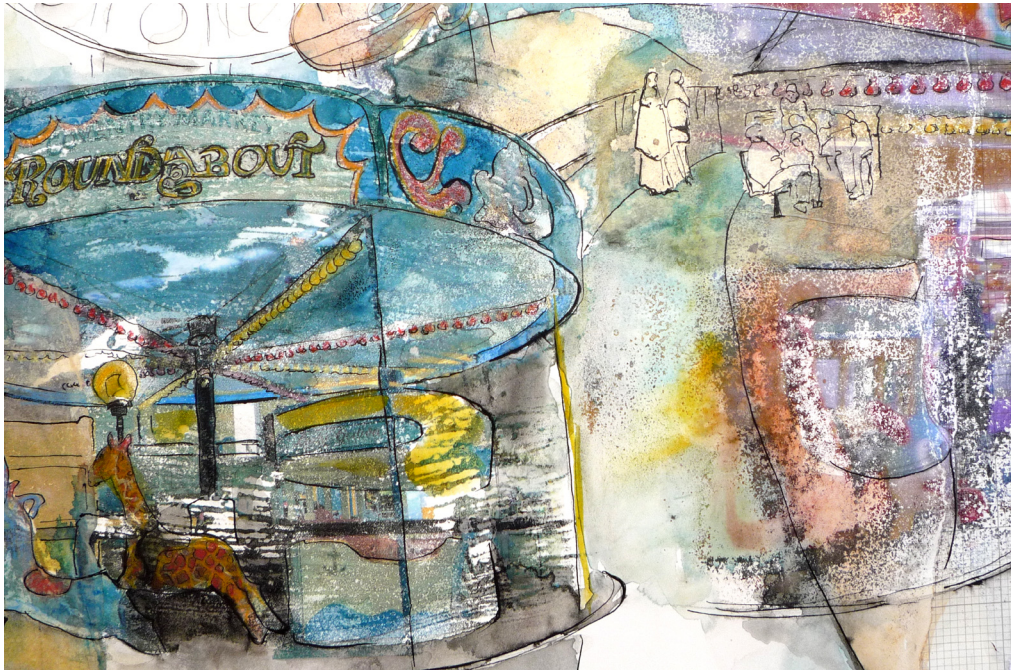
Coventry Market: public spaces, meeting places

Alice Angus





Coventry Market, March 2010

In March 2010 I drew Coventry Indoor Market for the artistsandmakers Empty Shops Network Tour created by artist Dan Thompson (and involving Jan Williams (Caravan Gallery), Steve Bomford Natasha Middleton and podcaster Richard Vobes).
The comission follows from a series looking at Granville Archde, Brixton Market, also for the Empty Shops Network Tour.

An ancient city, Coventry's medieval buildings were almost all destroyed during the WW11 blitz that devastated the city. Its rich history is crossed by stories of King Canute and Lady Godiva. Today Coventry's maze of traffic free precincts and postwar modern buildings, watched over by cctv cameras, are far from what the medieval city must have been.

Coventry's indoor market is a circular space in which you can get dizzy trying to find which door you came in but in the process find everything from a cup of tea to 5 kinds of sweet potato, dog biscuits, birthday cards, fake flowers, fresh rolls, loose cake mix, baking tins and graph paper. Its got a real sense or people mingling from different communities, and ages using it to meet, chat and hang out, not just shop. It was once celebrated it in a musical...

In many of our recent projects people tell us it is the less regulated more informal spaces that draw their communities together. But these more informal spaces may be on the decline as Paul Kingsnorth wrote in *Cities for Sale*;

> *From parks to pedestrian streets, squares to market places, public spaces are being bought up and closed down, often with little consultation or publicity. In towns and cities all over England, what was once public is now private. It is effectively owned by corporations, which set the standards of behaviour. These standards are the standards that are most congenial to their aim – getting you to buy things... There will be no busking, and often there will be no sitting either, except in designated areas. You will eat and drink where you are told to. You will not skateboard or cycle or behave "inappropriately".*

The Empty Shops Network is aiming to celebrate the kind of local distinctiveness that gets lost in these developments and it is working with communities to use empty shops for projects in the meanwhile spaces and times inbetween other uses. The Network's projects involve public meetings, informal training for local artists, and showcase the tools needed to run empty shops projects. See www.artistandmakers.com for details. You can see all of the drawings for the Tour on http://proboscis.org.uk/category/tools/drawing-tools/





