

folkestone  
fringe

FLINT +  
CLAY

# OVERVIEW

Introducing the report, the research methods  
and the key findings

The Curious Kiosk, A Fringe Project in collaboration with CustomLeb and Bad News Press  
- Installed here on the side of The Urban Room, Folkestone, photo cc Chloe Osborne

# OVERVIEW OF THE REPORT

This research brings together learning across *Folkestone Fringe 2025: Flint & Clay*, a place-based participatory public art programme accompanying the Folkestone Triennial between September and October 2025.

In this report, we reflect on the range of ways *Flint & Clay* created meaningful opportunities for conversations between artists and audiences and the translation of local, lived experience. It can be read and digested either as a complete research report, or each chapter can stand alone as a document of the learning and a resource for artists, organisers and partners working in the public realm – specifically in Folkestone.

Each section is accompanied by a list of key words and phrases used throughout this report that shed light on some of the language around this practice, in recognition that readers may come to this research with different frames of reference.

This list is included in full at the end of this overview.

## About the research

Guided by the enquiry question,

*“How can the arts strengthen connections, surface or challenge divisions, and cultivate collective imagination of possible futures — and for whom?,*

the research adopts an approach that places artists in the central role as researchers.

A toolkit of open-access research tools was developed to support reflective practice across the *Flint & Clay* programme, comprising observation tools and conversation prompts as well as feedback postcards.

The artists and Fringe’s creative producers and facilitators were invited to use these tools to explore **the main themes of the programme: how art mediates connection, difference and imagined futures.**



## KEY FINDINGS

Three interconnected findings run through the programme-wide research:

### Conversation is both method and outcome.

Conversation became a central mechanism, shaping how artistic experiences were encountered and understood. Creative invitations, quality questions and attentive facilitation created the conditions for exchanges that might otherwise never happen: between strangers, across generations, across language barriers, and across political differences.

### Translation is a core artistic act.

Artists translated Folkestone’s landscapes, histories and tensions into creative form. Facilitators translated those forms into accessible invitations. Participants translated the experience into personal meaning, memory and further conversation. This was not a one-directional process — it was reciprocal and iterative.

### Place is integral, not a backdrop.

Artists interacted with, and intervened in, the politics of space and place. The specific histories, social codes and spatial politics of Folkestone actively shaped every project. The Harbour Arm, the Warren, Rendezvous Street, the bookshop — each site carried its own permissions, its own guardians, its own friction.

These reflections cement *Flint & Clay* within place and local context. The research demonstrates that conversation, translation and exchange can help shape meaningful participation and nurture an ecology of creative practice across Folkestone.

## About the report

Presented in four sections, this report brings together a narrative of the festival, research stories, learning and key priorities that have emerged from an analysis of the information gathered from the artists and creative producers and facilitators during the *Flint & Clay* festival.

**Section 1** provides the contextual backdrop of Folkestone and an introduction into the festival and its producers, the Folkestone Fringe.

It presents an analysis of the audience reach and identifies two key strengths of the festival for catalysing meaningful opportunities for audience engagement:

- Relational approaches across the artistic programme
- The festival's thematic framework

**Section 2** brings together a set of research stories, highlighting a selection of thematic examples of conversation and translation in practice.

These stories reveal the conditions and ingredients necessary for people to connect, share and participate. They are overlapping, interconnecting and interdependent themes, which cover the following areas:

- Creative invitations
- Quality of questions
- Navigating discomfort or challenge
- Inclusion and the edges of participation

**Section 3** serves as a practical resource, structured around five learning themes that emerged through discussions with cultural producers and artists across the festival about place-based working in Folkestone:

- Place / space
- Audience / participation
- Community / local context
- Collaboration / partnership
- Artistic practice / creative process

Together, these learning themes form a set of ingredients that can help inform Folkestone Fringe's ongoing role in developing supportive structures for participatory practice, public engagement and a resilient local creative ecology.

*Note: Artists and facilitators were invited to illustrate their own map of practice learning during the programme as part of our reflective Ideas Lab,. You will find a small number of these in this section of the research report*

**Section 4** concludes the report with a summary across the research and considers the purpose of Folkestone Fringe's work/programmes within the wider frame of a growing local cultural offer, responsive to the needs of the local area and the creative ecology.



## Key words and phrases

We use these words to think about our practice:

**Place** The specific geography, histories, communities and spatial politics within which creative work is made and experienced. In this report, Folkestone is introduced and understood as a place in these terms.

**Local Context** The local political, economic and social aspects that shape how a place is experienced, who has power within it, and what is possible there.

**Geo-politics** How geography, power, economics and politics interact to shape the world we live in — from international relations and national policy down to the dynamics of towns, neighbourhoods and communities.

**Politics of Space and Place** The recognition that spaces are shaped by power, access, history and perception. The politics of place encompasses the dynamics between residents, local government, the economy, education and access to services.

**Local Creative Ecology / Ecology** The interconnected network of artists, organisations, spaces, communities and systems across Folkestone that enable creative practice to emerge.

**Ecology-Building** Intentional actions to strengthen relationships, capacity and shared imagination within the creative ecology — creating platforms and opportunities for artists to be active and to develop their practice.

**Place-Based Practice / Place-Based Art** Rooted in a specific geography, responding to its histories, assets and communities. In this report, projects are inextricably linked to Folkestone and its past, present and future.

**Civic Art** Art that invites co-creation in shared public space, helping communities imagine better futures. Civic art is place-specific, participatory and rooted in social change.

**Relational Practice** Describing artistic approaches that are built on relationships — between artists, communities, places and ideas — rather than on individual production or passive consumption.

**Socially Engaged Art Practice** Creative work that centres participation, relationship and social context as both method and material, where the process of working with people is as significant as any outcome.