

In January 2017, the Yale-China Arts Fellowship, supported by the Yale-China Association and the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office, New York, enabled me to take up a six-month artist residency at Yale University in New Haven. I had never been to the United States before and I relished the chance to challenge myself by stepping out the comfort zone of my artistic practice in Hong Kong, where I grew up, and working in brand new environments. Even though the [International Festival of Arts and Ideas](#) and the [Pop-up Festivals](#) took place in June 2017, the research on social innovation through the artistic practice and strategies of New Haven took place in the summer of 2016. I proposed to use the New Haven Green for my community-based project. It is a beautiful 16-acre park in the urban area of New Haven, owned by private body but open to the public. This choice of site and location was crucial in terms of the concept and development for my upcoming public art project – New Haven Green & I.

Upon my arrival in New Haven, the invisible tension between the university community and the people who live here immediately refused in me. The Green could be considered as a microcosm of the "town-gown" social dynamic that exists: home to the distinguished Yale University for more than three centuries. The disparity between the well-to-do and poor in the community is wide, and often divides along racial lines, with minority communities such as African Americans, Latinos, and recent immigrants isolated from the rich and vibrant academic community of Yale. While many local residents have enjoyed free concerts and festivals and shared celebratory cultural events on the green, it is the same space where the homeless may find a bench to sleep, and a makeshift soup kitchen, and which others may sport to avoid harassment by parkrangers or outright crime. The Green has the capacity both to divide and to unite the New Haven community.

How you view and interact with the Green may depend on where you stand on the socio-economic ladder. For this reason, I chose to target elementary and middle-school students of various races, whose beliefs about the uses and reputation of the Green are not fixed. I believe that children have their own views about what happens around them and they can be more direct and honest than adults. Children do not always look for a "correct" answer to questions. They are freer to explore questions out of curiosity, rather than a duty to solve the problem. I was most interested in hearing their ideas on the promise of the Green for community use.

Learning from New Haven Notes on My Fellowship at Yale



Through collaborative processes in educational workshops, we jointly developed a plan to open up new possibilities by creating a series of art playground installations in the heart of the city. At the end of my residency, urban sculptural playground facilities were actualised and built with the material and studio support of the [Yale Urban Design Workshop](#) and the [El Whitney Museum](#). During the arts festivals, the works were exhibited in Blatchley Park, Scamillebury Park, Townbridge Square Park and on the Green. These installations offered on-site artistic experiences and invited improvisational engagement by the general public in these neighbourhoods.

My deep thanks go to the people I had the chance to work with on New Haven Green & I for their support as facilitators, translators and technicians within such a short timeframe. I am grateful to all the student participants, their parents and school staffs for their collective effort and memorable contributions to this project. I have benefited hugely from the fellowship, not only as an artist but also as a research fellow at Yale. I miss the campus life and idea exchange at the bi-weekly meeting with my colleagues from the Yale-China Association and the faculty member from Yale University. I hope that I was able to contribute to the fellowship programme and I gained a lot by connecting with the New Haven community.

In my forthcoming solo exhibition supported by the Burger Collection at Ia space in October 2018, I am working on a book to share the findings of this research-based art project developed in New Haven, along with a new series of works it has inspired. The journey of New Haven and these latest works inspired me to develop my work to take on new facets while incorporating many of the same elements that are so central to it, including sculptural installation, public art, social engagement and interactivity, and how these can change the way people see and understand their communities.

<http://www.debesham.com>

1 Each year the International Festival of Arts & Ideas welcome artists from all over the world. They have delighted audiences with an outstanding mix of entertaining and inspiring programmes for 23 years. <https://www.artideas.org/>

2 One-day Pop-up Festivals take place each year just prior to the International Festival of Arts & Ideas in Fair Haven, Dixwell, Hills and downtown New Haven.

3 Founded in 1992 by Alan Platts, then Associate Dean and Professor at the Yale School of Architecture, the Yale Urban Design Workshop (YUDW) is a community design centre based at the School of Architecture. <https://ydw.architecture.yale.edu/>

4 The El Whitney Museum and Workshop, founded by Bill Brown, is an experimental learning workshop for students, teachers and families. They collect, interpret, and teach experiments that are the roots of design and invention. <https://www.elwhitney.org/>



“街道藝術家”是由推廣協會和香港經濟貿易發展局的辦事處共同支持的项目。去年1月，我有幸獲得支持，在位於紐黑文的耶魯大學開展了為期半年的藝術駐紮計劃。我是一個土生土長的香港人，從未踏足過美國這片土地。在全新的環境裡開展社區藝術項目，與社區內不同持份者建立互信，我遇到不少的挑戰。

國際藝術創庫節 1 和 Pop Up 節 2 每年六月在惠州紐黑文的劇院，舉辦與社區緊密地舉行。早於一年前的暑假，我已開展了關於紐黑文的藝術實踐和策略輔助的社會學研究。在研究當中，我計劃使用紐黑文綠地公園開展我的公共藝術項目 - New Haven Green & I。這片美麗的公園位於紐黑文市中心，佔地 16 英畝，是一座向公眾開放的私有產業。對於 New Haven Green & I 的概念和創作的發展而言，這個地點和位置的選擇都至關重要。

