

## What is Thamesmead Texas and how did it begin?

Thamesmead Texas began on Sunday 16 September 2018, with a series of speed exhibitions hosted from our living room, representing one of the 40 disused flats on Wolvercote Road, rented by artists whom had recently moved to Thamesmead as part predominantly because of the unaffordability of living in inner London. Every Sunday over the course of eight weeks, throughout autumn, an individual artist from the newly forming arts community in Thamesmead was invited to exhibit a new piece of work and design an accompanying artist cocktail (which would be served on arrival!). This invitation was a gesture to get to know each other in an informal and relaxed way, as neighbours and fellow artists.

Liam Scully created a centre piece for Thamesmead Texas, a work of social sculpture that expanded throughout the exhibition, which served to host a new artist cocktail each week by one of the exhibiting artists. The bar was salvaged from an old piece of furniture disposed of on the Southmere estate and reconfigured to create a tex-mex style saloon bar, which also became a pin board for Liam's 35mm photographic work and drawing. The bar has since become an anchor for our project space, which is wheeled around with us, as we move between sites in Thamesmead.

Dr Pepper pulled pork, cowboy beans and Sol beer was served, exchanges made and friendships formed. As each week passed a new work of art populated the space, eventually filling the living space with a collection of artworks, ranging from painting and drawing through to performance, video and sculpture. While not representing the entire community occupying the flats, the speed exhibitions marks this pioneering period, and the prospect of a new life in Thamesmead. Thamesmead Texas launch a publication this Friday marking our first year in the area. (More details about our public events can be found via links below).



## **Tell us a little bit about your background and what led you to this project?**

We're social beings, who seek time and space to be artists. As a result of the reputation London has as an international and multicultural city, we chose to build our lives here as professional artists and filmmakers. Despite the grand offerings of the city, from world class Museums, Galleries and Collections, London can also be a lonely and claustrophobic place, especially if you don't have financial means to socialise or a living room to host from!

Coming to Thamesmead was nostalgic, it has the romanticism of the country- friendly, green and secure, but it is neither boring nor homogeneous. Thamesmead is a radical utopian architectural dream based on principles of equality and good design. Because of these principles, the ancient woodland and close proximity to the city, Thamesmead and Abbey Wood are super diverse, in terms of age, socioeconomics, ethnicity and profession. We've come to know Thamesmead as a restful and rehabilitating place where people smile and greet each other by name, raise families, keep vegetables and animals.

Thamesmead Texas is something we see as an extension of our lives as residents simply yearning to be part of a wider community. By developing Thamesmead Texas, we had ambitions to cultivate an environment where you know your neighbours by name, feel comfortable enough to pop in for an impromptu cuppa, or grab a pint of milk or an onion on a Sunday arvo, when the shops are closed from 4pm.

## **How has Thamesmead influenced you both in curating these exhibitions?**

It's been a manic year in Thamesmead for Scully & Scully productions. Thamesmead Texas has presented three series of exhibitions, totalling 13 shows in 13 months, and shown alongside a programme of walks, screenings and performances! We're pragmatic and do things out of necessity, which is thus reflected in our exhibition programming. The necessity to get to know each other; the necessity to get to know the wider Thamesmead community, the necessity to be placed on an art map and the necessity to reflect on our role as artists in cultural regeneration. As artists living in London, we have become nomadic due to the high cost of living, but this doesn't necessarily equate to our needs of creating a healthy and sustainable life and artistic practice. Many of us have begun to recognise this, as we have become settled in Thamesmead.

The first series of 'speed' exhibitions from our living room, were by way of introduction to each other and our practices. Whilst the second series of exhibitions '**Moloko Plus Six**' at the Lakeside Centre in Summer 2019, were by way of introducing our practices to the wider Thamesmead community. Our third exhibition, currently on show at the Lakeside, 'An independent study, the future of artists and architecture?' is a commission, delivered by James Lander and Steph Chadwick, which reflects on the situation we find ourselves in Thamesmead. It began from a conversation between James and ourselves about the status and value of artists in short term, guardian housing. It has since evolved into beautiful provocations between James and Steph which formally demonstrate speculative futures for both artists and (brutalist) architecture.



