

IMAGE BY MAGDA ZALEWA  
FOR INEFFABLE ZINE



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INSTAGRAM : @zalevajka



Interview with Sophie and Lydia, creators of INEFFABLE ZINE – a zine – map that unlocks sound and visual art pieces in East London. Through the experience of walking, rather than commuting,

Sophie and Lydia invite participants to truly engage with spaces they pass by on a daily basis. You can choose to join one of their guided tours and meet new people or explore on your own, finding art pasted in one of the many locations chosen for the project. In this interview, they chat about how they experience the spaces of London, what they think about traditional modes of curating and the importance of community.

Berenika Stachera

B:erenika Stachera: Firstly, can you introduce yourself?

Sophie Barrett – Pouleau: I'm Sophie, I'm an LCF Graduate and I work in Art Programming. I'm a public programmer for an independent gallery in Hackney and also the co-curator and editor of Ineffable Zine.

Lydia Poole: I'm Lydia and I'm studying Fine Art at CSM, final year. I'm the co-curator and editor of Ineffable Zine.

B: When we were on your tour, we had a chat about what made you want to work on a project like this. Would you be able to tell me about it now – what made you want to work on a public art project?

L: I think when it started out, I had a space to create publications through a gallery I was volunteering at over the past year. I think we both figured out we wanted to work on something like this – it started out with a zine and how to use a zine as a format and what a zine can be. Sophie does a lot of sound art so we started thinking – ok, how can we make sound into a publication, since they are two very different mediums. And then, it just grew from there, we thought it was really important, especially after lockdowns, to get out of your space. I guess it was the walking and bringing the artworks out of the space of the physical zine, which fit in with trying to bridge the gap between the physical, written text and sound, which is definitely less tangible. We found that bringing the whole artwork out of the zine, using the zine not as a space to showcase the artwork, but as a way of unlocking the artwork, is what works best for this project.

B: Yeah, I was really surprised when I opened the zine and there was just the map, that was really unexpected.

S: I've been very interested in how we can activate live sound spaces, especially urban environments. When the physical zine was proposed, it was like – ok, but let's use it as a medium for another thing. It's not just the artifact itself; it unlocks other entire experiences. It all started from that post-Covid shift of get out of your house, use this thing to get out, listen to what's around you, and like we did during the tours, we were listening to the piece and from that point until the next one, we were listening to the city, we were talking, exploring our environment.

B. It was really fun when at one point we just started bird-watching in Victoria Park, I really enjoyed that.

L: Yep, yep! It's all about completely engrossing people in their environment and I think one thing that you [Sophie] said that I really loved that we put in the zine is just like exploring the city through not commuting. When you said that, I was thinking we all commute and that is like the basis of how we move around London, we ignore our environment, we are in a dark tunnel with no views. Your ears and your eyes kinda go inwards



B: Yeah, absolutely. I really enjoyed that because even though I've lived in East London for three years, I often catch myself only knowing "pockets" of London around the stations and I have no clue what's between one station and the other. Walking the tour with you allowed me to be like "oh this is how this connects, this is what's around and between the stations".

S: Yes, this is the thing! You realise things are not that far apart, they are definitely within walking distance from each other.

L: For me personally, I love walking and I always would prefer to walk somewhere rather than getting the bus or the tube. If it's under an hour, I'm gonna walk instead of taking the bus, even if it would take only 20 minutes.

S: Literally, it's ridiculous! I call you up sometimes and you're like "Yeah I'm gonna be in CSM in like an hour and a half. I'm gonna walk."

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. L: Yeah, I think it's such a nice way of engaging with your environment and especially when I moved from a small town in North Yorkshire, where you know everything, I came here and I didn't want to just hop on the bus, put my headphones on and just pop up somewhere else. It was really important for me to ground myself in the city and feel like I was part of the city, be present and understand how things work.

But also on that note, I was just thinking about how going from one borough, or one area, to another, the difference between them. I think it's really nice because each little area has its own identity, personality. You start to see it changing, and you're like "oh, now I'm here". Each area has its own atmosphere, its own ambience, buildings are different, the people are different and it's nice to take notes of those differences. And when you're on the border of those places, how they merge from one to the other. Site-specificity was a massive part of the work as well

S: Yeah, when we were actually pasting the works in their locations that they were responding to, we were like “oh my god this is going to sound sick”. The pieces are placed in the middle of the environment they respond to. I had a chat with him about that and we were just talking about how that sound from the environment that it's responding to affects then your perception of the piece and your understanding of the area.

