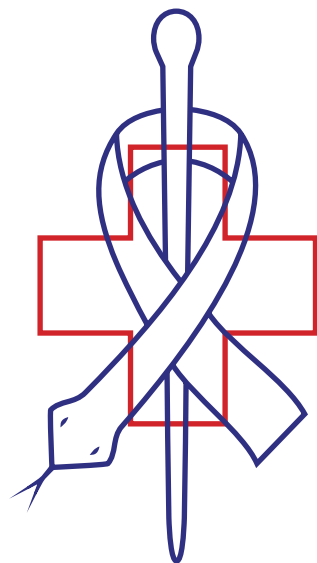


The Cambridge Betterment Society

A project by
Harold Offeh



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About the Project

Cambridge Betterment Society is a fictional group developed by artist Harold Offeh, who was commissioned to respond to the work of world leading Cambridge medical researchers. In turn, Offeh has invited three artists: Frederica Agbah, and artist collaborators Jack Scott and Louis-Jack Horton-Stephens, to contribute to the themes within the project. The artists have been working with researchers at the University of Cambridge's new Capella building on the Cambridge Biomedical Campus near Addenbrooke's Hospital, as part of the public art programme for the project led by Commission Projects. The Jeffrey Cheah Biomedical Centre (previously known as Project Capella) will be a centre of excellence for research into new medical treatments, bringing together three research centres: Wellcome-MRC Cambridge Stem Cell Institute, Cambridge Institute of Therapeutic Immunology and Infectious Disease (CITIID), and the Milner Therapeutics Institute.

The four films produced provide insight, observation, humour and alternative perspectives on the work of scientists and clinicians. Each of the artists has established dialogues with individuals or small groups of researchers and clinicians, concentrating on the ideas of 'betterment' and 'care'. "The project seeks to draw out points of connection and dialogue between the scientific aspirations and the artists' own approaches, values and ideals," explains Offeh. "We want to find out how the ideas of 'betterment' and 'care' inform the research methods, thinking and aspirations at Capella. Each artist has responded to the scientists' research aims and goals and looked at some of the values and ideals that underpin their research methodologies."

The ideas of betterment and care came from the Victorian desire for social improvement. “It’s something we now see as high minded and misjudged, but betterment speaks to a notion of change and improvement and a desire to advance ideals and practices,” says Offeh. “We also want to look at what care means with respect to research, in day-to-day tasks or just in regard to mindset.”

This evening marks the launch of the four commissioned films. After this evening’s event they will also be available to view online at: www.cambridgebettermentsociety.com

The Jeffrey Cheah Biomedical Centre (Project Capella) site is located on the north side of the Cambridge Biomedical Campus, adjacent to the Cancer Research Institute. The site will include ‘Corpus’, an art commission by artists Dalziel + Scullion, which will feature a series of standing stones of human scale that people can interact with through sitting, lying, reclining or standing, with the aim of experiencing different perspectives and physical sensations from the cool stony surfaces.

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A microscopic image of fibroblast cells, showing a network of interconnected, elongated, and somewhat wavy structures. The cells are illuminated against a dark blue background, highlighting their intricate, fibrous nature. The overall appearance is that of a complex, interconnected network of cells, typical of fibroblasts in a tissue environment.

Fibroblast

by Harold Offeh

'Fibroblast' has been developed from a conversation between Harold Offeh and Dr Alice Denton, a scientist based at the Babraham Institute and a member of the Cambridge Immunology Network. Offeh was particularly interested in the character and roles played by particular cells in the immune system, as well as the immune system's role as a primary source of protection and care. The film takes as a starting point microscopic images of fibroblast cells, an area of research for Dr Denton.

Offeh shares his research through video documentation of live re-enactments of microscopic images of the fibroblast cells. These are presented with text from conversations with Dr Denton. The film presents a visual portrait of the cell and Dr Denton's enthusiastic and insightful description of its often overlooked role in the immune system.

Harold Offeh is an artist working in a range of media including performance, video, photography, learning and social arts practice. Offeh often employs humour as a means to confront the viewer with historical narratives and contemporary culture and is interested in the space created by the inhabiting or embodying of history. He has exhibited widely in the UK and internationally including Tate Britain and Tate Modern, Studio Museum Harlem, South London Gallery, MAC VAL, Kulturhuset, Stockholm and Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, Denmark.

In 2018, his projects included performances at Publics, a contemporary art space in Helsinki, Finland and Actions: The Image of The World Can Be Different, Kettles Yard, Cambridge, UK. The Real Thing: Towards a Live Authentic Archive was presented as part of Material Experiments at The Tetley in Leeds, UK. Offeh also produced a 12-hour live event and film attended by 17,000 people called 'Down at the Twilight Zone'. Part of Nuit Blanche 2018 in Toronto Canada, it marked queer experiences of nightlife in the city.

In 2019, he will be Artist-in-Residence at the Contemporary Art Centre, Art Tower Mito, Japan, and will also present a solo exhibition at Turf Gallery in London. Offeh studied Critical Fine Art Practice at The University of Brighton and MA Fine Art Photography at the Royal College of Art. He lives in Cambridge and works in London as visiting tutor at the Royal College of Art and as a Reader in Fine Art at Leeds Beckett University.

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After initial conversations with Dr Jenny Nichols and Dr Roger Barker from the Cambridge Stem Cell Institute, Jack Scott and Louis-Jack became particularly interested in the idea of potential, as exhibited by a stem cell, along with the positive effects of 'cross-pollination' that can occur when scientists and clinicians gather or inhabit the same space.

With these cues in mind 'Agora Blend' takes for its setting the tea room of a scientific institution, a communal area that naturally encourages the sharing of stories and ideas, where a mug, spurred on by the conversations it overhears, begins to question its existence and consider how it relates, and is connected to, those around it.

