

The problem with privatisation – Croxteth: a 'pandorama'

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Earlier this summer a local accommodation company, Signature Living, announced a proposal to turn Croxteth Hall into a premier hotel. At the moment, Liverpool Council, who manages and maintains the Hall, is said to be losing more than £1m each year through this historical building alone. The Council has begun to look for private companies to put forward proposals that outline how they might run the hall. Crucially, the Council has asked that public access to the Hall and its heritage remains. (For more on Croxteth's future, click [here](#)).

It is not the first time that financial challenges have impacted Croxteth Hall's history. In 1972 the last Earl of Sefton died and, as there was no heir to the title, Croxteth Hall passed to Liverpool City Council. The following year its contents were put up for sale at auction. Despite these changes however, much of the Hall and its history has been carefully preserved and available to view by the public.

One of the artworks featured in summer's exhibition at Croxteth – *Constructing Connections: Art, Fiction and Life* – is called *The Air Monopolist*, by artist Patricia MacKinnon-Day. This artwork consists of three parts: a copy of the 1973 auction book (edited by the artist), a projection of text from *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* and individual bags of air. Each of the bags of air has been collected from the rooms of Croxteth Hall, and listed as lot numbers in the edited version of the 1973 auction catalogue. MacKinnon-Day also staged a performance event, in which the bags were auctioned off.

Implicit in the capsules of air is an exaggerated sense that fundamental resources can be seized and sold back to the people that need them. The piece points to a carefully-managed dependency that reinforces inequality. In *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, Frank Owen (the book's protagonist) discusses how poverty is created and managed through private monopolies. He is angry at how the workers unquestioningly accept and comply with a system that affirms the wealthy and their right to control resources, and disempowers the less wealthy. He says:

"If it were possible to construct huge gasometers and to draw together and compress within them the whole of the atmosphere, it would have been done long ago, and we should have been compelled to work for them in order to get money to buy air to breathe."

The Air Monopolist asks us to think about ownership and power. It asks us to question, rather than accept, the increasing prevalence of monopolistic big-businesses and the systems and ideologies that allow these private organisations to thrive, whilst public institutions flounder.

You can see this work installed at the Hall until the end of September as part of an exhibition of contemporary art that is interwoven with the historical displays. In the meantime, however, here are some images and extracts from MacKinnon-Day's *The Air Monopolist*:

Featured image: a still image from the video of *The Air Monopolist* performance – in which the bags of air are offered at auction.

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