

“We are an association of people working within the community who bring the arts to a wider public through education and play. Use your imagination, we’ll use ours.”

In the late 60s Ken Turner was experimenting with 3D structures through his teaching at the Central School of Art and Design, whilst Mary Turner was researching ideas in play through the Playgroup Association in north London. The combination of the two strands, along with a 1968 ‘Bubble City’ commission from theatre director Joan Littlewood, was the starting point for Action Space as an artists’ initiative. Blowing up enormous multi-coloured inflatables in parks, council estates and shopping centres, then using them as the stage for improvised performances, the group was determined to dispense with art-world protocol and to reach people who wouldn’t dream of entering a gallery.

Although this ten-year experiment has continued to create ripples in the realm of play, urbanism and site-specific arts (as well as through organisations like Architects of Air), the story of the group itself is not widely known. Now Ken’s son Huw Wahl has not only made a new documentary, but also created an inflatable which functions variously as film-set, screening room, play-ground and performance space. Flatpack is honoured to present the first screening of Action Space the film, and to welcome this blow-up behemoth to Victoria Square.

The Action Space project is supported by the Henry Moore Foundation and the Michael Davies Charitable Settlement.

Action Space

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Saturday 23 April, 15:00 - 17:30
The Electric · £8.50 / £6.50

Dir: Huw Wahl, UK 2016, 87 mins

To watch this film is to be transported into another world. A world before risk-assessments, where questioning authority is the norm and kids throw themselves down hills at speed.

Action Space had a similar ethos and life-span to many other groups spawned in 1968 (including the Birmingham Arts Lab), with the rare advantage that they seem to have documented pretty much everything. Drawing from a mountain of wonderful archive footage as well as testimonies from those involved, Huw Wahl has crafted a thought-provoking story about art, family and time. Resisting the pitfalls of nostalgia, the film also follows the construction of a present-day inflatable, and teases out questions that are just as relevant half a century on. How do children learn to manage risk? What do we mean by community arts? How public is our public space?

Action Space in Birmingham

For the final three days of the festival, the all new Action Space inflatable will set up home in Victoria Square, right outside the Council House. All events and screenings are free to enter – just turn up on the day.



Friday 22 April

12:30-14:45: Action Space Archive

A collage of film captured by the group over the years, from pastoral super 8 to glitchy early video. (15 minute loop)

15:00: ShortCuts

A programme of inventive, often funny stories, told in less than five minutes. Among other delights you’ll find the hilarious *Croissant*, by Birmingham filmmaker Louis Hudson, cringeworthy ad parody *Action Man: Battlefield Casualties* and quirky documentary *Bob Spells Backwards*. (45 mins)

16:00: Parts and Labour: Experiments in Animation

Selection of shorts from the recent Animate Open show at Derby Quad, including work by acclaimed artist Paul Bush (*The Five Minute Museum*), BAFTA New Talent Award winner Ross Hogg (*Scribbledub*), and Nottingham filmmaker Jonathan Gillie (*Building on a Detail*). (65 mins)

18:45: OVO: Untitled no.2

A correspondence between projected visuals and percussive sounds, OVO (Noriko Okaku and Monchan Monna from Bo Ningen) perform their second collaborative work experimenting in a system of memory, reminiscent of visions and auditory senses that will embody a narrative weaving between the abstract and linear.

Saturday 23 April

From midday artists including Kem, Title and Helen Martin will be creating a live painting outside the space, a taster for Digbeth street art jamboree City of Colours in June.

12:00: Action Space Archive
(See Friday 22 April, 12:30)

13:00: City of Colours

Compilation of street art shorts, including animated murals by Blu and David Ellis as well as work by Birmingham artist Lucy MacLauchlan. (60 mins)

15:00-17:00: Mirror Mirror Magic Lantern workshop

Learn about optical illusions, create your own multi-coloured slides, and see them projected using a genuine magic lantern. (See p.51 for more info)

19:00: Action Space Live
Audio-visual collaboration between Huw Wahl and Simon Connor, the director and sound designer of the Action Space documentary. (40 mins)

Sunday 24 April

11:30-12:30: Action Space Revisited

Following on from Saturday’s documentary (see opposite), a chance to explore the Action Space story in more detail with guests including founder Ken Turner.

13:30-14:45: Risky Play

With kids’ horizons increasingly curtailed by safety concerns, how can we cultivate the conditions for risky play in Birmingham? Amy Martin (FAMALAM) hosts a conversation with guests including Ludicology and Emma Bearman of Playful Leeds. Includes a screening of Erin Davis’ short documentary *The Land*, a portrait of the Plas Madoc adventure playground. Kids welcome.

15:30-16:45: Earthy

Found materials workshop - see p.51 for more details.

17:30: Deflation Time

Watch the air disappear from the structure for the last time, as we prepare to bid tara to Flatpack 10.