

Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art.

City Library and Arts Centre
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09

THINK TANK a marketplace of ideas 17 October 2009 – 13 February 2010

Airside *with* DEMOS

AOC Architecture *with* Fabian Society

Popular *with* Compass

Ben Branagan *with* Progress

Changethought *with* ResPublica

Kelvin Chan *with* Centre for Policy Studies

Simon Magill and Simon Lowe *with* Institute of Economic Affairs

Dan Ziglam and Elliot Brook *with* Policy Exchange



“Work as if you were living in the early days of a better nation.” Alasdair Gray

“2009 will be the year when the question of how society should be arranged will cease to be an idle, abstract topic and will enter the mainstream with a vengeance. Everyone will become a political philosopher.” Alain de Botton

‘THINK TANK’ consists of what might be described as speculative propaganda for a future society. The exhibition is the result of collaborations between Britain’s leading policy think tanks and leading designers. Each has created a newly commissioned work to visualise and promote one idea which could make our lives better.

‘Think tanks’ have created many of the ideas which go on to shape our lives. Their research and proposals frequently become the party policy of tomorrow and affect us all. Here, they ask us to think about our shared future, and imagine how we might, together, create a better society.

‘THINK TANK’ is part of Design Event 09 (DE09), the North East’s annual design festival, www.design-event.co.uk.
Image: Changethought, ‘We not Me’, 2008

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DEMOS present the results of an enquiry into what shape power takes in 21st century Britain. They ask: 'who and what determine our life chances?' And how have new technologies changed the balance of power between different groups, institutions, and individuals?

Airside are an award-winning design agency who have helped defined the look of digital graphics.

Fabian Society ask 'what if we all lived together?' When homes are still unaffordable for many, social housing is available only for a tiny few and segregated away from other types of home, which reinforces inequalities, separates groups, and sharpens prejudices. What would happen if we had far more social housing, which shared the same space as private homes?

AOC Architecture have created both new buildings and exhibitions, including for the South Bank Centre. In 2009, the Observer described them as, leaders of "the young generation with a vision to build Britain".

Compass ask "what if we had a 'High Pay Commission' that set maximum wage ratios and a tax on bonuses?" They argue that, as the pay gap between rich and poor is higher than ever, and that the rewards for different jobs remain unfair, that this needs to be tackled by action on excessive pay. What if, in the public sector, the highest paid employee in any organisation took home say no more than 12x their lowest paid colleague? Could this ensure a more sustainable, equal and secure economic future for everyone?

Popular, led by art director Peter Chadwick, have created work for Hed Kandi, Island Records, and the BBC.

Progress ask 'what if we 'mutualised' the banks the government owns?' If the banks now in public ownership became building societies, could we avoid another crash? Instead of chasing profits at ever-higher risks, could banks create a more co-operative society for us, and a sustainable future for themselves?

Ben Branagan is a London-based graphic designer whose work has been seen both in galleries and the pages of Creative Review, and who has collaborated with artists and charities such as the Cluster Munition Coalition.

Centre for Policy Studies ask 'how new technologies will shape us as citizens?' Do we want to be subservient to a 'database state', where our information is held by government, or could technologies allow us to take control, make more informed choices, and hold our leaders to account?

Kelvin Chan is a graphic designer based in Hong Kong.

Institute of Economic Affairs ask 'how can we end global poverty?' They argue that the spread of free trade will further reduce the proportion of people in absolute poverty, which has fallen from 80% two centuries ago to less than 20% today. For the IEA, free trade involves peaceful exchange and is the best guarantee of prosperity and welfare for all.

Simon Magill and Simon Lowe are graphic designers based in Northwest England.

ResPublica ask 'what if the poor became 'dragons'? When we sell off Britain's share of the banks, what if we used the proceeds to create new social enterprises and small businesses? They propose giving 'investment vouchers' to people in Britain's poorest communities, which can only be used when people agree what assets they should invest in. The money would be used to seed-fund new enterprises – assets everyone shared in. We would become an enormous version of 'Dragon's Den', with each community investing in their future.

Changethought are a collective of US graphic designers led by Christopher Cox.

Policy Exchange ask 'what if you were chancellor?' – arguing that we will need to rethink not just what we spend collectively, but how we fund our public services in the long term. With a probable bill of two trillion pounds of debt, how can we create better public services for everyone, which we can continue to afford?

Dan Ziglam and Elliot Brook are 3D designers; both are based in Northeast England.

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