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Meet PAM: Pride Art Map

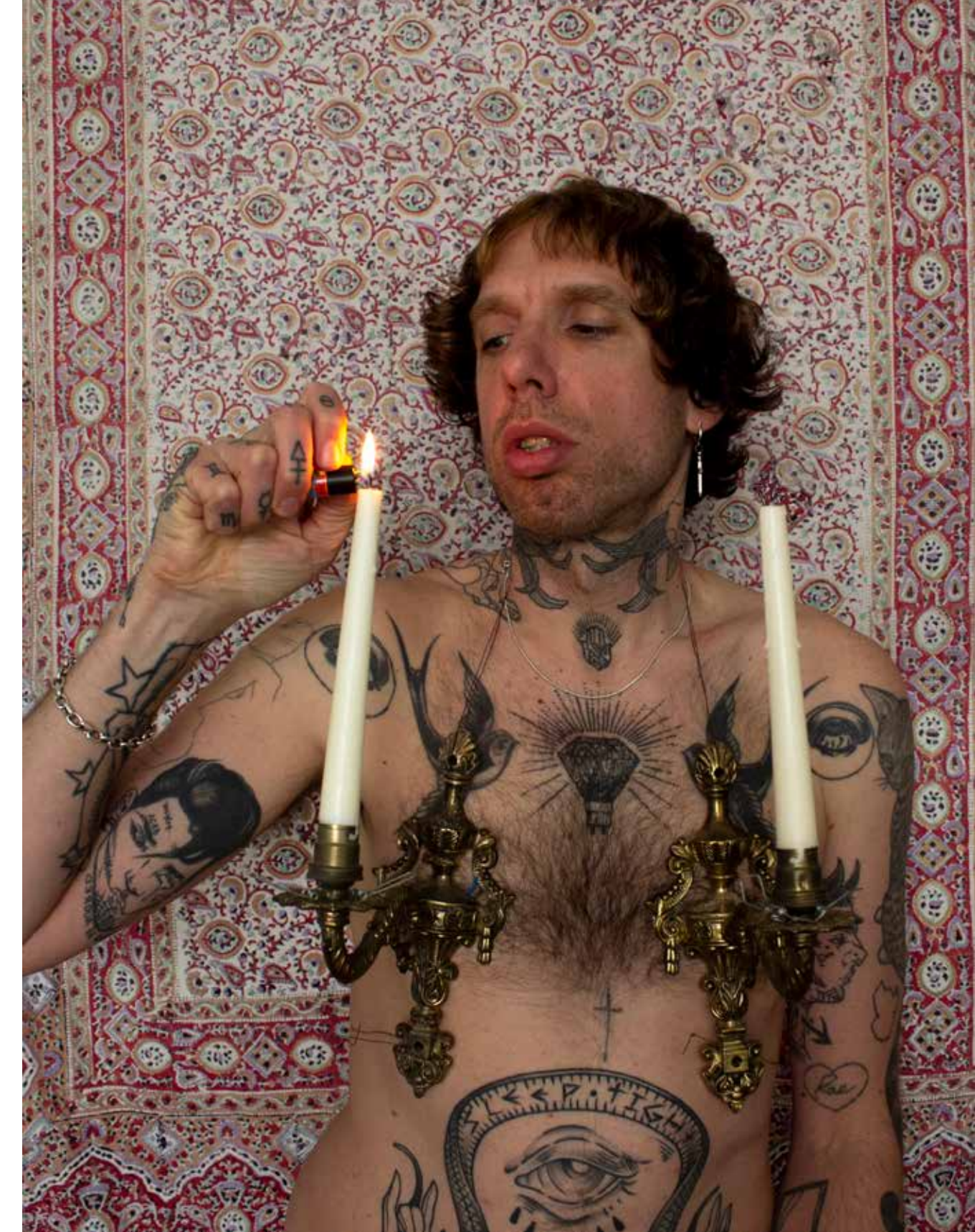
Emilia Ong speaks to Lo Lo No, curator of the Pride Art Map, to find out just why getting the Pride message out through art continues to be so necessary

Back with a new name, more funding, and a renewed, post-pandemic energy, this year's Pride is set to be bigger than ever: two full weeks of events, exhibitions and workshops are planned as part of the charity's ongoing efforts to creatively engage the full spectrum of Margate's community.