L: I guess it's like an equivalent of a microscope, having a little ear finder that's pointed at the pieces, a little scope of the sounds that are around you. It allows you to focus on what's actually around. Instead of just being in the space, it picks up sounds from the market or at Limehouse docks, it had the trains going over, and you hear the echoes of the sound piece and an actual train goes over and you're so much more aware of the sounds that are going on around you because the sound piece has allowed you to pick them out and stay at that location rather than passing through it



B: Would you say that your project is a response to the traditional modes of presenting art, such as the white cube gallery spaces?

L: You know the white cube spaces..... this is just so beyond that, that I don't even think of it as a critique anymore. That format of exhibiting is bland and dead...

S: It's outdated.

L: I don't even consider it a critique anymore, because I think it should be dead already. I think the modes that we try to present with, and especially with sound, sound doesn't do very well in a white cube space.

S: We had to take it out of the gallery space, out of the institution, out of the very plain space in which even when you're listening to a piece of sound, you have nothing, it's a void.

L: Especially with how, you know, the whole thing was about engaging with your environment. You can't remove any of the stimuli and the environment is as it is. The white cube gallery is making art exist in a void, which might allow you to engage with the work more easily, but art doesn't come from a void, it isn't made in a void and especially the sound pieces that were so site specific they could never have existed in a void. The sounds around you are in itself another layer to the experience.

S: Yeah, the white cube is completely outdated. It's not even that we're fighting against it or critiquing it, but for me a little bit, just in terms of accessibility, how many people get put off these spaces. That's the baseline of my practice – I never felt like I was able to go to those spaces, why should I be there, they're not for me, I don't fit the class structure that exists in these spaces. It's always about being a member, it's like an exclusive club in which if you don't know anyone, just piss off.

So yeah, it was about accessibility. With this, I just give you a map, and it's just like "go for it" and you can access all of those spaces on your terms, you don't have to ring a bell, talk to a receptionist, it's just on the street – you can go whenever you want.



L: The pieces are short, so you don't have to invest a lot of time into it, it's not taxing and we wanted it to be really accessible, really easy to consume. The aim of it was also to promote conversation, you're not only allowed to talk, you are encouraged to – it's a social experience, you're meeting new people.

S: It's all about being loud and comfortable in the spaces around you, you become a part of the piece.

B: Since this is a very different mode of curating, how do you, if even you do at all, quantify the success of the project?

S: I personally didn't really care. We were planning the launch, we were expecting 10 people to show up, it's just gonna be our mates. It was about having fun, creating communities. We're not placing value on this project based on how many people showed up, how many zines we sell. It was a personal project, our little baby that we've been working on for a while. It was one of the first projects that we worked on together, we weren't really bothered. But then we had that launch, and it was insane. We sold out three times over. We couldn't believe that so many people would respond to this. The amount of feedback that we got from people is amazing. That's how I would quantify the success of the event

S: We wanted to remove the competition between the artists, we don't wanna pit them against each other. We wanted enraging artists to meet each other, collaborate and I think we achieved that.

L: Again, this was away from the institutions. We got all the artists, this is why collaborating with LUV A was such an integral part of the project, by using this platform, we were able to access a whole range of people outside of UAL, outside of our own network. There's this lady who took part in this project. I love her, she's from Canada, she didn't go to uni, she's 50 – I'm never gonna meet her and she's never gonna see the project in person, but we connected. I was really happy to move from our own bubble.

S: For the sound pieces, the artist had to be here, but the visual pieces, they were international.



B: Lydia, since one of your sound pieces was part of the zine – how do you feel about leaving your piece out there for anyone to see – with no way of explaining or defending yourself or your work?

