

Project Profile: Birmingham City Centre
Client: Birmingham City Council
Value: Programme - £4.5M
Strategy Development, Commissioning Artists, Project Management
Duration: Jun 1988 – June 1991 (Managed by Geoff Wood)



Project Aims

The Convention Centre and Centenary Square programme focussed on creating a new quarter for the city and linking this to the Library and Chamberlain Square so that that pedestrian movement around the city became fluent and straightforward. Art became a valuable tool in creating a civilised and legible environment. This project was Birmingham's first step towards transforming itself from a manufacturing only city to one equipped and welcoming for business, conference and leisure visitors.

Objectives

- To create a distinctive pedestrian plaza that welcomes residents and visitors
- To engender images of Birmingham that make people re-evaluate their perceptions of the place
- To collaborate with all the City Departments to see art infused into all areas of the new pedestrian environment
- To liaise with officers and members and support the development of a programme of artworks and artist interventions of the highest design quality and relevance
- To appoint and manage artists to deliver to a very tight and unmoveable programme

- To develop and manage a programme of temporary events to support the launch of the revised public realm.

Outcomes

- Full Council support for the Strategy
- Collaborations with City Architects, commissioned architects, highway engineers, landscape architects, lighting designers and signage specialists throughout the programme of work
- An agreed programme of artists' designs for what remains a landmark programme in the recent development of public art
- Recognition of Birmingham as a pioneer in using art as an instrument of change
- Substantial private sector investment in a programme of public works

Project Overview

Birmingham was going through great change and was attempting to find a new role for itself as well as contend with the practical issues thrown up by past engineering and planning decisions. In particular the city wanted to break the concrete collar of the ring road and reconnect the relatively small city centre to all its immediate districts and neighbourhoods. This would allow the centre, and thus the city, to grow and prosper.

The aim of the art programme has been to pioneer the change in perception of districts and the centre and to introduce a set of new images of Birmingham that act as signals of intent and signs of change. The overwhelming success of the programme gave the city the confidence to press on with projects like Victoria Square and the pedestrianisation of New Street, all of which Geoff Wood worked on, and the development of Brindleyplace.

Additional commissions and project work with the city continued into the late 90s.

