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In The Studio: Peter Liversidge, artist

'You could say that what I display is failure, what has not been achieved'

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Peter Liversidge works in a studio in Bethnal Green, east London. Although there are 38 other artists in the building, he does not know any of them. He works with one part-time assistant and listens to music while he works – it was his father who told him music would help him to concentrate. Ask him which exhibitions he has seen lately and he talks about the gigs he has been to, or the records he is listening to.

The studio, high up with views of yellow cranes in the distance, is filled with delicate, small objects: bits of ribbon, stones, postcards, branches nailed to the ceiling. Liversidge points out that his work is "about found objects – all belonging somewhere else". A sack of gaudy plastic toys spills out onto the floor. "This is the only constant in my work," he says. "It's postal art; I sent these back from America to my two small sons." There is only a 70 per cent success rate, he says, picking up a single golf club. "Only one of these got here but two baseball bats made it."

Born in 1975, Liversidge is a conceptual artist who is pushing the boundaries of what can be considered art. "It's not canvas or brush but it is the sense that the work can exist in any form." His practice, in part, consists of constructing a set of proposals for specific commissions. This recently attracted press attention

when for his show at Bloomberg Space in the City he offered as a proposal "damming the Thames to flood the City of London".

The first work in his current show at the Whitechapel is a book of proposals. It's a graceful, unassuming tome that suggests, among other ideas, knocking down the buildings opposite the gallery and replacing them with a facsimile of the Whitechapel, and running a stream through a gallery. I remark that I am not surprised that Whitechapel director Iwona Blazwick did not choose to adopt these two proposals. "You could say that what is on display is failure, what has not been achieved," replies Liversidge.

Liversidge is that rare thing for an artist, a poet who proposes to "investigate coincidence" and "a composer" of other people's actions. It is up to the recipient to determine to what extent they can embrace the project. For an artist who describes his work as "descriptive, not prescriptive", and whose ideas range from destruction to delicate calls for memory, it is great to see his recent successes. His proposal for a series of flags simply saying "hello" will soon be unfurled over buildings throughout Edinburgh as part of the Arts Festival. And for readers of this column there is the "potential" to download an original proposal – a playlist – and have a Liversidge artwork of your own.

Peter Liversidge can be seen in the Spirit of Utopia exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery, London E1 (whitechapelgallery.org) until 5 September. He is part of the Edinburgh Art Festival (edinburghartfestival.com) to 1 September. Download your own Liversidge playlist at whitechapelgallery.org/exhibitions/the-spirit-of-utopia