L: That's what I based my 3rd year, putting my art in the public and leaving them to exist alone. When you're there at the gallery, at the opening, people associate your work with you. Having worked in the gallery, we had a resident artist, she's a beautiful beautiful girl and her paintings are impeccable. When a picture of her sitting in front of the painting was posted on Instagram, it blew up. Having this beautiful person associated with the art can change the way people perceive it, what they focus on.

That's what I love about sound art, you put your voice in your work, but you're not visible. Sound art is so removed from the visual self, which I really love. Having that out in the public, further removes you from that criticism of you as a person, of you as an artist. I'm not scared of criticism, but I'd rather just chuck it out there, people can pick it up if they'd like to.

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S: None of us are neutral, art should be grounded in the world, be socially and politically aware, but I think from a receiving point of view, it's good to let the artwork exist away from the artist, so you have no preconceived notions about the piece. Art should be aware of where it is and where it comes from, but the body of the artist, if it can be removed from the equation, that means the art can speak for itself.

B: Yeah, I was thinking about the piece in Ridley Road Market and how it shows the issues of the area. Whether you're familiar with the place or not, you start wondering and the art gives you a suggestion of the answer.

L: Yeah, the piece involved and engaged with the local people and it is that question again, of can the piece stand on its own two legs without the artist. You shouldn't have to explain yourself, your artwork should have some grounding in the real world. As long as you're not just making it for the sake of making it, which happens in institutions, in universities, you get a brief, you make a piece to tick a box. Having graduated uni, I haven't made a sound piece until this project. I could be churning them out week after week, but why? Why are you gonna do it? I think it's important to sit on that for a while.



B: That's really interesting and really relevant, I think since the most obvious way of existing as an artist outside of the institutions is social media, but then with social media you still have to be churning out one thing after another, because if you don't you don't get engagement.

L: When you have a reason, when you have something to say, that's when you should do it.

S: When you're at uni, you're so exhausted, because you feel like you have to perform being an artist. Just being an artist isn't enough, you have to do things a certain way, you have to make them look good for social media. It's that whole extra level of unnecessary exhaustion, and it's the same dynamic in university and social media.

L: If you don't post, probably every week, your engagement goes down, and for some people who maybe rely on that to make money, their sales go down. Sometimes you don't wanna make work, sometimes you shouldn't be making work so fast, in such a pressure cooker environment. Sometimes you have to stop what you're doing, get away from your practise and there's nothing wrong with that

B: Speaking of social media, I know you were considering putting the pieces on social media, have you decided if you want to do it?

L: We still haven't done it.

S: Yeah, some people have messaged us, some of the artists who wanted to see their works, but at that point we were still doing the walking tours and it was very important for us that people got out. We were thinking that if we provide links to the pieces and post the images, then you don't get the engagement with the environment, and that is the point of the piece. I don't think we should do it and I don't think we will.

L: We send all the artists a little package with the zine and a handful of the posters with the artworks and the QR codes, so you have the work for your own consumption and it's physical which is very important to us.

S: F\*ck digital, physical forever.

L: Although the digital is more accessible in some sense, the attention span just isn't there, you're not actually engaging in it. Maybe a thousand people viewed your work, but did they actually engage with it? Maybe one person went up and scanned the QR code and listened to the piece, I'd take that over a thousand people on Instagram.



B: What are your plans for the future of the project?

L: We're not sure if we're gonna use the same format, or maybe do something differently. Maybe a different part of London? But, INEFFABLE as a thing is a long-term project. "Ineffable" means something that can't be described with words and I think that's an important part of the project, and maybe we're gonna try and explore that a bit more. The whole relationship between a physical object, the sound, the city, it's something we definitely want to explore.

S: Oh yeah, so many things are brewing at the moment. We were contacted as well by a couple community groups or collectives that do socially engaged practices, they said they like what we're doing and they'd like to do something with us. So there's a lot of things brewing. The ideas are always changing, but it circles around sound, urban environment, activating communities, accessibility.

L: Throughout this post– during– whatever pandemic situation, the walking aspect is really important. It works really well, it's essential, it's the most accessible way to get people engaged, without having to think about Covid restrictions. Even if we can't do a group tour, we can give you a map to explore on your own.

S: We've all been so lonely and isolated for so long that we need communities, we need other people. That's what we're all about, fostering communities and connections and we can't wait to continue with this project.