"You could say lockdown really changed our approach," Lo Lo is saying, as they think back to (whisper it) those dark days of 2020. "Though Pride Day itself was impossible that year, there was a stronger need than ever for people to feel connected to others. So we had to get a bit more innovative about how we created a presence in town."

Lo Lo is referring to 2020's inaugural art trail, which had at its heart Elissa Cray's Portrait Project, a series of photographs of Margate's LGBTQIA+ community that were exhibited in non-traditional spaces, like disused shop windows and cafés. That year, Lo Lo also pioneered the first Red Flags exhibition, which protested the reassignment of the rainbow flag to the NHS: what did this mean for minority groups? they asked. The feedback on these efforts was so positive that the art trail became, well, a thing. It was developed and embellished for 2021 - and now, following an intensive period of crowdfunding, this August Margate can look forward to a glorious fortnight of diverse arts events, each characterised by the probing, joyful creativity Pride is known for.

It's also worth noting that the art trail



has a new name for 2022: Pride Art Map, aka, PAM. Why? "Because PAM is a fabulous name!" laughs Lo Lo.

"Pride has always been very arts-led," they continue. "It's about bringing communities together across platforms to discuss lives and to share lives. It's about visibility." They explain that, so far, "great relationships have come out of previous art trail activities" - perhaps particularly via BRINK, an arts residency conceived by Pride in 2021. The residency will return this year, but replete with extra funding, such that participating artists can be provided with a stipend.

"It's been a lot of work," acknowledges Lo Lo, "but so worth it. With the community support via the crowdfunder and the additional support of Kent County Council, we've been able to hire gallery spaces, commission mentor projects to engage local youth, and offer artists both free spaces to exhibit in and a

budget for their materials."

Whilst PAM is already attracting artists from as far afield as Denmark and the US, they are also hoping to focus more on artists from Margate this year. "It might sound surprising, but back in 2018 for example, it was hard to fill up a gallery purely with queer artists from Margate - there just didn't seem to be so many around. Now, it feels different."

That, of course, is testament to just how well Pride, and PAM, are doing their job: Margate is becoming renowned for its diverse and inclusive community. "That's the biggest thing really," Lo Lo agrees. "We want to encourage people to feel that they can come out and be their authentic selves - and that, when they do, there will be a community waiting for them. It doesn't matter how old you are, or at what stage of life. The message is that, here in Margate at least, it's safe to show up and be visible - just as you are."

▲ Are These My Tits, ©Lo Lo No

PAM Highlights



▲ JENDRE, ©Marika Kochiashvili

PAM Highlights:

The Art of Drag, in windows around Margate



Red Flags, The Margate School

Last year's Red Flags show (Queertopias) had, in line with the positive mood of last summer, an optimistic inflection; this year, however, a more sombre mood pervades. Artists will be looking at the ongoing debate around conversion therapy, and at the government's apparently transphobic decision to ban conversion therapy for gay people, but not for trans people. Displayed in the window of The Margate School, this is sure to be one to challenge people's perceptions.

BeYou, The Margate School

Meanwhile, in the main gallery of The Margate School, the youth group BeYou will be displaying their work. Run by a charity called Porchlight, the group will be investigating the topic of identity via a programme of workshops, including banner-making and drag workshops. "We'll have a few drag queens come and do their make-up and get them dressed up," Lo Lo says. "It should be a lot of fun - plus, a room filled with queer teen angst can't fail to yield up some really interesting work."

Adult by Nature, Quench Gallery

Bringing together the work of seven artists, this show will see Northdown Road's Quench Gallery transformed into a house! Working on both a literal and metaphorical level, each artist will be assigned a room, and will be responding to their experience of childhood as "other". How has that experience of difference played out in their current practice?

