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Thangarajah, Siva. "Thank you NHS": the local artist whose sign paintings on Roman Road went viral." *Roman Road London*. April 30, 2020.

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ROMAN ROAD LONDON



Artist Peter Liversidge, who put up his signs with the help of his son.

Local artist Peter Liversidge is no stranger to the power of text. He talks about his latest project which went viral, *Sign Paintings for the NHS – signs of support for key workers during the Covid-19 pandemic*.

Over the last month, you may have come across a colourful patchwork of signs that have mysteriously appearing on the railings near Wennington Green, at the intersection between Roman Road and Grove Road. Colourfully painted positive messages and statements of support for key workers cluster around the Roman Road road sign, and continue to creep up the street.

Images of the signs, which first circulated around locally-based social media accounts, have now been picked up by Time Out London and Getty Images.

These images are the latest project of local contemporary artist, Peter Liversidge, who lives and works around Mile End. He wanted to pay tribute to NHS and key workers using the power of public art.

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In early April, he started to paint the signs using acrylic paint on cardboard, drying them with a blow dryer, before putting them up. And he continued to create and add to his growing exhibit under cover of night.

In a rainbow of colours, he painted signs for NHS workers, bus drivers, and postal workers. You can also spot encouraging messages for the public and for volunteers, with appendages attached telling them to stay safe. He also christened the piece *Sign Paintings for the NHS*.

'I just wanted to thank people,' says Liversidge. 'All the key workers are just doing their everyday jobs, that they do in their normal life. But at same time they are taking these huge risks to their lives by doing just that.'

Liversidge was also encouraged by chance interactions during his nightly excursions adding on to the signs.

'When I was putting up the signs, I would sometimes see NHS workers driving by – probably because we've got a couple of hospitals nearby.'

'There was a car full of nurses who applauded when they drove by. An ambulance driver once rolled down his window and yelled "that's brilliant!"'

Facing a pandemic seems to have brought conversations about the value of a national health service at the forefront of our national conscience – which we've seen play out from Captain Tom's herculean efforts to raise tens of millions for the NHS, to the many local drives supporting hospitals here at home.

But Liversidge's deep appreciation for the NHS is lifelong and personal; the majority of his immediate family are in the medical profession, including his parents, siblings and even grandparents.

'I remember seeing my parents work as a young teenager, and realising how important the NHS is, and how civilising it is that you will always be cared for.' 'I have always thought the measure of a society is how we look after those who need it most.'

As such, the trickle of news stories over the past few years about the threat of privatisation of the NHS and more recent headlines about personal protective equipment (PPE) shortages – these are all issues that concern Liversidge.

'If we come out of this crisis with anything,' he says, 'it should at the very least be a renewed understanding of how important the NHS is to all of us.'

As an artist, Liversidge understands the power of protest to make political statements. So if these signs – hand painted on cardboard – remind you of protest boards, that is not entirely coincidental.

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Sign Paintings for the NHS is a continuation of his work, *Sign Paintings for Plymouth*, where he organised with a group of local people to make protest placards at the Plymouth Council House. Liversidge has exhibited far and wide, from Bonniers Konsthall in Stockholm, to the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh.

Liversidge will continue to add signs for the foreseeable future, replacing ones that have been damaged by rain and extending it further along up the road.