- 'Agora' is a Greek word for 'gathering place' specifically serving as an assembly area and a place for commercial, civic and social activities, where people would gather to discuss all kinds of topics: business, politics, current events, or the nature of the universe and the divine.

Jack Scott and Louis-Jack are award-winning artist filmmakers who have been working collaboratively for the past couple of years. Collectively and individually their work has been shown at the National Art Centre Tokyo, UCL Art Museum, London Short Film Festival at the ICA, the BP Big Screen Trafalgar Square and Channel 4.

In 2016 Jack Scott's film 'jam' was aired as part of Channel 4's 'Random Acts' series, and in 2017 he released 'Smut Smut', a collection of contemporary poetry tracing an obscure journey through sexual and emotional longing.

Louis-Jack's most recent film 'Sink or Swim' explores depression through underwater ballet. It was made with the support of the charity Mind, Arts Council England and The Royal Opera House. It premiered in December 2017 on the online platform 'Nowness', and has since gone on to receive national TV and radio coverage and screenings in cinemas worldwide.

Jack Scott is currently writing a novella about a medical professional struggling with the moral implications of his job, and Louis-Jack is working on a narrative short titled 'Petrichor'. The film delves into the mind of a has-been snooker star in his final professional game. It has received funding from the BFI (British Film Institute) and is now in pre-production.

www.jakskotmemorialalbum.net
www.louis-jack.com



Reprogramming the Human Heart by Frederica Agbah

'Reprogramming the Human Heart' explores an extraordinary moment, the discovery of the science behind the creation of Pluripotent Stem Cells, arguably one of the most important and dramatic developments in stem cell research history. The film also speaks to the notion of the 'Niche' and the search for this unique microenvironment. Whether malignant or benign, all cells seek their Niche, a place to call home.

Written after a series of in depth discussions and interviews with Dr Thorsten Klampfl, Dr Justyna Rak and Dr Alice Denton, the film follows the journey of the adult Somatic cell as it becomes a Pluripotent stem cell, demonstrating through metaphor how the standardised and personal ethics of researchers and clinicians may affect the treatment of cells on their journey to rebirth. Research was also conducted with two local sixth form colleges as well as through conversations within three

local Facebook groups. The resulting feedback has been incorporated into a sound art piece, designed and created by the film's director and brought to life by the film's stars; music artist Afrikan Boy and dancer Kate Thompson. The sound art piece will have its debut at the upcoming film screening in Cambridge.

Frederica Agbah is a Yorkshire born photographer and visual artist based in London. As an art practitioner, Agbah is influenced by her experience of a peripatetic adolescence, moving abruptly from a nuclear familial upbringing in the north of England to the communal but hectic environment of a busy West African city, to an intimate and slow moving tribal village life, and back again to the West Riding of Yorkshire.

Working fully manual in-camera, predominantly with available and ambient light, Agbah works at the intersection of socially engaged documentary photography and moving image, with a particular interest in portraiture and biographical film.

Agbah's photographic work often focuses on candid opportunistic portraiture, featuring subjects approached on the street or at mass participation events. The work interrogates powerlessness, personal space, fractured identities and problematic relationships. Her practice captures interrelated characters within communities and cliques, constructing layered visual narratives and illuminating shared cultural histories. Her current research has organically taken on a more abstract interpretation of identity in response to proximal and world events.

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**Connect,
Accelerate,
Engage**
by Harold Offeh

A second film by Harold Offeh responds to the Milner Therapeutics Institute's mission of '**connecting** academic institutions with pharmaceutical and biotech companies, **enabling** collaborative research projects throughout Cambridge, and **accelerating** the formation of new biotech companies with a therapeutic outlook.' Harold Offeh responds to these key words through a sequence of performative actions and gestures; none is related specifically to the Institute's work, but instead try to evoke the energy of the Institute's aspirations.

About the Biomedical Campus

In 1999 Addenbrooke's NHS Trust (now part of the Cambridge University NHS Foundation Trust) in partnership with the University of Cambridge and the Medical Research Council, set out a vision for transforming the Addenbrooke's Hospital Site into the Cambridge Biomedical Campus which will combine world-class biomedical research, patient care and education on a single site – Vision 2020.

The 70 acre site is currently undergoing a major expansion that will result in a campus of international stature which will be an exemplar for integrated hospital facilities, biomedical research and healthcare education.

The Strategic Masterplan for the Campus sets out a structure of streets, pedestrian routes, squares and gardens, entrance courtyards, semi-private spaces and functional areas with sustainability at its core.

The aim is that the Jeffrey Cheah Biomedical Centre will provide high level facilities for leaders in their fields of research which will benefit collaboration, stimulate the exchange of new ideas and help develop new alliances. This approach to collaboration and ideas exchange has informed the Public Art Strategy.

What's Next? The Cambridge Betterment Society Continues... Get involved!

Harold Offeh will next extend the Cambridge Betterment Society Project for a new commission to coincide with the launch of the Jeffrey Cheah Biomedical Centre building in 2019.

Offeh would like to invite scientists, clinicians, patient groups, community groups and students to participate in a series of practical workshops. In mixed groups, they will be asked to create visualisations or models of cells, reflecting common areas of research or treatment across the three institutes housed in the new building. Working with specialist makers, using processes like glass blowing, ceramics and textiles, each group will collectively design and make a small collection that reflects their shared interests in research and the advancement of treatments. The resulting objects and short film documenting the process will be shown at the launch of the new building.

Workshops will take place in the New Year. If you're interested and would like to get involved please add your name and contact details to our list at this screening event; or email Harold at:

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