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Artist talk and drinks reception:

Wednesday 21 October, 3.30–6.30pm
Daphne Oram Gallery

John Dargan delivers a talk about the themes and ideas behind his work. A drinks reception follows the talk.

Daphne Oram Gallery

Daphne Oram Creative Arts Building
North Holmes Road, Canterbury CT1 1QU
Mon - Fri, 10am - 4pm
@cccu_artsandculture
canterbury.ac.uk/arts-and-culture



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The Estate We Are In

Recent work by **John Dargan** about the development of Council Housing after the Second World War



Overview

Animation and illustrations by artist John Dargan, about the development of Council Housing after the Second World War, focusing on Churchill Gardens in Pimlico.

Near the end of the 19th Century, solutions to overcrowded inner cities were sought by radical thinkers and philanthropists.

They had seen and experienced the effects of industrialisation on the working class and had been moved enough to propose means and ways of improving the conditions in which they lived.

By the early 20th Century this had evolved into housing provided by the state, through local councils. Councils were empowered to create large scale housing solutions to alleviate poor housing conditions in their area. This resulted in a range of housing being built; from low density suburban estates to higher density 5 storey block estates.

Whether good or bad, these estates were effective in alleviating poor housing conditions for low-paid working families.

But did they create as many problems as they solved?

The work presented here is a reflection on council housing. It focuses on an award-winning estate, Churchill Gardens, in Pimlico, London; that, whilst being well-built and designed, is not without flaws.

The film focuses on attitudes to design and building of council housing after World War Two.

It implies that the continuing use and existence of a modernist estate, like Churchill Gardens, built in 1947, is a great achievement and one that offers an approach to large scale housing that could be used, now, to alleviate our current crisis of the scarcity of affordable housing.

John Dargan 2026



***Context panel** (detail) for Council House building up to and just after WWII*

Process Context

When I decided to make work about Council Housing, I looked at and visited a lot of notable post-war housing. On settling for Churchill Gardens, I wasn't sure how to tell the story of Council Housing in relation to a specific instance. A colleague at UCA suggested making an animation. It would be a way of weaving a lot of different information together and be an open-ended way of visualising my ideas; I could potentially work with a variety of media (btw, I had made animations before).

Once I had a basic script, I used an animatic as a way of collecting my visuals together with sound. I initially thought I might just use stills, hence the individual illustrations, then moved onto simple animation techniques like boils and morphs.

I wasn't happy with this entirely and felt the project needed to be richer, so I then started to mix up the media a little more and be less careful about how I rendered each sequence.

I also allowed myself to play with more visually abstract ideas of rendering space or ideas, to juxtapose the more static, representational aspects of the film.

Most of the illustrated stills made for the film use an initial gound of gouache, loosely representing the subject matter. This is worked over with coloured pencil to clarify the image. This way of working, in layers, is a common illustration technique, but I decided to apply it to the animation as much as I could.

This has resulted in some really pleasing sequences, that break new ground for me in terms of animation technique. I am glad that digital media has been used sparely to animate, for the most part, just to composite and assemble. It made sense to me to hand make the individual frames; their materiality had a more direct connection to the subject matter.

John Dargan 2026









Artist Statement

What can art address?
An Imbalance? Awareness?

Can Art change things? Or is the nature of consuming art too interior a pursuit to effect collective change?

The work I make is conscious of the context in which I grew up; an era of collective activity, where the unity of many without power were able to effect societal change. There was a groundedness in social relations, where people accepted the idea of pooling resources in the creation of a supportive state for everyone.

Whilst not all was perfect or utopian when I was young, whatever we had, together, was shattered, as I grew older. With social relations destroyed or disrupted by the deployment of monetarist policy, in the 1980's, people were encouraged to see themselves as individuals, not part of a collective.

Council Housing played its, unwitting, part in that, by isolating tight-knit communities, but as whole regions were overlooked or abandoned, Estates like Churchill Gardens seem like a beacon of hope for housing hard-working and ambitious low paid people.

In answer to my question, yes I do believe Art can change society. Art is an act of rebellion. An artist uses their time in generating objects that may not have exchange or use value. This is inimical to capitalism. Everything must have purpose or use or value in a capitalist society.

To step outside those norms and proselytise for collective outcomes like Churchill Gardens, is to be deemed an extremist. The work I make hopes to raise awareness of this kind of state intervention for people with no affordable accommodation – and argue for its return, or make work about the issues that involve, occupy or affect the Working Class.

John Dargan 2026

Mixed Development *(detail), Gouache and Coloured Pencil, 2025*