

ANDREA LUKA ZIMMERMAN AND  
LASSE JOHANSSON  
**IN WAIT**

ANDREA LUKA ZIMMERMAN AND LASSE JOHANSSON FOUNDED THE ARTIST COLLABORATION *FUGITIVE IMAGES*, BASED ON HAGGERSTON ESTATE, WHERE THEY MADE THE PUBLIC ARTWORK *I AM HERE* ON THE FACADE OF SAMUEL HOUSE ([WWW.IAMHERE.ORG.UK](http://WWW.IAMHERE.ORG.UK)). ANDREA COMPLETED A PRACTICE-BASED PHD AT CENTRAL ST MARTINS COLLEGE OF ART IN 2007 AND USES FILMMAKING, PHOTOGRAPHY, AND TEXT TO EXPLORE THE GRAY ZONE BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE MEMORY. LASSE JOHANSSON IS A RECENT GRADUATE OF GOLDSMITHS COLLEGE WITH MAS IN PHOTOGRAPHY AND URBAN CULTURES AND USES FILM AND INSTALLATION TO EXPLORE THE FORMATION OF PUBLIC SPACES AND THE IDENTITIES THEY GIVE RISE TO.



We began our project on the Haggerston West and Kingsland Estates in the Fall of 2008, just after the majority of the residents voted in favor of a regeneration project that pledges to demolish the old council flats and rebuild the estate as a mixed tenure development. Using photography and video we wanted to record, over a long period of time, the changes that the regeneration would inevitably bring. We have been long-term residents on Haggerston Estate, and the work emerging from this project is intimately bound to this experience (see also [www.iamhere.org.uk](http://www.iamhere.org.uk)). For this photo essay, rather than photographing the estate's residents, we recorded the marks and impressions that people had made and focused on the curious, startling, and distinctive interventions in a "regular" and to some extent standardized environment.

### **THE HAGGERSTON WEST AND KINGSLAND ESTATES: A BRIEF HISTORY**

Haggerston West and Kingsland Estates are located on opposite sides of Regent's Canal. London County Council (LCC) began to build the estates in 1928 and the last blocks on the Haggerston side were completed in 1948, while the Kingsland side was completed in 1953. The estates contained 480 flats in total; sizes ranged from one to four bedrooms. In those days, a rather small four-bedroom flat was expected to house a family of seven. For us today this may sound like unacceptable living conditions. However, when seen in relation to the current emphasis on building compact, high-density, inner-city dwellings, it is worth asking what future generations will think when they look back and evaluate our current design strategies for the contemporary urban landscape.

Haggerston Estate overlooks Regent's Canal, which was built during the early nineteenth century to transport the raw materials needed by rapidly expanding industries. Due to changes in demand as well as in modes of transportation, it fell into disuse during the latter part of the twentieth century. However, with the property boom beginning in the late 1990s, the canal found a new economic purpose: this time its role was symbolic and aesthetic rather than tangible and material. With its scenic views, Regent's Canal offered plenty of development opportunities for real-estate investors. As such, it is something like a gold vein running through the borough, increasingly dotted with exclusive warehouse conversions and luxury developments.

While this rapid transformation was going on in the nearby area, nothing much had changed on Haggerston West and Kingsland Estates since the early 1980s when they were transferred from the Greater London Council (GLC) to Hackney Council. This turned out to be the first step in a drawn out process that would eventually end up with another transfer, which saw the ownership of the estates being transferred away from public ownership, by a vote of 71 percent of the residents on the estate, to L&Q Housing Association.

Before the GLC handed over the blocks to Hackney Council, a large part of the estate was emptied to allow for a partial refurbishment. Unlike the current regeneration project, where the residents are encouraged to return to the estate, in 1980 none of the residents were offered the opportunity to return once the refurbishment was completed. Thus, the community was dispersed and the continuity of the estate life disrupted.

The transfer to Hackney Council also signaled the beginning of three decades of neglect. This led to the rapid exodus of key workers who, amongst others, had been allocated flats on the refurbished estate. During this period the management was characterized by a *laissez-faire* approach, leaving the estate in an increasingly desperate condition, though there was never a lack of promises of a brighter future. In fact, during the past thirty years, proposals to modernize the estate have come and gone with regularity, but none of them ever progressed beyond the planning stage. Perhaps partly because of this vacillation and uncertainty, major external and internal repairs were forever postponed. Consequently, the housing blocks were gradually run down and left in a state of dilapidation.