向紐黑文學習 ——我的耶魯駐美札記

剛一抵步紐黑文，我就感覺到大學社群和當地居民之間隱隱存在某種张力。紐黑文與世界各很多大學一樣，有著典故的 “town and gown” 特質。超過三個世紀，著名的耶魯大學就坐落於此。社區裡當地的居民和鄉人之間有著很大的差異，而這種常常成為差異的界線，諸如非裔美國人、拉美裔美國人和新移民等少數群體在因教育程度與社會地位較低，難以與耶魯的學府有真正的溝通交流，以致兩個社群完全脫離。綠地公園位於社區裡貧困的社群與耶魯的學府社群的中間，兩個社群共用一片綠地，公園實為 “town and gown” 的縮影。當不少當地的居民在綠地公園享受音樂會，享受著慶典與文化活動時，同樣很多無家可歸者就在公園露營，或者徘徊在附近的救濟站。若沒有大型的慶祝活動，本地人很少在公園休息停留，入夜後更是冷清，許多人甚至繞道而行，以躲避行乞者的騷擾或是明目張膽的犯罪。

綠地公園令我重新思考「社區」的定義，問題不在於公園的空間設計的尺寸，而是人與人的實體及心理距離，這亦是我在藝術創作上所關注和探討的問題。這公共空間獨特的社區文化背景，正好為我提供一個起點思考這社區的需要，亦讓當地人重新探索這公共空間對他們的意義，我覺得尤其這個小朋友和單親的自來、好奇心與創造力，這方面的探索會更有可能性。因此，“New Haven Green & I” 特別指向賦權於當地不同種族的中小學童作為對象。他們儘管年紀小，對周遭環境，對生活的社區仍會有自己的想法，而且他們比成年人更直接、更誠實。對不同的問題，孩子們並不總是尋求“正確”的答案，他們對問題的回應也不是為了履行解決問題的責任，更多是為了滿足自己的好奇心，無拘無束地去探索問題。

在 “New Haven Green & I” 教育工作坊中除了彼此分享對綠地公園往後的理想願景，我們也透過遊戲和說故事的方式，加強孩子們對公園的認識。然而我們共同制定出一個計劃，在城內幾個地方安裝一些巧妙的空氣裝置，讓更多人能去了解社區。而 Yale Urban Design Workshops 和 Eli Whitney Museum 給予了物料和工作室後者的支援。這些城市規劃和遊樂裝置才得以建造。藝術節期間，這些作品在布萊切利公園、斯沃特白公園、特羅布里奇奇爾城公園和綠地公園展出，為周邊地區的民眾提供了親身的藝術體驗。在帶動人與人之間的連結互動，尋找戶外公共空間的可行性以至一點一滴改變當地社區的氣氛，使綠地公園變成一個更多人會駐足的共享空間。

New Haven Green & I 讓我有幸與許多新朋友一起共事。我在此感謝職員和技術員一直幫助我完成計劃。我尤其要感謝所有學生參與者，他們的父母和學校教職員為這個項目作出的努力和貢獻。無論是對於我的藝術創作或者研究而言，然而這又對這種我受益匪淺。我依然懷念校園的生活，想念雙週會與預備班當年的同事和耶魯大學的教員之間的異鄉交流。與紐黑文社區的探索聯繫更讓我收穫了許多許多，我希望自己的為推動藝術項目增添精力。

今年我十分榮幸獲得 Burger Collection 的支持，將於 10 月在 Ia 空間舉行個展。我正準備創作一系列新作品和一本書，分享和回顧紐黑文之旅的發現。歡迎 New Haven Green & I 的創作過程裡我有機會重新認識「藝術節」的本身，讓我不斷拓展自己的創作視野。如此展覽議題以研究「互動」/ 公眾參與場域 / 及「人與人的連結及心理距離」為重心。

<http://www.dabeart.com>



1 國際藝術創庫節每年都會接待來自世界各地的藝術家，23 年來，他們住進於風味佳和啟發性的節目給觀眾帶來啟蒙。 <https://www.artand.org/>

2 每年在國際藝術創庫節的節夕，一天 Pop Up 節會在耶魯黑文、德里維爾、希爾頓和耶魯文庫區舉行。
Shale Urban Design Workshop (UDW) 由耶魯的耶魯建築學院副院長，Prof. Alan Powers 於 1992 年建立，它是一個基於建築學院的社區設計中心。 <https://udw.architecture.yale.edu/>
4E11 Whitney Museum 由 Bill Brown 建立，是一個向學生、教師和家庭的實驗性學習工作室。他們收藏、解釋和製作作為設計和啟蒙的圖畫的實驗。 <https://www.4e11whitney.org/>