**You've had a wide variety of exhibitions displayed at the Lakeside Centre, can you tell us a little bit about how you've selected the artists?**

The six artists: Emily Crookshank and Jackson Payne; Natasha Bird and Miyuki Kasahara; Matthew Berka & Dominika Kieruzel and Vanessa Scully were selected based on the quality of the work, commitment to practice, synergy between the environment and its matched pair, and of course having a shared interest in building both a life and studio practice in Thamesmead. It is by no means representative of the artist community, as there are many talented artists based on Wolvercote Road whose work, approach and ethos fit these criteria. We also wanted to work with people whom we had met throughout the year, the first wave of Thamesmead artists, by way of supporting each other settle into the area and studios.

**What impact do you think Thamesmead Texas is having on the residents of Thamesmead?**

We'd like to think that Thamesmead Texas has made a positive impact on the growing artist community, just as the other artist led initiatives in Thamesmead have had a positive impact – including the reading group, led by Liam Sprod; and the peer forum, led by Almudena Romero. These initiatives have been a bridge to build relationships and professional exchanges between artists. It is important to acknowledge ourselves and our needs as a community based in Thamesmead, particularly because of the sensitivities of living in a redevelopment, undergoing a series of dramatic and rapid changes.



## What are your future aims for Thamesmead Texas in Thamesmead?

In terms of Thamesmead Texas wider impact in the local community, it's too premature to measure. Mainly because the Lakeside Centre is still forming its identity and we within it. Thamesmead Texas next projects include a community cinema, spotlighting cultures who are based in the area including the Travellers, Nepalese, Ghanaian and Nigerian communities. The accumulation of this engagement will be shown in an upcoming show at the Peabody Information Hub in March 2020. More details will be announced by our funders soon! In the far future we have hopes that Thamesmead will be an international place for not just architects to visit the Brutalist architecture, but an international place for artists to live, work and visit!

In the meantime, come visit us in Thamesmead!

## Artist Bio

**Scully & Scully** is an artist filmmaking cooperative, who commission and produce artist films and exhibitions. We produce and distribute artists films, which are both experimental and political in nature. Our recent films include *Decolonizing Marisa* (2019) and *Bogvegas* (in post-production). We also commission artists to produce new works, across our two unique platforms, Thamesmead Texas and Sick Monday. We are based at the Lakeside Studios, Thamesmead, with our Chinese-Bedlington puppy Prince.

**Liam Scully** is an artist, filmmaker and cinematographer. Constant drawing underpins most of Scully's practice; this is often expanded upon and develops through painting, performance, video, music and installation. The drawing is blunt and essentially diaristic in its approach. Commenting, observing, and confessing, on the daily activity around him. Possibly semi-autobiographical, political, taking inspiration from, and embracing low-brow culture. Liam Scully graduated with an MA in Fine

Art from Chelsea College of Art in 2003 and a BA in Fine Art from Birmingham School of Art in 2002. Scully currently lives and works in Thamesmead.

A Digital Suicide: [http://uniongallery.com/content.php?page\\_id=3986](http://uniongallery.com/content.php?page_id=3986)

Bogvegas: <https://vimeo.com/276724636>

**Vanessa Scully** is an Australian/ Filipino artist and filmmaker based in London, whose practice explores primary questions related to gender, race and class. Scully's work operates in opposition to tv programming, genre film and advertising, yet imitates the visual language of mass media, reworking the dominant narrative to critical end. Most recent projects explore her mixed-race heritage as a 'person of colour', whilst questioning the institutional knowledge of 'the Philippines', as depicted by the mass media news and entertainment machine. Scully graduated with an MA in Experimental Film from Kingston School and Art in 2019 and a BA in Fine Arts from Chelsea College of Art in 2012.

Batubalani Art Projects: <https://www.batubalani.com/interview-with-vanessa-scully>

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