



## **“*Making Places: Working with Art in the Public Realm*” Dealing With Commissioners (and Living to Tell the Tale)**

### **David Mach**

I spend my whole life going to meetings with people, with potential commissioners. They're building a new art gallery, they're building a flyover, and they've asked half a dozen artists to come along and give them some ideas! Sometimes you feel like a salesman who's really lost his way. You're opening your coat like a sleazy salesman and saying: Hey, try this, what about one of these, heh-heh! But I've got to say: If they want you to play God, they should give you a bigger budget!

When a project lasts a long time, you go half a dozen steps forward, it's all going well, and you get nearer that cheque! Then, once again, somebody pops out of a cupboard and says: Whoops, hang on a minute, we've got to think about this some more!

*Train* began in something like 1982. I did an installation in a gallery with about 2 tons of magazines, a train moving so fast that the smoke enveloped the body of the train. And it's one of those ideas you think: I'd like to make that much bigger, even life-size, and it's one of those ideas you carry around inside your coat and you keep asking: How about doing this? And finally, someone says: OK, we'll do it!

People, especially councillors, are so worried. About everything, including art! And they always want to see exactly what it's going to look like---no imagination allowed! With *Train*, I'd done almost nothing, only described it. But eventually I made a doodle, and then, when these worried people wanted to see more and more, I started doing the collages.

The collages started as a reasonable portrayal, a photograph of the model, and you add a landscape, which you populate, just wanting to show the scale of the thing, what a real person would look like next to it. But the collages got more and more exaggerated, reacting to people's concerns, especially the ones --- there's always one ---who, no matter what anyone else wants, just want to stop the thing.

Because they're all terribly worried about what kind of a mess they are going to get in, and I'm busy saying: Look, you're not going to get into a mess, this thing is going to be *great*.... It's a brick *train*, for God's sake, it's not a great big brick version of a baby being beaten! It's an understandable, *reasonable* thing....But it was written all over their faces. They were saying: It's great to have you up here, we're really looking forward to it! But what they meant was: We would rather set you on fire and push you in the river than let you make this thing!

So, in the collages, instead of just making people stand around and look the right size, I began to have them dancing for joy, shouting: We love this train, it's great! But even if you have angels singing all around the finished art, praising it happily to heaven, the miserable ones are still miserable --- they still want to stop it! So finally I'm drawing the train with bats coming out of it (there really are bat-holes in it, by the way), a creepy castle in Darlington in the background, storms raging. A voice in heaven saying: This is what happens when you give artists lottery money---the Lord will wreak revenge! --- I'll destroy Darlington in a great whirlwind!

I work in so many different places. I work on huge projects, I work on things the size of your fist. I work on tiny things, I work on things that go flat on walls, and I work in discotheques, in swimming pools and parks and moving trains. I really feel as an artist that you should get yourself out there and work everywhere.