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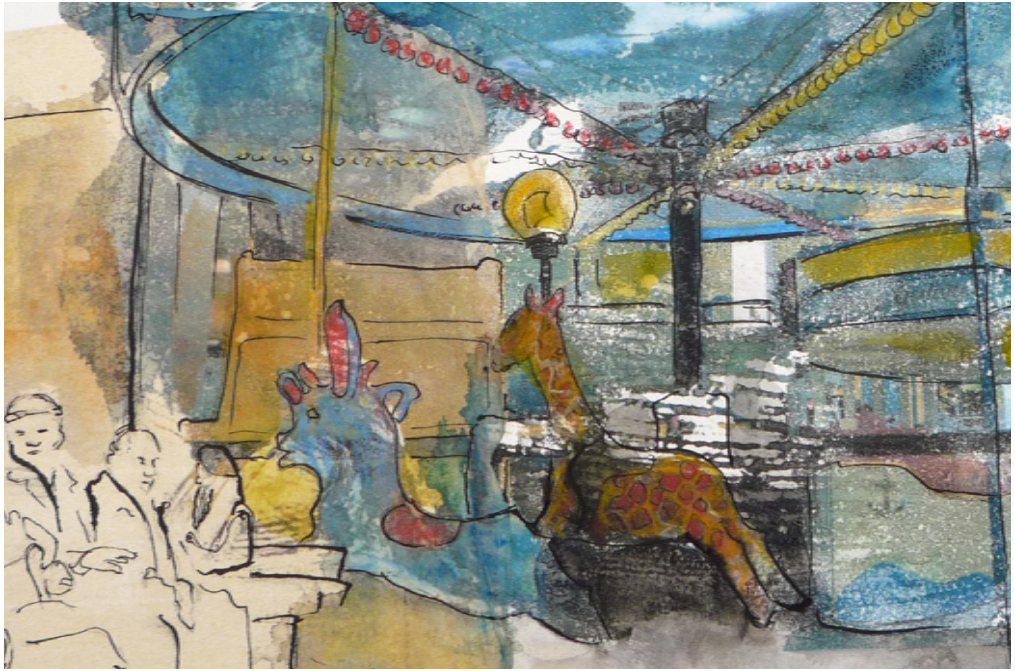










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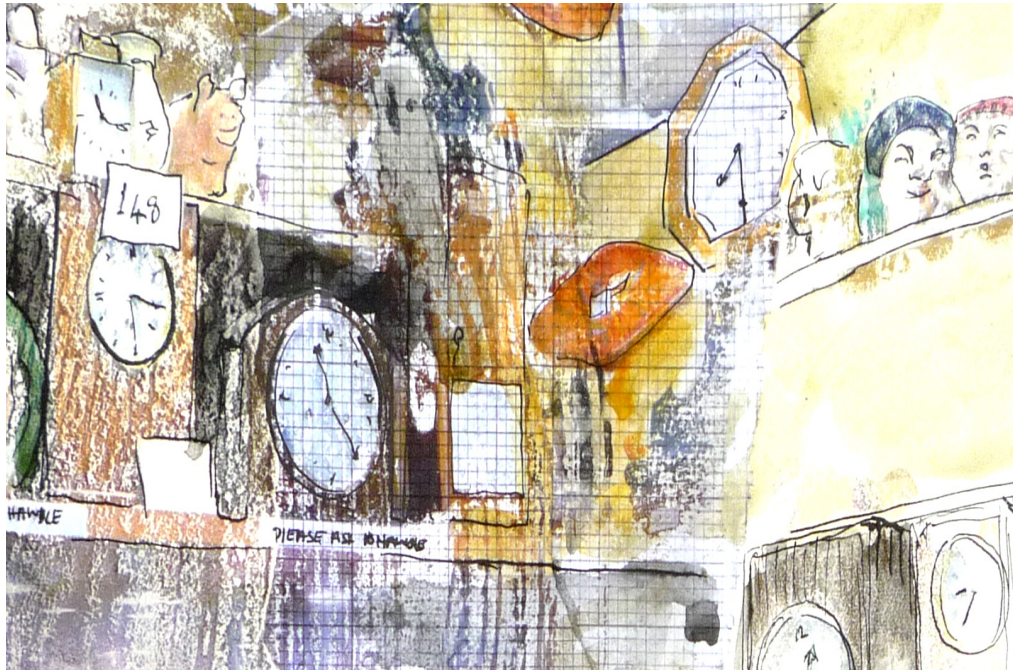
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Drawings, by Alice Angus, of Coventry Indoor Market commissioned for the artistsandmakers Empty Shops Network Tour created by artist Dan Thompson in early 2010.

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