You can find full listings at margatepride.org.uk



▲ ©Red Flags

Photographer Stephen Daly will be exhibiting portraits of Margate's drag queens in the windows all around town - including, notably, the top end of the High Street, where there remain many unused and derelict spaces. "We didn't really do anything there last year," admits Lo Lo, "but this year we've recognised that it's an area that would really benefit from a bit of love and care."

Working with young people from Arts Education Exchange, Stephen will also be offering workshops in photography, set design, and costume design. Stephen, who comes from a youth theatre background, is keen to nurture the creative interests of the young, and as such there will be the opportunity for those who are really excited about the project to continue working with him over several days as he shoots the portraits.

Poster Campaign

Pride will be working with young illustrators and graphic designers to create text-based posters, which will then be placed throughout the town. Whilst no one yet knows quite what the posters will look like, Lo Lo says that their aim is to spread positive messaging about the queer community. "We want to leave golden breadcrumbs all around Margate for people to see," they say - "even for those who don't usually engage with this sort of thing. After all, Pride is first and foremost a protest. The party comes second. Of course we hope that people will love what they see, but if they don't, it's a good reminder that this is the reality: in parts of the world, queer culture is still illegal or significantly oppressed."

It can be easy to feel angered by the way things are, but that's precisely why Pride exists: "in order to tread the line," Lo Lo explains, "between calling out and celebrating. Because, sadly, some people still don't think queer joy can even exist."



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Photography: Cynthia Laurence-John Model: Lily Breuer



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FREE KIDS' SPORT

Writer
Emilia Ong

For children to be happy, healthy, and confident, it's recommended that they engage in one full hour of physical activity per day. Emilia Ong speaks to two local organisations who are working hard to make sports in Margate accessible to all children

“It's very easy in this area to get sucked into something that's not good for you,” Yofi Yvorra, founder of street football social enterprise Yo! Street Zone says. “Especially when it comes to the youth. So I just wanted to inspire them. Show them that hard work, focus, can lead somewhere.”

He's definitely doing something right. Now, the Margate-born non-profit is the biggest street football organisation in the UK. Alongside their street-based youth engagement, they coach in schools and colleges; they also coach individuals, football teams, and organise events. Nevertheless, says Yofi, community will always remain at the heart of everything Yo! Street Zone does.

For that reason, he is committed to offering free community sessions twice a week. “We do them in two locations: on Wednesdays in the heart of Cliftonville, Dalby Square, and on Thursdays at the Quarterdeck Youth Centre,” says Yofi. “Both are good vibes. We've got music, lights. There are girls, boys, young and old. So many different backgrounds too: white, black, Asians, Eastern Europeans... everyone together, just having fun.”

Street football might not seem like the most obvious way of changing local kids' lives, but for Yofi, it made a lot of sense. He recalls his own experience of moving to Margate with his family back in 2008: “I was in limbo - just didn't know what to do with my life. Basically, football was my life. It was more than just, 'Let's kick a ball about'. It was a whole social gathering.”

If you take a look at the videos on the Yo! Street Zone website, you'll get something of a flavour of what's on offer: the sessions are joyous, and whether it's street football, freestyle or panna, the skill on display is seriously impressive. “We can really move kids onto a higher level. The ones who want to take it more seriously join our Tuesday skills class, where they learn ball mastery, and how to take that confidently onto the pitch.”

He mentions just a few of the many success stories they've seen. “Patrick - he's now in his 20s, has done adverts for Coca-Cola, and works with us to deliver events. Then there's Anna - she's done Nike Adverts, got sponsorship from Puma, and demos 1v1 'face-off' events all over the UK. Her videos have gone viral - one was even shared by Piers Morgan!” Yofi laughs.

“It's so rewarding to see them happy. The world opens up because of their skill and talent. We take them on road trips, even go abroad to compete.”

Of course, all this costs money, and securing funding is the most stressful part of Yofi's job. “Honestly, my wife Lydia does a lot of it,” he laughs. “It's a really difficult process, preparing each application, not knowing whether you'll get it or not.” Things have improved since they set up as a CIC in 2020, making the organisation eligible for a wider range of support. “We've flourished since then,” he

◀ Yo! Street Zone, ©Yofi Yvorra



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says, "and now we can do way more for the community."

