

Innovative Artwork Brings Messages of Love to Derry

'I Just Called' by Colin James Woods

Installed at Yellow Yard, Palace Street, Derry/Londonderry

16 March to 20 April 2024

Participation/message collection events 23 and 30 March 12 to 4pm.

An interactive artwork created by Northern Ireland/New Zealand artist Colin James Woods is currently on display at the Yellow Yard in Derry – and the artist is looking forward to including more Derry voices in the work.

I Just Called is a curated series of voice recordings of people pretending to leave a voice message to a loved one. Each anonymous caller's words are unscripted and without context, but the result is immensely affecting for the listener. The original recordings were collected in Northern Ireland and Aotearoa/New Zealand.

The work is about love, our shared humanity and the importance of heartfelt communication.

Ben Allen of the Yellow Yard is an old friend of Woods from their days in Belfast band The Allotropes in the late 1970s.

'I Just Called' underwent a major redesign in response to Covid: in the original format, visitors listened to messages using eight dangling telephone handsets.

"It's no longer a safe option to have visitors to an exhibition pick up a handset and listen to the messages," Colin says, "because the handsets are potential vectors for transmission of pathogenic organisms, particularly as they involve hand contact and are then brought into close proximity to the face.

"At the same time, the pandemic has made us very aware of the importance of communication and connectedness, so I feel the work is more relevant than ever."

In 2020, Woods moved the work online (see <http://ijustcalled.online>). The current version combines the online work with a physical presence (telephone seat and framed poster). People can scan the QR code on the poster, sit on the telephone seat, and listen to the messages on their own phones.

"This piece plays with the dynamic between intimacy and voyeurism. We hear people saying heartfelt and private things to the ones they love. By agreeing to be recorded for the work, they have given us permission to listen, but still, there is a sense that we might be intruding – and that's both delicious and slightly uncomfortable!"

It's most recently shown at the Arts Care exhibition in their new gallery space at Connswater Shopping Centre in East Belfast. Now, this innovative and inspiring work may be seen and heard right here in the Walled City for the next month or so. One of Colin's old friends, Ben Allen, is hosting the work at the **Yellow Yard** in Palace Street.

Colin will run events at the Yellow Yard (23 and 30 March) to collect more content for the piece. He says, "We have voices from Ireland and New Zealand in the collection at the moment- in about twenty different languages, but it will be great to hear some Derry accents there, too. The Yellow Yard is such a cool place, and I am excited for my old pal Ben and his partner Katie that it's become such a cornerstone of Derry's cultural scene- even getting a cameo in *Derry Girls!*"

Expressions of interest in hosting an event or exhibiting a version of the piece are welcome.


Recent reactions to the work on social media (Facebook):


"I only listened to two and already started crying. How lovely!" – Shannon

"Great concept, wonderful" - Kevin

"This is wonderful, a very thoughtful piece indeed" - Justin

"Very clever and such a positive thing to do" - Evans

"I love this  What a brilliant and heartwarming way to bring connection." - Kate

"Incredible  love, love, love"- Kylie

"What a fabulous concept!! I love this idea" – Sophie

"Class concept, love it!" – Lucy

"Great stuff-so much better to have the personal contact, even at a distance." - Sylvia

About the artist

Colin James Woods was born in Belfast in 1961 and grew up in the Protestant community during the troubles. He embraced punk music and non-sectarian politics as a teenager. "Being in a punk band, it didn't matter that my working-class family couldn't afford a piano, or piano lessons – I got a guitar, learned a few chords, and started a band with friends."

He left school at 16 to earn money to buy a guitar amplifier. His first job, in a hospital laboratory, became a 30-year career as a Biomedical Scientist.

Colin emigrated to Aotearoa in 2002 after living in Edinburgh for ten years but returned to Northern Ireland in 2023. In 2009, he fulfilled a lifelong ambition to study music, enrolling in the Diploma of Contemporary Music at Unitec. He then completed a Bachelor of Music at the University of Auckland (majoring in Composition /Sonic Art) and a Master of Creative Technology at AUT. The first iteration of *I Just Called* was part of his Master of Creative Technology exhibition at the Audio Foundation in 2017. He is currently working towards his practice-based PhD at Ulster University's Magee campus.

Notes about *I Just Called* from the original exhibition: <https://colinjameswoods.com/i-just-called/>

Video about version 2: <https://youtu.be/A8SIFs7r9jw>

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Yellow Yard's Katie Blue enjoys a preview of the work

