

## **Within the Limitations**

Interview by Kay Hare with Lorrain Mailer from Ashford Visual Artists.  
21 March 2024

**An intriguing and diverse display of over 700 artworks from 28 countries framed within cast-off CD cases.**

***Within the Limitations* exhibition, held in Tesco's UK supermarket chain in Willesborough, Kent over the weekend 8-10 March and attended by the public and members of the art world.**

**I set out to learn more about how and why the exhibition came about.**

*It is quite an unusual concept, how did the idea first come to mind?*

Hi Kay,

It arose from a conversation with Greg Daines, another Ashford Visual Artists. He had been working on a new line of miniature papercuts while I was on a roll, doing outdoor installations that used thousands of secondhand CDs, leaving my garage full of CD cases, as I do not want to add to landfill.

Greg's prototypes were 12 x 12cm, the exact dimensions of a CD case. It just clicked, a free commodity to function as an artistic frame and a simple format to upload images onto Instagram. We soon realized we could offer artists, communities, and us the opportunity to play, promote, network and be part of an exciting project and at no cost! The only outlay for the artists was the postage to mail their work in if they wanted to be the exhibition. And the artists did, it was amazing.

*Why did you call it Within the Limitations?*

It came about while improvising with the group on how we could express to anyone that the submissions had to be constrained to 12 x 12 x 0.5cm to fit within the CD case.

*How did you find all the CD s?*

From local charity shops in Ashford and Hythe, and through Facebook groups. Everyone donated them and my collection must now be in the region of 6,000 and counting.

*How did you find the venue?*

Tesco's in Willesborough seemed the obvious choice, we already held our AVA meetings and workshops up in their free community space. But we also chose it as it reflected the essence of the exhibition. Anyone visiting had to walk through the entire store before seeing the work. This blurred the line between consumerism, art, and the value of waste.

*How did you manage all the entries, and did you have to limit the number of submissions?*

We placed the open call on art-related platforms and through our international contacts. Anyone submitting needed to provide four jpg images, an accompanying statement, and their media

handles. This information was formatted to create the pdf catalogue which you can download via <https://www.ashfordvisualartists.com/withinthelimitations.html>

The artists upload their accepted artwork on Instagram, following and crediting @ashfordvisualartists and @withinthelimitations, then mailed their work to us.

It was clear in the open call that we would not accept any product placement, branding or offensive material that might provoke hate or violence and we received none.

*What has been the feedback?*

Fantastic, especially from the artists, who appreciated this opportunity. Due to more cuts in art funding and available venues to show their work, openings have been getting fewer and fewer. And they were more than aware of the colossal amount of time and effort given freely by us to deliver this exhibition.

While Tesco's were delighted, offering AVA the chance to do more public engagement projects in this space.

*What happens to the artwork and CDs now?*

I received an invitation at the exhibition to display the work again in an eminent free space this August. Information will be available via <http://www.lorrainmailer.com/about.html>

After which we are looking for sponsorship to create clear perspex towers to encase the CD cases, so these amazing artworks are permanent. If you are interested in donating, please email: [info@lorrainmailer.com](mailto:info@lorrainmailer.com).

*What would you do differently, and would you do it again?*

It has been a huge learning curve, a test ground for future projects. The hardest decision has been when to limit the rollover of exhibitions and the destination of the donated artwork, which is still in question. Then there has been the enormous amount of time taken without pay with the added cost of materials, printing, and petrol.

On this basis AVA are launching The Beat, Instagram @2024beat from 29 April – 29 September 2024 in conjunction with Echo's Studio in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Submissions will now include sculpture with all work limited to 12 x 12 x 12cm and on acceptance, a small fee to cover administration.

It will be an amazing opportunity to exhibit twice on two continents.

Artwork again will not be returned, rather everything is to be donated to the University of the Creative Arts, Canterbury to exhibit and auction March 2025 to raise funds for their fine art graduation show. This will give every artist a third exhibition, plus a link to upload the live stream and receive their buyer's details.

Yes it will be a lot of work but this time I hope to have others helping me.

Why not check out what AVA can do and what we can do for you. As an art collective we act with organisations and groups to deliver events that engage and work with communities in creative ways. <https://www.ashfordvisualartists.com/workwithava.html>