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Thinking outside the box

Red phone boxes have been redesigned by artists, designers and celebrities for a city-wide art hunt. **Alice Wiggett** speaks to the creators of some of the best

The dominance of mobile phones is sadly reducing the red London phone box to little more than a curiosity and a tourist attraction.

However, from Monday the iconic structure will be getting a serious make-over and transformed into a city-wide public art project.

To mark the 25th anniversary of the ChildLine charity, 85 phone boxes which have been redesigned by the likes of architect Zaha Hadid, model Lily Cole, cartoonists Modern Toss, milliner Philip Treacy, and fashion designer Julien Macdonald, will go on display.

The BT ArtBox project will see the creations dotted around London in a colourful treasure hunt.

Designs range from leopard print, photomontages, camouflage, abstract assemblages, Jubilee-themed boxes and even a padded telephone box. Photographer Willie Christie has used a photograph of creative director of US Vogue Grace Coddington's lips to adorn his phone box. She is his ex-wife and, appropriately, the box will be placed outside the Vogue headquarters in London.

Melcolm Garrett, BT ArtBox curator and the man who designed record sleeves for bands such as Buzzcocks, says: "London is one of the premier art capitals of the world and it is important that it fully embraces projects like this, especially at times when the eyes of the world are upon it."

On June 15 there will be chance to see all 85 boxes on display in Trafalgar Square, before they are moved to landmark locations around the capital, including Covent Garden, St Pancras Station, Carnaby Street, The Ritz, outside Big Ben, in Hyde Park and even in the shark tank at London Aquarium.

"It brings art out from the rarefied atmosphere of the art gallery and places it directly into the community," Garrett says.

Selected boxes will be auctioned on July 18 at The National Portrait Gallery to raise funds for ChildLine. "I'm looking forward to seeing all the BT ArtBoxes as they're incredibly diverse and should look fantastic when they're placed across the city," ChildLine founder Esther Rantzen tells Scout London.

"Ben Shine's Long Distance ArtBox, which features a giraffe popping out the top, and Cosmo Sarson's Peekaboo ArtBox are very eye-catching so I'll be looking out for them. "If I had designed an ArtBox, I think it would have been like a tropical forest, with orchids and monkeys, and perhaps Tarzan making a phone call!"

One of the most recognisable London designs will be by New Zealand artist, Mandii Pope. She says: "I looked at the shape of the BT ArtBox and figured if I could make or find a Big Ben roof, I could combine two British icons, utilising the existing shape of the phone box. It would then be perfectly suited as an icon of London."

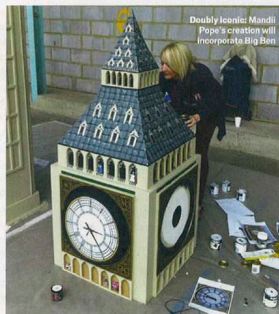
Pope's design features some hidden details, such as Olympians and London marathon runners. The Queen and Will and Kate can be spied waving out of the top windows.

Taking the near-obsolete and bringing it bang up to date will be the TweetBox, created by Alasdair Scott, which will display the BT ArtBox Twitter feed. People tweeting while close to the box will have their photo taken by the box, which can then be shared with their followers.

From June 15, across London

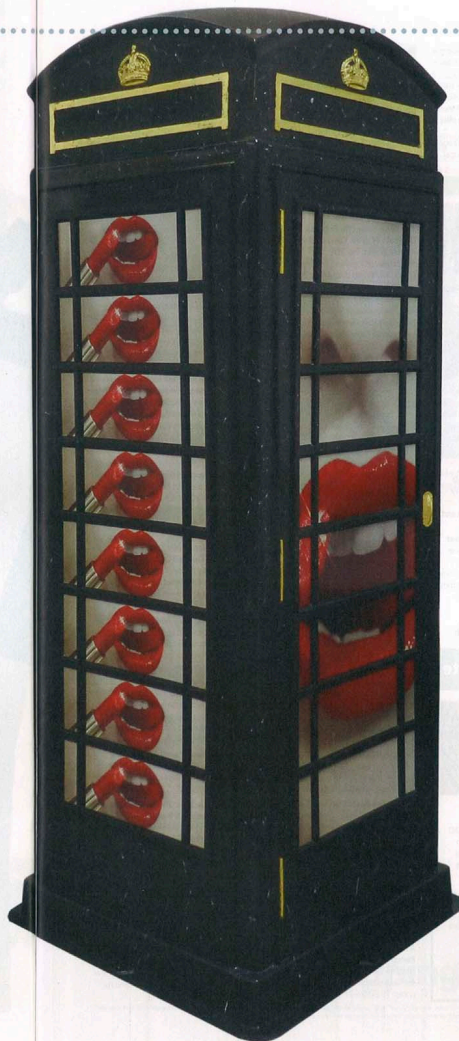


Peek-a-boo: The BT ArtBoxes will be across the city



Doubly iconic: Mandii Pope's creation will incorporate Big Ben

Lip service: Willie Christie's ArtBox captures his ex-wife's lips



featured

Boxing clever

Benjamin Shine

"I created two pieces for this event. Long Distance, featuring a giraffe poking its head through the roof, takes inspiration from the telephone as a worldwide connector;



playfully referencing the incredible reach this technology provides us. It very much plays with the London backdrop, which provides the necessary juxtaposition for the giraffe to appear so out of context. The other, Box Lounger, brings the familiar phone box indoors, as it is transformed into a sofa. Designed with button-back red leather upholstery and light-up telephone signs, it packs a patriotic punch in its fusion of British heritage design."

Photographer Peter Anderson

"My box is a memorial shrine to Joe Strummer. Using my 80s photographs of Strummer and The Clash, the telephone box has become a pop-up gallery,



featuring the perfect set of photo frames. The title of my piece is London Calling, from The Clash album title, linking it to the call box. It's a shrine and an exhibition out on the streets, which is great as not everyone visits galleries."

Artist Gerry Judah

"The telephone box itself inspired me. It is a fantastic monolith. By cutting it up and displacing it, I tried to show the angst and broken relationships which kids in need often have. That was an important message which I wanted to send out. It's meant to be an urban piece, I needed to reflect the surroundings of the city and it's a fantastic setting being in the Tower of London."

