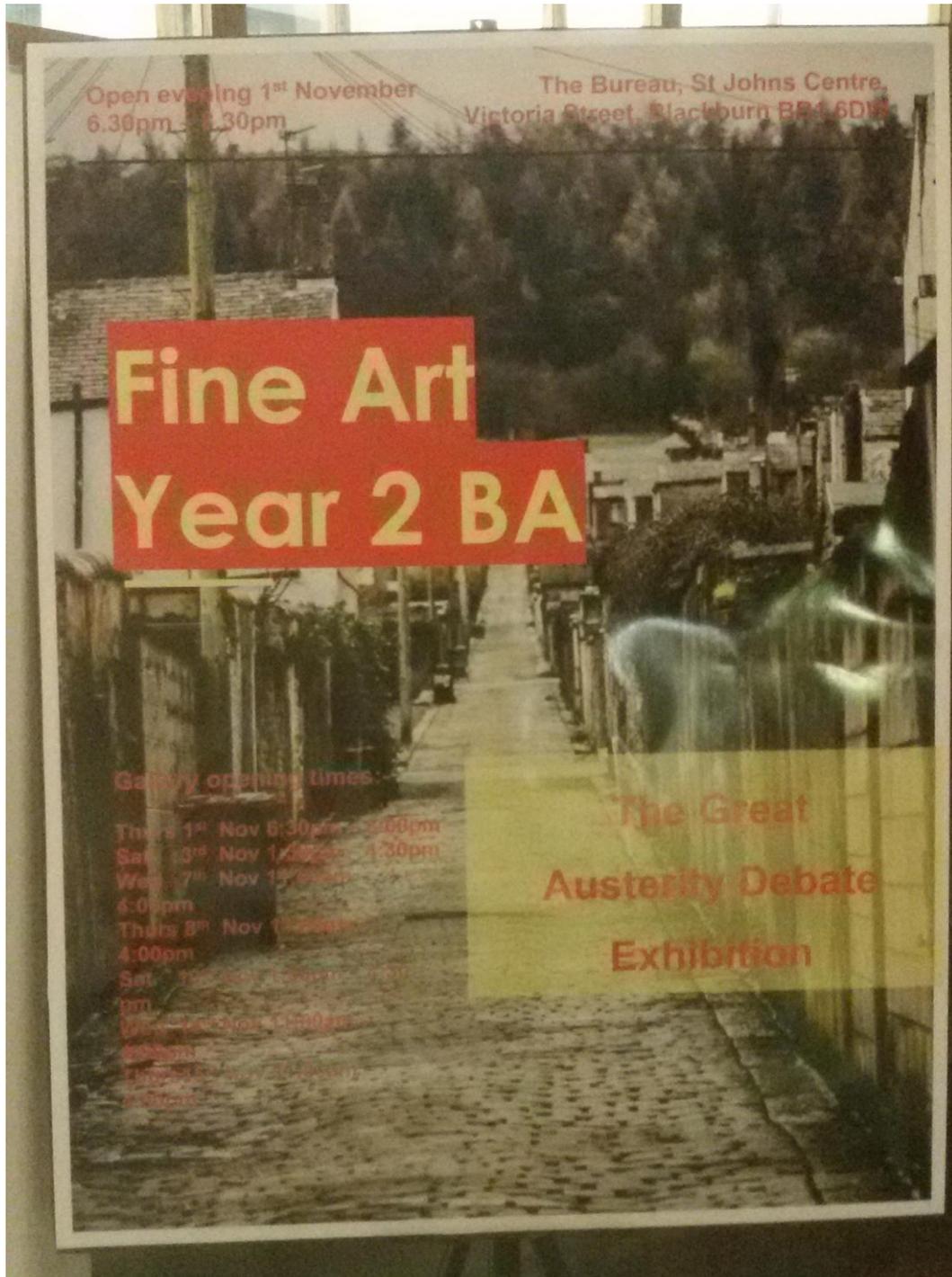
Level Five art students were given a brief to respond to the work the Menagerie Theatre Company, Cambridge toured to Blackburn last November. '*The Great Austerity Debate*' connected with the students who, as a consequence; produced an exhibition beyond the level expected of second year students, and also motivated them to raise money via their private view, which they donated to the local food bank.