For residents on the estate, like us, it created a sense of continuous suspension—a feeling of simultaneously being present and absent, never really knowing whether this would be our last Winter spent in the cold and damp flats.

However, in October 2007 all of this changed when the residents on the estate voted in favor of a regeneration package that would demolish the old blocks and build a new estate. Part of the estate has already been demolished and construction should soon commence. All residents have been offered flats in the new development and will be temporarily rehoused during the demolition and construction phase.

It was the particular combination of the estate's history of neglect, decline, and broken promises and its imminent regeneration that motivated us to embark on our estate project. We were especially struck by what we perceived as an inherent ambiguity at the core of the regeneration process. On the one hand, there was a tangible sense of relief—finally everyone would have a decent flat to live in. On the other hand, we felt the presence of a strange kind of loss that seemed difficult to grasp and quantify. In fact, the regeneration of the wider area carries with it an uneasy sense of inevitability. Nothing would stop Haggerston West and Kingsland Estates, and especially their recent past, from being buried deep beneath a flagship state-of-the-art regeneration project.

We were intent on resisting the temptation to erase and forget, mainly because our own experience of the estate differs from the often clichéd narrative of “trouble estates,” which evokes a particular kind of social, economic, and psychological place for which the only solution seems to be demolition. There is no denying it has been far

from a perfect place over the years; but we must not forget it has also been a home for many people, the place where some were born, spent their childhood, fell in love, and grew old. For us personally, it has been a home and sanctuary, offering, amongst other things, an affordable place to live.

We are not interested in simply uncovering a past world from the safe distance of the present, which we believe often caters for a nostalgic engagement with the archive, depicting, for example, a lost world where children played innocently in the early-1930s estate courtyard, a place where “you could always leave your door unlocked,” or the transformation of those playgrounds into air-raid shelters during World War II.

Our interest is rather in how to remember and make sense of the last thirty years of decline at the estate, when it became known as a “sink estate.” Yes, there is ample evidence of vulnerability, illness, and neglect; but there is also ingenuity, a sense of play, resilience, and humor. What we found particularly striking, in this economic milieu of small means, were the interventions and innovations that eloquently displayed a refusal to resign or simply accept the hand that had been dealt.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Some of these images are part of a forthcoming publication: Andrea Luka Zimmerman and Lasse Johansson (eds). 2010. *Estate*. London: Myrdle Court Press ([www.myrdlecourtpress.net](http://www.myrdlecourtpress.net)). Tristan Fennell collaborated with Andrea and Lasse on the *I am here* project and shot the studio photographs they collected for estate.

**Figure 1**  
Bag made by resident and  
men’s wear fashion designer.



**Figure 2**  
Both pen and light adapted by resident to play music.



**Figure 3**  
The entry doors to the flats are flimsy, and a resident has devised this safety contraption.

**Figure 4**  
Flints used by a resident to recycle disposable lighters. "Friends" newsagent, situated on Haggerston Estate is the only corner shop within a mile's radius where we found these flints being sold.





**Figure 5**  
Residents in several flats have used discarded wardrobes as cabinets and ceiling storage.

**Figure 6**  
The bathrooms and kitchens in the flats are very small, with a lack of surface space.



**Figure 7**  
Hair rollers, the only items found in this empty flat.



**Figure 8**  
 This resident moved to Haggerston thirty years ago. When eating a piece of baguette she saw an image of Jesus, dried it, and painted it with nail varnish.



**Figure 9**  
 Vertical storage.



Figure 10  
DIY. Empty flat.

Figure 11  
Tooth pain remedy. Empty flat.



Figure 12  
Ceiling painting.



Figure 13  
Door painting.



Figure 14  
Wall painting.



**Figure 15**  
Plastic ceiling tiles. Empty flat.



**Figure 16**  
Instructions to teenager. Empty flat.



**Figure 17**  
Polystyrene ceiling tiles, pre-1980, highly flammable. Empty flat.



**Figure 18**  
Wardrobe substitute. Empty flat.

**Figure 19**  
Lino floor as wallpaper  
covering lino wallpaper. Empty  
flat.



**Figure 20**  
Oil heater, in use.



**Figure 21**  
Nearly every flat we photographed had taped up the air vents, as the flats are drafty and very cold in Winter.



**Figure 22**  
Omlette'n chips in a tin, found in empty flat.