Air Datascape

Thursday 24th - Monday 28th September 2026

Air Datascape is a ten-month project exploring air pollution in Southampton through art and citizen science.

Air is everywhere, but air pollution is often invisible. We move through it without seeing it, measuring it or knowing exactly what we are breathing. Yet the air we share does not affect us all in the same way.

In May 2026, artists Atsuhide Ito, Aster Cook, Sian Chungh and Agalya Kumaraguruparasharma carried air pollution sensors with them as they moved through Southampton. They collected data from the places they travelled through, lived in and spent time in, paying attention to the air around them.

Atsuhide ran the Southampton Marathon on 3rd May 2026, recording pollution levels every two minutes as he moved through the city. Aster, Sian, and Agalya walked through Southampton, following familiar routes and paying attention to their immediate surroundings. Their journeys produced four different datasets - each shaped by a body moving through the air.

The artists have each found their own ways of translating these invisible fluctuations into something that can be seen, sensed and felt. Through their work, air pollution becomes more than a number: it becomes something experiential.

We often talk about air as a common resource. Writer Elias Canetti described it as “the last common property”. But although we all breathe air, we do not experience it equally. For someone living with a respiratory condition, the experience of breathing can be radically different from that of someone else standing beside them.

The politics of air is also much darker. Toxic air has long been used as a weapon, from the deployment of chlorine gas during the First World War to the use of chemical weapons in more recent conflicts. Air can sustain life, but it can also carry harm - invisibly and indiscriminately. Around the world, approximately 7 million people die each year from illnesses linked to air pollution.

Breathing is not simply a biological act. It shapes how we move through the world, how confident we feel in our bodies and how able we are to participate in everyday life.
As Caterina Albano writes in Out of Breath (2022), ‘breathlessness can thus be understood as a physical impairment, as the powerlessness that fear induces…’

The Covid-19 pandemic made the relational aspects of air suddenly impossible to ignore.
We became acutely aware that what happens in the air around us can affect everyone who breathes it - while also revealing inequality, and vulnerability of others.

Air Datascape brings together citizen science, artistic practice and aeropolitics. Rather than treating data as something distant or objective, the artists ask how it might become something we can encounter with our bodies and imaginations.

Celebration Event and Workshop *Friday 25th September, 1pm - 3pm*

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