

# DAVID HALEY ON THE RECORD

David Haley is an artist, academic, poet and all round creative intellect who refuses to be pigeon-holed. He describes himself as an 'artist without style'. This is not self-deprecation, but a statement of intent. His work is constantly evolving, beyond any constraints of method, media or technique. His work envelops the rural and the urban. He is as comfortable in a room of scientists and engineers, as he is in the gallery or lecture theatre. He finds inspiration on the streets of Manchester and in Cumbria's wild expanse. And he has undertaken projects of which many a water or biodiversity expert would be proud.

Whilst working with Welfare State International in the early 1990s David undertook a project at their headquarters, a Victorian school in the Cumbrian town of Ulverston. He knew that the culverted town beck flowed near the school and sought to restore it to its former glory. 'I spent six or seven months trying to get permission to unculvert the river,' explains David. 'It was at the time when the National Rivers Authority was handing over to the Environment Agency.

When I eventually got permission to go ahead with the project the Planning Officer said he had never heard of someone applying to unculvert a river.'

Once the river was revealed nature added its own creative juices to the project. 'The following spring we had kingfishers visiting us,' David marvels. 'The whole experience defined for me what I wanted to do with my art.' From this point David's work has taken many turns and been expressed in various ways, the constant throughout, however, are the themes of water, evolution and climate change.

David's work has brought him into contact with many scientists and engineers. But when I ask him about collaborations between the arts and science he is adamant that the role of art is not just to educate the public or translate a scientific message. He comments: 'There has been a fashion for science/arts projects where the arts have sought to illustrate a scientific problem. This does neither discipline any favours.' David explains that rather than simply providing an accessible vehicle, art is at its most successful in collaboration with other

disciplines, when it extends the skills base, opening up a subject for examination, without preconception or defined methodology.

He continues: 'Climate change is an ennobling problem, an issue that brings together all disciplines, without hierarchy. It is the most urgent matter of our time and we must come together to consider how we might live with climate change. Because of economic values we are focusing on the carbon issue, but other issues need to be taken into consideration, species loss for example.' As an artist David is able to ask the questions that the engineer or scientist may not. 'Why are we developing the Thames Gateway when the south-east is over-populated and likely to become water scarce, for example? As an artist I can become a critical voice,' he concludes.

'A Drop In the Ocean, A Trace of Life' is a conceptual idea that David plans to develop into a 'live artwork' that follows the course of a bacterium from the River Mersey as it completes its cycle through the north Atlantic tidal and weather systems. 'Bacteria evolve very quickly,' David explains. 'Bacteria can live

in many different climates. So the project will consider whether climate change is an act of evolution - climate change as a biological expression. Does it actually have a life?'

Working with the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology David has helped scientists to move away from a traditional linear ways of problem solving to a more holistic method of questioning. 'Scientists no longer spend much time in the field using all their senses. A lot of their work is based on data gathering systems, numbers and statistics. They are using linear methodologies to try to resolve non-linear problems,' says David. Concluding: 'Technology is just another discipline, it won't solve anything. Even if it slows down the situation, we will still have a 30-year cycle of climate change. The most urgent thing is how we adapt. Industries need to start thinking outside of the box.'

**\*David Haley** will be speaking at CIWEM's annual conference 'The Global Environment 2007'. For further information visit [www.ciwem.org](http://www.ciwem.org).