Happily, they've just secured funding for Rule the Court, a street football tournament which ran in Dane Park for the first time last year. "It was an amazing vibe. Along with locals we had teams come from London. There was a DJ, Caribbean food provided by CD Kitchen, and we had it all filmed - over 200 people, and eight teams battling it out."

For 2022 the competition is set to be even bigger, and will run across two days in June and July. The whole point, Yofi says, is "to bring quality to this area. For local kids to see that they don't have to leave to find this sort of stuff: it's happening on their doorsteps. Ultimately it's about them learning to take pride in their area, and in themselves."

After all, he says, "everyone needs a role model, someone relatable to look up to. There aren't enough people round here who are passionate about something - kids don't always know what they like, but when they see that with skills you can do something, it's motivating."

"Kids," he adds, "thrive off energy. The problem is, the local drug dealer is usually pretty charismatic, offering them quick rewards. We're here to show them another path that makes sense to them."

Yofi admits that you can't save everyone. Nevertheless, he says, "you can help. Basically, we're a street football family. I've personally made lifelong friendships through football, and it's important to me to continue that way of doing things - to show Margate youth that energy of believing in themselves."

Philip Cartwright - or Coach Phil, as the kids call him - is also doing his bit to change the lives of local children through sport. Founder of Thanet Mustangs, which runs American flag football sessions for 8 to 16 year olds, he is emphatic about the need for more non-profit sports organisations in this area. "Everything we offer is, and always will be, completely free," he says. "That means free training sessions, free membership to the British American Football Association, and, if the kids show commitment to the sport, a free kit as well."

What exactly is American flag football? "It's similar to American football," Phil explains, "but non-contact. Teams are 5-a-side, and each player wears a belt with two flags hanging off each hip. Instead of tackling each other, you pull off a flag."

"It's hard to visualise unless you see it," he laughs, "but you could say it's like chess, though much more physical. You have attacking and defending sides, and can either throw the ball to someone or run with it. It's up to defenders to figure out where you're gonna run."

Phil, whose youngest son is homeschooled, established Thanet Mustangs in response to his son's



"It's about them learning to take pride in their area, and in themselves"



experience of social anxiety. "People have a misconception about home-educated kids - they think it's just for rich, middle-class families. But usually it's the opposite: it's kids with mental health problems, who find socialising difficult." Team sports can be particularly challenging, Phil notes, "as there's peer pressure involved. If you're good at it, you have lots of time with the ball and everyone's watching you. That's stressful in its own way. But, if you're not good at it, you get left out."

Everything changed for Phil and his son when they found an American flag football club in Canterbury. "It was a revelation. It really helped my son mentally as well as physically."

Eventually Phil started running his own sessions in Northdown Park, expressly for other home-educated kids. "It grew to about 30 kids, but it was still a pretty casual thing. Then, during lockdown, I really felt: we have to grow this."

He started with a crowdfunder last April and, with the help of Carly Myles of Thanet District Council, was put onto Sported, a charity which provides funding for grassroots sports clubs.

"We raised about £2k," Phil says, "which was great. Previously I was just buying a few balls and cones out of my own pocket, but now we've been able to get everything we need, even our own kit." He's also been able to expand his offering to include 8-10 week training programmes, and Sunday sessions, which are open to everyone.

◀ Yof Street Zone, ©Yofi Yvorna ▲ Thanet Mustangs, ©Philip Cartwright

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"It's funny, sometimes people turn up with their little ones and say, 'Oh, I forced them to come, but I'm pretty sure you won't see them again.' But then there they are the next week, boots and ball in hand. It's great."

Like Yo! Street Zone, the whole ethos of Thanet Mustangs is inclusive: "Boys and girls," says Phil, "everyone together."

"It can get tricky with sport, because it can be so misogynistic. People get tribal and use phrases like, 'Oh, it's just banter'. As far as I'm concerned, banter is just another word for bullying. It legitimises bullying."

