

# Failure leads to success

**Jo Nightingale** discovers how the Abandon Normal Devices festival tackles aesthetics, science and technology

Abandon Normal Devices, the North West's festival of new cinema, art and digital culture, is rounding up its 2012 run with events that began in Liverpool and continue in Manchester and Preston. As part of the Cultural Olympiad and now in its fourth year, AND showcases over 50 eclectic works from the worlds of technology, science, design and media – with experimentation a core concern.

"When we founded AND we wanted to explore what kind of festival could exist in the 21st century – how you can transmit things differently and audiences experience them differently," says festival manager Gaby Jenks.

"2012 is our most adventurous programme yet: our projects have become more complex, interdisciplinary and open-ended and we don't always know what the outcomes will be, so there's a risk of failure."

The theme in this Olympics year is Success? – the question mark embracing the idea of failure as an alternative route to creativity. According to Jenks: "Success? is a lens through which to view the work, and the artists have welcomed it on their own terms."

In *Ask A Teenager* at Manchester's Number One First Street, for example, Toronto's Mammalian Diving Reflex performance group will encourage adult visitors to ask youngsters for advice on succeeding in life. John O'Shea's *Pig's Bladder Football* at the city's CUBE gallery will unveil the world's first biologically-engineered super-football.

"We like trouble-makers, people who challenge existing norms," Jenks says. "But it's also really important to us to retain and promote talent in the region. Being part of the Cultural Olympiad has made a massive difference to our ability to attract audiences, and to work internationally."

The main programme will run in Manchester from 29 August to 2 September, with highlights including local CGI artists AI and AI's magic-realist take on Alan Turing's



**The Creator is a film about the enigmatic computer scientist Alan Turing**

dreams, *The Creator*, and LA-based Stanya Kahn's first UK exhibition, *It's Cool, I'm Good*. Already open at the Cornerhouse, the show contrasts the artist's darkly comic line-drawings and short films with the visceral personalities and life-struggles revealed in her video portraits.

AND strives to offer those audiences new, enlightening experiences that prompt them to see the world differently. In Todd Chandler and Jeff Stark's *Empire Drive-In*, a post-apocalyptic outdoor cinema at a car park in Manchester, patrons will be able to watch short films, cult classics and live performances from wrecked cars that symbolise the platform's decline. Meanwhile guerrilla artists HeHe's *M-blem* will offer the antithesis of high speed rail travel by offering visitors a ride on an environmentally friendly but slow rail system on the tracks of the first passenger station at the Museum of Science And Industry.

Transportation is a bit of a theme, with *Mobile Republic*, a convoy of five caravans re-imagined by artists including the Center for Genomic Gastronomy, having toured the region throughout the summer. Their re-modelled interiors explore the themes of nature, industry and extinction, and the flexibility and sustainability promised by future technologies.

For its finale AND moves to Preston, as the *Mobile Republic* caravans roll into town and the multi-disciplinary Humble Market reaches its peak. A collaboration with next Olympics host nation Brazil, the project's exhibition has been running at Liverpool's FACT since June, where digital interfaces pose philosophical and personal questions to test our readiness for "a more Brazilian world". In Preston the work will link up with a Brazilian town in real time, and immerse viewers in the spectacle of its carnival.

Part of the North West's cultural legacy programme *We Play*, AND is one of only five Olympiad projects nationwide that will continue after 2012. The action's also ongoing in its online stream, where Mark Amerika's *Museum of Glitch Aesthetics* is currently exhibiting art altered, and arguably enhanced, by technical glitches.

"We try and offer unique experiences – we think that's what a festival should do," Jenks says. "Some will make people think and others they might not like, but we're hoping they'll be things they wouldn't normally get to try."

**Abandon Normal Devices:**  
29 Aug-2 Sept, Manchester; 7-9 Sept, Avenham and Miller Parks, Preston. [www.andfestival.org.uk](http://www.andfestival.org.uk)



## ALSO SHOWING



### DANDY DICK

28 Aug-1 Sept, Opera House, Manchester

Reverend Augustin Jedd is a pillar of Victorian respectability but, under pressure to restore his church spire, he risks it all at the races after a visit from his wayward sister. Chaos ensues as the reverend finds himself in the hands of the law in a play that involves romantic intrigue, mistaken identity and a runaway horse. Christopher Luscombe directs a cast of comic actors in this restoration of Arthur Wing Pinero's 1887 farce.



### SOUL MAN

Until 1 Sept, Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough

Stand-up comedian Justin Jones has a secret and, pursued by enemies, he needs to get out of the country with his precious cargo before it's too late. Writer Chris Monks presents his first musical adaptation, in which Italian opera meets 1970s soul. *Soul Man* is set in West Yorkshire, 1974, and is adapted from Verdi's *Rigoletto* and Victor Hugo's *Le Roi S'Amuse*.