

Suffocating City

A new piece of interactive public art, set to be presented as part of Bristol Ideas' Festival of the Future City in October, will challenge spectators to take action to tackle the impact of air pollution on our cities and their inhabitants.

The installation Suffocating City will raise public awareness of the worsening problem of urban air pollution and encourage people to adopt a greener approach to city living to help address the climate emergency. Air quality has been identified as the greatest environmental threat to public health globally.

Funded by Arts Council England, the animation represents the city as a living organism with a heart, lungs, and intestines; industrial pipes are attached to these human organs, symbolising the brutal impact of industrialisation and air pollution on our health.

Suffocating City will be projected onto the Arnolfini in Bristol from 18-19 October 2023 as part of Bristol Ideas' Festival of the Future City. Members of the public will be encouraged to interact with the installation by using pedal power to keep the 'organism' alive.

The imagery has been inspired by the concerns of community groups in Bristol and informed by research carried out by The Met Office and members of the [Clean Air Champions](#).

Creator Leo Jamelli says, "The organs will struggle to function and almost suffocate due to air pollution; I wanted to take a different approach with the imagery for this project to show inhabitants of large urban areas, who may seem disconnected from the natural world, that climate issues will also have a serious impact on those living in our cities.

"As the animated organs begin to fail due to air pollutants, the heart goes into cardiac arrest. An old-fashioned exercise bike acts as a defibrillator, and spectators can take action by pedalling to charge it up - helping bring the city back to life. The suggestion is that alternative forms of greener energy can help save our cities."

Bristol was the European Green Capital in 2015 and has now declared a climate emergency. High levels of air pollution have led to the development of the newly introduced Clean Air Zone.

The Festival of the Future City aims to be the largest public debate about the future of cities. It brings together politicians, writers, artists, scientists, change-makers, academics, journalists, students, economists, futurists, policymakers, roboticists, philosophers, filmmakers, think tanks, charities, social enterprises, city-builders and the general public.

Leo's hand-drawn animation will be accompanied by sound, created by Moss Covered Technology, aka Grieg Baird, breathing life into this huge project. Devon-based Stage Engage is providing the equipment for the projection at a reduced cost.

Naomi Miller of Bristol Ideas says, “The air in most of our towns and cities is up to five times more polluted than the World Health Organisation Air Quality Guidelines recommend. Leo Jamelli’s sensitive new artwork, Suffocating City, brings the hearts and lungs of our cities to life and reminds us how much is at stake. We are delighted to be showing it as part of this year’s Festival of the Future City, where audiences will be invited to engage with these topics further.”

The artwork draws on information from the Clean Air Champions, who bring together outstanding researchers in the fields of atmospheric, medical, and social science to develop solutions to tackle air quality issues.

Professor Sir Stephen Holgate is an authority on environmental pollution and has published influential reports on its health impacts. He says, “We urgently need to clean up the air we depend upon for life because dirty air is now known to be one of the greatest environmental risks to health, accounting for 7 million deaths around the world every year. Air pollution also has insidious effects, sometimes triggering a severe worsening of diseases such as asthma or coronary heart disease, most often adding to other stressors in accelerating many different diseases.

“We are exposed to air pollution, both indoors and out, throughout our lifetime. In addition, air pollution is an issue of social injustice, with those most affected being those who are most deprived. As this artwork shows, this public health emergency demands we all take action to drive down emissions. In doing so, we will also help save the planet because air pollution and climate change are two sides of the same coin.”

Noel Nelson has worked for the Met Office for over 30 years as an air quality scientist and has engaged with the Government on air quality matters. He says, “The challenges we face regarding poor air quality are pervasive, insidious, and intrinsically linked to our modern way of life. Air pollution is gradually making all of us ill and shortening our lives. The development of sustainable solutions requires effort not just from scientists, but from a wide range of experts and the general public. The work of the Met Office and the UKRI Clean Air Champions seeks to bring together expertise from all relevant sectors. This art installation will impress upon us all the urgent need for change. It is essential that we tackle this issue collectively - we all have a role to play.”

With [Bristol Green Capital Partnership](#), the project is connecting with community groups who have highlighted air pollution as an issue of concern in their community action plans. As a large piece of public impact art, Suffocating City will help people visualise what is happening in our cities and encourage dialogue to inspire positive change.

Bristol Ideas

Celebrating the work of great writers, commentators, and thinkers in and around the city, Bristol Ideas hosts workshops, discussions, and debates, posing urgent questions about the world in which we live:

We collaborate widely in the city, nationally and internationally. We are dedicated to building new futures for people, places, and the planet. We are committed to commissioning new work; forging lasting partnerships; and supporting artists and organisations to contribute to major cultural programmes. Our projects include the creation and renewal of cultural organisations; citywide and national arts and heritage projects; and festivals – [Festival of Ideas](#), [Festival of Economics](#) and [Festival of the Future City](#).

Festival of the Future City

Festival of the Future City aims to be the largest public debate about the future of cities. It brings together politicians, writers, artists, scientists, change-makers, academics, journalists, students, the public, economists, futurists, policymakers, roboticists, philosophers, filmmakers, think tanks, charities, social enterprises, city-builders and more.

Professor Sir Stephen Holgate

An authority on environmental pollution, he is the founder Chair of the Department of Health and Social Care's Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants, former Chair of the DEFRA Expert Panel on Air Quality Standards, and a previous Member of The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. He is currently a Special Advisor to the Royal College of Physicians on Air Quality and UKRI Clean Air Champion.

Professor Holgate says Short-Lived Climate Pollutants (SLCPs) such as black carbon account for over 45% of the emissions contributing to global warming. Therefore, addressing air pollution is a critical and easy-to-implement solution to climate change with health benefits that will rapidly be seen.

Noel Nelson

With a background in Physics and Environmental Technology, he is the Met Office Clean Air Community Engagement Ambassador and has worked for the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. He was a founder member of the Institute of Air Quality Management, past Chair and now a Vice President for the Institution of Environmental Sciences.

Health impacts of air pollution

Tackling Air Pollution by reducing Short-Lived Climate Pollutants will have an immediate impact on our health and on climate change, while also providing cleaner air for future generations. Research from King's College London illustrated that long-term exposure to poor air quality is estimated to cause up to 36,000 premature deaths in the UK every year. Public Health England estimated that the cost of air pollution on health and social care in England could amount to £5.3 billion by 2035 if we continue at the current rate of pollution. The United Nations Environment Programme states that air pollution and climate change are closely linked as both are caused by greenhouse gases. Reducing air pollution will improve human health, and also bring environmental benefits.

How to reduce air pollution

- Develop more green forms of transport and public transport in our cities, moving away from modes of transport which produce Black Carbon, introduce clean air zones

- Promote efficient driving practices that reduce emissions, such as turning your engine off rather than idling
- Promote and encourage more use of sustainable energy sources for businesses and homes, moving away from fossil fuel operations
- Greener architecture and construction practices to make our living spaces more energy efficient
- More green spaces, community growing projects, planting more trees
- Reduce and recycle rubbish instead of burning it. Recycle and upcycle clothes.

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