It is impossible to underplay the impact an opportunity like this has on students in a town like Blackburn. Without a touring programme of art and culture, these students would not have the opportunity to engage with professionals and make their own work visible.

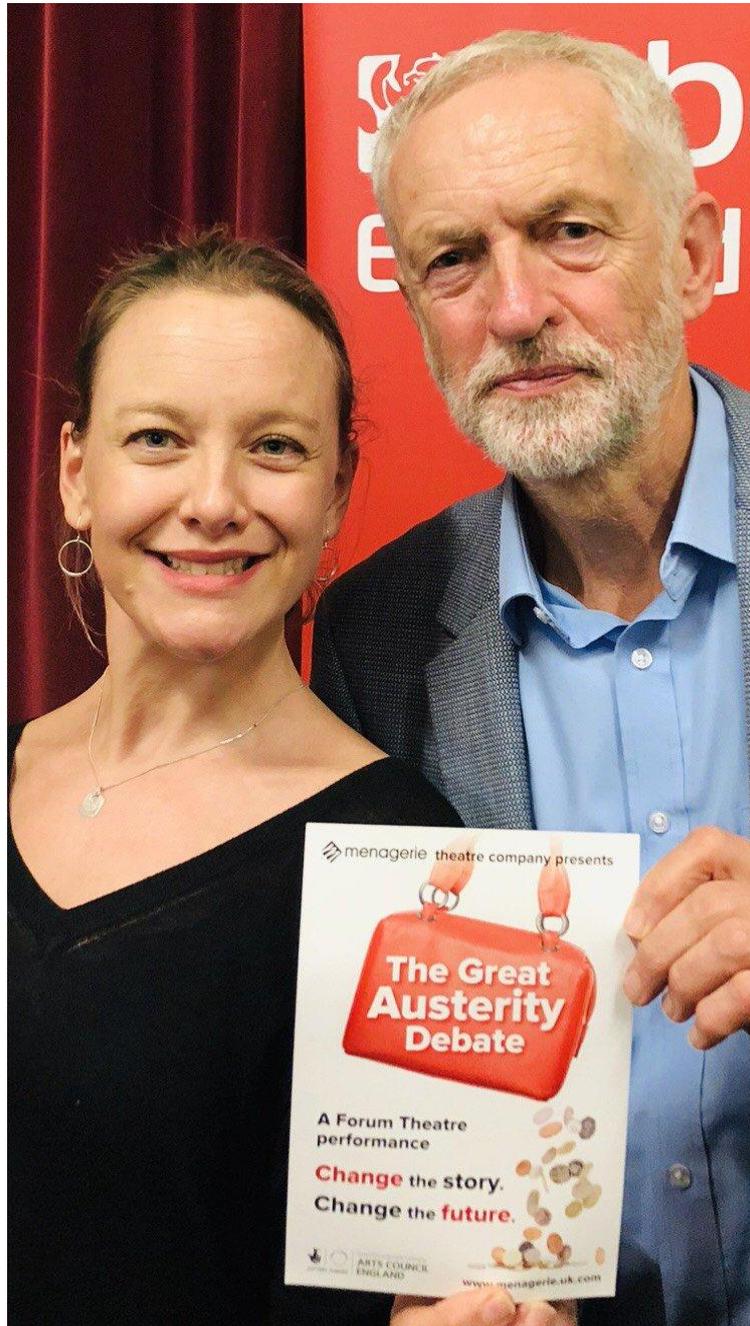
Jamie Holman
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Below, the exhibition poster and images of 2 pieces from the exhibition.





Cast member Caroline Rippin meeting the Leader of the Opposition during our East Midlands leg of the tour...



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