He acknowledges that it can be difficult with this age group: "They're coming up to teens, lots of hormones pumping." But his aim is to create a safe space. "I make it clear: not here. The whole point of the Mustangs is that it's for kids who might not be classed as sporty, or who might not 'fit-in' if they tried joining traditional teams."

He agrees that fundraising is the toughest part of keeping the organisation going. Luckily he managed to secure the Council's support: they now provide a pitch and changing rooms, and repaint the pitch lines every week.

"It's just a couple of guys who paint it, and it's probably a tiny thing out of their week, but to us it's massive. They've met



MARGATE MERCURY

all the kids now, who all lined up and thanked them!"

Nevertheless, there's always more that can be done. "Grant applications are so difficult. They take so long to prepare, and then you have to wait God knows how long for an answer. I mean, here I am, offering two hours of fun, free sports a week to children in one of the most deprived areas...why wouldn't people want to support that?"

MORE INFO

Yo! Street Zone runs free street football sessions twice weekly: in Dalby Square on Wednesdays, 5-7 pm, and at the Quarterback Youth Centre on Thursdays, 6.30-8.30 pm. This year's Rule the Court will be taking place on Sunday 19 June (Juniors) and Sunday 24 July (ages 16+), in Dane Park.

Thanet Mustang's American flag football sessions for 8-16 year olds take place at Northdown Park every Sunday from 12.30-2.30 pm, and there will be a Summer Open Day on Sunday 31st July.

Find out more at yostreetzone.com and facebook.com/thanetmustangs

◀ Thanet Mustangs, ©Phillip Cartwright

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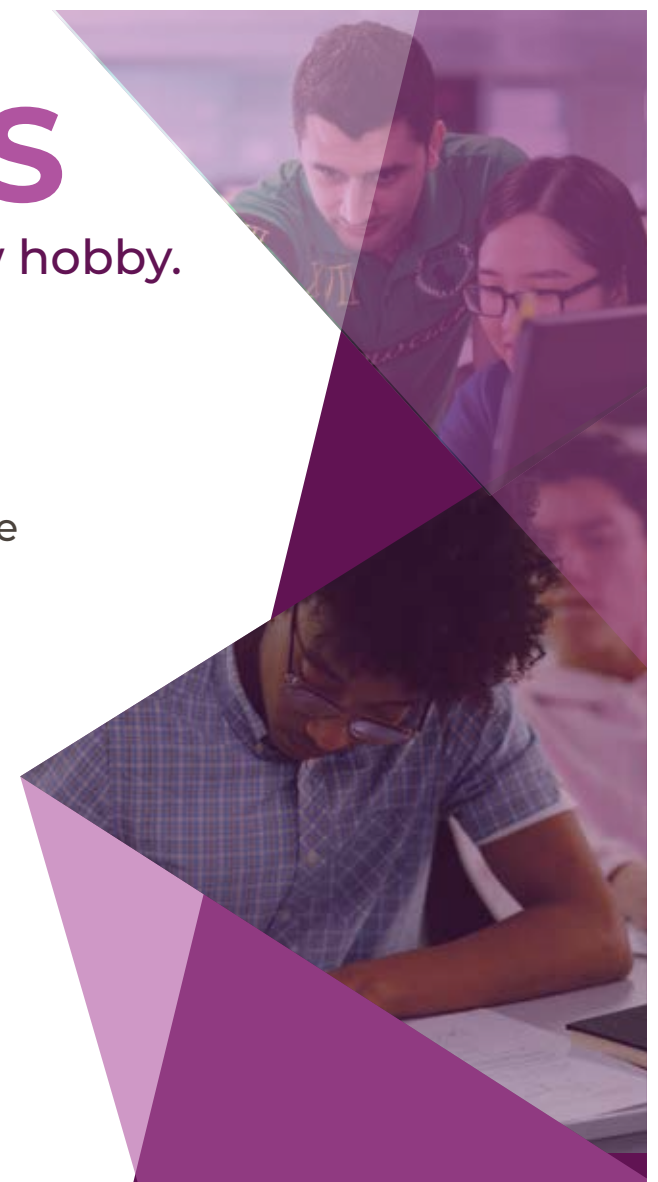
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