

Apollo by Steve Messam

Sequence of shots showing various viewpoints of Apollo by Steve Messam.

Caption:

Steve Messam, Artist - Victor Pasmore's 'Apollo Pavilion', Peterlee, County Durham

Steve Messam:

So, I was approached by Colin Robson at Durham County Council to see if I wanted to do something with the Apollo Pavilion to mark its 50th birthday this year. He wanted something that was playful and transformative. To see if I could do something that would completely transform it.

The fact that this is the heart of the community, means you're taking art and you're taking it to where people live; you're right next to people's houses. But actually, being in the middle of a residential area like this doesn't happen often. It's a privilege to do that and it's interesting to talk to people and hear their reactions as well. Hear their stories that connect with the sense of place. So, it's a very human environment; very connected with people.

Sequence showing Steve Messam making the inflatables in his studio, without voiceover.

Steve Messam:

Sequence of Steve talking to camera, interspersed with shots of Apollo being installed at the Pavilion.

The peace is my response to the Pavilion; so, I was looking at the shapes, at the colours, at the location, looking at the sightlines. I was particularly interested in the interior spaces. I think the interior spaces are really interesting, with their geometric forms and blocks. It's really complex. It's a really really complex shape. There's no symmetry in it. I really wanted to do something with that to transform it.

The Apollo was an interesting aspect. Apollo was always a working title, because of the Apollo Pavilion. And it's kind of stuck. But obviously it's about 1969. It's about the Apollo space missions. That's where the name is coming from.

I wanted to use a viewing point as an entrance. It's perfectly off-centred as well, looking at the off-centre geometry of the building. So, what I wanted to use was a Moon Gate. A Moon Gate is a circular gateway they use in Chinese garden design, which is all about a sense of reveal, which is essentially what the peace is about. Particularly in this environment and how it reveals itself and all the different views.

Caption:

Colin Robson, Community Cultural Development Coordinator

Colin Robson:

Sequence of Colin talking to camera

It was completed in July 1969. Obviously, that coincided with what was probably the most exciting event of the 1960s, which was the Apollo 11 moon landing.

Montage of archive film footage of the Apollo 11 moon landing.

Looking at the Earth from the surface of the Moon offers a different perspective of the Earth, of where we are so to speak, the place we occupy. There's kind of a parallel there, an analogy, to make that connection between that event and that perspective with what Pasmore is trying to invite us to do in terms of bringing art into daily life, or certainly the aesthetic realm, a way of looking.

Sequence showing local school children exploring the interior and exterior spaces of Apollo in discussion with Colin.

Caption:

Sara Cooper:

Sequence showing local school children exploring the interior and exterior spaces of Apollo in discussion with Sara.

Sara Cooper:

My name is Sara Cooper. I'm an artist and educator. I've been commissioned to work on this project to facilitate engagement with schools and young people in Peterlee.

I think what's important to them is that they can tell their own story about the place. Any public artwork creates memory, it creates spectacle, it creates a connection; so, to give voice to those opinions and using art, or artworks, as a mechanism to that.

Steve Messam:

Just that opportunity for the kids to come and see stuff and engage with it; to come and see stuff that's on their doorstep. That's a kind of unique opportunity. This is celebrating 50 years, so it's a special event and to have that opportunity to really experience it and learn a bit more about it and hopefully lock in a memory. In 50 years', people will look back and go "do you remember when they did this to the Pavilion." But also, to give them a sense that stuff like this can happen here, So, if stuff like this can happen here, then they can do stuff like this. They can do anything. It doesn't matter where you live. It shouldn't hold you back.

Caption:

The Playful Places programme enabled children from local schools to create their own artworks inspired by the Apollo sculpture.

Sequence showing young people working on designs for their own artwork.

Colin Robson:

Sequence of Colin talking to camera, followed by montage of clips showing the young people making and installing their sculptures in school grounds.

Because it's such an important piece of cultural heritage; it is recognised internationally, it does allow us to use it as a catalyst to create works, projects, programmes of work like this. Our starting point is that there are no right and wrong answers to what we are doing. You just need to explore and follow the thread as it emerges. What we're doing when we're going in with these kinds of projects and bringing artists in, is something quite different. It opens up the scope for the imagination, to be creative and to play.

Montage sequence showing Steve Messam's 3D drawings for Apollo alongside shots of the installation.

Steve Messam:

It's all about exploring a site and looking at it afresh and encouraging other people to look at it in a completely different way. It's not just about transforming the Pavilion beyond recognition. It's about transforming the site that the Pavilion sits in and this part of Peterlee, so people see this little area completely differently. That's how I see this being seen in 50 or 100 years and that's the kind of legacy I'm looking at in terms of the story, the narrative of the area. To have something people can look back on and go "little known fact, but for four days this thing was transformed in this kind of way. I like that feeling.

Montage sequence showing Apollo illuminated in the evening, with visitors exploring the spaces.

END CREDITS