

The Life Voyager's Tea Service

September 2015



The Life Voyager's Tea Service is a site-specific installation devised by Hester Reeve especially for Art Social 2015. It is commissioned by The House of St Barnabas, an innovative charity located in the centre of London, which combines a private members club for socially engaged folk downstairs, the proceeds from which fund an independent academy upstairs which mentors former homeless people in developing life and job skills.

Hester has responded to the festival theme 'Maslow's Pyramid of Needs: Shelter' by producing three connected elements celebrating the role of language in self-growth, community bonding and the achievement of a meaningful sense of existence. The artist has focused on the significance of language for any individual voyaging to achieve a meaningful life and in particular to those individuals receiving mentorship within the House of St Barnabas. Through talking together, life stories get shared and concerns find solutions enabling individuals to achieve self-development and make firm footholds in the journey to social belonging and domestic fulfillment. In such a way, shared language can be celebrated as the fundamental shelter of humans, as expressed by the philosopher Martin Heidegger when he wrote, "Language is the House of Being."



The first element of the artwork will not be hard to miss - a 4-meter high teapot in Soho Square which aims to welcome the many visitors passing through the park to the festival whilst broadcasting the work of the charity. The teapot will be hosted by a 'life voyager,' one of the mentees of the charity's employment program, who will invite people into conversation. Both the teapot and the hosts' apron proclaim T (talk), E (exchange), A (arrive). Inside the nearby House of St Barnabas building the second element of the artwork will be installed as part of the festival's art exhibition, a bone china tea-service hand-painted with inscriptions created by former homeless people in relationship to the life voyager theme and decorated with motifs by the artist.



The third element, which the artist regards as the most important of the commission, is a specially designed tin of biscuits bearing the inscription "Language is the House of Being." These tins of biscuits can not be viewed (or eaten!) by the public but belong 'behind the scenes' where they will be distributed through out the Academy's offices to recognise the staff who make the charity's goals, which are very much in line with Maslow's, a reality.



The artist would like to credit the following for their inscriptions: Dominic Luke (teapot inscription) and Sammy Barra, Fatmata Koroma, Tony Mitsing, John Smallshaw and Ki Yoong.

A film made by one of the mentees of the charity about the commission can be seen here:

<https://vimeo.com/149002032>